
A Tour of Stakeholder Engagement Methods: User-centered Design Usability Testing Experience

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The THINK ALOUD Methodology:

Test users are asked to THINK ALOUD as they work with an interface and verbalize their thoughts, feelings, and decision making. The aim is to capture how users make decisions and how they feel about using the interface. Our data collection will be based on the critical response concept, described below:

1. Critical response - This method requires users to THINK ALOUD as they attempt to complete predetermined tasks. The user's word and actions are the data set (please see data capture form in Appendix A).

Methodological Context:

THINK ALOUD methodology supports data collection to understand how tools or interfaces are used, what users expect, and how the user's expectations are in- or out-of-line with the interface. We want to learn, and potentially modify the tool or interface based on, the user/user-interface interaction.

In-Session Moderator Responsibilities:

- Describe THINK ALOUD methodology
- Describe at a high level the interface being tested
- Obtain informed consent if necessary
- Explain usability procedure – the user will be asked to complete several tasks
- Explicitly mention recording (via Zoom or other platform, if applicable) and ask for permission
- Explain that the THINK ALOUD tests the interface, not the individual user
- If testing a group, ask which individual would like to “drive” or manipulate the interface
- Reassure users about what will happen if they encounter difficulties, i.e., the moderator will not tell them how to complete the task, but instead ask the user to explain out loud their difficulty in completing the task, but the user will not be forced to continue if the task is incomplete
- Explain that the design will evolve from the current version based on their feedback, insights, and identification of pain points
- Explain that we will document their suggestions but don't promise to implement them
- Confirm ending time



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THINK ALOUD Conditions Required of the Moderator

- **Let the user(s) work uninterrupted** – While you may observe something surprising, remain quiet so the users can stay focused on task completion.
- **Be conscious of your body language (even on Zoom)** – Be mindful of your body language as to not distract from task completion.
- **Don't tell users how tasks are to be completed** – If a task is difficult, it is okay to stay on that task and learn more about it rather than rushing through to get to all preconceived tasks.
- **No helping** – Let the user try and work out their own solutions, you will likely learn something along the way.
- **Avoid asking for design guidance** – The focus is on the current design, not future design decisions.

Tasks for Completion – Example Structure

Session 1

- Group A & B
 - Task 1:
 - Task 2:
 - Task 3:
- Group C & D
 - Task 1: variation of Task 1 from Group A & B
 - This task should be similar to Group A & B's Task 1 in that both tasks should involve the same component of the interface, but asks users to complete a slightly different objective that will help you understand more fully how they approach and interact with the interface.
 - Task 2: variation of Task 2 from Group A & B
 - This task should be similar to Group A & B's Task 2 in that both tasks should involve the same component of the interface, but asks users to complete a slightly different objective that will help you understand more fully how they approach and interact with the interface.
 - Task 3: variation of Task 3 from Group A & B
 - This task should be similar to Group A & B's Task 3 in that both tasks should involve the same component of the interface, but asks users to complete a slightly different objective that will help you understand more fully how they approach and interact with the interface.



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Session 2—replicate tasks from session 1

- Group A & B
- Group C & D

APPENDIX A – Data to Collect In-Session

- **Overview**
- **Task number & name** – List the task name and number.
- **Goal:** What will users have accomplished when they have finished the task? How will they know the task is complete? Write down the goal so you remember when to stop the test.
- **Time – record** the beginning and ending time, i.e., 3:02-3:15
- **Notes** – Take notes on interesting things said or actions that happen during the usability test. RESIST INTERPRETING during the test.
- **User comments/statements:**
- **User actions/behaviors:**
- **Paint Points** – note particular points in the task that are especially difficult in terms of the interface and not being able execute particular functions

Notes:



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