Testing Methodology:

Three testers were given a document with a brief description of the project and their role as user testers, and assured that if they needed any clarification they could ask me any questions they had.

They were then told to perform 3 tests after navigating to the prototype home page (https://hybrid.concordia.ca/JO_MCKA/cart351/prototype/site/index.html), write mandatory short responses for each, and optionally give any additional feedback or comments at the end. I felt as though qualitative responses would be better for me to get an understanding of where to take the project next rather than raw quantitative data-driven tests, and given the small number of testers I would be more able to digest the responses.

The Tests

The three tests given were:

TEST 1: Locate the examples of previous submissions from other users, and identify one that sticks out to you and why.

My reasoning for this test is finding out what could draw interest to the interactions of past users, as that's the network that's being built in this project.

TEST 2: After going to the page to upload a message, consider what kinds of messages the current prototype is suggesting you send: what are some keywords that come to mind?

For this test, I wanted to get a read on what people feel the themes of the project are. While the themes in the prototype aren't being expressed by the style yet, I felt the concept of the project might be enough to get some feel of what the project might be provoking them to write.

TEST 3: Send a message. Identify any problems you had doing so, and list them. If there were none, that's fine.

For this test, I wanted to get them to go through the full "workflow" of the project, and see if they had any critical errors doing so. This is more of a technical test, to see if the site's form holds up under the use of someone who didn't write the page themselves.

Responses:

Test 1:

"I think you should change the look of the previous messages left behind by other users, to make it seem more like cryptic remnants of a previous user/message. At first I thought they were just examples of what to write rather than actual left behind messages"

"The examples of what other people wrote seemed joking and quite varied. The one that stands out the most is one sent 'flocking patterns?' as it was sent ~50 years in the past. Although they show what other users have sent, that could be conveyed in a clearer way. It makes me wonder if I will have all the same options when I submit a message. Will it ever appear there?"

"One is addressed to a recipient 50 years in the future. I find it very hard to believe that we'll have a future stable enough in 5 decades that could support the discovery of the bottle amidst waves of ocean garbage, let alone understand the content of the memes. Poor planning, Yersta."

Test 2:

"Keywords: Time capsule, hidden messages, SOS, help"

"I think the custom message page doesn't really suggest anything in particular. I get the feeling once you send a message it goes into a vast space where it may never reach someone. The first page gives a bit of exposition as to what the meaning of this message is. Although, I think it might help to simplify some of the introduction and remove the instructions maybe. If the introduction gave the user inspiration to write a message I think it's nicer to keep that on the message creation page since it is free writing. Vast, lost message, long distance communication, strangers"

"One might assume that such a momentous occasion would call for an austere and inspiring message. I hope to subvert this expectation. Fuck humanity, fuck auterity. Absurdism is the mode of the futurepast!"

Test 3:

"No errors encountered, and I like how the random name generator produces random names related to either the user or someone lost."

"A small thing is the subheader in red isn't the same on both pages. The only error I noticed is that the random is selecting the same recipient that was already selected. You can also submit nothing and the message is sent (what should be required of a given message?)"

"CSS was a bit rough, but I was able to stomach my bile until I finished. I shall be forwarding you an invoice for damages received. Besides that, no! I love the project :)"

Further Comments:

"Nice prototype, the only thing I'd suggest is giving that pay-off of seeing your impact on the site even if you just flash up a preview of the message and say that it's been that would be enough. Also, I think It would be even better with more visuals or other things you put on the site that convey the narrative you set up. Good work!"

Conclusion:

I feel as though the user testing went well, and solidified some thoughts I was having about the project, especially regarding theme. The message in a bottle has legs, now it needs more. One idea that I hadn't considered, letting the user see their sent message in some way, seems like it could be a valuable addition to provide the user more feedback. Given that idea came from the further comments field I may encourage responses there more in any similar tests for future projects.

It's nice to see some concepts I wanted to evoke with the project were expressed by testers, like the uncertainty of the message, although I wonder if the tangibility of the project could be made a little more clear, connecting it to the physical, real world. "time capsule" as a keyword is something that I had in mind from the beginning and is very situated, so it may be possible to emphasize that aspect. It's also very clear that the style of the page is a blank slate at best as it stands in the prototype, which gives me an opportunity when designing that to make the project more distinct.

Overall, the user testing was valuable and gave me a good sense of how the concept feels to people.

Thank you to each of the testers!