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# What is Product Usability?

In this article, you'll understand product usability by learning about five critical components of usability: learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors, and satisfaction.



Can you remember a time when a product you used left you with a miserable experience? Perhaps a particular tool was difficult to use, or a website made it difficult for you to perform a simple task (like logging in, for example).

Now think back to a time when you used a product that was astonishingly easy and maybe even fun to use. What do you remember about that experience?

When you thought about these experiences, you likely (and unknowingly) remembered certain aspects of what makes a product *usable*.

In this article, we'll discuss what it means for a product to be usable. We'll break the definition of product usability into five components based on Jakob Nielsen's (of NNG) analysis.

## WHAT IS USABILITY?

We'll explore usability by learning about its five main components (listed below).

Learnability

Efficiency

Memorability

Errors

## Satisfaction

To better illustrate how the five components of usability affect a product, let's envision a fictional product. For this article, let's envision a fictional e-commerce site called **Dasmoto** where users can purchase items online.

As we explore the five components of usability, we will apply them to Dasmoto to better understand how they affect the overall usability of Dasmoto.

## Learnability

When new users encounter a product, there is a period where the users must *learn* how to use the product.

Well-designed products, in theory, are easy for a new user to learn how to use. They help users accomplish basic tasks seamlessly, perhaps even on the first try. The amount of time it takes for a user to learn how to use a new product may be very short.

Other products, however, might be more complicated for a new user to learn how to use (a complicated stock market mobile app, for example). In fact, users may never thoroughly learn how to use the product correctly.

## Efficiency

Another component of usability is *efficiency*. Efficiency is something often gauged *after* a new user has learned how to use a product. Specifically, efficiency is how quickly a user can perform a particular task with a product *after they have learned* how to use that product.

## Memorability

What happens when users that have learned to use a product efficiently step away from the product for some time? When they return to the product, can they easily remember how to use it? The third component of product usability is *memorability*.

A product with strong memorability is one in which learners have no trouble re-engaging and using the product after not having used it for some time.

The memorability of a product can be affected not just by the amount of time a user has spent *away* from the product, but also by any new changes to the product. Have you ever returned to a website you used years ago and noticed new changes to the website that affected how you remembered using the product?

For some products, this is natural, as the product will continuously evolve. In the short term, however, it is important to keep in mind how even small changes to a product (like moving a button on a website) can affect its memorability.

## Errors

A product's usability is also affected by the number of errors encountered when using the product.

A variety of things can cause errors in a product. Here are a few examples related to websites:

- A user presses an incorrect button because the button's icon led them to misinterpret the button's intent

- Poor labeling in a form causes a user to enter the incorrect information

- Poor choices in color schemes prevent a learner from correctly interpreting important information on a website

Central to this component is how easy it is for users to recover from errors they make. For example, requiring important information before activating a button on a website is one way of preventing users from erroneously pressing the button ahead of time.

Minimizing the number of errors a user can make with a product and allowing them to recover quickly from errors is central to product usability.

## Satisfaction

The fifth component of usability is *satisfaction*. More specifically, product satisfaction refers to whether or not users find the experience of using the product pleasant or fun.

It's possible that a website, for example, may be easy to learn, efficient to use, have strong memorability, and be error-free, but if the overall experience is not enjoyable, then the impact of the previous usability components is minimized.

## APPLYING USABILITY

Think back to Dasmoto, the fictional e-commerce site where users can purchase items online. Let's evaluate its potential usability by looking at each component.

Is Dasmoto easy to **learn**? That depends. If new users can learn how to find the items they'd like to purchase in a relatively short amount of time (and purchase those items), then Dasmoto might be considered to have strong learnability.

Is Dasmoto **efficient** to use? If users can quickly find an item they'd like to purchase, then Dasmoto could be considered to be efficient.

How **memorable** is Dasmoto? Experimenting and monitoring returning users is one way of determining memorability.

How many **errors** do users on Dasmoto make, on average?

Again, monitoring usage is one way of encountering the common errors users make on Dasmoto.

Finally, how **satisfactory** is Dasmoto? Qualitative user feedback is critical to determining how satisfying the experience is.

## SUMMARY

Consider your users as you design a product (like a website, for example).

Is the website easy to learn for new users?

Is the website efficient?

Can a user spend time away from the website and seamlessly resume using it?

Are users making lots of errors while using the website?

What are users saying about the experience? Are they satisfied?

In addition, consider the consequences of failing to incorporate usability components. A poorly designed e-commerce website, for example, may prevent users from finding items they would otherwise purchase. Worse, users may stop using the product altogether.

By keeping these components in mind, you place the user at the center of your design and increase the overall usability of the product being designed.