Working with users

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 working with users.

slide 2

There’s sort of 2 parts to this lesson, first, how to get your hands on said users, and secondly, working with them once you’ve got them.

* + Recruiting users
  + A brief word on scheduling
  + The Legal Stuff
  + Structuring & Conducting the Session
  + Assignment

slide 3

[people]

The first step towards working with users is getting some users to work with. The way that you go about this will vary depending on your project and organization, so I apologize is this is a bit general.

Whether you’re planning to work with your users remotely or in person, the best way to recruit them is to use your website or application directly.

slide 4

[adzerk screenshot]

You have access to a direct pipeline to your user population- why not make use of it? How I’m doing it here is that I’m recruiting helpers for future tests rather than a specific test. So I’m pointing them to a really short survey, gauging their level of interest.

slide 5

[other good recruiting channels]

Along the same likes, social media is a great place to recruit people. It allows them to self-select, responding to you if they’re interested, rather than putting the onus on you to make phone calls or send emails.

slide 6

[calendar]

A brief word on scheduling. It’s sometimes the case that you’ll need to conduct sessions with several users in a single day. Make sure to leave plenty of room, if you can, between sessions. Things can run longer than you would expect, and you don’t want to have to rush through. Also, you may have things like unexpected cancellations, mixups, people having trouble finding your location (in the event that you’re having an in-person session) or technical difficulties for remote sessions. Just be sure to take that into account. Giving yourself extra space in between sessions will allow you to regroup and handle any issues that might come up.

One time I scheduled a day of back to back sessions, only to discover that I had left myself no time for lunch! I was starving all afternoon, and that was pretty distracting. So a word to the wise, for in-person sessions, bring a snack in case you get stuck.

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[book]

unless you work for a university or state agency, it’s unlikely that your organization will have an explicit policy on conducting research with real people. But to be safe, check with your legal department if you have one. They may wish to have your volunteers sign some sort of non-disclosure agreement. If you’re working with a client or organization that’s large enough to have a legal department, it’s better to be safe than sorry.

slide 8

[running a session]

slide 9

[be friendly]

It’s important to be friendly and confident when running a session. Begin by telling the person who you are and what you do. I often find it helpful to reassure them that I want their most honest feedback and that they will not hurt my feelings. They might be a little nervous, so it’s nice for you to try to put them at their ease. If they feel they can relate to you, they may open up a little more and give better (or at least, more) feedback.

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[language]

Be mindful of language. And I don’t mean ‘don’t cuss in front of your users’ although that’s also not bad advice.

This person has taken the time to meet with you and share their opinions with you. You may remember that I’ve mentioned in past lessons that users are notoriously bad at describing what they want and need. So try to just take their word for it, let them describe things in their own terms, and just take notes and observe.

Remember, you and I, we’re nerds. Or, more nerdly than your average bear. Users are going to use language which you and I might perceive as inaccurate or just plain wrong to describe their perceptions and experiences. Try to focus on what they’re saying rather than how they’re saying it. It’s often the case in my experience that users will have trouble finding technical terms to describe what they want to say, and that’s okay. If the user wants to call the navigation bar a ’stripe’, then by george, a stripe it shall be, until the end of this session. I know it hurts your feelings. It hurts my feelings too. But this isn’t about you and me.

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[no technobabble]

to this end, above all, avoid technobabble. use the simplest, plainest terms you can when you must explain something or engage with the user to get them to explain themselves further. avoid using technical terms like, ‘application’, any programming or scripting language name, industry terms for layouts, and other things of that sort. If you’re not sure when you’re doing this, conduct a practice session with a friend or coworker before sitting down with a user, to do a dry run and make sure you’re being human friendly.

slide 12

[no leading]

if you’ve spent any time at all working on a website before testing it, you’ve probably got a couple of pet issues with it. if we’re being truly honest, you might be hoping for a particular outcome from a test if you know what i mean.

stomp on that tendency. do not ask any leading questions. avoid trying to get users to go down a path in the hopes of getting the response that you want. A) it will probably backfire on you, but B) it’s our job as user researchers to be as objective as possible. so come to the session with an open mind, and be ready to hear what the users have to say, even if they say they hate the widget you so lovingly crafted.

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[assignment]

Alright, time for an assignment!

Earlier in this lesson, I mentioned doing a dry run of a session with a friend or colleague, just generally someone friendly to your cause. For your assignment, take the testing plan you developed in the last lesson, and recruit a friend to do a dry run with you. This will give you a chance to practice, work out the kinks in your introduction shpiel, and get comfortable working with a real live person. It doesn’t have to be long, just something to get the feel of it.

Next time on [Fundamentals of User Experience Design ], will be [Lesson 10: Creating a Design: Information Architecture ]. This is [Sarah Kahn], and from all of us here at Tuts+, thanks for listening!