Identifying problems

slide 1: Introduction

Hi guys! Welcome to [Fundamentals of User Experience Design ], a Tuts+ premium course. I’m [Sarah Kahn] and today we’re going to talk about identifying problems.

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Here’s what we’re going to cover:

* + What does a usability problem look like?
  + Putting your Metrics to Work
  + The Obvious Stuff
  + Listening for negatives and uncertainty
  + Assignment

slide 3

[angry user]

In our last lesson, ‘Creating user personas’, we talked about becoming more intimately familiar with your target users. In other past lessons, we’ve talked about implementing metrics reporting and other methods, as well as how to get started with user testing. All of this activity was to help you determine what users are actually doing on your site, and it was for the end goal of determining whether you have any problems.

slide 4

[what does a usability problem look like]

So what does a usability problem look like? How do you know when you’re seeing one?

The biggest giveaway is any point when you see or hear a user expressing frustration, or is unable to complete a task.

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[red flag]

When you’re working with a user in person or via a remote test, it’s pretty easy to see when this happens. I would hope that most of us are able to understand the social cues involved with a frustrated individual. Frowning, fidgeting, seeming tense, or, quite possibly, simply stating to you as the UX researcher, ‘I’m feeling frustrated’.

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[cnn heatmap]

When you’re looking at metrics or click data, there are some other telltale signs to look for.

This screen was kindly provided by CNN from a whitepaper they published about one of their recentish redesigns. It demonstrates an anti-pattern known as ‘deadspace’. You can see everyone is clicking all around but not in this area down here.

slide 7

[crazy egg]

Another pattern to watch for is excessive aimless clicking in random places on the page. Sometimes people click randomly when they don’t know where to go next, or when things that aren’t clickable look clickable. Also, when things that \*are\* clickable do not look clickable. It’s a general indicator that they aren’t getting the scent. Here’s an example of a heatmap with very focused clicking, which indicates that users are navigating through very successfully.

slide 8

[adzerk scrollmap]

Scrolling up and down (also known as ping-ponging), or the worst of all, closing the window and clicking away. Whatever it is you’re trying to do, you don’t want your users to give up and leave.

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[taking a long time]

This is something you can determine whether you’re working with a user in person, remotely over a tool like skype, or looking at metrics. How long are people spending on your pages?

If they’re content pages, spending a long time can be a good thing- you do want people to linger and read your important content. But what if it’s a task completion page, or a call to action page? If users aren’t finding and completing that action that you want them to do within a reasonable period of time, that’s a big red flag.

slide 10

[obvious]

When you’re testing, begin with the obvious. Try to take a step back, and listen to your users, when you’re working with them in person. People are sometimes hesitant to criticize things, but they may mention things right off the bat that you don’t notice or haven’t thought about due to your level of closeness to a given design.

slide 11

[black and yellow site]

Some examples:

Is your theme an eye-watering yellow?

or maybe you have a beautiful parallax scrolling navigation scheme, but your users aren’t comfortable scrolling.

So, not to pick on these folks, they obviously care about usability since one of their star ratings is based on ‘ease of use’.

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[made by water]

But this is a quick visual reminder that certain colors can constitute a usability problem. And not just with older sites, pretty, visually appealing new sites sometimes fall into this trap as well. I don’t want to pick on made by water, he clearly does gorgeous work. And portfolio sites are often avant garde, but this was the first yellow site I could think of. Clicking around, it’s kind of disorienting. And if you as a designer had just fallen in love with this color palette, you might not have the distance to see that it could be a problem.

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[missing anything?]

One of the first things a user will be able to tell you is that you might be missing something basic. Here are some classic oversights:

Can they tell who you are and what you do from the homepage?

Does it answer all the basic questions you’d expect them to ask?

Is there a clear call to action?

Can they figure out how to contact you?

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[listen for the negative]

When working with users in person, there are some language cues to be especially tuned in to. listen for things like,

I can’t read that font

Those colors are hard to see

I can’t get out of here

People often want to be nice, polite, and kind. So they may not call a problem like they see it. Listen for negative words, or action words that imply a stopping, dead end, or lack of direction. Words like ‘can’t’, ‘unsure’, ‘what’.

slide 15

[listen for uncertainty]

Also listen for words that are questioning. If your user flow is working as expected, your user should have a pretty clear idea of where they need to go next. Indecisiveness can indicate a problem.

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[more in depth problems]

this is just beginning to gloss over the surface of finding problems. You start with the biggest most glaring holes and go from there, but how do you get more subtle?

You have to work with your stakeholders to identify what constitutes a successful completion of a given task. This is what is sometimes called a ‘win state’. By working with your users over time, you’ll begin to see how well they’re negotiating these key tasks, and whether or not your design is in a win state.

So here’s your assignment. For once, I’m not going to make you make anything, I’m going to have you do some reading. There’s a website called wiki.darkpatterns.org

Your assignment:

* go to <http://wiki.darkpatterns.org/Home>

Observe the darkness, and learn what not to do and why. The best way to identify problems is to never even subject your users to them, but to learn from the work of others. The trail has been blazed ahead of you, and there’s a large body of work out there for us to draw from as we work to become better designers.

That will take us nicely into our next lesson, when we’ll discuss what to do once you discover all these problems. Unless you have an unlimited development team with unlimited time and money to devote to fixing said problems, in which case, you can skip the next lesson.

Next time on [Fundamentals of User Experience Design ], will be [Lesson 7: Prioritizing ]. This is [Sarah Kahn], and from all of us here at Tuts+, thanks for listening!