**Syllabus**

**Usability Testing for Survey Research**

**Emily Geisen**

**Dr. Jennifer Romano**

**March 4, 2026 - April 1, 2026**

# Course Abstract

This course introduces the concepts of usability and usability testing and why they are needed for survey research. The course provides a theoretical model for understanding the respondent-survey interaction and then provides practical methods for incorporating iterative user-centered design and testing into the survey development process. The course provides techniques and examples for designing, planning, conducting and analyzing usability studies on web or mobile surveys.

# Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will…

* understand what usability and usability testing are and how to apply usability testing to survey research
* learn about moderating techniques, such as the think-aloud protocol and verbal probing
* learn when to test, where to test (lab vs. field vs. remote) and who to test with (type and number of participants)
* be able to plan for usability testing (develop protocol guide, determine test metrics, consider hardware/software)
* learn what to test: conceptual testing, paper prototypes, wireframes
* understand how to collect, record, and analyze usability data

# Course Composition and Teaching Methods

This is an online course, using a flipped classroom design. It covers the same material and content as an on-site course but runs differently. In this course, you are responsible for watching video-recorded lectures and reading the required literature for each unit prior to participating in mandatory weekly one-hour online meetings where students have the chance to discuss the materials from a unit with the instructor.

Although this is an online course where students have more freedom in when they engage with the course materials, students are expected to spend the same amount of time overall on all activities in the course – including preparatory activities (readings, studying), in-class-activities (watching videos, participating in online meetings), and follow-up activities (working on assignments and exams) – as in an on-site course. As a rule of thumb, you can expect to spend approximately 3h/week on in-class-activities and 9 hours per week on out-of-class activities (preparing for class, readings, assignments, projects, studying for quizzes and exams). Therefore, the workload in all courses will be approximately 12h/week. This is a 1-credit/2ECTS course that runs for 4 weeks. Please note that the actual workload will depend on your personal knowledge.

*Wednesdays, 11:00 AM EDT/5:00 PM CEST, starting March* 4*, 202*6

The 1 hour meetings will be held online through Zoom. Follow the link to the meeting sessions on the course website on https://elms.umd.edu/.

In preparation for the weekly online meetings, students are expected to watch the lecture videos and read the assigned literature before the start of the meeting. In addition, students are encouraged to post questions about the materials covered in the videos and readings of the week in the forum before the meetings (deadline for posting questions is Tuesday, *11:00 PM EDT/5:00 PM CEST*).

Students have the opportunity to use the BigBlueButton feature in Canvas to connect with peers outside the scheduled weekly online meetings (e.g., for study groups). Students are not required to use BigBlueButton and can of course use other online meeting platforms such as Google Hangouts, Skype or Microsoft Teams.

# Evaluation and Grading

Grading will be based on:

* Participation in discussion during the weekly online meetings (10% of grade)
* Weekly online exercises reviewing specific aspects of the material covered (60% of grade)
* A final open-book online exam (30% of grade)

A+ 100-97

A 97-93

A- 93-90

B+ 90-87

B 87-83 B- 83-80 Etc.

Variations for grading on a scale are at the discretion of the instructor.

The final grade will be communicated under the assignment "Final Grade" in the Canvas course. Please note that the letter grade written in parentheses in Canvas is the correct final grade. The point-grade displayed alongside the letter grade is irrelevant and can be ignored.

Dates of when assignments will be due are indicated in the syllabus. Extensions will be granted sparingly and are at the instructors’ discretion.

# Readings

**Primary Readings**

Geisen, E., & Romano Bergstrom, J. (2017). *Usability Testing for Survey Research*. Waltham: Morgan Kaufmann. (available at [https://www.amazon.com/Usability-Testing-Survey-ResearchGeisen/dp/0128036567)](https://www.amazon.com/Usability-Testing-Survey-Research-Geisen/dp/0128036567)

**Required and Recommended Readings**

List of required and recommended readings for each class are provided below for each specific unit.

# UMD AI Policy

Students should consult with their instructors, teaching assistants, and mentors to clarify expectations regarding the use of GenAI tools in a given course. When permitted by the instructor, students should appropriately [acknowledge and cite their use of GenAI applications. Wh](https://lib.guides.umd.edu/c.php?g=1340355&p=9896961#:%7E:text=Title%20of%20work%3A%20Use%20the,date%20the%20content%20was%20generated)en conducting research-related activities (e.g., theses, comprehensive exams, dissertations), students should refer to the guidance below for research and scholarship. Allegations of unauthorized use of GenAI will be treated similarly to allegations of [unauthorized assistance (cheating) or plagiarism and](https://policies.umd.edu/academic-affairs/university-of-maryland-code-of-academic-integrity) investigated by the Office of Student Conduct.

**Sessions**

# Week 1: Introduction

Video lecture: available Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Online meeting: Wednesday, March 4, 2026, 11:00 AM EDT/5:00 PM CEST

Assignment 1 due Wednesday, March 11, 2026, 11:59 PM EDT

**Required Readings:**

Textbook: Chapters 1 & 2

**Recommended Readings:**

Couper (2000). Usability evaluation of computer-assisted survey instruments. *Social Science Computer Review*, 18(4), 384-396.

# Week 2: Moderating Techniques

Video lecture: available Wednesday, March 4, 2026

Online meeting: Wednesday, March 11, 2026, 11:00 AM EDT / 5:00 PM CEST

Assignment 2 due Wednesday, March 25, 2026, 11:59 PM EDT

**Required Readings:**

Textbook: Chapters 6 & 7

# \*\*\*Spring Break- No Online Meeting- March 15- March 22, 2026\*\*\*

# Week 3: Test Materials, Metrics, Equipment, Location

Video lecture: available Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Online Meeting: Wednesday, March 25, 2026, 11:00 AM EDT/5:00 PM CEST

Assignment 3 due Wednesday, April 1 2026, 11:59 PM EDT

**Required Readings:**

Textbook: Chapters 4 & 5

# Week 4: What to test / Analyzing Results

Video lecture: available Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Online meeting: Wednesday, April 1, 2026, 11:00 AM EDT/5:00 PM CEST

**Required Readings:**

Textbook: Chapters 3 & 8

# Project/Homework/Final exam

A final open-book online exam

Due: Wednesday, April 8, 2026 11:59 PM EDT/5:59 AM CEST

**About the Lecturers**

**Emily Geisen**

**Senior XM Scientist at Qualtrics**

Emily Geisen is an Experience Management Product Scientist at Qualtrics. At Qualtrics, she helps to design and build

innovative products for researchers. She is currently working on products related to data scrubbing, conversational

interviewing, qualitative research, and user experience. Prior to Qualtrics, she managed RTI International’s Cognitive/

Usability Laboratory. She has 20 years of applied experience offering client-focused solutions related to developing and

evaluating survey questionnaires, designing methodological research studies, developing sampling designs, user

experience, and measuring and reducing nonresponse bias. She is the author of two books - Bias Testing for Market

Researchers and Usability Testing for Survey Research. She is the former Editor-in-Chief of Survey Practice. Ms. Geisen

also teaches a graduate course on Questionnaire Design at the University of North Carolina.

**Dr. Jennifer Romano**

**UX Research Lead and Strategist at Romano UX**

Jen Romano, Ph.D., is an award-winning UX Research Leader, with 15+ years experience: in industry, academia and

government; as manager, director, and individual contributor; strategist and executor. Jen has made her way through some of

the biggest and best UX orgs in the world (Facebook, Instagram, Bridgewater Associates, Principles by Ray Dalio, Fors Marsh

Group), speaking, teaching and being a keynote speaker at top UX conferences in the world (e.g., UXPA, WUC, HCII). She

founded UXR Coach to help people make their UX dreams a reality. With small, instructor-led workshops, courses, and

retreats, and personalized 1:1 coaching, Jen offers ways for people to have renewed confidence and skills to grow as a UX

Researcher. Her UXR Intensive Training Retreat in Hawaii (next one: Aug 4-10) helps people grow in their careers by gaining

real-world experience conducting research in the field with real clients. She teaches at UC Berkeley and University of

Maryland and has published more than 30 articles, chapters, and books, including Usability Testing for Survey Research

(2017), Eye Tracking in User Experience Design (2014) and Modern Socio-Technical Perspectives on Privacy (2022). She

continues to consult, offering research and strategy services.

Jen founded the mentorship program, webinar program, and short course program for the User Experience Professional

Association (UXPA) and is a Board Member of the UX Quality Certification Center (UXQCC). She is the founder of the

Research Challenge Workshop and is expanding her coaching business to include a network of coaches. She is past

President of the UXPA, past President of the DC chapter of UXPA, past President of DC chapter of the American Association

of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), past Director of Marketing and Communications for the UXPA, and past Membership

Chair for the Pacific chapter of AAPOR (PAPOR). Jen holds a Ph.D. in Applied/Experimental Psychology.