

English 515 Usability Project

For our final project this semester, we will conduct a usability review of WebCT Vista, the new course management system adopted by Purdue. Normally, usability testing is conducted through user observation. In formal usability testing, a usability team would solicit a group of people to interact with the software. The team observes the users and collects data from them through various protocols, such as talk-aloud, questionnaires, etc.

Because we are the users and thus, we can't run tests on ourselves, we will be conducting a modified usability review of the software. During the next few weeks, we will interact with various components of the software, and each of you will record your detailed observations on those interactions. We will also critique the interface, organization of information, navigation, help features, etc. This data will be collected and composed in a usability report to be submitted to Purdue's Instructional Technology group at the end of the semester.

Components of the Project

I. Individual user log of your observations

As we work on this project, you will maintain an MS word document of your observations, problems, issues, and positive experiences with the software. I will provide time in class for you to record your observations, but I will also expect you to interact with the software outside of class and record your thoughts. You will submit your user log to me and to the class on **April 22**. It should have at least **6 separate entries** and cover all of the major components of the software.

II. Collaborative report

As a class, we will divide into teams and produce a 20 page single-spaced, collaborative report on our findings. We will have four teams for this project, corresponding to different sections of the report.

Team 1: Responsible for writing the introduction and description of project; discussion of the subject, purpose, scope, background, methodology, significant findings, and preview of the organization of the report. This will require some outside research on both WebCT, theories of educational media, and usability.

Team 2: Responsible for reporting instructor observations of the software and its usefulness for teaching.

Team 3: Responsible for reporting student observations of the software and its usefulness for learning.

Team 4: Responsible for making recommendations and suggestions on the basis of user interactions.

Assessment

Format of Report

Usability reports should be presented in formal report format, much like the recommendation reports that you might have completed in English 420 or 421, or the reports written in English 424. The report should have a cover page, running headers, hierarchical heading structure, single-spaced, etc. The report should be free from grammatical, mechanical, and typographical errors. The sections of the report should also flow together seamlessly, which means that the class will need to take special care in establishing effective transitions. I will provide a checklist to assist with the format.

Content of Report

This report should use a great deal of detail and description, especially from your user logs and observations. The report should reference specific actions, screens, comments, questions, and ideas made by participants. The report might even include screen shots to explain specific problems or present solutions. The recommendations should be clear, direct, specific, and thoroughly explained. All conclusions and recommendations for revision should be supported by user observations or by our usability readings.

User Logs for Report

User logs should be specific, detailed, thorough, and complete. Observations should be as accurate as possible and cover as much detail as possible. Each entry should be several full paragraphs that detail your experiences with the software. You must complete your entries on time and in a complete manner in order to receive full credit for this component.