Usability Testing: Strategies for Getting Started
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Top Five Tips

1. Define your target audience and test five representative users. If you have "several highly distinct groups of users," you will want to test three to four users from each group if you intend the website to serve them all (http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20000319.html).

2. Develop realistic tasks and scenarios based on the needs of your target audience. Ask yourself what your users really do with your website.

3. Avoid biasing your results through the wording of your tasks or prompts. Help participants to think aloud but stay neutral (What are you thinking now? What did you expect to find?).

4. Record as many actions and comments as possible, but don't worry about video, audio, or screen capture if they are obstacles – pen and paper are just fine.

5. Look for patterns in user behavior and summarize your findings. Focus on whether participants could accomplish tasks successfully, but don't judge user behavior based on your ideas about the "right" or "best" ways to accomplish tasks.

Recommended Readings

Steve Krug. *Don't make me think!: a common sense approach to web usability*. Indianapolis: Que, 2000.

Elaina Norlin and CM! Winters. *Usability testing for library web sites: a hands-on guide*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2002.

Jeffrey Rubin. *Handbook of usability testing: how to plan, design, and conduct effective tests*. New York: Wiley, 1994.

Jerilyn R. Veldof, Michael J. Prasse and Victoria A. Mills. Chauffeured by the user: usability in the electronic library. *Journal of Library Administration, 26*(3-4), 1999, 115-140.

PowerPoint Presentation available at
http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/~bquigley/acrlusability.ppt.

Activity 1. Writing your tasks.

The Engineering Library defined the target audience for its website as primarily faculty and graduate students in the College of Engineering, followed by undergraduate engineering majors. Its draft website is on the reverse side. Keep these in mind as you work on this activity.

1. Pair up with someone at your table and develop two tasks for our usability tests.

Task 1:

Task 2:

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2. Discuss all your tasks as a group at your table. Choose one of these tasks to share with the workshop participants as a whole and work as a group to refine it.

> Consider these questions:
> - Does the task reflect the target audience's needs?
> - Is it clear and realistic?
> - Does it use words from the website? Will this bias your results?

Refined Task:

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3. Pick a spokesperson for your table. Briefly describe the task and be prepared to discuss why you identified this task as important and how it got refined through your group discussion.

Activity 2. Applying your results.

Determine if the library has online dictionaries, encyclopedias, and handbooks.

Results:

1
- Clicked on Reference & Data
- "It's good I can scroll down."
- "It was hard to look for this on the home page. I was looking for the words: dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc."
- "Reference & Data is trying to be an umbrella, but people talk about dictionaries, etc."

2
- Hovered over Articles, then chose Electronic Journals A-Z (hosted on Main's website)
- Clicked on Home link, which went to the main library home page
- Clicked on Articles link - Article databases by title
- Clicked on Electronic resources: subjects A-Z: "This will take too much time."
- Clicked on Electronic resources: types A-Z
- Returned to the Engineering Library home page
- Clicked on Reference & Data

3
- Moused over the first section from right to left, skipping over Reference and Data
- Selected more... link, taken to article database pages, didn't find "Encyclopedias"
- Went back to home page
- Now looking under Services, said "borrowing from other libraries..."
- Under Help, said: "managing citations."
- Scrolled up, found Reference and Data link, found table of contents at the top
- Reference and Data didn't register at first: "Need more space between the words; not easy to pick out links from the string of text."

4
- Browsed center of page looking for "encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc."
- Hit [Ctrl]+F, typed "handbooks" to no avail
- Then found and chose Reference and Data

5
- "I do know you have them."
- "Definitely would be under the Databases."
- "Probably under more..."
- "This is pretty long..." Hit [Ctrl]+F, typed "handbooks" to no avail
- Home, Reference and Data. "I had trouble seeing some of the things on the page ... maybe because it's in paragraph form instead of a list."

1. What usability issues do these results highlight? What changes could you recommend to the website to address these issues? Brainstorm as a group using the flipchart at your table.

2. With your table mates, choose one of your recommended changes to share with the workshop participants as a whole. Pick a spokesperson for your table. Briefly describe the recommended change and your reasons for recommending it.