

2013. Initial Testing Protocol: Site Flow

This usability test assumes that three or four people unfamiliar with the *Hidden Histories of the National Mall* comprise the initial testing cohort. The tester is present as facilitator, asking questions, taking notes and encouraging testers to “think aloud.” This test is conducted with hand-drawn diagrams of “pages” of the website. The facilitator reveals new diagrams based on tester navigational selections.

Goals of initial test

To identify strengths and weaknesses in site flow

To test the proposed navigational structure

To explore user expectations of how the site works and what they will find.

Set the scene

Hidden Histories of the National Mall is a website accessible using a mobile phone. The website is currently under development, and we want to talk to people at each stage of the project—from beginning to end—to ensure that the content and organization are responsive to the ways visitors might use the site. We are asking you to look at these diagrams that show how the site is organized and to walk through them with us.

Pretend you’re standing on the National Mall and want to know more about what’s around you and its history. You may wonder about monuments and statues, about who uses the Mall and the neighborhood, or about how the Mall has changed over time, why it looks the way it does and people associated with it. You search on your mobile find a site called Hidden Histories of the National Mall.

User Task

To create a path through the site, starting with the home page.

Facilitator questions (general)

- Which of these pages is more likely to encourage you to explore Hidden Histories of the National Mall? (Note to tester: Show two possible home pages for the website.)
- What do you think this site is about? What do you expect to find here?
- What would you click on first? Why? (Note to tester: use the selected home page)
- Did you expect to find this when you selected {___}?

- (Note to tester: If it meets expectations, move on. If not ask:) What led you to expect something different? (Note to tester: encourage them to tell you what they expected.)
- Where do you want to go next? Why?
 - (Note to tester: Repeat questions for each level of content, ie, Home→People browse →Person Item/show.)
- Are the terms/words clear? or Do the navigation links clearly guide you through the types of content available in this site? You might ask whether another word/term would make more sense to the tester.
- After testers have created their own user experience, encourage them to explore sections they haven't visited. If they haven't chosen a particular section, ask them why—maybe they didn't see it; maybe what it is simply isn't obvious at this point (and will be later); maybe it's just not of interest to them—and if so, why not? This might be the place to ask them, “where do you think x, y and z lead?”

Facilitator questions (directed)

When testers have explored the site, ask them directed questions (Note to testers: Users might approach these questions via places, events, people, and explorations.)

- How would you find out why the Washington Monument is two different colors?
- How would you find out more about Martin Luther King's “I Have a Dream Speech?”
- How would you find out who planned the Mall?
- How would you find out if other buildings used to be on the Mall?

Facilitator observations (general)

- Be patient; give testers time to make their own choices.
- Encourage “thinking aloud.” Ask testers to talk through their decisions in stream of consciousness format.
- Watch how testers make decisions. What they say and do may be tempered by indecision or lack of clarity or extreme conscientiousness.
- Note behavior: does their decision-making seem easy, difficult? Where are they most enthusiastic?
- Take notes
- Summarize and write up notes while your perceptions are fresh