



COURSERA

Heuristic Evaluation Report, Part #2

Abstract

This paper is a heuristic evaluation of Coursera's Discussion Forum for the course:
"Introduction to User Experience and Processes"

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Executive Summary

This report will document my heuristics evaluation of Coursera's Discussion Forum within the course "Introduction to User Experience and Processes." Although a heuristics evaluation is fast, inexpensive, and easy-to-use, it provides valuable information on the usability of any interface.

Designed by Jakob Nielsen in 1994, "Jakob's Ten Usability Heuristics" is a list of 10 key areas that help discover usability issues. The 10 cover these areas: visibility of system status, match between system and the real world, user control and freedom, consistency and standards, error prevention, recognition rather than recall, flexibility and efficiency of use, aesthetic and minimalist design, recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors, and help and documentation.

Once the usability issues are identified, they are then ranked in order of severity, starting with 1 (a cosmetic problem) to 4 (usability catastrophe) and assigned a recommendation.

Findings and Recommendations:

Finding #1: Follow/Unfollow options are unclearly stated. **Recommendation:** Replace the confusing "Unfollow/Follow" with the word "Follow" greyed out.

Finding #2: Help Center circuitous redirect. **Recommendation:** Re-examine how these pages are linked.

Finding #3: Mixed-up bullet function. **Recommendation:** Examine the coding behind this function; therein you'll find the error.

Finding #4: The increase/decrease indent feature not available. **Recommendation:** Examine the coding behind this function; therein you'll find the error.

Finding #5: Path to return "Home" unclear. **Recommendation:** Add a "Home" icon so the User clearly understands how to get back to the starting point.

Finding #6: Posting action could not be completed. **Recommendation:** Examine the coding behind this function; therein you'll find the error.

Finding #7: Vague error message for invalid URL. **Recommendation:** Rewrite the error message accordingly.

Introduction

Using heuristics evaluation, this report helps illuminate issues that students have when using the discussion forum. With each issue, I aim to answer the following questions:

- What heuristics are being violated?
- How are they violated and with what severity?
- What recommendations can we give for each violation?

Methods

Scope of Evaluation

The scope of the evaluation of Coursera's Discussion Forum within the course includes writing posts, formatting posts, inserting images, inserting URLs, and posting that post. It also includes inspecting the larger interface, specifically examining the moderator space.

Heuristics Used

As stated above, the evaluation system used is Jakob's Ten Usability Heuristics. They are as follows:

1. **Visibility of System Status:** Designs should keep users informed about what is going on through appropriate, timely feedback.
2. **Match between System and the Real World:** The design should speak the users' language. Use words, phrases, and concepts familiar to the user, rather than internal jargon.
3. **User Control and Freedom:** Users often perform actions by mistake. They need a clearly marked "emergency exit" to leave the unwanted state.
4. **Consistency and Standards:** Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform conventions.
5. **Error Prevention:** Good error messages are important, but the best designs prevent problems from occurring in the first place.
6. **Recognition Rather Than Recall:** Minimize the user's memory load by making elements, actions, and options visible. Avoid making users remember information.
7. **Flexibility and Efficiency of Use:** Shortcuts—hidden from novice users—may speed up the interaction for the expert user.
8. **Aesthetic and Minimalist Design:** Interfaces should not contain information which is irrelevant. Every extra unit of information in an interface competes with the relevant units of information.
9. **Recognize, Diagnose, and Recover from Errors:** Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no error codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.
10. **Help and Documentation:** It's best if the design doesn't need any additional explanation. However, it may be necessary to provide documentation to help users understand how to complete their tasks.

Individual Heuristic Evaluations

Once issues have been identified, they need to be triaged so that the significant issues are addressed first, the cosmetic last. The ranking system used for this evaluation is the following:

- 1 = cosmetic problem
- 2 = minor usability problem
- 3 = major usability problem; important to fix
- 4 = usability catastrophe; imperative to fix

Summary Results

The issues discussed in this report regard the following functions and interfaces: follow/unfollow, the help center, formatting posts, an individual moderator's page, and error messaging. These issues were ranked from 4/4 to 2/4, with no cosmetic issues found.

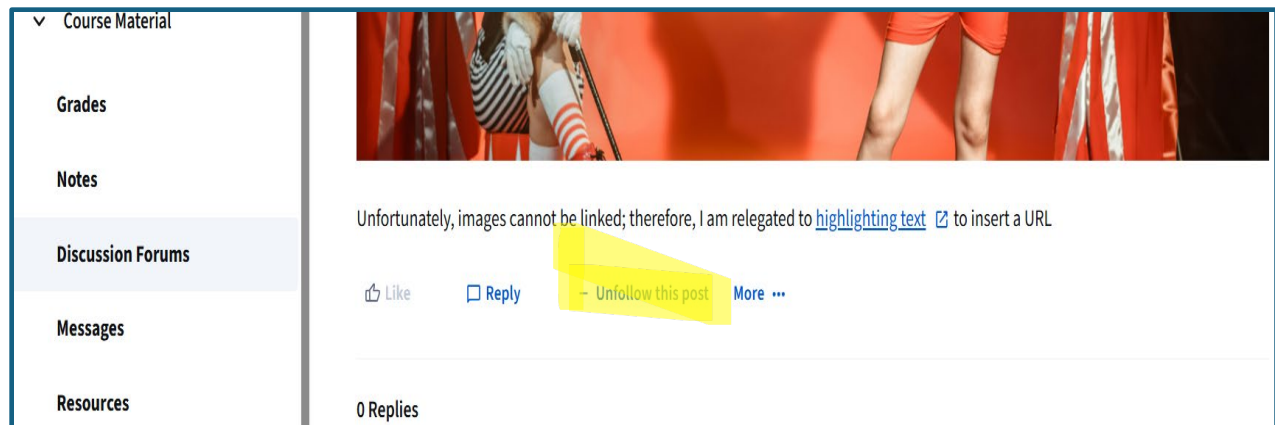
Key Findings

Finding #1: Post pop-up, Module 6: Follow/Unfollow a Post

Severity: 4/4

Heuristics Violated: Visibility of System Status, #2 Match between system and the Real World, Consistency and Standards

The options whether to follow or unfollow are unclearly stated. The zero state is as is shown in the screenshot below shows "unfollow" this post. Does this mean this option is automatically set at "follow" (unlikely) or does this mean it is automatically set at "unfollow" and the user must click to follow?



Recommendation: Replace the confusing “Unfollow/Follow” with the word “Follow” greyed out. Then the user would know it was not activated and that the zero state is “Unfollow.”

Key Findings

Finding #2: Help Center

Severity: 4/4

Heuristics Violated: Error Prevention, Help and Documentation **ERROR NOW CORRECTED**

Previously, when I accessed the Help Center below my profile. Upon clicking “Help Center,” I was taken to the screen that listed what the system needed access to and an “Accept” and “Reject” button. **(Image #1)** I pressed “Accept.” I was not redirected; no other screen was visible and there were no error messages. I remained on my screen. **(Image #2)** I then attempted to access the Help Center again via my profile. The same popup **(Image #1)** occurred. Mobius loop. Uggh!

UPDATE: However, when I later tried the same function, after pressing the “Accept” button **(Image #1)**, I was taken to the Help Center **(Image #3)**. Apparently, between the time I first accessed this function and the last, this bug has been fixed.

IMAGE #1

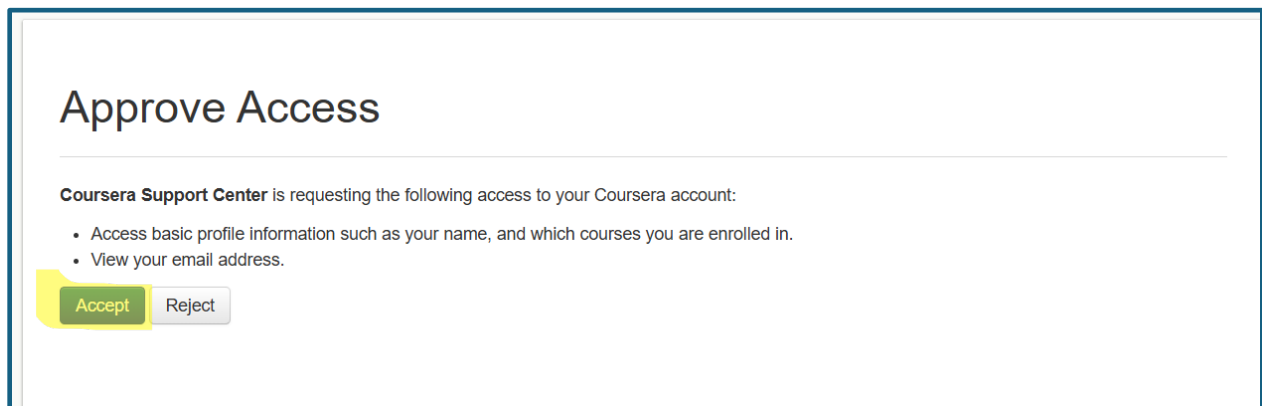


IMAGE #2

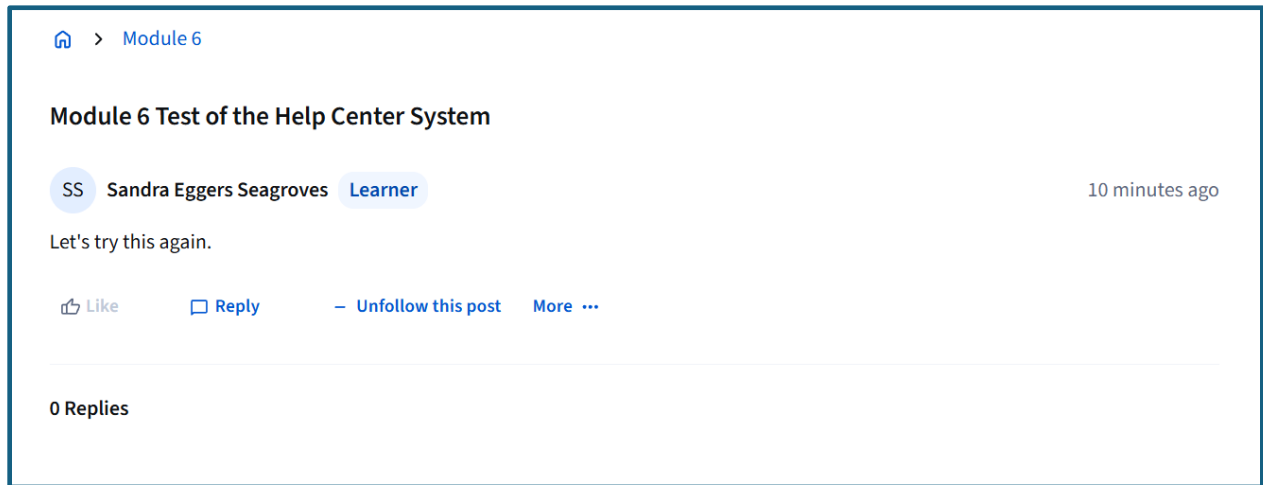
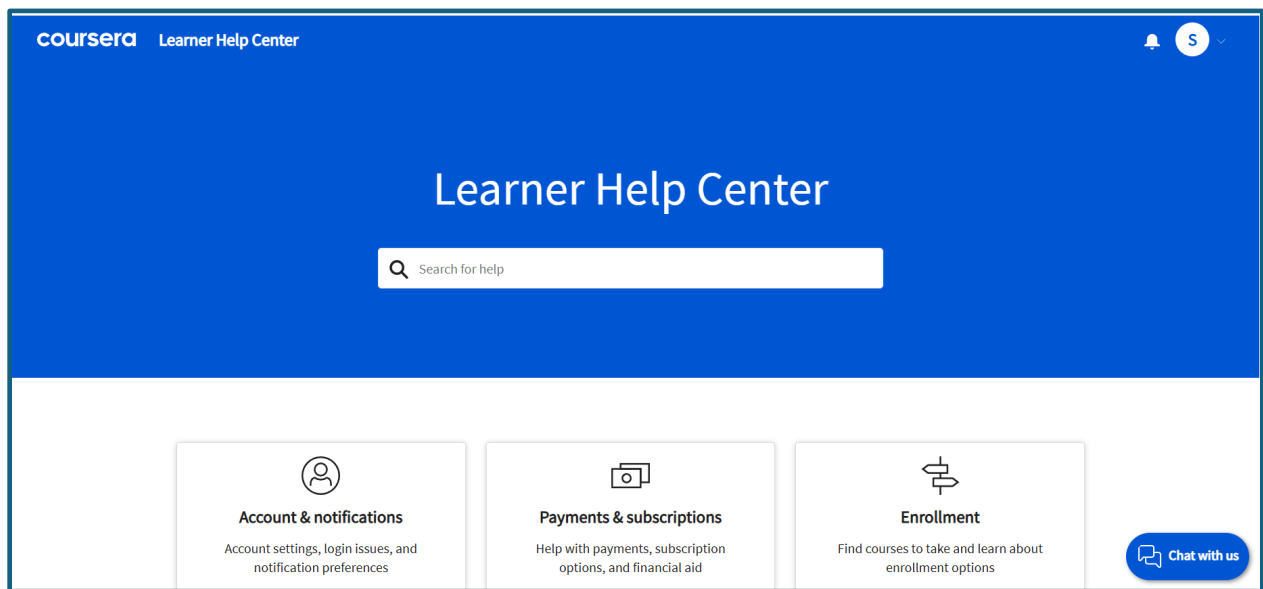


IMAGE #3



Recommendation: Re-examine how these pages are linked and address the issue, so that when the User clicks “Accept,” s/he will be taken to the actual Help Center, not to the same page. **ERROR NOW FIXED.**

Key Findings

Finding #3 : Post pop-up, Module 6

Severity: 4/4

Heuristics Violated: Consistency and Standards.

In this screenshot, I attempted to divide the sentence into several bullet points. I intended to place the part of the sentence to the right of the cursor below the first part of the sentence. (See Step #1). However, the interface behaved oppositely, with the first part of the sentence (to the right of the cursor) going below the part of the sentence to the right of the cursor. (See Step #2). This is not how bullet points operate.

STEP #1:

Fields marked with an asterisk(*) are required.

Title*

Module 6, Generating Issues, Part 1: Post #1

Body*

- **This is a test** from the Intro to UX Principles and Processes evaluation system.

1. This
2. is
3. only
4. a
5. test.

STEP #2:

Fields marked with an asterisk(*) are required.






Title*

Module 6, Generating Issues, Part 1: Post #1

Body*

- from the Intro to UX Principles and Processes evaluation system.
- **This is a test**

1. This
2. is
3. only
4. a
5. test.

B *I* U Σ      ...

Recommendation: Examine the coding behind this function; therein you'll find the error.

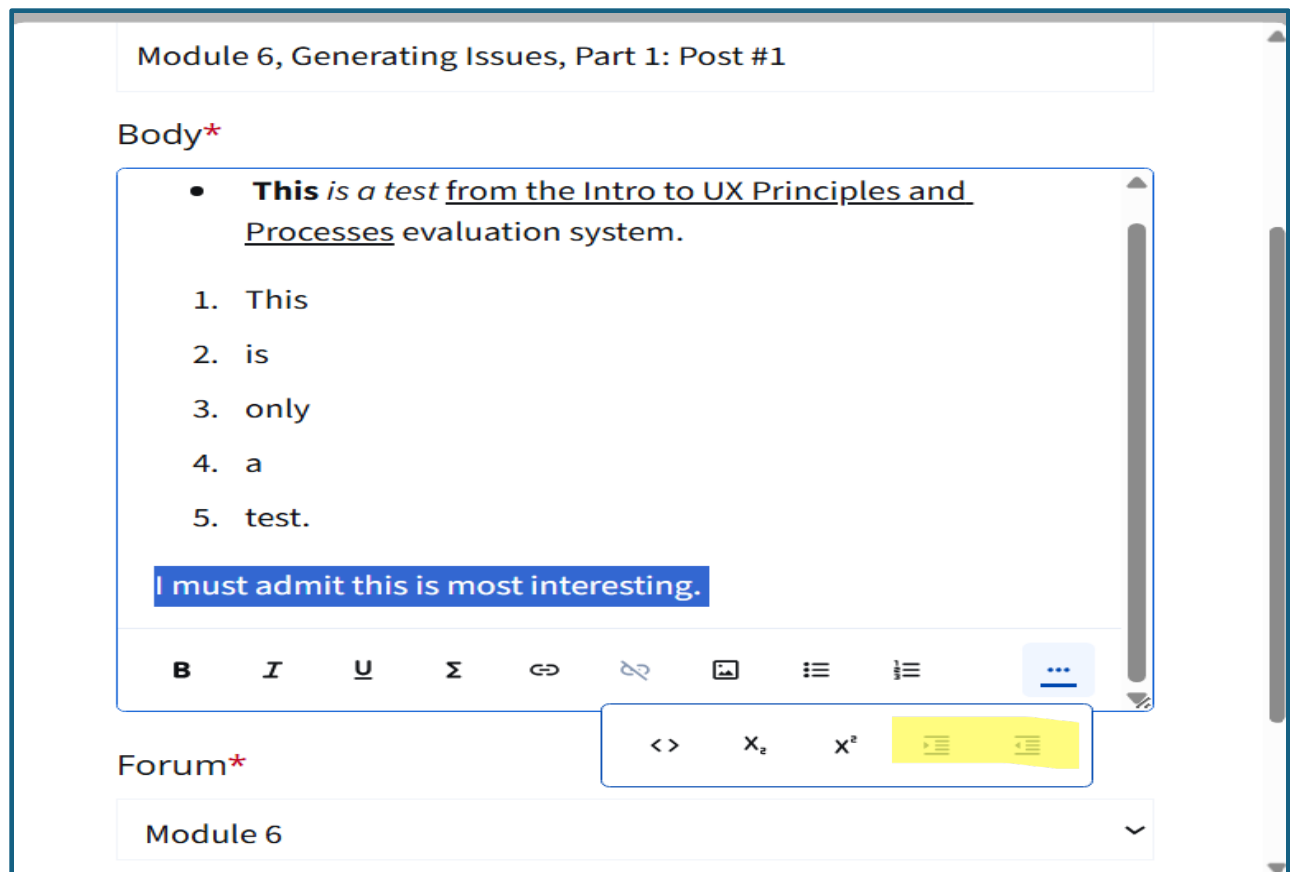
Key Findings: Post pop-up, Module 6

Finding #4: (Brief sentence)

Severity: 3/4

Heuristics Violated: Consistency and Standards.

The increase/decrease indent feature is not available when the text is highlighted; this departs from convention.



Recommendation: Examine the coding behind this function; therein you'll find the error.

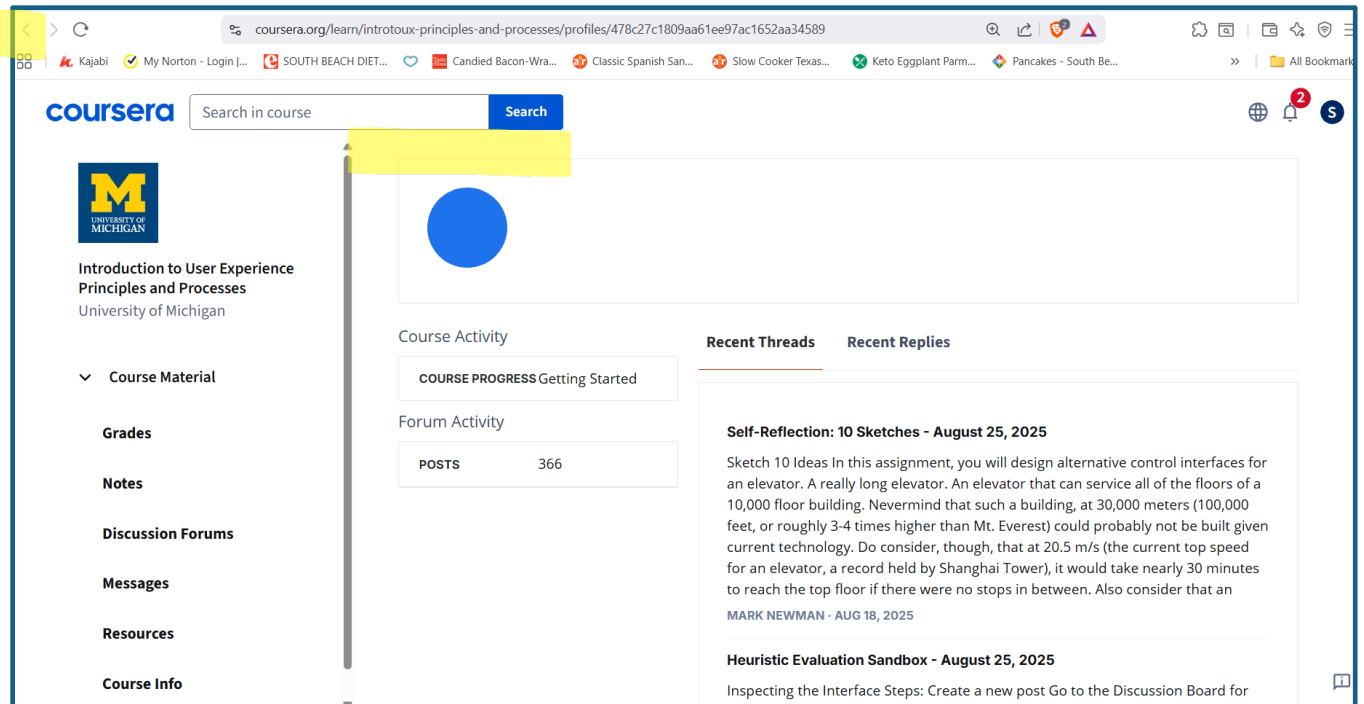
Key Findings

Finding #5 : Individual moderator page.

Severity: 2/4

Heuristics violated: User Control & Freedom, Consistency & Standards

You can easily go to the individual moderator's page; however, you can't get back to the landing page easily, as there is no 'Home' icon, as there is when you go to a particular forum. Instead, you must rely upon the standard web solution of using the left-facing arrow next to the URL box.



Recommendation: Add a “Home” icon so the User clearly understands how to get back to the starting point.

Key Findings

Finding #6: Post pop-up, Module 6


Severity: 2/4

Heuristics Violated: #5: Error Prevention







While attempting to post my piece completed for this assignment, the posting action could not be completed. Although both parts of the error message were clear

- #1: The issue. (*“Something happened” is acceptable, because either you don’t know or you don’t wish to cast aspersions on the User*), and
- #2: The action.

this was not the correct action. I merely waited for a time and reposted. I did not need to reload my image.



Unfortunately, images cannot be linked; therefore, I am relegated to [highlighting text](#) to insert a URL

B *I* U Σ      

Forum*

Module 6

Something went wrong. Please reload the page and try again.

[Cancel](#) [Post](#)

Recommendation: Examine the coding behind this function; therein you'll find the error.

Key Findings

Finding #7: Post pop-up, Module 6

Severity: 2/4




Heuristics Violated: #5 Error Prevention

In this case, I linked it to an invalid URL. The error message was unnecessarily vague.

Module 6, Generating Issues, Part 1: Post #2

Body*

This is a test of the link insertion system with an invalid URL

B *I* U Σ [↔](#) [↶](#)    `<>` ...

Forum*

Module 6

There is something wrong with your post. Please review and edit it or contact support for assistance.

Cancel

Post

Recommendation: Rewrite the error message accordingly: The reason should be: “Invalid URL” and the action recommended should be: “Please recheck URL.”

Conclusion

Of all the issues, the formatting, redirect, and follow/unfollow glitches were the most apparent and most severe, as these errors prevented proper formatting (bullet points askew), and the ability to get to the intended page (help center), and for the user to quickly know whether s/he is following a post or not. All of these are rated a 4/4 in the reviewer’s assessment and deserve prompt attention.