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 designing a usability test!

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Here’s what we’re going to cover:

* + Coming up with a test plan
  + Test styles
  + Remote vs in-person testing
  + What tools to use
  + Assignment

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[the underpants gnomes]

My first temptation is always to think, hmm. If I can just get some users in the room with my app, UX will just happen! It will be magical, for the users know everything, and they will solve all of my problems! (by the way, anyone getting this reference? southpark, underpants gnomes? if not, look it up, it’s a classic, although not safe for work.)

The field of UX is having a moment right now. People sometimes can romanticize it and think that if they just talk to their users, users will tell them exactly what they needed to hear, about the mysteries of the ages and how to make their application perfect, glorious, and beautiful!

The hard truth is, users are notoriously, infamously bad at articulating what it is that they need and want. They will ask for all kinds of things that might be what they think they want, but later we might come to find out that wasn’t it at all.

Now, don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying user feedback is bad, or that users never know what they want or need. I’m just saying, a little careful guidance and planning go a long way towards getting the kind of feedback that you can put to use.

ok, rant over. let us move on, shall we?

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[coming up with a testing plan]

look at this from the user’s perspective, for a moment, if you would. they’re taking 15-20 minutes out of their life to help you with what is essentially a glorified survey. there’s a reason we pay people to get them to do this stuff. so be respectful of your volunteer’s time and attention. go in with a gameplan.

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[gameplan]

how does one come up with such a plan? Well, it’s a combination of things. Ideally you would have your organized list of known problems, organized by priority. User testing is an excellent time to get help solving those nebulous problems, the long-term new feature development, or resolving internal conflicts over the best way to do something.

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[provide some structure]

It’s ok to have the mindset that you don’t want to hem in users with a rigid list of questions. But it’s important to provide at least a little bit of structure. People don’t work well in a vaccuum, or with too many possibilities. They get overwhelmed and then they clam up. Giving your users a manageable list of ideas to mull over and react against will help give them something they understand and can quickly form an opinion about, and will get you more concrete feedback that’s easier to parse and apply.

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[sample testing plan]

as a very brief and basic example, let’s say we’re testing a library website, where they have access to electronic journals and newspapers.

So here we have a known problem- the browsing mechanisms aren’t up to snuff. But you can’t just ask a user ‘what do you think about browsing?’

Well, you can, but you may find that the feedback will be more useful if you ask them to do a task designed to elicit feedback on that topic. For instance, asking them to look for a specific title in a specific date range.

how specific your testing plan going in is up to to you, and leads us nicely into our next point-

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[testing styles]

your philosophy on testing styles will probably have an impact on the type of testing plan you develop.

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[rage guy]

Now, I will begin by saying that I’m very pragmatic in my approach to these things. There are some very passionate people on both ends of the spectrum, but I’m of the opinion that there is no 1 right way.

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[toolbox]

There is a time and a place for just about every approach you cna possibly think of, so it serves us well as UX Researchers to have as many tools in our toolboxes as we possibly can.

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[naturalistic versus task-oriented]

the naturalistic school of testing tends more towards giving users a loose set of guidelines, and then seeing what they do.

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[examples of naturalistic test questions]

the naturalistic approach focuses on open-ended questions. Users may range far and wide in the application or website, and the tester wouldn’t guide them anywhere in particular, but would simply observe what they user is saying and doing.

this is a good approach to take when you’re looking for a baseline, more general problems, or just fishing for ideas about how to begin to design something.

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[examples of task-focused approach]

a more task-focused approach would be used for A/B testing, or for determining the effectiveness of a new feature. It would generally be much more focused in scope, and works well with 2 or 3 or more different versions of the same thing.

in the task-focused approach, the tester would prompt the user to follow a particular path, in order to get more focused feedback on specific parts.

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[remote vs in-person testing]

sometimes the physical limitations of a test will help determine the type of testing style you would use.

There are 4 kinds of tests that I’ve found are most common, or rather that I’ve mostly used.

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[in person moderated]

In person and moderated, where you’re sitting down with the user and looking at the screen with them. This is generally the most low-tech way, you don’t need any tools here except something to take notes with. It can be helpful to retain a recording of the session, using any software such as camtasia or jing

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[in person unmoderated]

in-person and unmoderated, where software records their actions and you observe either from behind a mirror or by watching the recording later. Screencasting software can be coopted to record this, but camtasia makes a software suite designed specifically for this. An alternative is cohdoo, and snagit.

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[remote moderated]

Remote and moderated, for example via skype or webex, or gotomeeting, where you’re doing screenshare and working with the user in real-time, and

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[remote unmoderated]

Remote and unmoderated, using a service like [trymyui.com](http://trymyui.com) or [usertesting.com](http://usertesting.com) that record sound and video of the user’s screen and voice for you.

In an unmoderated test, whether in person or remote, it would be difficult (but not impossible) to take a naturalistic approach. If the thing that you’re testing is small enough, this can actually work well to help you determine if you’re funneling users through well enough.

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[assignment]

Alright, time for an assignment! This week, take that list of prioritized problems that you should hopefully have from last time, and design a test around the top 3 or 4. Decide whether you have the best access to users remotely or in-person, and how you would go about conducting this test. And then, go do it! Or if you’re not quite ready yet, wait until next time, when we’ll talk about recruiting and working with users. Rumor has it that they’re just people.

Next time on [Fundamentals of User Experience Design ], will be [Lesson 9: Working with users ]. This is [Sarah Kahn], and from all of us here at Tuts+, thanks for listening!