

PROJECT 1:
A WEBSITE OF MISINFORMATION
AND/OR
MISSING INFORMATION

CSE100/INFO100 Fluency with Information Technology
Winter 2002

[PDF version](#)

[Part 1 details](#)

[Part 2 details](#) (updated 1/28/2002)

[Bottom](#)

Introduction

Historical Context

What does it mean to have “photographic proof” of an event? Twenty years ago, photographs were taken at face value. A photograph could serve as evidence for what it pictured: certain people or things had been in a particular place, together, at a particular time, doing particular activities.

What does it mean to publish valid and authentic papers? Factual reports and accounts of current events? For many, many years well-established publishing houses – for books, research journals, government documents, and magazines - have used well-established criteria for validating and authenticating the materials they print. A publishing house imprint or media signature carried meaning about the level and rigor of review for the content – with some imprints conveying greater rigor (e.g., The MIT Press, NPR) than others (e.g., *The National Inquirer*).

This world of twenty or more years ago, while far from being perfect, did have the benefits of being able to validate content at a glance. That’s the upside. The downside was the barriers to publication. If your ideas were not “accepted” or “validated” by the various review boards, your options for publication and

dissemination could be limited. A case in point: Albert Einstein's original paper on relativity was turned down by numerous scientific and mathematical journals.

Enter the Digital Age, the Internet and the World Wide Web. Technology provides unprecedented opportunities for self-publishing and freedom of expression. If Einstein was alive today, he could post his findings on relativity on a Web site and his ideas would instantly be available to billions of individuals across the globe. That's the upside. But, with unchecked self-publishing comes the downside of content that has never been edited to check for authenticity, for completeness, etc. How is the typical user who down loads a page from the Web to distinguish between the careful considerations of a scientist like Einstein and those of an amateur science fiction writer? Or if the user is looking for travel information or stock recommendations or whatever you wish to fill in here, how is the user to know that information is current, accurate, and complete? With the advent of digital images that can be easily manipulated (and as you will experience in lab), even photographs that previously might have served as "supporting evidence" are called into question.

In the world we live in today, where the opportunities for self-expression are seemingly endless, how do we discriminate between truth and fiction? Information and misinformation? What are the ethical limits on how content should be manipulated? Project 1 is designed to help you experience first hand the issues surrounding authenticity and self-expression. Remember that on the Web, the motivation for publishing misinformation does not always have to be intentional misdirection. Many, many sites contain inaccurate information that is published with the best intentions.

Now fast forward to September, 2001 where technology and terrorism crossed paths on U.S. soil: all of it broadcasted, live, for a global audience

The Current Situation

Since September 11th of this year our world has been turned upside down by surreal events that defy imagination. Two of the world's tallest buildings reduced to rubble and thousands killed. The story itself seems unreal to those of us who hear of it from afar. It is only those who visited Ground Zero in the weeks after the attack who could truly understand the enormity of the destruction and the inability of any

medium to truly capture the horror. During these frantic months which have produced, quite literally, BILLIONS of words of information and thousand upon thousands of pictures, two patterns have emerged that are neither tied together, nor totally separate.

First: Information is disappearing.

Out of concern for National Security, thousands of web pages and web sites have gone dark-pulled from the WWW for various reasons. Information that has traditionally been publicly accessible by any citizen is being pulled, not only from web sites, but from libraries and government installations.

Second: Misinformation is spreading like wildfire

Misinformation, little white lies, selective dissemination of facts, while not new, has been brought into the limelight because of the global attention surrounding 9/11. Not only do counter-intelligence agencies use the media to broadcast subjective, often dubious reports, but the average person now has the same opportunity.

Project Overview

In this project, your challenge is to do create a Web site of "misinformation" that *appears* as authentic as possible to the user. That is, while the content of your Web site will be questionable, everything else about your Web site should convey the opposite. There are no limitations on the topics.

Overall steps. Read carefully the detailed instructions for Part 1 and Part2:

- (1) Locate a digital photograph from an online or other source (you can take your own digital picture if you have access to a digital camera).
- (2) Using Adobe Photoshop, modify that photograph in a subtle but significant way.
- (3) Create some text to support your modified image.
- (4) Put your text and image together on a Web site that appears as authentic as possible.
- (5) Test your Web site with at least two individuals to see how successful you are at conveying the authenticity of your "fictional" content.

You may choose any content area for your Web site as long as it is in good taste and permits comfortable viewing by everyone in the course. If you're unsure about the "tastefulness" of a particular content, it is probably a good idea to talk with your TA or instructor first, or choose something else. Here are some possible ideas:

- Create an image that places a currently extinct animal in a location/point in time when it would already have been extinct.
- Create a site that supposedly includes "missing information" from September 11th that could have been removed out of concern for national security.
- Add a well-known landmark (e.g. the Space Needle) to a different cityscape (e.g., San Francisco) and create a Visitor's site for that landmark or city.
- Create home page for a fictitious product, company, special interest group, city, or school.

Assignment 1 provided some suggestions for searching for public domain images online.

The Web site should be in your Dante web area, but should be in a separate directory from the from the pages you have already created. **Name the directory information; name the page you will create for Part 1 as part1.html; name the main or home page for Part 2 as index.html.** Please use this exact spelling and capitalization so people (such as course staff!) can find your sites easily. Other names within the site can be whatever you choose. Make sure the directory and the files in it all have general Unix Read permission.

Objectives

- To design and implement a Web site using HTML
- To manipulate a photograph in Adobe Photoshop
- To experience first hand the ease with which "misinformation" can be made available online
- To reflect on how much information we have lost due to the events of September 11th and formulate an opinion on whether or not lack of information can also constitute misinformation when there is nothing to be found to counter new "facts" that are appearing every day.

- To become aware of and systematically explore the “cues” that users may use to assess the content of a Web site
- To conduct user testing to evaluate your Web site
- To reflect on the challenges for misinformation online
- Ultimately, to become an appropriately cautious user of online information

Copyright and Fair Use of Text and Images

Images and other files and content on the Internet are protected in the same way as print materials and photographs. Use of digital images for purposes of alteration and display on the Internet has limited coverage under the conditions of fair use: See the Four Factor Fair Use test at:

[<http://www.utsystem.edu/OGC/IntellectualProperty/copypol2.htm>].

Public Domain items are those in which the copyright has been lost, has expired, or the author of the work makes no copyright claims to reproductions or enhancements of the work. Photographs taken by Federal Workers and posted on Federal Government sites are public domain. Photographs posted on City, County, and State sites have varying copyright policies but tend to fall in line with Federal copyright guidelines. ALWAYS note the copyright policy of ANY site you visit, regardless of its status as a commercial, non-profit, government, or educational site.

If you use an image of a person for reasons of making a profit, you are responsible for obtaining permission from the person or their heirs. If you use a trademark image, you must also get permission.

Please Recall the Class Policy on Cooperation and Collaboration

It is valuable to work with a friend or classmate when learning a new application or working out a problem. However, the work that you perform in FIT100 for a grade must be your own work unless "working in groups" is explicitly allowed. The Projects involved in FIT 100 are NOT intended to be group projects. It is OK to run ideas and scenarios past your friends or classmates, but the solution you create should be based on what is inside your own head.

Part I: Due Monday, January 28 (details below)

What to do (hint: read through all of these items carefully before beginning):

1. Using the Web searching skills you developed in Assignment 1, find an image in the public domain and note the source of your image.
2. Decide what the theme of your Web site of Misinformation will be, and how you will modify the image and use it.
3. Using the HTML skills you developed in Lab Activities 3-5, create the beginning of your Web site. *At a minimum*, your initial Web site (part1.html) should contain the following:
 - a. A title (*use a title tag AND a heading tag to note the title in the main part of the page as well as in the title bar at the top*) for your Web Site (clearly identifying it as a Web site of misinformation).
 - b. Near the heading you should also include a bogus Web site logo that you create using additional features of Adobe Photoshop or any other image creation software.
 - c. Below the heading, put HTML code that will cause a browser to print the date and time the file was last modified (we'll supply sample HTML you can copy and use). T
 - d. Paragraph 0: A short description of the intended nature of the site.
 - e. The unmodified image. *Make the text flow around it.*
NOTE: If you decide later to use more than one image, then you must make sure all are public domain or that you have permission to alter both.
 - f. Paragraph 1 should state your source for the image(s). It should also include a statement of proof that the image(s) is in the public domain (or that you have permission to use and alter them). Your proof may be an excerpt from the site's copyright policy or email from the owner themselves giving you permission. However, your **MUST** include this information. Just saying that you have permission or that the pictures are in the public domain is not enough.

- g. Paragraph 2 should describe the “true” context of the image(s). What do they really depict and where did they come from.
- h. Paragraph 3 should describe the “fictional” context of your image(s) once modified. In other words, a description of how you **intend** to modify the image. (Note: You do not need to modify the image until Part II.)
- i. Links to 3 other sites what will help to authenticate your Web site of Misinformation. (These might be other bogus sites OR they might be sites of similar content that help to validate your page)

Turn-in procedure and Grading Criteria:

1. The deadline for making changes to your initial site is: **Monday, January 28, 8:00 pm.**
2. **After this date, make no changes whatsoever to your site**, or it will graded as late.
3. Browse to your site. Print it off, from the browser. The printout will show the date that the page was last modified, as well as the date and time of the printout. [Note: printouts which are not from the browser will not be accepted.]
4. From the browser, print out the HTML source for the site.
5. Staple all pages together, write your name and section on the first page, and bring to your next quiz section (Tuesday) or lecture (Wednesday).
6. Grading criteria: By the deadline, a Web site conforming to the description of required content, turned in according to the proper procedure.

Part II: REVISED 1/28/2001.

[Back to top of document](#)

[Bottom](#)

Completion deadline: Thursday, February 7, 2002, 8:00pm. Please don't modify the files after that. Bring printouts to class on Friday. Unless you hear otherwise before the due date, please follow the same procedures as for Part 1, including the two printouts (there's a possibility we might also ask for some form of electronic submission).

Details

1. Using Photoshop or Paint or some other tool available to you, modify the image(s) as described in Part 1. Don't be afraid to try other features of Photoshop, etc. while you are at it!
2. Make a copy of the part 1 web page to modify – do *not* modify the original part1.html file. The new file should be called **part2.html**. In your web site, you may create additional files as needed. They should all be within the original **information** directory. However, do not create any files with names that begin with "index," such as index.html, index.htm, etc. [Note: this is a change in the instructions (1/28) compared with Part 1.]
 - a. Do whatever you can to make the new page look authentic. For example, replace the original image with the modified one, *remove* the text describing the "true" context of the image; write text to reinforce the authenticity of your modified image, etc.; add additional links, etc. Your site does not have to follow the format of the original one, with the four paragraphs, etc. Remember what you learned about evaluating a Web sites and work on "improving" some of those features in your Web site. For example, consider how you can use fonts, colors, spelling and grammar, presentation, textual content, and vocabulary to further enhance the "credibility" of your image.
3. Using the more advanced HTML skills you developed in Labs 5 and 6:
 - a. Add a mailto link to your email address.
 - b. Use styles in at least a couple of places. It's OK to also use the older ways of formatting text, but styles are the future of HTML, so show us you know how to use them.
4. Create a separate Web page in which you reflect on the problem of misinformation. Keep this in the same directory, and call it **disclaimer.html**.
 - a. On this "disclaimer" page, provide a disclaimer for the quality of information on your Misinformation Web site.
 - b. Provide a discussion of the ethical issues concerned with conveying the accuracy, completeness and validity of the information you are presenting. This probably needs at least two paragraphs to be sufficient.
 - c. Include a link from this page (the disclaimer page) back to: your Web site of misinformation; and to your Dante home page.

Testing your website:

5. How effective is your Web site of misinformation? Find out by trying it out on some unsuspecting visitor! This is a form of experimentation, a typical tool in many disciplines.
 - a. **Create a copy of your part 2 Web Misinformation file.** Keep the page in the information directory, and call the new file **main.html**. On this copy, remove the misinformation title and anything else which gives a hint that the page is bogus. Link this test page to your disclaimer page and the disclaimer page back to the user test page.
 - b. Show this version of your Web site to two individuals; ideally, people who do not know you've been working on this project. After they've looked at it for a while, have each visitor rate your Web site according to the evaluation criteria you used in Assignment 2 – source, currency, verifiability, and so forth. For this purpose, create a table of the user evaluations of your site.
 - c. Summarize the results. Include the table and your summary on your disclaimer page.
 - d. Write a paragraph or so of the ethical issues.
 - e. Write a final paragraph on your disclaimer page discussing how effective your Web site was at establishing the credibility of misinformation. How you could have improved the credibility of your site, especially if you had more advanced knowledge of HTML or programming?

Grading Criteria:

1. How well your site meets the requirements named above, in a technical/HTML sense. The quality of your modified image.
2. How well your site meets the requirements, in the content sense; primarily, this refers to the persuasiveness and coherence of your misinformation (**at least 3 means to enhance the authenticity of your Web site should be used-see the criteria from the readings for Assignment 2**).
3. The care taken in conducting and writing up the visitor experiment, and the thoughtfulness of your discussions on the disclaimer page.

[Back to top of document](#)

[Back to top of Part 2 instructions](#)