

# Web Usability Guide

All you need to know about making your site more usable



The usability & accessibility specialists

Report written and researched by Webcredible © 2004-2007.



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## Usability – 4 basic principles

Web usability is about designing and structuring your website so site visitors complete your goals for them quickly and efficiently. A usable website can reap huge benefits on to your website and your business:

- Every £1 invested in improving your website's usability **returns £10 to £100**<sup>1</sup>
- A web usability redesign can **increase the sales/conversion rate by 100%**<sup>2</sup>

“

Make it as simple as it needs to be. But no simpler.

”

- Albert Einstein

### 1. Your website has to be easy to navigate

Users have gradually become **accustomed to particular layouts and phrases** on the Internet, for example:

- Logo is in the top-left corner and links back to the homepage
- The term 'About us' is used for organisation information
- Navigation is in the same place on each page and directly adjacent to the content
- Anything flashing or placed above the top logo is often an advertisement
- The term 'Shopping cart' or 'Shopping basket' is used for items you might wish to purchase

There are numerous other conventions like these that enhance your website's usability - can you think of some more?

Don't underestimate the **importance of these conventions** - as the Internet matures we're getting more and more used to things being a certain way. Break these conventions and you may be left with nothing but a website with poor usability and a lot of dissatisfied site visitors.

### 2. Pages must download quickly

<sup>1</sup> [www-3.ibm.com/ibm/easy/eou\\_ext.nsf/Publish/23/](http://www-3.ibm.com/ibm/easy/eou_ext.nsf/Publish/23/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.useit.com/alertbox/20030107.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20030107.html)

8.6 seconds is about the maximum time web users will wait for a page to download<sup>3</sup>. As of September 2006 just under one third of web users in the UK were connected to the Internet via dial-up connections<sup>4</sup> so it's essential for optimal usability that your website downloads quickly.

To speed up the download time of your website we recommend you read our article about how to speed up the download time of your web pages<sup>5</sup>.

### 3. Information should be easy to retrieve

We read web pages in a different manner to the way we read printed matter. We generally don't read pages word-for-word - instead we scan<sup>6</sup>. When we scan web pages certain items stand out:

- ▣ Headings
- ▣ Link text
- ▣ Bold text
- ▣ Bulleted lists

Did you notice that images were left out of that list? Contrary to the way in which we read printed matter, we see text before we see images<sup>7</sup> on the Internet. For optimal website usability, don't place important information in images as it might go unnoticed.

“

66% of all IT projects either fail or go over-budget because of their complexity.

IT complexity costs firms worldwide \$750 billion a year.

”

- The Economist  
(2004)

### 4. Restrictions mustn't be placed on users

Don't prevent your site visitors from navigating through the Internet in the way that they want to. For example:

---

<sup>3</sup> [websiteoptimisation.com](http://websiteoptimisation.com)

<sup>4</sup> [www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/intc0206.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/intc0206.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [www.webcredible.co.uk/speed](http://www.webcredible.co.uk/speed)

<sup>6</sup> [www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html)

<sup>7</sup> [www.useit.com/alertbox/20000514.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20000514.html)

- ▣ Every time **a link is opened in a new window** the back button is disabled. Approximately 60% of web users employ the back button as their primary means of navigation<sup>8</sup> so do be wary of forcing links to open in new windows.
- ▣ **Don't use frames** to structure your website. Frames can cause a number of usability problems, namely:
  - Disabling the back button (see above)
  - Bookmarking not possible
  - Impossible to e-mail the link to someone else
  - Problems with printing
  - Users feel trapped if external links open in the same window
  - Search engine optimisation issues

There are lots of other ways that websites can place restrictions on its users, ultimately damaging their usability - can you think of any more? Just think back to the last time a website really infuriated you - what annoying thing did it do to make you feel that way?

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<sup>8</sup> [www.stcsig.org/usability/newsletter/9807-webguide.html](http://www.stcsig.org/usability/newsletter/9807-webguide.html)

## Writing for the web – 8 guidelines

Writing for the web is totally different to writing for printed matter. We tend to **scan content on the web** hunting for the information we're after, as opposed to reading word-for-word. As a result, there are certain guidelines you should be sure to follow when writing copy for your website:

### 1. Use clear and simple language

Reading from computer screens is tiring for the eyes and about 25% slower than reading from printed matter<sup>9</sup>. As such, the easier the style of writing the easier it is for site visitors to absorb your words of wisdom.

Some **techniques** for using clear and simple language include:

- ❑ Avoid slang or jargon - Have your grandmother and ten year old nephew to read your site - if both can understand the page content you've done well!
- ❑ Use shorter words where possible - 'Begin' rather than 'commence', 'used to' rather than 'accustomed to' etc.
- ❑ Avoid complex sentence structures - Try to include just one idea or concept per sentence
- ❑ Use active ahead of passive words - 'We won the award' is shorter and easier to comprehend than, 'The award was won by us'

“  
77% of users return to content-driven sites because of ease-of-use.  
Only 22% return because the site belongs to a favourite brand.”

- Forrester Research (2001)

### 2. Limit each paragraph to one idea

If you assign just one idea to each paragraph site visitors can:

- ❑ Easily scan through the paragraph
- ❑ Get the general gist of what the paragraph is about
- ❑ Then move on to the next paragraph

<sup>9</sup> [www.useit.com/alertbox/whyscanning.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/whyscanning.html)

All this and **without fear they'll be missing important information**, because they'll already know roughly what the paragraph is about.

Limiting each paragraph to just one idea is especially effective when combined with front-loading paragraph content.

### 3. Front-load content

Front-loading content basically means **putting the conclusion first**, followed by the what, how, where, when and why. The first line of each paragraph should contain the conclusion for that paragraph, so site visitors can:

- ▣ Quickly scan through the first few words
- ▣ Instantly understand what the paragraph is about
- ▣ Decide if they want to read the rest of the paragraph or not

Because each paragraph contains just one idea, users can do all this safe in the knowledge that if they jump to the next paragraph they won't be missing any new concepts.

Front-loading also **applies to web pages**, as well as paragraphs. The opening paragraph on every page should always contain the conclusion of that page. This way, site visitors can instantly gain an understanding of what the page is about and decide whether they want to read the page or not.

Unfortunately many websites don't adhere to this guideline and end up writing page content in a story-format, with the introduction, middle and conclusion, in that order. Unfortunately, when scanning through web content we don't tend to read all the text nor read all the way to the bottom of the screen. As such, users may easily miss the conclusion if it's left until the end.

So remember, conclusion first, everything else second! For a great **example of front-loaded content**, just read any newspaper article. The opening paragraph always provides the conclusion of the article.

### 4. Use descriptive sub-headings

Breaking up text with descriptive sub-headings allows site visitors to easily **see what each section of the page is about**. The main heading on the page provides a brief overall view of what page is about, and the opening paragraph gives a brief conclusion of the page (because you've front-loaded the page content). Within the page though, there are various sub-themes which can be quickly put across by using sub-headings.

There's no hard and fast rule for **how frequently to use sub-headings**, but you should probably be roughly aiming for one sub-heading every two to four paragraphs. Most importantly, the sub-headings should group on-page content into logical groups, to allow site visitors to easily access the information that they're after.

## 5. Embolden important words

Another way to help users locate information quickly and easily is to embolden important words in some paragraphs. When site visitors scan through the screen this text stands out to them, so do make sure the text makes sense out of context.

Bolden two to three words which **describe the main point** of the paragraph, and not words on which you're placing emphasis. By seeing these emboldened words site visitors can instantly gain an understanding of what the paragraph is about and decide whether or not they want to read it.

## 6. Use descriptive link text

In the same way that bold text **stands out to scanning web users**, so does link text. Link text such as 'click here' makes no sense whatsoever out of context so is useless to site visitors scanning web pages. To find out the destination of the link, site visitors have to hunt through the text either before or after the link text.

## 7. Use lists

Lists are preferable to long paragraphs because they:

- ▣ Allow users to read the information vertically rather than horizontally
- ▣ Are easier to scan
- ▣ Are less intimidating
- ▣ Are usually more succinct

“  
A usability redesign  
increases the average  
site's number of visitors  
by 150%

”  
- Jakob Nielsen  
(2003)

## 8. Left-align text

Left-aligned text is easier to read than justified text, which in turn is easier to read than centre- or right-aligned text.

With justified text the spacing between each word is different on each line, so our eyes have to 'hunt' for the next word on every line. This slows down our reading speed. Right- and centre-aligned paragraphs slow down reading speed even more because



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each time you finish reading one line your eye has to search for the beginning of the next line.

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## Conclusion

These eight guidelines are nothing revolutionary nor are they difficult to implement. Yet so many websites structure their content so poorly to the detriment of their site visitors. Have a quick look over your website now - how does it do with regards to these content guidelines?

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Find out more about Webcredible's fantastic writing for the web training course!

Website: [www.webcredible.co.uk/writingtraining](http://www.webcredible.co.uk/writingtraining)

Telephone: 0870 242 6095

E-mail: [usability@webcredible.co.uk](mailto:usability@webcredible.co.uk)

## Ecommerce – 10 guidelines

More and more money is being spent online as consumers switch to shopping on the web. Yet so many companies don't seem to have considered the usability of their ecommerce site and of their ordering process, resulting in users prematurely giving up and abandoning their shopping basket. Here are ten ways to improve the usability of your ecommerce site, so you can maximise conversion rates and help convert the contents of users' shopping baskets into orders:

### 1. Identify users with their e-mail address

How many different usernames do you use for ecommerce website accounts? Now, how many different e-mail addresses do you use for ecommerce website accounts? You probably not only have fewer e-mail addresses, but find it much **easier to remember your e-mail address**, than your usernames.

Always try and use an e-mail address to identify users, rather than a username. E-mail addresses are easier to remember and are more standard, meaning that you don't have to worry so much about special characters. They're also always unique, so you can avoid the problem of another user having already taken a username.

### 2. Break up the ordering process into bite size chunks

The ordering process can often be quite complex. Users must typically enter a delivery address, choose their delivery method, enter their payment methods and then finally confirm their order. Trying to do all this at once can cause problems because users need to enter so much information.

Breaking the process up into smaller chunks allows users to tackle each step at a time. There's **less to think about at each step and less information to enter**. For example, Amazon<sup>10</sup> breaks the ordering process up into the following steps:

- Login
- Choose delivery address
- Choose delivery options

“  
Bad news travels fast - a  
dissatisfied shopper tells  
at least 10 other people  
about their bad  
experience.”

- Albrecht & Zembre  
(1985)

<sup>10</sup> [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

- Enter payment details
- Review and submit the order

### 3. Tell users where they are and where they're going

Isn't it awful when you're on a journey and you don't know how far you've been, or how far you still have to go? Well it can be just as frustrating for users when they're trying to buy something online and they don't know how many more steps are required before finally making the purchase. This is why it's important to let users know where they are in the ordering process, and how far they have to go. For example, [Dixons](#)<sup>11</sup> shows the current ordering step, and the steps still to go:



Alternatively, you could just specify the step number, together with the total number of steps left in the ordering process. For example, "Enter delivery address (step 1 of 4)".

### 4. Don't make the ordering process harder than it needs to be

It's amazing just how many ecommerce websites make the ordering process harder than it really needs to be. For example, users are asked to enter their credit or debit card expiry date as a month (Jan, Feb, March etc.), instead of a number (01, 02, 03 etc.). This forces them to convert the number shown on the credit or debit card to the corresponding month, instead of just entering the number straight in.

At each step of the ordering process **think about how this step could be simplified**. For example, do all of the input fields really need to be captured? By simplifying and streamlining the ordering process you should be able to minimise the number of problems users might experience along the way.

“  
More than 83% of Internet users are likely to leave a site if they feel it is taking too long to find what they're looking for.

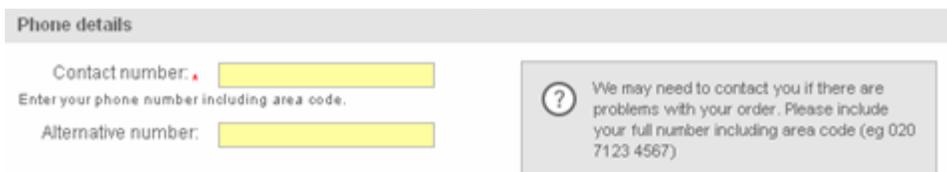
”  
- Accenture (2003)

### 5. Address common user queries

<sup>11</sup> [www.dixons.co.uk](http://www.dixons.co.uk)

It's important that throughout the ordering process, common user questions and queries are addressed. For example, users might want to know how long delivery is likely to take, or if they have to enter extra information such as their date of birth, they might want to know why this is.

Go through the ordering process and ask yourself at each stage: What queries might a user have? Answers to these queries should either be provided on-screen, or through a hyperlink. For example, Marks & Spencers<sup>12</sup> explain why they need users to enter a contact telephone number:



The screenshot shows a form titled "Phone details" with two input fields: "Contact number" and "Alternative number". Below the "Contact number" field is a small text instruction: "Enter your phone number including area code." To the right of the form is a grey help box with a question mark icon and the text: "We may need to contact you if there are problems with your order. Please include your full number including area code (eg 020 7123 4567)".

## 6. Highlight required fields

There's nothing more annoying than filling out a form, only to have it returned because required information is missing. It should be made very clear from the offset exactly which fields need to be filled in and which are optional. This can be done by simply marking those fields that need to be filled in, usually with an asterisk. Dabs.com<sup>13</sup> does this quite well:



The screenshot shows a form with a yellow background. At the top, it says "\* these fields must be completed". Below this, there are two fields: "title" with a dropdown menu showing "Mr" and "forename" with a text input field. Both fields are marked with an asterisk.

## 7. Make the ordering process flexible

By making the ordering process flexible, users should not only feel more in control, but should also be less likely to come across critical problems. For example, some ecommerce websites force users to undertake a postcode look up when entering an address. This can cause problems for those users with unconventional or new postal addresses because no list is returned for their postcode, or their particular address is not present in the list. This means they can't enter their address and of course can't place their order.

<sup>12</sup> [www.marksandspencer.com](http://www.marksandspencer.com)

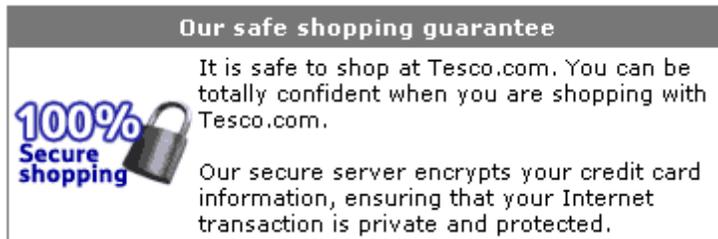
<sup>13</sup> [www.dabs.com](http://www.dabs.com)

A good example of an ecommerce website that has built flexibility into their ordering process is CD WOW!<sup>14</sup>. It allows users to place orders without having to register with the website, meaning that those users who aren't comfortable registering can still place orders.

## 8. Put users' minds at ease

Many consumers are still not 100% comfortable buying online. They might be concerned about giving out their credit card number, or about not receiving the items they've paid for. It's therefore important that you **allay these concerns and put users' minds at ease**.

Think about the concerns users might have at each step of the ordering process, and try to address them. For example, Tesco<sup>15</sup> makes a note at the payment stage of their ordering process of explaining to users that it's totally safe to shop at Tesco.com:



“

A usability redesign can improve the average site's sales/conversion rate by around 100%.

”

- Jakob Nielsen  
(2003)

## 9. Have users confirm their order before buying then provide confirmation

The last stage of the ordering process should always ask users to confirm their order. Users should be able to see a summary of their order, including how much it will cost and where it will be delivered to. They should then either be able to cancel or place the order. It's probably best not to copy something like Amazon's "1-click" ordering system<sup>16</sup>, because this allows orders to be placed without checking and confirming important details, such as the delivery address and delivery costs.

<sup>14</sup> [www.cd-wow.com](http://www.cd-wow.com)

<sup>15</sup> [www.tesco.com](http://www.tesco.com)

<sup>16</sup> [www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/468480/ref%3Dhp%5Fhp%5Fis%5F2%5F6/002-0838855-8993611](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/468480/ref%3Dhp%5Fhp%5Fis%5F2%5F6/002-0838855-8993611)

Confirmation should be provided for orders placed, so that users know whether their order was successful or not. This should include information such as:

- ▣ The expected delivery date
- ▣ The order number
- ▣ How to track the order online (if this is possible)

## 10. Send a confirmation e-mail

Once users have placed their order, a confirmation e-mail should be sent out straightaway. According to Jakob Nielsen<sup>17</sup>, confirmation e-mails should:

- ▣ Be brief
- ▣ Tell users what they're likely to want to know, such as the order number
- ▣ Act as a real customer service ambassador for the company

Remember, it's much cheaper for someone to resolve an issue online rather than having to call customer services. By second guessing users' queries, such as outlining how long a delivery is likely to take, calls to **customer services can be minimised**.

## Conclusion

Following these guidelines should not only make your ecommerce website more usable, but ultimately more successful as well. Of course, you can only go so far with usability guidelines, which is why **usability testing should be an important part of every ecommerce website**. Follow usability guidelines and carry out usability testing with real users and you should find that your ecommerce website is not only usable, but very effective as well.

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<sup>17</sup> [www.useit.com/alertbox/20031208.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20031208.html)

## User-centred design (UCD) – 6 methods

### Philosophy

User-centred design (UCD) is a project-approach that puts the intended users of a site at the centre of its design and development.

It does this by **talking directly to users** at key points in the project to make sure the site will deliver upon their requirements.

The stages are carried out in an iterative fashion, with the cycle being repeated until the project's usability objectives have been attained.

It's critical that the participants in these methods accurately reflect the profile of your actual users.

There are four essential activities in a UCD project, as outlined in ISO 13407:

Project stage	Description
Requirements gathering	Understanding and specifying the context of use
Requirements specification	Specifying the user and organisation requirements
Design	Producing designs and prototypes
Evaluation	Carrying out user-based assessment of the site

“

Supposing is good, but finding out is better.

”

- Samuel Clemens  
(Mark Twain)

The following is a typical **top-level characterisation** of the most popular UCD methods:

Method	Cost (Low vs. high)	Output (Statistical vs. non-statistical)	Sample size (high vs. low)	When to use (i.e. project stage)
Focus groups	Low	Non-statistical	Low	Req. gathering
Usability testing	High	Both	Low	Design & evaluation
Card sorting	High	Statistical	High	Design
Participatory design	Low	Non-statistical	Low	Design
Questionnaires	Low	Statistical	High	Req. gathering & evaluation
Interviews	High	Non-statistical	Low	Req. gathering & evaluation

## Focus groups

### What are they?

A focus group involves encouraging an invited group of intended/actual users of a site (i.e. participants) to share their thoughts, feelings, attitudes and ideas on a certain subject.

Organising focus groups within an organisation can also be very useful in getting buy-in to a project from within that company.

### When to use

Focus groups are most often used as an **input to design**. They generally produce non-statistical data and are a good means of getting information about a domain (e.g. what peoples' tasks involve).

“

A usability redesign can improve the time taken to complete a task by around 161%.

”

- Jakob Nielsen  
(2003)

## Issues

It's necessary to have an experienced moderator and analyst for a focus group to be effective.

## Usability testing

### What is it?

Usability testing sessions evaluate a site by collecting data from people as they use it. A person is invited to attend a session in which they're asked to perform a series of tasks while a moderator takes note of any difficulties they encounter.

Users can be asked to follow the **think-aloud** protocol which asks them to verbalise what they're doing and why they're doing it.

You can also time users to see how long it takes them to complete tasks, which is a good measure of efficiency (although you should bear in mind that using the 'think aloud' protocol will slow users down considerably).

Two specialists' time is normally required per session – 1 to moderate, 1 to note problems.

### When to use

Usability testing can be used as an **input to design** or at the end of a project. It represents an excellent way finding out what the most likely usability problems with a site are likely to be.

Usability testing usually generates non-statistical data, although sometimes it can also be used to generate statistical data.

## Issues

Usability testing requires some form of design to be available to test – even if it is only on paper. Testing works best if it focuses either on gathering non-statistical feedback on a design through 'talk aloud' or statistical measures.

## Card sorting

### What is it?

Card sorting is a method for suggesting intuitive structures/categories. A participant is presented with an unsorted pack of index cards. Each card has a statement written on it that relates to a page of the site.

The participant is asked to sort these cards into groups and then to name these groups. The results of multiple individual sorts are then combined and analysed statistically.

### When to use?

Card sorting is usually used as an **input to design**. It's an excellent way of suggesting good categories for a site's content and deriving its information architecture (i.e. its site map).

Card sorting generates **statistical** data, in the form of a site map.

### Issues

Providing participants with a trial run on some easy cards (e.g. sports, animals, etc.) can reassure them about what they're expected to do and result in a more productive session.

## Participatory design

### What is it?

Participatory design does not just ask users opinions on design issues, but actively involves them in the design and decision-making processes.

### When to use?

Participatory design is usually used within a mini-project to generate prototypes that feed into an overall project's design process.

An example would be a participatory design workshop in which developers, designers and users work together to design an initial prototype. This initial prototype would then feed into a more traditional design process.

Projects that only utilise participatory design are very rare.

### Issues

Participatory design sessions can be very fluid and require an experienced moderator with thorough knowledge of the domain to guide them.

“  
To err is human... but to  
really foul things up,  
you need a computer.

”  
- Paul Ehrlich

## Questionnaires

## What are they?

Questionnaires are a means of asking users for their responses to a pre-defined set of questions and are a good way of generating statistical data.

## When to use

Questionnaires are usually employed when a design team:

- Can only gain remote access to users of a site
- Is seeking a **larger sample size** than can be realistically achieved through direct contact

Questionnaires are usually administered through e-mail or post.

## Issues

Questionnaires allow statistical analysis of results, which can increase a study's credibility through its scientific appearance. This makes it all the more important that the questionnaire is well-designed and asks **non-biased** questions.

## Interviews

### What are they?

An interview usually involves one interviewer speaking to one participant at a time.

The advantages of an interview are that participants' unique points of view can be explored in detail. Any misunderstandings between the interviewer and participants are likely to be quickly identified and addressed.

The output of an interview is almost exclusively non-statistical. It's critical that reports of interviews are carefully analysed by experienced practitioners.

### When to use?

Interviews are usually employed early in the design process in order to gain a more detailed understanding of a domain/area of activity or specific requirements.

### Issues

Interviewing places a high premium on the experience and skill of the interviewer and analyst.



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## Conclusion

This has been an introduction to the major user-centred design methods. Remember that although each can be extremely valuable, using them in the right way for the right reasons and **at the right time** is critical.

Exactly which method to use, and when and how to use it, will differ from project to project.

## Usability testing – 8 guidelines

In professional web design circles, usability testing session has become an **essential component of any web project**. Similar to focus groups in brand development and product launches, usability testing offers a rare opportunity to receive feedback from the very people the website is aimed at – before it's too late to do anything about it.

But how can you get the most from these sessions?

“

If the user can't use it,  
it doesn't work.

”

- Susan Dray

### 1. Choosing your subjects

As with any market research project, the **results are only as good as the people you test**. Do not test people from your own company, or friends and family. Go to a market research firm or temp agency and ask them to source participants to a certain profile. Make sure the market research firm does not provide the name of the company or any other details that will cloud the judgement of the participants.

### 2. Before the test

As with everything in life, first impressions are vital. Each participant **must be put at ease**. Remember, usability testing sessions are often an extremely artificial environment and, for the most beneficial and informative results, we want them to behave as if they were using the site at home or work.

Provide **clear instructions on how to get to the test location**, and if necessary meet the participants at a local station. Don't use terms such as 'usability testing' or 'market research', as these can confuse and put people on edge. Also, ensure that participants know how long the test will take, and the type of tasks they'll be expected to perform.

After the initial greeting and welcoming drinks, there are always legal forms that must be signed. It's essential these are written in **plain English**, and are as short as possible. The last thing any nervous test subject wants is to be given a contract that looks like they're signing their soul away. All we want is for them to be reassured that the tests are completely confidential, and for permission to use the data generated during the test as part of our results. So tell them that.

### 3. Beginning the test

Before diving into key tasks, **get users familiar with the environment**. Tell them the website's name and URL, and ask them for initial feedback on what they would

expect from the site or what they would like the site to be. Make note of any terms or phrases they use – this not only demonstrates you're taking their feedback seriously, but may provide useful tips as to possible labels for key functionality or navigation.

Next, let them look at the website they're testing. Gauge their first impressions before allowing them to familiarise themselves with the site.

These few simple tasks will help convince participants that the usability testing won't be difficult and, perhaps most importantly, that they're not the ones being tested.

“  
Solving problems during design is 10 times cheaper than doing it in development, and at least 100 times cheaper than after its release.

”  
- Pressman  
(2000)

#### 4. Choosing tasks

Set tasks that are **essential to the new site's success**, such as buying products, paying bills or contacting the client. Remember, you're not looking for an ego massage. The site was built for a reason – can your target audience do what you need them to do?

It's also a good idea to **ask users to suggest tasks**. This can provide another indication of their expectations and requirements and may suggest new functionality or priorities.

#### 5. How to word tasks

People tend to perform more naturally if you **provide them with scenarios** rather than instructions. When giving them tasks, you should use phrases like 'Scenario A has occurred and you need to ring the company urgently'. 'Find the telephone number', for example, is far better than 'find the contact us section of the site'.

#### 6. Presenting tasks

Only provide participants with **one task at a time**. More than this may intimidate them or alter their approach to the test.

If participants are required to use inputs from outside the test (e.g. an e-mail giving them a password to the site), give them these inputs **in the form they'll be presented**. This will provide useful feedback on all elements of the process, rather than simply the site.

#### 7. How to behave during the test



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Remember that it's the website that's being tested, not you or the subject. Any feedback you get is valuable so make sure participants know this. If they can't do something, make sure they know it's **not their fault**.

You must stay quiet and out of sight during the test. You must not alter the test results by providing clues, suggesting directions or by reacting to things they say or do. All feedback you give must be **neutral**. Do not start shaking your head or huffing, however tempting it might be!

The only time you should speak is to help participants give an opinion, or to clarify a response. **If in doubt, shut up!**

Given the investment made in the project, clients often find it difficult to be quiet during tests. If your client wants to be present, put them in another room with an audio/video link.

## 8. After the test

After all the tasks have been completed, you should gather as much information as possible. Asking for overall impressions of the site will allow you to judge whether expectations have been met, and whether participants' view of the client or site has changed during the process.

Always **ask for suggestions** – this not only demonstrates the value you place on their thoughts, but may provide insights into how the site can better support the user.

Finally, ask participants **what they remember** about the site structure and functions of the site. Clear recollection will confirm that the site is structured logically and help identify any labelling issues you may have missed.

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Find out more about Webcredible's fantastic usability testing training course!

Website: [www.webcredible.co.uk/testingtraining](http://www.webcredible.co.uk/testingtraining)

Telephone: 0870 242 6095

E-mail: [usability@webcredible.co.uk](mailto:usability@webcredible.co.uk)

## Further reading

### Websites

- **Webcredible usability articles**  
[www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-usability](http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-usability)  
Lots of easy-to-understand usability how-to articles
- **Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox**  
[www.useit.com/alertbox](http://www.useit.com/alertbox)  
10 years' worth of usability articles and research findings
- **UsabilityNet**  
[www.usabilitynet.org](http://www.usabilitynet.org)  
One-stop shop website for all your usability needs
- **Usability.gov**  
[www.usability.gov](http://www.usability.gov)  
Comprehensive guide outlining the full user-centred design process
- **UX Matters**  
[www.uxmatters.com](http://www.uxmatters.com)  
Monthly web magazine publishing usability-related content
- **Usability Views**  
[www.usabilityviews.com](http://www.usabilityviews.com)  
Links to over 10,000 usability articles

### Books

- **Don't Make Me Think**  
– Steve Krug
- **Prioritizing Web Usability**  
– Jakob Nielsen
- **The Elements of User Experience**  
– Jesse James Garrett
- **The Design of Everyday Things**  
– Donald A. Norman
- **The Design of Sites**  
– Douglas K. Van Duyne



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## About Webcredible

Webcredible is a usability and accessibility consultancy providing a range of services:

### Usability

- ▣ Usability testing
- ▣ Usability website evaluation
- ▣ Ongoing usability support
- ▣ Intranet usability

### Training

- ▣ Usability testing training
- ▣ Writing for the web training
- ▣ Web usability training
- ▣ Web accessibility training
- ▣ Advanced CSS training

### User-centered design

- ▣ User research & focus groups
- ▣ Card sorting & site map creation
- ▣ Wireframe design & testing

### Accessibility

- ▣ Web accessibility evaluation
- ▣ Accessibility testing
- ▣ Ongoing accessibility & CSS help

### Accessible web design

- ▣ CSS web design & build
- ▣ CSS / XHTML coding
- ▣ DOM scripting & accessible

Webcredible is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and respected usability and accessibility consultancies in the UK. Webcredible's research articles have been re-published on well over 100 websites and in numerous offline publications.

Webcredible regularly conducts usability testing studies and has a purpose-built usability lab (see [www.webcredible.co.uk/services/tour](http://www.webcredible.co.uk/services/tour) for a virtual tour). Clients include BBC, Environment Agency, Norwich Union, T-Mobile, Visa, World Health Organization and Yamaha.

For more information please:

- ▣ Telephone 0870 242 6095
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- ▣ Visit [www.webcredible.co.uk](http://www.webcredible.co.uk)