

# Conducting a Usability Test

Usability tests involve asking different people to read and actually use a draft of instructions. They help technical writers learn more about their audiences and what readers they can change in their instructions to make them more effective. You will each conduct at least two usability tests of your set of written instructions.

Each person will need:

1. At least one printed copy of your instructions.
2. The household item.

## Tester's Role:

The tester (another student) will pretend to be the audience for the instructions. Testers should approach the instructions as if they've never used the item before and must use the instructions to operate ("use") the item.

Each person will take turns reviewing a set of instructions, looking at it slowly page by page. Testers will look for errors such as typos and incomplete sentences, but they will primarily look for whether or not the instructions work, that is, whether the instructions make sense.

They should ask many questions:

- Are there steps missing?
- Are the directions easy to follow?
- Do the pictures accurately portray the item?
- Are the parts labeled correctly?
- How could these instructions be better?

## Author's Role:

While the tester is testing the instructions, the author of the instructions should watch SILENTLY and take notes. The author cannot speak or help the tester. Remember, when most people use instructions, the writers are not present and users must figure things out on their own.

You can only be an observer in this process, but you will definitely want to watch closely, listen to the tester talk about problems, and take notes so that you can fix your instructions in the revision process.