

Memorandum

Date: Friday, February 10, 2006
To: C. Raisor, English 301 instructor
From: A Student
Subject: Trip Report

I took a virtual trip through the course materials used in the Texas A&M English 301 course. This report describes that trip in a memo format. With some help from my group, I explored numerous areas. I performed most of my investigations while located in the study lounge on the third floor of Zachery after 11 pm. I had brief communication with my group concerning the shared blog. My fact-finding trip took approximately 25 hours over the course of the last few weeks. In general, this trip included course content, blog research, and blog creation.

Accomplishments

Getting Started

The first thing I accomplishment was copying web based materials onto my local machine. Having a local copy improves both speed and reliability. The primary tool I used was `wget`. I discovered that there is one central course page that uses a web portal software package called Moodle. This package has podcasts, static webpages, forums, and wiki. In addition, this course uses two student submission services. One is `turnitin.com` and the other is `CPR`. The `CPR` service supports paper submission and peer reviews. `Turnitin.com` is used to prevent cheating.

Required Reading

After I had local mirrors of the course content, I listened to the podcasts while looking at the text descriptions of the course. Then, I read the prescribed sections of this course's web-based text called *Professional Writing Online*.

Blogging Research

My next task was to research blogging in the workplace. I entered the string `blogging in the workplace` into Google and pressed the I Feel Lucky button. The best article that I found was from CNet, titled, "FAQ: Blogging on the job" at http://news.com.com/FAQ+ Blogging+on+the+job/2100-1030_3-5597010.html. To complete the blogging research portion of the assignment I read one of my favorite technology blogs, <http://slashdot.org>. I then prepared a quick summary of what I discovered about blogging in the workplace and posted it to `turnitin.com`. I also uploaded my summary to my personal webpage so that I could share it with my group.

Group Collaboration

In order to facilitate communication, I created our team blog on blogger.com. Our name is Esquivalent and our address is <http://esquivalent.blogspot.com/>. This is a made up word from Apple's dictionary. The purpose of this word is to determine if anyone has stolen the dictionary verbatim. Apple defines this word as "the willful avoidance of one's official responsibilities; the shirking of duties." It turns out that a number of my team members reviewed the same article as I did. After a brief forum conversation in the group section on Moodle, I drafted the first version of our team's blog post and put that draft in the Wiki section so that my teammates could edit and improve the draft.

Finishing Up

After I completed these tasks, I drafted this report to collect my thoughts and to satisfy the last requirement. I asked a friend in a different tech writing class to look over this document. Upon completing it, I will submit it through turnitin.com and CPR.

Assessment

Time Management

My biggest problem was my lack of time management. For every deadline, I waited until 48 hours before it was due to begin the assignment. I don't think this seriously impacted the quality of my work, but it did result in more stress on my part. I think this problem would be best solved by me making this course a higher priority.

Team Dynamics and Forming

A smaller problem that I encountered was with my team. Since we never met face-to-face we definitely lack cohesion. It seems to me that some group deadlines would have been missed if I didn't force the issue. For example, I was the only one to suggest a team name. I feel that this problem was mostly likely the result of the normal forming trends of a new team. It has been my experience that small problems such as this will resolve themselves with some time.

Summary of Findings

From the Textbook

I learned the most from the assigned readings. One thing I explored was the effective use of color. I also discovered some common visual themes and styles. I have used some of the vertical styles before, but I have never emphasized horizontal elements before. The reading also discussed how audience affects writing style.

From the Internet

The CNet article that I found during my blogging research had the following main points:

- Blogging is common
- There are legal issues like libel and confidentiality agreements
- Some professionals are paid to blog, some do it on their own time
- Blogging can affect career (i.e., termination or marketing)
- CNet recommends anonymous blogging