The task I have chosen is to automate the SNAP-9B form, which is a form intended for those who have purchased food with their SNAP benefits, but unfortunately lost the food due to misfortune or other mishap. The form itself is divided into two pages: the first page is purely informational, and the second page contains the fields requiring input from a person. The second page is what needed to be automated and placed in a format that was conducive to quickly submitting to the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) via mail, in person, or by fax.

My initial review of existing solutions consisted of reviewing the various tools and programs discussed in class. For example, one of our lectures focused on the tool QnA Markup. This tool initially seemed appealing due to its simplistic coding style and user friendly, chatbot-like interface. However, I soon discovered after attempting to implement the form in QnA Markup that the back-and-forth questioning seemed to distract from the overall efficiency of completing the form. In addition, producing a filled pdf output was beyond my skill level with the tool. I had considered the free trial of Documate. However, I knew I would need more time than the free trial permitted and did not want to ultimately have to spend money on a tool when there were likely other suitable options.

I expanded my research to include tools not discussed in class. One such tool I examined more closely was TheFormTool, a free software tool for document assembly. While the tool seemed promising, it had a steep learning curve that was prohibitive. Apart from these tools, I also consulted colleagues for document automation tools. However, that line of inquiry was unfruitful, as nobody seemed to use any specialized tools besides those for billing and internal document management.

After settling on using the tools on the Document Assembly Line, I eventually had, what I thought, was a near complete version of the interview. I asked my very patient fiancée to be a user tester for me. I only instructed her to start the interview and then provide feedback after getting as far along as possible. The initial feedback was that the initial part of the interview was “tedious” and “hard to remember or understand the message.” Upon reflection, I came to the realization that the biggest problem with my initial interview was that it was overly complex and detracted from the primary goal of trying to make a tool to send the form to the DTA faster and more efficiently than without using the tool.

The first page of the SNAP-9B form is purely informational, but the information is quite important. For example, if a user does not get the form to the DTA within 10 days of the food being lost, the form will not be accepted. With the other parts of the first page, I had created a series of yes/no questions thinking that if the form did not apply at any point, I would save the user the trouble of having to deal with the tool any longer. However, as my first test showed, all of these questions were unnecessary. I realized the information should be presented in larger pieces and with no option but to click through. If a user wants to exit the tool for any reason, they could simply close the browser tab. Too much time was wasted getting to the end point of having a filled pdf ready to submit to the DTA.

In the second and current iteration, I removed the initial yes/no questions, incorporated feedback from the final presentation in class, and edited the form itself to further simplify the process of filling the form. I made the dates all one contiguous field, removed unnecessary lines for text, and increased the spacing between fields that would likely need more room, for example between the address area and the date.

When testing the current iteration of the interview, my fiancée was able to produce a completely filled pdf ready for submission. Though she did understand more about the form’s purpose and relevant information about the filing timeline (i.e., 10 days to file), that feedback was given little weight as she had already seen the first iteration of the interview.

Overall, I am pleased with how far along I was able to get with an actual tool that produces something that could be used to help someone who needs assistance replacing their SNAP benefits. With my minimal coding background, I was initially hesitant to try to create a working tool, and instead thought to just provide a diagram how it would operate. The Document Assembly Line resources were quite helpful and with all the feedback I received, I am thankful to have produced something that could be expanded and further refined for actual implementation.