

Designing the Printed and Electronic Page

Presenters:

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Both speakers presented summaries of research-based perceptions about readers. Rebecca Burnett noted the importance of defining and differentiating print legibility, readability, and usability. The successful printed page meets the needs of concerned, skilled readers. The work must be made legible by effective use of type and paper that is comfortable for reading under ambient conditions of light, temperature, and noise. To be readable, it must be understandable, and in the final analysis it must be usable.

Legibility considers the vision of read-

ers so that it is easy to detect content, purpose, and organization within current language conventions. Text readability meets the reader's needs for accessibility, accuracy, and appropriateness through an appealing presentation. Together legibility and readability can combine to make text understandable. However, we should all beware of over-reliance on formulas for readability.

Writer-based text, which makes good sense to the writer, must be edited to cross the bridge that makes it reader-based and thus comprehensible. Burnett pointed to

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the abstract as a key element in making research reports more understandable. An abstract is a familiar, short, logical device that assists the decision to read the full text. It provides the paper's key message, links it to earlier information, and influences the reader's decisions whether to read and to file.

Hattie Jeon-Slaughter brought a perspective to electronic-page design from user data. Several issues arise from the fact that e-pages have evolved in some way or other from paper pages. The E-Journal

User Study by the Stanford University Libraries has examined problems and concerns of e-page design related to reader preferences. Although more than 60% of survey respondents indicated some preference for electronic (PDF or HTML) access, the criteria remain similar for paper and electronic users. Searches are still by title, author, journal name, date of publication, and abstract accessibility. Readers still call for full-text access and better sorting by the search engines. New electronic subscribers cite convenience, increasing importance of electronic journals, and the addition of extra features by Web sites.

Increasing cost seems to be a major reason to cancel a journal subscription. Readers see benefits in joining a society that includes free journals, in addition to preferred access to conferences and support of the society's mission.

Jeon-Slaughter offered editors three pieces of advice:

1. Develop online-specific features.
2. Make more back issues available.
3. Provide full text access.

As is often the case with CSE annual-meeting workshops, the time was too short. I found the presentations fascinating, but the time constraint restricted us to only three questions. Perhaps speakers should be encouraged to allow more time for discussion. 