

# Usability vs UX

Usability, UX and Human-Computer Interaction may sound similar for most people, mostly because they have the “core” objective of making a product usable, or at least, not annoying and difficult to use, however, their meanings are slightly different. Usability is defined by ISO 9241-11 as “effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction with which specified users achieve specified goals in particular environments”, UX, on the other hand, is defined by the same standard (ISO 9241-210) as “all aspects of the user’s experience when interacting with the product, service, environment or facility”, In addition, HCI can be defined as a compound of various knowledge areas in order to improve the information sending between humans and computers/systems and make the work on them more efficient. The interaction with the user is what connects these 3 terms, it is that interaction where each term highlights their its unique aspect., I remember a past class where a very similar question was made: “What’s the relation between UX, Usability and HCI?”, I answered that both UX with its focus on experience and HCI with its focus in interaction between user-computer and efficiency, were what defined a “usable” system, something that was “fit for use”, but it seems that was quite the opposite, UX was the “umbrella term” with usability and part of HCI inside of it, meaning that usability with its focus on system’s goals (considering the user) and HCI collaborate to create an “User experience”.

We can say that usability focuses on the goal when using a product or system (defined by users), while UX focuses on human factors that make the product pleasant to use, for example, a website can have all the expected functionalities, be learnable, sturdy against errors, effective, efficient and overall, usable, but if colors are unpleasant, there’s not visual “feedback” or consistency in the UI, the website won’t be enjoyable for the user. On the other hand, HCI borrows from those terms but also focuses on efficiency, effectiveness, enjoyment, psychology and ergonomics to make and a system efficient to use, smooth and pleasant for use.

A UX feature for the HCI project I’m working on would be confirmation messages when creating/editing/deleting sessions to prevent confusion or even the repetition of the action if the user doesn’t notice the change made. This feature would allow feedback for the users (that is an attribute by itself), allowing them to know if changes/actions were made, and it could be verified with observation of the system usage to know if the user feels comfortable, doesn’t confuse and a questionnaire evaluating the average feeling and impact of those messages on the user.

All these terms tend to be confusing for me because they can be stretched at a point the meaning might dilute, for example, learnability and efficiency are attributes of usability, but isn’t interoperability, performance and resource usage also related to it?, because a system without those attributes leads to errors and defects noticeable by the user and therefore, affecting the goals of the system, and usability.