

OVERVIEW:

In this project, we worked with James Madison University's library to run a usability test and assess the usability of their eBook resources. We wanted to see what preferences the students held and how they interacted with the different interfaces that James Madison University provided for them.

In order to do this, we had five students perform a variety of tasks in three separate eBook platforms. Prior to this, I evaluated the eBook platforms on my own according to Nielsen's heuristics and Peter Morville's Honeycomb heuristics.

PERSONAS:

When evaluating what persona would be appropriate for this research, we decided on a student who is rather new to JMU (either a freshman or sophomore) and has already found a couple organizations that they're invested in on campus, which take up a significant portion of their time and emotional commitment. They are a good student who has always considered themselves smart, they've maintained a GPA of 3.5 or higher and have chosen a major with a big research and/or writing commitment.

They are interested in checking out all of their resources – they've been likely to use google before but want to know the resources available through the school. They're confident in learning how to use them through browsing and they're confident that they can contact people for help if they can't find something on their own.

EVALUATION/METHODOLOGY:

Our group chose to bring in Nielsen's and Peter Morville's honeycomb heuristics for design to evaluate the library's e-book resources.

We decided to code our findings with 0 meaning 'needs improvement', 1 meaning 'effective', and 2 meaning 'exemplary'. Below are my findings.

NIELSEN'S HEURISTICS:

Visibility of System Status Ranking	1	It is always fairly clear where you are on JMU's library website and it always opens the e-books in a new tab, so that you do not lose where you were before going to the separate site of the e-book providers. This varies for each e-book provider, but most of them do an okay job at showing you where you are on their website.
Match between system and real-world ranking	2	The main website and most of the e-book websites use direct and clear language to label the parts of their pages (like download, read, borrow, get JMU access). Most of the e-book websites also model real world concepts in how they present their e-books, like having pages that you can turn.
User control and freedom ranking	2	While the user control differs between different e-book sites, the process of getting to the e-books has good user control, as it has clear exit and backspace buttons, and the websites open in a new tab so that you do not leave the library's website irreversibly.
Consistency and standard ranking	1	Navigating the website is consistent with what I expect from navigating similar websites in the past, but when you go to the actual e-books, you are taken to entirely new sites that you then must learn how to use, and they are not all easy to navigate.
Error prevention	2	There was not much opportunity for error during the time I was navigating the site.
Recognition rather than recall ranking	2	Everything is clearly labelled in such a way that you can find your way through the website through the labels and not have to rely on your memory – this is, of course, also hard to rank consistently between individual e-book sites, but the process of getting to them is intuitive.
Flexibility and efficiency of use ranking	1	While the site and the process of accessing e-books is fairly intuitive and efficient, it is not a very flexible process – so, if you don't get the process immediately, there are not multiple ways that you could figure out what you're doing.
Aesthetic and minimal design ranking	1	This was hard to rank consistently because so many of the e-book websites have vastly different designs. Some of them are very appealing to the eye and some of them are overcrowded and overwhelming with jarring color contrasts. I will try to figure out which ones are which.

MORVILLE'S HONEYCOMB:

Usable	1	This was also hard to rank consistently, as you are consistently redirected to several other sites to view the e-books, but both the separate e-book websites and the main website have some usability concerns – on the main library website, it is very hard to find what you need unless you know <i>exactly</i> what you are looking for. On the individual sites, it varies, but most concerns are convenience and preference based (such as only being able to download a chapter of a book at a time). Learning a new interface for every e-book provider also makes it difficult for users to be able to easily use the library's web resources.
Useful	2	The choices and diversity of books available through all the separate websites create an extremely useful catalogue, depending on your purposes of perusing.
Desirable	2	In my opinion, the choices of books are desirable, but it really depends on your purpose. In the case of our persona, many of the choices would be desirable since they would be using it primarily to write papers, but many of the choices are unlikely to be read outside of that. However, the purpose of a campus library lines up with that.
Valuable	2	There is a plethora of diverse e-books available in tons of different subjects.
Findable	1	Finding e-book resources is easy if you know exactly what you are looking for (like a specific book or concept) and search for it directly, but it is hard to find things to peruse or just look through each e-book provider. It is also hard if you are just looking for books <i>about</i> a specific concept and are not looking for a specific book.
Credible	2	All of the e-book resources available are from credible sources.
Accessible	1	While it was easy to access e-books through the search function, other information is buried under several submenus and pages that are not clearly labelled.

Conclusion: