## Usability 101

### Definition

The concept of usability has been around for generations. In general, usability refers to how well users can learn and use a product to achieve their goals and how satisfied they are with that process.

The information technology growth of the last few decades and the Internet boom of the last twenty years has allowed this concept to expand greatly – and the field of usability and user experience has evolved as a separate and distinct profession.

### General Goals

- Map product to user’s understanding and expectations
- Make product capabilities discoverable to users
- Increase efficiency and satisfaction with overall product experience

### Examples

- The evolution of the telephone from heavy instrument to lightweight intuitive machine is one of the first examples of modern usability at work.
- Amazon.com has sold thousands of products while making it easy to search and find specific products. This is done by maintaining a constant focus on usability.
- Apple products are examples of technology designed with the user’s needs considered at every level – and is part of the reason they are so successful.

### Books

- Donald Norman – *The Design of Everyday Things*
- Mark Pearrow – *Web Usability Handbook*
- Rosenfeld & Morville – *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*
- Jakob Nielsen – *Usability Engineering*
- Chauncey Wilson – *User Experience Re-Mastered*
- Bill Buxton – *Sketching User Experiences*

### Web Sites

- Boxes and Arrows – [http://www.boxesandarrows.com](http://www.boxesandarrows.com)
- Usability Professionals’ Association (UPA) – [http://www.upassoc.org](http://www.upassoc.org)
- Usability Body of Knowledge (Beta) – [www.usabilitybok.org/](http://www.usabilitybok.org/)

### Videos (on YouTube)

- What is Usability? – [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTpsQ8vywY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTpsQ8vywY)
- Paper Prototyping Usability Test – [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppnRQD06ggY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppnRQD06ggY)
- Rocket Surgery Made Easy (Steve Krug) – [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QckIzHC99Xc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QckIzHC99Xc)
- 3 Ways that Good Design Makes You Happy (Don Norman) – [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIQEoJaLQRA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIQEoJaLQRA)
These methods can be used at different points in the development process, but this is the most traditional (and efficient) time to use this framework.

IS&T Accessibility & Usability - usability@mit.edu