

### Which Evaluation Approach to Use?

Every product, website, prototype, or system is different. Every client has different needs and requirements. Consequently, there is no quick answer to the question. It is best to discuss specifics with a usability and customer research specialist. The chart below serves as a basic guide to the various evaluation approaches and how they compare.

Evaluation Approach	Description	Number of users	Location	Timeline	Effectively Tests
<b>Usability studies</b>	An evaluation of a product or system's ease-of-use and the overall impact a product or system has on its end-users. Usability studies help companies understand the user's interaction and reaction to a product.	5-10 minimum, interviewed individually	Performed in a usability lab or business office setting	10-20 business days average*	The usability of a website, product or prototype
<b>Contextual assessments/ Ethnographic studies / Field observations</b>	A form of observing users in their natural environment and interviewing users about the ways they use the product or system.	5-10 minimum, interviewed individually	Performed in the user's natural environment	15-20 business days average*	The usability of a website, product or prototype
<b>Competitive analysis</b>	A comparison of the overall effectiveness of two or more competing products. This method is particularly effective when comparing websites; however it can also be used to compare software or hardware products across a set of competitors.	No users required / Requires one evaluator	No specific location required	5-10 business days average*	The usability of websites or products across a set of competitors
<b>Heuristic evaluations</b>	A quick and efficient way to evaluate a user interface based on usability best practices. The primary goal of a heuristic evaluation is to uncover key usability issues with the design.	No users required / Requires one evaluator	No specific location required	3-10 business days average*	The usability of a website, product or prototype
<b>Cognitive walkthroughs</b>	An exercise where a group of experts, each with a different role in the product's development, collaborate their expertise to evaluate a product or system.	No users required / Requires evaluators (2 minimum, preferably more)	Performed in a business office setting	5-10 business days average*	The usability of a website, product or prototype while considering the business-related requirements and/or restrictions
<b>Focus groups</b>	A form of qualitative research where a group of people discuss their opinions about a product, service, idea, advertisement or packaging. Focus groups are interactive and allow participants to talk with each other.	8-15 on average, interviewed in one group	Performed in a focus group lab or business office setting	10-20 business days average*	Opinions of a website, product or prototype
<b>User surveys</b>	A way to collect data from a large number of participants to explore their opinions about and use of a product or service.	5-10 minimum but usually more, surveyed individually	No specific location required / Performed face-to-face, online, by email, mail, and/or telephone	3-20 business days average*	Opinions of a website, product or prototype

\*The timeframe is directly related to the number of users participating in the evaluation or in the case where users are not required, the number of products included in the analysis.