

# Boilerplate Project 2011–2012

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## Introduction

Text editors are well known writing aids, with their automatic spell and grammar checkers, as well as templates where one only has to fill-in specifics without needing to understand the content, structure or even style of the document. As such, writing is becoming an increasingly subjective area where teachers and employers can have difficulties being able to judge the advancements, achievements and knowledge of students or employees within the area of writing.

Many schools and companies are aware of the need for increased communication skills and knowledge in the area of writing, and many look to writing workshops and personal tutoring to increase the level of writing proficiency with students or employees in this area. This project looks to using a text editor as a low-level, electronic tutor to help improve in these areas. The Boilerplate Project came about as a way to improve writing skills and proficiency, the writing areas considered, but not limited to, are style, composition, structure, grammar, intent and formatting.

In a previous study using the Boilerplate, three areas of problematic writing were specified. These areas known as *threshold concepts* (Meyer & Land, 2003) were designated *structural, methodological and mechanical*. Threshold concepts refer to approaches or abstract ideas that can be difficult to understand, and as such, a new way of addressing these are needed. When the concept is understood, one has crossed a threshold and understands the knowledge in a way that is so memorable and

tacit that it is almost unforgettable; a so-called ‘a-ha’ experience. In this way, understanding is achieved where rote-learning without comprehension might have been the result.

In the previous study, three areas of threshold concepts connected to writing were considered starting with structural concepts. These relate to those items that need structure: title page, formatting, lists, and sub-lists, etc. The methodological areas are those that relate to the content. Depending on the purpose and goal of the document, the content being written will have different aims that need to be met. Finally, the mechanical threshold concepts relate to how the text editor responds to the input of the user. Here we have changed the mechanics of the Boilerplate so that the text editor supports the writing process and does not take it over. In this way, the user is supported in their writing and can learn from the experience.

### **Main Objectives**

The Boilerplate Project has the main objective of increasing writing proficiency using text editors as a low-level tutor by editing the higher-level functions that are already a part of the program. A quantitative review will be given with statistical data as to ease of usage, improvement, learning curves, threshold concept review, etc. A qualitative review will be featured in a report as to the overall usage of the Boilerplate in the different environments, as well as how the different threshold concepts were met, user-friendliness, etc.

### **Considered Minor Objectives**

Each contact and group has different technological devices that are employed. The way in which the Boilerplate is usable with these differentiating devices is considered.

The different levels (age) that each group represents is looked to from an HCI perspective.

Use of the text editor: interface/design problems. When upgrading from MS Word 2003 to MS Word 2007 the change from “toolbar/text” to “ribbon/icon”

Interaction issues: knowledge of the reviewing toolbar and usage (both teacher and student)

Heuristic learning of the Boilerplate: cognitive and meta-cognitive usage/solutions

Domain Knowledge of user in relation to Boilerplate

The different areas (countries/states/principalities) each group represents are considered from a world view for a comparative perspective.

### **Project outline**

*Summer 2011*

Trial contacts set

*Fall Term 2011*

To October 8, 2011

*Finalization of Project plan*

October 9, 2011

*Final Project Plan sent to contacts*

October 10, 2011 – October 16

*Questionnaire sent to contacts and returned*

Specifications as to each Boilerplate for each area are collected

October 17 – October 24

Boilerplates (BP) are created for each level and region as to specifications of the questionnaire

*October 25, 2011 – October 31, 2011*

Contacts are given time to review and ask for adjustments to BP

*November 6, 2011- January 8, 2012*

BP is used in each level area

*Spring Term 2012*

*January 9, 2012 – January 22, 2012*

Review Questionnaire sent to contacts

*January 23, 2012 – Feb 5, 2012*

Discussions with contacts

Email, Skype, Phone, etc.

Documentation is finalized and clarified between contacts and coordinators

*February 6, 2012 – March 2, 2012*

Writing of final report

*March 5*

CoSN Conference Washington DC (Consortium for School Networking)

Presentation of Project

*Project Contacts in Alphabetical Order*

Bjerede, Marie. Oregon U.S.A.

Dillard, Malin. Sweden

Heald, James. South Korea (\*)

Lawson, Juliette. Banjul, The Gambia (\*)

Mattisson, Jane. Sweden (\*\*)

TBA, Mattisson, Jane. Ningbo, China

Schamp, Dennis. California U.S.A.

Schamp, Dwayne. South Carolina U.S.A.

Schamp-Bjerede, Teri. Sweden (\*\*)

\* Pending acceptance

\*\*Project coordinators

*Contact Requirements:*

Contacts are:

requested to be within the timeline set, and if any problems arise, immediate contact with project coordinators is requested

asked to have a specific writing component within their area set for the students to use the BP at the time set in the timeline

This can be a report, essay, thesis, project outline, project scope, etc.

Asked to have for comparison purposes

a BP user group

a control group

Asked to keep a log of usage, both positive and negative experiences, and other items of interest

To have Microsoft Word available on the device used for writing.

#### Data Collection

Raw data for evaluation from elementary level to company level):

Elementary School level usage

Area: Oregon

Contact: Marie Bjerede

Jr. High School level usage

Area: California

Contact: Dennis Schamp

High School level usage

Area: Sweden

Contact: Malin Dillard

Jr. High/High School level usage

Area: South Korea

Contact: James Heald

University level usage

Area: Sweden

Contact: Jane Mattisson

University level usage

Area: Ningbo, China

Contact: TBA / Jane Mattisson

University level usage

Area: Banjul, The Gambia

Contact: TBA / Teri Schamp-Bjerede

Employee/Company level usage

Area: South Carolina

Contact: Dwayne Schamp

#### References:

Meyer, E., & Land, R (2003). *Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practicing within the Disciplines*. Occasional Report, 4, 1-12.

Sharp, H., Rogers, Y., & Preece, J. (2007). *Interaction Design: beyond Human-computer Interaction*. Chichester, UK: Wiley.