CS155
HW5: Website evaluation and design guidelines

This is a team assignment. You will be given time during class on Thursday, April 4 to form teams of 4 people. You cannot do this assignment with fewer than 3 people.

Due date:
This assignment is due by the start of class on Thursday, April 11th.

Summary:
For this homework, your team will conduct a thorough assessment of the usability of a website. The website will be given to you during class when you form your teams. You will be conducting:

1. A usability test via a scenario-based walkthrough
2. An “expert” usability review via heuristics (best practices)

You will then summarize your findings using the results of #1 and #2.

Before you begin, review the website UX For the Masses - Guide to Usability Reviews. This is a great resource that is written in plain English and provides useful templates for design reviews.

Exercise 1: Scenario-based Walkthrough
In a normal website usability review, you would probably use between 2-5 scenarios (depending on the complexity of your website and offerings). However, for this exercise, you'll only use 1 (given to you during class).

Select 1 person in your group be the "client" who will be using the website for the first time trying to complete the scenario as outlined and given to you during class. Try to choose a person who has little or no experience with the website you were assigned. The other team members function as recorders and are responsible for writing down comments and observations during the exercise.

The recorders are strict observers (that is, they do not interfere as the client tries to complete a task using the unfamiliar website). They record observations of the client including any struggles or problems he/she has without talking amongst themselves. In order to help in the evaluation, the client should “think aloud” while navigating the website. This means that the client should try to voice their internal thoughts and intentions. This is a difficult thing to do, so the recorders may occasionally have to prompt the client with a phrase such as “What are you thinking now?” to help the client remember to think aloud.

I recommend that each recorder have a piece of paper and pencil/pen for their observations. Often, you will need to do a quick sketch of an element that the client is having difficulty with and pen & paper are much more conducive to this. Remember that the other people on your team will also be recording their observations and you can compare notes at the end of the task. Save these notes, as you will be asked to turn them in. (However, they do not have to be neat or pretty.)

When you are finished, summarize your observations using data from the recorders as well as the client. One person should type up your summary as you will need to submit it.

Think about the following questions
1. What was the outcome of your task? Do you think you were successful in completing it?
2. What assumptions (implicit or explicit) did you have to make about your persona/scenario? What are some of the details you had to fill in?
3. Generally, what were the strengths of the website when completing your task? What were the weaknesses? Where did the "client" struggle?
Exercise 2: “Expert” Usability Review via Heuristics
As a group, consider the website you were assigned. One person from your group should download the Usability Review spreadsheet (linked from the class homework page). If you wish, there is also a printable version of this form provided on the website.

Using the Usability Review, evaluate the website. Note that some parts of it may not be applicable to your website. You may also have to investigate parts of the website which you didn't use during Exercise 1.

Again, based on your group evaluation and the quantitative scores, think about the strengths/weaknesses of the website?

Exercise 3: Synthesis and Summary
Based on your responses to Exercise 1 and Exercise 2, answer the following questions.
1. What was the website's greatest strength? What are you basing your opinion on?
2. What was the website's greatest weakness? What are you basing your opinion on?
3. What would be your top three recommendations for how to improve the usability of this website?
4. Do you feel that either Usability Testing or the Usability Review was more useful? Why? Were some aspects of the website covered better by the Testing than by the Review? Vice versa?
5. As mentioned previously, in "real world" evaluation you would use more than one persona/scenario for analyzing your website. Write another persona/scenario that is significantly different from the one you were given. Ideally, it should cover some of the insufficiencies you discovered in #4 above.
6. We briefly talked about other methods of evaluating and analyzing your website. Describe another way of testing the website you were given. How would the data gained via this

Submission:
For this assignment, you will need to submit several things. Submit:

1. The notes from the recorders for Exercise 1. These will be messy and sometimes ugly. That's ok. (You may simply staple these together and bring them with you to class on the day the assignment is due.)
2. The summary you wrote for Exercise 1 (BB HW5 submission)
3. The completed spreadsheet for Exercise 2 (BB HW5 submission)
4. Answers to Exercise 3 (BB HW5 submission)

For the three items submitted through BB, be sure to attach them all to one submission. Do not make multiple submissions (e.g. one for each deliverable).

Remember, only ONE PERSON from your group should submit the files, but all group members names should be indicated in the files. Additionally, make sure the website you evaluated appears on at least one of the files you submit.