Developing the curriculum for the preparatory training for competence-based qualification in online communications

Paimio Vocational Adult Education Centre

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Abstract

This development project report describes the process of creating a curriculum. The curriculum is for Paimio Vocational Adult Education Centre, to be used in the preparatory training for the competence-based qualification in online communications.

The report explores the competence-based qualifications system, putting it into the context of the Finnish educational system in general. The threefold personalisation is described. Working life has an important role in the qualifications, and the meaning of this in online communications is looked into.

In building the curriculum these questions were asked: what laws and regulations direct the planned training? What subjects need to be taught to fulfil the requirements of the qualification? How do students become and remain professionals in a field of constant change? How can online learning be incorporated into the curriculum to the best effect? What is the role of working life?

After examining the different questions a curriculum is created on the basis of the requirements. It features the main content and aims of different subjects as well as the order the subjects need to be taught so that the student gets a full understanding of professional practices in this line of work.

Keywords
Adult education, curriculum, competence-based qualification, online communications

Miscellaneous

Contents

1. Introduction

In February 2008 I all of a sudden got a new job and needed to commence in less than two weeks from the day I heard I was selected. My new job title was trainer in charge of the preparatory training for competence-based qualification in online communications in adult education. The previous educator had left and I needed to step right in. The name of the college is Paimio Vocational adult education centre, later referred to as PAKK. After beginning my project a merger to the Turku Vocational adult education centre has been agreed on but that should not affect my work in the near future.

A frantic search for knowledge about competence-based qualifications followed. The qualification is one of eight different qualifications in audio-visual communications. As I began finding out what I needed to teach and how, I realised that there was no written curriculum and no strict rules as to what had to be taught, only a four-page document stating the requirements the students would need to fulfil at the end of their training (See Appendix 1). The situation was both challenging and interesting for me, having earlier taught according to much stricter lists of subjects. The current group of students was fairly far on in their studies but I needed to prepare the curriculum for the following group starting in autumn -08.

It was a natural choice to select the curriculum as the subject for my development project because the need arises directly from my work. Students need to be given a clear curriculum in the beginning of their studies. The present group 5s the first one in online communications the college has had and there wasn’t much written down for a curriculum. Personalisation is one of the key factors of adult education and it is another area I needed to look into. In my former work at a university of applied sciences some personalisation was also taking place but it was not a major issue for young students with little experience. In competence based qualifications personalisation is threefold.

The competence based qualifications system was created as part of lifelong learning policies. In 1996 a committee was formed by the government to de-

vise a national strategy for lifelong learning. In their report they stated that everyone should have opportunities for acquiring all the knowledge, skills and capacities they would need during the course of their lives in various environments. An individual should also be able to receive official certification for knowledge and skills acquired in each environment. Personalisation of studies was one of the key factors from the beginning. (The financing of lifelong learning, 1998, 61-62)

Apart from deciding the contents of the curriculum I am also looking into methods of teaching practical skills. They are different from teaching knowledge and concepts. Before commencing at my present post I had taught computer skills for about seven years. Therefore I had many ideas and experience as to what works well and what doesn't but I also realise that there are many areas where the effectiveness of the teaching could be improved. It is not enough to know what subjects to teach, I also need to be prepared to teach them as effectively as possible.

2. Competence-based qualifications

2.1 Further Vocational Qualification

In the Finnish educational system three levels of vocational qualifications exist. The present system was created in 1994. It is based on skills being recognised regardless of the way they have been acquired. It is an opportunity to get official qualifications even though you haven't studied your trade earlier but learned your vocational skills through work, or you can attain the needed skills through the combination of training and practical work. An important factor of the system is the three-fold collaboration between employers, employees and the educational authorities. All three groups are involved in the creation and revision of the general system, the requirements of the different competence-based qualifications and the testing procedure. The required skills are shown in competence tests. Personal learning plans, including accreditation of former learning, are also important factors. (Näyttötutkinto-opas 2007, 12-13).

Competence-based qualifications have three levels:

1. Vocational upper secondary qualification

   This qualification is the same as the one that can be acquired in a three-year curriculum-based vocational training, 120 credits. Requirements are that a person has basic vocational skills in his field but no work experience.

2. Further Vocational Qualification

   Person taking the qualification needs to show skills equivalent to three years of experience in their field of work. He is capable of performing professional tasks independently.

3. Specialist vocational qualification

   Person taking the qualification needs to show skills equivalent to five years of experience in their field of work. He needs to be capable of performing the more demanding tasks in the field.

   (Näyttötutkinto-opas 2007, 15)

The training I am involved in is therefore the middle one of these three levels.

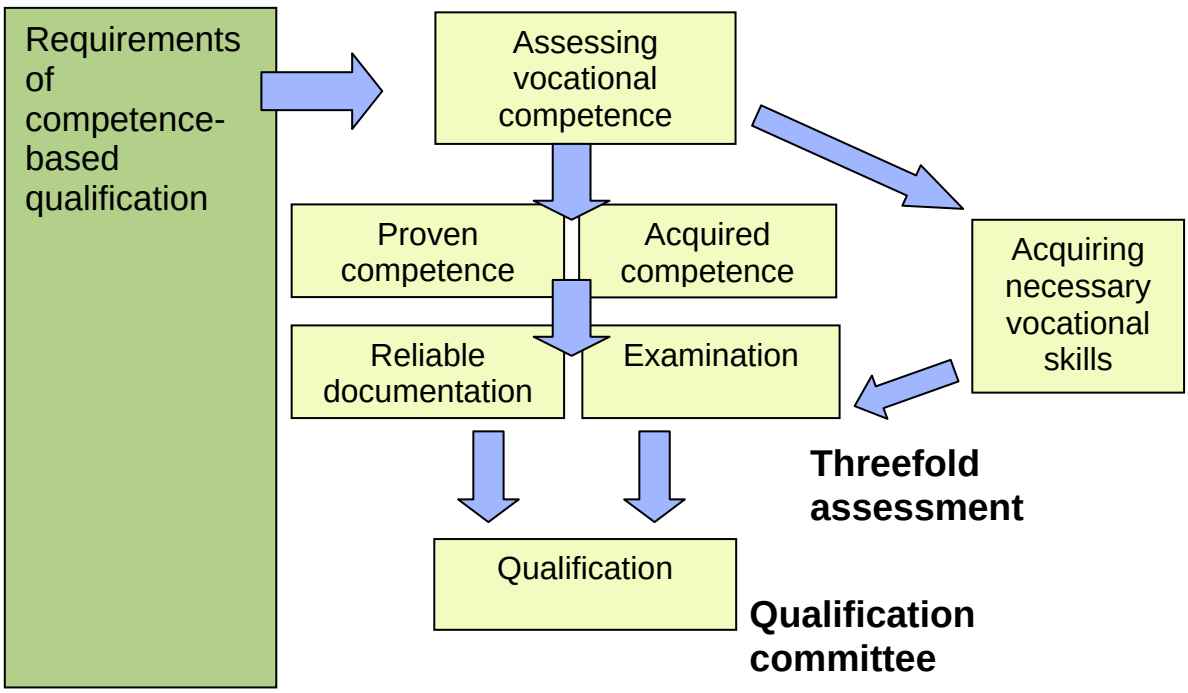

Image 1. The further vocational qualification system

2.2 Competence test

The candidate shows his/her vocational skills in a competence test. The test examiners are separate from preparatory training organisers. Anyone can enrol to take part in a test regardless of how he gained the required skills. Attending preparatory training is therefore not obligatory. (Laki ammatillisesta aikuiskoulutuksesta 631/1998, Luku 1).

The tests are organised in varying ways depending on the occupation. In most occupations the examiners follow the participant while they perform given practical tasks. In audiovisual communications the test normally consists of a presentation portfolio sent to the examination board before the initial test interview. The portfolio contains either projects the candidate has completed in his work, during the preparatory training or both. At the interview the student can either pass directly or a plan is made on how he will complete the portfolio in following weeks or months. At a final interview he again can pass or yet a further plan is made about more work to prove his competence. In the test the student needs to show that he masters all the requirements listed for the particular competence-based qualification. Importance is placed on a large part of the work presented being made for real customers because of the emphasis on working life skills.

2.3 Laws and statutes

The law about vocational adult education states that it is the education provider who decides the contents of the preparatory training for competence-based qualification on the basis of the requirements. There is therefore no list of exact subjects that have to be covered but subjects outside the requirements should not be included. The possibility to participate in the competence test has to be provided as part of preparatory training. (631/1998 chapter 3, § 8) In practice this means that the training originally needs to be timed so that it is possible for students to have their first exam interview and at least six weeks time to complete their exam portfolio while the training lasts.

2.4 Personalisation and accreditation of former learning

Personalisation is one of the key concepts of vocational adult education. Education needs to be customer-oriented. Much of the training and passing the exam can be personalised in varying arrangements in regards to timetables and organisation of studies. Former skills, whatever way they have been acquired, need to be identified and accredited.

Personalisation does not mean that the requirements of the qualification would change from one person to another. They are always the same. Personalisation means that within the context of gaining the skills needed for the competence-based qualification, each student can find ways best suited to him to attain and demonstrate those skills. (Kekäläinen et al, 2007, 8)

In further vocational qualifications the personalisation is done at three levels, covering both former learning and personalisation of preparatory studies:

- Personalisation during the application process
- Personalisation of passing the competence test
- Personalisation of acquiring the needed skills

Personalisation during the application process

Part of the personalisation during the application process is to identify the student's skills and pointing him towards the competence test best suited to his needs. This may in some cases be a different test from the one he has first applied to. The site www.osaan.fi by the National Board of Education is a useful tool in finding out the candidate's skills in the area of competence. This can also be a help in deciding whether it would be suggested that the candidate takes the test directly without preparatory training.

I am the one who performs this personalisation for the web design students. Personalising the passing of the test is normally done by the educational institution that organises the test but PAKK has an agreement with Adulta in Helsinki that we do it ourselves.

Individual plan for completing competence-based qualifications

Former learning that the student can show documentation for is accepted as part of the qualification. In online communications this documentation is most often reports of completed work projects and documented work history. A candidate may have enough work experience gained over years that he can show that he masters the different criteria set out in the requirements without any need to attend preparatory training. In online communications it is taken into account that work requirements change constantly. Therefore the candidate needs to prove that he has kept all his skills up to date. The qualification committee may grant part or whole of the qualification certificate on the basis of the documentation provided.

Personalisation of acquiring the needed skills

Personalisation of acquiring the needed skills means that the student selects the ways in which he can best learn the skills he is lacking in order to take the competence test. In many cases it means attending part or all of a preparatory training. In entering the training each student assesses his skills to date and is given help in seeing what skills he needs to improve in.

There are effective online tools available for the assessment, created by the Finnish National Board of Education. The site www.osaan.fi covers the obligatory parts of all the different qualifications that can be attained. On scale 1-3 you assess each of the skills listed in the requirements. The assessment and diagrams the candidate gets at the end of the questionnaire give a clear general idea of the level of his skills and where improvement is needed. This assessment is also required as one of the documents for the competence test.

The site www.verkko-ohjaus.net is a tool that covers all parts of the process of getting a competence-based qualification, from financing one’s studies to assessing one’s learning styles.

2.5 Emphasis on working life

The requirements of competence-based qualifications state that all skills have to be demonstrated in authentic work life situations.

The studies need to give the students the ability to update their knowledge constantly in the ever-changing field of online communications and web design. During their studies they need to establish a habit of keeping up with progress. It is not possible to know everything that goes on but one needs to have general knowledge of new developments and know some areas in detail. Fortunately this is now easy with many tools for getting knowledge. One could simply get a feed of titles from major online communications, web design, image processing and other IT sites to select from. Already that would give one the general idea of the subjects being discussed and help to see which knowledge and skill areas one could then deepen.

3. Teaching and learning practical skills

I have encountered many different ideas about how to best teach practical skills but there is one common factor: you only learn by practising and repeating the new skills. This work is individual, each student has to repeat the techniques themselves until he masters them. However, having others at hand while practising is a help and I always encourage students to discuss any problems or unclear areas with each other.

3.1 Student motivation

In my experience there are generally less motivation problems in adult education than in education geared towards young people or young adults. Adults have not entered education because they had to but normally see clear benefits of the education for their work lives.

There is no “must” in preparatory training for competence-based qualifications. There are no grades and no obligatory assignments to hand in. I give many assignments but it is up to each student to decide if he needs or wants to complete them. My role is only to prepare them for the exam by external examiners. But I aim to motivate the students to complete assignments by letting them see for themselves how much faster they learn when they practise a lot. It is important that I prepare meaningful assignments and give constant feedback on their progress. In tying all teaching to examples of practical work life uses of the new skills I can help students to stay motivated.

Support of the whole student group can be important for motivation and help over times when motivation might get lower. Therefore my goal is to create a sense of belonging to the group right from the start. With some students not taking part in all classes this can be a challenge. Therefore I will also use the online environment for tasks that require students to have contact with each other.

3.2 Teaching methods

One of the questions on the feedback form that our students need to fill in asks if the teaching methods of the teacher in question correspond with the subjects being taught. One teaching method I would rule out in this form of teaching practical skills is problem-based learning and instead go for more teacher-led methods. When students need to learn a large amount of new computer skills, I need to find the method that is the most efficient use of time and at the same brings high learning results. But this can be done in many different ways.

When a new subject is started it is important to tie it to students’ former learning and to the aim of the full course as well as to the entire course of their studies. When the students can see how useful a new function or technique is, where they can make use of it and how it relates to the whole, they start learning it in an intelligent way, not merely copying. This is often called a deep approach to IT learning as opposed to a surface approach. The deep approach means that a student seeks to find relevance in what he learns and to relate it

to his former skills. He looks for patterns and underlying principles. He seeks to develop an overall understanding of the whole. (Cohen 2002, p 62)

The most common method of teaching any computer skills is that a teacher first shows a new function on a projector screen, then the students perform the same function and afterwards repeat the same on their own through exercises or projects. This is mainly how I teach, too and if a student studies using the deep approach, it seems to be an effective method. I realise that I can always improve my teaching by being clearer, remembering to tie the new subjects to former ones, not proceed too fast and comment on work well done. Especially the last point, remembering to give positive feedback, is one I always forget. Feedback forms have repeatedly shown me this, and even so it is difficult for me to remember to do it. I may think that a student or a group has done really well but it requires me extra effort to remember to say it.

In the beginning of the studies the students also complete some tests about learning styles. These tests are in Finnish. One of the tests is a learning strategy test at www11.uta.fi/laitokset/tyt/verkkotutor. This test helps students find out if their attitude to learning is towards deep or surface learning. If some have a very surface learning preference, they can be guided towards a deeper strategy of studying. Already being aware of one's preference can help in making chances towards a more lasting, deep way of studying.

Another online test at www.akonet.org/pinoste/7eeroa/testi/havaintokanavatesti.php tests learning preferences, to find out whether one has visual, auditive or kinesthetic preference. My former experience would point out that practically all students in visual communications have strong visual learning preference. In some ways this gets taken into account automatically as almost all teaching is done through computer screens where you always experience the subject matter in a visual way.

The third test at www.dlc.fi/~tenviesti/oppimistyylit.htm is based on David Kolb's learning style inventory, especially useful for testing adult students. He divides learning styles into four: reflective observation, abstract conceptualisa-

tion, concrete experience and active experimentation. Like in all tests, most people are a mix of the different styles but normally one or two are predominant. In deciding teaching methods the different styles can be taken into consideration in the use of variety of methods and also in forming groups. It is better if there are students of different styles within each group. (Davis and Lowe, The Kolb learning cycle)

3.1 Online learning

At the moment PAKK uses Moodle as online learning environment. But we are soon merging with Turku Adult Education Centre and they use Optima. I hope we can begin using Optima as soon as possible because it is much more versatile and offers many possibilities that the free programme Moodle doesn't have.

An important part of the course will be conducted online. The division of subjects, however, will be such that most new practical skills will be first taught in the classroom. I have needed to learn many computer skills on my own using manuals and tutorials and it is a much slower way than having someone at hand to show you how to proceed in the beginning and give guidance as you practise. In learning practical skills there needs to be an emphasis on practising all new skills until they become mastered in a more automatic way. On the various subjects I need to decide separately what part of the course will be mainly online so that the online studies will be effective.

Especially in the beginning it is important that I comment all work that students return. This will help keep up their interest, make them used to checking the Moodle often and see the usefulness of online studies. Assignments can be returned either in such a way that students see each other's work or that they only see their own work. In most cases it will benefit the whole group that submitted work is available for all to view. This gives students the opportunity to see how similar results can be achieved through varying means. I myself have learned many new computer skills by studying in detail how someone else has built a certain image, animation, stylesheet or web site.

Online learning also offers many possibilities for students to personalize their studies. During the scheduled online sessions, one or two evenings a week, I can take more time to answer students' individual questions than in class. With the previous group I found that as the students became more skilled they began to ask more specific questions. One person became interested in very different subjects than another.

When a student asks questions relating to programme functions or general knowledge about the subjects we study, I will require that they use the online discussion forum, not e-mail. That way all questions and answers build a database of subjects students can later refer to. This also helps in my time management. Often many students encounter similar problems.

4. Building the curriculum

4.1 Goal

The goal of the curriculum can be stated easily: What skills does an online communications professional need to master? What subjects do the students need to study in order to fulfil the requirements of the competence-based qualification? In working on the curriculum I have had to have the requirements document in front of me all the time. It is only four A4 pages long but contains concise information needed for building the curriculum.

4.2 Challenges

The internet world is in constant change. A professional in any web-related field must be able to update their knowledge on a continuous basis. Our students will need to get into the habit of following discussions both online and in magazines, in Finland and abroad. When new standards, practices or programme versions come out, they need to be aware of those even though they can't be experts in everything in this wide field. So, I may present a skill in class but at the same time I need to say that next year this may well be performed in a different way. This is also a constant challenge for me to keep up to date. A network of people working in the same line is a great asset. At the

moment I don’t know very many but I follow several online forums and blogs where developments are being discussed.

It has been my observation that it is a must for a teacher in any online media or IT related subjects to constantly work with customers at the side of the teaching career. Just reading about changes and new developments is not enough, the real development and changes in demands only show themselves in customer work.

4.3 Practical factors

The way PAKK has organised the other audiovisual preparatory training courses gives me the scope of having the training last from one to one and a half years. The qualification exams will be taken inside that time. Classes can only take place in the evenings as most students work full time. I share the classroom with another group and therefore have two nights a week for contact teaching. The rest needs to be distance learning. The first time I organise the entire course will in a sense be a test because the dates of the course had to be decided before the curriculum was ready. The first time the course will include about 12 months of classes, a summer break of seven weeks and the time for the exams. When one group enters the exam stage, the next one begins. This way the new group can benefit from seeing presentations by the finishing group and get an idea of what their goal is.

4.4 Personal learning

Different education centres organise their teaching in different ways. The starting point is to give different learners and people in different life situations the opportunity to gain the necessary skills (Näyttötutkinto-opas, 24). Of course, personal learning cannot mean that subjects outside the required curriculum would be included if someone wanted to study them. As mentioned earlier, the preparatory training can only include subjects needed for the competence test. The actual personalisation is done at the stage where student’s prior learning is acknowledged. This means that I need to discuss with each student to find

out what they already know and what part of the studies would be useful for them to attend. After that they can decide what they attend. It often happens that after explaining the contents and aim of a course the student realises he only knows a fraction of the area covered and decides to attend.

At a personal level each student can direct his studies towards his own personal goal. Online media is a wide subject area and students can concentrate on different aspects, still being able to include all the main requirements. An example of this: each student needs to become a professional in image processing in order to be able to get the qualification. However a student who will mainly be creating online graphics in his work can study this area much deeper. Therefore his exam portfolio will include many items of image processing while another student, concentrating on XHTML programming, will only show a couple of processes of creating or manipulating images.

Part of my role as a trainer and tutor will be to help students identify their specific needs within the curriculum. I can take the different needs into consideration especially in planning assignments and in online teaching. As no grades are given of the course at all, there is no obligation for students to attend any classes, online sessions or complete any of the exercises. This is a new arrangement for me. At the same time it is challenging because the motivation for attending has to be other than enforcement and at the same it is easier for me with no grading. The only examination they will carry out is the competence-based exam by external examiners and I have no part in deciding its outcome.

5. Curriculum content

5.1. Order of studies

In familiarising myself with the work of my present students I have been surprised that some of the main skills had been taught at a late date in their course. After one year some fundamentals had not been discussed at all. For the students to gain maximum benefit from their studies they would need to

get the basic skills in all the technical subjects right in the beginning. Otherwise they end up making plans on drawing programmes that they are not able to transfer into functioning web sites, as happened with the present group. When the main practical skills are taught intermittently, students first learn the basics and at different stages of the course they become more expert in their skills. That way they will be able to take on some customer work early on and learn much in the process.

Some of the items mentioned in the requirements for the qualification are subjects that come up all the time throughout the studies.

5.2. Web project process

At the end of their studies, when getting ready for the exam, the student needs to have an extensive understanding of the full process of working on an online project from start to finish. He needs to be aware of his own role in the process, know what parts he can complete himself and where he needs to have help of other professionals. Getting acquainted with this is not a single subject but a process that runs through the whole training. Theory or a chart of the basic process can be shown and explained but it is only through practice and practical work assignments that the process becomes deep knowledge the student feels he can master.

In work life it often happens that someone enters a project already in progress or takes on work from someone else. All web professionals need to be able to follow given instructions. For this reason one of the assignments I want to use repeatedly is for students to pass on their half-finished projects with instructions to another student for completion. This will help in getting accustomed to working on projects you didn’t design or plan yourself.

5.3 Subjects to study

As stated before, the requirements of the competence-based qualification for online communications do not specify what computer programmes need stud-

ied. In order to be professionals, the students need to have a basic understanding of how the World Wide Web works as well as of the role of online media in today's society. They have to know some programmes in detail and have a general understanding of others. They also need to be able to make an informed choice about what technique to use in a given situation.

This is where the personal learning plan also comes into the picture. Different students need different skills but all need to learn the basics.

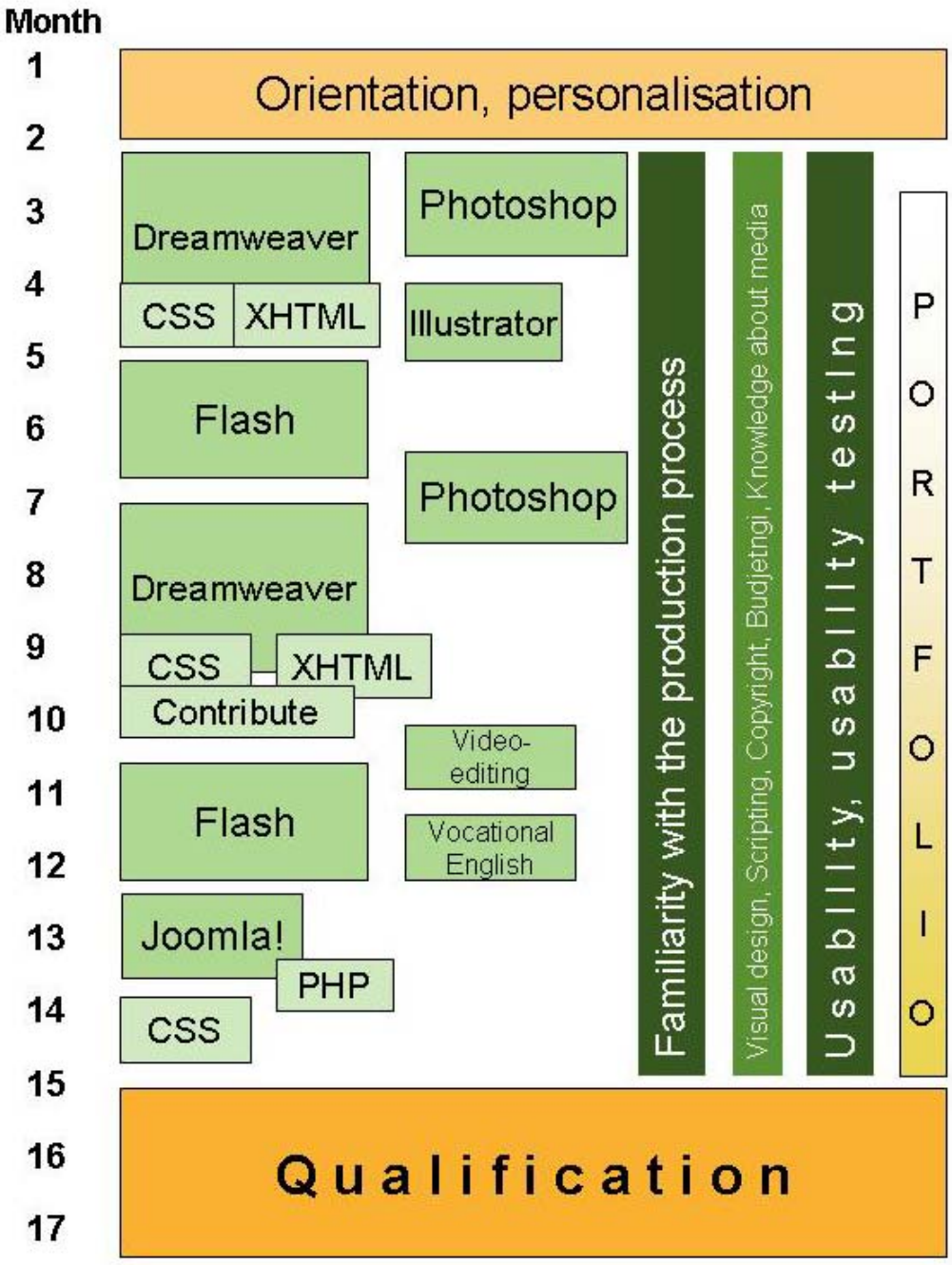

Image 2. Subjects and timing

5.3.1 Making websites and animation

This is the main part of the course. Each student needs to learn the technique of making websites. We will mainly be using the wysiwyg (“what-you-see-is-what-you-get”) -editor Adobe Dreamweaver CS3 but they also need to know the basics of how the XHTML code works. For a long time now it has been the requirement of any professionally made websites that the content and design of the site are separate. This means the use of Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) in the formulating of how a web site will look. CSS is also taking over as means of site layout instead of the table structure that has long been the main method. Students need wide practice in the many different techniques so that they learn to select the best suited technique and layout for each of their projects. They need to get to the stage where much of the technical work is automatic so that they can concentrate on the layout and usability of sites.
A web site can be static or dynamic. A static website is like a book that has the pages stored on a server in the same form as the user sees them. The user has no impact on the content. A dynamic site is one where the page content loads separately each time a page is called for and the user can influence the content. It is necessary for the students to separate these and have the basics of creating each kind. There are many ways of creating dynamic web sites. We will look at the PHP scripting language and the open-source application Joomla. (Wikipedia 2008, Web site styles)

Adobe Flash has become the standard in web animation, and learning to use it is another major part of the course. Students need to learn how to build individual animations to be incorporated in a site as well as how to make the entire site using only Flash. Through using the programme and studying its use on existing sites they will learn to make good choices as to when to use Flash, to what extent and when it is better to build a site without animation. Knowing the possibilities and limitations of animation is also important when discussing site requirements with a client.

Students will study some video and sound editing. Each one needs to know how to edit a video or sound clip in such a way that it can be used in the inter-

net or otherwise shared online. Then those more interested in that line can continue to learn more either on their own or on additional courses.

5.3.2 Image processing and drawing

Websites are rarely made without images or graphics. The students need to be able to make changes to existing images, photographs and drawings as well as create new ones. They need to understand the basics of colour theory and graphic design. But because the qualification they are aiming for is primarily a vocational one, not an art diploma or a degree, they need to concentrate on practical skills. Therefore the theories will constitute a minor place in the curriculum but they need to know enough to be aware of what they are basing their choices on. Because many people on more practical courses don't like – or even attend - theory lectures, I need to include the theory in the course in discussion format and examples, either in contact lessons or online. The programme used is Adobe Photoshop CS3, which is the most widely used professional image editing programme. Many of the students may have some skills on it. Many people have learned to use it by trying out this and that but have never studied it systematically. Therefore it is important to start using professional ways of working with the various functions and tools right from the beginning. You only become a professional in using a programme with such wide variety of features by constant practice, so it is vital that students use it throughout the course, not just for those weeks when they actually actively study it.

It could be said that mastering a vector drawing programme like Adobe Illustrator or CorelDRAW is not absolutely necessary because Photoshop and Flash have vector drawing tools mostly sufficient for web site creation. Information architecture charts and plans can be made using office applications. However these programmes can greatly assist in creating graphics, so it is for this reason that I plan to have Adobe Illustrator as one of the programmes the students will learn.

Both image editing and vector drawing programmes will be studied from the point of view that they will be used online. The course is not long enough to

cover print requirements and techniques. The students will study the file formats they need in working versions of images and well as publishing formats and how to optimise those for web use.

5.3.3 Planning, scripts and information architecture

Web site creation and maintenance often means teamwork. Therefore it is vital that students learn to present their plans in a way that others can understand and follow. There are many books and tutorial giving us ideas on how to design. Some of them are useful, others are not. It is important for me not to try to fit all the students into a specific method of planning and designing because I myself don't often plan according to any specific method and have at times been criticized for that. Instead of drawing and sketching I often just write and describe. I will present some methods but leave it up to each individual to select one of them or find their own. But in spite of that each one needs to be able to present their plans in an understandable way that can both be passed on online and printed if necessary.

Information architecture is closely related to usability – what goes where and how do I navigate on a site. Students will learn how to make these plans so that they can use them when building sites as well as when somebody else compiles a site they have designed.

5.3.4 General knowledge about media

The requirements document describes as one of the necessary skills as understanding media. The candidate needs to have knowledge about the importance and workings of media in society. He also needs to be aware of ethical questions within media and how they affect his own work and know where online media fits in related to different kinds of media. This is one of the few subjects I will not teach myself. This would be a subject that would be ideal also taught online in discussion format with all the students doing research and contributing ideas.

5.3.5 Copyright, usability and budget and price calculations

Copyright

Because it is now technically easy to copy and pass on anything, it is even more necessary for a web design professional to know what is legal and what is not. This includes images, text and any other media like videos or music. Apart from this students need to be aware of the regulations that state what images can be published and what kind of photos would violate the privacy of those photographed or filmed. It is an aid to them if during their studies they collect resources and links to facilities they can later use. It is also a great help for a web professional if they can create their own supply of images to use in various projects. When you take photos and create images yourself there will be no copyright problems.

Usability

It could be said that usability is the most important consideration in creating a new website. If visitors can't quickly and without effort find what they came to look for, they instantly switch to a different site. Depending on which research results one uses, a user stays on a new site from six seconds to 2 minutes. In this time he needs to find answers to two questions: "Can this site fulfil my need?" and "Where do I start looking for the answer?" If he can't instantly see the answers to those two questions, the user will proceed to a different site (Parkkinen 2002, 28). Therefore usability issues first need to be discussed with the students at the same time as they begin making their first sites. Later during the course these questions come up all the time and students' knowledge on the subject can be widened through examples from their own work. This is one of the subjects that the students are likely to already have many experiences and observations on. The goal of studying these is to clarify their thinking and give their thoughts and experiences a systematic form that they will know to put into practice in all their work.

Usability testing is a discipline widely studied nowadays. I plan to organise a visit to one of the professional usability testing studios in Helsinki. Apart from that students will test all their sites using different means available.

Budget and price calculations

Creating a budget is essential for any project, large or small. Students need to have an idea of how many working hours different parts of a project demand. Many of the students will be involved in calculating offers on web projects. This is another one of the subjects I will not teach myself but need to get a business professional to take. Our college has many of those and I am also investigating the possibility of my students taking part in general business courses.

5.3.6 Professional English

The requirements document states that a person taking the further vocational qualification exam needs to understand English documentation and instructions related to his line of expertise. He also needs to prepare an English CV and have the ability to describe his vocational skills in English. (Opetushallitus, Näyttötutkinnon perusteet, page 45). This means that while great fluency in English in not a requirement, the students will need to show the ability to master vocational vocabulary. Some of this will come naturally as all the computer programmes we use are in English. I am also very careful to always pronounce any terms the proper way, not reading them letter by letter according to the Finnish pronunciation.

It is rare now that someone would enter studies and have no knowledge of English at all. Most prospective students are likely to have studied English at school for a varying number of years. In the present group most speak English quite well or fluently. But if someone needs to learn basic English, they will have to get that outside this course. There are no resources or time for that within the course.

The requirements state that those passing the exam will need to be able to use English in ordinary work life situations. For that the best exercise is to create situations where the students work on a project in groups, using only English in all discussion, all instructions also being given in English. This way

many terms come up and need to be expressed. Students get some practice in describing procedures in English.

I am aware that since no classes are obligatory in this form of adult education, those who would most need improving their English may choose not to attend. In spite of that I plan to try this method of language teaching at least for this one group.

5.4 Business collaboration

Students need “real” commissions where they work for a customer, both in order to learn actual work life practices and to have projects to show in their competence test portfolio. You cannot learn all the aspects of customer work by working on your own projects where you are in a position of making all the decisions yourself. In working for a real customer the student needs to take into consideration matters to do with setting the timetable and making agreements. They also get practical experience about the fact that in customer work there are almost always problems, setbacks and unwelcome changes. They need to learn to calculate the price of their work and be familiar with the general price level within their sector of work.

In the past the college has helped students to get projects to work on, and I plan to continue this. There are many mainly smaller businesses that need their websites revised, and still some that need their first website. Mainly these projects are the right size for the students, giving experience in different aspects of the work without being too extensive.

Many of the businesses also need graphic design. Many don’t have any planned corporate image and need consistent colours and fonts decided for all their marketing needs. Some want a new logo, letterheads or business cards. The students in the graphic design department mainly deal with these but when the same businesses also need websites, it is a good opportunity for the online communications students to learn to use ready-made colour schemes and graphics in designing a site. Collaboration between graphic designers for print and for online is a necessary part of the work the students are preparing

for. At the same time more and more people want to be qualified both in print graphics and in website making. Out of our 16 new students five are print graphics professionals who have noticed that their customers expect them to have wide knowledge and skills also in online communications.

The more practice students get in actual commissions during their studies the more prepared they will be for working life.

Conclusion

I will organise the first full course using the guidelines created in this thesis. I am confident that I have made a comprehensive and informed choice of subjects to teach as well as the order in which they are best to be taught. I was thankful for the opportunity to follow the starting interviews of my first group of students and discuss the requirements with the examiners. One of them is a member of the qualification committee for online communications. This gave me confirmation that the curriculum is headed the right way. At the same time I am looking forward to being able to evaluate the curriculum at the end of the course and make necessary changes. One and a half years is a long time in the internet world and by the end of it new things will certainly have come up and some techniques or practices may have become too old to use. Even during the time of working on this paper several new changes have been introduced in the internet world, some to do with techniques, some with practices or preferable ways of working. Also new programme and browser versions come up all the time. I constantly need to keep up with changes and progress.

By this time of finishing this project my work among the new group of students has began, using the curriculum I have created. I have also started studies to become a specialist in competence-based qualifications. I feel motivated and excited in aiming to give my students a wide and varied background for becoming and remaining online communications professionals.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Requirements of competence-based qualification, online communications (in Finnish)

Finnish National Board of Education, Regulation 41/011/2005

Näyttötutkinnon perusteet, Audiovisuaalisen viestinnän ammattitutkinto, verkkoviestinnän osaamisala

Opetushallitus, määräys 41/011/2005

Verkkoviestinnän osaamisala on tarkoitettu erilaisissa tilaaja- ja asiakaslähtöisissä digitaalisen viestinnän tuotantotehtävissä toimiville henkilöille. Ammattinimike voi olla esimerkiksi käsikirjoittaja, konseptisuunnittelija, käyttöliittymäsuunnittelija, käytettävyyssuunnittelija, www-suunnittelija, www-koostaja, ohjelmoija (esim. www-, flash actionscript-, lingo- tai java-ohjelmoija), mobiilisovellus-suunnittelija, äänisuunnittelija, projektiassistentti, projektikoordinaattori tai www-tiedottaja.

Toimenkuvana voi olla verkkoviestinnän suunnitteluun ja toteuttamiseen liittyvät työtehtävät, joissa yleensä työskennellään työryhmässä. Tutkinnon suorittaja voi toimia myös itsenäisenä yrittäjänä.

Työympäristö voi olla esimerkiksi digitaalisen median sisältötuotannon yritys (mm. Internet-, mobiili-, digitelevisiotuotannot), it-yritys, ohjelmistoyritys, mainos¬toimisto, lehtitalo, yrityksen tai yhteisön viestintäosasto.

Verkkoviestinnän osaamisala muodostuu kolmesta tutkinnon osasta:

19 § Verkkoviestinnän suunnittelu ja ilmaisu
20 § Verkkoviestinnän työmenetelmät ja -välineet
21 § Verkkoviestinnän tuotantoprosessit ja -ympäristö

19 § Verkkoviestinnän suunnittelu ja ilmaisu

a) Ammattitaitovaatimukset	b) Arvioinnin kohteet ja kriteerit
Tutkinnon suorittaja osaa digitaalisen median käsikirjoitusprosessin eri vaiheet ja	Tutkinnon suorittaja • osaa toteuttaa riittävän tarkkoja,

tunteen niiden vaikutukset koko tuotantoprosessiin.	selkeitä ja ymmärrettäviä käsikirjoituksia, joista ilmenee tuotannon käyttötarkoitus • osaa tuottaa asiatekstiä verkkokäyttöön.
Tutkinnon suorittaja osaa ottaa suunnittelussa huomioon käyttöliittymä-, vuorovaikutus- ja käytettävyyssuunnittelun perusteet.	Tutkinnon suorittaja • osaa suunnitella viestintätuotteelle teknisesti toimivan ja visuaalisesti tarkoituksenmukaisen ulkoasun ja käyttöliittymän, jossa on huomioitu tuotteen tai palvelun kohderyhmä ja vuorovaikutteisuus • osaa havainnollistaa suunnitelman selkeällä tavalla.
Tutkinnon suorittaja osaa rakenne- ja informaatioarkkitehtuurisuunnittelun perusteet ja ymmärtää niiden merkityksen tuotantoprosessissa.	Tutkinnon suorittaja • osaa suunnitella viestintätuotteella selkeän, perustellun ja teknisesti toimivan rakenteen ja informaatioarkkitehtuurin • osaa ottaa suunnittelussa huomioon tuotteen käytettävyyden sekä ylläpidon ja päivitettävyyden.

c) Ammattitaidon osoittamistavat

Näyttöympäristön tulee olla todellinen työympäristö ja näytöissä käytetyn tuotantotekniikan yleisesti ammattikäytössä olevaa. Näyttöjen tulee olla monipuolisia, ja ne tulee toteuttaa tilaaja- ja asiakaslähtöisessä toiminnassa.

Tutkinnon osan näyttönä toimivat alaan liittyvät keskeiset työtehtävät, työnäyteportfolio, kirjalliset tuotanto- tai toteutussuunnitelmat sekä niiden perustelut, toteutusraportit ja -analyysit.

Näytössä tulee arvioida samanaikaisesti sekä osaamisalan ammattilaiselta vaadittavaa ydinosaamista että tutkinnon suorittajan erityistaitoja. Arvioinnissa kiinnitetään huomiota tutkinnon suorittajan työtapoihin ja kykyihin arvioida työtään suhteessa asetettuihin tavoitteisiin.

Näyttöä täydennetään keskusteluin, joissa tarkennetaan ja täsmennetään tutkinnon suorittajan kykyjä kyseisellä ammattialueella. Tutkinnon suorittajan itsearviointia käytetään hyväksi arviointipäätöksiä tehtäessä.

20 § Verkkoviestinnän työmenetelmät ja -välineet

a) Ammattitaitovaatimukset	b) Arvioinnin kohteet ja kriteerit
Tutkinnon suorittaja osaa käyttää ammattimaisessa käytössä olevia laitteisto- ja ohjelmistokokonaisuuksia.	Tutkinnon suorittaja • osaa käyttää työprosessin eri vaiheissa vaadittuja laitteita ja ohjelmia osaa tuottaa asiatekstiä verkkokäyttöön. • osaa käyttää sopivia ohjelmia still- ja liikkuvan kuvan käsittelyyn, tekstinkäsittelyyn, äänenkäsittelyyn, koostamiseen ja dokumentointiin • osaa käyttää tarvittavia pakkaus- ja tallennustapoja • osaa tietotekniikan ja ohjelmoinnin perusteet.
Tutkinnon suorittaja tietää verkkoviestinnän tuotannon työmenetelmät ja osaa toteuttaa laadukkaita tuotteita.	Tutkinnon suorittaja • osaa analysoida omaa työtään ja arvioida oman työnsä merkityksen osana tuotantoprosessia • osaa ammattimaiset työmenetelmät, alan ammattisanaston, selkeän havainnollistamisen ja tuotannon dokumentoinnin

	• osaa tulkita kuvakäsikirjoituksia ja konseptikuvauksia.

c) Ammattitaidon osoittamistavat

Näyttöympäristön tulee olla todellinen työympäristö ja näytöissä käytetyn tuotantotekniikan yleisesti ammattikäytössä olevaa. Näyttöjen tulee olla monipuolisia, ja ne tulee toteuttaa tilaaja- ja asiakaslähtöisessä toiminnassa.

Tutkinnon osan näyttönä toimivat alaan liittyvät keskeiset työtehtävät, työnäyte-portfolio, kirjalliset tuotanto- tai toteutussuunnitelmat sekä niiden perustelut, toteutusraportit ja -analyysit.

Näytössä tulee arvioida samanaikaisesti sekä osaamisalan ammattilaiselta vaadittavaa ydinosaamista että tutkinnon suorittajan erityistaitoja. Arvioinnissa kiinnitetään huomiota tutkinnon suorittajan työtapoihin ja kykyihin arvioida työtään suhteessa asetettuihin tavoitteisiin.

Näyttöä täydennetään keskusteluin, joissa tarkennetaan ja täsmennetään tutkinnon suorittajan kykyjä kyseisellä ammattialueella. Tutkinnon suorittajan itsearviointia käytetään hyväksi arviointipäätöksiä tehtäessä.

21 § Verkkoviestinnän tuotantoprosessit ja -ympäristö

a) Ammattitaitovaatimukset	b) Arvioinnin kohteet ja kriteerit
Tutkinnon suorittaja hallitsee digitaalisen viestintätuotteen tuotannon.	Tutkinnon suorittaja • osaa suunnitella, toteuttaa ja testata viestintätuotteita eri käyttöympäristöissä • tietää osuutensa koko tuotantoprosessissa ja osaa työskennellä itsenäisesti • tietää tuotannon eri vaiheet ja työtehtävät • ymmärtää viestinnän eettisiä kysymyksiä ja niiden vaikutusta

	omaan työhönsä • ymmärtää viestintäalan toiminnan yhteiskunnassa.
Tutkinnon suorittaja hallitsee ammatin yhteydessä tarvittavan englannin kielen.	Tutkinnon suorittaja • ymmärtää englanninkielisiä työhönsä liittyviä asiakirjoja, käyttö- ja ylläpito-ohjeita ja tiedotusluonteista tekstiä • osaa laatia englanninkielisen ansioluettelonsa ja kuvailla omaa ammattiosaamistaan englanniksi.
Tutkinnon suorittaja tietää digitaalisen viestintätuotteen tuotannon suunnitteluun ja hallintaan liittyvät prosessit.	Tutkinnon suorittaja • osaa laatia tuotannolle aikataulun sekä resurssi- ja kustannusarvion • osaa raportoida työnjohdolle • tuntee tarjous- ja tuotantosopimuskäytännöt ja tekijänoikeuslainsäädännön • osaa tuottaa selkeää työhönsä liittyvää kirjallista materiaalia • osaa esittää asiansa ymmärrettävästi asiakkaalle, työnantajalle ja muille työyhteisön jäsenille.
Tutkinnon suorittaja tietää julkaisukanavien erot ja hallitsee tallennus- ja jakelumuotojen vaatimukset.	Tutkinnon suorittaja • tuntee julkaisukanavien eroja ja merkityksiä • osaa siirtää valmiin ja testatun tuotteen jakelukanavaan • hallitsee työtiedostojen versionhallinnan • hallitsee oikeiden tallennus- ja jakelumuotojen käyttämisen eri medioissa

	• tuntee keskeisimmät tiedosto-muodot.

c) Ammattitaidon osoittamistavat

Näyttöympäristön tulee olla todellinen työympäristö ja näytöissä käytetyn tuotantotekniikan yleisesti ammattikäytössä olevaa. Näyttöjen tulee olla monipuolisia, ja ne tulee toteuttaa tilaaja- ja asiakaslähtöisessä toiminnassa.

Tutkinnon osan näyttönä toimivat alaan liittyvät keskeiset työtehtävät, työnäyteportfolio, kirjalliset tuotanto- tai toteutussuunnitelmat sekä niiden perustelut, toteutusraportit ja -analyysit.

Näytössä tulee arvioida samanaikaisesti sekä osaamisalan ammattilaiselta vaadittavaa ydinosaamista että tutkinnon suorittajan erityistaitoja. Arvioinnissa kiinnitetään huomiota tutkinnon suorittajan työtapoihin ja kykyihin arvioida työtään suhteessa asetettuihin tavoitteisiin.

Näyttöä täydennetään keskusteluin, joissa tarkennetaan ja täsmennetään tutkinnon suorittajan kykyjä kyseisellä ammattialueella. Tutkinnon suorittajan itsearviointia käytetään hyväksi arviointipäätöksiä tehtäessä.

Appendix 2: Opetussuunnitelma. The curriculum I created as distributed to the students (in Finnish)

Verkkoviestinnän ammattitutkinnon valmistavan koulutuksen opetussuunnitelma

- Koulutuksen laajuus 32 opintoviikkoa

Ohjelmat ja tekniikat

- Dreamweaver
- Flash
- Photoshop
- Illustrator
- Contribute
- Joomla
- XHTML
- CSS
- PHP perusteet, tietokantapohjaiset sivut
- Premiere

Muut aiheet

Suuri osa alla olevista käsitellään joko verkko-oppimisena tai ne tulevat toistuvasti esille muun työskentelyn ohessa.

- Käsikirjoitusprosessi
- Tuotantoprosessin tunteminen
- Julkaisukanavat
- Media yhteiskunnassa
- Visuaalinen suunnittelu
- Informaatioarkkitehtuuri
- Käytettävyys, käytettävyystestaus
- Kustannusarviot
- Tekijänoikeuslainsäädäntö

- Portfolion teko

Pääohjelmien sisällöt

Dreamweaver

Tavoite: Opiskelija osaa valmistaa tekniseltä toiminnaltaan, käytettävyydeltään ja päivitettävyydeltään toimivia sivuja. Hän tuntee tallennusmuodot ja osaa julkaista sivut.
Sisältö: Käsiteltävinä aiheina ovat sivustorakenteen luominen, kaikki yksittäisen sivun sisällön luomisessa huomioon otettavat asiat, linkitykset, eri taittotekniikat, sivupohjien (template) luominen ja käyttö, lomakkeet, sivujen siirto palvelimelle ja hakukoneoptimointi. Opettelemme (X)HTML-kielen perusteet. CSS-tyylitiedostojen käyttö tärkeässä osassa sekä sivujen ulkonäön luomisessa että taitossa.

Contribute

Tavoite*:* Opiskelija osaa yhdistää Dreamweaverillä luodut template-sivut käytettäviksi Contributella ja opastaa asiakkaan sivujensa päivittämiseen.

Photoshop

Tavoite: Opiskelija oppii käyttämään Photoshopia siten, että hän osaa sekä valmistaa grafiikkaa käytettäväksi www-sivuilla ja Flashissä että korjata valmiita kuvia. Hän tuntee käytettävissä olevat tiedostomuodot ja osaa valita niistä kuhunkin tarkoitukseen sopivan.

Sisältö: Uusien kuvien ja grafiikan luominen ja vanhojen korjaaminen. Perustyökalut ja toiminnot, värien käyttö, tasot, säätötasot, tasomaskit, piirtäminen Photoshopilla, teksti, filterit, kooste- ja taustakuvien luominen www-käyttöön, tallennusmuodot ja optimointi www-käyttöön.

Flash

***Tavoite**:* Opiskelija osaa tehdä Flashillä sekä yksittäisiä animaatioita että kokonaisia www-sivuja.

***Sisältö**:* Flashin toimintaperiaate ja käyttöliittymä, symbolien merkitys, luominen ja käyttö, eri animaatiotyypit, Actionscript-kielen peruskäskyjä ja interaktiivisuuden luominen. Erimuotoiset tekstit, äänen ja videon liittäminen. Kokonaisen www-sivun luominen Flashillä. Flash-animaation liittäminen sivuun Dreamweaverillä. Julkaisumuodot ja -kanavat.

Illustrator

***Tavoite**:* Opiskelija osaa tehdä www-sivuilla ja Flashissä tarvittavaa grafiikkaa sekä sivujen layout- ja rakenne-ehdotuksia.

Premiere-videoeditointi

***Tavoite**:* Opiskelija tietää videoeditoinnin perusasioita siten, että hän osaa muokata videota ja julkaista sen verkossa. Hän tietää, mitä mahdollisuuksia on käytössä tilattaessa videoeditointia alihankintana.

Joomla-sisällönhallintajärjestelmä

***Tavoite**:* Opiskelija osaa asentaa Joomlan, valmistaa sillä toimivat ja käyttöliittymältään selkeät sivut ja opastaa eritasoisia käyttäjiä valmiiden sivujen päivittämisessä.

***Sisältö**:* Joomlan lataaminen ja asennus, kansioiden ja tiedostojen oikeuksien määritys, sivun rakenteen luominen, sivumallin (templaten) valinta ja muokkaus. Sisällön lisääminen ja hallinnointi. Käyttäjätasot, päivittäjien ohjaaminen.

PHPn perusteet

Tavoite: Opiskelija tuntee PHP-kielen merkityksen ja käyttötarkoituksen ja tietää, miten muuten staattisiin www-sivuihin voi liittää dynaamisesti generoitavia osia. Hän tietää teoriaa tietokantayhteyden luomisesta.

Ammattienglanti

Tavoite: Opiskelija tuntee ammattiin ja ammattiohjelmiin liittyvät englanninkieliset termit ja osaa käyttää niitä.
Sisältö: 2 lähi-iltaa + verkkoilta, jolloin työskennellään verkkoviestinnän projektin parissa ryhmissä käyttäen pelkästään englantia sekä puheessa että kirjoituksessa.