

Introduction

When attempting to evaluate the usability of a web site, there are a variety of methodologies you can use in completing your tasks. When presented with the task of evaluating the usability of the new FSU library web site, we (my group) were assigned the task of using several particular methods interchangeably. We were to do a usability test on the FSU library web site. In turn, we were required to conduct the same usability test on the library website of our hated rival, the University of Florida. So in a way we were doing both a usability test and a landscape analysis (a method in which you compare your site with a competitor). By completing the usability test and comparing the usability of the FSU web site with that of the University of Florida's, we would get a good idea of which site had better usability. This would then give us a starting point for our evaluation of the FSU web site. We would then complete the evaluation by conducting a heuristic analysis, or a review of the website based on standard usability guidelines. We broke down this evaluation process into three phases.

Phase 1

Our first task, and the first task of all usability tests, is to review the product (in this case the FSU library web site) and determine appropriate tasks for the users to complete. For this evaluation, we kept it to one task. We wanted our task to test something other than the usability of the more common functions (such as searching for a book). So, as a group, we decided on the following scenario:

“You have just graduated from FSU and have been hired for a new job in Jacksonville. While packing for the move, you came across a lot of old textbooks you no longer need anymore. These books would not net you very much money if you sold them back to the campus bookstore. You recall that you once overheard someone saying you could give books to the libraries at FSU. You decided this was the best choice, but it is very late and the libraries are closed. The moving truck comes in the morning, so you only have time to drop off the books real quick. So, from the library's main website, you need to find and print the form that you must fill out. This way you can fill out the form now and then quickly drop off the books in the morning to be back in time for the moving truck.

The user successfully completes this goal when they find the Gifts Information Form (in .pdf format) on the Gifts and Donations page. With our scenario completed, we felt confident enough to begin testing several end users. These users would be students at FSU.

Phase 2

With our scenario completed, each group member began testing their own separate users. Our users completed the usability test for both the FSU and UF library websites. After each of us tested our users, we came together as a group and collected our results into the following table:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
Number of Clicks											
FSU	2	3	2	3	3	2	4	5	5	6	3.50
UF	13	3	8	5	6	9	7	7	7	7	7.20
Time (in seconds)											
FSU	27	85	25	45	43	31	28	33	34	43	39.40
UF	270	60	58	67	71	83	43	53	50	64	81.90
Rating (5 being the best)											
FSU	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4.70
UF	1	4	3	2	4	3	3	3	3	1	2.70

Fig. 1.1 – Group results from the usability tests of both web sites.

In total, we tested ten users on both sites. Based on the results collated, it is clear that in regards to this scenario, the FSU library web site is the far superior site in terms of usability. The number of clicks it took for the user to successfully complete the task on the UF web site was twice as much (7.2 clicks compared to FSU’s 3.5 clicks). Also, the time it took for the user to complete this task also shows that FSU’s web site was clearly better. It took almost twice as long for the user to complete the task on the UF site as it did on the FSU site. However, looking at the table above, the second user, whom I tested, mentioned something very interesting to me. The user commented on the face that since the links on the main index page of both sites were very similar (fig 1.2 and 1.3), and the fact that he had just done the task on the FSU web site, it was easier to complete the task on the UF web site. With that said, the other users seemed to struggle with the UF site even after completing the task on the FSU site.

Figure 1.2 – FSU’s main links

About the Libraries	Library Services	Help with Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All FSU Libraries • Hours • Contact Us • Directions / Maps • Forms • Policies • Jobs / Employment • Administration • Gifts & Donations • Friends of the Libraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Faculty ◦ Grad ◦ Undergrad ◦ Distance learners ◦ Users w/ disabilities • Study Spaces • Technology • Getting Materials • Interlibrary Loan • Programs & Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask Us Now • Research Guides • One-on-one Help • Course Instruction • Citation Management • Online Reference Shelf • Tools and Software • Graduate Workshops

Figure 1.3 – UF’s main links

Find	Services	About the Libraries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Books ▪ Articles ▪ Journals ▪ Databases ▪ Course Reserves ▪ Subject Guides & Specialists ▪ Internet Reference Sources ▪ UF Digital Collections ▪ More... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Borrowing & Circulation ▪ Research Assistance & Information ▪ Interlibrary Loan ▪ Information Commons ▪ Off-Campus Access ▪ Instruction ▪ Faculty Services ▪ Distance Services ▪ For Users With Disabilities ▪ More... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hours ▪ Libraries & Collections ▪ Computers & Equipment ▪ Places to Study ▪ Strategic Planning ▪ Library Bookstore ▪ Giving to the Libraries ▪ Employment ▪ Dean’s Message ▪ More...

Even though these results seem to make it evident that FSU's site is more usable, there are certain things to consider. First, these numbers may not be the same across all functions of the site. Also, FSU's libraries allow you to just fill out a form and then turn in the books. Donating at UF may not require a form. In fact there really was little mention of book donating. They seemed to be looking more for cash donations. This may not particularly make UF's site less usable since they may not accept book donations. However, it still may be poor usability since it is difficult for the user to determine whether or not they accept book donations. Even with these things considered, it would appear that FSU's site is more usable. With the average satisfaction rating of FSU's site being almost twice as much (FSU's 4.7 compared to UF's 2.7), we feel that the FSU website seems to be more enjoyable for the user and therefore should be more usable for most other functions.

Phase 3

After we completed the usability tests and collected our results as a group, we were assigned to complete the final phase individually. The final phase includes my evaluation of the FSU web site based on standard usability guidelines. We shared ideas amongst group members, but our heuristic evaluation of the site will be different for each member. The heuristic evaluation will only cover the FSU site and not UF's.

First, the colors scheme is properly done. Not only does it incorporate the universities garnet and gold, it maintains good color guidelines. The number of colors is a bit on the high side, with roughly about five different colors throughout the main index page (see figure 1.4). Now some of these colors are used less, and therefore do not seem to cause any problems. The site does a great job of using high contrast colors. It has white text on darker colors, and black text on the lighter colors. Luckily enough, the two colors garnet and gold work well together and form a good color scheme. However, some of the colors are not always consistent. If you look at figure 1.5, you will see that on some pages there is a blue box, highlighting certain information. Although it makes that stand out, it is just not consistent with the rest of the scheme and seems out of place. Instead of using a blue box, it would be more consistent to make the box the light red color used for the other boxes. Overall though, the site does a good job with its color scheme, which is one of many things that can help reduce the cognitive load on the user.

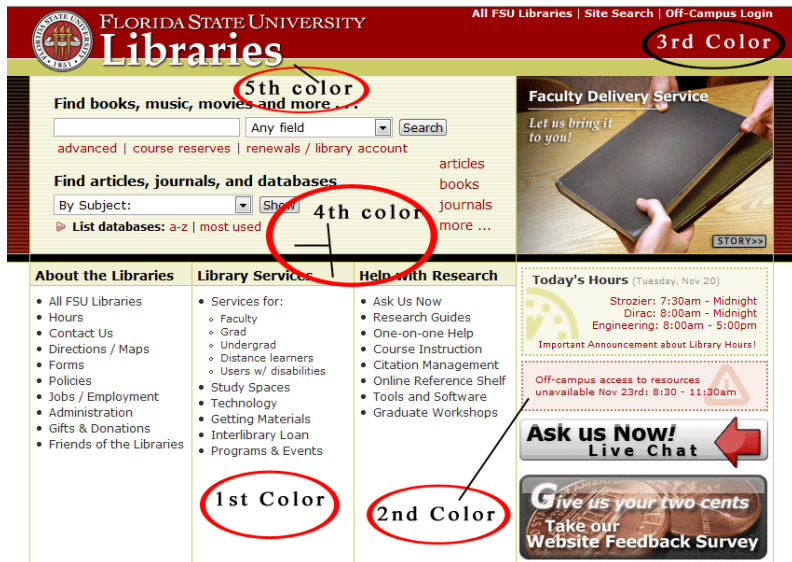


Figure 1.4 – Examples of the color usage on the site.

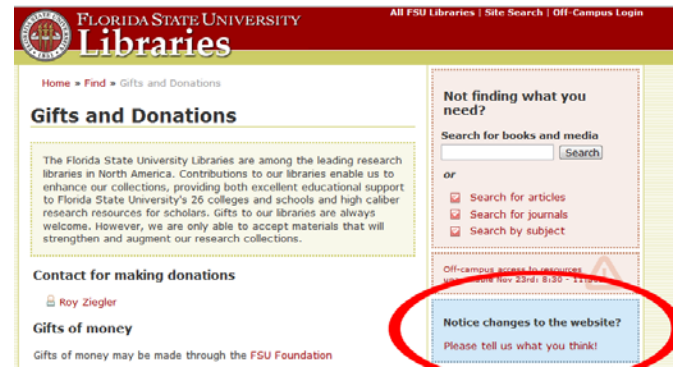


Figure 1.5 – Examples of the blue box.

Secondly, the navigation and layout is also well done. It allows the user to easily move through the site. It maintains perfect consistency throughout the various pages, with most of the information staying in the same place. Also, the important items are placed very consistently. The right bar which includes notices, the live chat button and the search bar are on every page and the breadcrumbs at the top are always in the same place. These important elements consistently look the same and never disappear from any of the pages, allowing the user to find them very easily when needed (see figure 1.6). Since the breadcrumbs are always present, it creates a terrific navigation as the breadcrumbs not only tell the user where they are, but it tells them how they got there, allowing them to quickly retrace their steps.

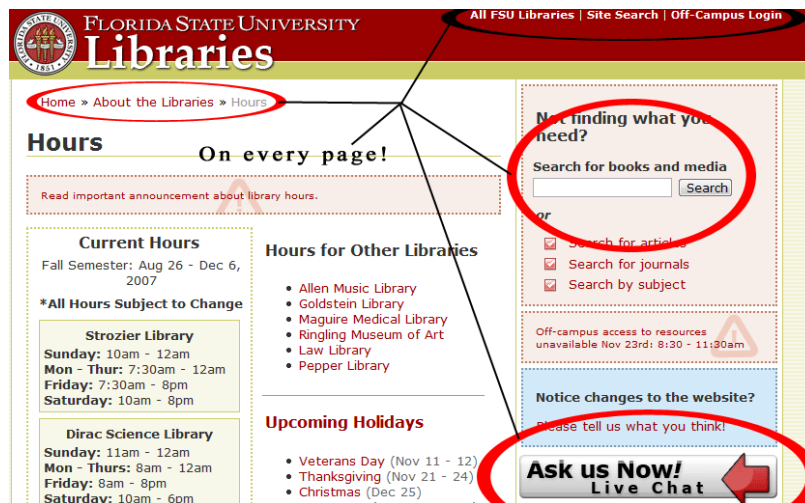


Figure 1.6 – Perfect use of layout and navigation consistency, these elements are on every page.

Another thing to note is that the site is not very cluttered. Even with the large amounts of information, no one particular page is overwhelming for the user. This is due to the fact that most of the key information is nicely organized in various boxes. With these various boxes, the page is very easy to scan and quickly allows you to catch the information you need. The site uses a good amount of whitespace in between these boxes as well, which helps make it appear less cluttered. Finally, the site is very fluid. Since the main section is centered on the display, it will stretch out to properly fit the standard 1024 x 768 resolution. Even with all the good however, there are a few things missing, but they really are only minor details. Absent from any of the pages appears to be a sitemap. Since the site does have a lot of pages, a sitemap may help a user find the information they need even quicker. In the end, the site's terrific layout and navigation give the site a great level of usability.

Conclusion

With the three phases completed, it was pretty clear to see that the new library web site has very good usability. With the data from the usability test, the landscape analysis, and the heuristic analysis, there is sufficient evidence to support this claim. The users from the usability test were very satisfied with the web site and it outperformed UF's site. The site does a good job following proper color guidelines, has an outstanding layout, and solid navigation. As an FSU student, and a student studying usability, it is good to see that our library web site has terrific usability. This great usability allows our students to find the information they need quickly, easily, all without the worry of being overloaded with too much information and being slowed down by poor navigation and inconsistent layouts.