

Expert Analysis

Through our research and interviews, we've found that a significant factor keeping users engaged on Goodreads is the sense of community. Many users place significant value on the opinions and reading tastes of the other users, rather than relying on the site's automated recommendation system. They trust the reviews, ratings, and book choices of users whose taste they find relatable, making their profiles a key source of discovery. However, we discovered that navigating these profiles – whether it's other users' profiles or their own – can be frustrating. Because the profile interface limits access to and engagement with community insights, the current design of user profiles undermines one of the primary ways users explore books. In our expert analysis, we identified both usability strengths and challenges encountered when navigating Goodreads user profiles.

Usability Strength

Strength 1 | Principle 5: Strong Error Prevention

Error prevention focuses on minimizing the chance that users accidentally make errors. Designs must be proactive in anticipating users' potential mistakes and designing safeguards to prevent them. For example, having proper error prevention could look like an error message that provides the user with instructions on how to fix the current problem (Schneiderman, et al. 96).

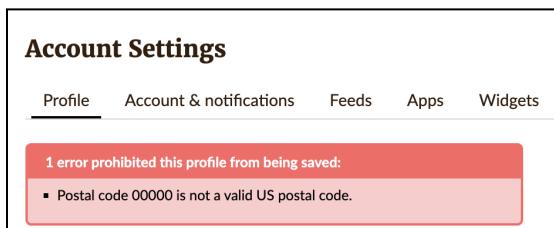


Figure 1: Error Pop-Up

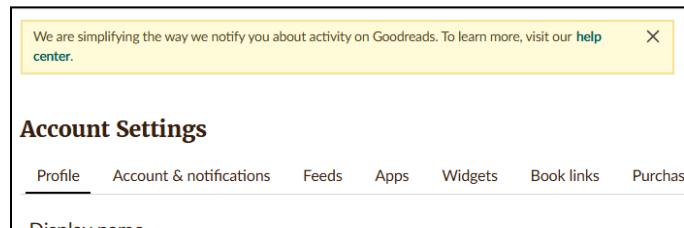


Figure 2: No Confirmation After Change

Figure 1 above displays a pop-up that appears in an attention-grabbing red box, explaining why information could not be saved by the system. There are several such error-preventing pop-ups throughout the profile settings, each safeguarding the user from serious error.

Usability Weaknesses

Weakness 1 | Principle 3: Lack of Informative Feedback | Severity: Low

While the Goodreads system effectively safeguards against serious user error, it falls short in keeping the user updated on the status of their actions. Offering informative

feedback involves giving the user some sort of interface feedback for both minor and major actions done by the user (Schneiderman, et al. 96). Currently, most changes made by the user on the profile page are not visually acknowledged by the system, leaving the user unsure if any of their changes or actions were accepted. This further hinders their ability to fully personalize their profiles according to their tastes, as described in the user story. As shown in Figure 2, when a user creates a change to their profile, such as the display name, they aren't informed of the successful change. Instead, a different, unrelated message regarding notifications is displayed.

An easy solution to this problem is to provide a dialogue box that confirms the actions of the user. In this specific instance, it would help the user to have a bright green text box, confirming that the latest changes were made successfully.

Weakness 2 | Violation of POUR Principle: Understandable | Severity: High

Weakness 2.1: Overwhelming User Profile Layout

The screenshot shows a Goodreads user profile for 'Ash'. At the top, there's a large circular profile picture of a woman. Below it, the user's name 'Ash' is displayed with a link to 'edit profile'. To the right of the name are sections for 'Details' (Female, United States) and 'Activity' (Joined in January 2018, last active this month). Further down, there's a 'Year in Books' section titled 'ASH'S YEAR IN BOOKS' with a thumbnail for 'Year in Books 2023'. On the left, there's a 'ASH'S BOOKSHELVES' section showing 'read (47)', 'currently-reading (1)', and 'to-read (36)'. On the right, there's a 'ASH'S FRIENDS (3)' section listing three friends: Rehana, Ananya :3, and Lisa Nguyen. At the bottom, there's a 'ASH IS CURRENTLY READING' section showing 'Persuasion' by Jane Austen, which is currently being read. A 'Rate this book' button is also visible.

Figure 2: Cluttered Goodreads Profile Page

A Goodreads user's profile is a cluttered page that makes it hard for others to have a full understanding on how to navigate and process it. Having an understandable site means that users have to be able to understand its navigation and be able to break down all its parts in order to complete their task (WebAIM). Figure 3 displays a typical Goodreads profile page, which is difficult to follow due to its lack of visual distinction between several sections such as bookshelves, friends, and currently reading. The page creates cognitive overload for users, presenting an excess amount of information without a clear visual hierarchy. It's also overly wordy, requiring other users to sift through text. This barrier not only limits interaction, but it also interferes with the goal outlined in the user story, as it has the potential to drastically hinder the discovery of new books. When a

user first encounters another user on Goodreads, their initial engagement typically stems from reading a book review that the other user has written. If the user finds the review relatable, they may click on the reviewer's profile to explore more – such as finding other books they enjoy. However, because the profile page is so jumbled and lacks clear organization, the user would be discouraged from pursuing this deeper exploration.

A potential solution that would lead to a better user's profile page is the implementation of a streamlined intuitive navigation feature, which includes links to jump to other pages, such as the user's activity, bookshelves, and reading challenges.

Weakness 2.2: Inadequate Visibility of User Taste

The user profile page is convoluted to the point where important details of their book tastes are almost hidden. It's not a concise and understandable representation of what kinds of books the user would recommend to other readers. Currently, if other users try to explore someone's profile to discover their reading preferences, they face a couple of challenges, which again directly conflicts with the goal of the user story. First, if they do manage to find the small, often overlooked "Favorite Genres" section at all, shown in Figure 4, this section offers broad genre categories. While users can select multiple genres, this doesn't provide much insight into their true preferences. It's unclear how much they actually enjoy each category, or whether they have a stronger preference for one over another. Alternatively, they might browse through the "read" shelf linked on the page, which is a list of all the books the user has read, but it may be excessively long and include books the user rated poorly. In the end, this means the user would have to sift through lots of content and navigate multiple layers of the site, with no guarantee of uncovering clear reading preferences.

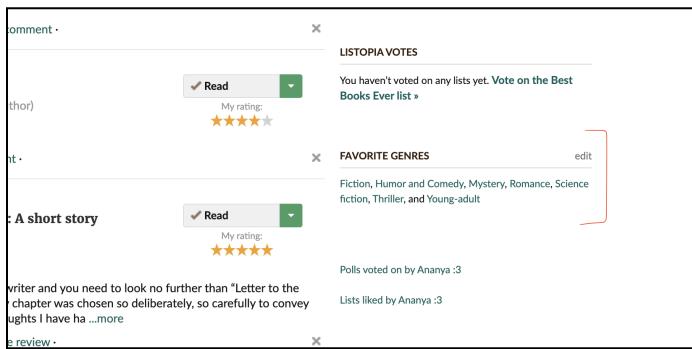


Figure 4: Small, Hidden "Favorite Genres" Section

As found in the interviews conducted, the community tends to favor book recommendations from other readers as opposed to the current recommendation algorithm. A proposed feature could be to introduce a showcase of the user's top five books, which would reveal the user's taste immediately, and such books could be treated as recommendations, assisting other users in finding new books to read. The user can provide a blurb in their personal top five, in hopes of getting others to read their recommendations.