Usability Testing for Technical Communicators (TCC 6490) [CRN: 70968]

Northeastern University — College of Professional Studies (CPS)
Fall Quarter 2017 (First-Half Fall Term)

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Instructor: Katherine Wahl
Email Address: k.wahl@northeastern.edu
Class Dates: 9/18/17 – 10/27/17
Web Site: https://nuonline.neu.edu/

Course Prerequisites
No prerequisites are required, but an understanding of basic usability and a desire to learn the fundamentals of usability testing are helpful.

Required Textbooks

Note: Many of the readings in this course include relevant academic articles – particularly recent research in the field. These readings are located within Blackboard > Course Material > Week [X] > Readings.

Please note that some articles are direct links to the article within a database accessible through Northeastern University’s Library system, some are PDF and some are HTML. Your myNEU login information will be required for accessing the library information. You can obtain information at http://library.northeastern.edu/. Additional information is available at http://library.northeastern.edu/gateways/graduate-students.

Course Description
Introduces and examines how to plan, create, run, and facilitate usability testing based on best practices and known testing methodologies. These concepts and methodologies can be used to test products, services, websites, and documentation. Course includes overview of how to construct a usability test, recruit participants, facilitate test sessions, analyze results, and reporting findings. Emphasis is placed on the emerging use of remote and mobile usability testing.

Course Outcomes and Methodology
Upon the completion of this course, you will understand the basics of usability and user experience and how they relate to product development and particularly technical communication. Additionally, this course will give you an overview on the basics tenants of Human Factors.

This course combines discussion, posted lectures, homework, several projects, and a capstone of a final project. There are no “tests or quizzes” per se, rather the final project will be a culmination your work through the term.

Each week you will be expected to do the following:

1. Review the week’s learning objectives
2. Complete all assigned readings
3. Complete lecture materials for the week
4. Participate in the Discussion Board
5. Complete and submit all assignments by their due dates

Participation/Discussion Board
Participation is a portion of your overall grade and lively questions and discussion are expected throughout each week of the course. **Note that we post two questions per week in the Discussion Board.**

Each week we expect, at a minimum, each student to do the following:

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Post one primary response to each question that I post in the Discussion Board. The response must be a thoughtful and thorough response to my primary question. We also require each student to reply to another student as a follow up to (each) primary question posted.

Each week we require a total of four responses/postings by each student in the Discussion Board: one response to each of the two primary questions and one response to another student’s postings for each question.

Reply to each question within 48 hours (preferably 24 hours). You will only be able to post responses for the week in the Discussion board for the current week.

We expect email replies to each other to be respectful, thoughtful, and polite. Email does not come across with the tone you get from traditional classroom discussion. Think carefully before you respond.

Refer to the Discussion Board Rubric Overview document (within the Discussion Board sections) for a complete understanding of the requirements and expectations of class participation for this course.

Since class participation is 25% of your final grade, get involved in discussions early and often. For this class, you can obtain 4 points per week (each question and responses are worth 4 points) in the discussion board as part of your class participation grade -- so use this option to maximize your grade and discuss the question with other students. The only exception to this is week 6, when you are only graded on question 1 – as question 2 is optional.

Please note we will be reviewing posts daily but short of a direct question or someone acting inappropriate in the Discussion Board, we do not generally impede the flow of student conversation. We prefer to let students discuss the specific topic without professorial interruption. At the end of each question period, we will write and post a ‘wrap up’ reflection post and then answer any outstanding questions.

Office Hours
There will be times throughout the term where we will be available for “Office Hours” in the Blackboard IM Chat to discuss course and/or assignment-related issues. This time can be used to talk about assignments, readings, or anything else regarding the class or topic. This time will be formalized in class, but we are generally available Tuesday evenings (Boston time).

Submission of Work
Submit homework assignments through Blackboard instead of sending them via email. Once your assignment is graded, you will be able to view the grade through Blackboard. Generally, we will send you a separate email with homework comments for each assignment.

Homework is due Monday mornings by 8 am [Boston time] after the week completes, except the following:

Homework # 4 is due Friday October 27th, 2017 at 8 pm [Boston time]

When we mention page requirements or limits, page expectation includes a double-spaced page of no more than a 12-size font – with an expectation of an 11-point font such as Calibri or Tahoma. Papers should have standard one-inch margins on each side. Please include a cover page with your name, date, class number, and homework assignment number – and this page is not included in the page count.

For easier homework identification, always submit your homework with your last name underscored with the homework number: for example: smith_hw1.pdf.

Submit all homework in PDF format unless stated otherwise; otherwise homework will not be accepted.

Grading
The following is the grading scheme for this class:

25% -- Class Participation (Discussion Board)

10% -- Homework Assignment 1
(Due at start of week 2 – 9/25/17 at 8 am [Boston time])
15% -- **Homework Assignment 2**
(Due at start of week 3 – 10/2/17 at 8 am [Boston time])

25% -- **Homework Assignment 3**
(Due at start of week 5 – 10/16/17 at 8 am [Boston time])

25% -- **Homework Assignment 4**
(Due at the end of week 6 – [Friday] 3/31/17 at 8 pm [Boston time])

Each week builds upon the previous week and failure to participate in discussion and complete homework assignments is strongly discouraged. Anyone neglecting to participate in discussions and complete homework on time will receive an unsatisfactory Class Participation grade, hindering your ability to pass the class.

Please note that we have struck a balance within this homework between giving you details on what we expect and sometimes leaving open requirements to be ambiguous/open to interpretation in certain instances. This is done to help you develop cognitive thinking skills and attempting to emulate a work-related environment where you will rarely ever receive all the information needed before proceeding with project work. I always encourage questions but remember sometimes we are setting up assignments to encourage everyone to think and interpret what they have learned and apply that to the specific assignment.

Homework is due at 8 am Monday morning (Boston time) unless otherwise noted. **Late homework will not be accepted!**

Final course grading ranges are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alphabetical Equivalent</th>
<th>Numerical Equivalent</th>
<th>Final Grade Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>4.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-94</td>
<td>3.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>3.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>3.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>2.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>2.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>2.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>1.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below 70</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assignments**

**Homework Assignment 1 — Usability Testing Perspective/Reaction Paper**
Discuss what if any type of usability testing you performed or participated in previously. Discuss what you think went well and what could have been improved based on your personal assessment. If you have not performed or participated in a usability test previously, explain what you would most like to learn or understand about the entire process of usability testing. More details given once class starts.

**Homework Assignment 2 — Usability /User Edit Usability Testing of Documentation**
You will be given a set of installation tasks and then perform a usability/user edit method test to evaluate the usefulness and usability of these tasks. You will perform this test with 2 users. More details given once class starts.

**Homework Assignment 3 – Usability Test Plan Creation and Test**
This homework entails creating a usability test plan, recruiting participants, and running a test on a Web site of your choice. You will be expected to do this end to end usability testing process and protocol in face to face meetings with the participants: be it in a room, a usability lab, a coffee shop, etc. Once you are done with this testing, you will be expected to
produce a quick overview document stating the good points of the Web site, the issues with the Web site, and usability recommendations in two pages or less (minus all the raw data). More details given once class starts.

**Homework Assignment 4 – Remote Usability Testing of Homework 3**

You will use the tasks and Web site from homework 3 and perform another round of usability testing for but the testing must be remote and unmoderated. Please use the software at [http://www.trymyui.com/edu](http://www.trymyui.com/edu) as this is free for educational purposes. You will perform the same set of tasks, but all of this must be done online.

Like Homework 3, once you are done with this testing, you will be expected to produce a quick overview document stating the good points of the Web site, the issues with the Web site, and usability recommendations in two pages or less (minus all the raw data). The difference is that we will expect details on any differences in the results or participants’ views if they differed between the two types of testing methods. More details given once class starts.

**Weekly Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/18 – 9/24</td>
<td>Introduction to User testing and the User Edit method (in the context of usability testing)</td>
<td><strong>READING</strong> Tedesco/Tranquada: Intro and Chapter 1 Course Materials.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>READING</strong> Tedesco/Tranquada: Chapter(s) 2-4</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>READING</strong> Tedesco/Tranquada: Chapter(s) 5-8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>READING</strong> Tedesco/Tranquada: Chapter(s) 9-14</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>READING</strong> Tedesco/Tranquada: Chapter(s) 15-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9/25 – 10/1</td>
<td>Introduction to moderated testing</td>
<td><strong>HOMEWORK</strong> Homework 1 due 9/25/17 @ 8 am [Boston time]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/2 – 10/8</td>
<td>Moderated testing: In person and remote</td>
<td><strong>HOMEWORK</strong> Homework 2 due 10/2/17 @ 8 am [Boston time]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10/10 – 10/15</td>
<td>Introduction to unmoderated testing</td>
<td><strong>HOMEWORK</strong> Homework 3 due 10/16/17 @ 8 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10/16 – 10/22</td>
<td>Unmoderated testing: methods and tools</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Academic Honesty and Integrity
The University views academic dishonesty as one of the most serious offenses that a student can commit while in college and imposes appropriate punitive sanctions on violators. Here are some examples of academic dishonesty. While this is not an all-inclusive list, we hope this will help you to understand some of the things instructors look for. The following is excerpted from the University’s policy on academic integrity; the complete policy is available on the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution web page.

Cheating – intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in an academic exercise

Fabrication – intentional and unauthorized falsification, misrepresentation, or invention of any data, or citation in an academic exercise

Plagiarism – intentionally representing the words, ideas, or data of another as one’s own in any academic exercise without providing proper citation

Unauthorized collaboration – instances when students submit individual academic works that are substantially similar to one another; while several students may have the same source material, the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the data must be each individual’s independent work.

Participation in academically dishonest activities – any action taken by a student with the intent of gaining an unfair advantage

Facilitating academic dishonesty – intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to violate any provision of this policy

For more information on Academic Integrity, including examples, please refer to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution web page.

Finally, if in doubt, cite it, cite it, cite it!

Student Accommodations
The College of Professional Studies is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities to students with documented disabilities (e.g. mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical). To ensure access to this class, and program, please contact The Disability Resource Center (http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/) to engage in a confidential conversation about the process for requesting reasonable accommodations in the classroom and clinical or lab settings. Accommodations are not provided retroactively so students are encouraged to register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as they begin their program. The College of Professional Studies encourages students to access all resources available through the DRC for consistent support.

End of Course Evaluation Surveys
Your feedback regarding your educational experience in this class is very important to the College of Professional Studies. Your comments will make a difference in the future planning and presentation of our curriculum.
At the end of this class, please take the time to complete the evaluation survey at the NEU EvaluationKit website. Your survey responses are completely confidential. Surveys will be open for the last two weeks of the class. An email will be sent to your HuskyMail account notifying you when surveys are available.

**College of Professional Studies (CPS) Policies and Procedures**
For comprehensive information, please see the Registrar University Catalogs page as well as the Student Resources page of the Northeastern University College of Professional Studies website.

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