Usability Testing Results for Legal Icons Northwest Justice Project – A Case Study

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Background

Northwest Justice Project (NJP) and the Superior Court of Washington have long relied on plain language and readable design to support people who want access to legal forms and information, but do not have lawyers. In 2018, NJP asked Transcend to create 6 new legal icons to enhance the readability of their family law document assembly project. These new icons are now included in the legal icons set[1] at transcend.net. NJP uses the icons to support step-by-step court form instructions on Washington Forms Online. The icons provide a visual summary of each step, aiding comprehension and making a complex process feel more manageable.

The purpose of this article is to share the various testing methods used to ensure the legal icons conveyed their intended messages. We detail the testing steps below.

NJP requested icons for these phrases:

① Review your forms
② Print
③ Sign
④ Copy [forms] (show the number of copies)
⑤ Deadline[2]
⑥ Parenting Plan[2]

NJP provided "inspiration" icons from nounproject.com, and asked Transcend to create and test icons that matched the style of Transcend's existing set of 200+ legal icons.

Usability Testing Procedure

1. Research / identify existing icons

Our first step was to collect existing icons for these phrases. Icons were selected based on a google search of each phrase.

2. Preference Test Existing Icons

We next did individual preference testing with 5-12 users of existing icons to ask users which image they most preferred for each phrase.

How to Preference Test

Show each user the inspiration image along with other popular icons for each phrase. Ask, *"Which icon do you think best represents the phrase: ?"*

Example:

Which icon do you think best represents the phrase "**Sign**"?

				None of them

If you chose "None of them", do you have a suggestion for a better icon for this phrase?

At the end of this test, the icon with the most votes was redesigned to match the style of our previous icon set. It was ready for the next phase.

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[1] To learn more about how we started the legal icons project, watch this video.

[2] *NJP requested these two icons at a later stage (they were not tested for recognizability, only in-context)*

3. Test Icon Recognizability (Icon Only)

In this phase, we tested the icons for recognizability. We showed 3 **new** participants the icons and asked what each icon meant to them. We said:

> *"I am going to show you some pictures of things you might find on a legal website or in legal self-help documents.*
>
> *I'd like you to tell me what you think they mean. There are no right or wrong answers. It's OK if a picture has NO meaning for you. You can just say, I don't know. All answers are OK. The information you give us helps us get better."*

Two of the icons (Review & Copy) did not test well. But because these icons would not be used in isolation; i.e., they would appear next to text, we decided to test them in-context with text.

4. Test Icons In-context (Icon with text)

Each participant was shown some icons next to typical text and asked to rate how well they communicate a particular phrase.

Example:

Look at the picture for # 8. Now look at the words. Does this picture do a good job communicating **Deadline**?
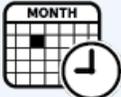
8. Write down the deadline for your court form.

Participants were asked to rate their answers using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
NO!	A little	Pretty good	Good	Great!

Unsuccessful	Successful
Icon needs more work	Accept Icon

Icons rated *Good* or *Great* were considered a success. The icons were accepted without further changes. Only **Print** & **Sign** were deemed successful by every participant.

5. Get More Input On Unsuccessful Icons

The 4 other icons (Review Your Forms, Copy, Deadline, Parenting Plan) received low ratings. At the end of each test, we asked each participant for more input on each of these icons.

The artists and production team then translated the participants' input to revise the icons; this triggered a new round of in-context testing, with new users.

6. Iterative Testing on Unsuccessful Icons

It took several more rounds of iterative testing, feedback, and reworking the icons to produce icons for "Parenting Plan", "Copies", "Deadline" & "Review" that participants successfully connected with.

Customized Copy Icon

NJP requested a *customizable* copy icon where the user could specify the number of copies required.

We conducted a preference test at Usability Hub, asking "Which image best represents the phrase '5 copies'. Please explain why you chose this option".

A	B	C

Choice B got the most votes as it appeared less cluttered and most effective to the participants.

Further testing helped us determine that some users would have difficulty figuring out how to use the customizable version of this icon, so we created a How-To video here.

Summary

Effective images can do much to enhance access to legal information and court forms and websites. Testing them is not that difficult. Follow the basic steps outlined in this article, including:

1. Research/Identify existing icons
2. Conduct preference testing
3. Conduct recognizability testing
4. Conduct in-context testing
5. Get feedback on unsuccessful icons
6. Rework unsuccessful icons
7. Conduct iterative testing until Icons are successful