

## **Checklist of Web Usability Criteria**

(adapted from "Great Tips from CNET designers,"  
on the Builders.com web site, 2002)

Site: Holy Cross Physics Department  
<http://www.holycross.edu/departments/physics/website/index.html>  
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<b>Site Design</b>	<b>Excel</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Disaster</b>	<b>DNA</b>
1. Clear, consistent naming conventions		X			
2. Locate logos consistently	X				
3. Reduce load-time for prospective users			X		
4. Reduce the user's technology burden			X		
5. Use same image on multiple pages		X			
6. Consistent page design		X			
7. Clarity on content priorities		X			
<b>Navigation</b>	<b>Excel</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Disaster</b>	<b>DNA</b>
8. Offer multiple navigation approaches			X		
9. Write good text links			X		
10. Design navigation icons wisely			X		
<b>Page Design</b>	<b>Excel</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Disaster</b>	<b>DNA</b>
11. Create a grid layer for page design		X			
12. Create interesting pages		X			
13. Keep vital elements above the fold			X		
14. Blur backgrounds for clearer text					X
<b>Page Layout</b>	<b>Excel</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Disaster</b>	<b>DNA</b>
15. Use subheads for effect			X		
16. Lay out type in a narrow column			X		
17. Avoid nesting and long vertical tables		X			
18. Avoid scrolling text	X				
19. Use white space		X			

### **Item Annotations (Supporting Narrative for Assessments):**

- GOOD: The site follows a pattern of consistent naming conventions on professor photos using "prof(name).jpg."
- EXCELLENT: The Holy Cross logo appears in the top upper left-hand corner of each page.
- PROBLEM: The "Faculty and Staff" page has 9 staff photos. The general rule of four images per page is broken here; however, the photos are not large and would only pose a problem on a dial-up connection. If the designer used a list of names of the

professors that served as links to individual professor pages and their personal information it would solve the potential image load time problem and remedy the vital elements above the fold issue on the “Faculty and Staff” page #13 (i.e. Each professor’s picture and individual information would be highlighted above the fold in such a case).

4. PROBLEM: One particular page “Complete Catalog Listing” is a .pdf file and poses a problem for users who may not have .pdf reader software on their computer. There is no warning that this is a .pdf file, and no link for the user to get .pdf reader software online. Although this is only one page, it would be courteous to users to provide the above-mentioned information.

5. GOOD: The “Physics” image is used consistently and serves as a marker that you are in the department site. With the Holy Cross menu bar at the top of the page users may be misled to other pages on the university site; therefore, the absence of the “Physics” image may indicate to the user that they have left the physics department pages.

6. GOOD: The site uses repeated elements on each page: color, layout, text size, headings, and menu.

7. GOOD: Each page provides clear information that ties in with the navigation links. The site is not cluttered with misleading information.

8. PROBLEM: The site only offers one navigation approach for the physics department. A list of navigation links at the bottom of each page would assist users. The Holy Cross menu bar at the top of the page is another navigation approach but leads users to other pages on the university site and may be confusing to a user who strictly wants to be in the physics department section but inadvertently clicks on that navigation approach.

9. PROBLEM: The text links are brief and to the point; however, there are some links that take users away from the physics department site without warning. Once the user gets to these pages there is no way back except for the back button. The user should be warned of this via text, or the pages could open in a new window with a warning for users to close the new window to come back to the physics department pages.

The “Courses” page makes good use of a list of courses that go to anchor links; plus, the back to top icons are used well with the aforementioned text links.

Some of the professors have personal course pages if a user clicks on the name of the particular person; however, this is not apparent to all users. A navigation bar is provided on the particular professor pages that shows a “Physics” image that allows users to go back to the physics department home page except for Professor Yang’s page which is quite different from the others and offers no link back to the physics department site.

10. PROBLEM: The “Back to top of page” icons found on some pages work well. The icons at the top of each page that take users to different pages on the Holy Cross University site are well designed; however, they potentially mislead the user to areas they might think have to do with the physics department but lead them elsewhere.

11. GOOD: The physics department pages follow a consistent design pattern and layout that follows the use of a grid layer for each page; however, the professor pages do not follow a particular grid layout that the department page uses. Nevertheless, focusing specifically on the department pages they follow a pattern from a grid layer.
12. GOOD: The pages serve their purpose of providing information about the Holy Cross Physics Department and have a consistent color scheme, font, and overall layout.
13. PROBLEM: Most important elements are above the fold. The “Faculty and Staff” page would benefit from links to individual staff pages that put each staff member’s photo and information above the fold on separate pages; plus, assist in reducing load-time as noted in #3. Contact information for the department is at the bottom of each page and not above the fold; thus, the home page should at least have this information for users to access in case of questions or need to contact.
14. DNA: This item did not apply.
15. PROBLEM: The “Program Requirements” page should especially make better use of subheads. There is a lot of information presented, and subheads would break up the information and make it stand out. For example the following subhead suggestions would be helpful to the user on the program requirements page: **Physics Major Requirements, Advanced Electives, Physics Minor Requirements, Programs of Supervised Research, and Advanced Placement Credit.**
16. PROBLEM: Pages that have little information (i.e. “Teacher Education” and “Course Web Pages”) would not benefit from narrow columns, but the other pages with a lot of information would benefit from narrow columns to make the text less intimidating to users/readers (i.e. “Program Requirements”).
17. GOOD: Nested and long vertical tables are used effectively or avoided.
18. EXCELLENT: There is no scrolling text or gimmicky Java tickers.
19. GOOD: The Holy Cross Physics Department pages are not cluttered and make good use of white space. The user does not find items placed on the site pages just for the sake of putting something there.