Document Usability

Professional Communications
Document Usability

• Does the document allow the user to use the software product easily and confidently?
Document Usability

• Plan a usability test
• Conduct the test
  – Informational Observation
  – Surveys and Interviews
  – User Protocols
  – Computer and Editorial Analysis
• Use the results to revise your document
Planning a Usability Test

• Select the aspects of the document you want to evaluate
• Select the methods you will use
• Recruit the test subjects
Selecting the Aspects

• Time
  – How long did it take the user to find the information?

• Errors
  – How many and what types of errors did the user make?

• Assistance
  – How often did the user need help?
  – At what points did the user need help?
  – What other information did the user need?

• Information
  – Was the information easy to find and understand, and was it sufficient to perform the task?
Selecting the Aspects

• Format
  – Is the format consistent?
  – Are the heading, introductions, visuals, etc. helpful?
  – Is the arrangement of the pages helpful?

• Audience Engagement
  – Is the vocabulary understandable?
  – Is the text concrete enough?
  – Is the sequence “natural”?
  – Does it seem to the user that this is the route to follow to do this activity?
Selecting the Method

• Informational Observation
  – Watch the user use the document and record all the places where a problem arose (for the selected aspects)

• Surveys and Interviews
  – Create a series of questions that you ask the user after he or she has worked with the document

• User Protocols
  – “Speak-aloud”
  – Record the thoughts that the user speaks as he or she works with the document
Selecting the Method

- Computer Text Analysis
  - Automated
    - Word count, spelling, grammar, readability score (grade level)

- Editorial Review
  - Knowledgeable commentary from a person who is not one of the writers of the text

- The goal is to match the test method with the kind of information you want to get

- For this assignment, you must use either informational observation, a survey, or an interview
  - You may optionally use one of the other methods in addition
Selecting the Subjects

• The ideal users for the usability study are those individuals who are probable members of the document’s target audience, but have not worked on developing the document
Conducting a Usability Test

• Have a way to record all the data!
  – Use a tally sheet with three columns:
    • Observation, Expected behavior, User comment
  – Record an audio or video of the test session
  – Design a form with a list of questions
    • Yes/No or rate on scale (1 = highly disagree, 5 = highly agree)

• Get as much feedback as quickly as possible!
Sample Survey Questions

• Were you able to find information on X quickly?
• Did the comments in the left margin help you find information?
• Did you read the introductions to the sequences?
• Did the introduction to each sequence make it easier for you to grasp the point of the sequence?
Evaluating a Usability Test

• Determine how to use the results of the test
• Results could indicate a problem with:
  – The text (spelling, grammar, sufficiency of information)
  – The text’s design (consistency, usefulness of column arrangement, placement of graphics)
  – The learning style of the audience (basic way in which they approach the material)