

Jordyn Smith

HCI 460

Prof....

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A Heuristic Evaluation of NYT Cooking

For this heuristic evaluation, I will be evaluating the [NYT Cooking](#) website. It is a recipe finder consisting of mostly moderate to expert level recipes developed by writers and collaborators of the New York Times. Users can search for recipes and guides by searching keywords or categories (Ex. breakfast), add food items to a virtual grocery list for recipes they plan to cook, and bookmark recipes to review later. On their front page, the site includes featured recipes and curated lists to inspire. Additionally, users can view and adjust their account details such as login and subscription information.

Accessing these features requires a monthly subscription. As such, it's likely users are adults with moderate to expert cooking abilities who'd be willing to pay for the subscription. Although there are recipes for novices and even kids, neither are likely to pay for the subscription themselves while they are still learning. Users would only need basic computer knowledge to navigate the site.

For this evaluation, I will be sole inspector. Although I have limited user testing experience, I'd consider myself an expert user of the site as I use it frequently. The evaluation should take about two hours and will be low task oriented. Rather, I will focus on the major features of the site and navigate through the pages.

The heuristics that I will use to perform the evaluation are the "10 Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design" determined by the Nielsen Norman group and are as follows:

1. **Visibility of the system status** – concerned with keeping the user informed about the state of the system
2. **Match between system and the real world** – concerned with using words and phrases that the user would be familiar with and following real-world conventions
3. **User control and freedom** – concerned with ensuring that users are provided with an "emergency exit" allowing them to abort unwanted actions in a reasonable amount of time/steps
4. **Consistency and standards** – concerned with following platform and industry standards
5. **Error prevention** – concerned with helping users avoid errors proactively by removing conditions that would allow them to make mistakes or confirm their choices before continuing with an action
6. **Recognition rather than recall** – concerned with allowing users to recognize the correct actions to take rather than remembering them by making relevant elements visible or easily retrievable
7. **Flexibility and efficiency of use** – concerned with making the system easier to use for more expert users with hidden shortcuts that can be learned over time
8. **Aesthetic and minimalist design** – concerned with ensuring irrelevant or unneeded information is removed from the interface

9. **Help users recognize, diagnose and recover from errors** – concerned with providing easy-to-understand error messages that state the problem and offer a solution in a clear, concise manner
10. **Help and documentation** – concerned with providing relevant documentation to assist users in completing their tasks.

Finally, each heuristic will be based on a severity scale of 0-4, 0 being of no severity/does not violate and 4 being of high severity. The severity of the heuristic is determined by the degree to which the problem impacts users, the frequency it occurs, and the persistence of the problem. See the table below for details of the evaluation and appendix for a few corresponding screenshot examples.

Page 0: Site Wide

Issue	Heuristic	Severity
Hovering over elements throughout the site causes the element to change visually in some way (embolden, change color, highlight, etc)	H1	0
The place for users to store saved recipes is called a “Recipe Box”	H2	0
The search bar in the header is sticky and scrolls with the user for easy access	H2	0
Clicking the search bar causes it to expand	H1	0
Total		0

Page 1: Navigation Header

Issue	Heuristic	Severity
An error message was shown when trying to remove a recipe from the grocery list failed but it was shown behind the opened modal so it's hard to see and doesn't offer any solutions	H9	4
The place for users to store saved recipes is called a “Recipe Box”	H2	0
The search bar in the header is sticky and scrolls with the user for easy access	H2	0

Clicking search bar causes it to expand	H1	0
The settings menu is indicated by a gear	H4	0
Total		4

Page 2: Home Page

Issue	Heuristic	Severity
The recipe of the week uses icons of popular social media platforms to indicate to users that they can share to that platform	H2	0
If the user has saved the recipe of the week to their recipe box from the home page and tries to remove it from the recipe box via the same button on the home page, they are given a confirmation dialogue before it is removed (<i>See 2.2 in appendix</i>)	H3	0
The above is not applied to all recipes, only the recipe of the week	H4	3
The platform options presented on the Recipe of the Week share button are not that same as those presented in the detailed view of a recipe (see 2.4 in appendix)	H4	2
Total		5

Page 3: Search Results

Issue	Heuristic	Severity
Users can refine their search using the provided filters	H7	0
Meal and diet types listed use common names like “breakfast, dinner, dairy-free, vegan, etc”	H2	0
Checking a filter item shows the check, adds the filter keyword to the top of the search results, and refreshes the search	H1	0

The searched keyword is displayed at the top of the search results list	H1	0
User can remove filters either by checking the from the list on the left of or clicking the filter item at the top of the search results	H3, H5	0
Recipes that have already been saved in the Recipe Box, show its bookmark icon filled in to indicate its status (see 3.6 in appendix)	H1	0
Recipes can be saved to/removed from the recipe box directly from the search results without needing to open the recipe	H7	0
Search results have a separate section for matched items from the recipe box as well as the entire site (see 3.8 in appendix)	H6, H7	0
Not every result contains all the keywords searched for, but there's no indicator that shows what keyword or filters each result matched on	H1	2
Total		2

Page 4: Recipe Detail

Issue	Heuristic	Severity
A dialogue explaining what the “Give” button is and how to use it appears when first opening a recipe	H10	0
Clicking the “share” and “give” button yields the same result: presents a list of platforms to which the user can share the recipe. The difference is the give button has a little explanatory text showing how many recipes the user has left to gift to other	H7	1

users who don't have a subscription. It feels redundant		
Presented with a block of anecdotal text and images before getting to the recipe with no option to hide	H8	1
The picture used to showcase the recipe is the same seen in the search results thumbnail	H4	0
The icon used to save a recipe to the recipe box (bookmark) is the same as that of the Search Results page and it's state (filled-in or empty) is consistent between both pages	H1, H4	0
When saving a recipe, user can add it directly to sub-folder of the recipe box using the hamburger menu that appears after saving without having to go to the recipe box (see 4.6 in appendix)	H7	0
User loses what they searched for (keywords, filters, etc) after opening a recipe and no recent search history is made available when searching again	H6	3
Clicking "Read...community notes" scrolls users directly to notes, bypassing the recipe	H7	0
An "Add to Your Grocery List" button adds all the ingredients of the recipe to the user's grocery list all at once	H7	0
Comments made by other users regarding recipes are meant to give details on how well the recipe is and what tweaks can be made. As such, they're called notes	H2	0
The notes text box has a prompt to help the user before they begin writing	H10	0
Users can back out of writing a note by resetting the form before submitting	H5	0

If the notes window doesn't have focus when user tries to submit an empty note, they are not warned that it's empty and no status is given if the submission went through or not	H1, H9	3
If the notes text box has focus and the user tries to submit an empty note, they are warned that the form is empty and needs to be filled in before submitting (see 4.14 in appendix)	H1, H2	0 (conditional, see above)
Once a note is submitted users cannot remove it, even if it's private	H3	3
No confirmation is given before a note is submitted	H3	3
When browsing other user's notes, users are presented with those considered "most helpful" first	H7	0
Users cannot undo their upvote on a note	H3	2
Users can clear out their star rating of a recipe after setting it	H3	0
Star ratings of recipe is represented by stars and is consistent with other rating systems	H2, H4	0
Users can uncheck the "Mark as Cooked" button if clicked by mistake	H3	0
The "Add to your Grocery List" button is unresponsive (possibly broken/bug)	H1	4
"Ingredient substitution" button navigates user to a different page and avoids adding further information to recipe page and can be referenced along side the recipe	H8, H6	0
Total		20

Issue	Heuristic	Severity
A load indicator is shown while loading recipe	H1	0
User is given a confirmation dialogue when trying to delete a folder(see 5.2 in appendix)	H3	0
Total		0

Page 6: Tools for Saving

Issue	Heuristic	Severity
The “Tools for Saving” link in page footer takes user to documentation	H10	0
A Chrome extension can be added for more advanced users from this page. This page can only be accessed from the footer that most novice users would not access	H7	0
Total		0

Page 7: Easy Weeknight Recipe

Issue	Heuristic	Severity
List of platforms available to share at top of the page is not consistent with the other share buttons found throughout the site	H4	2
Page includes curated sub-lists of recipes but isn't organized, filterable or searchable	H6	3
Total		5

Page 9: Footer

Issue	Heuristic	Severity
Quick category searches in the footer would be handy for novice users who could use some initial search suggestions, but they aren't likely to scroll this far down	H10	2

The “See our Features” link also takes users to a different documentation page separate from “Tools for Saving”. Although it does highlight site features it also contains videos on how to use said features aligning it to documentation, but its name would not suggest that, making it hard to find	H2, H6	1
Total		3

Grand Total		39
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From the evaluation, I was able to pull out 50 “issues”. Each of these could have had a max severity score of 4, meaning the worst possible score the site could have been given is 200. Based on my evaluation, the NYT Cooking website has a severity score of 39. The most occurring heuristic violation is H1: Visibility of the system status. Though its violations are few, the NYT Cooking website could improve its usability by ensuring that the state of the system is always indicated to users, especially after the user has executed some action. I also found consistency of system indicators and actions across the site to need some improvement, as well as a bug that resulted in a heuristic violation.

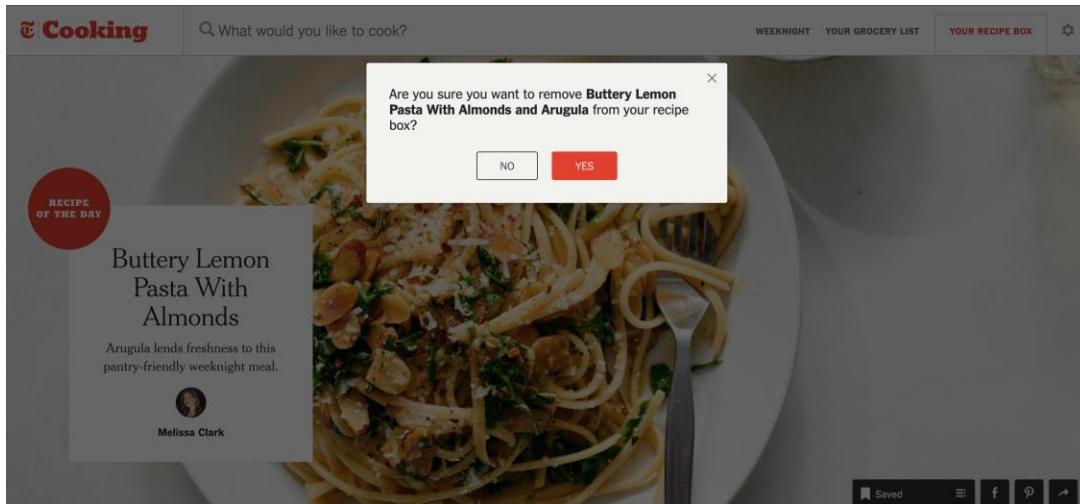
Overall, I find the NYT Cooking website to be very useable in terms of satisfying Nielsen Norman group’s 10 Usability Heuristic of User Interface design, with minor room for improvement.

Appendix

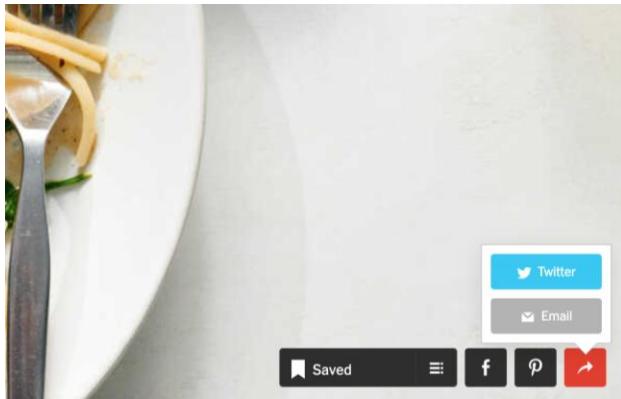
NYT Cooking website: <https://cooking.nytimes.com/>

Chosen Screenshot Examples

2.2. If the user has saved the recipe of the week to their recipe box from the home page and tries to remove it from the recipe box via the same button on the home page, they are given a confirmation dialogue before it is removed



2.4. The platform options presented on the Recipe of the Week share button are not that same as those presented in the detailed view of a recipe



Time 25 minutes
Rating 4 ★★★★☆ (518)
Notes [Read 88 community notes](#) ↴

[Saved](#) [Give](#) [Print](#) [Edit](#)

INGREDIENTS

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

- Fine salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 pound linguine
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 cup sliced almonds
- 2 fresh rosemary sprigs
- ¼ teaspoon red-pepper flakes

Share

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Brown butter, crunchy almonds and tangy lemon make this pantry-friendly pasta. The arugula lends a peppery kick to turning this into a quick one-pot meal. If you don't have arugula, double the arugula. (Just add a little more lemon juice.) You can use wild arugula or hand, spinach or baby kale as substitutes. Don't stint on the red-pepper flakes; they add a ton of flavor.

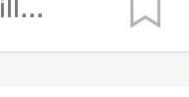
Featured in: Pull From Your Pantry for This Easy Lemon-Almond Linguine

PREPARATION

Step 1
Bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a boil. Add the linguine and cook until al dente, usually a minute or two less than the package instructions. Scoop out about 1½ cups of the pasta water and set it aside.

Step 2
While the pasta cooks, in a large skillet or sauté pan, heat the butter over medium heat. Cook, swirling occasionally, until the butter is golden-brown and the butter smells nutty and aromatic. Add the sliced almonds and cook until they are golden brown and fragrant. Remove from the heat.

3.6. Recipes that have already been saved in the Recipe Box, show the bookmark icon filled in to indicate its status

	15 minutes	1 hour 40
 Sandwich		
 Grilled Cheese Sandwich Julia Moskin		
 Bacon, Sandwich Ali Slagle		
 ...ill		15 minutes 
		20 minute

3.8. Search results have a separate section for matched items from the recipe box as well as the entire site

4.6. When saving a recipe, user can add it directly to a sub-folder of the recipe box using the hamburger menu that appears after saving without having to go to the recipe box

Time 45 minutes

Rating 5 ★★★★★ (3130)

Notes [Read 247 community notes](#)

Saved **Give** **Print**

Add to Folder	Create New
Cheesy Dinners	
Classic Dishes You Should Master...	
My Favorites	
Pantry Recipes	
Slow Cooker/Instant Pot	

Grilled cheese is a no-brainer dish... case, heaps of caramelized onions, and a good half-hour, so save time and effort (this recipe serves two). Rather than making a simple grilled cheese sandwich, you should add some flavor: the cheese will melt even faster if you add fragrant cheese to jalapeños, tangy mustard vinaigrette, or added to the onions and melted cheese. Making French onion...

PREPARATION

Step 1

In a large skillet over medium heat, melt 2 tablespoons butter...

4.14. If the notes text box has focus and user tries to submit an empty note, they are warned that the form is empty and needs to be filled in before submitting

COOKING NOTES

Add Note

Share your notes with other cooks or make a private note for yourself...

Enter a min. of 5 characters to add a note.

Your Name

Enter your name

Enter your name to add a note.

Public Private

[Cancel](#) [Submit](#)

5.2. User is given a confirmation dialogue when trying to delete a folder

