

Nielsen's usability heuristics

Ten general rules that evaluators use to review an interface and spot usability problems before testing it with users.

In Spanish

Heurísticas de Nielsen

Origin

Nielsen and Molich (1990); revised by Nielsen (1994)



What problem it addresses

Lets you detect many problems early and at low cost, before testing with users.

Components

Visible status

The interface always says what is going on.

People's language

Familiar words and concepts, not technical ones.

Control and freedom

A clear way out to undo or leave.

Consistency

The same thing has the same name and look everywhere.

Prevent errors

Better to avoid the error than to warn about it.

Recognize, don't recall

Options in view, without forcing people to memorize.

Flexibility

Shortcuts for experienced users.

Just enough

Every extra element competes with what matters.

Recover from errors

Clear messages that say what happened and how to fix it.

Help

Easy to find and focused on the task.

An example

A sign-up form with a date field.

Not reviewed

Date of birth

Submit

Error. Try again.

Fields cleared

The date is typed in a format that isn't stated. On submit, a generic error appears and everything is cleared. **Two rules broken.**

Reviewed with the heuristics

Date of birth

Submit

Format: day/month/year

Everything else was saved

The format is shown, the error appears next to the field and explains what is missing, and what was typed is kept. **Prevent errors and recover from them.**

With the list of heuristics, a single review finds problems the team no longer saw.

How it works

- 1

Several people review the interface separately.
- 2

Each problem is noted next to the heuristic it breaks.
- 3

The lists are combined and the problems are ranked by severity.

Applications in design

- Use it like this**

Run a heuristic review with three to five people before testing with users.
- Avoid**

Letting a single person review the interface and call it done.
- Don't fall for it**

Heuristics find problems, but don't tell you which ones matter most to the people who use the product.

20 to 51%

What the research says

That is the share of problems each evaluator found alone on average, depending on the experiment (there were four). With five evaluators, about two thirds were found (Nielsen and Molich, 1990).

Connections

Used in

■ UI design

■ UX writing

■ Cognitive walkthrough

■ Usability testing

Related to

■ Guidelines for Human-AI Interaction

■ Usability

■ Jakob's law

■ WCAG guidelines

Authors and works

1990	Jakob Nielsen and Rolf Molich	Proposed heuristic evaluation and measured how many problems each evaluator finds.
1994	Jakob Nielsen	Revised the list based on hundreds of real problems and brought it down to ten.

Sources

Original sources

- Nielsen, J., & Molich, R. (1990). Heuristic evaluation of user interfaces. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '90) (pp. 249–256). ACM. [View source \(https://doi.org/10.1145/97243.97281\)](https://doi.org/10.1145/97243.97281)
- Nielsen, J. (1994). Enhancing the explanatory power of usability heuristics. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '94) (pp. 152–158). ACM. [View source \(https://doi.org/10.1145/191666.191729\)](https://doi.org/10.1145/191666.191729)

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