

Usability Study of a Web-based Instruction Module

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Abstract

Students and faculty at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) are blessed with a rich variety of information resources, but often struggle selecting the right resource to use when they have an information need. In 2002 the library administration requested the libraries' instruction and web development committees to collaborate in the development of a web-based resource guiding users through the maze of licensed and free information resources. The two committees created the "Getting Started" website, guiding students of all disciplines, including science and engineering, to appropriate resources for common information needs, as well as providing basic instruction in using these resources. Our training in information science, as well as common sense told us that the Getting Started website should be easy to use. To ensure this, the librarians responsible for creating the website conducted extensive usability studies of the website as it was being developed. At every step, the findings of these usability studies forced us to reassess the effectiveness of the website we were creating, and even led us to question if the website should be released to our users. This poster will describe the development of the Getting Stated website, and will show how getting input from our users helped us to create a much more useful resource.

UCSD Libraries Getting Started Tutorial

<http://libraries.ucsd.edu/services/gettingstarted/new/> (Under construction. Final site will be released to the public Fall, 2004)

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Poster Session

Background

- UCSD has a complex information environment:
 - 11 libraries, each with its own website
 - A rich variety of information resources
 - No clear direction where to start
- This causes students and faculty to struggle to find the right library resource(s).

Based on this, we designed the “Getting Started at UCSD Libraries Website”

- Purpose: guide novice users to appropriate library resource(s)
- Design: 9 modules (finding books, finding articles, etc.)

Usability Study Planning

Usability tests were planned in every phase of the website development

1. Before development – survey posted on the Libraries websites asking users to describe why they visited the Libraries websites, and if they were able to find needed information.
2. After first phase of development – usability test on 11 students and faculty
3. Revisions made based on the first usability test
4. After second phase of development – usability test on 4 more students
5. Before release of site – final round of usability test

Usability Study – How

- Designed usability test (7 tasks, 30-40 minutes total test time)
- Used “Think Aloud” protocol – test subjects verbalized thought process while completing tasks
- Emphasized to test subjects that they were not being evaluated
- After completing tasks, test subjects filled out Final Site Evaluation.

Lessons Learned

Usability study:

- Was vital to the development of this web-based instructional resource
- Forced us to continually reassess the effectiveness of this website
- Provided guidance on design
 - Terminology
 - Modular design vs. long text
 - Choice of graphics
 - Balance of aesthetics and function

For future web-based instructional project, conduct usability study on ground floor of the project.