

Usability Testing Situations

The Minefield

- There's a known bug in the pre-release code. If she clicks that button, she'll get an ugly error message.

The Fork in the Road

- User isn't sure which approach to take. Thinking aloud, he says he could take path A (correct) or B (wrong). You've never seen anyone try B.

The Blind Alley

- You've done 3 usability tests, and have already seen a particular problem twice. It took those users some time to recover. User #4 has just run into it.

The Human Dictionary

- The user encounters a term she doesn't understand. She's not sure how to proceed. She turns to you and asks, point-blank, "What does X mean?"

The Non-Drinking Horse

- The help writer has just rewritten the help for a particularly difficult task. The user runs into the usual problem but shows no inclination to consult the help.

The Accidental Hint

- The user just clicked the wrong link. To ensure that the observers follow what happened, you neutrally say, "So you just clicked the so-and-so link." The user responds, "Oh yeah, you're right – I guess I shouldn't have done that."

The Novice

- For this study you need people who know X, and it quickly becomes apparent that this guy has never done X before. He is willing and pleasant, but the tasks would be way over his head. There are several team members in the observation room next door.

Paid Overtime?

- The user has been struggling, and is feeling very uncertain of her abilities. She has needed considerable help. You've been trying to reassure her that it's not her fault. You're almost out of time and she hasn't finished an important task. You have spare cash so you could pay her extra to stay until she completes it.

Who's the Boss?

- It's a co-discovery session. Pat and Chris are working together. They have not met before. Pat considers himself an expert and is dominating the session. In fact, some of the things Pat says are wrong. You have reason to believe Chris is more of an expert than Pat, but Chris is keeping quiet.