

THE DWS BLOG

THE BLOG DESIGN TEAM

for

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INTRODUCTION

In today's business environment, fundamental steps have been developed to become a successful employee, a manager and a leader. The students at Florida International University (FIU) are being given the chance to enhance their skill set at the Digital Writing Studio (DWS) to encourage our students to be successful. As an innovative component of the FIU English Department's Writing Program, the Digital Writing Studio will provide a collaborative environment where students will learn how to compose effective, rhetorically informed digital and multimedia texts. Whether it is for a class assignments or an extra-curricular project the DWS has a variety of channels to allow easy accessibility to FIU's student body, one of which is the DWS blog.

The definition of a blog, according to dictionary.com is:

A Web site containing the writer's or group of writers' own experiences, observations, opinions, etc., and often having images and links to other Web sites.

In developing the blog there were many factors to take into consideration such as:

- ◆ Proper representation of the English Department
- ◆ Accessibility to update information via a blog
- ◆ Easy navigation between documents
- ◆ Informative database on what the DWS represents
- ◆ Font which can be read by a wide population,
- ◆ Image visibility
- ◆ Usability

Completion of each factor would produce a successful blog for the Digital Writing Studio. The blog will be a bridge between the users and the DWS and will provide user-friendly appointment setting, easily accessible and current information on upcoming events, previous user's projects, and quick on-hand frequently asked questions (FAQ) & workshop schedules.

In our intent to provide effectiveness of high quality visuals, easy navigation, and a consistency throughout the blog we conducted two usability tests. The test results showed there were preferences and objections to the initially proposed prototypes. This report analyzes the information collected from a wide spectrum of our student body to help answer the questions:

- ◆ Is this blog informative?

- ◆ If so, will this blog assist with the effectiveness in learning the different skill sets proposed by the Digital Writing Studio?

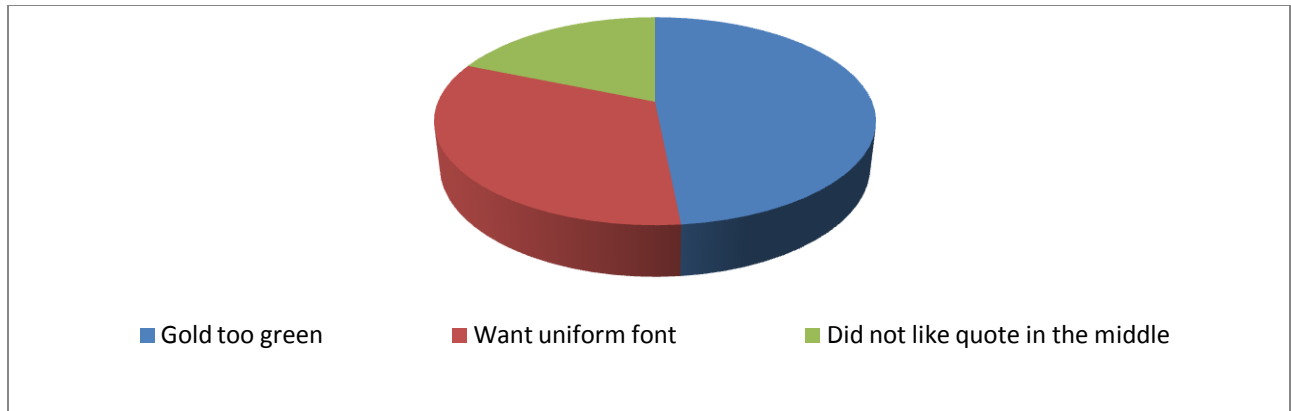
USABILITY TESTS

The Usability Tests gave us insight as to what, our audience preferences and objections are. It allowed us to develop a product which would best represent the Digital Writing Studio including the content, color scheme, & accessibility. As a team we gathered our research time and time again to provide the most effective results for the blog.

USABILITY TEST 1

For test one, we had already chosen the specific theme “Chameleon” from elegantthemes.com. We felt this layout was best in channeling the easy navigation that is seen in the English Department’s website. With the department’s website in mind we decided to use the same color scheme of dark blue and gold. We made two prototypes: One with a gold background and dark blue font for the headings (Prototype A) and the other with a dark blue background and gold font for the headings (Prototype B). With the prototypes we tested six people with a majority of them being from our class. We asked them to think out loud and describe what they thought of each prototype as they navigated through the blog. At this stage we had no content so we were looking for their opinions in aspect to the font color and size, background color, menu and content placement, and navigation.

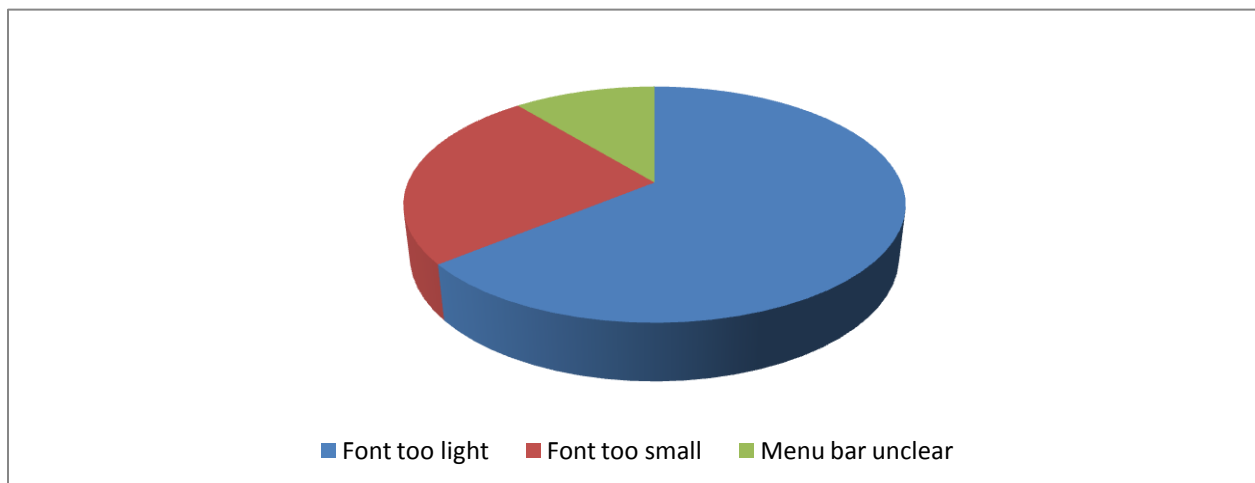
The test results yielded that prototype B was preferred. They identified the dark blue color with FIU and thought it made a better contrast. They found the location of the news slider good for easy access and visually pleasing. Four users were concerned that the multimedia bar should be placed higher for better accessibility. The majority of users agreed that the facebook and twitter icons were suitably placed on the top. All the users tested remarked that the gold background looked green instead of gold. They also stated that the font should be uniform in all pages pertaining to size and type of font. The middle “quote” section that came standard with the theme was disliked by two users. Another concern was that the middle section made the page longer and thus would take more time to scroll to the bottom and see the featured pages and or blog posts. When asked about menu labeling all users agreed that the menu was clear and easily seen. The chart below demonstrates the outcome of objections in test 1.



USABILITY TEST 2

After adjusting the blog according to the results of test 1, and adding content received from the blog content group, we did another usability test. We aimed at getting a good sample range of the university by testing people within and outside of the classroom. We tested people of different ages, sexes, and races; totaling 6 people were tested.

The general consensus was the site was easily accessible. They were able to navigate between pages such as, the FAQ and the Contact Us section. They liked the blue as the background color and gave positive praise about the icons used for the sections. Four of the tested people labeled the site as user-friendly. When asked where they would go to make an appointment all 6 people quickly completed the task. In the appointment page the users tested liked the fill out form to set appointments. We also got a couple of concerns from the users tested. Five people remarked that the font on the blog page was too light. Four people said that the font was too small. Two people claimed that the menu titles “News” and “Updates” were confusing since someone might think they were the same thing. Below is a chart depicting the objections of test 2.



KEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS USED IN BOTH TESTS

During the interviewing process the users were asked a sequence of questions to determine what adjustments were needed to obtain a successful blog for the DWS.

1. What do you think about the background color, font, and link colors?
2. Are the pages readable?
3. Is the blog easy to navigate?
4. What do you feel can be changed?
5. Would you visit the site in the future?

With the information attained, the blog design team altered a few areas on the blog. The font was made darker and larger and the “Updates” section was removed. We feel these changes will improve the blog for the enjoyment of the future users of the DWS.

FUTURE OBSTACLES

In the process of actualizing the blog there are other obstacles which developed. These obstacles will need to be enhanced in the future to ensure the functioning of the Digital Writing Studio blog without interruptions. The obstacles are as follows:

- ◆ Limitation of web space
- ◆ Complexity of the admin panel
- ◆ Uploads must be attached with a picture for the blog to display properly
- ◆ Spam
- ◆ Transferring the current site to FIU server & domain
- ◆ Unknown technical issues regarding the hosting of the site at FIU

CONCLUSION

The DWS blog design is an inspiration of the English department’s website. We chose a theme that reflects yet differentiates from the department’s site. A similar pallet of colors, such as the blue and gold tones, allows users to relate the blog with FIU. We used direct input from the usability tests and modified the blog accordingly. The changes included the background color, font, link colors, placement of blog content and making the blog easy to navigate. We merged our concept of the DWS blog with the blog content team’s work and successfully created a blog that will fulfill the following purposes:

- ◆ Inform the users as to what the DWS is
- ◆ Provide easy to access news
- ◆ User-friendly blog posting to post future projects created within the DWS
- ◆ Quick way to make appointments
- ◆ Information on how to contact the DWS
- ◆ Handy frequently asked questions
- ◆ Facebook integration via icon

RECOMMENDATIONS

While we have achieved our goal of designing the blog, there are possible issues that may arise in the future. The site was designed and tested on a server other than the FIU server, which will make it harder to transfer all the files and the database required to run site. As of the moment, it is still not known whether the FIU server has what is required to host a Wordpress site such as Apache server with the latest version of the server-side scripting language PHP 5.0 and the MySQL database, two of the core components required to have the DWS site online.

FIU Technology Services has informed us that there will be 300MB given to host the site. While it is enough to currently host the site, it may not be enough in the future as attaching pictures with every article is required keep the aesthetics of the DWS site. The space limitations could restrict users from uploading quality pictures.

Wordpress is a very user-friendly content management system with simple graphical user interface (GUI). The users of back-end panel, if unfamiliar with the system, may find it hard to use at first. An administrator with the basic knowledge of Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) and Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) will find it easy to solve minor coding issues that may arise as a result of updates made on different browsers such as Firefox, Safari, Chrome or Internet Explorer.

The blog design team is pleased to present the final outcome for the DWS blog that can be temporarily found here: [The DWS Blog](#)