



How to Conduct Your Own Heuristic Evaluation

Establish an Appropriate List of Heuristics

Nielsen and Molich's set of **10 usability heuristics** are a great starting point. However, we recommend that you create your own custom set of heuristics when you conduct heuristic evaluation. That's because each design has its set of tasks, constraints, functions and other variables. Therefore, you should customize the areas of focus depending on the core functions of your design.

Select Your Evaluators

Make sure you carefully choose your evaluators. Your evaluators should not be your end users. They should typically be usability experts and preferably with domain expertise in your product's industry type. That way, they can provide you with relevant and industry-specific recommendations to improve your design. For example, if your design is a point-of-sale system for the restaurant industry, then your expert evaluator should have at least a general understanding of restaurant operations.

We recommend that you hire different experts as evaluators, and preferably hire evaluators with different areas of expertise. That's because Jakob Nielsen found in a heuristic evaluation in 1992 that different evaluators identified different numbers and types of usability problems. Therefore, if you hire multiple evaluators, you can ensure the highest possible detection rate of usability problems.

Nielsen suggests that between 3 and 5 evaluators is sufficient. The general consensus is that more is better, especially when the evaluators have different skill sets (so the team is more likely to spot different usability problems). However, your financial and time constraints will often determine the number of evaluators on a project. With that said, 1 or 2 evaluators are often sufficient in the early stages of development to identify the majority of usability problems.

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Brief Your Evaluators

Brief your evaluators so they know exactly what they should do and cover during their evaluation. You should standardize your briefing session to ensure the evaluators receive the same instructions; otherwise, you may introduce bias into their evaluation. In your brief, you may wish to ask the evaluators to focus on a selection of tasks, but sometimes they may state which tasks they will cover based on their experience and expertise.

Conduct the First Evaluation

The first evaluation generally takes around two hours, depending on the nature and complexity of your product. In the first round, the evaluators will use the product freely to gain a feel for the methods of interaction and the scope of your product. This helps them to then identify specific elements that they want to evaluate in the second round.

Conduct the Second Evaluation

In the second evaluation phase, the evaluators will run through the product again, but this time they will apply the chosen heuristics to the elements they've identified during the first phase. The evaluators will focus on individual elements and look at how well they fit in the overall design.

Record the Problems Identified

The evaluators must record problems themselves—or you should record them—as they carry out their various tasks to track any problems they encounter. Be sure to ask the evaluators to be as detailed and specific as possible when they record the problems they find.

Debriefing Session

In the debriefing session, the different evaluators collate their findings and establish a complete list of problems. They then suggest potential solutions for these problems based on the heuristics.

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- What it is like to work as a UX Designer
- What skills UX hirers look for in an applicant

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