

Thinking about Design

INFO 360 A

User-Centered Design

For your first assignment, you will begin to look at the world with “designer’s eyes,” reflecting on the things with which you interact, and the quality of that interaction. Pay attention to anything and everything with which you *interact*: from door knobs to software user interfaces, household appliances to automobile dashboards, alarm clocks to library kiosks. Reflect on how the interaction unfolds. Do you experience *breakdowns*? Why or why not? Do you *notice* the artifact because of a breakdown (present-at-hand), or are you able to remain focused on your goal without thinking of the artifact *per se* (ready-to-hand)? When the interaction is successful, what properties of the design make it so? When the interaction is unsuccessful, do you find you employ *workarounds* to achieve your goal some other way?

Generate a list of *design principles* that apply to interaction in general. An example of a design principle is *consistency*, meaning that a design choice or convention is maintained throughout an entire product (internal consistency), and/or the choice or convention is found in other similar things (external consistency). Another design principle is *appropriate feedback*, meaning that the artifact presents its state to the user appropriately, especially after actions are taken. (Thinking broadly, *feedback* applies to many artifacts, not just software. Think about tactile and auditory feedback, not just visual feedback.)

For your assignment, do the following:

- **Breadth.** Generate a list of **10 distinct things** with which you interacted over the next week (carry a small notebook around with you). Write a paragraph (4-7 sentences) describing *your specific interaction* with each thing. Was it successful or not? In what ways? Where did breakdowns occur? Where did confusions occur? Most importantly, *why* did they occur? Did you use a workaround? What was it?
- **Induction.** Derive a list of **10 design principles** that apply to interaction based on the experiences you had in the last part. Name each principle and describe the principle in 1-3 sentences.
- **Depth.** Choose **two artifacts**. One artifact should be a thing whose design you *adore*, whose virtues you can extol to no end (a “beloved thing”). Choose another artifact whose design you *hate*, whose faults you can disparage forever (a “hated thing”). Write a 1/2-page description each of why you love or hate these things, *using the design principles in derived in the second part*. Which principles are violated? Which are upheld? Include an image or photo of each artifact in your write-up.

What to Turn In?

Your list of 10 things with which you interact, each with its paragraph description; your 10 design principles with short description; and your 1-page write-up about a design you love and a design you hate.

Your write-up should be approximately 3-4 pages in Times New Roman 12 pt, single spacing, with 1” margins on all sides. Please print on both sides of the page (save trees), and turn in your assignment at the start of class.

How will it be graded?

- **4.0 – Outstanding** – The assignment is complete (includes 10 things, 10 design principles, plus 1 beloved item and 1 hated item with pictures) and of superior quality. The report is well-written, professional, in-depth, and the student is reflective and insightful.
- **3.5 – Great** – The assignment is complete and of high quality. The report is well-written, professional, in-depth, and the student is reflective and insightful.
- **3.0 – Good** – The assignment is complete and of good quality, but the points could be better articulated, be more insightful, or more thorough. Report may contain minor problems with formatting or grammatical errors.
- **2.5 – Satisfactory** – The assignment is mostly complete and of satisfactory quality, but the points could be better articulated, be more insightful, or more thorough. Report may contain problems with formatting or grammatical errors.
- **2.0 or Lower – Unsatisfactory** – The assignment is incomplete or is of lower quality. The points are not well articulated or thorough enough. Report may contain major problems with formatting or grammatical errors.