**Usability Test**

Your Site Name  
  
  
  
  
**By Your Name**

Version 1.0

Last Updated 12/21/2010

# Usability Testing Guide

## Writing The Usability Test

* **Create five tasks you want the user to perform**. The task should require at least six to nine clicks to complete the task. The tasks could be signing into the system, or uploading photos and setting permissions.
* **Write scenarios for each task.** You should explain the task without telling the user what to do. An example would be, “You were at a family picnic where you took photos of your nephews and nieces. You want to share those photos with your family on the internet on Flickr. Where would you go to sign in, upload those photos, and set the preferences so only your family can view them?”
* **List follow-up questions you might want to add.** The magic of usability tests are the answers you get outside of the scenarios, so you might want to come up with additional questions that are outside of the scenarios, but within the screens you are testing.

## Finding Participants

* **Find people that fit your target audience.**   
  Very few sites have a target audience of “everyone”, so ideally you would test people that would use your site. In the example above, you want to use people that liked sharing photos with their family and friends.
* **Find people with a range of experience.**   
  If you find five professional photographers that share photos constantly, you’ll get a narrow view of how your site is performing. It’s best to find users that could be both expert users (a professional photographer) and users than might not have as much experience (an uncle that just bought a camera and uses Facebook sporadically).

## Performing The Usability Test

* **Do a dry run.**  
  There’s nothing worse than finding out on the first test that your script doesn’t work. Before you jump into the testing, you should run through the test before performing it in front of test subjects. Also, it’s important to work out any software or site issues before doing it before users.
* **Vary the tasks and keep the tests in the 15 to 30 minute range.**  
  For the purposes of Product Design Guild, you’ll be testing three of five tasks with each user. The longer the test, the more often the user will get bored with doing the test, so keep the tests short and snappy.
* **Do not guide the user.**   
  Use words that explain what they need to do, but are not contained within the site. Say “sign in” instead of “login”. Use “find files” on the hard drive instead of “browse”. Remember that you are testing the terminology the site uses as much as the design of the site.
* **Ask questions.**   
  The beauty of usability testing is that you can ask questions that are also outside what the test. You don’t necessarily know where the user is going to go. It’s also best to ask open-ended questions like “What do you think this would do?” than simple yes/no questions.
* **Let them talk.**  
  People are amazing — once they start talking, they’ll tell you all sorts of things. I’ve had participants tell me their complete business process including profit margins during tests. The best feedback is sometimes outside of the what I was asking.
* **Record the sessions with some kind of screen recorder and take notes.**I’ve used everything from Camstudio to WebEx to record results, but sometimes the best way to take notes is a simply pen and paper. Don’t get hung up on the tools. Eye tracking software is ideal, but expensive. You can get close to the same results just by recording what the users do with screen capture software.
* **Record the results on a range of pass/fail.**  
  In the past, I’ve used the pass/fail method on a task, but found on a scale of 0 (they passed) to 3 (they couldn’t find anything) was a better approach to grading tasks on a step by step basis and in aggregate.

## Evaluating The Results

* **Look for patterns.**   
  A focus group of one is not necessarily a good thing — too many usability professionals and product managers do this. I tend to discount those as preferences for that particular user. If two or three users say close to the same thing (“The button is hard to find.”), there’s a usability issue you may want to look at closer.
* **Highlight comments that can make your site better.**The best feedback from testing is something what you didn’t expect. Highlight some of the comments that might be outside of the tasks, but make great sound bites for describing issues with your site.
* **Remember results are subjective, so discuss them with the team.**Put a team of three usability professionals together, and sometimes they’ll come to three different conclusions about the test.Ideally, you could combine qualitative results with quantitive results (i.e. stats from watching the conversion funnel).
* **Combine testing with other data collection methods.**  
  I sometimes use a site called Attention Wizard (http://www.attentionwizard.com/aw/) that calls itself a visual attention prediction tool to see where users might click based on contrast of color values. If you combine testing with other validation methods, you’ll get better results.
* **Test your assumptions again.**Testing is not a one-time thing: you should test as much as possible (I’ve tested as much as every two to three weeks in an engagement), because the most you test, the more you get to refine your product.

## Links

### Guides

* **A List Apart’s Guides to Usability Testing**  
  <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/usability-testing-demystified/>  
  http://www.alistapart.com/articles/the-myth-of-usability-testing/
* **Discount Usability Testing; 20 Years**  
  <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/discount-usability.html>
* **Example Usability Questions**  
  <http://www.w3.org/WAI/EO/Drafts/UCD/questions.html>
* **Budget Usability Testing**<http://www.commonknowledge.net.nz/2009/11/budget-usability-testing/>
* **Start A Usability Testing Program In Five Days**http://www.edustyle.net/blog/2009/03/start-a-usability-testing-program-in-5-days/

### Software

* **Camstudio — PC/Free**  
  <http://www.camstudio.org>
* **Silverback – Mac/Free for 30 days**<http://silverbackapp.com>
* **Screencast O Matic**  
  http://www.screencast-o-matic.com/

# Usability Test

The purpose of our test sessions will be to gauge the usability of the site for specific target audiences, list target audience here.

We will test the Candidate Search site with 5 individuals pulled from the defined audience groups. We will administer an entrance and exit survey before and after each test. Users will be asked to complete tasks read aloud to them by the facilitator.

Our goals will be to determine what is or is not easily usable functionality from the users’ perspective. We will look for information such as:

* Do users complete each task successfully?
* If so, how fast do they perform each task?
* Is that fast enough to satisfy them?
* What paths do they take in trying?
* Do those paths seem efficient to them?
* Where do they stumble?
* What problems do they have?
* Where do they get confused?
* What words or paths are they looking for which aren’t supported by the navigation or copy?

After each session, we will include an open-ended general discussion period where users can share their thoughts on any aspect of the web site or testing with us.

## Description of Methodology

### Think-Aloud Protocol

We will employ a task-based think-aloud protocol, in which we will ask users to communicate their thought processes verbally while they work. We will ask them to vocalize what path they take to find information, what questions they have, and what surprises or confuses them as they go through the application. We will keep questions open-ended and neutral, such as “What do you mean by that?” or “What did you expect to happen?” When users identify a problem, we will ask them how they would fix it.

# Getting Started

The test facilitator will instruct and observe users performing fairly simple, common tasks. Facilitators will verbally lead users through the series of questions, encouraging them to think out loud and respond to what they are looking at, and ask questions about their thought processes and decisions as they work, without being intrusive or leading. The facilitator will also take in-depth notes.

Facilitator asks this question out loud. Try to use the wording listed here. Do not lead the user to the solution. Do not help the user find the solution. Remind the user we are testing the product usability, not them. Encourage them to think out loud. (“what words are going thru your mind?”, “what are you looking for?”)

### Rating system

Facilitator indicates difficulty rate of this task for this user based on Facilitator’s opinion

0 - User completed task with zero difficulty. (Zero Frustration)

1 - User completed task with only minor problem(s). (Little Frustration)

2 - User completed task, but it required more effort/time/dead-ends than the user expected. (Medium/High Frustration)

3 - User did not complete task. (Point of Failure)

### Ask the user to sit in a chair in front of the computer and sign in.

The test scenario **describe a scenario that works for your site**.

# Test Subject

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Test Date | 00/00/0000 |
| Test Facilitator | Patrick |
| Test Subject | Subject |
| Test Location | Office |
| Operating System | Operating System |
| Browser Version | Browser Version |
| Screen Resolution | 1680 by 1050 |

## 

## Task 1 — Summarize The Task

### Task Instructions

**Describe task.**

What would you do?

### Observe steps taken.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Steps |  |
| Step | 0 |
| Step  *Question: Question?* | 0 |
| Step | 0 |
| Step | 0 |
| Step  *Question: Question?* | 0 |
| Step | 0 |
| Step | 0 |
| Overall Score | 0 |

### If user does not follow the known path, what did they click on?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

### User’s verbal comments

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

## Task 2 — Summarize The Task

### Task Instructions

**Describe task.**

What would you do?

### Observe steps taken.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Steps |  |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
| Overall Score | 0 |

### If user does not follow the known path, what did they click on?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

### User’s verbal comments

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

Task 3 — Summarize The Task

### Task Instructions

**Describe task.**

What would you do?

### Observe steps taken.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Steps |  |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
| Overall Score | 0 |

### If user does not follow the known path, what did they click on?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

### User’s verbal comments

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

Task 4 — Summarize The Task

### Task Instructions

**Describe task.**

What would you do?

### Observe steps taken.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Steps |  |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
| Overall Score | 0 |

### If user does not follow the known path, what did they click on?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

### User’s verbal comments

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

Task 5 — Summarize The Task

### Task Instructions

**Describe task.**

What would you do?

### Observe steps taken.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Steps |  |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
|  | 0 |
| Overall Score | 0 |

### If user does not follow the known path, what did they click on?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

### User’s verbal comments

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| User | Notes |
| 1 | * None |

Exit Questions

|  |
| --- |
| Is the information easy to read? |
|  |
| Is the information written in a style you understand? |
|  |
| Does the site look professional? |
|  |
| Do you understand the purpose of the site? |
|  |