

Heuristics Evaluation of The New York State Library Website **<https://www.nysl.nysed.gov/>**

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1. Visibility of system status

- Always keep users informed about what is going on.
- Provide appropriate feedback within reasonable time.

Evaluation

Not satisfied. The layout of the home page feels random and disorganized. The home page menu offers tabs for ABOUT, LIBRARIANS, GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, and NEW YORKERS. For those new to the website, these feel somewhat arbitrary since many government employees may be New Yorkers, and the same with Librarians.

2. Match between system and the real world

- Speak the users' language, with words, phrases and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms.
- Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.

Evaluation

Not satisfied. The website presents phrases and words like "NovelNY" without any context, often requiring visitors to navigate totally different websites in order to gather information. Phrases like "advisory services" are vague and suggest that casual visitors to the website are not as welcome as experienced visitors.

3. User control and freedom

- Users often choose system functions by mistake.
- Provide a clearly marked "out" to leave an unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue.
- Support undo and redo.

Evaluation

Not satisfied. After clicking several links on the homepage and in the tabs, I was redirected without my knowledge to websites of which I held no familiarity. The only way to redirect back to the NYSL is through the back button on my web browser, or but opening each link in a new tab which is annoying and can get confusing. Some, I imagine, would not be able to tell when they are on a completely new website and may struggle to figure out how to find what they are looking for.

4. Consistency and standards

- Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing.
- Follow platform conventions.

Evaluation

Somewhat satisfied. A similar website, like the Arizona State Library (<https://azlibrary.gov/>) offers immediately recognizable categories for new users: ABOUT, BRANCHES, COLLECTIONS, SERVICES, EVENTS. It also offers more contextual information than the New York State library website. On NYSL, the event section on the home page does not link to more events, whereas the Arizona website does.

Displayed prominently on the Arizona website is a link that reads "Got Questions?" The entire experience on the Arizona website is tailored to new users, unlike the NYSL.

5. Error prevention

- Even better than good error messages is a careful design which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place.

Evaluation

Not satisfied. There appears to be no interest in error prevention. For example, the main categories of the site offer no information about who is best suited to use each category (librarians, New Yorkers, etc.). Users are forced by trial and error to discover where they want to go. There is little preceding information or context presented to a user before they are redirected to another site or section on the website.

6. Recognition rather than recall

- Make objects, actions, and options visible.
- User should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another.
- Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate.

Evaluation

Not satisfied. This website makes a user rely on recall to navigate the website, especially as certain sections open to entirely different websites without explaining why they are being redirected. For example, the NovelNY link is a plain image without any context that redirects to another site. One has to constantly recall where they have previously been, or keep tabs open to make sure they are on the right track to complete their chosen task.

7. Flexibility and efficiency of use

- Accelerators -- unseen by the novice user -- may often speed up the interaction for the expert user so that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users.
- Allow users to tailor frequent actions.

Evaluation

Somewhat satisfied. I imagine that a user very familiar with the state library system will know exactly where they need to go, and several larger links on the front page seem to indicate popular destinations for users. On the other hand, these apparent shortcuts add to the clutter and would make new users confused as to the primary library destinations. For example, NovelNY is a large image link that is presented with no context to anything else. As someone unfamiliar with this term, I had to click on the image to learn that NovelNY is a digital media platform in the library system, and likely very popular. Only regular users would find this shortcut useful.

8. Aesthetic and minimalist design

- Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed.
- Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.

Evaluation

Not satisfied. The most notable issue with this aesthetic is clutter. Most everything is of the same font, and most of the words on the home page are hyperlinks to other sections of the site or to different sites entirely. The layout feels random, tailored to certain users over others, and inconsiderate of usability. Too much information is displayed all at once. It is not clear that some images are links to other subjects since most links are text-based. It creates a confusing, frustrating experience that is not minimalist.

9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors

- Expressed in plain language (no codes)
- Precisely indicate the problem
- Constructively suggest a solution.

Evaluation

Not satisfied. When a website redirects to another site, or there is an issue finding content, there are no clear signs, visual or otherwise, to indicate a clear error or roadblock. The text style remains the same and the only indication that we are on a new site is that the layout is somewhat different.

10. Help and documentation

- Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation.
- Help information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.

Evaluation

Not satisfied. There is no visible "Help" section on the website, and sections that may seem helpful for website use more likely pertain to something else (User Information, for instance). There is no help section in the footer, either.