

User Testing

Getting Started with User Testing



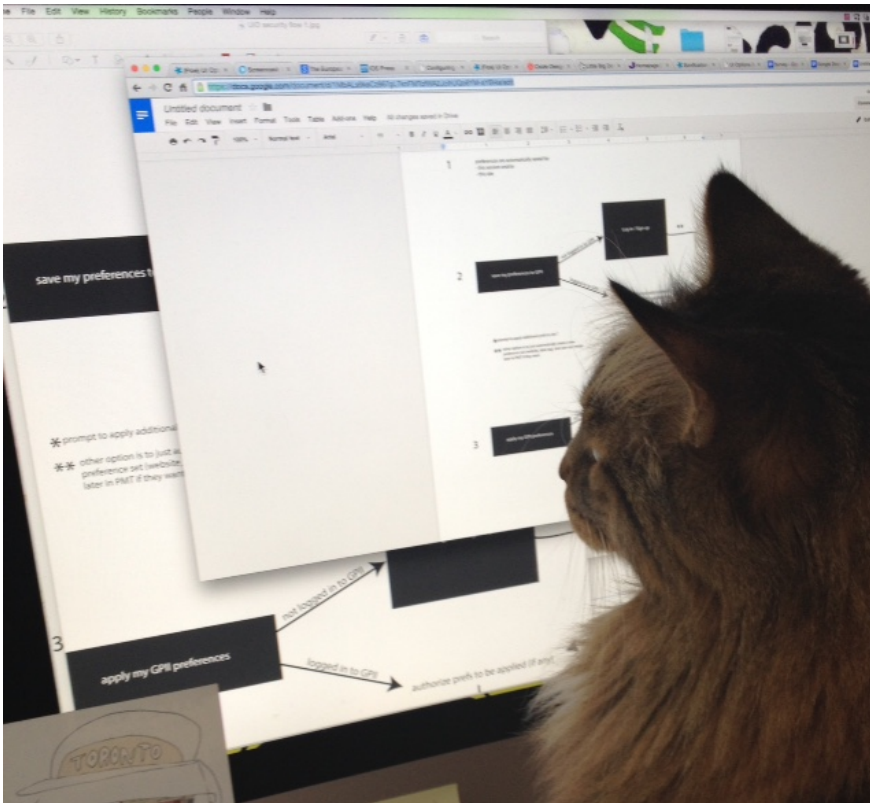
Getting Started with User Testing

After reading the info on *this* page, check out [User Testing Tips](#) which provide a high-level summary of things you should think about when planning and executing user tests. [User Testing Methods](#) discusses techniques you can use to conduct a user test.

[Selecting and Recruiting User Test Participants](#) gives advice on this important part of the user testing process. The next step would be to create [User Testing Scenarios and Tasks](#) and then a [User Testing Protocol](#) for the facilitators to use when running a user test.

An example of how the process of setting up a user test might work is described in [User Test Example - the Fluid Lightbox](#), and you can see all the user tests performed in the Fluid Project at [Fluid User Testing](#).

Specialized information about user testing is available in [User Research Ethics](#) and [User Testing in Open Source](#), and more general information can be found in [User Testing Resources](#).



What is User Testing?

User testing, also sometimes referred to as usability testing, is a technique for evaluating usability, working with an actual or potential user of a product or system. At a basic level, a user test usually involves a facilitator asking a user to complete a series of tasks (which may or may not be pre-determined) while observing the interaction, noting any problems the user encounters, errors made, and sometimes the amount of time it takes to complete a task. These findings are then fed back into the design and development cycle in order to improve the product or system.

User testing can be performed on products or systems at any stage of development, from the early stages of design to production systems. It can be helpful to start by performing user tests with paper prototypes and continuing to test more interactive prototypes as a product or system is iterated upon.

What is Essential to a User Test?

Many people think of user tests as requiring sophisticated usability labs with one-way mirrors and recording equipment, with highly detailed tests that take an hour or more to complete, and require even more time to transcribe and understand the results. While there are definitely times where this level of testing is useful, this approach often doesn't justify the return on investment for smaller projects. In fact, you can obtain extremely helpful results, and realize great improvements in your product or service, from usability tests done at a user's desk or in the conference room down the hall.

In "A Practical Guide to Usability Testing" (1990), J. Dumas and J. Redish explain, "While there can be wide variations in where and how you conduct a usability test, **every usability test shares these five characteristics**:

- The primary goal is to improve the usability of a product. For each test, you also have more specific goals and concerns that you articulate when planning the test.
- The participants represent real users.
- The participants do real tasks.
- You observe and record what participants do and say.
- You analyze the data, diagnose the real problems, and recommend changes to fix those problems."

Creating User Testing Documentation



Creating User Testing Documentation

If you're creating own user testing pages in this wiki (e.g. under [Fluid User Testing](#)), you can copy the following templates:

- [User Testing Summary Template](#)
- [User Testing Round Template](#)
- [User Testing Protocol Template](#)
- [User Testing Results Template](#)

Alternatively, if you are not creating pages about in this wiki but would like to use our templates, each template can also be converted to a Word document by going to the following pages and choosing "Page Operations" -> "Info" -> "Export as Word."

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User Testing Resources

Fluid User Testing Resources

- [User Testing Protocol](#)
- [User Testing Checklist](#)
- [User Testing Consent Form](#)
- [User Testing Round Template](#)
- [User Testing Summary Template](#)
- [User Testing Greeting Script](#)
- [User Testing Scenarios and Tasks](#)
- [User Testing Demographic Questionnaire](#)
- [User Testing Tips](#)
- [User Testing](#)
- [User Testing Results Template](#)
- [User Testing Protocol Template](#)

Other User Testing Resources

Books

- "Handbook of Usability Testing" by Rubin J. and Chisnell, D.
- "A Practical Guide to Usability Testing" by Dumas, J. and Redish, J.
- "Don't Make Me Think" by Steve Krug
- "Usability Engineering" by Jakob Nielsen

For more suggestions, check out the [Society for Technical Communication's Usability & User Experience Group's Bookshelf](#)

Online Resources

General Info

- [Usability Testing as an Assessment Technique \[pdf\]](#)
- Dana Chisnell's blog (author of "Handbook of Usability Testing"): www.usabilitytestinghowto.blogspot.com/
 - [Templates, examples, and links to other resources from Dana](#) by Christine Perfetti
- ["Five Techniques for Getting Buy-In for Usability Testing"](#) by Christine Perfetti
- [UsabilityFirst.com](#)
- [Usability.gov](#) - the U.S. Government's website on Usability, containing Usability & Accessibility guidelines, methods, and links
- [Usability Professionals' Association Resources](#) - good source of all things "usability"
- Society for Technical Communication's [Usability & User Experience Group Topics](#)
- [Usable Web's User Testing page](#)
- University of Texas at Austin
 - [Plan a Usability Test](#)
 - [Developing Usability Test Documents](#)
 - [Conduct the Usability Test](#)
 - [Write Usability Report](#)
- [Usability Test Reporting](#) - nice description of Formative vs. Summative Testing
- [Sample Usability Test Script](#) - found in "Looking for Downloads" section
- [Usability Resource Center's Usability Testing Materials](#)

Usability Testing Techniques

- ["5-Second Tests - Measuring Your Site's Content Pages"](#) by Christine Perfetti
- ["Interview-Based Tasks: Learning from Leonardo DiCaprio"](#) by Jared M. Spool
- ["Inherent Value Testing"](#) by Jared M. Spool
- ["Card sorting: a definitive guide"](#) by Donna Spencer and Todd Warfel
- ["Card-Based Classification Evaluation"](#) by Donna Spencer
- ["What You Should Know About Prototypes for User Testing"](#) by Chris Farnum
- ["Remote Online Usability Testing: Why, How, and When to Use It"](#) by Dabney Gough & Holly Phillips