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User Testing Guidelines

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Mitchell Joe

Don't go solo

Nobody should be testing by themselves. Paired teams are key when listening to our users.

We often hear different things and observe different behaviors than do our co-workers. This means we draw different conclusions. Look for consensus, repeatable findings.

•Two people means less chance of missing something important.
•One person conducts, one person takes notes.

Don't interview your uncle

Our friends and family naturally have a bias and want us to succeed. We are looking for the hard truth.
Remove as many biases as possible.

When looking for candidates to interview, look for people who are our customer, or would be our potential customer.

We talking to a couple, steer towards the decision maker.

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Be quiet. Listen.

Your words are not going to make the highlight reel. ☺

We go out into the field to observe users' reactions and behaviors.

Keep the user in natural use mode.

People will often say one thing and do another. We're concerned with what they do, not what they say they'll do.

Ask people to just do whatever they would naturally do, there are no right or wrong answers, we just want to be a fly on the wall.

Use Mode vs Critique Mode

The opposite of use mode is critique mode, where the user is not really using the product anymore, they are just giving their opinion of it.

Red flags:
- "Is this what you want me to do?"
- Aimless browsing that suggests lack of engagement (waiting for more instructions)
- Completing a task too quickly as if being "tested" (e.g. "I'd book the first hotel.")
- Anyone who is talking more than they are demonstrating (doing). These people are not helping you, and might be more interested in proving something to you, or are a professional "tester".

Don't lead.

You may need to ask clarifying questions to uncover the users' thoughts and motivations, but phrase the questions as open-endedly as possible.

GOOD: "Why did you click that?"
BAD: "Did you click that because…"

Remain even keeled--Poker faced

Another way of leading is to get excited when the user does something that confirms your hypothesis or likes your new design and get annoyed when they don't. Don't do that.

Put yourself in researcher mode and just try to see what's there.

Wait. Don't answer questions.

Users will often clarify their thoughts through their words or actions *without* you asking them any questions if you just wait a little bit.

If they don't do that, then you can always ask.

Explain that you will answer all of their questions at the end of the interview.

See what captures their attention.

What are they looking at?
What are their motivations?
What are their goals?
What are they feeling?

Your goal is to learn these without asking them outright.

Ask them to explain their sighs.

And any other non-verbal noises like "Hmm…"

Ask them to speak out loud.

It's unnatural to speak out loud while you use a travel site, so you'll have to ask them to speak their thoughts out loud if you want to hear them. The danger of this is that they go into critique mode and start describing what they normally do rather than just doing what they normally do (and we want them to just do what they normally do because they might be wrong when they tell us).

I like to start out with silence and not hearing their thoughts and then occasionally ask, "What are you thinking now?".

Set up the task to observe their behavior.

A good way to get honest reactions and feedback is to set up the task so that they will show you what they do.

Start by observing what they would do (a site of their choosing), then show your idea.

Questions for learning:
•How would you book a hotel?
•Now let me show you another site. How would you book a hotel here?

Goal of interview:
•Do they notice the retail-opaque pairings? (Not directly asked)
•Do they find the opaque products attractive? (Not directly asked)

Be open to side-findings.

While testing a new navigation, you might find that people dislike the graphic design.

Be open to finding any new information about your product.

Thank them for their time.

With money. ☺
We usually give them $5 Starbucks cards.

Summary

- Paired teams—not solo.
- Avoid asking biased participants--your uncle, friends, etc.
- Be quiet. Listen. Observe.
- Keep the user in use mode not critique mode.
- Don't lead the user. Ask open-ended questions.
- Remain even-keeled.
- Wait for the user to speak. Answer their questions afterwards.
- See what captures their attention.
- Ask why they're sighing, laughing, or grumbling.
- Ask them to speak out loud.
- Set up the task to observe natural behavior.
- Be open to side-findings.
- Thank them for their time. With money. ☺