

SENECA POLYTECHNIC
SCHOOL OF MEDIA
Summer 2025
TCN706 – Online User Assistance

Professor: Mark Philp

Office Hours: Virtual office hours (via MS Teams or Zoom) are typically held before and after class or by appointment only. Please schedule appointments via email.

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Subject Description

Help authoring tools assist technical writers in designing, publishing, and maintaining web-based user assistance. This course examines various software commonly used by writers to create online help files. In this course, students are taught how to create professional online help content and context-sensitive help. Topics include planning help systems, customizing layouts and templates, single-sourcing topics, and publishing content in various formats. Students will develop and generate an online help system as part of their professional portfolio.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Summarize basic principles and processes of designing online user assistance for different audiences.
2. Examine how users interact with online content in order to improve usability and findability.
3. Plan an online help system that addresses site design best practices, ease of navigation and searchability, and appropriate technical detail.
4. Apply topic-based writing principles to create content for optimal readability and understanding.
5. Select graphics and visual elements that maximize a user's response to content.
6. Use layouts and templates to improve the quality, visual appeal, and functionality of help systems.
7. Publish for different audiences using multi-channel authoring and single-sourcing methods.

Grading and Assessment

Assessment	Learning Outcome(s) Covered	Value of Final Grade in the Course
1. Assignment 1: User Assistance Analysis	1, 2	10%
2. Assignment 2: Simple User Guide	1, 2	15%
3. Assignment 3: Multi-audience, channel guide	2, 3, 5, 7	25%
4. Assignment 4: Group Project 1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	20%
5. Final Project	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	30%

Text and Materials

Resources	Details
Global English Style Guide	(Purchased during Semester 1)
Microsoft Writing Style Guide	Free online access
Purdue Online Writing Lab	Free online access
Seneca Libraries: MLA Citation Guide	Free online access
Portable media to hold your files	1TB USB recommended

Supplemental materials will be posted on Blackboard or on class shared drive.

Tentative Weekly Schedule

*Schedule may be modified by the instructor. Supplemental materials are posted in Blackboard.

	Topics	Learning Outcomes	Human skills covered	Assessments/ Homework
Week 1	Foundations of Online User Assistance	1	Critical thinking, communication	
Week 2	Introduction to Tools for Online Help	1, 2	Problem-solving, technical skills	
Week 3	MadCap Flare & Topic-Based Authoring	2, 3	Writing, technical skills	Assignment 1: User Assistance Analysis (10%)
Week 4	Snippets & Variables, Content Reuse, and TOC	3, 4	Content management, technical skills	Assignment 2: Basic Online Help Guide (15%)
Week 5	Writing for Different Outputs, Conditional text	3, 5	Adaptability, technical writing	
Week 6	Collaboration and Intro to Central	5, 6	Collaboration, project management	Update guide with snippets and a TOC Assignment 3: Multi-Channel Online Help (25%)
Week 7	Project Management	5, 6	Time management, teamwork	
Study Week				
Week 8	UX Writing & Advanced Features	4, 6	UX design, writing for usability	

Week 9	Writing for Accessibility	5, 6	Empathy, inclusivity, critical thinking	
Week 10	Study Lab	3, 4	Self- management, editing skills	Assignment 4: Online Help Project 1: (20%)
Week 11	Analytics & Review, Editing for Clarity	6	Analytical thinking, editing	
Week 12	Final Project Development; Applying Tech Writing Best Practices	4, 5, 6	Project management, writing, editing	
Week 13	Final Presentations	2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Presentation skills, communication	Assignment 5: Final Online Help Project (30%)
Week 14	Reflection	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Reflective thinking, self-assessment	

Missed Tests/Late Assignments

Students are graded on assignments, projects, teamwork, and final portfolio projects. Synchronous workshop participation, professionalism, and attention to deadlines will also form part of a student's final evaluation.

Specifications and due dates for projects and assignments will be provided in writing, discussed in class, and posted to your online learning platform. No late work will be accepted unless you provide valid medical documentation or have made prior arrangements with your instructor (prior to the date of the assignment due date or in-class exam).

Late submissions will not be accepted unless you provide a valid medical note or have made prior arrangements with your instructor.

Attendance is mandatory for all in-class assessments.

Academic Integrity

Seneca upholds a learning community that values academic integrity, honesty, fairness, trust, respect, responsibility and courage. These values enhance Seneca's commitment to deliver high-quality education and teaching excellence, while supporting a positive learning environment. Ensure that you are aware of Seneca's Academic Integrity Policy which can be found at: <http://www.senecapolytechnic.ca/about/policies/academic-integrity-policy.html>

Review section 2 of the policy for details regarding approaches to supporting integrity. Section 2.3 and Appendix B of the policy describe various sanctions that can be applied, if there is suspected academic misconduct (e.g., contract cheating, cheating, falsification, impersonation or plagiarism).

Please visit the Academic Integrity website

<http://open2.senecac.on.ca/sites/academic-integrity/for-students> to understand and learn more about how to prepare and submit work so that it supports academic integrity, and to avoid academic misconduct.

Discrimination/Harassment

All students and employees have the right to study and work in an environment that is free from discrimination and/or harassment. Language or activities that defeat this objective violate the College Policy on Discrimination/Harassment and shall not be tolerated. Information and assistance are available from the Student Conduct Office at student.conduct@senecapolytechnic.ca.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

The College will provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities in order to promote academic success. If you require accommodation, contact the Counselling and Accessibility Services Office at ext. 22900 to initiate the process for documenting, assessing and implementing your individual accommodation needs.

Camera Use and Recordings - Synchronous (Live) Classes

Synchronous (live) classes may be delivered in person, in a [Flexible Learning space](#), or online through a Seneca web conferencing platform such as MS Teams or Zoom. Flexible Learning spaces are equipped with cameras, microphones, monitors and speakers that capture and stream instructor and student interactions, providing an in-person experience for students choosing to study online.

Students joining a live class online may be required to have a working camera in order to participate, or for certain activities (e.g. group work, assessments). High-speed broadband access (e.g. Cable, DSL) is highly recommended. In the event students encounter circumstances that impact their ability to join the platform with their camera on, they should reach out to the professor to discuss. Live classes may be recorded and made available to students to support access to course content and promote student learning and success.

By attending live classes, students are consenting to the collection and use of their personal information for the purposes of administering the class and associated coursework. To learn more about Seneca's privacy practices, visit [Privacy Notice](#).

Technical Requirements

The following checklists outline the technical requirements for all students starting and continuing at Seneca:

TEC Laptop Requirements

This program has a bring your own device policy. All students will be required to have their own Windows-based laptop. Please ensure your device meets or exceeds the following expectations.

You must have a Windows-based laptop, as the Adobe Technical Communication Suite and MadCap Flare are not supported for a Mac OS.

- Microsoft® Windows® 10
- 1.6GHz or faster processor with SSE2 support
- Intel Core i7-i9 (or similar - AMD) processor
- 16 minimum GB DDR RAM - Recommended: 32 GB or higher
- 512 MG - Recommended: 1 TB
- 50 GB of available disk space
- 1920x1080 (HD) or 3480 x 2160 (4K)
- NVIDIA GeForce MX250 or similar graphics capability (example AMD Radeon 520 graphics card or Intel UHD Graphics 620)
- Must be internet capable: 10/100 Ethernet Port
- Microsoft® Office Suite
- Integrated webcam to support online course instruction (or can purchase separate webcam)

Note: The cost of your laptop is considered in books and supply costs.