TYPOGRAPHY & INTERACTION

FALL '25

THE NEW SCHOOL, PARSONS, MPS CD
PMCD 5001, CRN 4253/9023
65 WEST 11TH STREET, ROOM 464
FRIDAYS, 9–11:40AM

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

"TYPOGRAPHY & 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. OVER BOTH CLASSES, STUDENTS WILL ACQUIRE AND HONE THE SKILLS THEY NEED FOR SUCCESS IN THE FIELD OF INTERACTIVE DESIGN.

THIS FIRST SEMESTER WILL FOCUS ON A MASTERY OF TYPE AND LAYOUT CONCEPTS ON THE WEB.

Typography is the infrastructure of communication in nearly any visual medium. It provides the very first shape and form to written content, and as designers, it is our responsibility to do this with intention and care. Whether towards goals of expression itself or in the service of ideas, the designer must understand type to use it successfully. In this way, we are stewards of meaning.

Digital design, the web in particular, is inextricably linked with typography—from the very letters of code at its base to the words in arrangement we see on a screen. Type, thus, is the scaffolding in which all interaction design first rises. The very shape of the web, in its layouts, grid systems, and patterns—and its various technologies—all exist in the service of type, at their root. They provide the tools with which we can breathe a form and different, digital life into that meaning.

In this class, students will learn intermediate and advanced methods in typography and layout as they concern interactive design. We will use web technologies as the lens to examine this subject—introducing the foundational, front-end languages of HTML (*HyperText Markup Language*) and CSS (*Cascading Style Sheets*) to achieve our designs. Students will understand the specific challenges of type in this medium, but also how it offers unique and particular forms to us as designers. They will learn the common tools and paradigms with which we practice, while developing their own visual, design vocabulary and critical understanding.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

BY THE END OF THIS SEMESTER, STUDENTS WILL:

- Demonstrate advanced knowledge of and be able to critically analyze type, form, and interactivity as it applies to screen-based media.
- Understand how to effectively deploy type hierarchy in layout and grid systems, in responsive, device-agnostic design.
- Effectively translate these designs into functional websites using HTML, CSS, and other web technologies.
- Design and prototype work while taking into account the ever-shifting, bespoke challenges of web design.
- Give, receive, and respond productively to feedback in critiques.
- Think critically and develop their own, distinct thoughts on the role of digital within the larger canon of design.

COURSE OUTLINE

THE COURSE IS STRUCTURED INTO THEMATIC UNITS, EACH BOOKENDED BY READINGS ON THE SUBJECT AND A PROJECT THAT WILL DEMONSTRATE THE MATERIAL:

UNIT № 1: “TYPE AND THE WEB”

WEEKS 1–6

We will focus on reviewing the core principles of typography, and introduce the web and its base technologies. Students will learn about HTML, semantic DOM, basic CSS, as well as type hierarchy and the use of custom typefaces for the web.

READINGS

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW TYPOGRAPHY →

Jan Tschichold, 1928

THE CRYSTAL GOBLET, OR PRINTING SHOULD BE INVISIBLE →

Beatrice Warde, 1932

DETAIL IN TYPOGRAPHY →

Jost Hochuli, 1987

THE ELEMENTS OF TYPOGRAPHIC STYLE →

Robert Bringhurst, 1992

A HANDMADE WEB →

J.R. Carpenter, 2015

PROJECT № 1: “MANUSCRIPT”

The unit ends with Project 1, *Manuscript*, which students will present on October 3.

Students will choose a seminal design text from readings.design, read and respond to it, and typeset their selection and reply together as a web page. Other texts are also allowed on a case-by-case basis.

We’ll be looking for the quality of responses, appropriate type selection and hierarchy, semantic HTML, and basic CSS.

UNIT № 2: “THERE IS NO PERFECT LAYOUT”

WEEKS 7–10

Students will learn how to design and implement more complex, flexible layouts, while collaborating closely with a classmate. We’ll introduce responsive design, media query CSS, and advanced web type techniques.

READINGS

INVESTIGATIONS ON GESTALT PRINCIPLES →

Max Wertheimer, 1923

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE →

Max Bill, 1953

GRID SYSTEMS IN GRAPHIC DESIGN →

Josef Müller-Brockmann, 1981

THE WEB’S GRAIN →

Frank Chimero, 2015

THE DIMINISHING MARGINAL VALUE OF AESTHETICS →

Toby Shorin, 2017

PROJECT № 2: “SPREAD”

This unit concludes with Project 2, *Spread*, which students will present on October 31.

Students will work in pairs, with the texts they selected in *Manuscript*. Each duo will sketch collaboratively and then implement a new expression together, via pair programming. The final web page will be responsive for mobile, desktop, and print layouts.

Here we're looking for successful design and development collaboration, box-model layout design, and use of responsive media queries.

UNIT № 3: “TYPOGRAPHY AS INTERFACE”

WEEKS 11–15

In our final Fall unit, we will focus on creating advanced, multi-page layouts with grid systems, prototyping their flows, and exploring typography's usage as interface elements for navigating a website.

READINGS

DESIGN INTERFACE: HOW MAN AND MACHINE COMMUNICATE →

Gianni Barbacetto, 1987

A SOFTWARE DESIGN MANIFESTO →

Mitchell Kapor, 1990

TYPEFACE AS PROGRAMME →

Jürg Lehni, 2011

INTERFACE WRITING: CODE FOR HUMANS →

Nicole Fenton, 2014

MY WEBSITE IS A SHIFTING HOUSE
NEXT TO A RIVER OF KNOWLEDGE.
WHAT COULD YOURS BE? →

Laurel Schwulst, 2018

PROJECT № 3: "BINDING"

This unit, and the first semester, will culminate with Project 3, *Binding*, which will be presented in class on December 5.

Students will assemble a collection of texts from *Spread*, combined with their original selection, into a "book." The book will be a multi-page website with a homepage (cover), navigation (table of contents), individual pages for each text, and an introduction (colophon)—with consistent styles applied across all pages.

We want to see effective multi-page design and navigation, advanced layouts (flexbox, grid), consistency across the pages and content, and polish/nuance.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

ENGAGEMENT

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.

This engagement will be unavoidably reflected in the quality of students' work—but we also evaluate this discretely based on their participation in and out of the classroom, with us and with their peers.

READING RESPONSES

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 are not looking for summarization, here—these should be personal reflections on the subjects, and are evaluated with this lens. We will then discuss these readings as a group.

QUIZZES, EXERCISES, MILESTONES

Each unit will also have short quizzes on topic material, and specific, technical exercises and milestones that are assigned towards completion of the projects. Quizzes will occur in the class following new material; assignments are expected to be completed outside of class, before the next session. Some of these will be small; some of these will be large. They are *all* evaluated for completion and quality.

PROJECTS

The bulk of the work for this class takes the form of projects. They are intended as opportunities for students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills learned in class while developing their own practice, and are evaluated in this light.

There will be check-ins and reviews around each of these before the final due dates, when we will have critiques as a group. In addition to the quality of the project itself, students will be subject to an in-person code review and will also be assessed on the presentation of their work. More specific evaluation criteria will be delineated with each project's introduction.

GRADE CALCULATION

ENGAGEMENT	20%
READING RESPONSES	10%
QUIZZES, EXERCISES, MILESTONES	10%
PROJECT Nº 1: “MANUSCRIPT”	10%
PROJECT Nº 2: “SPREAD”	20%
PROJECT Nº 3: “BINDING”	30%

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 with New School emails.

WE WILL USE THE FOLLOWING TOOLS TO ORGANIZE OUR CLASS:

COURSE SITE →

For housekeeping, agendas, and lectures

SUBMISSION FORM →

For submitting your work/URLs

SLACK CHANNEL →

For direct and asynchronous communication (*not* email)

FIGMA TEAM →

For visual sketching, sharing

GITHUB ORGANIZATION →

For code examples, sharing

GOOGLE DRIVE →

For document collaboration, recorded lectures

ZOOM ROOM →

For screen sharing and recording

CLASS POLICIES

OUR COMMUNITY

This agreement is intended to help us create and maintain a safe, empathetic, and productive space for our course. It is built on trust and accumulated experience across cohorts. It can be revised and modified, with all of our input, over the year:

- Classmates should use our preferred names and pronouns.
- We will have a short break, roughly halfway through the class.
- The class should feel comfortable asking the instructors anything— nothing is too trivial, or embarrassing, or off-topic. Tangents are good! Students can always ask us via Slack, if they would like to remain anonymous.
- When presenting, students will "have the floor" while they take us through their work. This means everyone else will be quiet, we'll close our laptops/turn off our phones, and give our full attention to the person showing their work.
- Likewise for when the *instructors* are presenting new material— no laptops, no phones. If students require either for assisting their learning, they must request approval beforehand. Our default setting should be "full attention, up front."
- We will all engage meaningfully with presented work and try to give constructive feedback (no fluff).

- For Fall semester, we're not going to use LLM agents/autocomplete ("artificial intelligence"), nor traditional copy/pasting, nor any other tools where we do not write our own code. We will talk through appropriate, allowed use of these technologies in the Spring.

- We will always attribute our work when referencing others, tools, or examples.

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.

OFFICE HOURS

We will have limited availability outside of our class time, and won't keep scheduled "office hours." Students should not expect us to immediately solve specific design or technical problems, or have their progress be blocked by this. Their first resource should be themselves, then our course site and its materials, and then each other.

That said: if there are still questions—particularly logistical or content ones—students can message us on Slack, and we will respond when we can. But again 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. They should be available midway through Fall semester, and usually have drop-in schedules. More info will be provided as available.

The University Learning Center also offers its own tutoring sessions; these are by-appointment.

As tutors are only available a limited number of hours per week, it is advisable to start early on your projects and seek help along the way—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. This *includes* from LLMs, more below.

If adapting, with attribution, students must explain the usage and demonstrate an understanding of how the code works. We will have in-person code reviews to facilitate and guage this understanding.

We have zero tolerance for any sort of plagiarism—which ranges from "verbatim copying" (copying-and-pasting) to "thorough paraphrasing" (changing names or rearranging) and "autocompleting" (with LLM-assisted editors). Students should also review the Academic Integrity Policy.

LLMs AND "ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE"

Relatedly, there has been much discussion and developments in our field (and others) around *large_language_models*, a.k.a. "artificial intelligence."

Here's what we're going to say about this: tools like the conspicuous ChatGPT, Cursor's IDE, or GitHub Copilot are known to often generate wrong or unnecessarily verbose code. This, combined with the fact that their results are derived from copyrighted and/or legally questionable sources—usually without permission or attribution—means the use of these tools continues to be fraught, at best.

We think you first need to write code yourself to understand the medium. Copying/adapting from ChatGPT/Copilot is no different from anywhere else (see above) and is ultimately a disservice to your education. These are always to be treated like any other tools at our disposal—as *aides* to your understanding, not *shortcuts* around learning. We think you know the difference.

RECORDING SESSIONS

We will take 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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