

Think Aloud

# Think aloud

- Basic idea: Have a participant use the interface and speak aloud while they do so
- Think aloud is a very versatile, can be long or short, detailed or minimal, planned or ad-hoc
- Pros
  - Get a sense of what the user is trying to do and why they click on some things
  - Very detailed information
  - Testing with 5 users will find the majority of major issues
- Cons
  - Small sample sizes
  - Talking aloud changes how long a user spends on tasks so this method cannot be combined with timing

# Think aloud

- Think aloud sessions are typically scripted, that is, you write down everything you will say in advance
- Everything you say to the participant will change their behavior so you have to be very careful
- Typical session
  1. Tell the participant what the session will involve including things like how long it will be and what kind of data recording you will be doing (informed consent)
  2. Train them in thinking aloud
  3. Ask them to accomplish several tasks which have been previously written down, reading aloud each task before starting it
  4. End by thanking them and offering to answer any questions they may have

# Usability testing the iPad

- 7 participants with 3+ months experience with iPhones
- Signed an informed consent form explaining:
  - what the participant would be asked to do;
  - the length of time needed for the study;
  - the compensation that would be offered for participating;
  - participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time;
  - a promise that the person's identity would not be disclosed; and
  - an agreement that the data collected would be confidential and would be available to only the evaluators
- Then they were asked to explore the iPad
- Next they were asked to perform randomly assigned specified tasks

# Examples of the tasks

App or website	Task
iBook	Download a free copy of <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> and read through the first few pages.
Craigslist	Find some free mulch for your garden.
eBay	You want to buy a new iPad on eBay. Find one that you could buy from a reputable seller.
<i>Time</i> Magazine	Browse through the magazine and find the best pictures of the week.
Epicurious	You want to make an apple pie for tonight. Find a recipe and see what you need to buy in order to prepare it.
Kayak	You are planning a trip to Death Valley in May this year. Find a hotel located in the park or close to the park.

**Table 14.1** Examples of some of the tests used in the iPad evaluation (adapted from Budiu and Nielsen, 2010).

Source: Copyright Nielsen Norman Group, from report available at <http://www.nngroup.com/reports/>.

# Think aloud training

“In this observation, we are interested in what you think about as you perform the tasks we are asking you to do. In order to do this, I am going to ask you to talk aloud as you work on the task. What I mean by “talk aloud” is that I want you to tell me everything you are thinking from the first time you see the statement of the task until you finish the task. I would like you to talk aloud constantly from the time I give you the task until you have completed it. I don’t want you to try to plan out what you say or try to explain to me what you are saying. Just act as if you were alone, speaking to yourself. It is most important that you keep talking. If you are silent for any long period of time, I will ask you to talk. Do you understand what I want you to do?”