



Usability Analysis for Online Courses

The UTSA Center for Distance Learning & Academic Technology's Instructional Design & Development Team (ID²) is pleased to offer the following instrument to help you measure the **usability** of your online course(s).

What is usability? According to Denise Pieatti, Manager of Usability, Analysis & Design at Xerox Corporation, "Usability has a simple definition – it means that people can use a product easily and efficiently to accomplish their own tasks." For our purposes, we could say that **courses are usable when they enable students to concentrate on learning rather than on the tools they use to learn. A usable course is efficient to use, so it's easy to remember how to get around. It's also enjoyable to study there because it's visually pleasing and mentally stimulating.**

With this instrument you will conduct a heuristic self-evaluation of various aspects of your course by reviewing compliance with established principals, learning theories and research-based web design and usability guidelines.

We have provided a defined set of usability principles drawn from various sources that you will use as your benchmark. You will move through your course, and taking the role of a student, perform user actions and tasks, and then identify areas that you feel meet (or miss) the heuristics or standards listed. This way, you will be able to **evaluate your course against accepted usability standards and identify areas that may need improvement.**

If you find some area of your course that does not meet the standards, or that you'd like to improve, don't worry! We are here to help you make sure that your course has everything you want for your students. Simply contact the Instructional Design & Development Team, and bring this document with you when we meet. We'll suggest strategies and methods for engaging, motivating and teaching online students that you can incorporate into your course. We can also help you create a plan for navigation, multimedia enhancements or improve the visual appearance of your course.

Instructor Information

Instructor Name _____

Instructor Office _____ Phone _____

Course information (please complete a separate form for each course)

Course Title _____

Subject _____ Course _____ Section _____ CRN _____

Semester _____ New Course? Yes No Migrated from another CMS ? Yes No

Instructions

In order to complete this documents, please log in to the course you are evaluating. Identify each of the items that exist in the course by putting a check mark next to the item. Please note that the item must exist within the course at the time of evaluation – do not check the box if the items is to be added.

Instructional Design and Delivery

Starting with your course's homepage

On my Course Homepage:

- I have created a professional first impression
- I've limited the amount of items on the homepage - using folders or other organizational tools
- I have a Course Banner image which conveys a distinct meaning while adding visual interest
- Text blocks (or Headings) are small enough to eliminate the need for scrolling
- My background color is neutral
- I have chosen similar or complimentary colors for elements (menu, icons, images, etc)
- Parings of high-chroma, spectrally extreme colors are avoided. (Red text on a green background)
- All Text/Fonts are at least 12 point and the color contrasts with the background
- Typeface is east to read
- Fonts are restricted to two or three families

- Textured and patterned page background are used only when they do not interfere with the clear, legible, and usable display of information
- My layout is clear
- There is sufficient "white space"
- Graphics occupy a minimum of screen space while retaining meaningfulness
- Graphic file sizes have been minimized
- There is a consistent icon design scheme
- Unnecessary animation is avoided (animated icons)
- Icons are concrete and familiar
- Icons are labeled

Overall Course Design

- Terminology is used consistently throughout the site
- Heavy use of all uppercase letters has been avoided
- There are no more than four to seven colors used throughout the site
- High-chroma colors are used to attract attention
- Color is used in conjunction with a redundant cue
- Colors are consistent throughout the course
- I provide useful content – no “fluff”
- I do not use color alone to convey information (i.e. "see text in red")
- I've organized information clearly
- Site structure is simple with no unnecessary levels
- I've used video, animation, and audio meaningfully
- I've used images to facilitate learning
- Each display page has a title or header describing the user's location

Content Organization

- Content needed most often is in a prominent place
- Content critical to acceptable performance is in a critical place
- Content that contributes to a larger understanding of the topic is in a prominent place

- I've grouped related elements
- I've ordered elements to maximize user performance

Sequencing

- It is apparent to learner that there is a sequencing of instruction
- Each page in a sequence clearly shows its place in the sequence
- Each page in a sequence allows navigation to other meaningful places in the sequence
- I've standardized task sequences
- I have used Selective Release to keep students on task and prevent them from moving ahead

Course Navigation

- Each hyperlink uses wording that clearly identifies where it leads
- All hyperlinks that takes the learner out of the course are clearly labeled
- I avoid misleading cues to click – no words are underlined
- Standard colors are used for links and visited links
- I've indicated internal vs. external links

Learner Support

- Unfamiliar words are highlighted and link to a glossary
- Pages are printable when appropriate (i.e Syllabus, Schedule)
- Links to plug-ins are provided
- Links to tutorials are provided or they are embedded in the course where needed
- Clear instructions are provided for students
- Learning objectives are stated in observable, measurable terms
- Each major learner task (assessment, assignment, discussion etc.) is tied to a learning objective

Modules

- I have organized my content into Learning Modules
- Each Learning Module has an advanced organizer or guide that includes a description of learning outcomes and activities, a rationale for learning, and an estimate of time needed
- Each Learning Module includes an opportunity for the learner to practice performance
- Each Learning Module includes an opportunity for the learner to demonstrate acceptable performance
- My learning modules facilitate user decision making and task processing

Accessibility

- There are transcripts of non-text items (audio or video)
- My video or multimedia is captioned
- I have provided a verbal descriptions of visual elements/media for visually impaired users
- Images have ALT tags and Long Descriptions
- Alternate methods are given for tasks which require non-accessible tools (audio/video)
- Universal accessibility concerns are addressed throughout the course

Use of Technology

I have added the following WebCT tools to my course:

Organizational Tools

- Calendar
- Search

Communication Tools

- Announcements
- Discussions
- Mail

- Who's Online

Student Learning Activities

- Assessments
- Assignments
- Goals

Content Tools

- Learning Modules
- SCORM Modules
- Media Library
- Web Links

References

Research-Based Web Design & Usability Guidelines. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: <http://www.usability.gov/pdfs/guidelines.html>

Rubric for Online Instruction. Chico State University Available at:
<http://www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi/>

Usability Evaluation Checklist for Web Pages. Gerry Gaffney, Information & Design PTY LTD. Available at: <http://www.infodesign.com.au>

Usability checklist for e-learning. Society for Technical Communication Available at:
<http://www.stcsig.org/usability/resources/toolkit/e-learning-checklist.doc>

Heuristic Evaluation – A System Checklist. Usability Analysis and Design, Xerox Corporation. Available at http://www.stcsig.org/usability/resources/toolkit/he_cklst.doc