

ENGLISH 1302: Advanced College Rhetoric: Writing in Engineering
Texas Tech University
Unit I: Designing for Humans

Project 1: Design Analysis

“[Design] elevates the likelihood of certain kinds of choices and shapes certain kinds of behaviours.” — Jennie Winhall, “Is Design Political?”

Prompt

Select a technology (an object, space, or process) and write a 750-1000-word report to me critically analyzing its design. You should choose an object, space, or process that helps to structure everyday life. The report should both describe the technology and analyze the effects of its design. The goal of this project is for you to look *at*, not through or past, the technologies that we engage with and to explore their non-neutrality and how design choices have effects on users and stakeholders. Ultimately, your report should advance and support a position on your subject.

Selecting a Subject

Your subject should be an object, space, or process that helps structure everyday life and involves design choices by the creator(s). An “object” is a physical thing. Examples of objects include a backpack, a cell phone, a laptop, designer jeans, eyeglasses, a student ID, a Citibus, and a five-subject notebook. A “space” is a defined area with a specific use or set of uses. Examples of spaces include a specific classroom, a store, a restaurant, somebody’s office, and a bus stop. A “process” is a series of actions taken in order to achieve a particular end. Examples of processes include registering for classes, ordering a meal, buying your textbooks, and following a class schedule. You’ll notice that any given situation involves an object, a place, and a process: for example, at the Starbucks in the Student Union Building (a place), you order (a process) your coffee in a disposable cup (an object). You should select a subject that both 1) provides you with rich material for exploring how it shapes values, users’ choices, and people’s behaviors and 2) is narrow enough in scope that you can discuss its design and the effects of those design choices with specificity.

Questions to Consider

Consider these questions to help you as you draft:

- What activities and uses does your subject facilitate or encourage? What does it prevent or discourage?
- For whom is your subject meant, and for whom does it work poorly?
- How could your subject be different, and how would that change the situations in which it’s used?
- Are most people aware of the effects your subject has on their lives? How significant are those effects?
- *What are the most important ways in which your subject shapes human activity?*

Note that your report does not have to address *all* of these questions; instead, use these questions as a starting point.

In order to earn an A or B, your project should conform to the following degrees of excellence:

Content: The report thoroughly analyzes your subject. It offers rich description, but more importantly goes beyond the superficial to analytically and critically explain the effects of design. It demonstrates understanding of the idea that technologies affect our actions, values, and behaviors. Claims are well developed with reasoning and evidence from the subject you're analyzing.

Organization: The report is in memo format (with effective to, from, subject, and date lines) and is logically and carefully organized to support your analysis. Paragraphs cohere, are clearly ordered, and flow together smoothly. Paragraphs contain appropriate topic sentences.

Style, Specificity, and Clarity: The report is relatively free of mechanical and grammatical errors. The report makes points clearly and succinctly, avoiding wordiness and empty sentences. Descriptions are clear and claims and evidence are provided with specificity.

Resources for This Assignment

Irish (2015), Chapter 2: "Constructing Engineering Arguments" (pp. 19-55).

Winhall (2006), "Is Design Political?"

Course Goals Supported by This Project

Rhetorical Knowledge

- Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts (academic and nonacademic) calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure
- Read and compose in several genres, understanding how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes
- Identify stakeholders and their standpoints on issues of public concern, and identify, explain, and analyze the values informing those standpoints

Inquiry & Research

- Formulate viable research questions, hypotheses, and conclusions

Writing Processes & Craft

- Develop a writing project through multiple drafts
- Develop flexible strategies for reading, drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, rereading, and editing
- Evaluate the work of others, give useful feedback to others on their writing, and evaluate and incorporate feedback from others in their own writing
- Assess accurately the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing, and develop individual plans for revision and improvement
- Enact revision as substantive change