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HCI 460

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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 |
|-------------|--|----|

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.

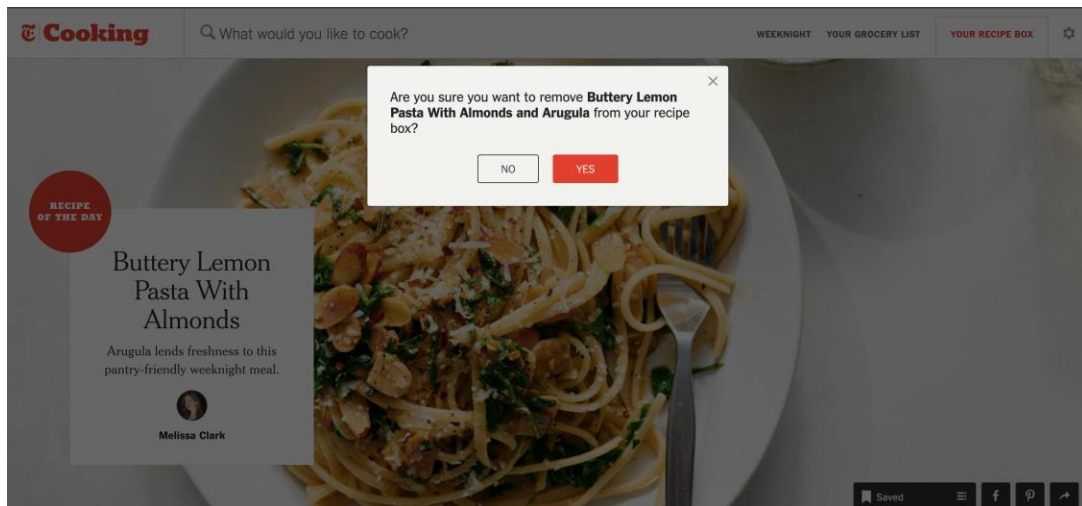


## Appendix

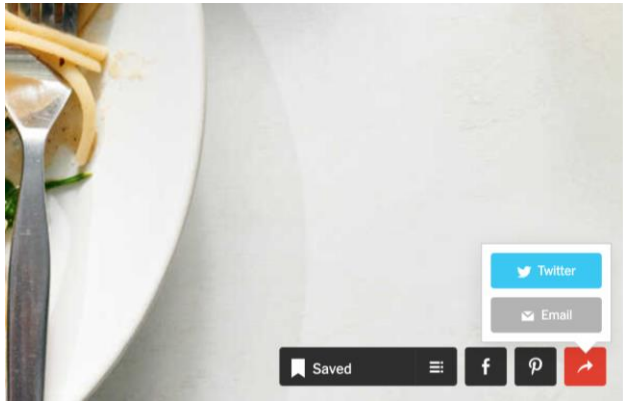
NYT Cooking website: <https://cooking.nytimes.com/>

### 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](#) ↕

**Share**

- Copy link
- Email
- Pinterest
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Whatsapp
- Reddit

**INGREDIENTS**

**Yield: 4 to 6 servings**

Fine salt and pepper

1 pound linguine

6 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 cup sliced almonds

2 fresh rosemary sprigs

¼ teaspoon red-pepper flakes

Brown butter, crunchy almonds and tangy lemon zest make this pantry-friendly pasta. The arugula lends a peppery kick, turning this into a quick one-pot meal. If you don't have wild arugula on hand, spinach or baby kale are substitutes. Don't stint on the red-pepper flakes for extra flavor.

**Featured in:** [Pull From Your Pantry for This Easy Lemon Pasta](#)

**PREPARATION**








**Step 1**

Bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a boil. Cook the pasta 1 minute shy of being al dente, usually a minute. Drain the pasta, reserving 1 cup of the cooking liquid. Scoop out about 1½ cups of the pasta.

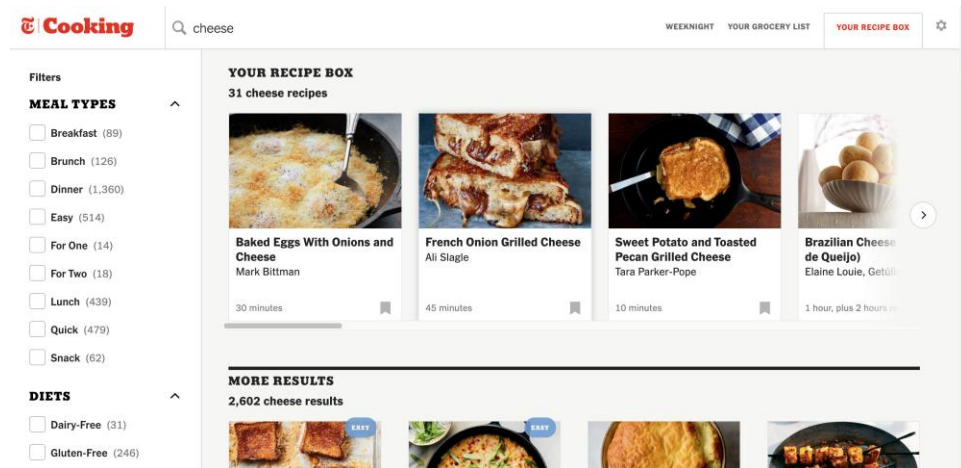
**Step 2**

While the pasta cooks, in a large skillet or Dutch oven, heat the butter over medium heat. Cook, swirling occasionally, until the butter is golden-brown and the butter smells nutty and fragrant.

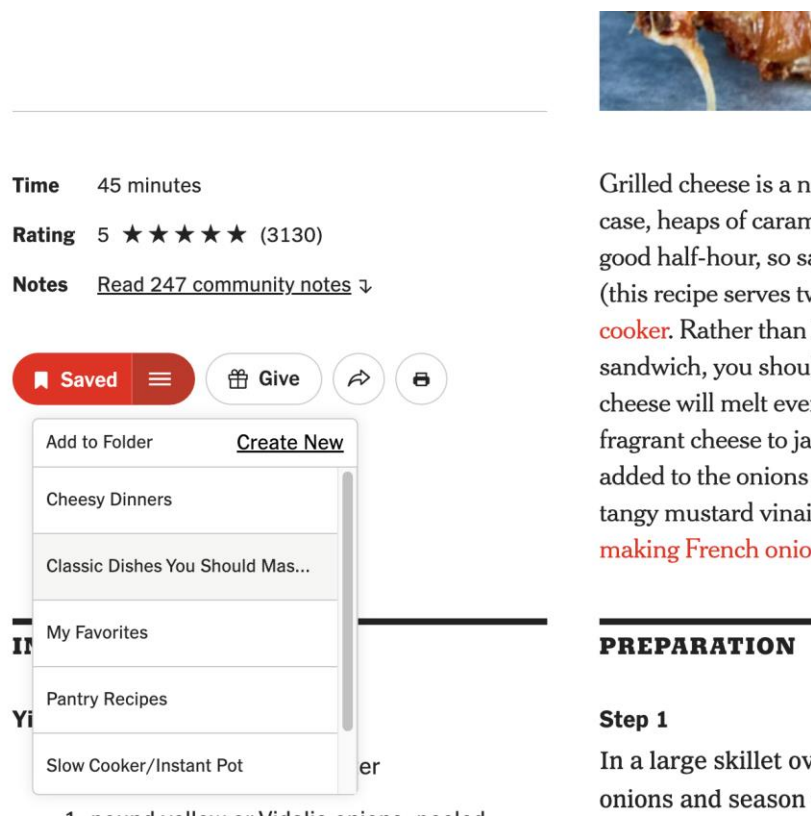
3.6. Recipes that have already been saved in the Recipe Box, show the bookmark icon filled in to indicate its status

|  |  |   |           |
|--|--|---|-----------|
|           | 15 minutes   |    | 1 hour 40 |
|           |              |  |           |
| <b>Sandwich</b>  | <b>Grilled Cheese Sandwich</b><br>Julia Moskin   | <b>Bacon, Egg, and Cheese Sandwich</b><br>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



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

