Providing Access to Digitized Content Via the Finding Aid: A Usability Study

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Problem statement: How usable is this?
Methodology

Efficiency:
Time on task, number of clicks

Effectiveness:
Successful task completion

Satisfaction:
Ranking of perceived difficulty and positive vs. negative comments

Learnability:
Improvement in time, clicks, and success over 4 tasks in a single session
## Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
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</table>

* U=Undergraduate, G=Graduate Student, PG=Post graduate volunteer, S=University staff
Procedure

Task 1: Locate a piece of legal correspondence.
Task 2: Locate an estate document.
Task 3: Locate some kind of deed.
Task 4: Locate a family history document or some other family item.
Results: Efficiency, Effectiveness, Satisfaction

of item-level described content,
compared to finding aid access:

Efficiency:
35% less time, 48% fewer clicks

_Not surprising: finding aid provides more context._

Effectiveness:
Success rates 7.5% higher

_Not surprising: no EAD search function or navigation box._

Satisfaction:
Preferred by a ratio of 3:1

_Not surprising: these are novice users._
Notable Comparison Between Participants

**English as a second language**

*Difficulty with both interfaces!*

- 51% more time and 10% less success in the item-level interface
- 41% more time and 13% less success in the finding aid interface
- 80% preferred the item-level interface

**No previous experience with digital collections:**

*Found finding aid interface significantly easier than those with digital collection experience!*

- 42% less time
- 27% fewer clicks
- 12% more success
## Results: Learnability

### Paired-sample t-test comparing task 1 to task 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<td>FirstClickJem1 - FirstClickJem4</td>
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No significant differences
Further Research Indicated

More tests on the finding aid interface to determine *what actually improves usability*.

Suggestions from the research include:
- replacing archival terminology
- Providing search in page feature
- Providing navigation links for sections of the finding aid on the left

**THEN:** learnability tests for novice users that span multiple sessions.
Conclusions

Don’t compare item level access to finding aid access; they aren’t comparable.

Find ways to make the EAD more user-friendly.

*EAD delivery works for us; let’s make it work for our users!*
References


For more information: ...upcoming American Archivist article?

  - Project Site: http://www.lib.ua.edu/libraries/hoole/cabaniss
  - Display: http://acumen.lib.ua.edu/u0003_0000252