AARP Audience-Centered Heuristics: Older Adults

We derived these heuristics from our review of recent research about older adults and the web. We used these heuristics in doing a persona-based, task-based heuristic review of 50 web sites.

See:
Chisnell and Redish, 2004, *Designing Web Sites for Older Adults: A Review of Recent, Relevant Research*, and Chisnell and Redish, 2005, *Designing Web Sites for Older Adults: Expert Review of Usability for Older Adults at 50 Web Sites.*

Interaction Design: Designing the way users work with the site

1 Use conventional interaction elements.

1.1 Does the site use standard treatments for links?

1.2 Is link treatment the same from section to section within the site?

2 Make it obvious what is clickable and what is not.

2.1 In lists of bulleted links, are the bullets clickable?

2.2 Are command and action items presented as buttons?

2.3 Do buttons and links show that they have been clicked?

2.4 Are buttons clearly labeled?

2.5 If there is an image on a button or icon, is it task-relevant?

2.6 Do graphic buttons avoid symbols that will be unfamiliar to older adults who have low computer and Web expertise?

2.7 Is there a visible change (other than the cursor changing) when the user "points" to something clickable with his or her mouse?

3 Make clickable items easy to target and hit.

3.1 Are buttons large enough to easily see the image or text on them – at least 180 x 22 pixels?

3.2 Is the area around buttons clickable?

3.3 Is there enough space between targets to prevent hitting multiple or incorrect targets?

3.4 Do buttons and links enlarge when the rest of the text size is increased?

4 Minimize vertical scrolling; eliminate horizontal scrolling.

4.1 Does the site work at the resolution that the user would typically view the site at without horizontal scrolling?

4.2 Do pop-ups and secondary windows open wide and long enough to contain the content without the need for scrolling?

4.3 For scrolling lists, for example, a list of all the states:

- Are checkboxes used rather than drop-down (a menu that drops down when requested and stays open without further action until the user closes it or chooses a menu item) or pull-down menus (a menu that is pulled down and that stays available as long as the user holds it open)?
- If not, are drop-down menus used rather than pull-down menus?

5 Ensure that the Back button behaves predictably.

5.1 Does the Back button appear on the browser toolbar on every page?

5.2 Does clicking the Back button always go back to the page that the user came from?

6 Let the user stay in control.

- 6.1 Is there no rolling text that goes by automatically?
- 6.2 Does the site use static menus (a click leads to another page) rather than "walking menus" (exposing a sub-menu on hovering the mouse over the label)?
- 6.3 If there are walking menus, do they expand on a click (rather than a hover)?
- 6.4 Are the sub-menus timed to stay open for at least 5 seconds or until they're clicked?

7 Is there clear feedback on actions?

- 7.1 Are error pages descriptive and did they provide a solution to the user?
- 7.2 Are confirmation pages clear?

8 Provide feedback in other modes in addition to visual.

- 8.1 Are captioning and or meaningful alternative text provided for images, video, and animation?
- 8.2 Does the site support haptic pointing devices (such as the Logitech iFeel mouse)?

Information Architecture: Organizing the content

9 Make the structure of the web site as visible as possible.

- 9.1 Does the site use a directory list format (a list of links) for listing topics (such as Yahoo!, hhs.gov, or firstgov.gov do)?
- 9.2 Does the site use cross-references to related topics and redundant links?
- 9.3 Is the site hierarchy as broad and shallow as possible?

10 Clearly label content categories; assist recognition and retrieval rather than recall.

- 10.1 Are labels descriptive enough to make it easy to accurately predict what the content will be under each topic category?
- 10.2 Do labels and links start with different, distinct, and relevant key words?
- 10.3 Are labels useful and understandable each on their own?
- 10.4 Do labels reflect language that older adults are familiar with?

11 Implement the shallowest possible information hierarchy.

- 11.1 Are important, frequently needed topics and tasks closer to the surface of the web site?
- 11.2 Are related topics and links grouped and labeled?
- 11.3 Do labels and category names correspond to users' tasks and goals?
- 11.4 Do paths through the information architecture support users tasks and goals?
- 11.5 Is the path for any given task a reasonable length (2-5 clicks)?
- 11.6 Is the path clear of distractors and other obstacles to reaching task goals?
- 11.7 Are there a few, helpful cross-reference links that are related to the current task goal?
- 11.8 Do redundant links have the same labels?

12 Include a site map and link to it from every page.

- 12.1 Is there a site map?
- 12.2 Is the site map linked from every page?
- 12.3 Does the site map provide a quick overview of the whole site (rather than descriptions of the top level choices, a rehash of the main navigation or a list of every single topic on the site)?

Visual Design: Designing the pages

13 Make pages easy to skim or scan.

13.1 Are pages clean looking and well organized (versus cluttered or busy)?

13.2 Is there a clear visual "starting point" to the page?

13.3 If pages are dense with content, is content grouped or otherwise clustered to show what is related?

13.4 Is it easy to tell what is content and what is advertising?

13.5 Do task-supporting keywords stand out?

13.6 Are images relevant to, and supportive of, the text content?

13.7 If there are videos or animated sequences, do they support specific goals or tasks?

14 Make elements on the page easy to read.

14.1 Is the default type size 12-point or larger?

- If not, is there an obvious way on the page to increase the type size?
- If not, does changing the type size in the browser enlarge all of the text?

14.2 Is the type size on pull-downs and drop-down menus the same size as the text content? Does it change when the user increases the type size?

14.3 Are headings noticeably larger than body content (18- or 24-point)?

14.4 Is sans serif type used for body content?

14.5 Are headings set in a typeface that is easy to read?

14.6 Are there visual cues to direct users' attention to important items that are in the left and right columns?

15 Visually group related topics.

15.1 Is the amount of information – sparse, dense, or in between – appropriate for the audience and type of site?

15.2 Are the most important and frequently used topics, features, and functions, close to the center of the page rather than in the far left or right margins?

15.3 Are task-related topics grouped together?

15.4 Are frequently used topics, actions, and links "above the fold"?

16 Make sure text and background colors contrast.

16.1 Are text and interaction elements a different color from the background (not just a different hue)?

16.2 Do the colors that are used together make information easy to see and find?

16.3 Are clickable items highlighted differently from other non-clickable highlighted items?

16.4 Are multiple types of highlighting minimized on each page?

17 Use adequate white space.

17.1 Are there visual cues in the layout of the page that help users know there is more content "below the fold"?

17.2 Is there line space between clickable items? (at least 2 pixels)

17.3 Is body text broken up with appropriate and obvious headings?

Information Design: Writing and formatting the content

18 Make it easy to find things on the page quickly.

18.1 Is the amount of text minimized; is only necessary information present?

18.2 If there are introduction paragraphs, are they necessary?

18.3 Are instructions and messages easy to recognize?

18.4 Is there liberal use of headings, bulleted lists, and links to assist skimming?

18.5 Do bulleted lists have the main points and important keywords at the beginning of each item?

18.6 Do links have meaningful labels?

18.7 Are buttons labeled clearly and unambiguously?

18.8 Do button and link labels start with action words?

19 Focus the writing on audience and purpose.

19.1 Is the content written in active voice, directed to "you"?

19.2 Are sentences short, simple, and straightforward?

19.3 Are paragraphs short?

19.4 If humor is used, is it appropriate?

19.5 Are headings, labels, and captions descriptive of associated content?

19.6 Are conclusions and implications at the top of a body of text, with supporting content after? (inverted pyramid)

20 Use the users' language; minimize jargon and technical terms.

20.1 Does the site use words that most older adults know?

20.2 If there are technical words or jargon, are they appropriate for the level of domain expertise that the audience has?

20.3 If there are new or technical terms, does the site help users learn what the terms mean?

20.4 Are concepts and technical information (such as safety and effectiveness information about a prescription drugs) written in plain language?

20.5 Are instructions written in plain language?

20.6 Is the reading level appropriate for the capabilities of the audience and their literacy in the topic area? Is it easy to draw inferences and to understand the implications of text?