

Examining the Usability Impact of Content in Canvas: HTML vs. PDF

By Danni Noyes

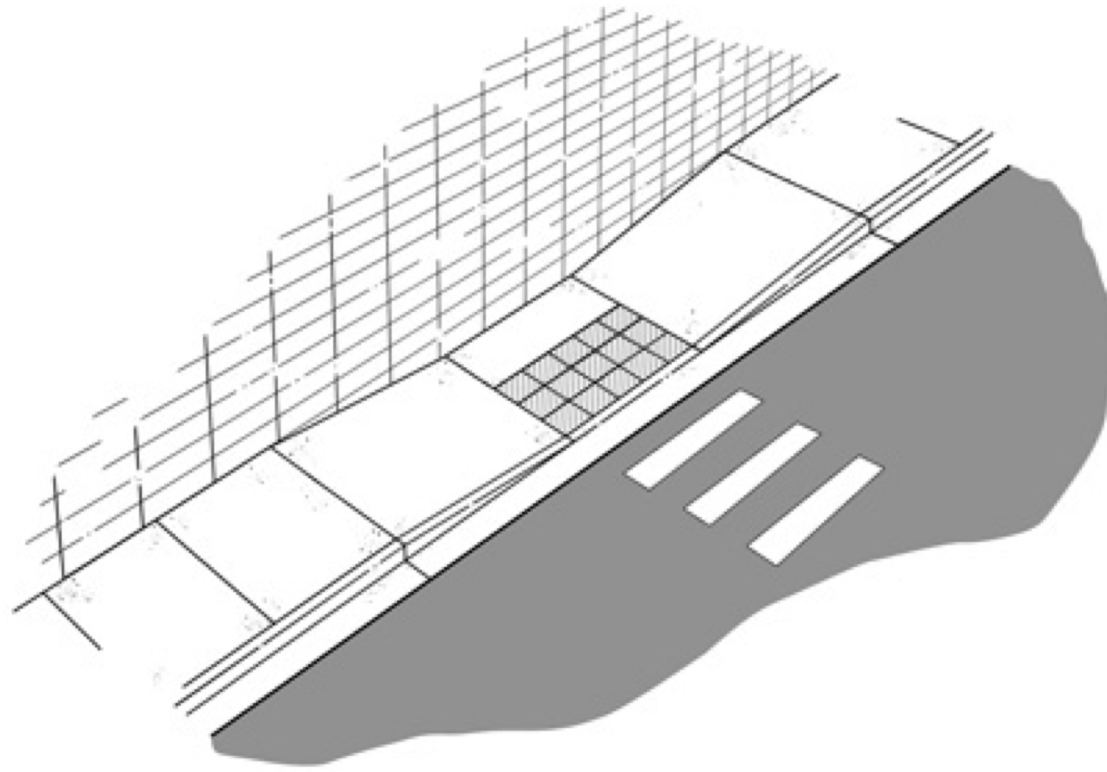


UtahStateUniversity

Usability and Accessibility

- “Usability... refers to the ease of access and/or use of a product or website” (“What is Usability?”).
- “Accessibility refers to inclusiveness for people of all functional abilities, whether as an architectural attribute or functionality in information and computer technology (ICT)” (Pappas, 2003).

Theories of Universal Design



Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, Pub. L.
No. 101-336, 104 Stat. 328 (1990).



Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, Pub. L.
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HTML



PDF





Course 1 Usability Survey

Survey

Usability Survey

The brief survey provided in this exercise is to support an undergraduate research project regarding the usability of course materials. The readings below are from the class.



Overview

There are two content samples below, one a web page and the other is a PDF file from content you will be asked to read in this course this semester. Please review both content excerpts and then click on the survey below.

HTML Content

- [HTML Excerpt from "Planning and Organizing Proposals and Technical Reports"](https://usu.instructure.com/courses/536857/pages/strategic-planning)
(<https://usu.instructure.com/courses/536857/pages/strategic-planning>)

PDF Content

- [PDF Excerpt from "Planning and Organizing Proposals and Technical Reports"](https://usu.instructure.com/courses/536857/files/72666478/download?wrap=1)
(<https://usu.instructure.com/courses/536857/files/72666478/download?wrap=1>) 
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Survey

[Click here to take the brief Survey.](https://usu.co1.qualtrics.com/) (<https://usu.co1.qualtrics.com/>).

Course 2 Usability Survey

Survey

Usability Survey

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HTML Content

- [HTML Excerpt from "Technical Communication" Book](https://usu.instructure.com/courses/536857/pages/technical-communication-excerpt)
(<https://usu.instructure.com/courses/536857/pages/technical-communication-excerpt>)

PDF Content

- [PDF Excerpt from "Technical Communication" Book](https://usu.instructure.com/courses/536857/files/72666752/download?wrap=1)
(<https://usu.instructure.com/courses/536857/files/72666752/download?wrap=1>) 
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Survey

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Strategic Planning



Richard Johnson-Sheehan, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Purdue University
Sponsored by Indiana DOT

Strategic Planning

Defining Subject, Purpose, Main Point, and Readers

Defining the subject, purpose, main point, and readers of your project may not seem like writing, but clarifying these items will help you write better and more efficiently.

Subject: The *Scope* of Your Project

The **subject** defines the scope of your project. Define the boundaries of your efforts—the kinds of issues your project addresses and the kinds of issues it does not.

Purpose

The **purpose** explains what project will do. Try writing your purpose in one sentence:

- “The purpose of this project is to...”
- “Our goal is to...”
- “The primary aim of this project is to...”

Main Point

Your **main point** states the overall aim of the project. For some projects, it helps to think of this as your “strong suit”—the aspect of your project that will be particularly appealing to your proposal’s readers. It’s what makes your work interesting, exciting, and important.

A main point can be articulated a variety of ways:

- “When this project is completed,....”
- “We believe this project will...”

Readers

A well-developed and articulated understanding of your readers will help you craft your documents more effectively and help you write more efficiently. When considering your readers, keep the following

Defining the Current Situation

Many proposal writers compose the introduction last, preferring to start with the body of the proposal’s narrative.

The first section after the introduction is often a description of the current situation. In this section, you will define the problem your project is trying to solve, explaining the problem’s causes and effects.

Guidelines for Understanding the Problem

While developing this section, you should keep three guidelines in mind:

- Guideline 1: Problems are the Effects of Causes
- Guideline 2: Ignored Problems Tend to Grow Worse
- Guideline 3: Blame Change, Not People

What Exactly is the Problem You Are Trying to Solve?

This might seem like an odd question to ask, but often people mistakenly try to address the symptoms of the problem and not the problem itself. Here are some questions to help you determine what exactly is the problem you are trying to solve:

- What changed to create this problem?
- Is this problem a symptom of a deeper problem?
- What aspects of the problem cannot be solved by you?
- Are you able to solve the whole problem or just a part of it?
- Can the problem be solved in stages?

What are the Problem’s Causes and Effects?

A helpful technique is to use “idea mapping” to identify the causes and effects of the problem. The next two figures demonstrate how these idea maps work.

Identifying Causes: Put the problem you are trying to solve in the middle of a sheet of paper. Then, identify the 2-5 major causes of that problem. For each of these major causes, identify 2-5 minor causes that create the major cause. Keep mapping out until you have identified all the significant causes of the problem.

Identifying Effects: Again, put the problem you are trying to solve in the middle of a sheet of paper. Identify the 2-5 major effects of the problem if nothing is done about it. Then, identify 2-5 minor effects for each of those major effects.

These diagrams should give you a solid overall sense of the problem, its causes, and its effects.

Technical Communication Excerpt

Reference

Lannon, J. M. & Gurak, L. J. (2017). Specific documents and applications. *Technical communication* (319-325). London, UK: Pearson.

John M. Lannon and Laura J. Gurak

Memo Parts and Format

A standard memo has the word "Memo" or "Memorandum" centered at the top of the page and includes a heading (flush to the left margin) identifying the recipient(s), sender (and senders initials), date, and subject. At the bottom of the memo, include a distribution notation if copies are to be sent to anyone not listed in the "To" line (usually managers who simply need to know that the memo was sent). Because memos are often read rapidly by busy recipients, they must follow this consistent, predictable format. Figures 14.1 and 14.2 show these standard elements.

The body copy (main text portion) of a memo should focus on one topic. Content should be complete yet compact, providing all the information readers need but not going into unnecessary detail. Organize the body of your memo by starting with a short introduction, and then a paragraph or two to address the main issue. Conclude by suggesting a course of action or asking your readers to follow up. Figure 14.3 shows a typical memo with all parts labeled.

Memo Tone

① What memo recipients want to know

As a form of "in-house" correspondence, memos circulate among colleagues, subordinates, and superiors to address questions like these:

- What are we doing right, and how can we do it better?
- What are we doing wrong, and how can we improve?
- Who's doing what, and when, and where?

Memo topics often involve evaluations or recommendations about policies, procedures, and, ultimately, the people with whom we work.

Because people are sensitive to criticism (even when it is merely implied) and often resistant to change, an ill-conceived or aggressive tone can spell disaster for the memo's author. So, be especially careful about your tone. Consider, for instance, this evaluation of one company's training program for new employees:

Electronic Publishing

Your work may involve electronic publishing, in which you use programs such as *Adobe RoboHelp* or *Adobe Dreamweaver* to create documents in digital format for the Web, the company intranet, or as online help screens. You also might produce Portable Document Files, PDF versions of a document, using software such as *Adobe Acrobat* or *Apple Preview*.

For more on Web page design in particular, see Chapter 25.

Electronic publishing works well for large, complex documents

Using Style Sheets and Style Guides

Style sheets are specifications that ensure consistency across a single document or among a set of documents. If you are working as part of a team, each writer needs to be using the same typefaces, fonts, headings, and other elements in identical fashion. Here are two examples of what you might find in a style sheet:

Style sheets provide design consistency

- The first time you use or define a specialized term, highlight it with *italics* or **boldface**.
- In headings, capitalize prepositions of five or more letters ("Between," "Versus").

Possible style sheet entries

The more complex the document, the more specific the style sheet should be. All writers and editors should have a copy. Consider keeping the style sheet on a shared document (Google Drive or other) for easy access and efficient updating.

In addition to style sheets for specific documents, some organizations produce style guides containing rules for proper use of trade names, appropriate punctuation, preferred formats for correspondence, and so on. Style guides help ensure a consistent look across a company's various documents and publications.

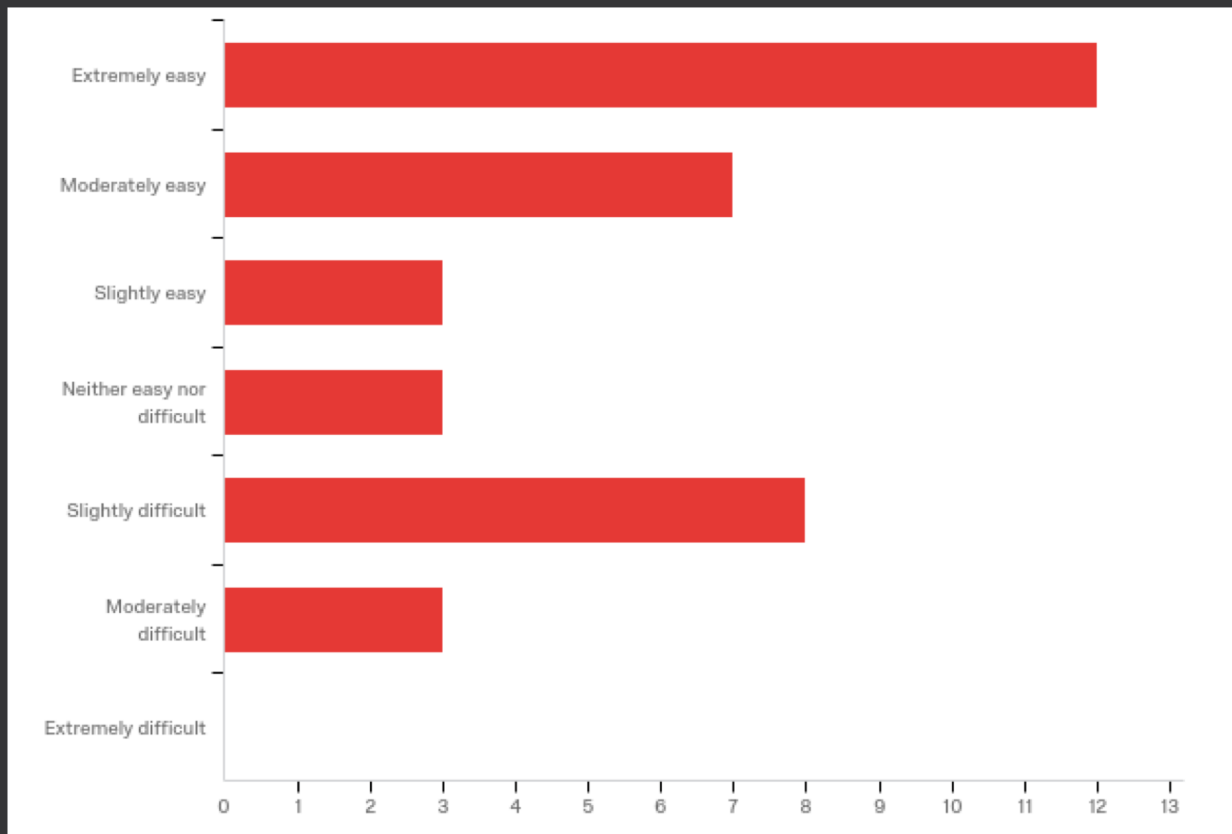
CREATING A DESIGN THAT WORKS FOR YOUR READERS

Approach your design decisions to achieve a consistent look, to highlight certain material, and to aid navigation. First, consider the overall look of your pages, and then consider the following three design categories: styling the words and letters, adding emphasis, and using headings for access and orientation.

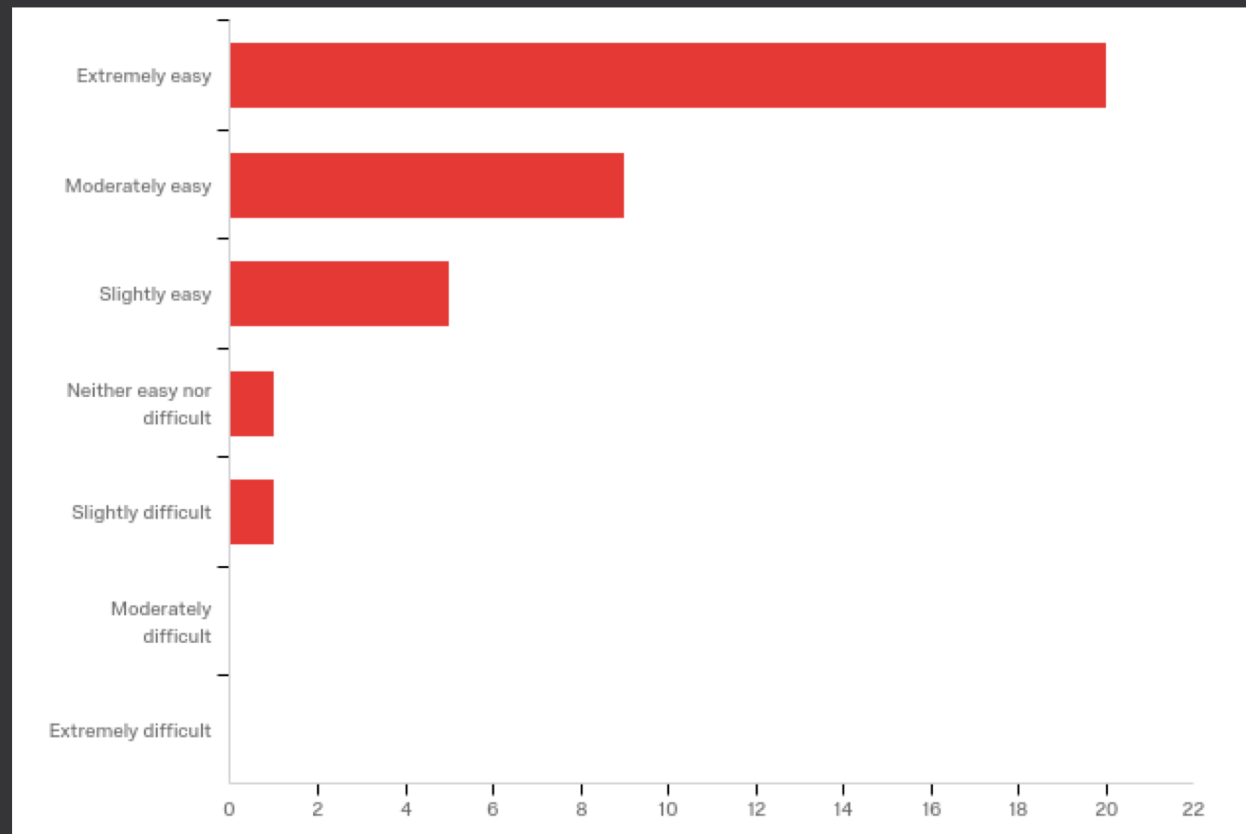
NOTE All design considerations are influenced by the budget for a publication. For instance, adding a single color (say, to major heads) can double the printing cost.

If your organization prescribes no specific guidelines, the general design principles that follow should serve in most situations.

PDF



HTML



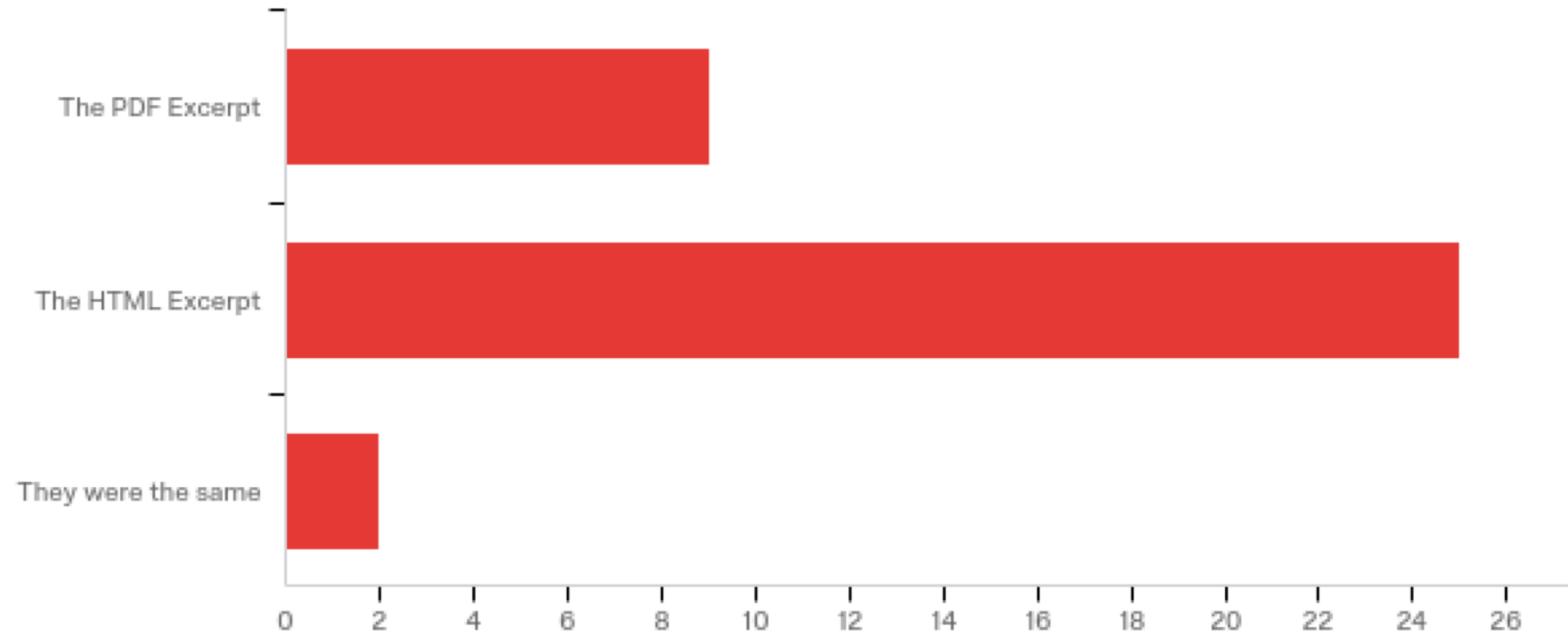
Preference for HTML

- “didn't have to download anything”
- “easier to scan”
- “cleaner look”

Preference for PDF

- “had the original words from a published work, which lends credibility”
- “more familiar with PDF”
- “the pdf opens in a separate tab”

Overall Preference



Conclusion

- Indicates a preference for HTML files
- Without further research, cannot conclude that HTML files are overall beneficial for everyone
- Conduct more studies involving a population representative of USU

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Jarrett, et al., Accessibility score: Low Click to improve 'Designing for People Who Do Not Read Easily' p. 39-66.

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