

Writing Spaces

Assignments & Activities Archive

Brand Style Guide Assignment

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Overview

The Brand Style Guide (BSG) is a common genre for organizations both large and small. It establishes a verbal and visual style that employees can apply in print and digital communications, yielding consistency across different expressions of the brand. Creating a BSG is therefore a good fit as an assignment for an introductory professional writing course, helping students become familiar with a genre that may significantly shape the communication they do throughout their career. Moreover, creating a personal BSG—that is, a style guide for their own “brand”—helps students develop and express their own professional style, which is useful for documents and websites they may create as they pursue internships, jobs, and other opportunities.

The BSG assignment is also well suited to help students learn key components of visual rhetoric—specifically, color, typography, imagery, and page design—in lower-division courses that include a unit on multimodal composing or in upper-division courses that focus entirely on this topic. Creating a BSG helps students understand and practice the expression of style, rhetorically contextualized in terms of audience and purpose, through different modes. As they work on this assignment, students can examine elements of visual rhetoric and develop the vocabulary to justify or critique the particular choices of typeface and color, for instance, in documents that they author or for which they are the audience.

Time Commitment

Varies. Instructors of upper-division multimodal writing courses can build an entire course around the BSG project, taking two to three weeks (four to six class sessions) each to cover typography, color, imagery, and page design, with an additional two to three weeks for drafting, peer review, revising, and editing the BSG itself. Alternatively, in professional writing courses or in lower-division courses with a multimodal component, the BSG project can be

developed over three to four weeks (six to eight class sessions) and used as an initial phase for other assignments in which students apply the style guidelines they've developed in subsequent print or digital compositions they create for the course. For instance, the BSG would help students design their resume, letterhead, and perhaps even a logo for professional communications that are required in other course assignments in an introductory professional writing course.

Materials

As above, the materials—or more specifically, the software programs—used to create the BSG vary according to the prominence of this assignment in the course in which it is taught. For multimodal writing courses, the BSG assignment provides an excellent opportunity for students to learn software for photo editing, illustration, and page layout. Indeed, the assignment can engage students in learning the three major programs in the Adobe Creative Suite: Photoshop for image editing; Illustrator for logo design and other illustrations; and InDesign for page layout and typography.

In the shorter version of this assignment for professional or lower-division writing courses, the BSG can be completed with multimodal composing tools that are more user-friendly and low-cost. For example, Canva offers many templates that students can modify to create a Brand Style Guide, and Canva provides wide selections along with guidance for using typography, color palette, imagery, and other choices that comprise the BSG.

Assignment or Activity Process

- Instructors lead a class discussion providing an overview of the Brand Style Guide as a professional multimodal genre and sharing examples of BSGs drawn from the Internet. A collection of examples can show a range of styles and contexts and serve as models for the BSGs that students subsequently create. If instructors repeat this assignment in multiple courses, students can look at examples created by their near

peers. Instructors can also encourage students to seek out additional examples of BSGs from websites of companies and organizations (e.g., their own college).

- Next, students work in small groups focusing on one section or element of the BSG—for instance, logo, color, imagery, typography, writing style, page layout, front and back cover, and table of contents. Each group is tasked with delivering a presentation to the entire class on that section of the BSG. The presentation should include general guidelines for that section along with examples from existing BSGs that demonstrate effective and different stylistic approaches. Preparing and delivering these presentations takes up two to three class sessions.
- Next, students articulate the audience and purpose for their own BSG. They select a set of three to five adjectives that describe the style they envision for themselves and write a justification and elaboration for each of these adjectives. For instance, if “bold” is one of the adjectives describing the style, the student will explain why this is appropriate for their BSG’s audience and purpose and how this “bold” style will be expressed in the typography, color, imagery, and other BSG elements.
- Finally, students use software programs (e.g., Adobe Suite, Canva) to create drafts of the various sections of the BSG, with peer feedback given and received on individual sections. Incorporating that feedback, students create a final version of their BSG which they submit for a grade. Figures 1 through 4 show examples of specific pages of BSGs created by two of my former students, demonstrating the content of different sections of the BSG as well as different verbal and visual styles employed by these students.



Figure 1: Color illustration. Credit Sara Bredice.



Figure 2: Color description. Credit Sara Bredice.

Logos & Stuff

As a Vietnamese-American, my name is often read and written without the accents.

Within this logo, I want to embrace my **heritage** and the **meaning** my parents put into my given name by writing it the way it was intended to be.



The Logo



The Icon



The Wordmark



03

Figure 3: Logo. Credit Vân Võ.

DO'S & DO NOT'S

Do not transform



Do not apply gradients



Do use the color palette



Do have fun!



04

Figure 4: Logo dos and don'ts. Credit Vân Võ.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this assignment will:

- Gain an understanding of the key sections and elements of the Brand Style Guide as a professional multimodal genre
- Learn about visual rhetoric by analyzing how audience, context, and purpose determine choices made by BSG authors, including themselves
- Demonstrate how style can be consistently expressed through visual as well as verbal elements—for example, through typography, color, and imagery as well as through writing
- Practice multimodal composing and gain facility with relevant software tools

Learning Accommodations

- For students who have very little experience with the kind of multimodal composing required to produce a Brand Style Guide, they should have the option to use Canva or a similar program that provides templates and guidance.
- Rather than creating a personal BSG for themselves, students can do a “re-brand” by modifying an existing BSG for a new audience. For instance, a student could re-brand a product or service specifically for a younger or older audience, or for people in a specific geographic location.
- Students can work on the entire project collaboratively, working in a team to develop a brand or re-brand for an existing product or organization.