Colorado State University Libraries Website Usability Tasks

Draft - Greg Vogl, April 22, 2010

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to help us by trying out a prototype of the new library website. Your participation in this study will help us improve the design of the site. We really appreciate your input.

Your participation will be kept anonymous and only shared with library staff for improving the site.

We would like you to:

1. Use the new library website to complete some tasks.
2. Complete an online survey about the site.
3. Discuss your experience with the site.

Please try to think aloud during the tasks. Tell us what you are doing and why. Ask questions and make comments and suggestions whenever they occur to you. Please tell us what you think, not what you think we want to hear.

We are not testing you; we are just trying to assess the usability of the site. There are no wrong answers.

This site is in early stages of development and not fully functional. You may encounter some errors.

Usability Tasks

Open the Web browser you use most frequently (Internet Explorer, Firefox or Safari).

Start each task at <http://acquia.library.colostate.edu/> or <http://acquiasvn.library.colostate.edu/>.

For each part of a task, read it aloud, and then try to complete it just as you would in real life.

1. Name your general **academic subject or area** (department or major, for research or teaching).
   1. Find a list of online article databases or electronic resources in this area.
   2. Find a CSU Libraries Web page that lists research resources in this area.
   3. Find contact information of a librarian who could help you with research in this area.
2. Name a specific topic of interest to you that might be found in **books**.
   1. Find a few books on this topic that you might use.
   2. Show if they are available for you to use today.
   3. For one that is available, show what information you would need to get it.
   4. For one that is not, show some ways you could get a copy from another library.
   5. Show how you would renew a book that you have checked out.
3. Name a specific topic of interest to you that might be found in **journal articles**.
   1. Find a few journal articles on this topic that you might use.
   2. Find an article that has full text online, or show that none of the articles have full text.
4. Find some materials of interest to you, either created by **CSU** faculty, staff or students, or unique to CSU.
5. Name a CSU course of interest to you for which materials might be on reserve at the library.
   1. Show what materials have been placed on **reserve** for this course, or show there are none.
6. Show what types of library **rooms** you can reserve.
   1. Show for what purposes they can be used, and name a type you might use.
   2. Show how you would reserve one.
7. Show what types of **equipment** can be borrowed or used in the library.
   1. Name a few types that you might use.
   2. Show how you would borrow them.
8. Show what types of **training, courses and online assistance** are available at the library.
   1. Name one type you might use.
   2. Show how you could use these services.
9. What **questions** do you have or have you had about library resources, facilities and services?
   1. Show some ways you could get answers using the library website.
   2. Show some ways you could get help from library staff.
10. Complete the online survey at <http://lib.colostate.edu/websurvey>.

Instructions for Facilitators

Welcome participants and thank them for helping us.

Give them the two-page instructions above. Ensure that they read the tasks aloud.

Keep encouraging the participant to continuously think aloud throughout the test. If they are quiet, ask questions like “What are you thinking now?” and “Can you explain why you …?” in a friendly, encouraging tone.

Encourage participants to try to complete the tasks. If they just say what they would do, ask them to show you how they would do it. Allow participants to give up on any task at any time, and end a task when appropriate.

Try to avoid instructing or helping participants to complete tasks. Ask them “What do you think you should do?” Remind them to do what they would in real life. However, it may be occasionally necessary to help them, e.g.:

* Return them to the prototype home page if they cannot do so on their own.
* Explain and clarify the intent of tasks and survey questions when participants do not understand them.
* Instruct the participant and answer all questions after the tasks have been completed.

Try to take notes while you facilitate. (See the Instructions for Observers below.)

Encourage the participant to complete the [online survey](http://acquia.library.colostate.edu/surveys/website-redesign) after completing the tasks. (The survey is the first item on the prototype home page under News and Events.)

Discuss the open-ended survey questions (5-9) with participants after they complete the survey. ([Print a copy](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5HZVR22).)

Discuss your observations and explanations with the observer after the participant leaves.

Instructions for Observers

Please complete one observation form section (one half page) for each task (e.g. question 1).  
Label parts of questions within the observation section, e. g. 1a, 1b, and 1c.  
If you need more space for observations, continue on the bottom of the page or the next page.

If you can’t record exact start and end times, give an estimate of task completion time, e.g. 1 minute.

After the participant leaves, try to fill in any information that you did not have time to complete during the test.  
Also add details that will make the notes understandable to others.

## Observations section:

Try to record as much as you can, but focus on what you think is important.

Use verbs for participant actions, e.g. **typed** “thesis”, **clicked** “Services”, and **said** “How do I get back?”  
Use “quotes” to record the user’s exact words. Use [square brackets] to paraphrase the user’s meaning.

Clearly distinguish your **observations** of what the participant did from your subjective **explanations**.  
Write **Why:** to explain why you think the participant did something or had a problem.  
Write **Suggest:** to suggest how you think the site could be improved to avoid the problem.

Some usability issues for observation

1. Do participants use **navigation menus/links**?
   1. Top drop-down navigation menus and/or left navigation areas?
   2. Which menus and links are used? Which are not?
      1. Computers, equipment, rooms, Computer Application Training, Instruction, ILL
   3. What problems do they have?
      1. Opening and closing drop-down menus, reading menu text and tool tips
2. Do participants use **search boxes**?
   1. On home and non-home pages?
   2. Which tabs and options are used? Which are not?
   3. What problems do they have?
3. Which terms do participants consider to be **jargon**, inconsistent or unclear?
   1. Colorado State University vs. CSU; CSU Libraries vs. University Libraries vs. Libraries vs. Library
   2. Libraries Staff vs. Librarians; College Liaisons vs. Reference Librarians
   3. E-Resources & Databases vs. Articles vs. Journals
   4. Digital Repository vs. Institutional Repository
   5. Archives vs. Special Collections vs. Digital Collections
4. Is it clear to users who they should **contact**, how, and in what circumstances?
   1. Questions about doing subject-specific research and using online research tools and resources
   2. Questions about locating and borrowing research materials
   3. Questions about borrowing, reserving and using computers, equipment and rooms
   4. Questions about training and instruction
5. Also see the [survey questions](http://acquia.library.colostate.edu/surveys/website-redesign).

CSU Libraries Usability Observation Form

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date: | Time: | Place: |
| Facilitator: | Observer: | Participant Number: |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Task number: | Task completed? | Yes No |  |
| Start time: | User had problems? | Yes No |  |
| End time: | User was helped? | Yes No |  |

Observations (what the user did and said; why; suggested changes to website):

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Task number: | Task completed? | Yes No |  |
| Start time: | User had problems? | Yes No |  |
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