

The first step in Usability testing is to decide what you are looking to learn. Do you want to test overall Library website usability, or one particular aspect of the site (Digital Commons, Electronic Resources, LibGuides)? Are you looking to do a complete site overhaul, or just sidebar and link name adjustments? Are you looking at the design and feel of the site, or the content? Do you want to create an environment that promotes continuous usability testing, or is this just a one-time thing?

The next step, is forming a Usability Committee. Inviting people who have a vested interest in the project, people who want to help, and people who need to know - librarians, faculty, technical support staff. Performing a usability test is not a singular task, and many hands will be needed to make it successful.

All of these people who have made a commitment to the committee will bring with them their own ideas. Revisit the first step, begin with what you decided you wanted to learn and do. Ask the committee members for their input. Together, you can create unified goals and objectives, where everyone has buy in.

The next step is to develop the study. It can helpful to survey the userbase - librarians, faculty, staff, students - to see what they want from the library website. The Library Website Usability Checklist (LWUC) is also a good place to start, to see where your site matches up, and where you are lacking. There are also tools to show how users use your site such as Google Analytics (google.com/analytics) to see usage statistics and Crazy Egg (crazyegg.com) which can create heat maps of your site, to show what links are actually being used.

There are many examples of Usability Study tasks and questions. Norlin and Winters suggest: "know the rationale behind each item to eliminate redundancy. Start with simple tasks or questions and slowly get more complex. If possible, use the usability test to educate the participants about your library Web site. Keep the number of questions under ten so they can be completed in an hour, or you run the risk of losing the participant's interest. Include summary questions such as "What did you like/not like?" to bring the process to a close" (2002).

Decisions must be made on how the test will be handled, and the data collected. Is this going to be an online survey, and in-person session? Will the sessions be recorded - audio, video, screen-capture? You also need to create a script for those giving the test to survey participants. Make sure they explain the procedure and how long it is going to take. Remember to emphasize that the site is being tested, not the participant. If a participant gives up on a task, it is good practice to ask how we could make it simpler or what would make more sense.

Next, you must find participants. Where will you advertise? Will there be compensation? Will participants be limited to faculty/staff/students? Does it matter if the institutions' full demographic is represented? How many participants do you want? Some studies suggest that a number as small as 5 participants can reveal most of a site's usability issues.

Once you have the test prepared, the procedures defined, and the participants found, you must coordinate the actual testing. Where will it be? When? Who will give the test? Will someone else do the recording? What resources are needed for the testing, for analyzing the data?

Now, you can give the test to the participants, and gather your data. Once this is done, you must analyze the data. The committee must then make recommendations, and action must be taken. Then you can either decide you are done, or retest. Retesting can be done with the

same test and different participants, to see if the changes do indeed improve the usability of the site.