Final Project FAQ

Q: Do we need to specify “test participant should complete task in 5 minutes” in the task description?

A: I tend not to, because it might make the test participant anxious, as he/she feels like the time is getting close. I think it is good practice to have in mind a time at which point you will abort the task and consider it to be a “fail” for this participant. But then I say in the instructions, at the beginning of the whole session, “We may interrupt you before you complete a task. When we do this it is just because we have learned all we need to learn from that task and are ready to move on to the next one.” This way they don’t feel like a failure, and they don’t get so frustrated as to be worthless to you the rest of the session.

Q: How do we arrive at the measurable usability criteria, especially when we can’t talk to any of the stakeholders?

A: You’re right – it WOULD be best to talk with stakeholders and agree with them on what good criteria values should be for each task (e.g., should be completed in 3 minutes, should average no more than .25 calls to the help desk). Even better would be if you had some data from a predecessor or competitor product. In the absence of that, just pick something reasonable, SAY that that’s what you’re doing, and SAY that you would have preferred to work with the team to arrive at the criteria.

Q: Do we need a consent form?

A: Yes. Here’s one – go to this site and click on Consent Form 2: http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humansubjects/forms.html

Q: May I use words from the interface in the task descriptions? That is, if the correct link is “Housing Fees,” should I avoid asking the user to check out how much he/she owes in “housing fees”?

A: Here’s my rule of thumb – in general, try to imagine the question the user would have in his/her head when coming to the task. So, TRY to avoid using the actual link wording, and thereby leading the test participant. But don’t be so rigid about this rule that you avoid using language that you’re pretty sure the user would have in his/her own mind. (Hey, THAT’S why they named that link what they named it!) So, if the task requires clicking on the “Configuration” link, try to figure out if your target audience would tend to be thinking, when they come to the task, “OK, now I need to set
this up,” or “OK, now I need to configure this.” If it is the latter, then, sure, word the task as such: “Now go configure your newly installed software application.” Or some such.

Q: When is the IX Lab available?
A: Let’s say it is open the same hours that the IT Lab is open. I will endeavor to get a key put in the IT Lab to check out.

Q: Is there a Morae tutorial?
A: I think there IS one created by the iSchool IT team, but so far we can’t find it. Stacy Crain found this one on the TechSmith site – thanks Stacy: http://www.techsmith.com/learn/morae/default.asp

Q: How did my white paper grade stack up against the others?
A: Grades were all A’s and B’s – there is no one in the class who cannot make an A, and no one who is guaranteed of making an A, at this point. Keep on keepin’ on.

NEW ITEMS, 11/13/2009

Q: Are we obliged to use Morae?
A: No.

Q: Hey, could you give us one good idea about data collection that might make our lives easier?
A: One trick is to specify (perhaps in an xls file) the “correct path” for each task. Then, when you’re observing you can just check off all the “correct” steps, and will have to take notes on only those steps that deviate from this.

Q: I know we’re going to be testing only a small number of test participants. But still we may offer some descriptive statistics. When you report “time on task,” do you include ALL times or only those for which the test participant successfully completed the task?
A: I tend to average (using the median, for small sets of numbers!) just successful attempts.

Q: What else have you forgotten to tell us?
A: I think it is perfectly appropriate to include in your report ALL the potential problems you have identified, whether it was in user testing or from your own review of the product/interface/site. However, prioritize ‘em, and make it clear where the finding came from. That is, if it “just” your opinion, say so. That way the development team can prioritize their tackling of the solutions.
Q: Do you have any idea what it meant, when you wrote a note to yourself that said “20 to 30” on the list of things you wanted to include in this FAQ?

A: Not a clue.

Q: Which teams are making their presentations on Nov. 23rd?

A: Mann/Roberts, Milaski/Crain, Alfredson/Reindel, and Mondragon/Berry, plus I THINK Agrawal and Rangarajan. (Neha and Suudhan, you wanted to go early, right?)