Don’t Make Me Think: User Testing in Action

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Usability Testing Overview

What it is
Observe users to discover errors and areas of improvement to evaluate products. Measure how well users respond in four areas:

- **Performance** -- How much time, and how many steps, are required for people to complete basic tasks? (For example, create a new account, find content, etc.)
- **Accuracy** -- How many mistakes did people make? (And were they fatal or recoverable with the right information?)
- **Recall** -- How much does the person remember afterwards or after periods of non-use?
- **Emotional response** -- How does the person feel about the tasks completed? Is the person confident, stressed? Would the user recommend this system to a friend? (Usability testing)

Basic Principles
- Testing one user is 100% better than testing none.
- Testing one user early in the project is better than testing 50 near the end.
- The point of testing is not to prove or disprove something. It's to inform your judgment.
- Testing is an iterative process (develop, test, fix, test, etc).
- Nothing beats a live audience reaction.

Best Practices

**“Hallway testing”** – Select 5-6 random users for testing (one per computer/observer). Have numerous small usability tests at various stages of development process. 95% of usability problems can be found with this technique (Nielsen, 2009).

**Think aloud protocol** – User says whatever they are looking at, thinking, doing, and feeling. Observers take objective notes, without interpreting user actions/words. Test sessions preferably recorded (video or screen capture w/ microphone).

- "Get it" testing – allow user to explore the site and see if they understand the purpose, value, organization and functionality of site.
- Key Task testing - observe how well users are able to complete given tasks.

Recruiting
- Offer a reasonable incentive–typical one hour test sessions range from $50 - $300 stipends.
- Keep the invitation simple.
- Avoid discussing the site (or the organization behind the site) beforehand.
- Try to find users who reflect your audience, but it's not essential—friends/neighbors work, too.
  - We're all beginners under the skin.
  - Site not well designed if only target audience can use it.
  - Experts and beginners appreciate clarity.

Adapted from useit.com and sensible.com
Usability Test Facilitator Script

Part 1 – 10 minutes

Welcome and Purpose
Thank you for agreeing to participate in the VISTA Campus Web site evaluation. Today we are asking you to complete a set of tasks to help us evaluate the Campus. Our goal is to see how easy or difficult you find the site to use. We contribute to the development of a number of online products and your feedback can help inform that process. Today’s session will last for approximately one hour.

With your permission, we’re going to record what happens on the computer screen and what you have to say. The recording will be used only to help us figure out how to improve the site, and it won’t be seen by anyone except the people working on the project. Your name will not be associated or reported with data or findings from this evaluation. Please fill out the release form. There’s also space on the form to provide your mailing address so that we can send you a thank-you letter. [Give user release form]

Test Participant’s Role
I will ask you to find information on the Campus to learn how you would use the site. I’ll do this by asking you to look at the site as a whole as well as giving you tasks to complete on the site. As we go along, I’m going to ask you to think out loud so I know what’s going through your mind. I will record your reactions and opinions and I may ask you to clarify statements that you make from time to time. You will also be asked a series of questions about your experience at the end of this session.

Things to Keep in Mind
Here are some things that you should know about your participation:

- While we participated in the design of the site, it was part of a larger group effort and the overall creation and decisions are not our own. Don’t worry about offending us…we would like honest feedback.
- This is not a test of you; you’re testing the site. So don’t worry about making mistakes.
- There is no right or wrong answer. We really just want to know how you use the site.
- We are testing the functionality of the site, not the content. Feel free to skim the content, but don’t worry about reading or comprehending any of it.
- If you ever feel that you are lost or cannot complete a task with the information that you have been given, please let me know. I’ll ask you what you might do in a real-world setting and then either put you on the right track or move you on to the next task.
- Finally, as you use the site, please do so as you would normally at home or your office.

Test Facilitator’s Role
I’m here to record your reactions and comments on the VISTA Campus. During this session I will not be able to offer any suggestions or hints. There may be times, however, when I’ll ask you to explain why you said or did something.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Start screen recording]

First, we have a brief survey so we can learn more about you. [Ask tester to complete pre-survey] [5 minutes]
Part 2 – 10 minutes

Get It Testing
Which browser do you prefer, IE or Firefox?

[Open homepage http://vistacampus.org/ in user’s preferred browser]

First, I’m just going to ask you to look at this page. For now, don’t actually click on anything. And again, as much as possible, it will help us if you can try to think out loud so I know what you’re thinking about.

- What do you think it is?
- What strikes you about it?
- What did you expect to see?
- What would you click on first?

Now go ahead and get familiar with the site, clicking on any areas that interest you. Before you can explore, please login. [test user login: tester; password: test] [allow user to explore and think out loud of the page(s) they review]

We are now going to look at the VISTA member homepage and again, tell me what you think it is, what strikes you about it, and what you think you would click on first (provide instructions on which page this is if necessary). Remember to think out loud so I can record your thoughts.

Part 3 – 20-25 minutes

Task-based Testing
I have 4-6 tasks for you, and I’ll give them to you one at a time. Please remember to think aloud while you go through each task. Here is a hard copy description of the tasks for your reference [hand participant printout of tasks.]

[menu of tasks for facilitator to choose from – can be customized by different providers; aim to have each task tested by 4-6 users so return to tasks menu to complete as many as possible in time allotted; do not read headings]

[After each task, observer will launch survey asking participants to rate overall ease (1 very difficult – 5 very easy)]

1. **New to VISTA**
   Where would you look for the “PSO Welcome Packet”?

2. **Tutorial & Journal**
   a. Where would you look for a tutorial about organizational culture? Once you find it, skim through the pages and activities. You do not need to read each page.
   b. Within the tutorial, go through the steps to create a journal entry, but you do not need to write anything or save it. Close the journal and return to the tutorial.

3. **Resource**
   Where would you look for a PSO Resource about the Fieldstone Alliance Framework? Open the PDF file, close it, and go back to the Campus.

4. **Discussion forum**
   If you wanted to post to a discussion forum about a new idea about living on a limited budget, where would you go?

5. **Search**
   How useful is the search function to find a topic you are interested in? Tell me what you think of the results.

6. **User Areas**
   a. Where would you look for information for VISTA Leaders? [alumni, supervisor, state office] AND/OR,
   b. What do you think these icons are for? [point to upper right icons representing different user areas]
Part 4 – 10 minutes

Post Survey
I have a few more questions about your overall experience and reactions to the site

Most Important Questions, to begin with:

1. What did you like most about the site?
2. What did you like least about the site?
3. If you were to describe this site to someone else in a sentence or two, what would you say?
4. Overall, how would you rate the site? (On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highest) Why?

Other questions to ask, if you have time:

5. Describe your impressions of the site’s navigation. Easy/hard? Intuitive or not? Why? Did the different sections make sense to you? If not, why not?
6. Are the graphics and pictures pleasing and appropriate? Explain.
7. Do the labels and terminology on the site make sense to you? If not, can you give some examples?
8. How likely are you to return to this site? (Ask only of VISTA members, supervisors and others who would have a reason to return.)
9. What is one thing you would change about this site if you could?
10. Do you have any other final comments or questions?

Thank you for helping us evaluate the VISTA Campus! We will e-mail you a gift card.

Adapted from usability.gov and sensible.com
“Think Out Loud” Protocol

Prompting
Focus on tasks, not features: Rather than “Do you like that button?” try “Did that button help you reach your goal?”

Explore user thinking in a neutral way: Rather than “What is your problem here?” try “What is your goal?” or “What are you thinking you should do here?”

Remain as neutral as possible in terms of interest, facial expression and vocal tones.

Focus on questions, not answers. Good user-focused questions include:
- What is your goal?
- What did you expect when you did that?
- How did you expect that to work?
- Can you tell me what you were thinking?
- What do you want to accomplish here?
- Describe the steps you are going through here.
- How did you feel about that process?
- Tell me about your thinking here.
- What did you expect to happen when you…?

Echoing
Repeat users’ own words or phrases back to them as a question: “That message is confusing?”

Refrain from interpreting users’ thoughts:
- If they say, “I’m not sure what to do here,” don’t say, “So you are confused because the menu bar is unclear?”
- If they say, “That didn’t happen like I expected,” don’t ask, “So you thought that the task menu would be displayed here?”

Signal that you’re listening (Mmm hmm…).

“Conversational disequilibrium”
Let your statements trail off and end in an upswing, as if you were asking a question. The participant will usually complete your statement.
- “And you were expecting…?”
- “And your goal is…?”

Speak softly.

Summarizing at key junctions
When you have learned something new that is key to understanding, summarize the event and the thinking that the user explored, very briefly. Users may offer more detail about their thought process.

Adapted from the Usability Toolkit
References and Resources


