How testing your documents can improve plain language compliance

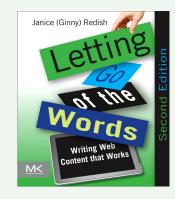
Janice (Ginny) Redish, Ph.D. ginny@redish.net www.redish.net



@GinnyRedish



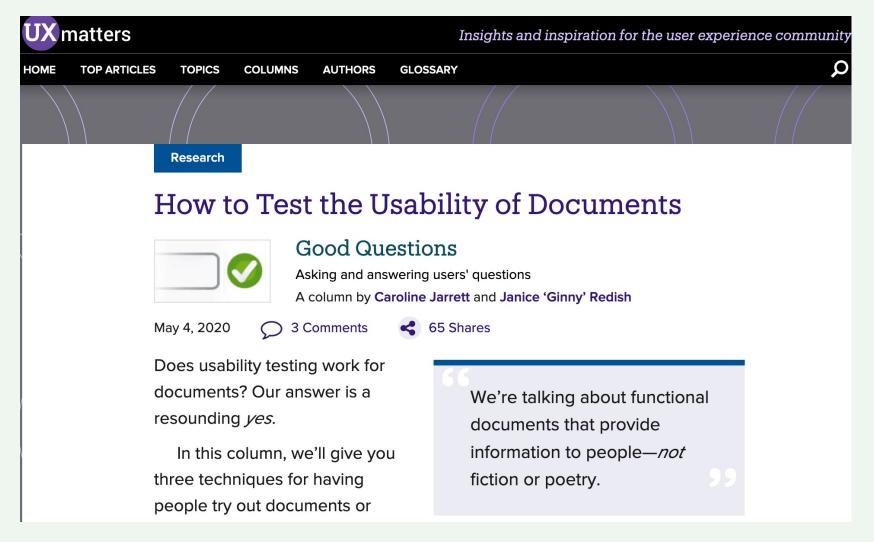
Ginny Redish



2nd edition Elsevier, 2012

Webinar with demonstrations for the U.S. Plain Language Community of Practice and **Digital.gov** April 14, 2021

This webinar is based on an article in UXmatters



www.uxmatters.com/mt/archives/2020/05/how-to-test-the-usability-of-documents.php

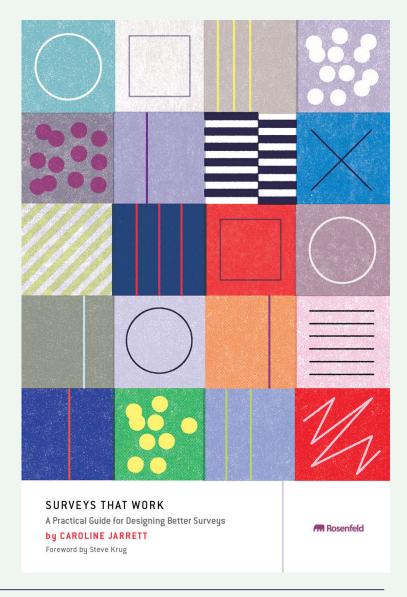
Caroline Jarrett wrote the article with me



www.effortmark.co.uk @cjforms

Surveys that work: A practical guide for designing better surveys

Rosenfeld Media, coming June 2021



Topics for this session

- Setting the context
 - Why? Paper documents need testing, too.
 - What? A brief review of usability testing
- Demonstrating 3 techniques
 - Tell me in your own words (paraphrasing)
 - Mark positives and negatives (plus / minus)
 - Find an answer or do something (task-based)
- Adding a technique for when you can't test with users
- Leaving time for your questions and comments

Setting the context

Why?

What?





Why?

Everything we write at work has a purpose



Get people to do something



Help people make good decisions



Answer people's questions

For you to meet your organization's goals. . .

The people who get your documents must be able to

- find what they need
- understand what they find
- use what they find to meet their needs

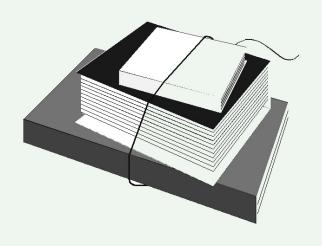




If people don't understand what we write. . .











© 2021, Janice (Ginny) Redish

Testing Paper Documents

What?

For a usability test, you must have. . .



A draft of the letter, notice, fact sheet, or other document you are worried about

A few people who need to get or use your document Note: You work with each person separately.

A method that will let you know how well (or not) the document works for those people

Paraphrase Plus / minus Task-based

All the guidelines for a good usability test apply to testing paper documents, too

Take care of your participants.

- Treat them with respect.
- Make sure they are comfortable.
- Watch their body language.

If you record (and you should), get consent first.

Set expectations for time, and keep to that time.

Listen. Talk very little.

Ask questions neutrally.

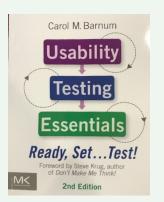




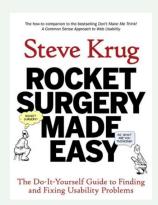
Honing Your Usability Testing Skills

Ginny Redish
ginny@redish.net
www.redish.net
@GinnyRedish

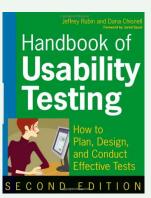
https://redish.net/wpcontent/uploads/Redish-Honing-Your-Usability-Testing-Skills.pdf



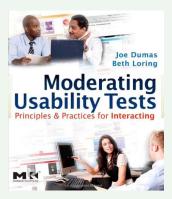
Barnum, 2nd edition, 2021



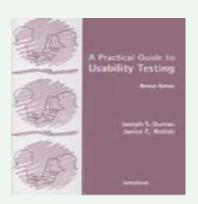
Krug, 2010



Rubin and Chisnell, 2008



Dumas and Loring, 2008



Dumas and Redish 1999

Tell me in your own words



Amanda Dean

Subject: Notice of intent to offset

Our records show that you owe a state debt to the Minnesota Department of Revenue. If this is a joint debt each debtor may receive a separate notice.

Debtor name:

Debt type: 2009 Individual Income Tax - Audit

Amount due: \$1,541.63

We intend to file a claim with the U.S. Treasury Offset Program for this amount. This federal program allows the Department of Revenue to claim your federal tax refunds and federal non-tax payments and apply them to your debt. Some non-tax payments, such as social security are ineligible for offset. The U.S. Treasury will only send us your payments that are eligible for offset by federal law. In addition, they will deduct a fee for each transaction before they send the payment to us. The U.S. Treasury sets the amount of this fee and may change it annually. We may have already filed a claim with this program for other state debts you owe.

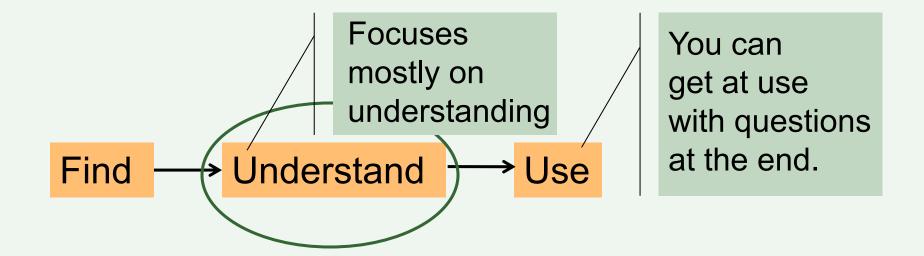
Having an active payment agreement will not prevent us from filing a claim. If your federal tax refund and/or federal non-tax payment applies to your debt, your payment agreement may end earlier than scheduled. Your payment agreement will automatically end when either you no longer have a balance due with the Department of Revenue or all scheduled payments have been requested. If you currently have a payment agreement in place with the Department of Revenue, continue to follow the terms of the agreement.

To avoid this claim from being filed, you must pay the amount due in full immediately.

Options for making payment:

- Electronically debit your bank account pay online at www.revenue.state.mn.us or call 1-800-570-3329. There is no charge to you for using this service.
- Major credit card log into the Value Payment Systems website at www.payMNtax.com or call 1-855-9-IPAY-MN. There is a fee charged by Value Payment Systems for using this service.
- Money order or check use the enclosed payment voucher and include your Letter ID
 on the payment.

"Tell me in your own words" - Paraphrase



Getting the draft to your participants



In person – Hand it to the participant



Remotely with screen sharing – Put it on the screen



Remotely by phone – Email it when you start the session

Running the session

Opening

Introduce

Thank

Get consent

Set time expectations

Explain how the session will go

Set the scene – when, how would the participant get the letter, notice, (or whatever it is you are testing)



Have participant

- read out loud a unit of the draft
 (for example: a heading; a few sentences;
 a paragraph; a table) whatever forms a coherent unit
- tell you in their own words what that meant

Listen for

- words the participant stumbles over
- what they paraphrase correctly, what they miss, what they get wrong
- their comments about what they understand and don't understand

Closing

You might ask a few questions, such as

- What they think a particular word means
- What they would do now
- Any final comments they have about the draft

Thank again

Give the incentive if you are doing that

Say good-bye

Your role – note taker



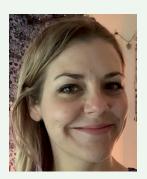




Listen for

- words the participant stumbles over
- what they paraphrase correctly, what they miss, what they get wrong
- their comments about what they understand and don't understand

Let's try it



Amanda

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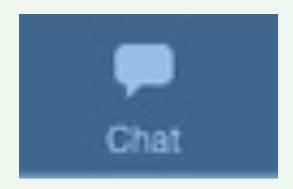
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To avoid this claim from being filed, you must pay the amount due in full immediately.

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- Money order or check use the enclosed payment voucher and include your Letter ID
 on the payment.

What did we learn?



To: Everyone ▼

Type message here...

More Y

What did Minnesota DOR do?

The Minnesota Department of Revenue may take your federal payments

Debtor: TEST TEST

Debt Type: METRO STATE U General Accounts Receivable

Amount Due: \$801.42

Why can you take my federal payments?

When you owe a state debt, the law allows us to take certain federal payments to pay your debt.

Note: Each person responsible for paying this debt may receive a copy of this letter.

Will you still take my federal payments if I already have a payment agreement?

Yes. The terms of your payment agreement include collecting federal payments and refunds to pay your state debt. Your payment agreement will continue as scheduled.

What federal payments can you take?

We can only take payments allowed under federal law. Some examples are below.

We can take	We cannot take
Vendor or contractor payments	Federal tax refunds
 Expense reimbursements 	 Social Security income
 Travel advances 	 Veterans benefits
 Certain types of grants 	 Railroad retirement benefits

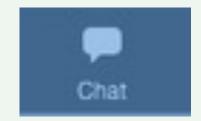
What happens next?

If you still owe this state debt in 60 days, we will notify the federal government. They will send us your federal payments until this debt is paid in full.

Note: If you have evidence this debt is not past due or not legally collectible, you may request a review by mailing your evidence to the address listed below. (For example, debts that were discharged in bankruptcy are not legally collectible.)

Minnesota Revenue P.O. Box 64564 St. Paul. MN 55164-0564 ? ?

What do you notice about this revision?



Revision by Melissa Donndelinger and team

uments Slide 21

How can I stop this?

We will stop taking your federal payments when this state debt is paid in full. Call 651-556-3003 or 1-800-657-3909 for a payoff amount.

Payment options:

- Pay electronically from your bank account. Go to www.revenue.state.mn.us and type payment options into the Search box or call 1-800-570-3329. We do not charge you for using this service.
- Pay by credit card or debit card. Go to www.payMNtax.com or call 1-855-947-2966. Value Payment Systems processes these payments and charges you a fee for this service.
- Pay by check or money order. Include the enclosed voucher with your payment. Write the Letter ID on the memo line and mail your payment to the address on the voucher. The Letter ID is in the top right corner of this letter.

If you cannot pay this debt in full and do not have a payment agreement, you may call us at 651-556-3003 or 1-800-657-3909 to request one. Payment agreements that include tax debt are subject to a nonrefundable \$50 fee.

Sincerely,

Collection Division

Phone: 651-556-3003 or 1-800-657-3909 (toll-free)

Email: mdor.collection@state.mn.us

Fax: 651-556-5116

Tear or cut here

Your check authorizes us to make a one-time electronic fund transfer from your

MINNESOTA · REVENUE

Collection Division Payment Voucher

ID: XXX-XX-0551

TEST TEST

Letter ID: L1455908480

Amount Due: \$801.42

Make check payable to:

Amount paid: \$

Minnesota Revenue PO Box 64564 St. Paul. MN 55164-0564





category finalist 2016

per Documents

Slide 22

Mark positives and negatives

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

SPECIAL NOTICE

To File a No Use Tax Return: call 1-800-426-1776

For general tax information contact: Telephone Information Center 1-800-647-7706 or (360) 486-2345

USE TAX OBLIGATIONS OF BUSINESSES

The Department of Revenue routinely reviews the tax reporting practices of registered taxpayers to ensure proper reporting. We are contacting you with this reminder because, according to our records, you have not recently reported any use tax on the Combined Excise Tax Returns and may have overlooked a tax obligation.

Businesses owe either sales tax or use tax on tangible personal property used or consumed in conducting their business (this excludes goods held for sale, i.e., inventory). Generally, sales tax should be paid when purchasing such items. However, if you make purchases directly from out-of-state sellers via the Internet, telemarketing, and mail order, you may not have been charged sales tax. If you did not pay tax on such purchases, you need to report use tax on these items. The following list contains examples of purchases on which you may owe the use tax:

- Consumable supplies such as stationery, forms, books, magazines, canned software, office supplies, etc.
- Capital assets such as furniture, office equipment, computers, corp machines, fax machines, etc.

Timeframe - Under the statute of limitations, the current timeframe that is open to audit or making tax adjustments is from January 1, 1998 through the year 2002. Therefore, please take some time to review your purchases made since January 1, 1998.

If You Owe Use Tax - Report the total amount of your purchases on which no tax has been paid on the use tax line. the local use tax line, and the Region Transit Authority line (if you are located within the RTA district) of your Combined Excise Tax Return.

For those reporting on a Sales Tax Remittance Return, there is no provision for reporting use tax on that form. If you have use tax to report, you will need to file a regular Annual Combined Excise Tax Return. To obtain a copy, visit our web site at http://dor.wa.gov and click on FORMS. You may also call us to obtain the form.

If You Do Not Owe Use Tax - If, after reviewing your purchases, you determine that you do not owe use tax, we request that you call 1-800-426-1776 to file a No Use Tax Return. This toll free number is an automated service used only to file the No Use Tax Return for this mailing. To report that you owe no use tax, you will need your nine-digit registration number and simply follow the directions given through the automated system. The nine-digit number is printed on the tax return, above the name/address label.

Once you have contacted us (either by reporting use tax on your Combined Excise Tax Return or by filing a No Use Tax Return) you will receive no follow-up letters regarding the use tax program.

To inquire about the availability of this document in an alternate format for the visually impaired, please call (360) 486-2342. Teletype (TTY) users please call 1-900-451-7985.

Washington State Department of Revenue Olympia, Washington 98504-7478

PO Box 474T8

http://dor.wa.gov

Serving the People of Washington

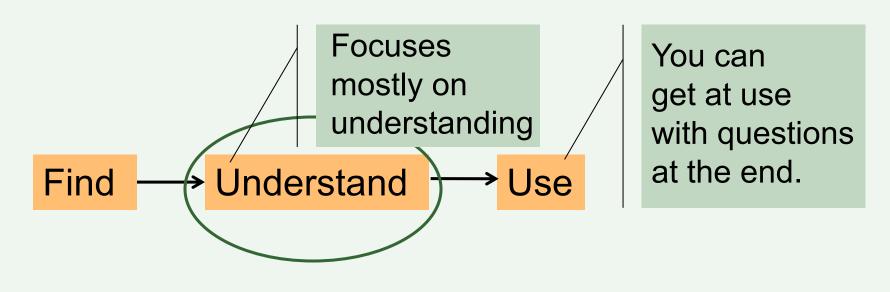




David Lipscomb

"Mark positives and negatives" – +/– (plus / minus)

Developed by Menno de Jong and Peter Jan Schellens



Emotional response – "affect"

Getting the draft to your participants



For all modes Email it beforehand with instructions

Hi David.

Thank you for participating in my webinar by working with me on one of our examples.

I attach the example we will use: A notice from a State Department of Revenue

The scenario:

In addition to teaching at Georgetown, you own a small consulting firm registered in your state.

(The notice we are using comes from a state other than Maryland, but you can imagine Maryland sending an equivalent notice.)

As a business owner, you just got this notice in the mail.

Note: I have replaced specific information like dates and phone numbers with generic words. The actual notice has real dates and phone numbers.

Please mark up the notice following these instructions:

Note: You do not have to mark up everything — only words, sentences, any parts that you want to point out as positives or negatives.

Please use different colors to highlight the positives and negatives. For example, you might choose

- §light green highlight to indicate positives
- Syellow highlight to indicate negatives

(If you choose other colors, just let me know what color is for positives and what color is for negatives.)

Positives might be that you

- Sunderstand it easily, or
- §think well of the sender for that part

Negatives might be that you

- §do not understand it easily,
- Shave negative feelings towards the sender, or
- §are worried or concerned about what it says

I would appreciate it if you would add a comment for each positive and negative. Start the comment with a + or - and tell why you gave it a plus or a minus.

In our interview, we'll discuss each of your pluses and minuses. If you don't have time to write the comments before sending it back to me, I'll ask for those comments in our interview.

When you are finished please send your marked-up document back to me.

Getting ready for the session



In person – Have a print-out of the participant's marked-up copy



Remotely with screen sharing – Put the marked-up copy on the screen



Remotely by phone – Be sure you each have the marked-up copy handy

Running the session

Opening

Introduce

Thank

Get consent

Set time expectations

If necessary, make sure everyone has a copy of the marked-up document

Remind participant of the scenario and that you want to discuss their positives and negatives

Discussing

Go through the document with the participant, discussing each plus and minus.

Listen!

Only speak to

- indicate that you are listening
- ask the participant to clarify (if you aren't sure you understand what the participant means)
- ask the participant to expand on their reason

Probe when necessary

When you want to do this	Try this
Let the participant know you are listening.	"uh-huh" "I see."
1000 (CONT)	"Thank you. That's useful."
Clarify something	Can you explain [xxx] a little more?
Get more details	Please tell me more about that.
Explore rationales	What about what you highlighted there [pointing out the place] prompted you to mark that with a [plus or minus, whichever it is]?
If the participant stops talking, but you think they have more to say	Paraphrase the last bit they said. And wait. (This is "active listening.")

Closing

You might ask a few questions, such as

- What they think a particular word means
- What they would do now
- Any final comments they have about the draft

Thank again

Give the incentive if you are doing that

Say good-bye

Your role – note taker



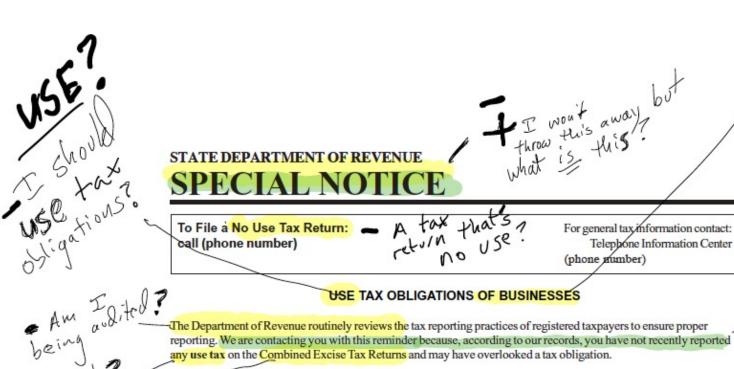






Let's try it

David

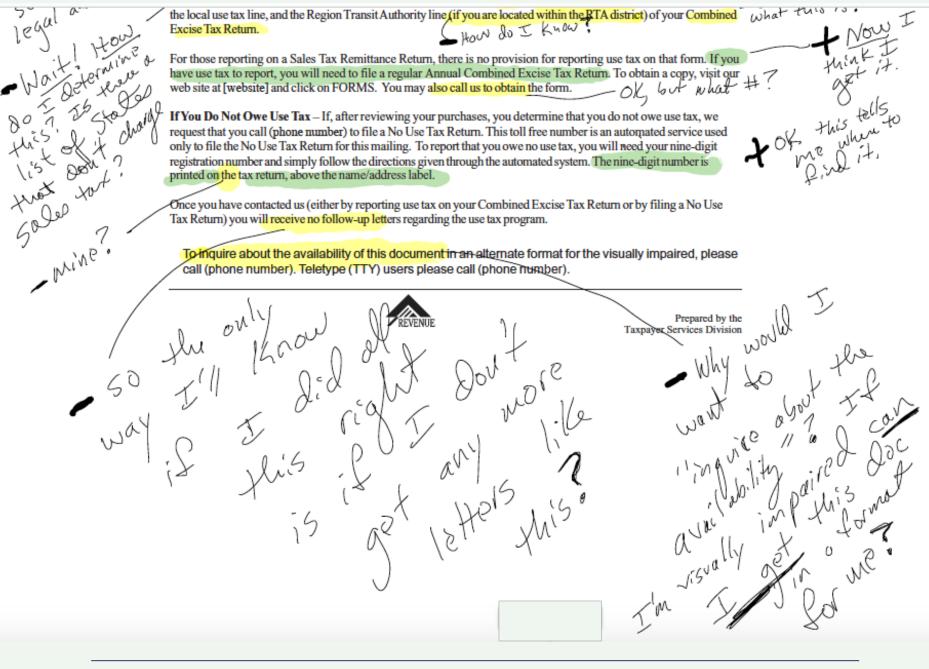


The Department of Revenue routinely reviews the tax reporting practices of registered taxpayers to ensure proper reporting. We are contacting you with this reminder because, according to our records, you have not recently reported any use tax on the Combined Excise Tax Returns and may have overlooked a tax obligation.

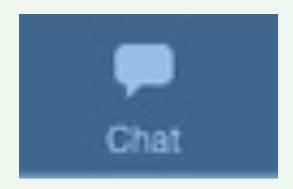
Businesses owe either sales tax or use tax on tangible personal property used or consumed in conducting their business (this excludes goods held for sale, i.e., inventory). Generally, sales tax should be paid when purchasing such items. However, if you make purchases directly from out-of-state sellers via the Internet, telemarketing, and mail order, you may not have been charged sales tax. If you did not pay tax on such purchases, you need to report use tax on these items. The following list contains examples of purchases on which you may owe the use tax:

- Consumable supplies such as stationery, forms, books, magazines, canned software, office supplies, etc.
- Capital assets such as furniture, office equipment, computers, copy machines, fax machines, etc.

these Aurchases



What did we learn?



To: Everyone ▼

More Y

Type message here...

What happened to the Use Tax Notice?

Taxpayer's Identification Number

Taxpayer's Name Address City, State, Zip Code

Dear Taxpayer:

According to our records, you have not recently reported use tax on your Combined Excise Tax Returns. Because businesses engaged in similar activity typically owe use tax, we are asking you to review your purchases for possible unpaid tax.

What to look for

Look for Internet, mail order, catalog or other purchases of tangible personal property on which sales tax was not paid. These purchases are subject to use tax, with the exception of goods held exclusively for sale, such as inventory or merchandise. Certain retail services, such as remodeling or repair, are also subject to the sales or use tax. Use tax is only due when sales tax has not been paid.

Examples of purchases on which you may owe use tax:

- · stationery & forms
- · books & magazines
- office supplies

· office equipment

- prepackaged software
- fumiture

If you owe use tax

Report the total cost of purchases on the following lines of your Combined Excise Tax Return:

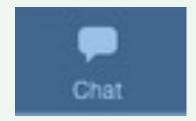
- use tax line (line 17)
- local use tax line (line 23)
- Region Transit Authority line, if you are located within the RTA district (line 26)

If you do not owe use tax

Call 1-800-426-1776 and use our automated service to report that you have reviewed your records and determined that you do not owe use tax. You will need to enter your Tax Registration Number listed above when using the automated service.

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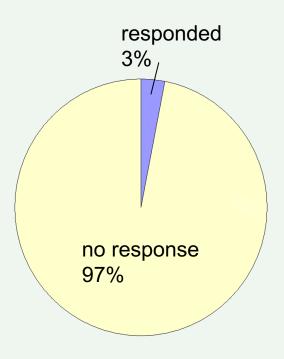
What do you notice about this revision?



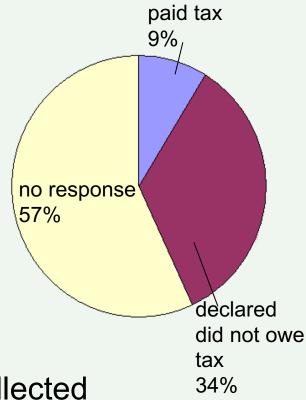
Revision by Janet Shimabukuro and Alyson Chase

The change made a huge difference

First version – Special notice



Revised version – Letter



They collected \$800,000 more than their goal.

Find an answer or do something



Alison Kohler

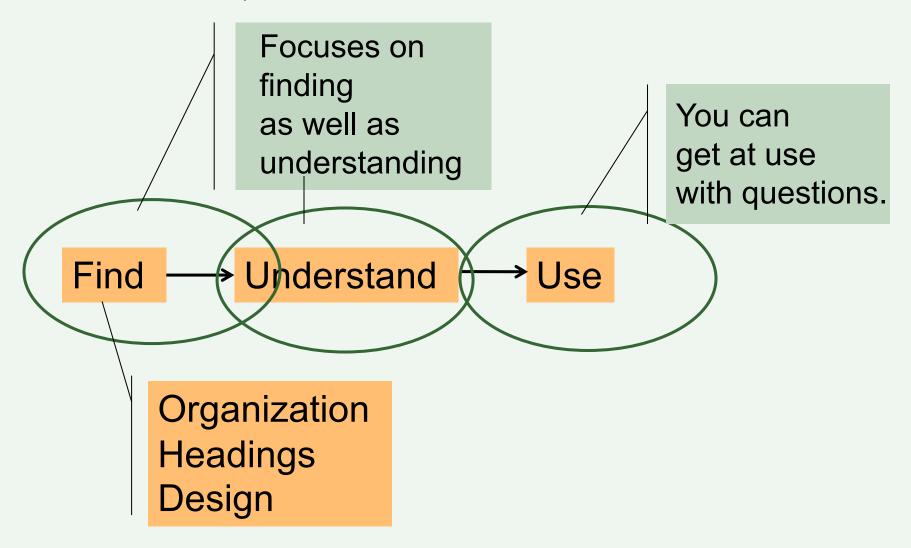
SOLE PROPRIETORS AND SPOUSES - RCW 51.12.020; WAC 296-17-31007

Sole proprietors are not mandatorily covered by industrial insurance. However, your firm can elect coverage. Sole proprietors who have elected coverage may report at 480 hours per quarter in the highest applicable risk classification or at actual hours in the appropriate risk class(s), provided that you keep a daily record of the actual hours you work. Hours include, but are not limited to, clerical, administration, travel time, and all other labor.

The spouse of a sole proprietor, who works for the business, is generally considered to be exempt from mandatory coverage also. Mandatory coverage may apply to the spouse if there is clear indication that the spouse is treated as a worker of the business.

Coverage may be obtained by completing an "Application for Elective Coverage" form. A "Cancellation of Elective Coverage" form is required to discontinue this coverage. These forms and additional information are available on the web at: www.lni.wa.gov or at your local Labor and Industries field office. Coverage will begin at 12:01 a.m. on the day after the application is received by the Department unless you indicate a future date. We will not make coverage effective on a date prior to our receipt of your completed application for owner/officer coverage. The coverage will remain in effect until the Department receives a written cancellation request.

"Find an answer or do something" – Task-based; scenario-based



Getting the draft to your participants



In person – Hand it to the participant



Remotely with screen sharing – Put it on the screen



Remotely by phone – Email it when you start the session

Running the session

Opening

Introduce

Thank

Get consent

Set time expectations

Explain how the session will go

Set the scene – when, how would the participant get the letter, notice, (or whatever it is you are testing)

Finding; Answering

Give participant a scenario or a task to find the relevant information and tell you what they understand or would do

Watch and listen for

- where the participant looks for the answer
- what the participant answers or would do
- their comments about all aspects of the document

Closing

You might ask a few questions, such as

- What they think a particular word means
- What they would do now
- Any final comments they have about the draft

Thank again

Give the incentive if you are doing that

Say good-bye

Your role – note taker







Watch and listen for

- where the participant looks for the answer
- what the participant answers or would do
- their comments about all aspects of the document



Let's try it

Alison

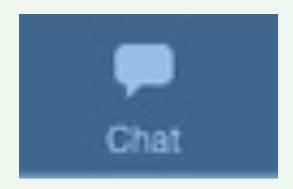
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What did we learn?



To: Everyone ▼

More Y

Type message here...

Could this be better?

Elective Coverage: Sole proprietors & spouses

If you are a sole proprietor, you are not required to pay for workers' compensation insurance coverage, but you may purchase 'optional coverage' if you choose. Also, if your spouse works for the business, he or she is also **not** required to purchase this coverage **unless** it's clear that the spouse is treated as any other worker in your business.

If you choose optional workers' comp insurance coverage, you must report everyone you cover this way using the same method.

Report either:

 'Assumed hours': 480 hours per quarter, no matter how many hours actually worked.

Do not reduce reported hours for vacation, holidays, sick leave, or part-time work.

If it's your first or last month of coverage, you may report a partial month, using 8 hrs./day.

or

Actual hours worked in the risk class.

Daily time records required. Keep records for three years.

If reporting actual hours, you must include all hours spent working for the business, such as time spent on:

- Bookkeeping, payroll, correspondence, preparing job estimates, running business errands, and work-related travel
- Meetings with bookkeepers, accountants, lawyers and future clients/customers
- All other duties related to running the business.

To sign up for elective (optional) coverage:

Go to: www.Lni.wa.gov and search Form # F213-004-000 or "Application for Elective Coverage" form

More information:

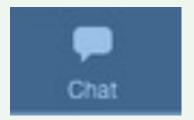
RCW 51.12.020 Employments excluded

WAC 296-17-31007 Owner/officer coverage and coverage for exempt

employments

? ?

What do you notice about this revision?



Revision by Dana Botka and team.

This was part of a large project to improve communications with employers. Another part of this project won a ClearMark award.

What if I can't test with users?







Use your personas – or create as realistic a persona as you can

You can imagine what it would be like to be









https://redish.net/wpcontent/uploads/Review_your_website_through_personas_and_conversations.pdf

Walk your persona through the conversation

This is a great technique for critiquing drafts.

Be the persona.

Talk through your experience and reactions to the document – as the persona.

- What is your day like today when you get this document?
- How do you get it?
- What do you do with it when you first get it?
- Do you read it right away?
- Do you read all of it?
- What part of it do you go to first?
- How do you react to it?
- Does it answer your questions?
- What are you going to do now?

Thank you!

Your turn:

Question?

Comment?



Write to me:

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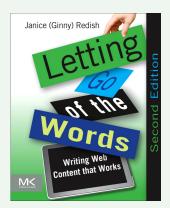
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