Participants and Ethics

This material has been developed by Georgia Tech HCI faculty, and continues to evolve. Contributors include Gregory Abowd, Jim Foley, Diane Gromala, Elizabeth Mynatt, Jeff Pierce, Colin Potts, Chris Shaw, John Stasko, and Bruce Walker. Permission is granted to use with acknowledgement for non-profit purposes. Last revision: March 2011 by Valerie Summet, Emory University
Now What...?

• You’ve got your task, performance measures, testing design, etc.
• Now you need to gather the data
• ... So you need ... PARTICIPANTS
Who?

- Different entities require different formal procedures to ensure ethical research.
  - Varies country to country
  - Govt. different from industry different from academia
  - Even if organization you work for doesn't require approval before research, you should conduct your research ethically.
    - Follow best practices!
IRB, Participants, & Ethics

- Institutional Review Board (IRB)
  - [http://www.irb.emory.edu/](http://www.irb.emory.edu/)
- Reviews all research involving human (or animal) participants
- Safeguarding the participants, and thereby the researcher and the university
- Not a science review (i.e., not to assess research ideas); only safety & ethics
Recruiting Participants

- Various “subject pools”
  - Volunteers
  - Paid participants
  - Students (e.g., psych undergrads) for course credit
  - Friends, acquaintances, family, lab members
  - “Public space” participants - e.g., observing people walking through a museum

- Must fit user population (validity)
- Motivation is a big factor - not only $$ but also explaining the importance of the research
- Note: Ethics, consent, etc. apply to *all* participants, including friends & “pilot subjects”
Ethics

- Testing can be arduous
- Each participant should consent to be in experiment (informal or formal)
  - Know what experiment involves, what to expect, what the potential risks are
- Must be able to stop without danger or penalty
- All participants to be treated with respect
Consent

- Why important?
  - People can be sensitive about this process and issues
  - Errors will likely be made, participant may feel inadequate
  - May be mentally or physically strenuous
- What are the potential risks (there are always risks)?
- “Vulnerable” populations need special care & consideration
  - Children; disabled; pregnant; students (why?); prisoners, etc
Before Study

- Be well prepared so participant’s time is not wasted
- Make sure they know you are testing software, not them
  - (Usability testing, not User testing)
- Maintain privacy
- Explain procedures without compromising results
- Can quit anytime
- Administer signed consent form
Attribution Theory

- Studies why people believe that they succeeded or failed--themselves or outside factors (gender, age differences)
- Want your subjects to not attribute problems to themselves, but to the interface
- Explain how errors or failures are not participant’s problem---places where interface needs to be improved. You need their help!!
During Study

- Make sure participant is comfortable
- Session should not be too long
- Maintain relaxed atmosphere
- Never indicate displeasure or anger
Issues

- What if user gets stuck on a task?
- You can ask
  - “What are you trying to do..?”
  - “What made you think..?”
  - “How would you like to perform..?”
  - “What would make this easier to accomplish..?”
- Maybe offer hints
- Can provide design ideas
After Study

• State how session will help you improve system ("debriefing")
  ▪ Discuss the session
  ▪ Show participant how to perform failed tasks
  ▪ Added richness and interpretations
  ▪ Warning: post hoc interpretation

• Don’t compromise privacy (never identify people, only show videos with explicit permission)

• Store data anonymously & securely, or destroy