Assignment 4: Procedure Documentation (Group)

Comment-able draft due Monday 3 March, e-mailed to me by 10 PM
Final draft due at the final exam, Tuesday, 18 March

As you have seen, most existing procedure documentation does not adequately prepare users for the tasks we're most interested in, nor does it adhere to the user-centered design criteria we have been discussing. Using the models and principles of good writing available to you from handouts and your reading in Price & Korman, Norman, and Pfeiffer, you aim to remedy this situation.

We have been asked to help provide user documentation for a common Mac classroom activity in technical and business writing: specifically, taking a screen shot or a photo file, sizing it appropriately, and integrating it usefully into a Word document using arrows and text-boxes located above the image, to the right side, and below. We will write step-by-step procedures for an instructor who has some basic Word skills but does not know how to do screen-captures on the Mac, nor how to place and integrate images with text boxes and arrows (consult the pumphouse plumbing document in the Pick-Up folder for the desired end product your reader wants to be able to create).

In upcoming class sessions we will continue to develop a detailed set of constraints or starting assumptions that your documentation will explicitly stipulate. Your intended audience should inform your choices about level of detail, but your work must include keystroke-by-mouse-click documentation, and should efficiently clarify relevant issues and help users avoid common pitfalls. In many instances there will be multiple ways to execute a task; your aim here is not to be exhaustive or to justify yours as the very best way to place and integrate images, but rather to present an effective way to do so while appropriately acknowledging that other methods are available. As we have discussed in class, your finished piece should also set contexts and employ useful analogies or conceptual frameworks, so that users can actually learn more about the process beyond your instructions, and become better learners.

Your documentation should demonstrate a hierarchy of section headings for mid-scale tasks, clear directives, and numbered steps, showing proper use of different verb forms and not-too-intrusive explanations. For the draft especially, your own integration of screen-captures is not the highest priority: I am far more interested in your ability to structure a presentation and craft written descriptions than I am in your ability to manipulate images in multiple-column formats. However, by the end of your process each of you should be able to pull the screenshots, size them, insert text boxes and size them, and place arrows from text boxes to specific places within the shot, ideally using the two-column format that makes efficient use of page space.

Please note that you will be working in groups, and that you will also be writing a formal evaluation of your own and your teammates' contributions to the team project at the end. This means, don't miss class, and don't let your teammates down.

I look forward to seeing what you come up with.