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HCI 460

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A Cognitive Walkthrough of NYT Cooking

For this cognitive walkthrough, 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, or vegan), 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.

The cognitive walkthrough will be performed individually and without further discussion. It should take 1-2 hours at most and will look at the following four tasks:

1. Find a dinner recipe that uses mushrooms and is vegetarian friendly.
2. Using the recipe found above, save it to a folder labelled "Vegetarian Dinners"
3. Using the recipe found above, give a rating and leave a private note.
4. Find the recipe above in the created folder of the recipe box

The above tasks were chosen because they use the main features of the site and are very common scenarios for most users. This cognitive walkthrough will help evaluate how easily the site can be learned. As such, the learnability of the site's main features should be readily discerned.

Each task will be broken down into intermediate level action steps. As the evaluator, I will attempt the action steps as if it were my first time using the website, asking four questions of each action along the way. These questions were set by Lewis & Reiman and are as follows:

1. Will users be trying to produce whatever effect the action has?
2. Will users see the control for the action?
3. Once users find the control, will they recognize that it produces the effect they want?
4. After the action is taken, will users understand the feedback they get, so they can go on to the next action with confidence?

How these questions are answered for each action (yes or no and why) will help determine how learnable that task is and ultimately how learnable the site is.

Results of the walkthrough can be found in the tables below and any relevant notes or pictures in the appendix.

Task #1: Find a dinner recipe that uses mushrooms and is vegetarian friendly.

Action	Will users be trying to produce whatever effect the action has?	Will users see the control for the action?	Once users find the control, will they recognize that it produces the effect they want?	After the action is taken, will users understand the feedback they get, so they can go on to the next action with confidence?
Type "mushrooms dinner" in the search bar	Yes – they want to find a recipe that is for dinner and contains mushrooms	Yes – the search bar prompts “What would you like to cook”	Yes – prior experience with other recipe finder applications or search applications have similar behavior for searching with keywords	Yes – the screen changes to display the initial search results
Check "vegetarian" under the Diets filter (optionally, check dinner under Meal Type Filter)	Yes – they want to filter their results to only show those that are vegetarian friendly	Yes – the filters are made visible alongside the search results on the left side of the screen. Theoretically, users should see them within a few seconds of the page loading	Yes – this section of the page is labelled “Filters” and the checkboxes affords its behavior and results. Search filters are common for recipe applications and other search applications.	Yes – the results will update based on their filter choices
Choose (click on) a recipe	Yes – they want to find a recipe	Yes – the results are recipes that match their search parameters	Yes – hovering over each recipe highlights it and changes the mouse icon to the clicking hand. Also clicking on the desired search result is common among search and other recipe	Yes – the recipe will open in a new page with all its details

			finder applications	
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Task #2: Using the recipe found above, save it to a new folder labelled “Vegetarian Dinners”

Action	Will users be trying to produce whatever effect the action has?	Will users see the control for the action?	Once users find the control, will they recognize that it produces the effect they want?	After the action is taken, will users understand the feedback they get, so they can go on to the next action with confidence?
<i>Scroll down a bit until the “save” button can be seen (depending on screen resolution that may be skipped)</i>	Yes – it will expose the button they need to complete the task	Yes – if there is overflow on the page, which will most likely be the case given the content amount, the scroll bar will be visible	Yes – the presence of the scroll bar and the visual of screens contents being cut off affords the ability to scroll in order to view the rest of the contents on the screen	Yes – the screen will reveal whatever content was hidden due to overflow
<i>Click the “save” button</i>	Yes – they want to save the recipe	Yes – there is a call to action by the save button	Yes – it is a button that looks like and has the affordance of a button. Its label signals to what it does	Yes – after clicking the button changes so that its bookmark icon is filled in and its text label is changed to “Saved”
<i>Click the hamburger menu that appears after saving</i>	Yes – the menu displays a list of folders created by the user	Yes – it is a hamburger menu button that is only visible after the recipe has been saved	No – while hamburger menus lend themselves to more options nothing other than curiosity would make the user click it. They have no reason to know that the options would include saving the recipe to a folder	Yes – a list of folders is displayed

<i>Click the “Create New” link</i>	Yes - this will allow the user to create a folder on the fly that the recipe will be saved to	Yes – it is the first option available in the list	Yes – it looks like a link and has the affordance of one. Its label signals to what it does	Yes – it will open a text field for the user to enter the folder name
<i>Create a “Vegetarian Dinners” folder</i>	Yes – it will create a new folder titled “Vegetarian Dinners” and add the recipe to it upon creation	Yes – the user was automatically set to focus on the text field	Yes – the text field prompts the user to enter a folder name and is accompanied by a button labelled “add” that isn’t enabled until a name is entered	Yes – the folder name will be added to the list of folder options and will have a checkmark on it to indicate that the recipe has been saved to it

Task #3 Using the recipe found above, give a rating and leave a private note

Action	Will users be trying to produce whatever effect the action has?	Will users see the control for the action?	Once users find the control, will they recognize that it produces the effect they want?	After the action is taken, will users understand the feedback they get, so they can go on to the next action with confidence?
<i>Click the link labeled “Read [#] community notes”</i>	Yes – it scrolls the user directly to the review and notes section of the page	Yes – the link is a part of the recipe summary labelled as Notes	No – while it looks like and has the affordance of one, and its label signals to what it does, that’s only part of the task. Nothing about it signals that the star rating will be in this section as well. Additionally, right above this link, is the recipe’s average community rating, but it is not editable itself by the user like in	Yes – it will navigate the user directly to the notes and rating section of the page

			many other recipe finder apps.	
<i>Choose a star rating</i>	Yes – they want to give their own rating	Yes – the section is visible on the left side of the screen and is well labelled with prompts	Yes – the stars are greyed out by default and become red when the user hovers over them signaling for them to click a start that represents their rating. This way of leaving a rating is common in other recipe apps	Yes – depending on the star clicked that number of stars are become red from their default gray
<i>Change the switch to “private”</i>	Yes – it will change the note type to private, meaning it will not be make publicly available to the community	Yes – the switch is located directly under the form	Yes – it is a standard switch control labeled Public/Private	Yes – the note type is shown as enabled when switched and by being highlighted and the form changes to ask for the relevant information depending on the note type
<i>Enter a note into the note text field</i>	Yes – the message entered into the text field will be the note that is saved with the recipe	Yes – it is directly to the right of the rating section where they were just focusing on and takes up a large portion of the screen	Yes – it is a standard text field that is labelled “Add Note” and prompts the user to write a message that can either be public or private	Yes – the text field will be filled in with their message
<i>Click submit</i>	Yes - this will submit the note, adding it to the user's personal notes list for the recipe	Yes – the button is positioned where most submit buttons are for internet forms: bottom left. It is expected	Yes – it's a standard button labeled “submit”	Yes – the form resets, and below the form the count of private notes is increased by one

Task #4 Find the recipe above in the created folder of the recipe box

Action	Will users be trying to produce whatever effect the action has?	Will users see the control for the action?	Once users find the control, will they recognize that it produces the effect they want?	After the action is taken, will users understand the feedback they get, so they can go on to the next action with confidence?
<i>Click "Recipe Box" at the top of the screen</i>	Yes – it is a navigation button that will take the user to the recipe box page	Yes – the recipe box would reasonably be found in a different page from the recipe, and the button can be found in the navigation header that follows the users as they scroll through the page	Yes – it's a standard link that is stylized as a tab of the site	Yes – the page changes to the recipe box
<i>Find and click on the "Vegetarian Dinners" folder in the side menu</i>	Yes – the folders are listed in the side menu	Yes – because this is the user's first saved recipe, the folder list should be readily visible in the menu without needing to scroll at all. This side menu is also visible by default on the left side of the page	Yes – it is single level list on the side of the page labelled "Your Folders". The folders in the list maintain the same name as when created in the steps above. Additionally, the folder name emboldens when hovered over and the mouse becomes a clicking hand signaling that it should be clicked on	Yes – the page filters out all the saved recipes to only those saved into the folder
<i>Find and click on the saved recipe</i>	Yes - they want to open the recipe they saved to the folder	Yes – the recipes saved to the folder are displayed similarly to the those	Yes – it's is the same recipe button seen in task #1 above ad behaves the same	Yes – it will open the recipe details in a new page as seen in task #1

	found in the search results in task #1 above	way, lending itself to be clicked	
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From the tables above, the tasks are mostly learnable although some recommendations for improvement could be made, specifically in task #2 and #3. In task #2, the purpose of the hamburger menu attached to the save button could be made clearer. Likewise, it needs to be made more apparent that the user can rate the recipe in the same place that they can write notes in task #3. These action step failures, however, seem minor when determining their impact to the user. In both cases, the user may complete the task slightly slower than would be ideal but will improve their speed over time once they understand the quirks.

Thus, from this cognitive walkthrough, I have determined that the main features of the NYT Cooking web site are highly learnable.

Appendix

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

No screenshots were captured for this walkthrough.