

‘Thinking Aloud’ Redux*

A reworking of Lewis & Rieman’s Exercise 5.1

Ask two friends to be subjects[†] of thinking-aloud studies. Choose a simple piece of software that your subjects have never used (a word processor, spreadsheet, or graphics program would be good). Take an hour or so to work with the program and devise a task that an experienced user could complete in about five minutes. Your novice users will probably require half an hour or more for the same task. Decide on “fallback” procedures — when will you give the subjects help and what will you say if they are seriously stuck.

↳ Quoted
from Lewis &
Rieman

Follow the thinking-aloud instructions given in Chapter 5, taking special care to emphasize that you are testing the interface, not the subjects’ abilities. Review the HyperTopic on “Ethical Concerns” before you begin.

Record each subject’s behavior on video if possible, or on audio tape. Remember that it may sometimes be necessary to remind a subject to think aloud.

Analyze the tapes to discover problems with the interface. Your report should not exceed three pages. For each problem, consider whether it might occur with other users (why or why not?) and how it might be solved. Note any additional problems that your subjects did not have, but that occurred to you during the study. Comment briefly on the differences between the two subjects.

☞ You will need permission from the Ethics Review Board prior to beginning this assignment. Permission may be obtained from the FCS Ethics Authority as this will be an in-class study. It will be easiest to obtain permission to conduct the experiment if all of the experimental participants are students in the same CSCI 6606 class with you.

References

[1] Clayton Lewis and John Rieman. Task-centered user interface design: A practical introduction. ©1993, 1994. Three versions available:

Plain text <ftp://ftp.cs.colorado.edu>;

PDF with index <http://users.cs.dal.ca/~jamie/TCUID/readme.html>; and

HTML <http://hcibib.org/tcuid/>.

*This exercise is based on Exercise 5.1 from Lewis & Rieman’s text [1]

[†]Since Lewis & Rieman wrote the book from which the quotation is taken the standard terminology has shifted. We no longer speak of human beings as ‘subjects of an experiment’ (or subjects) but rather as ‘experimental participants’ (or participants). Also asking friends to participate is not recommended because it can lead to bias and lends itself to coercion.