

## Put it to the Test: Usability Testing of Library Web Sites

### What is Usability Testing?

Usability testing is a process of analyzing the interaction between a user and a "system." The "system" being tested can be anything, ranging from computer operating systems to Web sites to handouts. Usability testing focuses on the user and whether they are able to use a system easily and effectively.

### Methodologies for Testing

There are many different ways to test for usability. The following methods are some of the most common.

*Formal Usability Testing* - A method that tests how a user interacts with a system. The participant is given a list of pre-defined tasks to accomplish using the system and asked to "think out loud" about their thoughts, reactions and feelings.

*Card Sort* - A method for testing the structure of a web site or application using index cards, each representing an individual concept or web page. Participants arrange the cards in an order or structure that makes sense to them.

*Category Membership Expectation* - A method that tests the participants' understanding of various categories including what they think should be in each category and what the category should be named.

*Cognitive Walkthrough* - Designers of the web site or product try to predict users' movements and actions by doing actual tasks themselves.

*Focus Groups* - A method that involves a small group of individuals discussing their opinions and ideas about a defined topic or set of topics.

*Questionnaire* - A set of questions designed to collect responses and opinions from users on a topic.

*Site Usage Logs* - A method of using web server (httpd) logs to track users' movements on a web site. This is especially useful for determining patterns of movement and use.

*Heuristic Evaluation* - A group of evaluators analyze the interface of a "system" based on a set of usability principles, called the heuristics.

---

Nicole Campbell  
Reference Librarian  
Washington State University Vancouver  
[campbell@vancouver.wsu.edu](mailto:campbell@vancouver.wsu.edu)