APPENDIX B: PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL SESSION

Follow this checklist as you prepare for your research study. These tips will help make sure that you do everything possible to reduce or minimize the chances of something unexpected or sticky happening. While we always hope for the best when it comes to our participants and study setup, it never hurts to plan for the worst.

For more information about these topics, refer to Chapter 15.

The recruiting process

- ➤ Discuss the recruit criteria with your stakeholders:
  - How many participants do you need (remember to account for possible no-shows)?
  - Do you need floater or backup participants?
  - If you don't recruit floater or backup participants, are there surrogate users at your study location who may be able to fill in for a session on short notice?
- ➤ Identify your key participant criteria, whether in a formal recruiting script that can be used by external recruiters or a checklist that you can use when scheduling participants on your own:
  - Explain who and what the study is for, how long it will take, where it will be held, and what (if any) compensation will be offered.
  - Make sure they understand that it will be one-on-one.
  - Specify if the session will be recorded (and if so, what exactly will be recorded) and observed.
  - Be specific about the experience/skills required.
  - Ask about the criteria in a way that makes it hard to tell what your desired answer is. For example, ask "What is the make and model of your car?" not "Do you have a Toyota Prius?"
  - Check to make sure you can understand the participant.
  - If you (or someone else at an organization) will be scheduling internal employees:
    - Reinforce that they are not required to participate.
    - Recruit a representative sample of users rather than just the best or most vocal.
    - Assure them that they'll not be watched by their manager or members of their own team.
  - Ask for the best phone number that you can use to contact them, and give them a way to directly get in touch with you if necessary.
  - If you'll be going to the participant's location, ask if there are any restrictions on what you can bring with you (e.g., cameras, USB flash drives) or if you'll need to arrive early to go through any additional security.

- Monitor the recruit—ask to receive updates as frequently as possible and double-check the answers provided by the scheduled participants.
- Send a confirmation letter or email to scheduled participants before the session:
  - Highlight the date, time, and location of the scheduled session. Include parking and transportation directions.
  - Ask them to arrive 15 minutes before the scheduled start time.
  - Remind participants that the session will be recorded and observed (if applicable).
  - If remote, include any requirements about the technical setup.
  - If the session will be at the participant's location:
    - Detail how many people will be with you (e.g., you plus one note-taker).
    - Remind them if you need them to have anything set up or available for the session.
  - Reinforce that the session is one-on-one.
  - Provide your contact information including your phone number on the day of the session.
- Reconfirm with participants the day before the session:
  - If you have the time, take this opportunity to test the screen-sharing applications with remote participants.
- Take extra measures if you have internal employees as participants:
  - Make sure none of their team members will observe their sessions.
  - Add extra reminders to the observer ground rules about respecting the participants' confidentiality.

Your study plan

- Work carefully on the wording of your tasks and questions to avoid leading or influencing the participant's responses.
- Prioritize the study plan so you know the highest- and lowest-priority tasks/questions.
- Create a backup plan. Consider creating a paper questionnaire that you can give participants if you experience technical difficulties.
- Think about any additional questions or tasks you may want to use if you have to shift the focus of the research in the middle of a session.
- Prepare your presession briefing:
  - Set clear expectations about the session:
    - The purpose of the session.
    - How you want them to provide feedback/think aloud (if applicable).
    - You're not a subject matter expert.

        - You may cut short certain areas of conversation to make sure you cover everything you need to.
        - You may not answer their questions right away.
        - The prototype may not be fully functional (if applicable).
        - They can take a break or end the session at any time.
    - Reiterate the consent form, including how the data and recordings will be used.
    - Ask the participant to turn off the ringer on her cell phone.
    - Use a format that is easy for you to read.
- Consider how you'll provide tasks to the participant. Will you read the tasks aloud? Will you send the tasks ahead of time (if the participant is remote)?
- Decide when you'll provide compensation:
    - Unless you specify otherwise as part of the recruit, plan to provide compensation to participants even if they're late or do not seem to meet your recruit criteria.
    - Decide if you'll give the compensation at the beginning or end of the session.

The product, space, and technology

- If you're using a live website or application:
    - Ensure that no updates will happen during your research.
    - If A/B testing is performed on the website, see if there is a way for you to consistently access the same version (e.g., always the A version).
- If you're using a prototype:
    - Work with your developers to make the prototype as functional as possible.
    - Build the illusion of functionality (e.g., by making all links look clickable) for areas that cannot be prototyped in time for your study.
- Test and document your technical setup, including:
    - Any recording technology you'll be using (e.g., Morae, camcorders) and the resulting files.
    - The product, on the device that the participant will use. For example, if you're using a prototype of a website, open the prototype on the computer and in the web browser that the participant will use.
    - Any links and passwords required to access the product.
    - Any phone or audio conferencing systems you'll be using.
    - Other devices that you plan to use to capture participant feedback (e.g., eye-tracking equipment).
    - Your screen-sharing application (both your process as the moderator and what the participant will experience when she joins the session).

- Make sure you have someone (a colleague or stakeholder) who can watch every session, especially if you're doing onsite sessions.
- Familiarize yourself with the study space:
  - Find the nearest fire exit.
  - Research evacuation procedures.
  - If there is building security, give them a heads up about your study and your scheduled participants.
  - If you're going to a different country or cultural region, learn as much as you can about customs and taboos ahead of time.

Your observers

- Communicate your moderating approach so observers understand that you may:
  - Jump around in your study plan depending on what happens during a session.
  - Avoid answering a participant's question directly.
  - Provide assists to participants.
  - Redirect participants from a topic but revisit it later.
- Establish and distribute ground rules for observer behavior during the session, including:
  - Keep conversation to a minimum—no laughing!
  - Keep the participant's identify and personal information confidential.
  - Avoid making fun of the participant.
  - Keep cell phones silenced.
  - Leave the room quietly if a call must be taken.
  - Avoid slamming doors.
  - Don't talk about the research study outside of the observation space at any point while sessions are running.
  - How to ask questions to the participant (e.g., you'll check with them 10 minutes before the end of the session to gather any questions).
  - How to communicate with you during a session, if necessary.
  - If you want them to take notes or help with data collection, include a short summary that they can refer to during the session.
  - If observers will be in the room with you and the participant, also include:
    - No conversation or discussion with other in-room observers during the session.
    - Avoid multitasking.
    - Avoid disruptions.
    - Be careful of body language and any physical or audible reactions.
    - Do not help the participant complete tasks or answer questions.

- If your observers are remote, also include:
  - Stay on mute unless you explicitly ask them to unmute.
  - Avoid using a screen-sharing application's chat feature to communicate with you, as the participant might see it as well.

Your technique

➤ Review the prefabricated phrases in Appendix A and include any that you think will be useful in your study plan.

➤ Review the list of moderator behaviors to avoid from Chapter 1.

➤ Review the steps to take during a session from Chapter 2.

➤ If time permits, use some of the techniques discussed in Chapter 16 to further refine your moderating technique.

➤ Run a practice session with a colleague acting as your participant.

➤ Run a pilot session with an actual participant at least one day before your first scheduled session.