Usability

Your constantly-updated definition of Usability and collection of topical content and literature
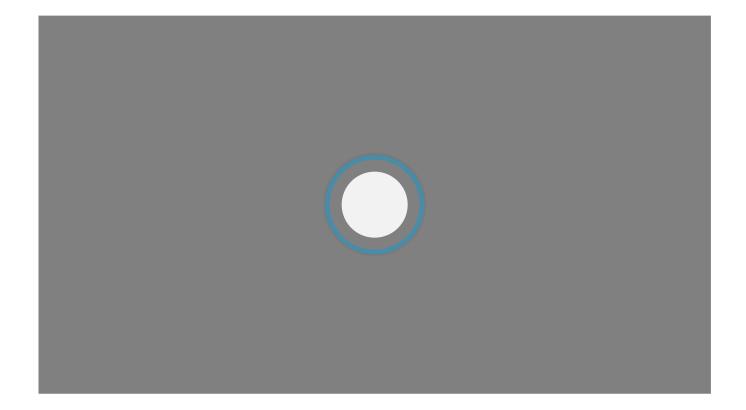
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What is Usability?

Usability is a measure of how well a specific user in a specific context can use a product/design to achieve a defined goal effectively, efficiently and satisfactorily. Designers usually measure a design's usability throughout the development process—from wireframes to the final deliverable—to ensure maximum usability.

> *"Usability is about human behavior. It recognizes that humans are lazy, get emotional, are not interested in putting a lot of effort into, say, getting a credit card and generally prefer things that are easy to do vs. those that are hard to do."*
>
> *— David McQuillen, ex-Swiss banker and founder of Sufferfest cycling workout resources*

Usability Elements For Exceptional Experiences

People often confuse usability with user experience and ease of use. Usability is a **component of user experience (UX) design**. According to the Nielsen Norman Group—a leader in the UX field—usability is the **second level in user experience**. It comes after **utility** and before **desirability** and **brand experience**. So, after you've determined that your item *can* solve users' problems, you must address its usability. A design's **usability depends on how well its features accommodate users' needs and contexts**. Therefore, *you* are responsible for your design's usability. It should contain these elements:

1. **Effectiveness**—It supports users in completing actions accurately.

2. **Efficiency**—Users can perform tasks quickly through the easiest process.

3. **Engagement**—Users find it pleasant to use and appropriate for its industry/topic.

4. **Error Tolerance**—It supports a range of user actions and only shows an error in genuine erroneous situations. You achieve this by finding out the number, type and severity of common errors users make, as well as how *easily* users can *recover* from those errors.

5. **Ease of Learning**—New users can accomplish goals easily and even more easily on future visits.

When they first encounter an interface, users should be able to find their way about easily enough to achieve objectives without relying on outside/expert knowledge. A design with high usability **guides users through the easiest and least labor-intensive route**. So, you must leverage a deep understanding of users' contexts. To do that, you must **accommodate their limitations**, such as their **environment**, likely **distractions** and **cognitive load**.

How to Design for Optimum Usability

You should **first focus on how well your design will flow *in context***. That means you **focus on it as a whole**—not on its parts (e.g., individual webpages)—and **make content simple**. Therefore, ensure you:

1. **Work with a clear understanding of users' goals and show it** in your design.

2. **Mimic the real world** regarding concepts, icons and language.

3. **Present instantly understandable, jargon-free messages and actions users can take**—*one* chief action per screen.

4. **Limit options to give a strong *information scent* on an uncluttered display**—show *essential* information for completing tasks.

5. **Keep content consistent**.

6. **Follow established norms** regarding function and layout (e.g., logo positioning, tappable buttons).

7. **Use proper font size, color, contrast, whitespace, etc.** to:

  a. combine aesthetic appeal with scanning readability,

  b. present a clear, logical information hierarchy,

  c. design for [accessibility](#).

8. **Use chunking and emphasize key information at the beginning and end of interactive sequences**.

9. **Offer informative feedback about system status**.

10. **Include helpful navigation systems and search functionality**.

11. **Allow for customizable controls**, including shortcuts.

12. **Avoid disruptions** – e.g., forced logins/pop-ups.

13. **Make forms easy to complete**.

14. **Include warnings and autocorrect features to minimize errors**.

15. **Make errors easy to diagnose**.

16. **Offer easy-to-understand help documentation.**

17. **Show clear contact options**.

18. **Provide a back button** to undo actions.

19. **Include ALT tags** to show more information about images.

20. **Consider server abilities** regarding page-loading time and downtime.

21. **Beware of in-app browsers and restrictions** (e.g.,scrolling) **in mobile design**.

22. **Make links active.**

23. **Describe links accurately**.

24. **Use [user personas](#)**.

25. **Do thorough [usability testing](#)**

Users should feel **immersed and in control of products/designs that predict their actions and help them get things done** *properly* **and** *fast*. If they stop to think about what you're showing them, they'll start losing trust. Overall, they should find it all **satisfying—if not pleasing**.

Our course-selection page anticipates users' needs by clearly guiding towards goals via filters.

Learn More about Usability

The Interaction Design Foundation has a wealth of material on usability, including this course:
https://www.interaction-design.org/courses/the-practical-guide-to-usability

See important points about desktop vs. mobile usability: https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/mobile-usability-research-the-important-differences-from-the-desktop

Read *Smashing* Magazine's extensive list of usability considerations: https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2007/10/30-usability-issues-to-be-aware-of

Here's an exemplary, insightful walkthrough of an app's usability: https://medium.com/@elizabeth.nicholas.14/10-examples-of-great-usability-on-airbnb-e47d2ebd0111

Literature on Usability

Here's the entire UX literature on **Usability** by the Interaction Design Foundation, collated in one place:

Featured article

Usability: A part of the User Experience

This subject may seem incredibly "big" for a single article, but it's about the specific nature of usability that we often overlook or confuse. With this appreciation, you'll be able to design more effectively, and your website's users will be able to grow, too.

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Learn more about Usability

Take a deep dive into Usability with our course **The Practical Guide to Usability** .

Every product or website should be easy and pleasurable to use, but designing an effective, efficient and enjoyable product is hardly the result of good intentions alone. Only through careful execution of certain usability principles can you achieve this and avoid user dissatisfaction, too. This course is designed to help you turn your good intentions into great products through a mixture of teaching both the theoretical guidelines as well as practical applications surrounding usability.

Countless pieces of research have shown that usability is important in product choice, but perhaps not as much as users themselves believe; it may be the case that people have come to *expect* usability in their products. This growing expectation puts even more pressure on designers to find the sweet spot between function and form. It is meanwhile critical that product and web developers retain their focus on the user; getting too lost within the depths of their creation could lead to the users and their usability needs getting waylaid. Through the knowledge of how best to position yourself *as* the user, you can dodge this hazard. Thanks to that wisdom, your product will end up with such good usability that the latter goes unnoticed!

Ultimately, a usable website or product that nobody can access isn't really usable. A usable website, for example, is often overlooked when considering the expansion of a business. Even with the grandest intentions or most "revolutionary" notions, the hard truth is that a usable site will always be the windpipe of commerce—if users can't spend enough time on the site to *buy* something, then the business will not survive. Usability is key to growth, user retention, and satisfaction. So, we must fully incorporate it into anything we design. Learn how to design products with awesome usability through being led through the most important concepts, methods, best practices, and theories from some of the most successful designers in our industry with "The Practical Guide to Usability."

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