

Expert Usability Testing Report  
**Organizational Strategies for First Year Composition Writers**  
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### **Introduction**

On December 14, 2004, we tested the "Organizational Strategies for First Year Composition Writers" project created by Bethany Ekle and Rob Glazebrook. This report highlights our major findings and the solutions we have developed as a result.

### **Goal**

Our goals were to discover any technical or interface problems with the project. Because our participant was an expert and not a member of the target audience, we decided against asking questions regarding the difficulty of the content.

### **Participant**

Our participant was Amanda Metz Bemer, a First-Year Composition instructor at Iowa State University.

### **Major Findings**

Testing produced four significant findings:

1. Audio  
*Problem:* When uploaded to a server, our audio did not begin immediately, as it had done when the page was served locally.
2. Color  
*Problem:* We emphasized words with a blue color which were initially mistaken for hyperlinks.
3. Navigation  
*Problem:* The navigation bar did not work as expected, and did not include links the user anticipated.
4. Submission  
*Problem:* Some of our end-unit exercises contain "submit" buttons. Others did not.

### **Findings Resolved**

After conducting the expert usability test, we determined that the following two problems were legitimate concerns which needed to be repaired:

1. Audio
2. Navigation

*Audio.* When played off a hard drive, flash drive, or CD-ROM, our audio started as soon as the flash movie began playing. However, once the movie and audio

were uploaded to a web server, the browser's slower download speed prevented our audio from playing at the beginning of the movie. To eliminate this concern, we added actionscript code which prevents the flash movie from moving past the first frame until the audio has finished loading. To prevent the user from believing the movie had not loaded properly, we added an animated object to the scene which informs the user the page is still loading, which then disappears once the audio has loaded successfully.

*Navigation.* Our navigation bar contained one link which did not work as expected. Instead of the "Go Up" button taking the user to the main page of the section they were currently in, the hyperlink instead sent the user to the project's main page. We edited the link to make it work as expected.

Additionally, our expert user expected a "directions" button to be present in the navigation bar. Although we included a "directions" button on each introductory page, the user expected to be able to re-access the directions while watching the flash movie. We added a link which serves the same purpose as the original "directions" button.

### **Findings Left Unresolved**

After considering our expert user's suggestions, we decided to leave the following two major findings unresolved:

1. Color
2. Submission

*Color.* The expert user expressed initial concern that we emphasized certain terminology with a bright blue color, as she confused the emphasized words with hyperlinks. However, after noticing that mousing over the terminology did not produce a "hand" icon and that our other links were all of a different hue, she was able to determine within a few seconds that the words were not hyperlinks. Because the problem did not prevent the user from successfully completing the unit tasks, and because the color of the emphasized text was chosen specifically to complement the project's palette, we decided not to change the color of the text.

*Submission.* Some of our unit exercises contain "Submit" buttons, while others do not, which confused our user. However, the unit exercises are meant to be in-class, collaborative affairs. As such, computer feedback is not necessary. Additionally, programs such as Macromedia Dreamweaver's CourseBuilder (which we used to create our exercises) are severely limited as to the type and quality feedback possible. Therefore, we have decided to allow the user to "submit" responses to the server only on questions the form has a high chance of understanding and responding to appropriately.

## **Conclusion**

Our expert usability test revealed four general problems with our design: our audio did not play properly; our color schema was confusing; our navigation bar did not work as expected; and only some of our exercises contained “submit” buttons. After considering the expert user’s advice, we decided two of the findings were legitimate problems, while two were not. We have since fixed the two problems noted by our usability test.