Typography and Interaction

Spring 2023

The New School, Parsons, MPS CD
PMCD 5002, CRN 3992 / 9589
2 W 13th, Room 1201
Wednesdays, 9–11:40 AM

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Course site ↗ https://typography-interaction.github.io/
Catalog ↗ https://courses.newschool.edu/courses/PMCD5002

Course description

Typography and Interaction is a year-long course, divided into two classes, which will provide a rigorous foundation of typographic and interaction principles in the context of digital design. This second semester will build on the type and layout foundations from the first, moving into interface design and interactive experiences on the web.

Interaction, interactive, interface, product, UI, UX designers—we are known by many names. These are all monikers for a digitally-native design practice. It is our responsibility, as practitioners in this increasingly consequential and broadening field, to both understand existing paradigms and help create and manifest purposeful new ones.

Contemporary digital design exists in the continuum of the ever-shifting, evolving, and ubiquitous web. Designers today work at many different scales and within many different systems. We act as mediators not only for users, meaning, and experience, but with these systems themselves, as well. They shape our work and we shape them—at the meeting point, the interface, between things.

In this semester, students will learn to give form to and then work at these intersections. We will again use web technologies as our lens for the subject, building on our foundations in HTML and CSS by incorporating JavaScript—to give behavior, interaction, and life to our designs. We will survey modern approaches to front-end design and development, as our discipline has as many methodologies as we do names. There is no one way to do this work, nor one thing to do it for—and through our readings, discussions, exercises, and projects, students will understand and then situate themselves and their practice within the larger field.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this semester, students will:

- Thoroughly exercise and extend their typographic, design, and technical web skills developed in the first semester.
- Learn to use modular, templated HTML components with varied and dynamic external data sources.
- Understand the Content Management System (CMS) and Application Programming Interface (API) as software archetypes.
- Be introduced to JavaScript and programming logic, the underlying concepts that make interactivity possible.
- Gain an awareness of competing, contemporary front-end methodologies, systems, and approaches at use in the field.
- Conceptualize a web project with an eye towards its complete implementation, balancing the tradeoffs between design, features, and practical build considerations or limitations.
- Develop an understanding of how they want to practice as a designer within the larger context of the discipline.

Assessable tasks

Unit tasks

- Readings and reviews

  Each unit begins with a set of readings to introduce the subject. Students are expected to read the required selections and synthesize their thoughts in a written response, prior to the next class. We will then discuss these responses.

  - Exercises

    Each unit will also have specific, technical exercises that are assigned towards completion of the projects. Students are expected to complete these outside of class, before the next session.

  - Critiques

    Each unit will conclude with a review of its project. In addition to the project itself, students will be assessed on their presentation of their work, as well as their ability to provide constructive, critical feedback to their peers.

Projects

The bulk of the work for this class takes the form of projects. They are intended as opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills learned in class while developing their own practice. There will be check-ins and presentations around each of these before the final due dates, when we will have critiques as a group:

- Project 4: *Links*

  Students will collaboratively assemble, connect, and present a collection of their creation, using Are.na as a platform/CMS—and will then design and build an interface to browse it.

  In addition to our previous project requirements, here we'll be looking for the effective use of images/media, meaningful interactive interface functionality, and your use of JavaScript.

  Due March 1.

- Project 5: *Functions*

  Students will identify a problem that they encounter within their lives and conceptualize how to solve it, on the web. They will design and implement a solution towards this problem, using the tools, technologies, and techniques they've learned in this class.

  We'll first be looking for strong concepts—not limited by or to existing conventions—that push the grain of interaction design in new and interesting directions. And as the capstone for this course, we're expecting the highest level of nuance and polish in both the design and technical aspects of the final projects.

  Due April 26.

Evaluation and final grade

Participation	20%
Reading reviews	10%
Exercises	10%
Project 4: *Links*	20%
Project 5: *Functions*	40%

Course outline

Unit 4: *Interface as interface*

Weeks 16–21

We will expand on our first-semester foundations in design, typography, HTML and CSS—now incorporating metadata, working with images/media, and introducing JavaScript to enliven our work. Students will be introduced to a CMS and will work with an API.

The unit ends with Project 4: Links*, which students will present on March 1.*

Readings

- *The Design of Everyday Things* ↗
  Don Norman, 1988 (revised 2013)

- *I am a handle* ↗
  Rob Giampietro, 2012

- *Sometimes it Looks like a Duck, Sometimes it Looks like a Rabbit* ↗
  Jack Balkin, Dan Michaelson (facilitated by Rob Mathews), 2012

- *Laws of UX* ↗
  Jon Yablonski, 2018 (ongoing)

- *Folk Interfaces* ↗
  Maggie Appleton, 2022

Unit 5: *If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail*

Weeks 22–30

To round out the course and semester, we'll review a range of contemporary approaches and practices in product design and software development. This will include a survey of topics such as accessibility, front-end frameworks, component-based development, and design systems.

This unit, and the course, will culminate with Project 5: Functions*, which will be presented in class on April 26.*

Readings

- *What Is Code? ↗*
  Paul Ford, 2015

- *Apple's Modernism, Google's Modernism ↗*
  Natalia Cecire, 2015

- *Life After Lifestyle ↗*
  Toby Shorin, 2022

- *Human Interface Guidelines ↗*
  Apple, 1987

- *Macintosh Human Interface Guidelines ↗*
  Apple, 1992

- *The Windows Interface Guidelines ↗*
  Microsoft, 1995

- *Aqua Human Interface Guidelines ↗*
  Apple, 2001

- *iPhone Human Interface Guidelines ↗*
  Apple, 2008

- *Windows Phone 7 UI Design and Interaction Guide ↗*
  Microsoft, 2010

- *Material Design 1 ↗*
  Google, 2014

- *iOS Human Interface Guidelines* ↗
  Apple, 2014

- *Fluent Design System* ↗
  Microsoft, 2017 (ongoing)

- *Material Design 3* ↗
  Google, 2021 (ongoing)

- *Human Interface Guidelines* ↗
  Apple, 2022 (ongoing)

Materials and supplies

In the open tradition of the early web, the only materials truly required are a computer, a browser, a text editor, and an internet connection. The specifics of these are open to the student's individual preferences and practices. We will do our best to accommodate everyone and will make recommendations, when needed.

In class, we will demonstrate using Figma for visual design and sketching, Visual Studio Code for programming, and GitHub/GitHub Desktop for version control and project hosting. All of these products are available for free, or offer free education licenses to New School emails.

We will use the following sites to organize and run our class:

- Course site ↗
  For housekeeping, agendas, and lectures
- Slack channel ↗
  For direct and asynchronous communication (*not* email)
- GitHub team ↗
  For code examples, sharing
- Google Drive ↗
  For document collaboration, recorded lectures
- Zoom room ↗
  For screen sharing and recording

Our class policies

Our community

During our first class session, we will collectively write and agree upon a code of conduct for our group.

This agreement is intended to help us create and maintain a safe, empathetic, and productive space for our course. It will live on our course site, and can be revised and modified, with all of our input, over the semester.

Inclusion

Our intent is to respect and give forum to a range of perspectives and backgrounds, including culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, and age. In instances where we are personally not qualified to speak from a specific perspective, students are encouraged to explore this area themselves. And please let us know if there are ways that the course can better serve these goals.

Engagement

There are program policies (below) around attendance, but we also have an *engagement* policy—which will likewise affect students' evaluation and final grade, as their engagement will be unavoidably reflected in the quality of their work.

Students are expected to actively and passionately participate in this course. This means more than showing up and turning things in on time, which should be a given. Beyond that baseline, students should be curious, prepared, thoughtful, vocal, and intentional throughout the course. They should make us understand why they are here, and demonstrate to us that they care about themselves, their work, and each other—and ultimately, about this chosen profession.

Office hours

We will have limited availability outside of our class time, and won't keep scheduled "office hours." Students should not rely on us to solve specific design or technical problems. Their first resource should be themselves, then our course site and its materials, and then each other. If there are still questions—such as logistical or content ones—students can message us on Slack, and we will respond when we can. But this should never be a bottleneck; all of this works better when not done at the last minute.

Additional technical help

For more specific technical instruction and questions, Parsons has dedicated CD-program tutors available to help students with HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, as well as offering general design critiques and feedback. The drop-in schedules are available in the CD@Parsons app under "Make & Remake."

As CD-program tutors are available only a limited number of hours per week, it is advisable to start on your projects early and seek help early to avoid the usual end of project/semester rush for additional help.

Code plagiarism

Students may find code similar to our exercises or projects elsewhere online. But the copying or adapting of any code beyond our provided course material (lectures, exercises, demos) without attribution is not allowed under any circumstances. If adapting, with attribution, students must explain the usage and demonstrate an understanding of how it works. We have zero tolerance for any sort of plagiarism—which ranges from "verbatim copying" (cutting-and-pasting code) to "thorough paraphrasing" (changing names or rearranging code). Students should also review the *Academic Honesty and Integrity* policies, below.

Recording sessions

We will take screen recordings of our sessions for students to reference later. As these will include the students and their work, the recordings will be stored on our Google Drive and made available only to New School email users.

Attendance, grading, and other policies

All CD classes adhere to the same common program and university policies.

Acknowledgments

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