EDLD 5318 Usability Testing Reflection

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Conducting usability testing for my HITT 1305 Medical Terminology course using students currently enrolled in the live 8-week session allowed me to gather authentic, experience-based insights into how learners navigate the digital environment. Because these students had already spent several weeks engaging with Blackboard Ultra, Cengage MindTap, and the structured weekly modules, their feedback provided a realistic picture of usability rather than first-impression reactions. Krug (2010) emphasizes that usability testing should be grounded in observing real users interacting naturally with a product, and this testing cohort's familiarity with the course offered a unique opportunity to evaluate how well the design supported ongoing learning. Their vantage point was especially important because, as Schön (1983) notes, reflective practice depends on understanding not only how a design is intended to work but how it is used in practice.

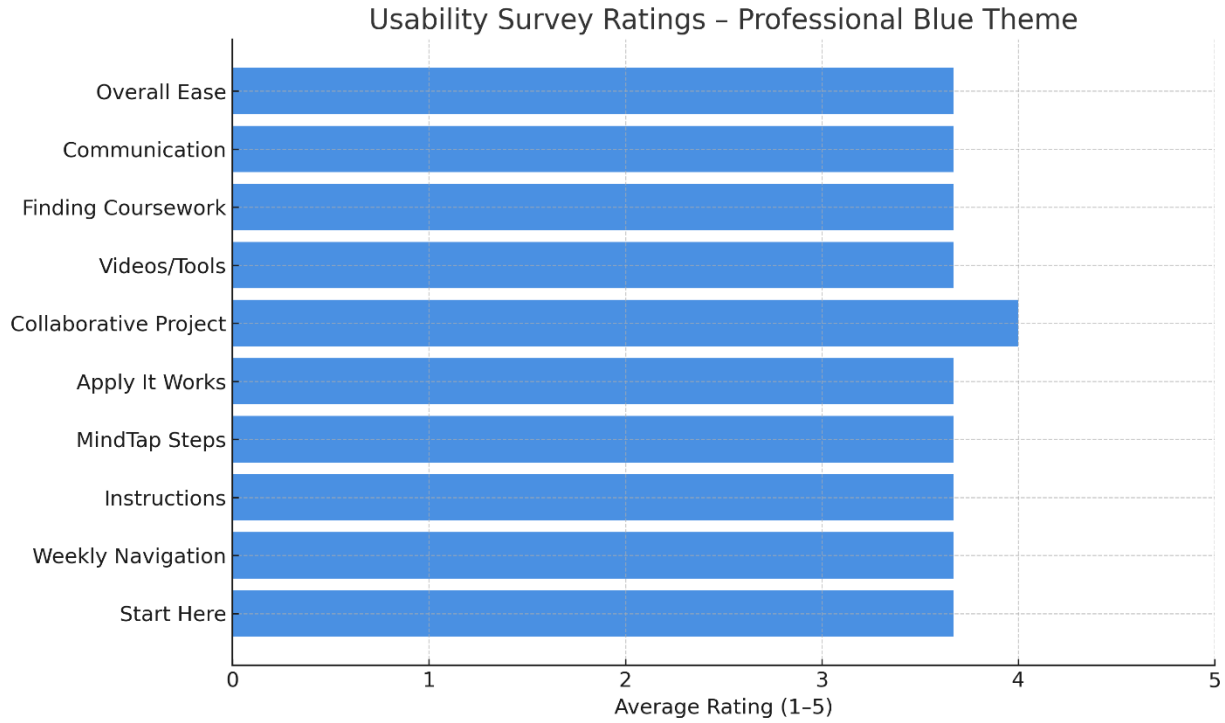
The participants were the ideal testers because they represented the full range of learners enrolled in the course, including those with varying technological confidence levels and device types. Their relationship with the course also made them well positioned to identify friction points that may not appear until later weeks, such as cumulative navigation challenges or repeated technical failures. In this way, their involvement satisfied the guidance in the assignment instructions, which emphasize selecting stakeholders who can meaningfully test both the Start Here section and early module activities before providing structured feedback (Usability Testing & Reflection Instructions). Their familiarity with Blackboard Ultra also reinforced that the LMS itself did not introduce new obstacles, consistent with Bates' (2019) observation that a stable LMS can enhance student confidence by offering predictable navigation pathways.

Because this is a live course, I expected a mixture of positive feedback and areas needing refinement, but the survey results clearly identified consistent patterns. Across ten usability items, students rated most elements of the course with an average of 3.67 out of 5, indicating that they generally agreed the Start Here section was easy to locate, weekly modules were navigable, assignment instructions were clear, and communication was effective. The Collaborative Discussion Project received a slightly higher average rating of 4.0, suggesting that students found its instructions straightforward. However, the most critical finding was that all students reported experiencing technical difficulties with Cengage MindTap's Apply It assignments and all indicated that they needed to switch devices, to campus computers in particular, to complete required work. This aligns with concerns I observed throughout the term and reflects a misalignment between intended functionality and practical accessibility. According to the University of British Columbia's Design Quality Online Course guidelines (2019), online course activities must be accessible to students regardless of device, and activities dependent on

incompatible software create inequitable learning barriers. Similarly, Quality Matters emphasizes universal access and reliable technology as fundamental components of online course design.

The survey results are represented visually in Figure 1, which captures the average rating for each usability item and highlights the overall consistency, as well as the notable outlier in technological performance for Apply It assignments. This visual depiction reinforces Schön's (1983) argument that reflective practitioners must examine both the explicit and implicit dimensions of user experience. Although students reported that course structure, instructions, and navigation were generally effective, the technical obstacles created significant friction in achieving the learning outcomes. Krug's (2013) reminder to eliminate unnecessary friction underscores that even the most organized instructional design can be undermined when essential tasks fail to function reliably.

Figure 1
HITT 1305 Usability Survey Average Ratings



Note. This figure depicts the average student responses (n = 3) across ten usability items, with most items averaging 3.67 and the Collaborative Discussion Project averaging 4.0.

Beyond the survey data, the Angelina College Office Course Review Evaluation (2024) also noted areas requiring improvement, including navigation between modules, clarity within modules, and refinements to the Start Here section. The majority of these concerns have already been addressed; however, this Fall 2025 semester included a major transition from Blackboard Original to Blackboard Ultra, which temporarily prevented the creation of an updated course

navigation video. In addition, an unexpected change in the online bookstore's access-code distribution process, implemented without instructor notification, rendered my previously developed instructional videos unusable. These system-level changes explain several of the navigational or orientation issues noted by reviewers and students. With updated videos and revised instructions now underway, the remaining concerns will be fully resolved in the next course update, ensuring a clearer and more streamlined learning experience for students. Given that the course is currently in session, I am unable to make major adjustments currently.

However, informed by the usability findings, I plan to implement substantial improvements before the Spring 2026 term begins. These will include producing a course navigation video, creating step-by-step guides for purchasing materials and redeeming access codes, revising or replacing problematic Apply It activities to ensure universal device accessibility, and enhancing module-to-module transitions to align with QM standards for learner support and navigational clarity. Bates (2019) emphasizes that digital course revisions must be iterative and responsive to learner needs, and this usability testing reinforces that principle. By refining these elements before the next offering, I anticipate improved student independence, reduced confusion, and fewer technical barriers.

This usability testing cycle has meaningfully strengthened my understanding of how the course functions from the learner's perspective. It also illuminated areas where alignment between outcomes, activities, and assessments becomes strained due to technological limitations rather than instructional design. Ensuring that students can reliably access and complete assessments is essential to maintaining alignment integrity, as noted in the assignment criteria. The testing also highlighted the importance of addressing infrastructure and support needs proactively by providing troubleshooting resources, clarifying technology expectations, and offering alternatives when third-party tools fail. Moving forward, these insights will guide revisions that not only enhance the course but also support a more equitable learning environment.

References

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