Mapping Important Sites in the History of Writing Across Time and Cultures

Issues in Design and Technical Communication

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Introduction

The history of writing reaches across thousands of years and places all around the world. However, no comprehensive compilation of sites relevant to this important history currently exists. Our research focuses on identifying and compiling these sites, which will contribute to Dr. Kinkead’s book, A Writing Studies Primer, and result in an interactive website that maps and explains them.

Historical Sites

Each historical site or artifact will be placed in one of six categories:
- Origins of Writing
- Writing Tools
- Printing Presses
- Paper
- Alphabets
- Keyboards

For each category, five to ten important sites will be highlighted in a page of their own (Figure 4).

Examples of these historical sites and artifacts include various parchments (Figure 2), typewriters (Figure 3), Hawaiian printing presses, and the Cumberland Pencil Museum.

Website Design

Designing an accessible, informative, and entertaining website for general readers, scholars, and tourists draws on technical communication principles.

We were faced with these problems:
- Deciding which sites to highlight
- Choosing sites to represent the world
- Creating an easily navigable interface
- Finding images for complex concepts

We considered proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast when making our design decisions.

One important feature is a Google map that will display the locations of these historic sites (Figure 1).

Continued Research

Our continued research will add to the list of writing sites and artifacts and promote the ongoing development of an accessible visual medium.

Figure 1 – Master Google map

Figure 2 – Parchment from Naples, Italy (1480)

Figure 3 – Underwood typewriter (1920s)

Figure 4 – Page design sketch

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