



What is usability testing?

Usability testing is a method of **testing the functionality of a website, app, or other digital product by observing real users as they attempt to complete tasks on it**. The goal is to reveal areas of confusion and uncover opportunities to improve the overall user experience.

(Note: if all testing activities take place on a website, the terms 'usability testing' and '*website* usability testing' can be used interchangeably—which is what we're going to do throughout the rest of this page.)

Why is usability testing important?

Usability testing is done by real-life users, who are likely to reveal issues that people familiar with a website can no longer identify—very often, in-depth knowledge can blind designers, marketers, and product owners to a website's usability issues.

Bringing in new users to test your site and/or observing how real people are already using it are effective ways to determine whether your visitors:

- Understand how your site works and don't get 'lost' or confused
- Can complete the main actions they need to
- Don't encounter usability issues or bugs
- Have a functional and efficient experience

Employing tests with real users helps you:

1. **Validate your prototype.** Bring in users early on in the development process, and test their reactions before locking down a final product. Do they understand what you're trying to do? Do they see the purpose of the product? Testing on a prototype first can validate your concept and help you make plans for future functionality before you spend a lot of money to build out a complete website.
2. **Confirm your product meets expectations.** Once your product is completed, test usability again to make sure everything works the way it was intended. How's the ease of use? Is something still missing in the interface?
3. **Identify issues with complex flows.** If there are functions on your site that need users to follow multiple steps (for example an e-commerce checkout process), run usability testing to make sure these processes are as straightforward and intuitive as possible.
4. **Complement and illuminate other data points.** Usability testing can often provide the *why* behind data points accumulated from other methods: a [heat map](#) might show that people aren't paying attention to an important part of the landing page, but observing users in action can reveal why they're ignoring it.
5. **Catch minor errors.** In addition to large-scale usability issues, usability testing can help identify smaller errors. A new set of eyes is more likely to pick up on broken links, site errors, and grammatical issues that have been inadvertently glossed over. Individually, these incorrect details may not matter a lot, but, collectively, they contribute to the perception of a site's professionalism and trustworthiness.
6. **Develop empathy.** It's not unusual for the people working on a project to develop tunnel vision around their product and forget they have access to knowledge that their typical website visitor may not have. Usability testing is a good way to develop some empathy for the real people who are using and will be using your site, and look at things from their perspective.
7. **Get buy-in for change.** It's one thing to know about a website issue; it's another to see users actually struggle with it. When it's evident that something is being misunderstood by users, it's natural to want to make it right. Watching short clips of key usability testing findings can be a very persuasive way to lobby for change within your organization.
8. **Ultimately provide a better user experience.** Great [customer experience](#) is essential for a successful product. Usability testing can help you identify issues that wouldn't be uncovered otherwise and create the most user-friendly product possible.

not, but can't tell you why.

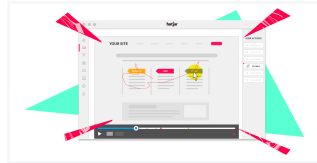
Usability Testing 101: What It Is & What It's NOT (2020 Guide)

- **Focus groups:** when conducting a focus group, researchers gather a group of people together to discuss a specific topic. Usually, the goal is to learn people's opinions about a product or service, not to test how they use it.
- **Surveys:** use [surveys](#) to gauge user experience. Because they do not allow you to actually observe visitors on the site in action, surveys are not considered usability testing—though they may be used in conjunction with it.
- **Heat maps:** [Heat mapping software](#) offers a visual representation of how users move around the page by showing the hottest (most popular) and coolest (least popular) parts of it. The maps allow developers to see how people *in aggregate* move around a website, but they are still technically not usability testing.
- **User acceptance testing:** this is often the last phase of the software-testing process, where users go through a calibrated set of steps to ensure the software works correctly. This is a technical test of QA (quality assurance), not a way to evaluate if the product is user-friendly and efficient.
- **In-house proper use testing:** people in your company probably test software all the time, but this is *not* usability testing. Employees are inherently biased, making them unable to give the kind of honest results that real users can.

Is usability testing different from user testing?

USABILITY TESTING VS USER TESTING

The difference between usability testing and user testing is confusing to most developers, project managers, and even UX designers.



Take your first usability testing step today

Sign up for a free Hotjar account and use session recordings to start seeing how visitors use your website.

[Free forever. Get started!](#)

THE REMAINING CHAPTERS OF THIS GUIDE COVER:

Usability testing methods

A breakdown of the main usability testing methods (includes lab testing, session recordings, card sorting) and when/why you should use them.

Usability testing questions

A list of 40+ questions to incorporate into your user testing process.

How to run moderated testing

Four veteran usability testers discuss a 5-step process to use for running moderated usability testing.

How to analyze testing results

A straightforward 5-step process to help you evaluate the results of your usability testing session.

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