Teaching Accessibility in Professional Writing Classes
The Purpose of the Surface

Dan Seward

Senior Lecturer, OSU Department of English
President, Global Society of Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE <gsole.org>)
“Technical communication is a process of managing technical information in ways that allow people to take action”

“Information consists of differences that make a difference.” -- Edward R. Tufte, Envisioning Information
We start by examining a “quaint” website and a PDF document containing instructions for its drink carbonation kit. <www.mypopsoda.com>
The MY POP OLD FASHIONED SODA SHOPPE is an environmentally green product. With this product you can reuse glass seltzer and plastic soda bottles many times. In many places that do not tax foods, no sales taxes you are forced to pay just to make bubbly water. This MY POP OLD FASHIONED SODA SHOPPE has been pressure tested and then vacuum packaged. The fittings are high quality precision parts capable of providing a long life if they are not abused. Unscrew one bottle (in the bag) it makes no difference which one. Blow into bottle if needed to pop bottle into normal shape. Fill with two teaspoons of baker's yeast, a cup of white sugar, add water. Leave a 3 inch air space inside the top of the bottle for shaking. Place palm of hand over opening and shake to mix ingredients. This should yield enough carbon dioxide to carbonate up to five 2-liter bottles over the course of a week’s time. To prevent the tubing from twisting, screw the bottle into the cap while keeping the cap from rotating. The pinch clamps are open and the pinch clamp for filling the soda bottle is closed. The six assembled bottles fit in The MY POP OLD FASHIONED SODA SHOPPE carrying bag. The tubing with the pressure gauge and the tubing with the closed pinch clamp and blue male fitting hang outside the bag for ease of use. Assemble all tubing connections finger tight. Hand tighten the bottle caps.

Motivators for Use

Conceptual Descriptors

Directives to Act

All-bold text in one long paragraph makes it harder for readers to distinguish varieties in information.

There is some visual “weight” in type styles—but this draws attention to ancillary info.
Instructions for First Use

1. **Unscrew** one bottle (in the bag) it makes no difference which one.
2. **Blow** into bottle if needed to pop bottle into normal shape.
3. **Fill** with two teaspoons of bakers’ yeast, a cup of white sugar, add water.
4. **Leave** a 3-inch air space inside the top of the bottle for shaking.
5. **Place** palm of hand over opening and shake to mix ingredients.
6. **Screw** the bottle back into the cap while keeping the cap from rotating (to prevent the tubing from twisting).

This recipe should yield enough carbon dioxide to carbonate up to five 2-liter bottles over the course of a week’s time.
Introducing Web Accessibility: Why & How

We start by watching a four-minute video from the Web Accessibility Initiative (part of the W3C):

<www.w3.org/WAI/videos/standards-and-benefits>

FOUR qualities of accessible composition:

1) Perceivable
2) Operable
3) Understandable
4) Robust and reliable
First Hands-On Task: Edit Carmen Pages

We use <Hx> formatting and enter Alt-Text on Professional Resources “Wiki” Page.
Surface Level with a Deeper Purpose

“Do we really need to use the Hx-tags for all the headings on all our pages?”

—A question from an otherwise diligent student in my ENG 3405: Organizational Websites class
Introducing Web Accessibility: More Why

“There are over one billion people with disabilities, or about 15-20% of the population. The UN Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines access to information, including the Web, as a human right.”
Second Hands-On Task: The WAVE Tool

We use the Web Accessibility Evaluation (WAVE) tool as part of website QA: <wave.webaim.org>
Third Hands-On Task: Analysis for Action

After gathering data with the WAVE tool, students will analyze the data and recommend action in their QA reports for their assigned websites.

“In Figure 7 above, the correct alt-text would read something like, “portrait of Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett,” to ensure that visually-impaired audiences understand just as fully as other audiences. Additionally, this was one of the few instances where alt-text was even included at all. Another main accessibility issue . . .” -Quote from one group’s report