

# SESSION REPORT



61	A284	Testing Information Usability	30
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Documentation		Barbara Chiles	CLM
PROJECT	SESSION CHAIRMAN		INST. CODE
Clemson University Computer Ctr., Clemson, SC	(803) 656-3466		

SESSION CHAIRMAN'S COMPANY, ADDRESS, and PHONE NUMBER

## Testing Information Usability

DeeAnne A. Safford  
Information Development  
IBM Corporation  
P. O. Box 1328  
Boca Raton, FL 33432

Documentation  
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### Abstract

The usability of product information is an increasingly important factor in the success or failure of an IBM product. Because product information has become so important, IBM Boca Raton has developed methods to assure its usability and technical accuracy.

This paper describes the methods used in the IBM Boca Raton laboratory to test information usability by bringing in people who represent users in a simulated customer environment.

### Introduction

Key reviews are conducted throughout the development cycle of an information product to ensure that it is easy to use and understandable by the intended audience.

These reviews are not only conducted on the information products developed for new computer users, but are also conducted on information products that are geared towards technical, experienced users. We have discovered that usability objectives like ease of information retrievability, technical accuracy, and clearly-written examples are also necessary for the experienced, technical person.

Testing information usability is a necessary tool to ensure that Information Development is meeting the needs of our customers. How easy a product is to use has become as important as technical accuracy.

One of the last, but most important reviews that takes place during a development cycle is a usability test. A description of the usability testing techniques that we use follows.

### Usability Testing

A usability test is conducted to measure how effective and how easy an information product is to use by simulating the actual customer environment.

The objective of conducting usability testing is to obtain:

- o An early customer viewpoint
- o An early test of product objectives

We consider these objectives "early" because we take a look at the information product while it is still in the development stage.

In addition to satisfying these objectives, usability testing enables us to "build our product right the first time." In other words, changes can be made more productively earlier in the development cycle, which makes more efficient use of the developer's time and, in turn, enables us to produce a quality product.

To run a usability test, we must:

- o Develop tasks, scenarios, and questionnaires for the test
- o Set up a test lab to resemble the actual user environment
- o Obtain test subjects that match the audience that will be using the product
- o Simulate the final appearance of the documentation
- o Develop and teach monitoring techniques to others who will be monitoring the test subjects
- o Report problems found during testing to the appropriate individuals

We assign an Information Development test coordinator to complete these tasks. A brief description of each of these tasks follows.





**What We've Found**

Listed below are some significant findings that we have confirmed through our testing:

- o The use of color not only enhances the appearance, but also the usability of an information product.
- o Providing "tutorial" style information vs. "reference" style information not only benefits inexperienced data processing users, but also experienced users.
- o Information products that contain a great deal of information are acceptable as long as the information is easy to locate.
- o Inexperienced data processing users generally have a high satisfaction level if they are able to complete a given task successfully regardless of the length of time it takes to complete it.
- o A high percentage of people primarily use examples to complete a given task, rather than reading text.
- o The cost savings of identifying and correcting problems while a product is still in development vs. out in the field is significant.

**Some Final Comments**

Testing information products has become an important part of our Information Development cycle. The techniques we use have undergone a great deal of change in an attempt to satisfy the end user's needs first and foremost, without jeopardizing information development cycles.

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SHARE SESSION REPORT

61	A522	Process Control Graphics	15
<u>SHARE NO.</u>	<u>SESSION NO.</u>	<u>SESSION TITLE</u>	<u>ATTENDANCE</u>
Graphics Applications		Jim Boyle	BKC
<u>PROJECT</u>		<u>SESSION CHAIRMAN</u>	<u>INST. CODE</u>
Bendix-Kansas City Div, Box 1159, Kansas City, MD 64141 (816) 997-4773			
<u>SESSION CHAIRMAN'S COMPANY, ADDRESS, AND PHONE NUMBER</u>			

A Process Control Display Language

L. Hoffman  
 J. M. Huber Corp.  
 Thornall St.  
 Edison, N.J. 08818  
 201-549-8600

Installation Code HUB

Graphics Applications Project

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents facilities required by both plant operations and plant management. The designs are to be used as a yardstick to measure any process control graphics system.

This display language is designed for rapid response in a process control environment. The commands are extensive, yet simple, constructs for both pictorial and data displays of process and associated data.

The language is not designed for any particular computer or display device.

