Typography & Interaction

FALL 2023

THE NEW SCHOOL, PARSONS, MPS CD
PMCD 5001, CRN 4253 / 9023
2 W 13TH, ROOM 1201
WEDNESDAYS, 9–11:40 AM

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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, 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, with the second semester emphasizing interaction and interface design principles.

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 course, 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 and CSS 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.

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 1: *MANUSCRIPT*

  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.

  Due September 27.

- PROJECT 2: *SPREAD*

  Students will work in pairs, with a new text from those selected by the class 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.

  Due October 25.

- PROJECT 3: BINDING

  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.

  Due November 22.

Evaluation and final grade

Participation	20%
Reading reviews	10%
Exercises	10%
Project 1: *Manuscript*	10%
Project 2: *Spread*	20%
Project 3: *Binding*	30%

Course outline

Unit 1: *Type and the web*

WEEKS 1–5

We will focus on reviewing 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.

The unit ends with Project 1: Manuscript*, which students will present on September 27.*

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

Unit 2: *There is no perfect layout*

WEEKS 6–9

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.

This unit concludes with Project 2: Spread*, which students will present (in their pairs) on October 25.*

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

Unit 3: *Typography as interface*

WEEKS 10–15

In our final 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.

This unit, and the first semester, will culminate with Project 3: Binding*, which will be presented in class on November 22.*

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

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 tools to organize our class:

🔗 **Course site**
For housekeeping, agendas, and lectures

💬 **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

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—particularly 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."

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.

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" (copying-and-pasting code) to "thorough paraphrasing" (changing names or rearranging code). Students should also review the Academic Integrity Policy.

LLMs and "artificial intelligence"

Relatedly, there has been a lot of 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 ChatGPT or GitHub Copilot are known to often generate wrong or unnecessarily verbose code. This, combined with the fact that their results are derived from potentially copyrighted and/or legally questionable sources—usually without attribution—means the use of these tools is 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). These are to be treated like any other tools at our disposal—as *aides* to your understanding, not shortcuts around learning.

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.

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