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# STC Student Chapter Website User Test

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## Executive Summary

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is a national organization for technical communicators. The recently restarted STC student chapter at Iowa State University has begun meeting again after Covid, but lacks resources for recruitment.

Therefore, the Vice President of STC designed a new chapter website and partnered with a usability team to test the usability of the site draft. On November 14 of 2022, the team tested the site with four students and young professionals in the Durham User Experience Lab in Durham Hall on Iowa State's campus.

The testing used a pre-survey to identify participant demographics and knowledge, then asked users to complete eight tasks on the website. Finally, users answered several more questions in a post-survey to assess opinions on successes and areas for improvement.

During testing, users either partially or fully completed every task, with only 3/24 tasks being partially completed. After analyzing the test results, tasks, and user feedback, the administrator identified 5 specific areas of improvement for the next round of design:

- Break out the FAQs from the "About" page and create a separate FAQ page.
- Create a "Join" page where visitors can be added to the email list or officially join through the Student Organization site.
- Add location information to the calendar events and "Meetings" page.
- Add member testimonials to the "About Us" page.
- Add the social media pages (Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn) to the top menu bar.

This document contains the details on the project, methodology, tasks, results, and recommendations for further developing and improving the usability of the website for the Iowa State chapter of STC.

## Introduction

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is a national organization with thousands of professional and student members. The recently restarted STC student chapter at Iowa State University has already begun meeting and reaching students, but a website is a necessary resource for building the club and retaining members.

As the website for this new chapter is being developed, a usability team conducted four tests on the website draft for the Iowa State STC Chapter:

[snm.engl.iastate.edu/smsmeenk](http://snm.engl.iastate.edu/smsmeenk).

The tests used four students to complete tasks and answer questions aimed at better understanding the organization of the website, its flaws, and how its design could be improved as the STC club at Iowa State University continues recruiting and building a community of Technical Communication students.

## Stakeholders

### STC Officers

There are currently four officers of the STC club: Sydney Peterson (President), Sadie Smeenck (Vice President), Isabella Babcock (Treasurer) and Makenzie Van Maanen (Secretary). Sadie is the officer in charge of redesigning the website, and all others will contribute photos and meeting information and approve the final design. Future officers are in charge of updating the website and its content. Every event that the club hosts provides photos and content for the website.

### STC Advisors

The two advisors for the club are Dr. Charles Kostelnick and Dr. Geoffrey Sauer, both professors within the Technical Communication department at Iowa State. Dr. Kostelnick is knowledgeable in document design and has ideas for student engagement but has no experience personally building websites. Dr. Sauer is highly proficient in web technology and teaches the web development classes. He is assisting in the development of the new website by offering advice and technology assistance.

## Methodology

### Test Locations

Testing was conducted on November 14 in the Durham User Experience Lab (DUX), which is located in the Durham Center (613 Morrill Road, Ames IA) on the campus of Iowa State University. The DUX lab has multi-camera and screen recording on a Windows desktop computer, a one way mirror for observation, and a seat for a test administrator in the room with the participant(s).

All tests were conducted in the test room, which contained only the participant and the test administrator. The observer(s) sat behind the one-way mirror to watch over the recording. The observers and participants did not interact during the test.

## Participants

The tests were conducted using four participants, all students aged 20 to 22 years. Before completing the tests, each participant answered several questions about demographics and self-identified levels of knowledge or proficiency (1 = no knowledge or proficiency, 5 = extensive knowledge or proficiency).

Age	
20	1
21	1
22	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>

STC Involvement	
Yes ISU	1
No ISU	3
Yes National	0
No National	4

STC Knowledge	
1-2.4	3
2.5-3.9	1
4-5.0	0
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>1.8</b>

Gender	
Male	2
Female	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>

Internet Proficiency	
1-2.4	0
2.5-3.9	0
4-5.0	4
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>4.5</b>

Web Design Knowledge	
1-2.4	3
2.5-3.9	0
4-5.0	1
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>2.7</b>

Because the site is being developed for the Iowa State chapter, users were asked whether they had ever attended an Iowa State STC meeting and whether they were members of the national STC. None were national members, and only one of the four had attended a meeting. Two of the participants are Technical Communication majors and the other two participants have majors in STEM.

All participants rated themselves very highly in internet proficiency with either a 4 or a 5. They had minimal knowledge of STC and only moderate knowledge of web design.

## Sessions

From start to finish, test sessions took between 15 and 25 minutes and were recorded in their entirety.

As participants arrived at the testing locations, they were welcomed in and seated at the test computer by the test administrator. That administrator was an individual from the usability team who had not developed the website but was familiar with the processes. The website developer acted as an observer by waiting and running the recording software in the observation room.

Before beginning testing, the test administrator read aloud a script (**Appendix A**) explaining the purpose of the test and details for how to proceed. Users were also asked to sign a release form giving permission to be recorded (**Appendix C**).

After all permissions had been obtained and the test was explained, the administrator asked users a few preliminary questions (**Appendix B**) to how site user demographics might impact interactions with the website.

Users were then asked to complete eight tasks on the STC student chapter website.

After the test, the users were asked six more questions to explain their preferences and impressions of the website (**Appendix B**). Finally, the administrator left the room to speak briefly with the observer(s) and ask if there were any follow-up questions for the participant. If there were not, the participant was thanked and released to the lobby for refreshments as a thank you for participating.

## Tasks

As part of the user test, participants were asked to complete eight tasks without using the search function. Only one task required the user to follow a link away from the STC site. Below the eight tasks are listed in the order in which users completed them:

**Task 1:** Scroll around the home page for a minute, but don't click any buttons. What strikes you about this home page? What is your first impression?

**Task 2:** Imagine that you were talking with your classmate Isabella, and she told you she got elected as an officer, but you've forgotten what role she had. Find out what role Isabella has for STC. (*Answer: Treasurer. Found on the "Officers" page in the main menu.*)

**Task 3:** Return to the home page.

**Task 4:** You heard from another classmate that STC just had an Instagram account created. Find the STC Instagram page. (Note: Ask the user to return to the home page after completing this task.) (*Answer: the link to the Instagram can be found in an icon in the site footer or on the "Connect" page under the "Networking" menu heading.*)

**Task 5:** Imagine that you just heard about STC from one of your professors, and you're interested in attending a meeting. What is the next event and when is it held? (*Answer: an STC study session at 7 pm on November 15 on the "Calendar" page under the "Meetings" menu heading.*)

**Task 6:** Now you are interested in joining the club, but you aren't sure what the requirements are. Do you need to be a member of the national STC to join the chapter? (*Answer: No! Questions about membership are in the accordion question section at the bottom of the primary "About" or "About Us" page.*)

**Task 7:** Now imagine you are a full member, and you missed one of the last meetings. You are hoping to watch Hannah Monk's talk on her career in user research. Find that recording. (Answer: On the "Recordings" page under the "Meetings" menu heading.)

**Task 8:** Imagine that you are a senior trying to figure out what you want to do when you graduate, so you're hoping to hear about what other technical communication graduates have done for their careers. How might you find that information? (Answer: Information on graduates can be found in profiles on the "Alumni" page under the "Networking" menu heading.)

## Results

### Task Completion

All but three of the tasks had a 100% completion rate, and those few were still partially completed. Because **Task 1** was only a homepage assessment and not a specific request, it is not included in the time or completion tables.

	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8
Participant 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	⦿
Participant 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 4	✓	✓	✓	⦿	⦿	✓	✓
	✓ : Task Completed		⦿ : Task Partially Completed				

### Task Times

The task times were also recorded and shown here. By far the fastest and most consistent task was **Task 3**, which asked users to return to the homepage.

	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8
Participant 1	0:13	0:02	0:15*	0:11	0:32	0:14	0:21
Participant 2	0:08	0:03	0:30	0:08	1:30	0:12	0:11
Participant 3	0:09	0:02	0:07	0:27*	1:55	0:08	0:16
Participant 4	0:15	0:02	0:09	0:18	0:21	0:06	0:18
Average Time	0:11	0:02	0:15	0:50	1:05	0:10	0:17

Participant 1 **Task 4** had an adjusted time because of site function difficulties. Participant 3 **Task 5** was not adjusted but may be slightly less because of button malfunctions.

## Task Notes

While some tasks went very smoothly, others had unexpected twists or difficulties.

**Task 2** – None of the participants had any trouble finding the “Officers” page and Isabella’s profile. Most also pointed out Isabella’s year and major in addition to her title.

**Task 3** – Every participant used the “Home” button in the menu bar to go home, and it took no user longer than three seconds.

**Task 4** – During the first test, the usability team discovered through trial and error that the Instagram button on the “Connect” page did not work. However, the three following participants accessed the Instagram using the logo in the site footer, so the button malfunction did not impact any other tests.

**Task 5** – Although several participants were able to find the calendar, Participant 4 only partially answered the question by going to the general “Meetings” page to say that meetings were bi-weekly on Tuesdays. Three of the users who accessed the calendar specifically remarked that there was no location listed for the meeting and that it should be included in future event listings.

**Task 6** – All participants found the correct answer eventually, but some of them took far longer getting there. Several people just looked at the top question on the “About” page – which states that you do not need to be a technical communication member to join – and answered from that first before looking further and finding the correct question. Participant 3 initially tried to find membership requirements by looking in the constitution section, which linked to the constitution for the Texas Tech chapter as a temporary placeholder. They had to be directed to return to the Iowa State site, where they subsequently found the correct answer.

**Task 7** – Every participant went directly to the recordings page through the main menu, resulting in the shortest and most consistent time.

**Task 8** – Three of the users found the alumni profiles to read more about graduates on the STC site. Two went directly there and a third went through “Networking” to “Alumni.” However, Participant 1 went to the Technical Communication major site linked on “What is Technical Communication” and found the alumni videos at the bottom of that page instead of the alumni profiles under “Networking.”

## General User Commentary

The test administrator observed the participants as they navigated the site, noting comments they made while thinking aloud. Following the test, users were also asked to answer questions about their favorite and least favorite parts of the site. While not every suggestion is turned into a recommendation, comments on the content, style, and organization are invaluable in developing the new design.



**Participant 1** – According to Participant 1, everything was where they expected. The large photo on the home page made the group feel very welcoming. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = very difficult, 5 = very easy), they ranked the website a 4 for ease of finding information. The one additional comment concerned the meeting calendar and the lack of locations listed for the meetings, which they found confusing and concerning.

**Participant 2** – The one thing that Participant 2 reinforced repeatedly was their desire for the website to have a “Join” button. When they were looking for membership requirements in Task 6, they didn’t think there were any because there was no “Join” button. They also pointed out the difficulty of finding the Instagram because it wasn’t in the top bar, the diminished figure-ground contrast of the logos in the footer, and the missing meeting locations. Finally, they suggested that more testimonials from the officers or other members be added to the “Home” or “About” pages to give the site a more personal feel.

**Participant 3** – In one word, Participant 3 described the first impression as “welcoming.” Because the site is simple, includes a personable photo, and isn’t packed with information, it’s very approachable. However, they found the “About” page to be a bit difficult to navigate and agreed that it might be easier to have a separate FAQ page rather than question accordions in other places. Participant 3 also agreed that they would attend an STC meeting based solely on the website and the information presented there if the locations and other relevant details were included.

**Participant 4** – Participant 4 found the home page to be very striking with the large photo and text against the white background. They mentioned the Instagram and YouTube links when exploring the home page, but expressed uncertainty as to whether they were for STC specifically or Iowa State generally. One thing they saw as missing from the site was the fun personality and the discussion of social events. The club is not always lectures, so Participant 4 suggested adding a rotating bar of photos on the home page. They were also slightly confused by the “About” organization and confirmed a separate FAQ page would simplify the search for information.

## Recommendations

The content and photos of the website will continue to be updated in ways unrelated to feedback from participants.

Based on the testing and user feedback, 5 additional items or tasks have been identified as areas for improvement in the structure or design of the website.

Recommendation	Justification	Usability Impact
Break out the FAQs from the “About” page and create a separate FAQ page.	Although every participant found the membership requirement FAQs eventually, several users agreed that a specific FAQ page would reduce confusion and allow questions or information from multiple pages to be duplicated or combined in the same place.	High
Create a “Join” page where visitors can be added to the email list or officially join through the Student Organization site.	To Participant 2 in particular, the next steps for getting involved with the club were unclear. Do interested members need to officially join, or can you just show up? By creating a page with specific next steps, STC can welcome new members to join and streamline meeting or event communication.	High
Add location information to the calendar events and “Meetings” page.	Multiple participants were confused by the lack of location listing both in the calendar and on the “Meetings” page. That missing piece was brought up during multiple tests and post-surveys as critical to include.	Medium
Add member testimonials to the “About Us” page.	Participant 1 would not attend an STC meeting based solely on the current website because they did not see the value. Quotes from members can clearly highlight the club benefits for prospective attendees.	Medium
Add the social media pages (Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn) to the top menu bar.	Participant 2 was confused by the lack of social media in accessible places, and Participant 4 was unsure whether the social media in the footer was for STC specifically or for Iowa State generally. If those links are broken out into the top menu, site visitors can get connected in an easy and understandable way.	Low

## Conclusions

Conducting usability testing with four participants on the website for the ISU STC chapter uncovered several clarity and design issues with the site and highlighted areas for improvement in the next round of revisions. By simplifying FAQ, adding easy next steps, and displaying the experiences of real students, the ISU STC website can provide a positive and user-friendly experience to current and prospective members.

## Appendices

### Appendix A – Script for User Testing

#### Introduction

“Hello, participant! My name is Megan, and I'm going to be walking you through this session today. Before we begin, I have some information for you, and I'm going to read it to make sure that I cover everything.

You probably already have a good idea of why we asked you here, but let me go over it again briefly. We're asking people to try using a website for the Iowa State student chapter of the Society of Technical Communication so that we can see how it works and how we can continue to improve it. The session should take about half an hour.

I want to make it very clear that we're testing the site, not you. You can't do anything wrong here. Don't worry about making mistakes; it helps us to understand which areas we can work on improving. As you use the site, I'm going to ask you as much as possible to try to think out loud: to say what you're looking at, what you're trying to do, and what you're thinking. I might remind you to think out loud during the test. This will be a big help to us.

Also, please don't worry that you're going to hurt anyone's feelings. We're doing this to improve the site, so we need to hear your honest reactions.

If you have any questions as we go along, just ask them. I may not be able to answer them right away, since we're interested in how people do when they don't have someone sitting next to them to help. But if you still have any questions when we're done, I'll try to try to answer them then. If you need to take a break or want to end the test at any point and for any reason, just let me know.

You may have noticed the microphone and the cameras in this room. With your permission, we're going to record what happens on the screen and our conversation. The recording will only be used to help us figure out how to improve the site, and it won't be seen by anyone except the people working on this project. If you would, I'm going to ask you to sign a simple permission form for us. It just says that we have your permission to record you, and that the recording will only be seen by the people working on the project.

Do you have any questions so far?”

[Participants completed pre-test survey]

## Tasks

“Thanks for answering those questions! Now, I will ask you to complete some specific tasks so we can test how the website works. Since this is still in development, some photos or content may be stand-in. However, you should be able to find the information you need to complete each task. I will read each task aloud and give you a printed copy. Please complete each task without using the search function and wait until I have fully read the task to begin completing it. gain, please think aloud as you go since that will greatly help us understand your thought process.”

[Participants completed tasks]

## Follow-Up Survey

Thank you for completing those tasks. We will end this session with some questions to get your opinion of the website. Do you feel that you have seen enough of the website to give an opinion of it? If not, take a minute to explore any other pages you'd like.

[Participants completed post-test survey]

## Probing

Ok. Thank you for your feedback so far. If you will excuse me, I need to go check that our observer does not have any follow-up questions for you.

[Administrator left to check with the observer(s) and asked any follow-up questions]

## Wrapping Up

Thank you again for your help on this session. This test was helpful and what we needed. Do you have any questions for me now that the session is over? [Allow for questions.]

Again thank you for your help. We have cookies in the reception area if you would like some. This is the end of the session, and the recording will now be turned off. Have a great rest of your day!

[Participant exited the session]

## Appendix B – Survey Questions

### Pre-Test Survey Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your profession/occupation?
4. If you are a student, what is your major?
5. Have you ever attended an Iowa State STC meeting?
6. Are you a member of the national STC?
7. On a scale of 1 to 5, how proficient would you consider yourself to be in using the internet? (1 = no experience, 5 = highly proficient)
8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much knowledge do you think you have about the Society for Technical Communication? (1 = no experience, 5 = highly proficient)
9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much knowledge do you think you have about web design? (1 = no experience, 5 = highly proficient)

### Post-Test Survey Questions

1. What parts of the website did you like the most? Why?
2. What parts of the website did you use the least? Why?
3. What information seems like it is still missing from the website?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = so difficult, 5 = very easy), how difficult or easy would you say it was to find the information you were looking for?
5. Would you be interested in attending a meeting of the STC based only on this website?
6. Do you have any other questions for me?

## Appendix C – Permission Form

### Consent & Recording Release Form - Adult

I agree to participate in the study conducted and recorded by Sadie Smeenck and Megan Pezley for the purposes of a project for the class ENGL 505 at Iowa State University.

I understand and consent to the use and release of the recording by Sadie Smeenck, Megan Pezley, and the Iowa State Durham Usability Lab. I understand that the recording will capture audio and video and that the lab may also track my eye movement using Tobii. I understand that the information and recording is for research purposes only and that my name and image will not be used for any other purpose. I relinquish any rights to the recording and understand the recording may be copied and used by Sadie Smeenck and Megan Pezley without further permission.

I understand that participation in this usability study is voluntary and I agree to immediately raise any concerns or areas of discomfort during the session with the study administrator. I understand that I can stop the test at any time if I wish to do so.

Please sign below to indicate that you have read and you understand the information on this form and that any questions you might have about the session have been answered.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please print your name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please sign your name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you!**

We appreciate your participation.