

# Myths and Misconceptions of Usability Testing

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*Built by*



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# Agenda

1. Why usability testing
2. Scientific mindset vs. craft mindset
3. Discussion

# Why usability testing?

- Minimum Viable Product (MVP) isn't enough
- A/B testing and analytics aren't enough

# MVP isn't enough

... a Minimum Viable Product tends to center around the business perspective – what's the minimum product I have to build in order to figure out whether or not I have a business? ... what if you come from a human-centered perspective, and you want to build the Minimum Desirable Product? ... **focus primarily on whether or not you are providing an insanely great product experience and creating value for the end user.** – Andrew Chen

# The triumph of design

As technology becomes easier to build, design has become a lot more important, especially if you are building a consumer-facing product....  
Design is a process and it takes a lot of iterations to get something you like... – Jonathan Good

# The tyranny of data

Analytics are...

- Not helpful at all with low users/traffic
- Probably not an option in many domains (enterprise software, devices, games...)
- Often lead to null results (test two or multiple designs, see no major differences)
- Tell you "WHAT is happening" not WHY or HOW

# You can't measure your way out of a paper bag, buddy

Don't try to measure your way out of a problem. Metrics do a great job of telling you what your problem is, but only listening to and observing your users can tell you why they're having trouble. – Laura Klein

A/B testing is like sandpaper. You can use it to smooth out details, but you can't actually create anything with it.

5:03 PM Jun 22nd, 2010 via Twitter for iPhone  
Retweeted by 49 people



**NathanBowers**

Nathan Bowers

# Design with empathy

[We believe in] design as a manifestation of empathy for users. Putting oneself into the perspective of the users of your product is a powerful thing, and can quickly illuminate usability, product, messaging, tone, and a host of other issues. –Tim Meaney



# Empathy vs. pseudoscience

Fundamental problem:  
the “pseudo-scientific mindset”

Science	Pseudoscience	Design research
Rigor	Appearance of rigor	<b>Empathy</b>
Replication	What’s that?	<b>Iteration</b>
Quantification	Appearance of quantification	<b>Qualitative insight</b>
Build theory	What’s that?	<b>Get results in context</b>

# Empathy vs. pseudoscience

What's wrong with trying to make user studies "scientific?" It leads to wacky practices like...

- Focusing on "summative" testing – evaluating or benchmarking a finished or nearly-finished product
- Defining strict protocols/scripts and attempting to conduct each session in exactly the same way
- Creating highly controlled, artificial testing environments
- Engaging in pointless efforts to quantify user behavior and perceptions
  - misunderstanding statistical significance
- Producing a formal report, analogous to a research article in a peer-reviewed journal

# Empathy vs. pseudoscience

*Collection Guides ("Finding Aids") Usability Study-  
Novice User Group  
Report of the Findings*

*Susan K. Pauley  
April 2010*

## Background

This study was designed to evaluate the usability of the Collection Guides Web site (otherwise known as the Finding Aids Web site), designed by the Special Collections Research Center, from the point of view of the novice user. As an example, a novice user could be a researcher, who, after submitting a query through Google, has been brought to the Collection Guides Web site. This study aimed to see how easily those who had never before or had seldom used finding aids for archival research would be able to navigate the Web site, search for desired information, and submit a request for materials from a collection.

## Goals for this Study

The Collection Guides Web site had been designed to present guide information by way of two separate views: a tabbed view (**see Appendix A screenshot**) and a standard view (**see Appendix B screenshot**). The tabbed view separated categories of information about the guide into titled tabs; the user would click on the tab with a desired heading to find more specific information about this aspect of the guide. Tabs were not present in the standard view; instead, the user could navigate the guide by either clicking on the table of contents link to the desired section, or by scrolling the length of the guide. Both the tabbed view and standard view offered a search box as a means of searching for keywords throughout each guide.

The web designer had chosen the tabbed view as the default view. However, it was noted that positive feedback was given for the standard view by users familiar with archival research. The Special Collections Research Center (the stakeholders for this study) were interested in whether novice participants would prefer the tabbed view or the standard view of the collection guides. Features specific to each view were also tested and the results analyzed for their usability.

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# Embrace craft

- Conduct “formative” testing throughout your design + development process
  - Make testing as lightweight as possible so you can do it regularly

# Embrace craft

- Define goals and questions (as well as customer profile) for your studies, but keep individual sessions exploratory and flexible
  - Interview-based tasks
  - Ask participants to bring topics & materials to the session

# Embrace craft

- Dive into natural contexts (home/office, remote, intercept, diary study)

# Embrace craft

- Embrace qualitative insights
  - Critical incidents
    - low points: confusion, getting stuck, frustration, or negative feedback
    - high points: elation, finishing a task, empowerment, or positive feedback
  - Quotes
  - Video clips
  - Themes

# Embrace craft

- Bridge the GAP between research and design
  - Identify key findings that are clearly ***Grounded*** in participants' experience (ideally seen in multiple sessions)
  - Collaborate with your team to determine ***Actions*** that will move your UX forward (e.g. change widget in UI, redesign a feature, add contextual help, explore new visual treatment)
  - ***Prioritize*** the next steps in the context of your timeline and resources



# Recap

- Embrace the craft of usability testing:
  - Integrate testing into your design/dev process
  - Test early and often
  - Conduct exploratory and qualitative sessions
  - Focus on actionable insights
  - DESIGN WITH EMPATHY
  - Pivot as appropriate

# Discuss

- How can the mindset of “design with empathy” help you in your work?
- How can you integrate usability testing into your process?
- What’s one small step you can take?

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**SIGN UP**

<http://bit.ly/mbl-ux-list>