

# Usability Testing Plan

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**Drafted for:** MyHomeworkRewards

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## Recommendations

- **Test as early as possible in the project.**
  - Simple testing with two or three users will work perfectly fine. Addressing and solving problems earlier in the process will save you from an accumulation of a mess down the line. Major changes will often be challenging to a site once it's live and in use.
- **Test in a quiet space where you won't be interrupted.**
- **Use screen recording software (such as Camtasia) to capture a record of what happens on the screen, and what the facilitator and participant say.**
- **Provide a reasonable incentive.**

## Process

1. **Introduction.** Welcome the user and introduce how the test will work (4 min)
2. **Background questions.** Ask the participant a few questions about themselves (2 min)
3. **Reactions to the Home page.** Open the Home page of the site and ask the participant to look around and tell you what they make of it. (3 min)
4. **Testing a task.** Watch the participant try to perform a series of tasks. Make sure the participant remains focused and keeps thinking aloud. Let them work on their own and don't do or say anything to influence them. (35 min)
5. **Wrapping up.** Thank them for their time and provide their incent. (5 min)

## Sample test session

### INTRODUCTION

Hi, Janice. My name is Steve Krug, and I'm going to be walking you through this session.

This whole first section is the script that I use when I conduct tests.<sup>5</sup>

You probably already know, but let me explain why we've asked you to come here today. We're testing a Web site that we're working on so we can see what it's like for actual people to use it.

I always have a copy in front of me, and I don't hesitate to read from it, but I find it's good to ad lib a little, even if it means making mistakes. When the users see that I'm comfortable making mistakes, it helps take the pressure off them.

I want to make it clear right away that we're testing the *site*, not you. You can't do anything wrong here. In fact, this is probably the one place today where you don't have to worry about making mistakes.

We want to hear exactly what you think, so please don't worry that you're going to hurt our feelings.<sup>6</sup> We want to improve it, so we need to know honestly what you think.

As we go along, I'm going to ask you to think out loud, to tell me what's going through your mind. This will help us.

<p>If you have questions, just ask. I may not be able to answer them right away, since we're interested in how people do when they don't have someone sitting next to them, but I will try to answer any questions you still have when we're done.</p> <p>We have a lot to do, and I'm going to try to keep us moving, but we'll try to make sure that it's fun, too.</p>	<p>It's important to mention this, because it will seem rude not to answer their questions as you go along. You have to make it clear before you start that (a) it's nothing personal, and (b) you'll try to answer them at the end if they still want to know.</p>
<p>You may have noticed the camera. With your permission, we're going to record the computer screen and what you have to say. The recording will be used only to help us figure out how to improve the site, and it won't be seen by anyone except the people working on the project. It also helps me, because I don't have to take as many notes. There are also some people watching the screen in another room.</p>	<p>At this point, most people will say something like, "I'm not going to end up on <i>America's Funniest Home Videos</i>, am I?"</p>
<p>If you would, I'm going to ask you to sign something for us. It simply says that we have your permission to record you, but that it will only be seen by the people working on the project. It also says that you won't talk to anybody about what we're showing you today, since it hasn't been made public yet.</p> <p>Do you have any questions before we begin?</p> <p>No. I don't think so.</p>	<p>Give them the release and non-disclosure agreement (if required) to sign. Both should be as short as possible and written in plain English.<sup>7</sup></p>



## BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Before we look at the site, I'd like to ask you just a few quick questions. First, what's your occupation?

I'm a router.

I've never heard of that before. What does a router do, exactly?

Not much. I take orders as they come in, and send them to the right office.

Good. Now, roughly how many hours a week would you say you spend using the Internet, including email?

Oh, I don't know. Probably an hour a day at work, and maybe four hours a week at home. Mostly that's on the weekend. I'm too tired at night to bother. But I like playing games sometimes.

How do you spend that time? In a typical day, for instance, tell me what you do, at work and at home.

Well, at the office I spend most of my time checking email. I get *a lot* of email, and a lot of it's junk but I have to go through it anyway. And sometimes I have to research something at work.

I find it's good to start with a few questions to get a feel for who they are and how they use the Internet. It gives them a chance to loosen up a little and gives you a chance to show that you're going to be listening attentively to what they say—and that there are no wrong or right answers.

Don't hesitate to admit your ignorance about anything. Your role here is not to come across as an expert, but as a good listener.

Notice that she's not sure how much time she really spends on the Internet. Most people aren't. Don't worry. Accurate answers aren't important here. The main point here is just to get her talking and thinking about how she uses the Internet and to give you a chance to gauge what kind of user she is.

<p>Do you have any favorite Web sites?</p> <p>Yahoo, I guess. I like Yahoo, and I use it all the time. And something called Snakes.com, because I have a pet snake.</p>	
<p>Really? What kind of snake?</p> <p>A python. He's about four feet long, but he should get to be eight or nine when he's fully grown.</p> <p>Wow. OK, now, finally, have you bought anything on the Internet? How do you feel about buying things on the Internet?</p> <p>I've bought some things recently. I didn't do it for a long time, but only because I couldn't get things delivered. It was hard to get things delivered, because I'm not home during the day. But now one of my neighbors is home all the time, so I can.</p> <p>And what have you bought?</p> <p>Well, I ordered a raincoat from L.L. Bean, and it worked out <i>much</i> better than I thought it would. It was actually pretty easy.</p> <p>OK, great. We're done with the questions, and we can start looking at things.</p> <p>OK, I guess.</p>	<p>Don't be afraid to digress and find out a little more about the user, as long as you come back to the topic before long.</p>

## REACTIONS TO THE HOME PAGE

First, I'm just going to ask you to look at this page and tell me what you think it is, what strikes you about it, and what you think you would click on first.

For now, don't actually click on anything. Just tell me what you *would* click on.

And again, as much as possible, it will help us if you can try to think out loud so we know what you're thinking about.

The browser has been open, but minimized. At this point, I reach over and click to maximize it.





Well, I guess the first thing I notice is that I like the color. I like the shade of orange, and I like the little picture of the sun [at the top of the page, in the eLance logo].

Let's see. [Reads.] "The global services market." "Where the world comes to get your job done."



I don't know what that means. I have no idea.

"Animate your logo free." [Looking at the Cool Stuff section on the left.] "3D graphics marketplace." "eLance community." "eLance marketplace."



In an average test, it's just as likely that the next user will say that she hates this shade of orange and that the drawing is too simplistic. Don't get too excited by individual reactions to site aesthetics.

There's a lot going on here. But I have no idea what any of it is.

If you had to take a guess, what do you think it might be?

Well, it seems to have something to do with buying and selling...something.

[Looks around the page again.] Now that I look at the list down here [the Yahoo-style category list halfway down the page], I guess maybe it must be services. Legal, financial, creative...they all sound like services.



So I guess that's what it is. Buying and selling services. Maybe like some kind of online *Yellow Pages*.

OK. Now, if you were at home, what would you click on first?

This user is doing a good job of thinking out loud on her own. If she wasn't, this is where I'd start asking her, "What are you thinking?"



I guess I'd click on that 3D graphics thing.  
I'm interested in 3D graphics.

Before you click on it, I have one more question. What about these pictures near the top of the page—the ones with the numbers? What did you make of them?



I noticed them, but I really didn't try to figure them out. I guess I thought they were telling me what the steps in the process would be.

Any reason why you didn't pay much attention to them?

No. I guess I just wasn't ready to start the process yet. I didn't know if I *wanted* to use it yet. I just wanted to look around first.

OK. Great.

I ask this question because the site's designers think most users are going to start by clicking on the pictures of the five steps, and that everyone will at least look at them.

## TESTING A TASK

OK, now we're going to try something else.

Can you think of something you might want to post as a project if you were using this site?

Hmm. Let me think. I think I saw "Home Improvement" there somewhere. We're thinking of building a deck. Maybe I would post that.

So if you were going to post the deck as a project, what would you do first?

I guess I'd click on one of the categories down here. I think I saw home improvement. [Looks.] There it is, under "Family and Household."

So what would you do?

Well, I'd click.... [Hesitates, looking at the two links under "Family and Household."]

### Family & Household

Food & Cooking, Gardening, Genealogy, Home Improvement, Interior Design, Parenting, Pets, Real Estate...

[RFPs](#) | [Fixed-Price](#)

Now I give her a task to perform so we can see whether she can use the site for its intended purpose.

Whenever possible, it's good to let the user have some say in choosing the task.

<p>Well, now I'm not sure <i>what</i> to do. I can't click on Home Improvement, so it looks like I have to click on either "RFPs" or "Fixed-Price." But I don't know what the difference is.</p> <p>Fixed price I sort of understand; they'll give me a quote, and then they have to stick to it. But I'm not sure what RFPs is.</p>	<p>As it turns out, she's mistaken. Fixed-price (in this case) means services available for a fixed hourly rate, while an RFP (or Request for Proposal) is actually the choice that will elicit quotes. This is the kind of misunderstanding that often surprises the people who built the site.</p>
<p>Well, which one do you think you'd click on?</p> <p>Fixed price, I guess.</p> <p>Why don't you go ahead and do it?</p>	<p>From here on, I just watch while she tries to post a project, letting her continue until either (a) she finishes the task, (b) she gets really frustrated, or (c) we're not learning anything new by watching her try to muddle through.</p> <p>I'd give her three or four more tasks to do, which should take not more than 45 minutes altogether.</p>