TURNING THE PAGE
A Design Thinking Approach to Increasing Literacy Advocacy in West Alabama

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Final Signatures

Turning the Page:
A Design Thinking Approach to Increasing Literacy Advocacy in Alabama,
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Contents

Chapter 1 - Introduction.................................................................6

Chapter 2 - Research.................................................................12

  Literature Review........................................................................13

  Research Methods......................................................................20

Chapter 3 - Design Process.........................................................28

Chapter 4 - Final Solutions..........................................................44

  Deliverable 1............................................................................48

  Deliverable 2............................................................................67

  Deliverable 3............................................................................74

Chapter 5 - Defense of Work.......................................................79

Conclusion....................................................................................86

Appendix......................................................................................89

Works Cited..................................................................................90
Chapter 1: Introduction
Introduction

Nationwide, functional illiteracy affects one in seven individuals; in the state of Alabama, that number increases to nearly a quarter of the state’s population (Berger, 8). Illiteracy in adults can have tangibly detrimental effects to job acquisition and performance, financial practices, and personal feelings and relationships. Agencies and resources exist and work to increase literacy rates, but often the materials used by these organizations do not adequately target the individuals they serve.

For illiterate populations, helpful information and resources may be difficult to comprehend and therefore not as effective at increasing literacy as intended. For those with the agency seeking to help reduce illiteracy in their area, it is very important that up-to-date and accurate information is available to help them do so. Digital communication, as well as other forms of visual communication, provide easily-accessible avenues for information acquisition for these individuals.

1 in 4 Alabama residents is functionally illiterate, meaning they cannot read or write at a level deemed appropriate to function in modern society.
Introduction

Through the problem/solution lens of design thinking, this research will critically analyze the promotional activities and materials used by the Literacy Council of West Alabama (LCWA) to determine their effectiveness in reaching both functionally illiterate populations as well as the fully-literate population aiming to work the advocacy front with this nonprofit organization. Qualitative data will be gathered through the utilization of a web heuristic evaluation, as well as the evaluation of current marketing materials for LCWA; these insights will then be used to guide the design and creation of new print and digital marketing materials for the organization. Results of this research aim to develop more effective promotional and educational materials to reach functionally illiterate populations in west Alabama, which could ultimately assist in increasing literacy rates in the area.

Additionally, a goal of this research is to create materials that will more effectively reach those seeking advocacy and volunteer opportunities with LCWA and increase engagement with community members and partners. Limitations of this research include limited publicly-available information about LCWA due to an outdated web presence, the quality of materials and copy already in existence and used regularly by LCWA, and the budgetary constraints of a nonprofit organization. Other limitations include openness and availability to collaborate with LCWA’s board, who serve on a volunteer basis in varied capacities throughout the area.

Specifically, this research will examine more in depth concepts related to literacy in America, specific promotional challenges for nonprofit organizations, the impact of visual communication, and the role of semiotics in increasing understanding and comprehension for both illiterate and literate audiences. The following research questions will be considered:

RQ1: What role does visual communication play in increasing literacy and literacy advocacy?

RQ2: How can semiotics improve comprehension for literate and illiterate audiences?

RQ3: Through the lens of design thinking, how can literacy organizations like LCWA better market themselves to both literate and illiterate audiences?
# Introduction

Stakeholders for this research include both a primary and secondary target audience. The primary audience impacted by this research will be those individuals who are considered functionally illiterate in the west Alabama area. A focus on this audience in the development of this research and then ultimately the creation of the project assets will aim to achieve clarity in the knowledge gap related to the research questions listed previously. This audience is the focus of the Literacy Council of West Alabama’s empowerment efforts (see Chapter 2), so they will also serve as the primary research audience.

The secondary audience group will be those interested in nonprofit advocacy work, specifically those interested in potentially working with the Literacy Council of West Alabama from an advocacy or volunteer capacity. This group has very different needs than the primary audience of illiterate individuals, so project deliverables will have to take into consideration research-based best practices for reaching a divisive audience effectively.

A significant lack of literature exists on the effects of visual communication in illiterate populations. There was no significant basis on which to build a case for the role of semiotics and visual communication in reducing illiteracy; however, there was significant literature related to each of the sub-topics above that helped solidify understanding of the issues at hand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Audience</th>
<th>Secondary Audience</th>
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<tr>
<td>Functionally illiterate individuals within LCWA’s service area</td>
<td>Individuals and groups interested in nonprofit advocacy work, specifically literacy and education</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Implications for this project, much like the target audiences themselves, are twofold. The first implication for this research would be an increase in those seeking services from LCWA; i.e. this research and the final products have the ability to begin a snowball effect of increasing literacy in west Alabama from a user standpoint as well as an advocacy standpoint. If the materials and digital presence of this organization are easier to understand and more accessible to both the literate and the functionally illiterate population, those individuals may be more likely to pursue those services and begin working toward becoming literate by today’s societal standards.

Other implications for this research include increased awareness of methods to better promote literacy organizations like LCWA in the future. By focusing on a more visual approach, these organizations may begin to see increased traffic from those who need specific services. By comparing current efforts to revised visual efforts, this research asserts that the revised visual efforts will be more successful in reaching this organization’s target publics.

Intended Outcomes:

- Increased interaction and engagement with the Literacy Council of West Alabama in hopes of increasing literacy rates among the area’s illiterate population.
- Increased engagement among those seeking to work with LCWA from an advocacy or volunteer standpoint.
- Better knowledge of how to promote similar nonprofit organizations using semiotics and visual communication.
Introduction

Based on both primary and secondary research methods, potential solutions to these research questions are explored in upcoming chapters.

**Chapter 2** discusses literature related to literacy in America, as well as semiotics, visual communication, nonprofit marketing, and the concept of design thinking as related to establishing creative solutions to complex issues. Results of primary research, including a heuristic evaluation of LCWA’s website, will also be included in this chapter.

**Chapter 3** will discuss the overall design process of solution development for this project, including ideation and deliverable iterations, illustrations, and comps used for solution development.

**Chapter 4** will feature the final visual solutions for this project, which include a revised organizational website, several visual marketing materials, as well as new promotional and collateral materials for the organization aimed at engaging both clients and community members and partners.

**Chapter 5** features justification and defense of work presented in Chapter 4 and details how these solutions may potentially address stated research questions and bring much-needed benefit to LCWA from a design and marketing standpoint.

Appropriate use of documentation and other necessary information will be included in a final appendix.
Chapter 2: Research
Literacy in America

The concept of literacy and the ability to successfully read is considered fundamental to modern life. Literacy ranks with agriculture as one of the most important technological innovations ever invented by humans (Wells, 1). The term itself has been construed in many different variations, including financial literacy, computer literacy, cultural literacy, and so on; however, a consensus on the meaning of the term explains that literacy is a degree of interaction an individual has with written language that enables he or she to be a functioning member of the societal system in which he or she lives and works (Gordon & Gordon, xv). These authors also argue that literacy is malleable and constantly being influenced by the world around us (xv).

Literacy in America has changed significantly over the last few centuries, but the country still faces challenges and problems related to illiteracy. In Alabama, one in four residents is functionally illiterate (Berger, 8). Recent attempts to define literacy have placed an emphasis on functional aspects and include certain competencies as a measure of overall literacy; in that sense, literacy includes knowledge and skills needed to successfully function in society (Morrison, 8-9). The United States as a whole ranks fifty-first in literacy when compared to other countries in the United Nations; the state of Alabama in particular faces many historical and systemic challenges that compound its illiteracy rates such as limited resources as well as poor transportation and communication systems (Berger, 9).

Often considered a side effect of education, literacy has been left up to school systems to support and maintain. However, evidence indicates that little has been done to improve literacy levels in American children over the last decade; evidence continues to suggest that children are not fully developing essential skills needed to function in society (Morrison, 3).
Research

Literature Review

As stated by Gordon & Gordon, literacy is not necessarily equitable to schooling, as much scholarship would have readers believe (xv). [Illiterate individuals] have learned to survive in an environment full of undecipherable print that, to them, is the equivalent of a foreign language.

In adults, functional illiteracy is difficult to observe or notice if one is not versed in the signs: struggling to read food labels or menus, asking for help on a particular reading-focused task, never writing checks when paying for items because they are unable to do so, etc. Though these examples are specific, even more specific and advanced are the coping mechanisms these individuals have developed to survive in a literate world. Arguments of literacy versus fluency have also been made in the literature. Fluency, according to the U.S. Department of Education, is paraphrased as the ability to read and write at a level to support oneself with a “decent” job and to live a life filled with “dignity and pride” (Gordon & Gordon, 286).

Though the feelings of self-efficacy in this definition are up for debate, what is known is that the inability to read and write can heavily impact an individual’s quality of life and can carry serious personal, social, and economic consequences (Berger, 16-18). In essence, according to Berger, the inability to read and write can heavily and detrimentally affect quality of life and human potential (23).
Research

Literature Review

Semiotics & Visual Communication

Semiotics is the study of signs that enables us to turn signals into a message with implicitly or explicitly understood meaning (Crow, 13). The meaning attributed to these signs is dependent on the relationship between the sign and the viewer (60). These signs become a form of visual communication in that they relay meaning through a visual medium. Letterforms in themselves are symbolic in that there is meaning associated with each letter. The skill of reading is a visual skill and relies on these images to invoke meaning (Banks, 11). The idea of language itself is only beneficial if it can be understood. For example, children who have yet to learn to read or write have simply yet to connect written language to spoken language (Clay, 20); similarly for illiterate populations, written language carries no meaning because there has never been any symbolic associations made between letters and their sounds.

The meaning of any sign is affected by the individual who is visually consuming that sign (Crow, 60); as such, semiotics relies on an agreement of meaning between a particular audience, which some call a linguistic community (Bennett, 20). Understanding of visual signs also relies on the individual’s cultural experience with the sign (21). Audience considerations are an integral portion of effective visual communication (Tyler, 37). Illiterate individuals, in the sense that they have no cultural connection with the visible signs that make up written language, are therefore not part of the majority linguistic community of literate individuals. Rather than acting as what Tyler calls “active readers” who actively ascribe meaning to written language as they experience it, illiterate individuals are mere casual observers of these, to them, meaningless symbols (37). Semiotics and signs may be a starting point for comprehension within illiterate populations by associating a sign or symbol, rather than words, with meaning. Researchers have also brought into question the ability of electronic and digital media to produce better learning gains than traditional printed text in terms of literacy (Strickler & Neafsey, 89).

One example of this intersection between digital media, visual communication, and literacy is the social networking site Facebook, which has according to Wells created an instance of “new” literacy (Wells, 172). Technology is a common denominator between many different demographic factors, including literacy levels; therefore, this “new” literacy presents itself as an equalizer among both literate and illiterate populations.
Nonprofit Marketing & Promotion

Nonprofit organizations have a unique role in relaying the concept of societal risks to their audiences, which can ultimately lead to the success or failure of that organization's overall mission (Cadet & Carroll, 1). At their core, nonprofit organizations find their mission in resolving social problems; strategic communication and marketing can play a beneficial role in reaching that mission (Bünzli & Eppler, 492).

Despite the important work nonprofit organizations perform, most find themselves lacking necessary resources regarding staffing and finances (6). According to Cadet & Carroll, the more effective these organizations are at pinpointing and relaying risk to society at large, the more successful at resource acquisition they will be (6). Risk, in regard to literacy, can include a number of factors previously mentioned by Berger: dropping out of school, living in poverty, unemployment, jail time, drug or alcohol abuse, etc. (13).

Nonprofits also face many pressures when it comes to marketing their programs and services. Often, the argument comes down to whether or not to market at all instead of where to actually target those marketing efforts (Jungbok). Specifically, research has found that nonprofit organizations tied to specific social causes could benefit from comprehensive marketing efforts. Cause-related marketing (CRM) has proven successful for nonprofit organizations. Confusion often arises within nonprofit agencies related to marketing strategy, and decisions are made with little to no knowledge of the marketing process (Jungbok). For some, the application of the marketing concept to nonprofit organizations is questionable (Padanyi & Gainer).

Societal Risks Related to Illiteracy:

- Dropping out of school
- Jail time
- Living in poverty
- Drug Abuse
- Unemployment
- Alcohol Abuse
Research

Literature Review

An additional barrier for some nonprofit organizations results from dealing with multiple, often diverse, constituencies. Multiple constituency theory indicates that nonprofits have to develop and implement different marketing strategies for different audiences. Best practices regarding multiple constituency theory suggest recognizing and addressing the needs of each unique target market separately utilizing approaches specific to those groups (Padanyi & Gainer). In the nonprofit sector, though, constraints such as budgets and timelines may be too taxing to complete such a task. Most nonprofit agencies have different customer bases and sources of income (donors, grants, etc.) which can sometimes result in them ignoring one for the sake of the other (Jungbok).

Another constraint on nonprofits with split audiences is the differentiation between the unique goals of these audiences. Bünzli and Eppler define two goals for nonprofit audiences: education and empowerment. Education is meant for those seeking to contribute to these organizations financially or from an activist viewpoint (donors, community members, etc.); empowerment is meant for those who may be positively affected by the organization’s programs and outreach (496).

The Literacy Council of West Alabama fits the model of multiple constituency theory due to its focus on educating community members and partners about the organization itself, as well as empowering those illiterate individuals in its service area to seek services and change their lives. The factors discussed above and more raise questions regarding the feasibility of some nonprofits to successfully implement this split-audience technique championed by multiple constituency theory.

| Education: Those seeing advocacy or financial contributions to LCWA |
| Empowerment: Those seeking to increase their literacy levels via LCWA services |
Design Thinking

Design thinking invites individuals to experiment, create, gather information and feedback, and redesign as a means of finding creative solutions to problems (Razzouk & Shute, 330). Design thinking is also considered a way to develop solutions by discovering the needs of individuals or groups. These solutions put consumers’ needs at the forefront of the design process (Pamfilie & Croitoru, 1030). All things considered, design thinking-based problem solving focuses on the existence of a problem and potentially solving it by developing working solutions (Pamfilie & Croitoru, 1031). This framework helps professionals design solutions for complex problems by taking the problem’s context into consideration (Overmyer & Carlson, 431). In this model, design solutions are developed specifically in response to a particular real-world need (Kees, 522). Overmyer & Carlson state that design problems are situated in the idea of place, and that context is key to making meaning out of design thinking activities (433). Kees also says that experienced designers only begin working toward these solutions after discovering what he calls the “central paradox,” or what makes the issue so difficult to solve (528).

Euchner establishes that design thinking focuses much more on qualitative insights to develop design strategies and to better understand consumers and constituents (12). In this regard, design extends far beyond just the realm of visual design and encompasses tools and ideas that reflect an overall concern with human experience (Gobble, 59). Whereas not all human experience is the same, it is important to consider every use case as a potential design situation, especially when dealing with interactive design with everyday application (Björgvinsson et. al, 107-109). It has also been argued that a simple consideration of users and their needs is not enough; rather, that designers should focus more on the larger social contexts of their work and how they may affect different populations as a whole (Overmyer & Carlson, 432).
Research Literature Review

Design thinking works through a framework of collaboration between different disciplines and best design practices to produce favorable outcomes (Brescani, 95). Disciplines in this method of collaboration can include design methodology, psychology, education, business, and many others to create a deeper understanding of complex reality (Kees, 521). Design thinking has been referred to as a productive mix of both analytical thinking and intuitive thinking (Euchner, 10). According to Razzouk & Shute, good designers should flexibly and adeptly use different strategies to best solve the problem at hand (338); the authors also characterize the process as being iterative, exploratory, and sometimes chaotic (336).

Design thinking has been and is considered more of a culture than a simple methodology of working through a problem (Gobble, 60). Brescani also indicates that designers should be flexible, or nimble, throughout the design thinking process and modify their work accordingly to changing needs or discussions (95). Over the last several decades in business and industry, design has shifted from being purely aesthetic to completely functional and has become a tool to create and modify products and practices to fit the needs of as many consumers as possible (Pamfilie & Croitoru, 1037).

Overall, the design thinking framework assists in connecting both academic and practical knowledge to influence design practice, which helps develop more competent and effective solutions in organizations (Brescani, 115).
Research Methods

Content Inventory

A content inventory was conducted on LCWA’s website and available print materials to see how the organization uses design practices to both draw attention and inform consumers. Particular focus was paid to the organization’s website, as it is currently the most used avenue for promoting programs and services to all audiences (per the organization’s executive director). The content inventory concluded that the organization has not updated its visual material in several years, and that the structure and function of the website are both lacking. Aesthetically, the site is outdated and features photos, graphics and copy that do not reflect modern web design trends. Functionally, several links and other factors on the site are broken or missing, which takes away from the overall goal of the site. A comprehensive site map reveals the complex architecture of the site, which is a detriment for both literate and illiterate populations. There were also no assistive functions such as video or audio capabilities on any pages. In terms of usability, the site appears to have become a bit of a “catch-all” for information and services the organization provides with no real sense of structure applied to the information itself. The majority of the site is dedicated to information regarding events and programs offered by LCWA, while another significant portion of the site is dedicated to procuring funds and time from donors and volunteers.
Available print materials were also evaluated for their sense of visual and written effectiveness. Of the two visuals evaluated from the organization, neither had a sense of consistency in terms of copy or visual representations like color scheme or type choices. A trifold brochure was analyzed and appeared to be geared toward reaching potential donors or volunteers, with a brightly-colored finish and handwritten typeface details. Another piece, a poster, appeared to list benefits of literacy and was geared toward the illiterate population LCWA serves. However, both pieces were very text-heavy and had no visual representations of reading or literacy. A noticeable absence of semiotic or iconographic elements was found on both pieces as well, providing no visual cues to assist comprehension for either target audience. Calls to action were present on both pieces encouraging readers to visit LCWA’s website, but as stated above the site itself faces a plethora of functional and aesthetic issues and therefore the call to action is not effective.
Research
Research Methods

Heuristic Evaluation

In order to determine the overall effectiveness of the Literacy Council of West Alabama's website, the site was examined utilizing Jakob Nielsen's ten general principles of interaction design (1994). Using these heuristic principles, it was determined that the site fails in many categories due to outdated and missing information, a lack of a human-centered interface, and a confusing and sometimes misleading menu structure.

1. Visibility of System Status
The first principle posed by Nielsen relates to visibility of system status: “The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.” LCWA’s site does not meet this expectation at a high level. The site appears cluttered and filled with information that has not been updated or evaluated in many years, with some sections dating back five or more years. In some instances, links are broken, and information is completely missing or otherwise not accessible via standard methods of click or touch. Many menu items are misleading and send users down a “rabbit hole” of unrelated information. Though there is currently a means of contacting the organization via a “reply” function on most pages, those forms do not seem to have a clear destination or administrator who actively and regularly reviews them.

2. Match Between System & the Real World
Nielsen’s second principle focuses on a match between the system and the real world: “The system should speak the users’ language, with words, phrases, and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.” Because of the widely varied audience that may interact with LCWA’s website, these criteria are not fulfilled very well. There is a plethora of information on literacy and resources to help alleviate illiteracy on the site; however, the way the information is presented is difficult to comprehend for even the standard user, and will therefore be exponentially more difficult to comprehend for those with lower literacy and comprehension levels. Additionally, the menu structure makes finding information illogical and difficult when navigating the site, and the lack of a clear hierarchy demands immediate attention from a user-focused standpoint.
3. User Control & Freedom
The third principle studied relates to user control and freedom: “Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly-marked ‘emergency exit’ to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue. Support undo and redo.” The site offers several means to escape unwanted areas, including the standard browser functions of forward and backward buttons. Additionally, the site includes a “home” button on the far left of the main menu structure, as well as a link to the homepage in the linked “Literacy Council of West Alabama” text at the top of each page. This follows the common functionality of including a link back to the homepage in the header of most modern websites.

4. Consistency & Standards
The fourth of Nielsen’s criteria is the consistency and standards of the site: “Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing.” The menu structure of the site does not provide much detail into the function of each particular button. Some buttons link directly to other pages, while others provide drop-down menus from which more options appear. It therefore becomes unclear to the user whether to click each button to be sent to a new page or wait for an additional menu to appear and then navigate accordingly. Also, there are several different means of contacting LCWA on the site. There is a “reply” function at the bottom of some pages that allows the user to leave a note that may or may not result in a response. Additionally, the standard “contact” portion of the site contains a form function as well, but also includes a linked email address to contact the organization directly. Each of these methods provides a significantly different method of reaching out to the organization, and neither indicates a preferred method of direct contact with the board or directors. Additionally, there is no confirmation function once a message is sent which leaves users wondering if their messages were ever received.
5. Error Prevention

Criteria five seeks to address error prevention on websites: “Even better than good error messages is a careful design which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place. Either eliminate error-prone conditions or check for them and present users with a confirmation option before they commit to the action.” In terms of error prevention and reduction on the site, there are several areas that could be improved to enhance overall user experience. Many sections of the site contain broken links and missing information, so the expectation and reality of those particular areas vary greatly. Additionally, there is no embedded confirmation when using the “reply” or “contact” options on the site; this leads to potential uncertainty when users reach out to the organization. Another example is the “donate” menu option: rather than providing explicitly-stated donation options, the page is misleading and may often result in user error and less received donations for the organization itself.

6. Recognition Rather Than Recall

Nielsen’s sixth principle stresses recognition rather than recall on sites: “Minimize the user’s memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible.” For LCWA’s site, this category is in need of a major overhaul. In addition to a confusing and somewhat misleading menu structure, there is no clearly-defined map of organization for the site. Based on the site map on the following page, the site has numerous pages with misleading titles and missing information. Additionally, links are not explicitly stated on the site’s pages and there is a distinct absence of a sense of hierarchy on the pages themselves.
7. Flexibility & Efficiency of Use

Nielsen also states that sites should be both flexible and efficient: “Accelerators – unseen by the novice user – may often speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users.” There is little flexibility on LCWA’s current site in terms of structure or functionality. The site does not respond well to mobile use and is not efficiently structured for desktop viewing, either. Links are often similarly sized and structured to body copy, and do not make for good accelerators on the site’s pages. This section served as a vital indicator for this project’s revised website deliverable.

8. Aesthetic & Minimalist Design

For aesthetic and minimalist design, Nielsen says this: “Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed.” The LCWA site seems to take on a maximalist, rather than minimalist, approach to design. There are many background elements on the site that distract the user from overall information gathering or simple information inquiry. Additionally, images and hierarchy are not used on the site, which creates a sense of unrest in the typical user. Visual communication revision will play a key role in making the site more effective from both an aesthetic and functional standpoint. The site also contains large amounts of copy in several areas, which will need to be broken down and simplified in the final revision.

Children and Literacy

According to the U.S. Department of Education, more than 60% of K-12 school children read below the level needed to proficiently process the written materials used in their grade levels.

Learning to read begins long before a child enters school. It begins when parents read to their children, buy their children books and encourage their children to read. According to the National Adult Literacy Survey, children who have not developed some basic literacy skills by the time they enter school are 3 to 4 times more likely to drop out in later years. However, it is never too late to improve one’s reading skills. Programs are available for Pre-K children and K-12 adolescents.

Adults and Literacy

There are 774 million adults around the world who are illiterate in their native languages, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

According to ProLiteracy, 42 million adults can’t read at all in the U.S.; 50 million are unable to read at a higher level that is expected of a fourth or fifth grader.

In Alabama, 3.4 million or 15% of Alabama residents are illiterate, according to 2003 statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics. More specifically, in West Alabama, an average 35% of residents are illiterate. Literacy is necessary for an individual to communicate, understand information and function in today’s society. Literacy is essential if we are to reduce poverty, reduce crime and end the cycle of illiteracy. Without literacy skills—the abilities to read, to write, to do math, to solve problems, and to access and use technology—today’s adults will struggle to take part in the world around them and fail to reach their full potential as parents, community members and employees.
9. Help Users Recognize, Diagnose, & Recover from Errors

Nielsen indicates that sites should help users recognize, diagnose and recover from errors as well: “Error messages should be expressed in plain language, precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.” Many instances of errors exist on LCWA’s site, with no clear indication of a solution or a focused reason for the error. This may be addressed by completing missing information or making sure all links are active and directed to the correct location in a revised website.

10. Help & Documentation

Finally, help and documentation should be present when possible: “Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation.” No assistance documentation was found on LCWA’s site. Neither a site map or any FAQs for content or functionality exist in the site’s current iteration.

As stated by Krug (63), usability is one of the key factors of a successful website or app. Upon completion of the above heuristic evaluation, enough evidence was provided that LCWA’s site needed improvement in several areas to meet all of Nielsen’s usability criteria. Specifically, the site did not meet Nielsen’s criteria of visibility of system status, match between system and the real world, consistency and standards, error prevention, recognition rather than recall, flexibility and efficiency of use, aesthetic and minimalist design, and error recovery.
Chapter 3: Design Process
With the recent appointment of a new executive director, the Literacy Council of West Alabama has undergone a major visual identity overhaul in the last several months. Original branding and visual components of the organization were outdated and not vector-based, which resulted in a number of design and functionality issues. Original organization coloration and theming were the basis for this project’s initial color scheme.

LCWA’s former logo featured a simple brick red and black word mark with a book beneath to better represent the organization’s mission. The use of the serif Copperplate typeface provided the logo with an implied sense of books and literature, but also dated the image.

One of the major issues with the organization’s logo files and branding was that no one had access to vector files or any file types aside from JPEGs for any of their assets. This poses a challenge for scaling the logo for marketing materials, as well as for assuring quality resolution when publishing on the web. Below is an example of a previous social media cover photo, which further provided a dated design aesthetic for the organization.
The organization’s new color scheme is one of a modern gray and blue variety, which indicates a new and distinct direction from the older brick red and black design aesthetic. Additionally, the more traditional Copperplate typeface has been replaced with a more modern sans serif face. The organization’s current website is a mix of many design elements that do not necessarily work together from both aesthetic and functional perspectives. Utilizing the modern color scheme and new branding elements, the new site design provides enhanced brand recognition, eliminating the conflict in aesthetics.
Design Process

Visual Research

The website for the World Literacy Foundation (worldliteracyfoundation.org) provides a good example of minimal but effective design and served as the main inspiration for LCWA’s new site design. The use of an above-the-fold splash photo has become commonplace in web design and provides a backdrop for LCWA’s new homepage. WLF’s site utilizes a modern yet exciting color scheme of blue, yellow, and mint green. These colors are vibrant and distinct enough that they ended up playing a functional role in the new site and app designs as well as an aesthetic one.
Design Process

Desktop Prototype Development

One of the initial and most pressing issues for LCWA was the explicit differences between its target audiences. The differences between literacy levels, and in many cases socio-economic status and cultural backgrounds, provided a set of challenges to establish an effective web presence for all stakeholders. This project’s first focus was to develop both a revised desktop website and mobile application for users to better interact with and receive information from LCWA. By using a very minimal approach to both the web and app design, it was originally inferred that both illiterate and fully literate users would be better able to access the resources they needed when compared to the organization’s existing site.

In initial prototypes, both the website and app focused on a smooth workflow utilizing a split-audience model of information processing. Literate audiences focused on advocacy work, volunteering, and donations were guided by a gold color scheme and pages designed specifically for them. Illiterate audiences were visually cued using a turquoise color scheme and were further guided through the workflow with vocal and speech icons. These prototypes were built using Adobe XD to accurately demonstrate potential workflows for both audience groups. Sketches for these designs were also developed to guide prototype production and are included on the following page.
Design Process
Desktop Prototype Development

The desktop prototype focused on providing a clean and concise workflow for both audiences, as well as enhancing the user experience for the illiterate audience by providing visual and verbal cues.

Desktop Prototype Homepage

Prototypes of additional desktop pages can be found on the following pages.
Design Process
Desktop Prototype Development

The turquoise color scheme on this page was meant to serve as a visual cue for the illiterate audience that they were in the correct area.
Design Process
Desktop Prototype Development

Similarly, the gold color scheme was meant to indicate that those seeking advocacy or volunteer work with LCWA were in the correct area of the site as well.

Increasing Literacy in West Alabama Depends on You

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Design Process
Desktop Prototype Development

Pages were built for both a news function as well as an “about” page for more information about the staff and board of directors for LCWA.

The news function was ultimately removed from the final live prototype, but the contact/about page remained.
Finally, the workflow of the desktop prototype took both audiences to a contact form with voice-to-text capabilities to complete inquiries for both literacy and advocacy resources.
Design Process
Mobile Prototype Development

Similar to the desktop prototype, the initial app prototype featured a color-coded workflow and voice-to-text features geared toward a divided audience.
Along the same lines as the desktop site, the mobile app workflow sends all users to a contact form to enter requests for tutoring or advocacy opportunities.
Design Process
Social Media Revisions

The original deliverables for this project also included a revised social media marketing presence for LCWA. Specifically, a revision of the organization’s current Facebook page was scheduled to better promote their services and advocacy resources from a visual communication perspective. A screenshot of the current Facebook page is below. Audience research has found that social media reaches a very broad demographic of users, regardless of demographic or psychographic factors; according to the Pew Research Center, seventy-two percent of the American public uses some form of social media (“Social Media Fact Sheet”).

A relatively simple update to the page would have included updated imagery such as a profile photo, cover photo, and semiotic elements for clarity and comprehension. Again, though, it was found that this solution would not have adequately fixed the problem at hand for either audience from a design perspective and was cut from the project. Further research into social media use for promotion to illiterate audiences via visual communication could provide insights into an enhanced marketing strategy for LCWA and other literacy organizations; however, that information is beyond the scope of this research.
Upon further evaluation, the prototypes did not appear to accurately provide the intended solutions for either audience group. Rather than continuing on artificial prototypes, a new strategy was launched to create a live, fully functioning site to provide a better environment to implement new solutions.

Using the web platform Weebly, a live demo site was constructed that integrated some of the same functionality as the prototypes while addressing issues found in those same prototypes.

One major change for the live prototype was the combining of elements from a split audience perspective into a fully integrated site for both audiences. Verbal and audio cues were integrated into all pages and forms, and information was simplified into language that could be better understood and comprehended for all literacy levels. Further explanation of the current prototype will be discussed in Chapter 4.
With major revisions to project deliverables underway, a campaign was discussed to engage audiences outside of the digital landscape and in the real world. For this process, several deliverables were discussed including billboards and signage, collateral materials, promotional items, and more. In the end, advertising pieces like billboards and transit ads remained, as well as a rack card for promotion in area retail locations plus several promotional items. These pieces were chosen for their ability to effectively promote LCWA in a variety of settings in rural west Alabama. Testing and revisions to these pieces were conducted over several weeks pending committee feedback. Final versions of these pieces will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

New LCWA Marketing Campaign includes:

- Billboards
- Signage
- Transit Advertising
- Rack Card
- Promotional Items
Chapter 4: Final Solutions
Final Solutions

As stated in Chapter 3, final solutions and deliverables for this project include both print and digital aspects aimed at addressing the proposed research questions.

The main deliverable for this research includes a reworked and revitalized website for the Literacy Council of West Alabama that integrates a new color scheme, simplified layout, semiotic visual elements, and functional elements geared toward assisting both literate and illiterate audiences to discover the resources they are looking for.

A second deliverable for this project includes print and visual materials to be found in the world as a means of marketing services and advocacy opportunities throughout LCWA’s nine county service area. Specifically, these materials include transit advertising, billboards, bus ads, and outdoor signage, as well as a rack card for placement in grocery and convenience stores, libraries, and other public areas of interest.

Finally, a collection of promotional materials was developed for use as guerilla advertising by those who have worked with LCWA from an advocacy standpoint as well as those who have sought out services from the organization. These pieces, meant to be used in everyday life in a variety of circumstances, can help spread awareness about the organization to a large audience. Included in this collection are a notebook, highlighter, and pen, all of which relate well to LCWA’s mission of learning and improving literacy.

Details of each deliverable are included on the following pages.
Final Solutions
Updated Visual Identity for Web & Print

By combining color and stylistic elements from multiple sources of inspiration, the color scheme of navy, gold, gray and white chosen for LCWA’s new materials is included below. These colors were chosen not only because of their similarity to other literacy organizations, but because of each color’s implicit associations as well. Navy is often associated with academics and professionalism, while gold is vibrant and often associated with achievement; these attributes work well with LCWA’s mission and values. Also, these colors provide high contrast when used together and on white, which thus aids legibility and readability in both digital and print applications.

![Color Scheme Diagram]

Literacy Council of West Alabama Revised Color Scheme

- **Navy**
  - CMYK: C 99, M 82, Y 42, K 38
  - RGB: #12214f

- **Gold**
  - CMYK: C 13, M 40, Y 93, K 0
  - RGB: #dd9c35

- **Gray**
  - CMYK: C 64, M 56, Y 53, K 28
  - RGB: #57585a

- **White**
  - CMYK: C 0, M 0, Y 0, K 0
  - RGB: #ffffff

The Literacy Council of West Alabama works to identify and provide direct services to communities to combat the needs of the functionally and completely illiterate.

Example color usage from updated LCWA website
Final Solutions
Updated Visual Identity for Web & Print

In terms of typography, this new visual identity utilizes the Montserrat type family. This sans serif face provides a modern look while also integrating well with the established typeface of LCWA’s new branding. Montserrat is web-safe, ensuring that quality will be maintained in both print and digital applications. This book also utilizes versions of Montserrat for body copy, headlines, and captions. The font family is included below.

Literacy Council of West Alabama
Montserrat Font Family

Montserrat Regular
AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLmMnNoOpPqRrStTuVvWwXxYyZz 1234567890

Montserrat Italic
AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLmMnNoOpPqRrStTuVvWwXxYyZz 1234567890

Montserrat Medium
AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLmMnNoOpPqRrStTuVvWwXxYyZz 1234567890

Montserrat Medium Italic
AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLmMnNoOpPqRrStTuVvWwXxYyZz 1234567890

Montserrat Bold
AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLmMnNoOpPqRrStTuVvWwXxYyZz 1234567890

Nearly 25% of adults in Alabama are functionally illiterate.

Example type usage from updated LCWA website
Deliverable 1
Live Web Prototype

As stated previously, the main deliverable for this project was an enhanced web prototype that better reflected the goal of combining the needs of both literate and illiterate audiences into one functional and aesthetically pleasing website. Though many iterations of this deliverable were initially created using Adobe XD, feedback from the committee and further research concluded that a live prototype would be a better option for a fully-realized website. Notes for improvement are included below.

Key Observations:
- More semiotic elements needed to improve comprehension
- More detailed page integration to make site more functional for both audiences
- Remove split page differentiation and combine into one functional workflow
- Integrate enhanced audio and video capabilities
- Add verbal cues to forms and submission areas
Deliverable 1
Live Web Prototype

Utilizing the Weebly content management platform and the notes previously provided, a live prototype was built to address this project’s research questions. An updated site map is included on the next page; each of the included pages will be discussed in detail following the site map.

Rather than building out a separate app concept as in the previous prototype, this site prototype was built using a responsive web theme which adjusts well to mobile devices of any size. Examples of how the site appears on mobile devices are included below.
In comparison to the site map of LCWA’s current website, the revised site map for the live prototype is much simpler and easier to follow. Rather than the “more is more” approach to web design that seemed to be employed by the current site, the new site took notes from the initial prototype which led the web audience to only a singular destination. Though the new site does integrate multiple destinations for each page’s links, the menu structure is much more streamlined to address usability issues found in the heuristic evaluation.

With unnecessary clutter and broken links removed from LCWA’s current menu structure, the new menu features only five options; this is a fifty percent reduction in options from the current menu which features ten clickable links. Also, all pages feature explicit links to additional pages and options, which were often missing from the current site.
Deliverable 1
Live Web Prototype - lcwa.weebly.com

Homepage
The homepage for the live web prototype is divided into five distinct sections, all of which serve a distinct purpose in engaging audience members and providing information as needed.

Above the fold, the site utilizes two very important indicators: 1) a clear menu structure at the top of the page as well as 2) a splash photo with a call to action. Both of these options provide a cue for the audience to click while also providing an indication of how to move forward on the site.

The logo for the organization is prominently displayed on the lefthand side of the menu bar; this is a common feature of most modern websites. The image is also clickable, which takes the user back to the homepage. This provides an escape function, indicated by Nielsen as vital for error prevention and recovery when a user becomes lost on the site.
As mentioned in the site map, the menu structure itself has been simplified and has been reduced from ten original options to only five in the new site. These menu options are more clearly indicative of what information can be found by clicking them, which better fits Nielsen’s heuristic criteria.

The first menu option takes viewers to a page where they can set up an initial tutoring consultation. This focuses on the key goal of LCWA, which is to “improve lives through literacy.” By offering tutoring as the initial option when audiences view the website, the organization’s mission is made clear by providing its services at the forefront of the main menu.

Rather than focusing the entire site on a split audience approach as multiple constituency theory would suggest, menu options are present for both literacy resources and advocacy resources which hearkens back to the idea of addressing the needs of multiple audiences. These links take viewers to distinct areas of the site geared specifically toward illiterate (literacy resources) and literate (advocacy resources) audiences. These pages meet the goals of empowerment and education previously mentioned by Bünzli and Eppler. These individual pages are discussed in detail in coming pages.

Another side effect of LCWA’s multiple constituencies is the donation function found in the main menu. This function can also be found on LCWA’s current site, but it was not made very prominent in the menu structure. As mentioned in the literature review, nonprofits have to cater to those who can provide donations, financially or otherwise. Placing a donation link directly on the homepage indicates that donations are a key component of a successful nonprofit strategy.

Finally, the menu features an “about” link which takes the audience to a page featuring contact information and more details about the organization. This page also features a map of the organization’s office, as well as images of board members and staff.
As viewers scroll down the homepage, they are presented with another distinct section featuring information about illiteracy in Alabama. The jarring statistic that nearly a quarter of the state’s population cannot read or write at a functional level is meant to serve as an attention grabber to keep audiences engaged with the site. Here we are also presented with our first audio cue. These cues, as well as those for verbal speech to text, will be discussed in detail in following pages. Both verbal and audio cues are meant to provide illiterate audiences with access to the same information as the literate audience, but presented in a way that they can comprehend outside of written word.

Along with the statistic presented by this section's headline, the section also introduces a video component to further explain the impact of illiteracy around the country. Though not solely focused on Alabama, the video does explain illiteracy in America and its impact on individuals, families, and communities. In essence, the video provides a sense of dual coding of information to both audiences: hearing, seeing, and/or reading the information may make more of an impact than receiving the information through only one of these methods.
Continuing down the page is a section dedicated to showing the services LCWA provides, as well as a visual representation of LCWA’s service area.

Though statistics on literacy rates are presented on a statewide level, it is important to note that LCWA focuses solely on nine counties out of Alabama’s total sixty-seven. These counties in west Alabama, particularly those that border the Black Belt region, are notoriously low-income and have high poverty rates. This area distinction is important not only from the tutoring and client standpoint, but also from the advocacy and financial standpoint. Resources are not as readily available in west Alabama as they are in other parts of the state and indeed the country, so effective fundraising is a key factor to keep LCWA successful into the future.

Visually, this section of the site features a state map with an emphasis placed on the nine-county service area within which LCWA operates. Though based in the city of Tuscaloosa (in Tuscaloosa county), this visual is an important reminder that LCWA’s services extend well beyond the city limits and into the region as a whole.

The included link also takes users to the site’s “about” page for more information.
Deliverable 1  
*Live Web Prototype - lcwa.weebly.com*

Finally, the homepage concludes with a testimonial from a tutor who has worked with LCWA in the past. This testimonial serves two purposes:

- For those seeing tutoring or literacy services from the organization, this testimonial serves to humanize the process and provide a sense of comfort to those who may be uneasy about beginning the process. By offering a friendly face, the stigma of seeking assistance may be alleviated to some extent.

- For those looking to work with LCWA from a tutoring or advocacy standpoint, this testimonial acts as a springboard to get them started. By seeing the success story of someone who has worked with the organization before, volunteers are more likely to actively pursue those same opportunities.
Deliverable 1
Live Web Prototype - lcwa.weebly.com

Schedule a Tutor
Tutoring is at the heart of services offered by the Literacy Council of West Alabama, so adding a tutoring link to the main menu seemed to be a step in the right direction for a new web prototype. Here we see the above the fold portion of the page, which again features an audio cue for audiences who wish to hear the content played rather than having to read and comprehend written language.

Additionally, this page is the first to use semiotics as a visual cue for the written content included on the page. As discussed in the literature review, signs only have meaning within the context of the audience that views them. In this instance, the pencil icon represents the idea of writing, which in turn relates back to the idea of tutoring. This icon, along with the header photo of a tutoring session, should effectively indicate the content of the page to the viewer via visual communication. Use of the icon can be found on the following page. Additional icons will be used throughout the site as well.
Deliverable 1
Live Web Prototype - lcwa.weebly.com

Semiotic elements on the page include the pencil icon, as well as the addition of audio and vocal cues
This page is the first to feature a voice to text option for form completion as well. For those illiterate individuals seeking a tutoring consultation, the idea of having them enter written communication to complete the request is counterproductive. Instead, utilizing the same technology as smartphones and other dication software, the prototype includes voice options to enter contact information as well as individual goals for the person seeking tutoring.

Both verbal and audio icons presented in this project reflect suggestions from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for website accessibility. One common accessibility issue included in ADA documentation are images without text equivalents for those with screen readers. However, in the instance of illiterate populations, the opposite seems to pose more of a comprehension issue: text without visuals. By including visual representations like icons and images, those with trouble comprehending written language may be more likely to understand the context of certain information. Also, written content is made more accessible through verbal cues indicated by audio buttons; forms are able to be completed using voice only, rather than physical typed input (ADA Best Practices).

To further assist in making sure the individual receives information in a way he or she can best utilize it, there is no space for an email address. Email fundamentally works through written communication, which is in essence useless to illiterate populations. Rather than email, the user is asked to submit a phone number where they will be contacted by an LCWA tutor or board member to discuss tutoring options. Mobile phone use spans user demographics across the spectrum, so this option seems to be the most effective in contacting those interested in LCWA’s services.

All fields in the contact form are required to ensure accurate information and allocation of resources.
Literacy Resources

Focusing again on the idea that LCWA works with two very distinct constituencies, considerations were made on the live prototype that provide different resources and experiences to both literate and illiterate audiences while integrating those aspects into one cohesive site. Specific menu items were added for both literacy resources and advocacy resources that focus on different audiences and different needs within the organization's reach.

As the main target audience for LCWA's services, those seeking to improve their literacy abilities were put at the forefront. The book icon included on this page works much like the pencil icon on the tutoring page, indicating that reading and literacy are the focus of this page's content. Again, audio capabilities are embedded here as well to further explain what services LCWA can offer to those wishing to improve their reading skills.
To distinguish between services offered for adults and those offered to school-aged children and below, images were introduced that focused on those specific audiences. Audio cues here also help the illiterate audience understand these different types of services and what programs may be right for them. This explanation of services can then be used to further indicate what tutoring options each individual may be interested in when completing the tutoring consultation form.
Finally, the footer of the literacy resources page provides a further explanation of LCWA’s overall mission and goals. The button included in this section sends users to the “about” function of the site where viewers can receive more information about the organization, including the location of its office space and tutoring services once they’ve signed up.

To reiterate, the content on this page is meant to serve as an indicator of the different types of tutoring and learning opportunities available to those who wish to improve their reading abilities regardless of age or background. The information here should help those seeking services from LCWA to better understand what to expect when working with the organization as well as expected outcomes.

Though not necessarily the intended target audience for this specific page, those seeking advocacy or volunteer opportunities may find useful information here regarding the specifics of LCWA programs and resources.
Deliverable 1
Live Web Prototype - lcwa.weebly.com

Advocacy Resources
For the audience focused on advocacy and volunteer opportunities, the theme of collaboration became important from a semiotic and visual communication standpoint as indicated by the icon and image used below. Additional iconography was used to indicate tutoring services, awareness opportunities, and monetary and other donations.

This page serves as an indicator that semiotics and other methods of visual communication can help even the most literate audiences better understand content.
Deliverable 1  
*Live Web Prototype - lcwa.weebly.com*

**Donate**

One of the key takeaways from multiple constituency theory is that nonprofit organizations must effectively cater to both the audience who needs empowerment via the services they offer and the audience who seeks education about the organization or cause with which the organization focuses its energies. A third audience, though, consists of those with the agency to provide financial support to the organization via grants or private donations to help the organization continue to operate successfully. Donations provide key financial support to nonprofits like LCWA, so a “donate” function was brought to the forefront of the new prototype.

Semiotic representation for this page includes a gift icon, indicative of the idea that any monetary donation would be received as a gift to the organization. Visuals include a representation of a child reading to further pull at the heartstrings of those considering donating to the organization. Verbiage on the page indicates that due to LCWA’s status as a nonprofit, all donations are tax-deductible; this further acts to entice donors to contribute to the organization.

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**Your Support Helps Support Literacy**

The Literacy Council of West Alabama is nothing without the support from community members and donors who contribute their time and finances to improving literacy in our area.

All donations to LCWA are tax-deductible, and will help support literacy advocacy and programming efforts within our nine county service area.
Deliverable 1
Live Web Prototype - lcwa.weebly.com

Much like the tutoring consultation form discussed earlier, the donation page also features a form with voice to text capabilities.

![LCWA Donation Form](image)

However, there are some distinct changes between the two forms that are worth noting. The first change is that this form includes a required field for an email address. The inclusion of an email address serves two purposes: it allows for those who make donations to enter a reliable database for future marketing materials and also allows an invoice to be sent to the individual making the donation to be completed via PayPal. LCWA currently has an account already set up with the payment system, which requires an email address to securely complete a transaction.

This form also includes a dropdown menu of specific donation amounts. However, the user can also select a different amount and specify that using the included field. Rather than completing transactions on the website, which requires an external system to be embedded in the site, invoices are created and sent via PayPal to those seeking to make a donation. Complete contact information and donation amounts are required before the form is submitted, which helps reduce erroneous submissions.
Deliverable 1
Live Web Prototype - lcwa.weebly.com

About LCWA
The final page in the main menu structure of the new LCWA prototype is an “about” page featuring information about the organization’s board of directors, as well as a variety of contact information to reach the organization directly. Additionally, there is a map that shows the location of LCWA’s office and where most tutoring and advocacy events are held. As on other pages, audio options are available to have page information verbally presented to the viewer rather than having to read and comprehend written language.

Meet Our Board Members

LCWA is dedicated to helping area citizens learn to read, write, and improve their lives through literacy efforts.

Charlotte Voss, Executive Director
Retired News Producer

Dr. Fran Turner
Retired Educator

William Ryan
Retired District Judge

Dr. Evelyn Guan
Retired Educator

Brenda Ryan
Retired Educator

Nancy McDonald
Retired Educator

Jim Johnson
Mortgage Banker, Synovus
The inclusion of photos of the board of directors, much like the photo and testimonial on the homepage of the site, seeks to humanize the organization in a way that removes the stigma of seeking tutoring services. By providing a bit of background on each of the board members, everyone who visits the site has an opportunity to gain more knowledge about who they will be dealing with within the organization.

Contact information is made easily accessible on the “about” page with the addition of a physical address, operating hours, phone number and a clickable email address. Additionally, a map showing the location of LCWA’s office provides a visual cue for those looking to visit a physical location.

This updated web prototype addresses several key issues from LCWA’s main site discovered during the comprehensive heuristic evaluation and content inventory. As the main means of communication for the organization, this prototype has the potential to perform better than the current site from both functional and aesthetic perspectives.
Deliverable 2
Out-of-Home Promotions

Billboards & Transit Ads
Alabama, as mentioned by Berger, is notorious for its lack of public transportation infrastructure. However, some metro areas, including those within west Alabama, feature some public transportation options like buses to help transport residents to and from their desired location. Automobile travel is still the top-ranking transportation method in the region, so considerations were made for a variety of outdoor and transit advertisements to engage LCWA’s diverse audience.

Placements for each of these pieces was considered based on the needs of both audiences. Transit ads are highly-visible to a large audience on a daily basis, and provide repeat exposure to those traveling the same routes daily. As a result, both empowerment and education ads were created to attract potential clients and volunteers.

These outdoor ads were developed using the established color scheme and font style of the web prototype for consistency in the digital and print world. Images on the ads were meant to provide a sense of diversity in both the clientele and offerings that LCWA provides to their constituents. Verbiage on each was limited to a short phrase, with a call to action leading viewers to the organization’s website for more information.

Original designs of each piece are provided on the following pages, as well as a potential placement opportunity for each to provide real-world context for the ads.
Deliverable 2
Out-of-Home Promotions

“Improving Lives Through Literacy”
Utilizing the organization’s already-established tagline, this billboard provides context for LCWA’s overall mission and goals. Both audiences were targeted with this billboard, with a general “learn more” call to action enticing them to the organization’s website. The imagery of a child reading acknowledges that LCWA offers services and programs to children as well.

Use of the Montserrat typeface, as well as the navy, gold, and white color scheme keep the billboard within graphic standards. This theme will repeat on all billboards and outdoor ads.

Contextual placement of the ad on the billboard mockup to the right shows how the ad could be placed in the real world. With the general audience and call to action, this piece should be placed in high-traffic areas like a highway to provide as many impressions as possible.
Deliverable 2
Out-of-Home Promotions

“1 in 4 Alabamians Can’t Read”
Much like the phrasing on the website homepage, this jarring statistic is meant to inspire action in those who see it. The included call to action implies that anyone seeing this ad can do something to help by visiting the organization’s website.

This advertisement is geared toward those looking to volunteer with LCWA or to work with them from an advocacy perspective.
Deliverable 2
Out-of-Home Promotions

“Help Improve Literacy With Us”
Similar to the call to action featured on the previous advertisement, this bus advertisement focuses on the tutoring aspect and other ways that individuals can volunteer with LCWA. By featuring an active tutoring session and including an explicit call to action to volunteer with the organization, this ad generates an instant and tangible way to assist LCWA in the fight against illiteracy. Anyone with the ability to read who sees this advertisement pass them by has now been given a chance to give back via helping others improve their reading ability.

Transit advertisements see a high volume of traffic per day, and therefore provide exposure to a large audience of potential tutors and volunteers.
Deliverable 2
Out-of-Home Promotions

“Reading is Fundamental”
With a saying we’ve all heard since childhood, this building advertisement presents a father reading to his child; for those who cannot read, they will never get the joy of reading to their children. As a result, these children are also less likely to have high literacy rates throughout their own lives. By presenting this adage in relation to LCWA’s services, both adults and children can work to increase their fundamental reading abilities and ensure they live a fulfilling life, as mentioned in the literature review as a necessary component of effective literacy rates.
Deliverable 2
Out-of-Home Promotions

Rack Card
Rack cards are an effective and relatively affordable means for businesses and organizations to promote themselves to a variety of constituents in high-traffic, public areas such as grocery stores, libraries, and convenience stores. With such a broad audience, LCWA’s ad placements must be well-designed and cost-effective; a rack card seemed to fit both of those criteria. Considerations were made for both literate and illiterate audiences when developing the rack card below.

The front of the card features the same image as LCWA’s web prototype, which users can access via a QR code on the back of the card. Additionally, the “1 in 4” statistic stands to make a strong first impression.

Semiotic icons are used on the back of the card to indicate different types of services offered by the organization from both the literacy and advocacy perspectives.

Finally, a call to action directs users to the website via link or a scan of the included QR code.
Deliverable 2
Out-of-Home Promotions

Rack card mockup
Deliverable 3
LCWA Promotional Items

**Branded Promotional Items**
Upon committee recommendation and further research, promotional materials were created for LCWA to be used by both audiences for dual purposes. Both audiences will innately help promote the organization using these promotional pieces, but perhaps more important is the use of these items during tutoring and educational sessions with the illiterate audience. In that sense, the dual purpose becomes both a promotional tool and a tool for facilitating learning among the audience seeking empowerment through literacy.

Explanation of each piece can be found on the following pages.
Deliverable 3
LCWA Promotional Items

Ballpoint Pen
Pens are one of the most popular, if not the most popular, promotional items for organizations to distribute. They are relatively cost effective, and can be branded to be any color or design.

With that in mind, the pen below was developed for LCWA to distribute at events and programs, as well as to their clients participating in tutoring sessions and educational programming. The pen features the same navy and gold color scheme as the website and other print materials to provide a sense of cohesion between LCWA’s marketing efforts. When combined with the upcoming notebook, these two pieces can be used to promote the organization also help facilitate learning in those using LCWA’s services.

A mockup of the pen is below, as well as the original design used to develop the mockup. The design features LCWA’s standard logo in the new gold color established for this project.
Deliverable 3
LCWA Promotional Items

Highlighter
If pens are the most popular promotional item, highlighters come in as a close second. Much like the pen, the highlighter below can be used as both a promotional tool and a tool to help facilitate effective learning outcomes when tutoring.

This highlighter features the same logo present on the pen, with the added benefit of the organization’s web address on the opposite side. This provides an implied call to action for users to visit LCWA’s website, and therefore helps the piece fulfill its marketing goal.
Deliverable 3
LCWA Promotional Items

Notebook
Perhaps the promotional piece with the most appeal is the branded notebook included below. This notebook again serves the dual purpose of both a marketing piece and educational facilitator.

The included quote on the cover of the notebook encourages everyone, regardless of literacy level, to continue reading as much as possible. This quote, along with the included visuals and contact information for LCWA, provide good context for the mission and values of the organization regardless of who’s in possession of the notebook. A mockup and original design are included below.
Final Solutions

The revisions to LCWA’s current web presence, as well as the creation of several out-of-home advertising pieces and multiple promotional items were geared at solving problems found while conducting primary research on the organization and its current efforts to reach a very divided audience.

Further justification and defense of these choices will be discussed in Chapter 5.
Defence of Work

As a nonprofit organization seated in the middle of mostly rural west Alabama, the Literacy Council of West Alabama faces numerous challenges when it comes to even existing, let alone promoting itself to potential clients, volunteers, or donors. Coupled with the fact that a significant portion of LCWA's audience can't read at a level appropriate to function in modern society, the organization's promotional efforts have done their best to be a catch-all and reach everyone equally.

Based on published research, however, it is clear that not all audiences will engage with nonprofit organizations equally. Each of these groups has its own needs and desires to be met before a decision will be made to spend time or money on said organization. Given these circumstances, this research sought to find ways to benefit LCWA's promotional efforts from multiple perspectives: a literate audience and an illiterate one; digital and print materials; large-scale and small-scale marketing efforts; refined text and engaging images; etc.

One in four residents in Alabama is functionally illiterate. A portion of these individuals are content with their lives and have found ways to cope and adapt to everyday situations without the need to effectively read or write. However, some of this nearly one-quarter of the state's population do wish to improve their reading situation and are actively looking for resources to get started. This project aimed to produce materials that could help these individuals connect with the resources they need to begin their journey to full literacy.

Additionally, to survive and thrive in today’s uncertain landscape, nonprofit organizations depend heavily on volunteers and donors to perform essential functions and keep momentum going for the populations served by these organizations. A design thinking approach of creative problem solving was used to develop solutions that reach this population of advocacy-driven individuals as well as the illiterate population that needs LCWA's services the most.

The work presented in this project was framed using the following research questions:
Defense of Work
Research Question 1

RQ1: What role does visual communication play in increasing literacy and literacy advocacy?

RQ2: How can semiotics improve comprehension for literate and illiterate audiences?

RQ3: Through the lens of design thinking, how can literacy organizations like LCWA better market themselves to both literate and illiterate audiences?

Each of these research questions can be tied back to the goal of this project of increasing literacy advocacy in the market area served by the Literacy Council of West Alabama. Research questions one and two deal exclusively with visual communication as a means of better promoting nonprofits like LCWA to functionally and fully illiterate populations; research question three deals with the marketing strategy as a whole used to promote literacy organizations to both literate and illiterate audiences.

As stated in the literature review, when dealing with a population that cannot read or is not fluent in the language of the society around them, visuals can play a major role in helping those individuals comprehend the meaning behind presented messages. For LCWA, visual communication played a major role in the establishment of new promotional materials, including the new website prototype and out-of-home advertisements. By showing people, both young and old and from diverse demographic backgrounds, reading in a variety of circumstances, it is clear to all audiences that the organization focuses on literacy and reading as a fundamental function. Without the use of any written copy, the visuals presented in this project’s deliverables place a focus on reading in the minds of both literate and illiterate audiences. Visual communication is only as strong as the implications that can be ascertained by those viewing the images, so audience and societal context are vital to the overall effectiveness of any visual.

In terms of this project, visual communication is essential to providing additional context to LCWA’s website and other promotional efforts and therefore may play a significant role in increasing both literacy and literacy advocacy in LCWA’s service area.
In relation to the question of the effectiveness of visual communication comes the discussion of semiotics and their effects on overall comprehension by illiterate audiences. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols; for signs to have any meaning, they must be ascribed some sort of cultural or linguistic representation. Without that meaning, the letter “A” is just three lines connected. For literate individuals, those three lines form a recognizable visible symbol, as well as an association with the alphabet and a vocal cue. For someone who has not studied or is not familiar with written language, such as an illiterate individual, those three connected lines carry no meaning.

However, though illiterate individuals make few to no associations with letters and written language, they are able to make associations with other pictorial representations around them. Those iconic representations were used in this project to provide a sense of context to different pages on LCWA’s website, as well as to show a variety of services offered by the organization. Though seemingly decorative to those familiar with written language, the icons used below and throughout this project have the potential to engage illiterate audiences and increase their understanding of the context of written material.
The process of design thinking also heavily came into play throughout this project. Several aspects of LCWA’s current promotional problems did not, and still do not, have clear-cut and easily accessible solutions. Design thinking brings together aspects of many different industries and practices to develop effective solutions for organizations. Specifically for this project, input from many different areas made it into the provided solutions: nonprofit communication, marketing, design, education, psychology, to name a few.

The solutions developed to address marketing to both literate and illiterate audiences worked through providing an integrated approach to marketing, utilizing digital and traditional media. By integrating aspects of visual communication into all promotional pieces, as well as refining copy and other elements to be more effective, the new pieces may increase awareness of and interaction with LCWA. In terms of digital media, LCWA’s web prototype features a streamlined interface that makes for a better user experience. Functionality was increased by adding audio and verbal cues for the illiterate audience, as well as by eliminating unnecessary and cluttered pages and links. With a better and more functional web presence, both audiences may be more likely to engage with LCWA and seek services or advocacy and volunteer opportunities.

Traditional media are still very effective in relaying information to large audiences, especially when placed in high-traffic areas. LCWA has never engaged in a traditional marketing campaign like the one proposed in this project, so any metrics of prior success using this method were unavailable. However, the assets created for this project utilize visual communication and semiotics in a way that could effectively reach LCWA’s split constituencies. Billboards and transit ads featured clear indications of reading, with clear calls to action for those wanting to assist the organization. The developed rack card, placed in high-traffic areas like convenience stores, provided both a traditional and digital means of contacting the organization. Promotional materials were created to both market and educate those who use them, serving a dual purpose within a single piece.

The use of information from several disciplines and practical areas assisted in the development of these pieces, and may provide a better marketing mix for LCWA and other literacy organizations like it.
Defense of Work
Side by Side Deliverables Comparison
Defense of Work
Side by Side Deliverables Comparison
Conclusion
Conclusion

This research focused exclusively on increasing literacy and literacy advocacy in west Alabama through services offered by the Literacy Council of West Alabama. Illiteracy, though, is not a problem exclusive to Alabama or the rural south (Berger, 9). We have seen statistics that rank the United States fifty-first when it comes to overall literacy among its citizens.

LCWA and other nonprofit organizations like it around the country work tirelessly and passionately, often with limited time and resources, to combat the effects of systemic and functional illiteracy in America. Strapped for time and creative energy, most of their energy goes to keeping their organization afloat while also serving the marginalized populations who so desperately need access to their services. As we’ve seen in the literature and in examples presented by LCWA, design and marketing efforts are often the last pieces touched; even then, the pieces developed for these organizations may not be the most effective at generating new clients, volunteers, or donors. When your sole focus is attracting everyone using the same strategy, you will most likely effectively attract no one.

This research sought to develop ways for LCWA and other literacy organizations like it to effectively market services and resources to the functionally illiterate audience that utilizes them, while simultaneously marketing advocacy, volunteer, and donation opportunities to those with the agency to provide those to the organization. Multiple constituency theory states that the best practice for doing this is completely separate strategies; this research challenged that theory and sought to develop methods to attract both audiences using similar materials.

Through effective visual communication methods, semiotic markers, and creative problem solving, the solutions presented in this research have the potential to more effectively promote LCWA and ultimately increase engagement with their services and programs throughout west Alabama. Future research should test these assets using A/B testing among members of both audiences, as well as the organization’s board of directors. Additionally, the intersection of visual communication and social media should also be considered for future studies as a means of more effectively promoting literacy organizations.
“As an instrument of cultural life, design is the way we create all of the artifacts and communications that serve human beings, striving to meet their needs and desires and facilitating the exchange of information and ideas that is essential for civil and political life.

Furthermore, design is the way we plan and create actions, services, and all of the other humanly shaped processes of public and private life.”

Richard Buchanan
Human Dignity and Human Rights: Thoughts on Principles of Human-Centered Design
Appendix

All logos and files of the Literacy Council of West Alabama were used with permission from Charlotte Voss, Executive Director, and shared via Dropbox.

Images used throughout the project and campaign materials were free-license and retrieved from Pixabay.com.

Mockups for campaign materials were collected from free-license sources and used for non-commercial use.

Images and screenshots of LCWA promotional materials, website, and social media were used with permission from the organization.

The free-license Alabama state map was sourced from the State of Alabama governemnt.
Works Cited


Works Cited


