

Document genres

↑ user awareness	digital	physical	task immediacy ↓
	suasives	suasives	
	books	books	
	help	cards	
	counsel	counsel	
	interface elements	interface elements	

English 392A

Document genres

A rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish.

—Carolyn Miller, 1984



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Audience, purpose, context

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Suasives

documents that (seek to) change attitude

digital	physical
tutorials, tours, demos; banners, pop-ups?	pamphlets, press releases; ads, promotional articles, ...
user-invoked, or intrusively supplied	

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Books

(extended) documents that inform

digital	physical
user guides, reference manuals	user guides, reference manuals
user-invoked documents that operate on physical book metaphors (indexes, ToCs, etc.)	traditional user-invoked paper documents

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Help & Cards

documents that supply brief assistive information

digital—help	physical—cards
true help	quick references, job cards
• task-specific	• task-specific
• user-invoked • task-specific • brief information	

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Counsel

documents that convey system status or expectations

digital	physical
dialogs, "error messages"	persistent instructions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• system-invoked or user-triggered	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• system supplied• user-consulted
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• transient and brief	

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Interface elements

the interface as document; information that directly participates in the user's activity

digital	physical
instructions, labels, icons	labels, persistent definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• information that disappears into the task• it doesn't even seem like information to the user	

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Assorted other genres

- memo, letter, report, flier, brochure, catalogue, newsletter, newspaper, magazine, resumé, business card, ad, infomercial, skywriting, spec-sheets, telemarketing, t-shirt blurb, spam, junk-fax,
- (not to mention tragedy, lyric poetry, spy novels, highway signage, ...)

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Fuzzy categories

- not defined by necessary and sufficient conditions
- prototypes
- mix and match: resumé that looks like a newsletter; a help system that looks like a cartoon; an interface that looks like a file cabinet; ...
- but: you need to know the genre expectations (and/or familiarities) of your users

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