

## [Website Usability Testing Guide](#)

Submitted by GravityWorks on Mon, 03/31/2025 - 11:58 AM



## **Website Usability Testing Guide**

This guide is designed to assist you and your program to understand the basics of usability and website usability testing. It is broken down into the following sections with subsections to provide a thorough understanding of the field.

[website usability testing guide](#)

[an example of a script for testing moderators to use in their tests](#)

[an example of a satisfaction survey to customize for your needs](#)

[a worksheet for you to plan your usability testing](#)

[a starting point to conduct your own heuristic evaluations](#)

[a list of remote testing resources with brief descriptions](#)

[a general checklist to start your usability testing](#)

### **1. Executive Summary**

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## **Why Test for Usability?**

Usability testing will save staff time, money and administrative overhead by defining what users need, how they find information and what information they are searching for. By listening to users, understanding how they interact with your site or tool, and responding to the needs users actually articulate programs can avoid spending unnecessary time and resources and better serve their users.

## **What to test for?**

Jackob Neilson defines usability simply as the “quality attribute that assesses how easy user interfaces are to use.” One way to measure a sites usability is to measure it against specific standards, such as Neilson’s five “quality components” of usability, which will be referenced throughout the guide. These include:

- Learnability
- Efficiency

- Memorability
- Errors
- Satisfaction

## When should I test for usability and who should be testers?

Testing groups of five users can identify 85% of the usability issues on a site. It is important to engage several testing groups throughout the process to ensure the most complete feedback, and to solicit feedback from current users, as well as groups you are targeting as future users.

## How do I test for Usability?

The basic process, as outlined in more depth in this guide includes:

### Create a testing script

The testing script articulates the purpose or goals of your site, the tasks your users perform to satisfy your site goals, and a set of scenarios in which your user would perform these tasks.

### Identify the metrics you will use

This allows you to measure how well the users performed the tasks from the scripts you provide. These metrics may include:

- Length of time it takes a user to complete a task
- How well individuals learn and navigate the site
- Errors users make while on the site.

## Determine the best test to capture this information

- Comparison testing compares two options for their strengths and weaknesses.
- A/B Testing tests for which option users prefer.
- Click testing and heat mapping will help you determine where your users click most

## Additional considerations

- Staff lead testing (obtaining targeted information from testers), vs monitor users as they navigate the site on their own (avoiding the risk of moderator bias).
- In person testing providing the most controlled environment vs remote testing allowing users the most flexibility.

## Compile testing results

This final step is where you establish a baseline, identify barriers to your users, and make data driven decisions regarding your site.

The balance of this guide will explore each of these aspects in greater depth, with special attention paid to ways of breaking this process down into manageable pieces.

## [2. What are Usability and Usability Testing](#)

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A website should be easy and intuitive to navigate for the website user. Jakob Nielsen defines usability as the “quality attribute that assesses how easy user interfaces are to use.” Although user’s opinion of a site can be helpful, usability refers specifically to how well people engage with a website. Nielsen develops five “quality components” that we will use throughout this guide as benchmarks for a usable site. These include:

- Learnability: How easy is it for users to accomplish basic tasks the first time on the site.
- Efficiency: Once users have learned the design, how quickly can they perform tasks?
- Memorability: How easily can return users reestablish proficiency?
- Errors: How many, severe and permanent are user error?
- Satisfaction: How pleasant is it to use the design?

Each of these components represent concrete methods to articulate the ways in which your site is, or can be usable, as well as benchmarks to measure your site's usability.

### [3. The Basics of Usability Testing](#)

Submitted by GravityWorks on Mon, 02/17/2025 - 7:14 PM

In this section, we will discuss the what, when and who of usability testing. what to test, when to conduct user testing, a variety of different types, and who to draw on as testers.

## **Exercise: Become the Tester**

Usability testing is readily understood by navigating a website as if you were the tester. Perform the exercise below, and answer the questions to get a sense of a simple usability test.

Goal: [Find information about hosting](#) an exhibit at the next Rudgewick County Show from [www.rudgewicksteamshow.co.uk](http://www.rudgewicksteamshow.co.uk) and answer the following sample questions:

- Were you able to find the correct page?
- Did it take longer than necessary?
- Would you return to this website?
- What are your first impressions?

Through this testing you can surface navigation complexity, user enjoyment of browsing the site and other issues. These findings are the foundation of the website's future version (iteration), which will be retested in a process of evaluating and responding to results called the iterative design process.

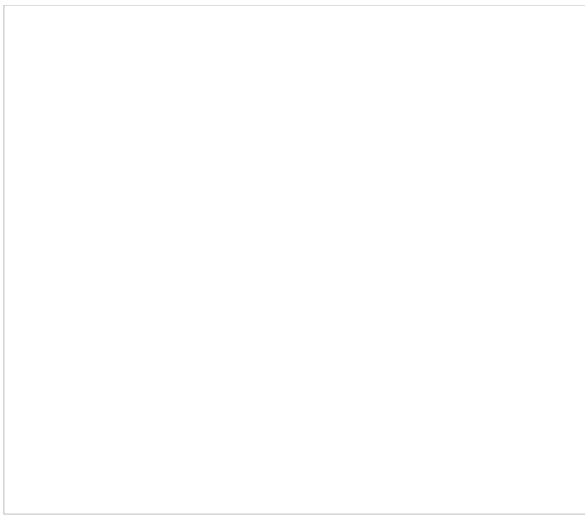
The iterative design process, at it's core, consists of:

1. Running usability tests;
2. Carefully analyzing the results;
3. Making necessary changes;
4. Repeating the process throughout the design or redesign process.

### [4. Why Conduct Usability Testing](#)

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While website usability testing is conducted for many reasons, primarily, it ensures that people can use your site. If they can't, they will find solutions elsewhere.



Usability testing can also help determine:

- The length of time a to complete a task compared with established benchmarks
- User satisfaction
- If users can navigate your website
- Potential problems with website functionalit
- Deciding if a design works
- If your website is accomplishing your organization's goals.

## [5. What to test](#)

Submitted by GravityWorks on Mon, 04/21/2025 - 11:50 AM

# Site goals, user tasks, testing scripts and metrics

When conceptualizing a website we rarely articulate what users must do, instead, we focus on what our site does.

Before testing, it is extremely important to articulate your sites' goals and the tasks users must perform to meet those goals. Jakob Nielsen's five quality components- learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors and satisfaction- can help frame your site goals and user tasks.

## Site Goals

To meet each goal, users may need to engage in different tasks, such as navigating different paths. By articulating your goals in concrete terms, you can focus your site's design and what to test.

Example Site Goals

- Receive donations and present mission
- Provide legal information
- Reach out to potential donors
- Pre-screen potential clients
- Provide contact information for your agency.

To help you articulate your site goals you can view this [Goals, Tasks & Script Worksheet](#)

## User Tasks

### User Tasks

Once you articulate your site's goals and the steps users must take to complete these goals, you must articulate specific questions or tasks. Frame your questions to ensure users can accomplish realistic tasks that reflect concrete goals.

Some questions that you could ask include:

- Can a first time user find my agency's mission?
- Can a return user remember how to find my agency's contact information?
- How much time does it take for a user to locate a resource about eviction?
- How many errors do users make when trying to locate the "contact us" feature?
- When users navigate to the wrong page, can they go on to find the information?
- Do users respond differently to a red vs blue navigation element?
- Do users enjoy interacting with the site?

Establishing the tasks users engages in can help create a focused, specific test yielding results you can readily implement. Often a user test will encompass more than one question, however the more specific the questions, even when combined into one test, the more effective the test will be.

To help you articulate user tasks there is a Goals, Tasks & Script Worksheet below

## Tester Scripts and Simple Tasks

### Tester Scripts and Simple Tasks

When evaluating your site with testers, there are two broad ways to obtain information. You may give your testers simple tasks to complete or you can use a script and offer your testers real-life scenarios in which they use your site to access information.

#### Tester Script

Context around tasks users should perform.  
You received a three-day notice of eviction and need information

#### Simple Task

Concrete instructions:  
Download eviction information Create an account

To help you create tester scripts as well as site tasks there is a Goals, Tasks & Script Worksheet below:

## Testing Metrics

### Testing Metrics

Once you have identified what you are testing, you must determine what metrics to collect. Your metrics will impact the type of test you conduct. Below are metrics you can collect, broken down by quality components which were introduced earlier.

#### Learnability:

How easily a user can accomplish a basic task the first time on the site.

Measure learnability by recording how quickly your testers learn to use your website. Monitor the clicks or amount of time it takes your users to accomplish given tasks. Typically, the first task should take the longest as the user adjusts to your website. Be sure that the tasks used to measure learnability take close to the same amount of time for the ideal user.

#### Memorability:

How easily can return users reestablish proficiency.

Measure memorability by testing a user on your website, and then testing them again after some time has passed. Can they complete the tasks quicker or with fewer clicks than their first attempt? You can also conduct post test surveys to ask users about your interface. For instance, ask them to identify your icons, and what those icons represent.

#### Efficiency:

How effectively your users interact with your website.

Measure efficiency by counting mouse clicks, mouse movements or times spent completing a task as recorded by a usability platform or program. The more mouse clicks/movements to complete the task, the less efficiently the user is interacting with a site. You can create a simple remote click test on sites such as UsabilityHub.com or in your analytics platforms to determine where people click when asked to find information.

## Errors:

How many, severe and permanent are user errors on the site.

Measure errors by the number of times a user navigates to the wrong page or chooses the wrong page when asked where information can be found. While this is not a 'fail' and often users will go on to successfully complete the task, the number of errors can highlight areas of improvement on your site.

There are several different types of errors to be mindful of:

1. Slips: When a user mistakenly presses the wrong key- reduce data entry to avoid these errors.
2. Mistakes: users enter incorrect information.
3. User Interface Problems: Users navigates to the wrong place to find information.
4. Scenario Errors: Errors in the testing script that wouldn't affect real users.

## Satisfaction:

How pleasant is it to use the design?

Measure quantitatively, as on a survey scale, or qualitatively, such as feedback from open ended questions to solicit feedback about how much the user enjoyed the experience.

Please see [Sample Satisfaction Survey](#)

[Goal, Task, & Script Worksheet](#)

## 6. When to Test

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# Beginning, Middle and End

Usability testing is a priority when launching a new project, and it is vital to test your interface at each level of the design process.

You should conduct user testing when:

1. Creating or redesigning a site;
2. Changing the goals of your site (i.e., adding donation capacity to your site);
3. Adding new content, tools, or functionality to your site;
4. Changing or adding navigation elements;
5. Conducting annual evaluations of your agency;

## 7. How to Test

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# Types of usability tests

Each type of usability test is best suited to answer a particular type of question. Articulating your testing question and knowing which test best responds to that question is key to your test's success. Although some distinctions below are artificial it is helpful to familiarize yourself with the various tests before creating your own.

### Some tips before you start:

1. Know and use the tools you have access to. For instance, Google Analytics has a 'In Page Analytics' feature, which provides a click map. If your site already uses Google Analytics, you may not need a separate program to create a click map. Similarly, if you need a survey of your users, and your agency already uses a survey tool, there is no need to use a new tool.

2. Keep all your usability documentation together and in one place. Because this is an iterative process, you will want to use your initial tests to inform any subsequent changes you make.

## Exploratory or Formative Usability Testing

**Scenario:** In the initial phases of development you want to judge users reactions to the design.

**What/Why:** Exploratory usability tests are done early in the design phase, often using paper prototypes\*. This type of test requires a lot of interaction between the moderators and the testers. It can help surface

- Users expectations of the site
- Users ability to distinguish between elements of each page
- User value of the functions the site presents

These tests typically yield information about user needs and enhancement ideas for the process and next iteration. Obtaining early testing results enables you to begin the design process fully informed with the exact needs of your users, saving your time, money and work throughout the process.

### Types of Questions/Prompts:

- Testers think aloud while looking at screenshots/prototype of the website.
- How would a tester conduct realistic tasks?
- To gauge user's understanding of the site, what assumptions do they have about the purpose/function of the site?
- Does anything confuse the tester?
- Additional features or enhancements- what do testers like/don't like?

\*Paper prototyping is a baseline prototype of the interface is given to the users, and they are able to change and make edits on the spot. It is often used in early stages because they are easy and cheap to make. <http://usabilitygeek.com/paper-prototyping-as-a-usability-testing-technique>

## Assessment Test

**Scenario:** You chose a design for your website and you've just implemented your first prototype, you want to know if it's working as planned.

**What/Why:** These tests are done early on or midway through your design after your early concepts are implemented. The assessment test helps you evaluate the effectiveness of your website. You may want to do several rounds as you make changes.

### Types of Questions/Prompts:

- Ask your user to complete a specific relevant task like complete a triage survey.
- Where would you go to make a donation?

In this part of the test, the moderator should try to stay out of the way and not interrupt the test taker.

## Validation Test or Verification

**Scenario:** You are about to launch your new website!

**What/Why:** Validation tests ensure your website meets certain standards. Set benchmarks for how long tasks should take and evaluate your users against these benchmarks. This quantitative data is measured and can help identify any problem areas.

### Types of Questions/Prompts:

- Create an account
- Complete pre-screening eligibility survey
- Navigate to a specific page
- Benchmark: 5 minutes

## A/B Testing or Comparison Testing

**Scenario:** You have a few options in design layout or navigation.

**What/Why:** When deciding on a unique, limited site decision (such as the color of a navigation element, or the wording of part of your site) A/B testing can be very instructive. This is also helpful in site redesigns when users can test your current site and compare it with a new version of the site. You can compare both sites through user feedback including strengths and weaknesses as well as navigation error rates and time to ultimately create the strongest site. This establishes the option that provides the better user experience and which enables users to complete tasks most efficiently.

**Types of Questions/Prompts:**

- Users complete concrete realistic tasks.
- Observe users engaging with each task measuring time it takes to complete each task
- Which option does the user prefer?

## Heuristic Evaluation

**Scenario:** You want to compare your website's interface against a set of widely accepted principles with a few people to assist.

**What/Why:** Heuristic evaluation involves a small set of evaluators examining an interface and judging its compliance with usability principles or "heuristics". Use a heuristic evaluation form to help you identify key problems (form attached). According to Nielsen, just 5 evaluators can detect 85% of errors with this method!

**Types of Questions/Prompts:**

- Create realistic tasks users can accomplish on your website
- Use the attached heuristic evaluation form to document each tester's experience.

\*Nielsen, Jakob. "10 Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design." 10 Heuristics for User Interface Design: Article by Jakob Nielsen. Nielsen Norman Group, 1 Jan. 1995. Web. 19 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics>>.

## Self Test and Self Audit

**Scenario:** You want to test your site's usability, but you have limited time and resources.

**What/Why:** A self-audit can help you find usability problems. By looking at your site objectively, using the Heuristic Evaluation form to find potential problems, writing questions and testing yourself you can easily surface issues that impact your site. See tech tips in rectangular boxes throughout this guide for additional resources.

**Types of Questions/Prompts:**

- How does the site look on mobile devices?
- Is it easy to find content on my site?
- How does it look to people with visual impairments?
- Is it screen reader accessible?
- How long does it take to complete x or y-task?

## 9. Outcomes of Your Test

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# Evaluation

After completing individual tests the next step is to compile and carefully examine the results. This includes the structured and unstructured feedback, results from remote testing platforms, and additional feedback. The results will help you move your project to the next stage. Some examples of issues you are looking for could include:

- Barriers to users completing the task/fulfilling the site goal
- Issues occurring multiple times within a user group
- Issues occurring multiple times across user groups
- Expressed preferences when conducting A/B testing

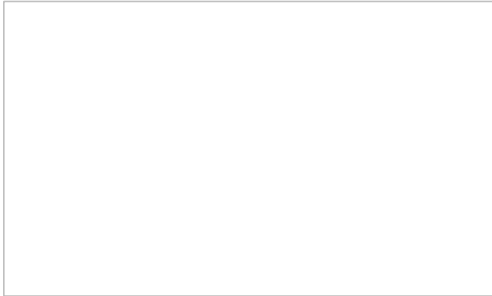


- Common user-characteristics for users who successfully completed a task
- Common user-characteristics for users who could not complete a task, or who had additional issues in completing a task.
- The amount of time it took users to complete tasks

From this information you can establish a baseline, begin to make educated and data driven decisions and compare the effectiveness of any future change.

## 8. Who to Test

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The idea of finding individual participants to test your site can be overwhelming and a stumbling block to routine user testing. However you do not need hundreds of testers to obtain good information.

The Nielsen Norman group indicates that 5 users can uncover 85% of the major usability issues, and 15 users can find 100%.\*

## How many testers will I need?

The same studies suggesting small testing groups also stresses the need to conduct several rounds of testing on your site.

If you are testing at several stages (i.e.: beginning and during your design process, and prior to launch) consider testing with multiple groups at each point.

With these small and agile groups, it is important to define your audience and find representative users. Most sites have several user types, such as clients, advocates, community members, and the press. Your user testing should reflect each of the user types accessing your site. If you do not know who is using your site, look at your analytics, or engage users from groups you want accessing your content.

\*Nielsen, Jakob. "Nielsen Norman Group." Why You Only Need to Test with 5 Users. Nielsen Norman Group, 19 Mar. 2000. Web. 19 Dec. 2014. <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/why-you-only-need-to-test-with-5-users>

## Mediated vs. Unmediated Testing

Below are some of the differences between mediated and unmediated user testing.

### Mediated

- Staff person walks the tester(s) through a series of tests and follows a script
- Script describes the test, handles user questions, and concludes the test
- Moderator says and acts exactly the same to avoid bias

### Unmediated

- Less structured allowing the user to act naturally with minimal input
- You may choose to record a user's screen or monitor their clicks to evaluate how they use the site
- You can follow-up with a debrief or focus group with a moderator

## **In Person Testing - Website Usability Testing Guide**

### **In-person testing**

In person testing allows you to see and interact with users in real time, with minimal barriers. If you choose to test your site with in-person testers (where you monitor and your testers share a physical space) there are a few options:

- Hallway testing: Engaging 5-6 randomly selected people to determine if there are issues so large untrained users cannot navigate through them. Because of this, users should not be familiar with your site.
- Focus groups: Engaging 5-6 participants to participate in a more formalized setting to conduct testing. Typically these users have more familiarity with your site, and you may conduct different focus groups with different users groups.

### **Where to Conduct the Test**

In-person user testing can be conducted anywhere comfortable to a user. Many agencies establish formal focus group sessions held in an office or a conference room. If you choose a formal setting consider factors such as the room configuration (i.e.:a classroom style, or circle/horseshoe). Just remember in-person testing does not have to be formal- you can engage clients in a waiting room with a staff person and a laptop, so long as you have a script.

## **Remote Testing - Website Usability Testing Guide**

### **Remote testing**

Remote testing allows you to conduct usability tests with the participants utilizing their own computers through online usability programs. Although these can be customized, overall the tests are between 15 and 30 minutes and contain 3-5 tasks per test. They can be moderated or unmoderated, depending on your needs and the platform.

Benefits of Remote Testing:

- Eliminates the need for physical space
- Encourages a larger more diverse group to engage
- Generally less-expensive than in-person testing
- Test can stay open longer.