



Thinking Critically: Website Building and Design

Asynchronous Activity Guide

German Program

Welcome to the critical thinking guide for website development and design. The activities in this guide are meant to help reinforce some concepts about website planning, web design, accessibility and best practices for website building. Additionally, the activities below are designed to help you practice problem-solving.

This guide is complementary to the slidedeck you are using to learn this web tool; when prompted within the slides, you'll work through the associated activities.

Activity #1: Evaluating Website Designs

PART A) Evaluating websites for best practices

Your goal is to **compare and contrast** both websites. As you browse, you are encouraged to consider what worked well, what could be improved, and what you can use as you develop your own website.

1. Visit two of these websites:
 - Julia Flanders' WordPress site (<https://juliaflanders.wordpress.com/>)
 - Nikoleta Yiannoutsou's Wix site (<https://nyiannoutsou.wixsite.com/profile>)
 - NULab WordPress site (<https://cssh.northeastern.edu/nulab/>)
2. Choose three of the following components/characteristics of the site, and **critically evaluate** them for each website. Write a few sentences explaining your assessment of each component for each site and prepare to discuss your findings with your classmates.

Website Components/Characteristics

1. **Navigation Menu** - How clear is it? How easy is it to use on each page?
2. **Design choices and accessibility** - Is the site easy to read and look at?
3. **Audience and user experience** - How well-tailored is the site to meet the needs of its audience?
4. **Widgets and buttons** - Do they make sense on the site?
5. **Mobile site** - Compare the site on your phone vs. your computer
6. **Communicating the purpose of the site** - Can you tell why this site was created?



7. **Do all the hyperlinks actually work?** What about the buttons?

PART B) Troubleshooting a badly designed website

What can be fixed in DITI's "bad example" website?

1. Visit the DITI "bad example" website: <https://ditibaddesign.wordpress.com>
2. Using the same website components and characteristics as before (choose three again), evaluate the "bad example" website, and figure out what concrete steps you would take to improve specific problems with the site.
3. Write a few sentences explaining your assessment of each component for each site and prepare to discuss your findings with your classmates.

Website Components/Characteristics

1. **Navigation Menu** - How clear is it? How easy is it to use on each page?
2. **Design choices and accessibility** - Is the site easy to read and look at?
3. **Audience and user experience** - How well-tailored is the site to meet the needs of its audience?
4. **Widgets and buttons** - Do they make sense on the site?
5. **Mobile site** - Compare the site on your phone vs. your computer
6. **Communicating the purpose of the site** - Can you tell why this site was created?
7. **Do all the hyperlinks actually work?** What about the buttons?

If you have time, take a look at any of our additional sample websites for design inspiration.

Wordpress examples:

- Digital Scholarship Group's professional website (<https://dsg.northeastern.edu>)
- NULab professional website (<https://web.northeastern.edu/nulab/>)

Wix example:

- Nikoleta Yiannoutsou's Wix site (<https://nyiannoutsou.wixsite.com/profile>)



Activity # 2: Wireframing (Planning your Website)

In this activity, you'll draw out a rough plan for your website while considering some of the website design 'best practices' we covered in the slides. The purpose of this activity is to jumpstart your thinking about how you envision your website design, who you envision as users (audience), and how you want users to interact with your site.

The wireframe is a **starting point** to an iterative process. You'll consider other aspects of the website planning process (i.e., accessibility concerns) when you've got your preliminary site laid out. The DITI encourages you to revisit all of the aforementioned concerns throughout the website design process and continue revising your website as needed.

1. Review the "Planning your website" breakdown (slides 9-11).

- Consider:
 - How many pages do you need?
 - What content will you include on each page?
 - What is most important for your viewer (images, media, or text)? This will affect the design of your website.
- For wireframing, you should pay special attention to the following components:
 - **Look/Appearance** of your website
 - **Navigability**
 - **User Experience** (interactivity)
 - **Functionality** (widgets, buttons)

2. Review the wireframing guide (slides 15-17).

3. Set a timer for 5 minutes. [see next page for additional instructions]



Use the rest of this page (or a separate sheet of paper) to sketch out the first pages of your website. As you draw, think about the relationships between each page: how would this affect your **navigation**? What decisions would you make to improve your user's experience?
