# Menus on XYZ.com

## A HOT Evaluation by YourNameGoesHere

## Purpose

To determine the extent to which the text of menu items articulates the structure of the site, and clarifies what the target pages are about.

The tactics for creating effective menus appear here as a set of guidelines based on research and actual experience, documented in books, journal articles, and online styleguides. (References appear at the end of each strategy). Each guideline, then, provides a method for a writer to follow, or a **heuristic**.

In this evaluation we test the text against these guidelines. You are, then, performing a **heuristic evaluation**.

## Method

Here's how to perform a Heuristic Online Text (HOT) evaluation.

**1. Save this file with a name that includes**

- ❏ The site you are analyzing
- ❏ The aspect you are evaluating (menus, in this case)
- ❏ Initials
- ❏ A period
- ❏ A suffix indicating the file type (doc for Word files, htm for HTML files)

**Examples:** ibmmenusjp.doc, yahoomenusds.htm

**2. Go to a site's home page, and reproduce the home page menus in outline form.**

You may find a set of menus at the top of the page, another set on the left, a third in the middle, a collection of extra references on the right, and a reprise of most of the major items at the bottom of the page.

Please try to make sense out of all the menus. The top level of your outline is Home Page. But what comes below that?

- Usually menus across the top are more important than any others.
- Check the menu at the bottom of the page for indications of the topics that the site designers consider most important.
- If you have trouble identifying the relationships between the various menus, please add descriptions (in parentheses).
- Isolate the menu at the bottom of the page, labeling it "Bottom Menu."

**3. Follow one of the major menus down, down, down, recording several more levels in your outline.**

Use indentation to indicate a lower level.

Reproduce the actual text of menu items, in order.

**4. Return to the home page and copy the URL for that page, then paste that into this file, in the line right after the last item in your outline.**

The URL is the address of the home page.

**5. Type today's date on the next line, to show when you collected the menu items in your outline.**

**6. Apply the HOT Evaluation to the outline you have collected, filling out the evaluation form.**

If a strategy or tactic seems irrelevant, omit it from your evaluation. Note that this will change the total possible points.

# Outline

## Top Level (title of home page)

### *Main Menu Items*

#### Subtopics

##### Sub-subtopics

URL to the page:

Date investigated:

# Evaluation

## 1. A title or a heading is an object you reuse in many menus, search results, bookmark lists, and See Also lists.

### *Each menu item reflects the actual title or major heading on the target page.*

#### Test

Clicking the linktext of each menu item takes me to a page in which that text reappears, verbatim, as the title or major heading on the page, confirming that I have gotten where I expected to. The page title or major heading is the same object used in the menu, as a menu item.

YES=1, NO=0.

#### Impression

Overall, the linktext of menu items seemed similar to that text of the title or major heading on target pages.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which menu item seemed particularly out of sync with the title or major heading on the target page, if any?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## *Each menu item is distinct from the others.*

### Tests

Comparing all the items in a single menu, I can tell the difference. There are no items that seem as if they might be describing the same topic.

YES=1, NO=0.

When I think of a topic I would like to find through the menu system, I can figure out which menu item might lead me toward that information. (Try 5 topics).

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

Overall, the menu items are easy to tell apart.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which menu items seemed as if they might be pointing to the same content?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## *Each menu item describes the content of the target page in enough detail so I can anticipate what I will find there.*

### Test

Reading almost any menu item, I can correctly guess what information will appear on the target page.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

Overall, the menu items are accurate and complete enough to let me gauge what content will appear on the target page.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which menu items seemed inaccurate, or inexpressive?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## In each menu item keywords appear early.

### Test

In looking at ten menu items that contain more than a few words, I see that the keyword always appears early in the item, not late.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

Overall, I can distinguish between menu items because the important words appear early in each item.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which menu items seemed to leave keywords to the end?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## The site offers shortcut menus to popular items.

### Test

On the home page, and major departmental pages, I always find links to popular pages that exist deep within the site.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

The site is helpful, offering menus leading to important pages that lie deeper within the site (not at the next level down).

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which pages were pointed to?  If none, which pages do you think the site should have offered shortcuts to?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## *References:*

**See**: Conklin (1987), Cooper (1995), Farkas and Farkas (2000), Keeker (1997), Mandel (1997), Shneiderman (1992), Shneiderman and Kearsley (1989) in the bibliography at http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf .

# 2. Each menu offers a meaningful structure.

## *Each short menu follows at least one easily recognizable pattern.*

### Test

Each menu of less than seven items contains menu items written so that I can tell why these items appear in a group, and why they appear in this sequence.

YES=1, NO=0.

No short menu is arranged in alphabetical order, unless it is a list of items that usually appear in that arrangement (states, authors' names, book titles).

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

Overall, I can grok why these items go together in this order.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which menu items seemed out of place in a short menu?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## *Each long menu chunks menu items in groups, arranging the groups in a familiar pattern.*

### Test

Each menu of more than seven items is broken into groups.

YES=1, NO=0.

When menu items appear in a group, I can see that the items all refer to the same kind of object, category, service, product, or activity. I see why all, or almost all of them belong together.

YES=1, NO=0.

Within each group of menu items, I can see, from the text, why they are arranged in this sequence. I can at least grasp why one item is first, others are in the middle, and another comes in last.

YES=1, NO=0.

When I look at the sequence of groups, I can see some familiar pattern emerging.  I am not puzzled by the order of the groups.

YES=1, NO=0.

No long menu is arranged in alphabetical order, unless it is a list of items that usually appear in that arrangement (states, authors' names, book titles)..

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

Overall, I can spot a meaningful arrangement of the menu items in groups.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which menu items seemed to out of place?

Which groups seemed out of place?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## References:

**See**: Abeleto (1999), Ameritech (1998), Apple (1987), Gregory (1987), Hix & Hartson (1993), Krug (2000), Larson & Czerwinski (1998), Lynch (2000), Mandel (1994, 1997), Sullivan (1998) in the bibliography at http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf .

# 3. The site offers multiple routes to the same information.

### *There are several different menus that I could follow down to the same page.*

### Test

There are distinct menus for several different audiences. But the content is not entirely separate. Following the trail of one audience, I might find the same page I already viewed when I posed as another audience.

YES=1, NO=0.

There are several menus set up using different categories (toys by age, toys by type, toys by character, toys by vendor). I could get to the same page from several different menus. (Not necessarily from every menu).

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

Overall, I feel that the multiple menus reflect the different interests, perspectives, or mental models of typical audiences.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which page could you find from several different menus?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## References:

**See**: Bushell (1995), NCSA (1996), Veen (2001) in the bibliography at http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf .

# 4. The site displays several menu levels at once.

### *On the same page, the site often offers at least two levels of menu items.*

### Test

The second-level items appear at the same time as the main items, and stay put as long as I am on the page.

YES=1, NO=0.

If the second-level items appear **after** I select a major item, they stay put, and do not disappear when I move the mouse, or release my grip on the mouse button. They remain stable.

YES=1, NO=0.

Second-level menu items **never** appear in cascading menus (temporary dropdown menus that go away if you slide your mouse the wrong way). Second-level menus **never** appear when I hover over the right areas, disappearing when I jiggle the mouse.

YES=1, NO=0.

The site allows me to explore more than two levels of menu items, all on the same page, so I can get a sense of the full content of the section before proceeding.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

Overall, I can see several levels of content in the menu items displayed on most pages.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which page offers the most levels of menu items?  (Insert a screenshot).

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## References:

**See**: Cooper (1995), Mandel (1997), and Norman (1991) in the bibliography at http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf .

# 5. The target page echoes the menu item I clicked to get there.

## *The key locator texts on the page match the text of the menu item, so I know I have come to the right page.*

### Test

I know that I have arrived at the right page, because the text at the top of the page is the same text I just clicked.

YES=1, NO=0.

Some or all of the words in the title or major heading appeared in the menu item.

YES=1, NO=0.

The introductory sentence echoes those words, or the same idea.

YES=1, NO=0.

The caption of the first big picture echoes those words, or the same idea.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

Overall, I can confirm that I have arrived at the page I expected to.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which page surprised you the most, because it was not what you expected when you clicked the menu item?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## *References:*

**See**: Apple (1999), Krug (2000), Lynch and Horton (1999), Microsoft (2000) in the bibliography at http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf .

# 6. The target page shows me where I am within the site hierarchy.

### *The page contains some indication of my location within some hierarchy.*

### Test

The page displays breadcrumbs, or some other text or graphic device showing where I am in the larger structure, for instance, displaying the major choices I would have made if I came down from the top, following a common path.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Impression

Overall, I can see where I am within the larger structure.

YES=1, NO=0.

### Example

Which pages completely lacked any indication of location?

### Comments

Please comment on the ways in which the text of menu items seems to follow, or ignore, this guideline. Please record what you have observed, while doing the testing.

## *References:*

**See**: Apple (1999), Black & Elder (1997), Bransford and Johnson (1972), Farkas and Farkas (2000), Keeker (1997), Nielsen (1996), Omanson et al (1998), Siegel (1996) in the bibliography at http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf .
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# Total Score

Assigning a grade to a set of texts is always a bit arbitrary.  But counting up the points for these sample texts, we reach this diagnosis:

### Total Points:

### Total Possible:

**Percentage:**

### Interpretation

90-100%: Excellent menus.

75-89%: Pretty clear menus, but occasionally confusing.

60-74%: Could use some rewrites, and reorganization.

45-59%: A mess.

25-44%: Sure to confuse visitors.

0-24: Guaranteed to make visitors reach for the Back button.

# Overall Conclusions

In a few paragraphs, summarize your most important observations—both positive and negative.

# Major Recommendations

List the top five problems with the menus, and in a sentence or two, summarize what you would recommend as solutions.