

USABILITY PROTOCOL

PRIMER

ONE PAGE

NOBODY WILL ASK IF YOU READ IT

Written before the session, not after.

WHAT IT IS

The written plan for a usability session: what you will ask someone to do, what you will say, what you will not say, and what you are watching for. One page, written before the session.

WHEN IT EARNS ITS PLACE

Any time you put a thing in front of a person to find out whether it works. In this course: the session assigned at W09, run outside class, reported at W11.

HOW TO MAKE ONE

- One sentence on what you are trying to learn. If you cannot write it, the session will wander.
- Two or three tasks, phrased as goals, not instructions. *"Find out when your next appointment is" — never "click the calendar icon."*
- Write your script. The welcome, the think-aloud request, and the exact words for when they get stuck: "what would you do if I weren't here?"
- Write down what you will NOT do. Not helping is the hard part and it needs to be decided in advance, not in the moment.
- Say what you are watching for — where they pause, what they say versus what they do, where they blame themselves.

RUNNING IT

- Say out loud that you are testing the thing, not them, and mean it
- Silence is your instrument. Count to five before filling it.
- Never ask "would you use this." People are polite and bad at predicting themselves. Ask what they did last time.
- Write the exact words they used. Paraphrase loses the finding.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

- Tasks are goals; the participant chooses the route
- You have a plan for the moment they get stuck, and you follow it
- You captured at least one thing that contradicts what you expected

- You are explicit about what your recruit invalidates — a classmate is a legitimate fallback, but say what it costs you

THE COMMON FAILURE

Demoing. The moment you start explaining what it does, the session is over and you have learned nothing except that you can describe your own work.

WITH A MODEL IN THE LOOP

LIFT

Drafting the protocol, and synthesising findings across several sessions.

LIE

It cannot be the participant. Structurally, not incidentally. A simulated session tells you what the average of the internet thinks a user would say.

CATCH

You know the difference between what someone said and what they did. The model only ever has the transcript, which is the half that lies.