Website Critique Questions ?

In this assignment you are to analyze one or more sites on the Web in relation to their effectiveness in terms of construction, presentation, representation and manipulation of cultural or historical knowledge. Using the following questions as a guide, write an in-depth critique of how the site or sites present information in the context of knowledge-making. First and foremost, approach the assignment as an in-depth analysis of a history or museum-based site.

Getting Started

If possible, you should pick a site to evaluate that at least tangentially lets you play with the issues that you think you'll want to investigate for your Online Exhibit project. The essence of the assignment is this: to carefully analyze and write about how the design, structure, and content of the site works together in two ways:

1. How sites transform knowledge from print into electronic media.
2. How particular website designs are influenced by, reveal, and communicate the cognitive architecture of cultural or historical knowledge, as it is imagined by its designers for a particular user context.

These questions do not attempt to cover all sites on the World Wide Web, just those making some claims to presenting cultural and historical materials with some academic, scholarly, or educational knowledge orientation. The questions are intended as the beginning of forming a vocabulary for critically discussing how the design and execution of websites provide the context for the creation of cultural and historical knowledge.

NAVIGATION

1. Do you know what to do when you open the site?

2. Is the "look and feel" of the entry page appropriate for the audience and purpose?

3. Does the homepage introduce the site, letting you know what it is about? Can users quickly get the "big picture" of what is offered by the website? Are the mission, goals, and objectives of the website clear?

4. Does the look and feel of the site reflect the content? Do you get a sense of what the site is about without actually reading any of the text?

5. How many sections are there to the site? Are there sub-groupings under major headings?

6. Are the links on the navigation bar logically grouped, i.e. are the sections of the site of equal importance and depth? Could they be better organized?

7. Is essential information linked by the navigation system? Is there an obvious method to navigate between primary and secondary pages?

8. Is there a site navigation bar on each page, or do you need to click back and forth? Is the menu located in the same place on each page?

9. Is the navigation bar clearly recognizable as navigation?

10. Can you get to anything within 3 clicks?

11. Does navigation allow backtracking/return to upper levels so the use of the browser back button is not required?

12. Can you see everything you need to see on the page, or must you scroll down to get to critical information? Are there options for browsing different types of information from one page?

13. On long pages of text, do you know the section headings without having to scroll down the page?

14. Is there a hierarchy of information, i.e. can you automatically "read" which is the most important information? The second most important, etc.? What elements did the designer use to indicate levels of importance—color, size, similar graphic elements, relationships of pieces of information on the page to each other?

15. Do you know which elements are links? Are links simple to understand and use? Are they clearly labeled and their destination obvious?

16. Is there a link back to the home page from each supporting page?

CONTENT

1. Is the content relevant, useful, and meaningful to the intended audience?

2. Is the content appropriate to the intended audience? (vocabulary, sophistication of topics and language, etc.)

3. Is the information thorough, accurate, and current?

4. Does the website provide resources that go beyond the ordinary (i.e., unique, local, special)?

5. Is the content presented in a variety of formats to meet individual needs and differences (i.e., text, graphics, photographs, diagrams, audio, video)?

6. Does the depth of content match the varied audience needs (i.e., levels of pages or information beyond an entry or introductory page)?

7. Is there an evident bias or stereotyping present on the site?

8. Is content credited and references included where appropriate?

9. Is a search function available to easily find specific information?

10. Is the text free from spelling and grammatical errors?

11. Are there section headings, bulleted lists, short sentences and paragraphs employed to permit easy scanning of the pages?

12. How is text arranged? How many words per line? How many lines per paragraph?

13. Is the copyright and contact information easily located?

APPEARANCE

1. Does the graphic design reflect the purpose of the site (i.e., serious, whimsical, sophisticated)?

2. Is the design appropriate and attractive to the intended audience?

3. Is the layout balanced, clean and uncluttered?

4. Is there a consistent page layout throughout the site through the arrangement of fonts, colors and images?

5. How many colors are used throughout the site; is there a moderate use of colors (3-5)?

6. Are color combinations pleasing and appropriate to the content? Is there a consistent color scheme throughout?

7. Does the design of the pages direct your eyes to graphics and other page elements?

8. Does the text contrast with the background so that it is not a strain to read? Is the body text clearly legible; is the text size and choice of body font easy to read?

9. Does the site make appropriate use of fonts (i.e, font type, style, size, color, ease of reading)? Is there a moderate use of fonts (2-3)? Are decorative fonts used as headlines versus body text?

10. Are graphics appropriate and relevant to the content? Are they arranged well?

11. Are there icons associated with repeated elements on the site? Are icon meanings obvious, and are text links provided as an alternative?

USABILITY

1. Is the site cross-browser compatible?

2. Is all of the content viewable without horizontal scrolling at 800x600 screen resolution?

3. Are all components of the site functional?

4. Are special browser or plug-in requirements clearly visible and easily understood?

5. Are interactive features clearly explained?

6. Are the skills required to use the site appropriate to the audience?

7. Does the site use sound? Does it use it effectively or is it a distraction?

8. Is there an off switch for music and sound?

9. Is the 'Skip Intro' option available where appropriate?

10. Is there a reasonable load time for the pages?

11. Are there continuously moving or blinking elements? Are animations and special effects put to good use, or are they merely a distraction?