

# Individual Assignment 1: Naïve Usability Assessment

**Date Assigned:** Wednesday, February 06, 2013

**Date Due:** Friday, February 15, 2013

**Points:** 20pts

The purpose of this assignment is to get you to think in terms of usability, and notice usability issues from the user's point of view.

During the next week, pick two times that use some sort of technology or information system: a web site, an ATM machine, an app on your phone, a computer application, a car, a bicycle...the possibilities are many. Choose one that you have used many times in the past, and one that you are using for the first time.

For the length of a transaction, or about 15 minutes, whichever is less, notice and record usability issues or problems. Pay attention to such issues as the following:

- Instances in which you had to modify your own activity to suit the needs of the system or technology;
- Moments of confusion or uncertainty, such as questions about what actions you should take or what a display or system response means;
- Inconveniences and instances requiring added effort from you -- physical (e.g., doing something, or doing something in an awkward or effortful way) or mental (e.g., having to remember something that takes some effort).
- Emotional reactions, such as annoyance ("Why do I have to do this? Why can't I do that?"), anger, fear ("Will it eat my ATM card?"); pleasure, happiness ("That was fun!" "That's really convenient!"); whatever.
- Added effort or attention of any kind.
- What's even harder to notice: times when everything went smoothly, without problems.

When you are using the system or item with which you have experience, these may be harder to notice.

Pay attention to the ways in which you have been trained by it to do things its way, the accommodations that you are now used to making. During the exercise, simply keep track of these instances as they arise. Then summarize your observations in a paper for me, spending a page or two on each of the two instances. Then write a page or so reflecting on what you learned about usability from this exercise. The point is not to apply any of the readings, but to notice your own experience as a user.

Stay with noticing the disjunctions between how you act and how the system works; do not leap into redesigning it to work better. This is hard; often our tendency is to focus on how to make it better without first noticing the problems. But premature re-design can lead to sub-optimization: we solve some problems while creating new ones.

***Write approximately 2 pages for each instance (the familiar and unfamiliar).***

## Writing Guidelines

Your paper must be organized as follows:

- Assignment title, your name, and date.
- Heading with the name of the first item (object, website, app) you have selected.
- One or two sentences describing the item and how regularly you have used it.
- A heading titled (Observations)
- A page or so summarizing your observations on the usability issues that you encountered.
- A heading titled (Reflection)
- A page or so reflecting on what you learned about usability.
- Heading with the name of the second item (object, website, app) you have selected.
- One or two sentences describing the item.
- A heading titled (Observations)
- A page or so summarizing your observations on the usability issues that you encountered.
- A heading titled (Reflection)
- A page or so reflecting on what you learned about usability.

Microsoft Word is installed in the lab. Use a reasonable font and font size. Number your pages. Your writing doesn't have to be double spaced, but it is okay if it is.

I have placed a book (Writing for Computer Science) in the lab. Do look at it 😊

Turn in your assignment as a hard copy at the beginning of class on Friday, February 15.