

Planning and Preparing for a Usability Test

Described here is a method for doing groundwork for a website usability test, summarized from Part II of Joseph S. Dumas and Janice C. Redish, *A Practical Guide to Usability Testing*.

Item #	Task	Questions to Answer
1.	Plan the test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long will the testing take, start to finish? 8-12 weeks? 4-6? Less? • What aspects of the product are not fully usable and so require testing? • What tasks will be tested? • What are the goals and concerns of the test?
2.	Define goals and concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specific tasks will be tested? • How should success with a task be defined? • What quantifiable results are to be derived? • Would a heuristic analysis be useful? How should it be done?
3.	Decide who should be participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the intended users of the product? • What are the most important characteristics of the intended users? • What different subsets of users are involved? • How should the user profile be structured? • How many participants are needed? 6-12?
4.	Recruit participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where can we find participants? • What are the qualifications of participants? • Are the services of a screening agency needed? • How can we ensure that participants attend the testing? • How should participants be recompensed? • How much compensation is adequate?
5.	Select and organize tasks to test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can tasks ensure we find usability issues? • What usability tasks can the designers and developers suggest? • What is the baseline of likely tasks? • What resources (time, hardware, software, documentation) will be needed? • In what order should tasks be performed?
6.	Create task scenarios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What realistic scenarios of tasks should be used? • How much background information will participants need? • Should scenarios be delivered in written form? Or spoken? • To what degree should scenarios be subdivided?
7.	Decide how to measure usability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What performance measures should be used? • What subjective measures should be used? • Is keystroke data needed? • How should we account for positive responses to the product? • How do we quantify the measures?
8.	Prepare test materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What legalities must be observed for this test? • How can we ensure that participants are at minimal risk in the test? • What background data do we need from the participants? • Do we want to use pretest, posttask, and posttest questionnaires? • What pre-test training will the participants need?
9.	Prepare the test environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where will the testing be done? • How will the test lab be configured? • How do we ensure that the equipment works on test day? • What sample data will be needed?
10.	Prepare the test team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many team members will be needed? • Who should be on the test team? • How should testing duties be distributed? • How much help with the product should participants receive during the test?
11.	Conduct a pilot test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When should the pilot test be run? • What should be the content of the pilot test? • Who should participate in the pilot test?