

Usability Study: The Key Ingredient in Designing Effective Help Systems



Agenda

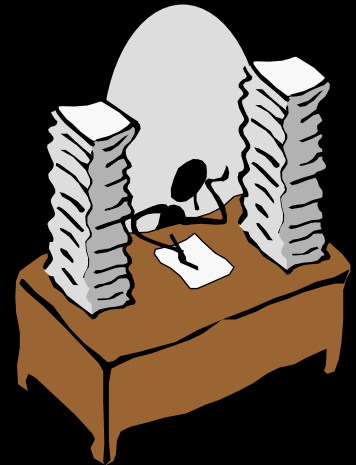
Purpose and perceptions of help systems

Introduction to our study

Method for conducting our study

Results of our study

Benefits of conducting a usability study



What's the purpose of a help system?



Purpose of a help system

- Translates software function into tasks that users understand
- Teaches users concepts required to perform tasks
- Familiarizes users with the user interface
- Addresses the information needs of a diverse audience
- Helps users resolve error conditions

Do you use help?

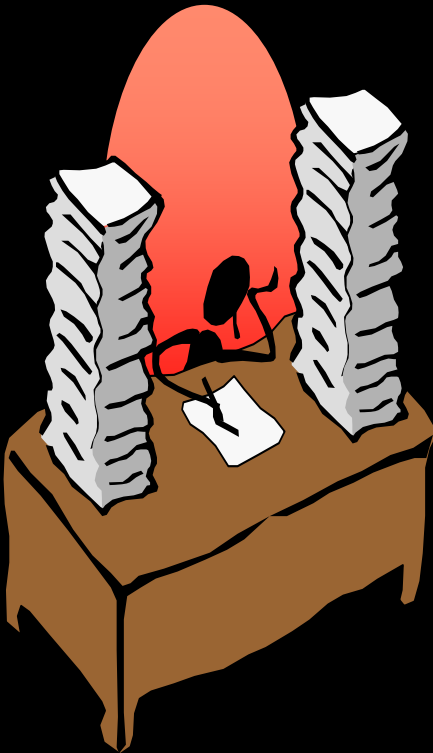


Negative perceptions of help systems

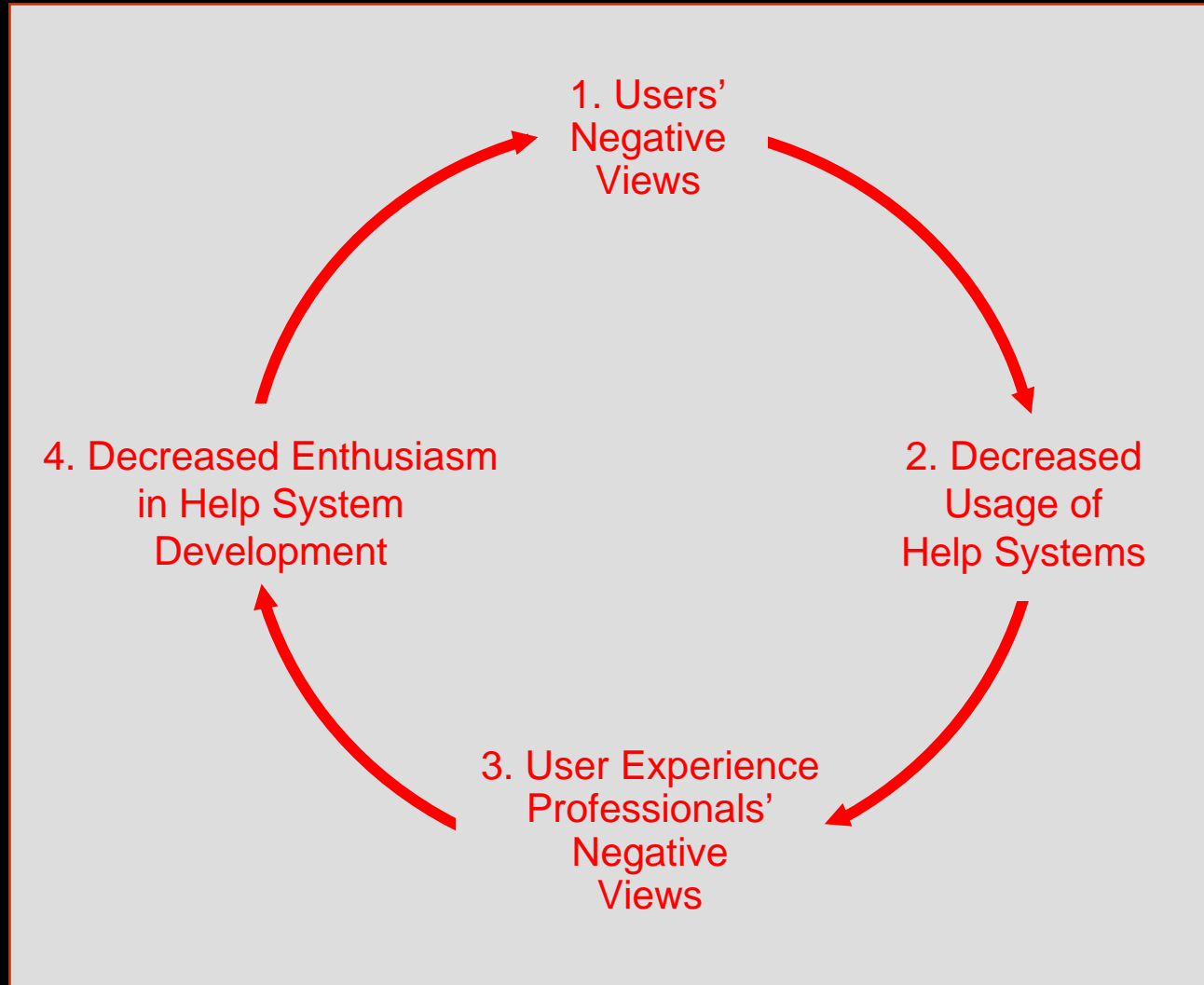
Users access help systems as a last resort because they believe help systems:

- Do not contain the information they seek
- Contain too much extraneous information
- Use terminology that they do not understand
- Do not provide concrete steps for them to perform
- Provide little return for their investment of time

User experience (UX) professionals embrace the negative views of users, which ultimately decreases UX professionals' enthusiasm for driving change in the area of help system development.



Negative perception cycle



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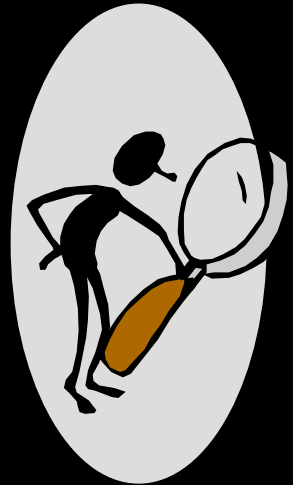
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Introduction: The usability study

The key to breaking the negative perception cycle is conducting usability studies that determine what users want, need, and expect of help systems.



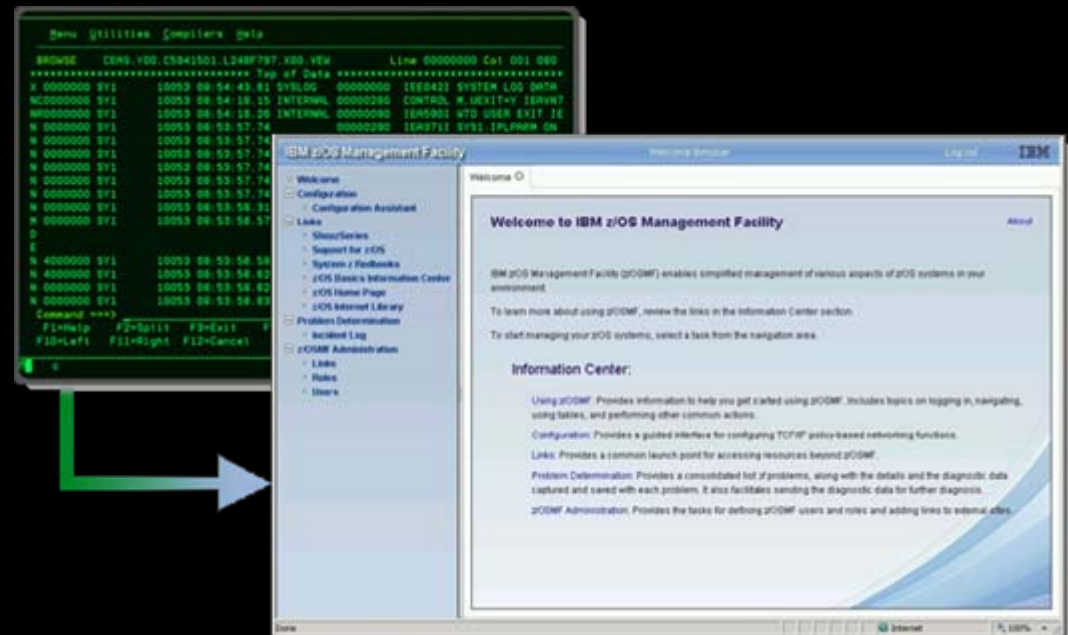
A usability study is a controlled experiment in which user experience professionals watch users interact with a product or help system and document what happens.

Through usability studies, user experience professionals can:

- Identify missing, incorrect, and extraneous content
- Identify the information needs of users with different backgrounds, education levels, and experiences
- Identify additional user requirements
- Ultimately deliver more helpful help systems

Introduction: IBM® z/OS® Management Facility (z/OSMF)

- Modernizes the “face” of z/OS
- Provides an integrated help system
- Makes z/OS accessible to a new generation of system programmers
- Reduces z/OS complexity



Introduction: The help system

IBM z/OS Management Facility Welcome debug1 Log out IBM

Welcome

Search: GO Search scope: All topics

Contents

- Welcome
 - What's new in z/OSMF Version 1 Release 13
 - z/OSMF tasks at a glance
 - Notices
- Getting started with z/OSMF
- Configuration
- Links
- Performance
- Problem Determination
- Software
- z/OS Classic Interfaces
- z/OSMF Administration
- Tools and techniques for troubleshooting
- z/OSMF messages
- Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Welcome

IBM® z/OS® Management Facility (z/OSMF) provides a framework for managing various aspects of a z/OS system through a Web browser interface. By streamlining some traditional tasks and automating others, z/OSMF can help to simplify some areas of z/OS system management.

With z/OSMF, you manage *solutions* rather than specific IBM products. Because z/OSMF provides system management solutions in a task-oriented, Web browser-based user interface with integrated user assistance, you can more easily manage the day-to-day operations and administration of your mainframe z/OS systems.

z/OSMF provides you with a single point of control for:

- Viewing, defining, and updating policies that affect system behavior.
- Monitoring the performance of the systems in your enterprise.
- Deploying z/OS software.
- Consolidating your z/OS management tools.

z/OSMF allows you to communicate with the z/OS system through a Web browser, so you can access and manage your z/OS system from anywhere.

For a description of the new tasks and features provided in this release of z/OSMF, see help topic [What's new in z/OSMF Version 1 Release 13](#).

For a brief description of each task provided in z/OSMF, see help topic [z/OSMF tasks at a glance](#).

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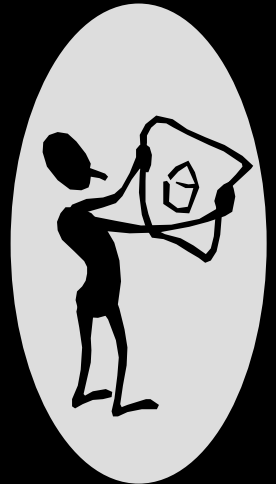
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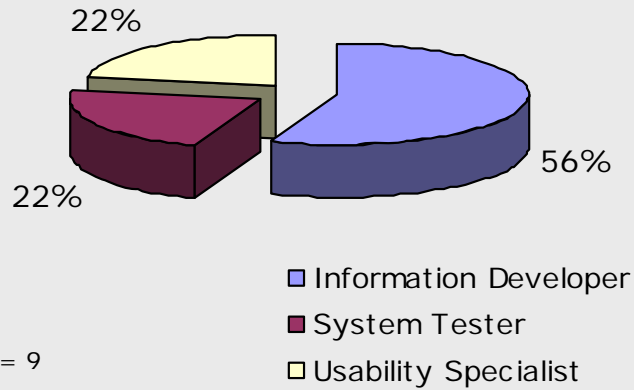
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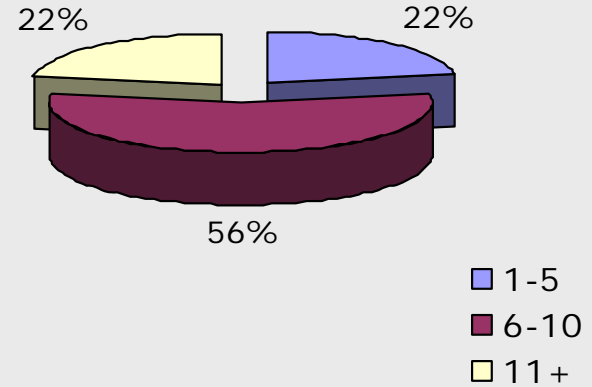


Method: Demographics

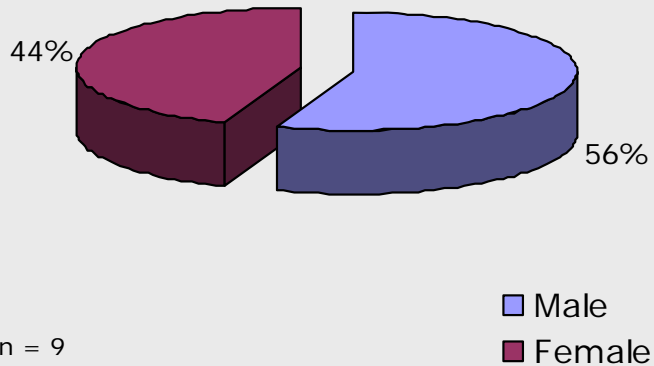
Role in IBM



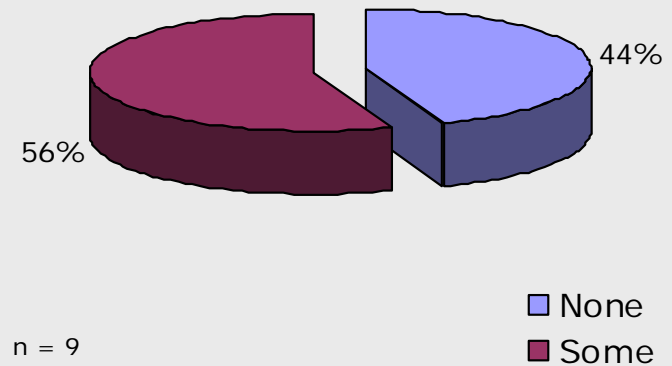
Years in Current Role



Gender



Product Experience



Method: Creating user scenarios

- Identified actions that require support of the help system
- Created 28 questions that users might have while completing each action
- Incorporated the 28 questions into 10 task-based user scenarios

Method: Sample user scenario

User Interface: Define a new desktop and add a metric to the desktop. This desktop should contain only generic sysplex resources.

Help: What's the benefit of defining generic sysplex resources?

Method: Conducting feedback sessions

The participants:

- Accessed the software directly
- Navigated to the page where they would complete the user interface portion of the scenario
- Accessed the help system from that page to answer the help portion of the scenario
- Verbalized their thoughts as they completed each task

Method: Conducting feedback sessions

We, the researchers:

- Conducted the review with one participant at a time
- Imposed no time limit for completing the scenarios
- Emphasized that we were testing the help system, not the participant
- Documented the completion rate and any errors or problems identified

Method: Categorizing and prioritizing issues

Each issue was assigned a:

- Category
 - Help System, User Interface, or Both
- Problem type
 - Clarity, Conciseness, Structure, or Missing Content
- Priority
 - Low, Medium, or High
- Resolution complexity level
 - Easy, Moderate, or Difficult

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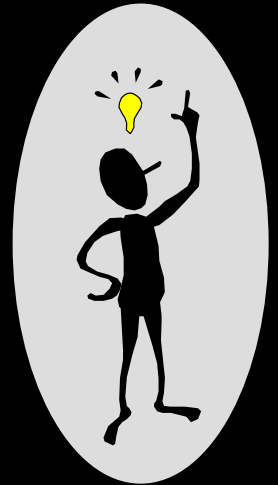
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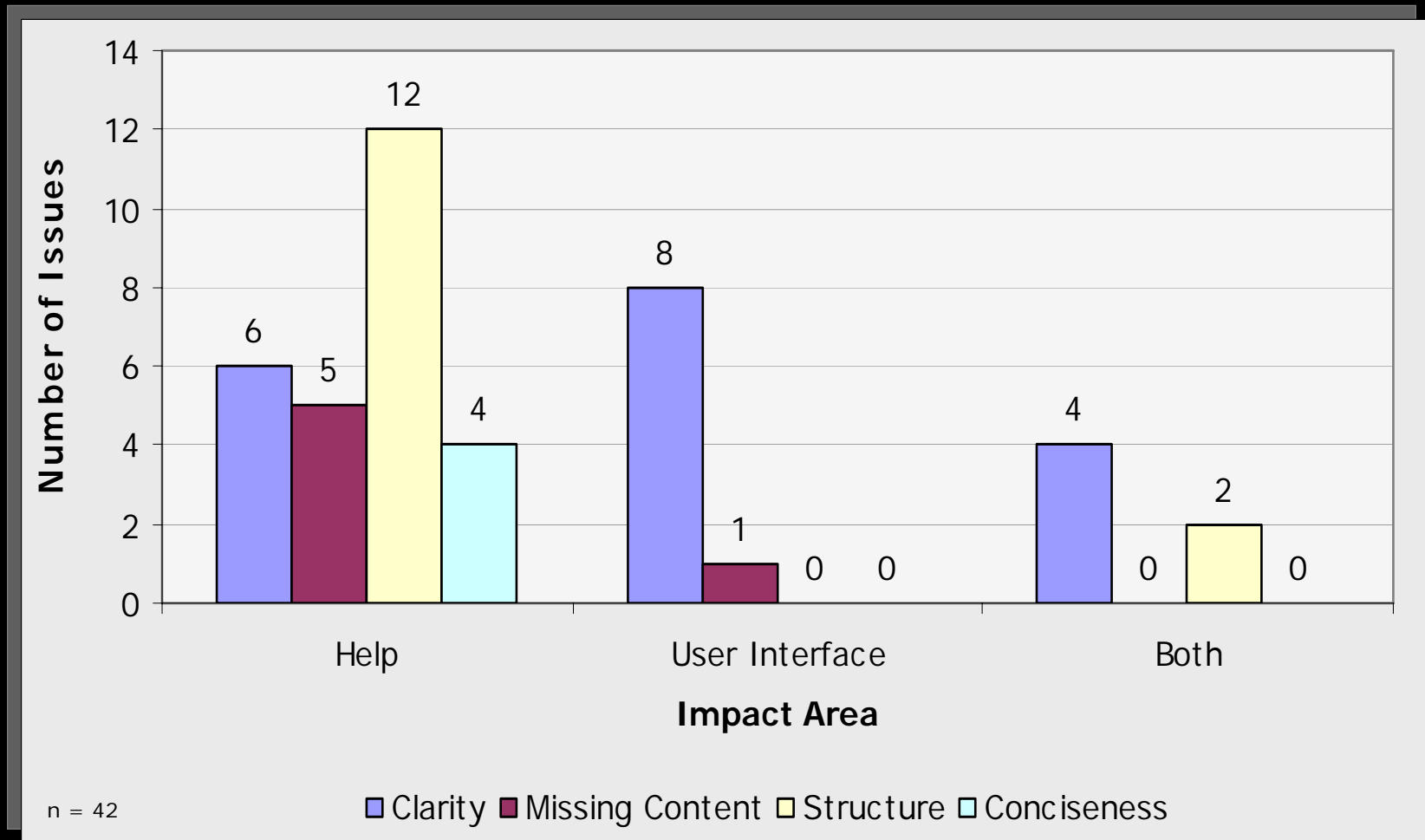
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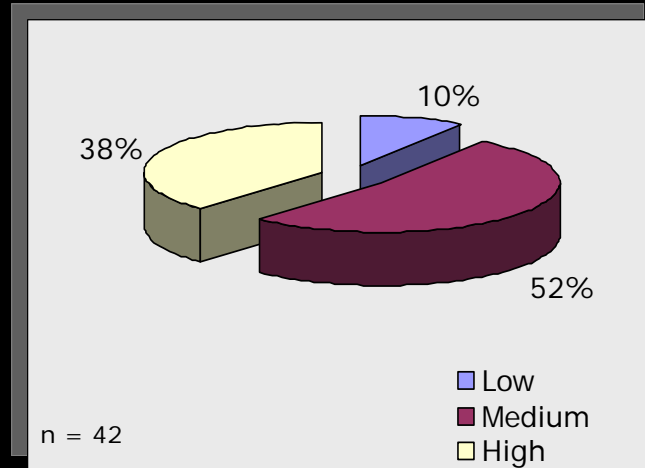
Results: Types of issues identified



Results: Example issues

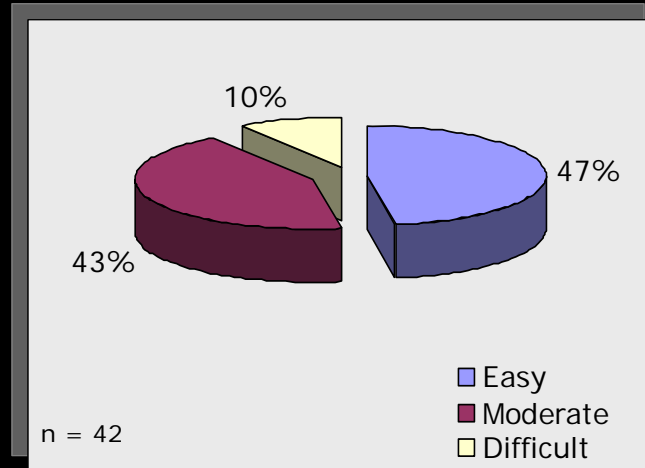
Impact Area	Problem Type	Example of Issues
Help System	Structure	Participants reported that paragraphs are more difficult to scan than tables, lists, and section headers.
	Conciseness	Participants reported that there was too much text overall.
User Interface	Clarity	Participants identified icons that were unclear.
Both	Structure	Participants reported that it was unclear how to suppress messages.

Results: Priority of issues identified



Priority	Example of Issues
Low	Participants reported not being aware that the help system was context sensitive.
Medium	Participants had a difficult time locating other help topics that were related to a specific topic.
High	Participants reported that the help topics were long and verbose.

Results: Complexity of resolutions



Complexity Level	Example of Resolutions
Easy	Add concise text to the help system or interface to clarify an icon, an action, or a dependency between tasks.
Moderate	Simplify help topics so that they address only one concept.
Difficult	Restructure the entire help system so that it doesn't require users to know what page they are on in the interface.

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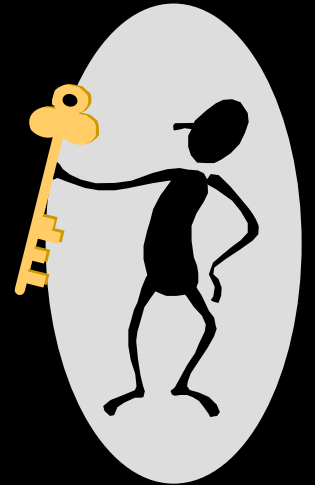
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What are the benefits of conducting a usability study of a help system?



Benefits of conducting a usability study of a help system

- Improve the help system
- Improve the usability of the software
- Increase the accessibility of the software
- Identify additional user requirements
- Increase customer satisfaction
- Reduce customer calls to technical support

Ultimate benefit: Positive perceptions of help systems

