

How to Test Usability

Modified from Keith Instone, Argus Associates

This is not Usability Testing

- “Of course my site is easy to use, I use it every day”

What is usability (user) testing?

- Pick some important tasks from the site and watch quietly as people try to do them
- Note failures and successes
- Note user interaction with the interface

What is usability (user) testing?

Usability Testing is **NOT**:

- link or load or code testing
- having friends view your pages on their computers
- online surveys or focus groups



Why to Test Usability

- Value of usability testing
- Cost of usability testing
- Role within usability engineering
- Role within your application development lifecycle

Why to Test Usability

- Identify Problem Areas Early
- Usability testing identifies problems within the site
- Provide real feedback with actual users
- Low-cost for valuable results
- What is obvious to you might not be obvious to the user
- Minimize risk prior to launch
- Test: The Earlier the Better

Why to Test Usability

- Usability testing early is cheaper and easier
- Allows you to identify problems and make changes early in development process (before coding begins)
- Testing wireframes or paper prototypes early in process doesn't affect time or budget
- Testing an HTML protosite is helps identify structural & navigational issues
- Informal testing is better than no testing.

Why: Value of usability testing

- A bad design can cost 40% of repeat traffic, half of potential sales - CIO / Forrester
- Companies spend millions of dollars on their fancy designs and will not spend \$4,000 to see if it works” – Jacob Nielsen
- Intranet: lost time = lost money
- Reduced calls to help line – free staff to do other work
- Saves the need for maintenance, patches, redesigns

Why: Cost of usability testing

- If you do it yourself, costs can be as low as \$0
- Bad design can lead to future costs down the road.
- Usability testing has a definite ROI value
- Ask the client can they afford to lose 40% of potential sales?

Why: Cost of usability testing

- ROI on usability testing can be as high as 800% depending on the nature of changes, client retention, increased sales, etc.
- Amazon dot com is the most copied e-commerce interface.

When to do Usability Testing

- Fit usability testing into your own way of doing things
- The sooner in the process, the better
- The more often you do it, the better
- Not a good idea: do testing just before a fixed release date

How to Test Usability

- Plan
- Do
- Follow-up

How: Plan

- Purpose and audience of site
- Usability goals
- Tasks
- Participants, scheduling, payment
- Materials
- Setting
- ...Expect to hear bad news

How: Plan

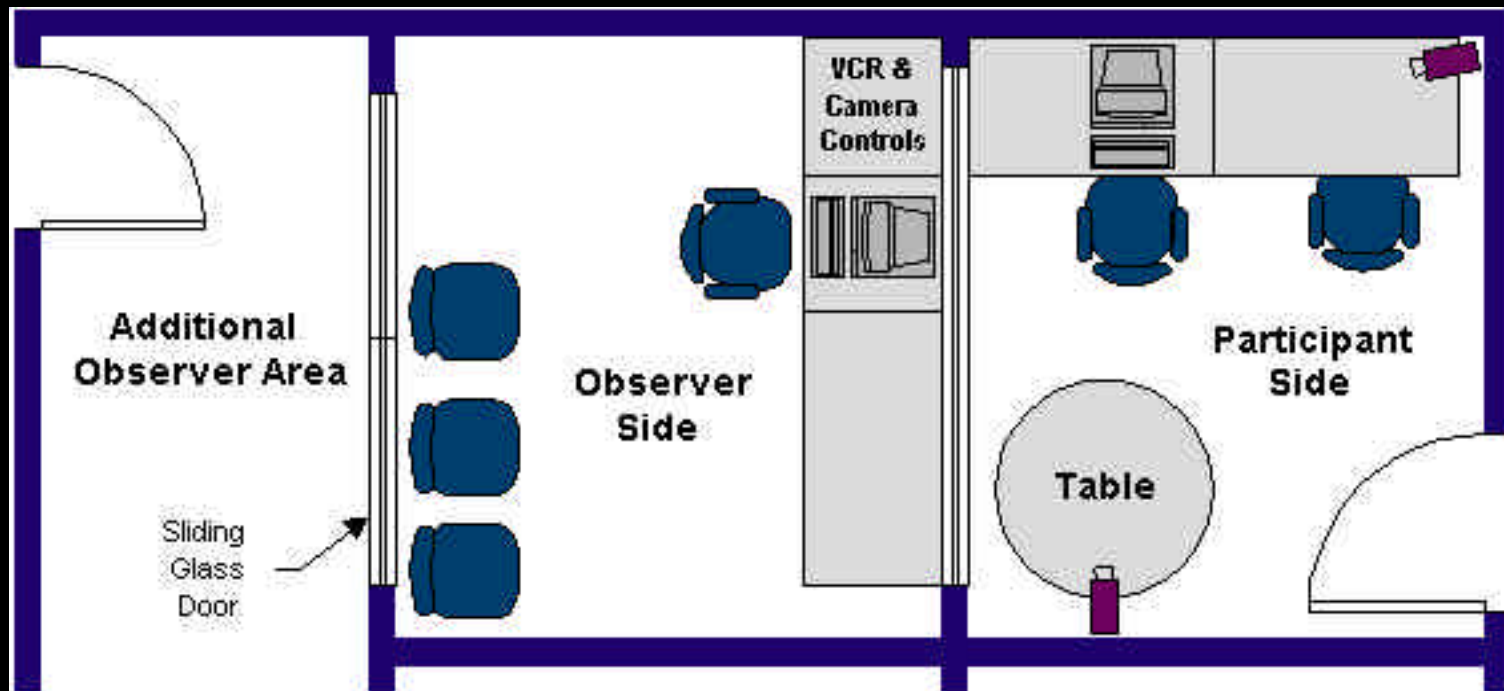
- Create a Task List
- Create list of tasks or questions for a general user to complete.
- Time tasks as they are completed.
- Make tasks are not too simple, or too difficult.
- Pre-test with friends or co-workers.

How: Do

- Introduction for participant, list of tasks
- Watch quietly
- Record behavior (take notes, tape)
- Interact with participant
- Debriefing, questionnaire, payment

How: Follow-up

- Tabulate data
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Actions



Tips: Participants think they are dumb

- Play dumb: “I do not know how to do it either, I am confused too”
- Join the club: “Everyone else has had trouble too, so it is not just you”
- Blame the designer: “If you are having trouble, then it must be the designer who is dumb”

Tips: Do not forget about other techniques

- Surveys
- Log analysis
- Focus groups
- User feedback

Tips: Do it before you get very far

- Existing site
- Competitors' sites
- Paper prototypes
- Templates
- Vertical prototypes