

Web Development Reflective Essay

Roles and contributions

The three contributors were myself (Patrick Dolloso), David Della Rossa, and Zeiad Sabra.

In Part 1, we all were equally tasked to do research on different theme park websites, their content, and their design layout. Individually, we each gave a review of our top 3 websites and their best and worst design features to be considered. I set up a google doc for our written questions portion to which I was tasked to consolidate and review the final draft for submission. Once our top design features were decided on, we listed them as design requirements for our web site and decided on our theme as a group: a Harry Potter VR/AR theme park was our final decision.

Then, we decided on a 3-page website to divide our roles equally: homepage (David), attraction page (Zeiad), and the “contact us” page (Patrick). This division of roles ensured that each of us had an equal exposure of CSS & HTML, and roughly equal split of work in the website.

Next, David set up an Adobe XD shared project for us to collaboratively design our wireframes (both wide and small screens) given our design requirements in our written portion. In Part 2, each team member marked up their wireframes with HTML tags to be coded and all changes were to be committed to the master file in a Github repository.

Your use of HTML and CSS

Once our general wireframe designs were reviewed and finalized, we were each responsible for our own respective webpage and to contribute any changes to the master project in Github.

All of us had prior experience working with HTML and CSS, therefore translating the wireframes to HTML and linking CSS stylesheets was relatively straightforward. Because of our previous coding experience, the challenge was not to go beyond the scope of the course and re-learn basic HTML & CSS techniques (without using libraries, templates, or JavaScript) to create the website as per the current marking scheme.

Despite having experience with basic web coding prior to this course, I learned many new HTML concepts and design techniques such as Accessibility, semantics, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques, and using the <head> section. I did not have much knowledge with metadata, and am enjoying this part of the course.

With CSS, I had never coded for multiple screen sizes before. Using different relative positions and dimensions such as “em”, was a good learning experience to me, and forced me to think about functional sizing for all screen types. Keeping the website visually aesthetic while still functional on a mobile screen sizes proved to be a big challenge for me and took a lot of time to get right.

The biggest challenge when designing for mobile screen sizes is that the screen real estate was much smaller and the “mouse-click” was replaced by a finger, which meant buttons took up more space in the screen. Moving forward, I will definitely start on the mobile screen size first, prior to working on the desktop screen sizes as I had very little issues designing a wide-screen webpage.

Positive aspects of your team work experience

Working with virtually team mates from around the globe was exciting because we had to use state-of-the art collaborative software tools such as Slack, Github, Adobe XD, Google Drive, and the Coursera platform. Being at the forefront of disruptive education, it was a good experience using industry-specific tools for collaborative team work. My team mates were forward-thinkers, hard workers, and have had made it easy to voice concerns and criticisms without fear of being overly picky with the design.

Because of the Slack group, all communication was automatically saved in the message history, and could be referred to again at any time if need be. My experience working in real-life meetings, there are rarely any meeting notes, and many risks of information being lost has almost been eliminated by making all communication through instant-messaging. The speed in information transfer is almost instantaneous, and working collaboratively with modern tools make it easy to commit changes to files.

A powerful aspect of working virtually was the ability to screenshot/copy designs and code-snippets for the team to analyse and fix. Afterwards, any code or comments could be pasted into the master code and committed. Decisions were easy to keep track of in the chat log, and files could be shared in the chat prior to committing to the master file.

Negative aspects of your team work experience

Because we worked virtually in different time zones (Canada, UK, and Egypt), a webcast meeting was impossible. All of us had work and family commitments, thus any comments or suggestions that were discussed and decided on was when at least at one person being absent due to sleep-schedules. At times this involved some people taking over other people's work to make sure changes were implemented prior to the submitting the assignment.

Even when the work was roughly evenly split, differences in design opinions was inevitable. Aspects such as font type, font size and working with other people's code was difficult to keep consistent. Moving forward, if I were to contribute to a collaborative project, I would wait until a single webpage style "template" was agreed upon, and work from there to avoid re-work.

Lastly, communicating via instant messaging can be taxing as typing takes much more time and effort than face-to-face interactions. Describing what needs to be done can take up paragraphs of text, reading the text, then re-typing to clarify what was said takes up too much time. As we aren't very comfortable with using recorded-voice or video, normally typing was the only way we communicated.

Effects of team work on the quality of the work

Overall, the contribution of the team was good, but was very reliant on David, who made the major design decisions and contributed the most to the master file. Although this was a big burden to him, this led to greater uniformity of the design and web structure. Eventually, to avoid re-work, we would wait for David to commit changes, and direct us on his expectations and we would implement them on our respective web pages.

Once we were done, we would then review the website with the marking scheme to determine if we met all the criteria, and make any necessary changes prior to submission. Although this created more waiting time initially and increased time pressure once it was time for us to contribute, it was necessary to avoid deviating from David's design.

Patrick Dolloso

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Because of this, more productive work was being done and the final website was very pleasing and functional with a uniform design throughout each web page.

There were instances that the website could be improved upon but were later disregarded as there was normally little time prior to the deadline using our workflow. Given this, our team managed to complete the website meeting all the requirements in the marking structure.

Tools you and your team used

Slack was used as our primary communication, messaging, sharing small files such as links, images, and YouTube links for discussions. “Mentioning” or tagging the responsible person in Slack was a useful and efficient way to send them a notification for work they are responsible to complete.

Google Docs was used for the written portion of the assignment, where all team members contributed to one master document. This was a simple way to edit, add comments, and export the pdf without sending different versions of the same document.

Adobe XD was used as a vector-based user experience (UX) application that supports collaborative website wireframing, and saves prior versions for prototyping. This was a very good tool for our wireframes and we very often came back to the wireframes as a reference when coding our website.

Github was used as our hosting repository and version control for the master website file. The ability for users to directly contribute and edit files collaboratively while storing all change history was very useful and helped immensely with deployment of the final website.

Overall, the functionality of collaborative tools have come a long way and have made team work less painful by allowing all progress to be saved, and working with one file. In the future, allowing remote-access and virtual machines could be a good way for groups creating websites because this allows for users to take control of the wheel and type in contributions for a team member if need be.