3 Website Usability Tips Based on Research Studies

TIP 1: Enable Content Skimming By Using an F-Shaped Pattern

Dr. Jakob Nielsen, a pioneer in the field of usability, conducted an eye tracking study on the reading habits of web users comprising of over 230 participants. What the research study displayed was that participants **exhibited an F-shaped pattern** when scanning web content.

Source: Alertbox

A similar study, by search marketing firms Enquiro and Did-it in collaboration with eye-tracking research firm Eyetools, witnessed a similar pattern when they evaluated Google's search engine results page with an eye tracking study that included 50 participants. Dubbed the "Google Golden Triangle" because the concentration of eye gazes tended to be top and left, the results are congruent with the F-shaped pattern seen in Nielsen's independent research.
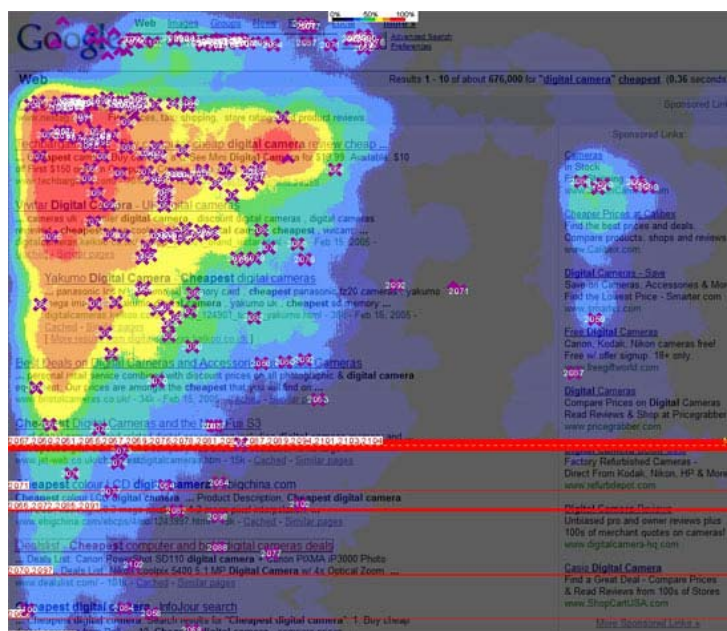
Source: Clickr Media

For designers and web copywriters, these results suggest that content you want to be seen should be placed towards the left, and also that the use of content that fits an F-shaped pattern (such as headings followed by paragraphs or bullet points) increases the likelihood that they will be encountered by a user who is skimming a web page.

Sources and Further Reading

- [F-Shaped Pattern For Reading Web Content](#)

- [Google Golden Triangle – Eyetracking How People View Search Results](#)

## TIP 2: Forget the "Three-Click Rule"

The idea that users will get frustrated if they have to click more than three times to find a piece of content on your website has been around for ages. In 2001, Jeffrey Zeldman, a recognized authority in the web design industry, wrote that the three-click rule "can help you create sites with intuitive, logical hierarchical structures" in his book, *Taking Your Talent to the Web*.

Logically, it makes sense. Of course, users will be frustrated if they spend a lot of time clicking around to find what they need.

But why the arbitrary three-click limit? Is there any indication that web users will suddenly give up if it takes them three clicks to get to what the want?

In fact, most users **won't** give up just because they've hit some magical number. The number of clicks they have to make isn't related to user frustration.

A [study](#) conducted by Joshua Porter published on User Interface Engineering found out that users aren't more likely to resign to failure after three clicks versus a higher number such as 12 clicks. "Hardly anybody gave up after three clicks," Porter said.

Clicks to Completion
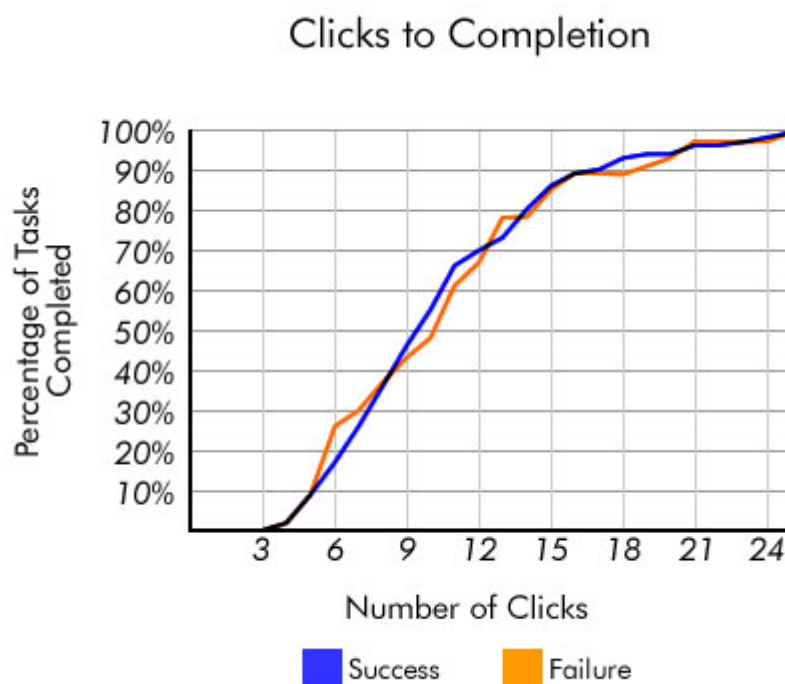
Source: [User Interface Engineering](#)

The focus, then, shouldn't be on reducing the number of clicks to some magically arrived number, but rather on the ease of utility. If you can construct a user interface that's easy and pleasurable to use, but takes like 15 clicks (e.g. 5 times more than the three-click rule) to achieve a particular task — don't let the arbitrary three-click rule stop you.

Sources and Further Reading

- [Testing the Three-Click Rule](#)

- [Breaking the Law: The 3 Click Rule](#)

TIP 3: Your Home Page Isn't As Important as You Think

Visitors to your website are less likely to land on your home page. Search engines are a big factor here, as they'll link to whatever page is relevant on your site. Links from other websites are also likely to link to pages beyond your home page if that's where the relevant information is.

According to an analysis by Gerry McGovern, page views sourcing from the home page of websites is decreasing dramatically. He witnessed a drop from 39% from 2003 to only 2% in 2010 of page views coming from the home page of a large research site. This trend was doubly confirmed on another site he studied, where page views sourcing from the home page halved in just two years (from 10% in 2008 to only 5% in 2010).

McGovern's results indicate that traffic, more and more, is coming from external sources — search engines, social media sites such as Twitter, and content aggregator services such as AllTop — rather than from the front page of a website. Therefore, a higher focus on landing pages versus your home page can get you more bang for your buck in terms of [conversion](#) and user-retention opportunities.

Sources and Further Reading

- [The Decline of the Home Page](#)

- [Is Home Page Design Relevant Anymore?](#)

- [Myth #17: The homepage is your most important page](#)