

# in usability testing around the world

This document highlights some of the lessons learned about running sessions in different countries and cultures. In doing so, we hope to help you avoid some of the potential pitfalls of planning, running, and interpreting sessions, in a culture that is not your own.

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We have members in 24 countries and have completed 250+ global projects and tested over 15,000 participants.



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**WARNING**

SOME MIGHT FIND ASPECTS OF THIS CONTENT  
OFFENSIVE.

PLEASE DON'T! IT'S NOT INTENDED TO BE -  
SMILE BEFORE YOU START!

IF YOU DON'T RECOGNISE YOURSELF IN YOUR  
COUNTRY, DON'T WORRY - WE ADMIT TO  
MAKING SOME SWEEPING GENERALISATIONS AND  
'OCCASIONAL' STEREOTYPING.



# Planning

## Check out the local calendar – make sure you find out what really happens

Customs vary from country to country, and even within countries, holidays may vary. Summer holidays need to be considered, and customs around how long people take off work vary.



In many countries recruiting participants is difficult from mid December to January because of Christmas and New Year holidays. In **Russia**, the orthodox Christmas is on January 7 and people are on holiday until then, or mid January. The **UK** is back to work mid January and in **Australia**, people are still on the beach until after Australia Day, January 26.



In **Turkey**, the biggest holidays in the Islamic calendar, Ramadan and Eid, usually last for a week. It is difficult to recruit participants during these times. The dates of religious holidays differ each year because the Islamic calendar used in Turkey is based on the lunar system.



In **Japan**, at the start of May there is a week-long public holiday called “Golden Week”; in August, there is another week-long public holiday called “Bon Festival”. Most companies shut down for the week, so both recruiting and testing are rare during this time.



In **Canada**, hockey is a religion! It's difficult to recruit evenings during the hockey season.



In **Korea**, the year-end season, including Christmas, is not as important as in Western countries, but you still need to allow for end of year parties in December.



In **Brazil**, don't even think of recruiting during Carnival (February or March, it varies).



In **France**, avoid running test sessions in the first half of May, around July 14th (Bastille Day), and between the last days of July and August 20th (all of France is in vacation during that period).



In **Germany**, “October-Fest” is in September.



In **Finland**, the summer is short, and Finns tend to make the most of it. Therefore, it may be hard to get usability tests done from June to August.



In **Denmark**, everything shuts down over Easter and over Christmas. There are also several local holidays on Thursdays during Spring which affect the scheduling for the Thursday and for the following Friday.



In **Poland**, recruitment during Christmas and summer (July – August) may be quite difficult.



## Pick the time for sessions carefully



In some countries lunch is an ideal time to test, with people using their lunch break to participate. In other countries participants can't be recruited during 'siesta.' Also, weekdays are easier to recruit for in some countries, but weekends in others.

The amount of time you allow for a session (and therefore how many session you can do in a day) will vary from place to place. Some countries pride themselves on punctuality – you are assured to start on time, and you must finish on time. Other countries expect people to run late, and for sessions to easily run over.



In **Japan**, evening and weekend sessions are common because office workers are usually unable to attend daytime sessions during weekdays.



In the **US**, it is difficult to schedule usability studies on the weekend. Most US participants place a high premium on their weekend time and reserve it for family, friends, or weekend errands and chores.



In **Korea**, sessions are usually after 6 pm, midweek for office workers. Housewives, students, and sales staff, however, can be scheduled during the day.



**Brazilians** often run late – traffic and other occurrences that prevent them from being in control contribute to laid-back attitude to punctuality.



In **China** and **India**, recruiters will always schedule participants 20 minutes earlier than actually required to allow for traffic.



In **Moscow**, many people have flexible working schedules; some of them work late in the evening, so session times can be varied. Free time is valuable (especially in large cities), so it's difficult to convince people to participate on weekends.



Sessions that take 60 minutes in Asia may take 75-90 minutes in the **US** (as Americans are more willing to be critical).



The **Danes, Germans, Canadians** and **Japanese** all pride themselves on being punctual.



In **France**, sessions during the weekend are not common (this is definitely time for family and friends).



In the **UK**, testing with kids is usually on the weekend.



In **Poland**, weekend testing is not done, but can be scheduled during the week in the evenings.





## Be aware of local demographics

People of a particular profile in one country may not match the same profile in another country.



For instance, the definition of 'older people' in one country may be 50+ but in another 70+. Their experience with technology may also vary compared with your own country. Demographics and cultural nuances in other countries may also be more complex than in yours. In larger countries, it could be that whichever demographic you choose, you may not include all profiles. Once you have decided on your target demographic, make sure you write a detailed specification and, if possible, get the specification checked with someone with local knowledge.



In **France**, people considered 'elderly' are actually quite young (between 58-62 years) and with a lot of free time they can dedicate to the using the internet. Such people became a real target for internet services, and we do a lot of testing with them.



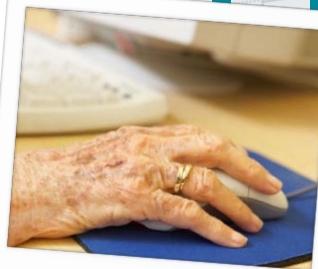
In **Poland**, people over 50 are not very familiar with computers, Internet and mobiles. Their internet use is limited.



In **Australia**, the older population is relatively computer literate and we tend to focus on city populations due to vast distances to reach rural and remote communities.



In **Russia**, in general, people over 55 are not Internet, smart phone, and other technology users. However, in large cities, (with over 1.3 million population), you can find those who are!



In **China**, whichever target user group is selected, it may only represent a small part of the Chinese market.

There is also a vast difference in people's educational level. Without education, it may be hard for people from the south to know the Pinyin system, which is the standard Romanization of Chinese characters that serves as the basis for typing Chinese. Due to this fact, they will have difficulties inputting Chinese into their phones and computers.



Due to the diversity of the **Indian** culture, detailed specifications regarding expectations are required to ensure the identification of appropriate test subjects.



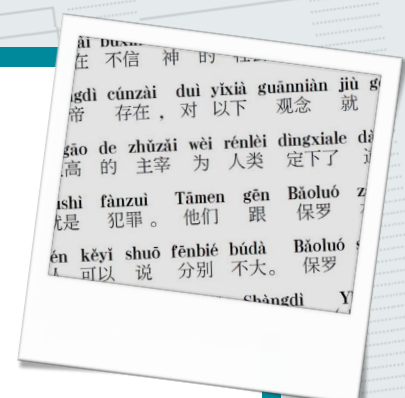
**Turkey** has a very dynamic and young population, with around 46% of the population less than 25 years old. This causes society to be highly extroverted socially and technologically, even as the public is generally introverted politically.



**Ireland** is one small island, but it's two countries, with two cultural identities. You may well need two different test plans for Dublin and Belfast.



A large number of people that live in the **UK** were born abroad, and reside either permanently or for a few years in the UK. It's not unusual for these people to qualify for session recruitment, which can be unexpected to foreign clients. Usually this is fine, but it's worth checking this with clients.



## Plan ahead for recruitment. Get help from someone local

Three weeks is usually enough lead time. It's best to find someone local who can help with recruitment.



In some of the bigger cities, you'll need to consider timing for sessions based on where participants are coming from. Of course, if you are moving between cities, or regional and rural areas, distances and travel options must be factored in as well.

How many should you recruit? Recruitment costs will vary from place to place. In most countries, the higher the incentive, the more likely the person will show for the session.



When recruiting from **Moscow**, it could take up to 2 hours for a participant to reach the session.



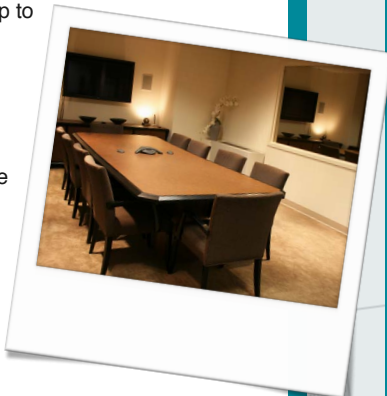
**Italy** tends to recruit 20-30% more users than required to ensure the appropriate sample size is achieved.



In the **UK**, 1 standby or 'floating' user for every 6 is recruited. This is true in **South Africa** and other countries as well.



In **Poland**, there is a low dropout rate (no more than 5%). One standby participant can be recruited.



In **Australia**, no-shows are unusual. Unless explicitly requested by the client, there is typically no backup recruitment. Instead, towards the end of the study, recruiters may be asked to find an additional participant at short notice, if necessary.



In **China**, no shows are very rare.



In **Japan**, although no shows and being late are rare, 1 floater for every 5 participants is recruited. Recruiting costs are relatively high compared to US and Europe, starting from \$300 (plus \$80 to \$150 remuneration) per person to recruit general consumers from an online panel.



In both **India** and **New Zealand**, gifts are often given to participants instead of cash.



In **Ireland**, during the heyday of the Celtic boom, participants were paid €100 for a session, and about 1 in 5 still didn't show. Nowadays, participants are paid €50-60, and no-shows are extremely rare.

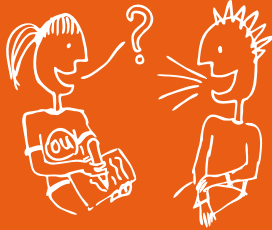




# Running sessions

## Does it matter who moderates?

For global tests, various factors such as language, translators, and gender may need to be considered in choosing the most appropriate and effective moderator.



Local moderators are important for picking up local cues to which a foreigner may be oblivious. Cultural nuances and sensitivities mean that the cultural background of the moderator is more important than having usability skills.



In **South Africa**, it is most important to have the right cultural fit between moderators and participants. As such, moderators are not typically experienced usability professionals.

In most other countries, test session facilitators are experienced usability professionals.



In **Finland**, and in other countries where the facilitator and participant don't speak the same language, it is a good idea to use a translator to open up the discussion.



In **Australia**, it's not unusual to use a local facilitator, even when the client is English speaking and has travelled to Australia to observe the sessions.

## What's polite in one culture can be offensive in another

Over 50% of communication involves body language. It's not so often the words used that explain feelings, but the gestures, facial expressions and tone that do.

Therefore, it's important having locals involved in running testing. Even without being aware of it, there is a significant reliance on interpreting participants' body language in order to frame and facilitate usability test sessions. But, what is perfectly acceptable and, indeed, polite and expected in one culture, can be downright rude or insulting in another.



In **Brazil**, it's informal and relaxed - it is not unusual for participants to greet moderators with a kiss.



In **Japan**, participants are serious about working on tasks and answering questions.



In **South Africa**, there are significant unique nuances. Sotho men and woman are unlikely to make eye-contact as a sign of respect in first meetings, whereas Xhosa and Zulus are the exact opposite. Moderators need to be chosen very carefully to avoid cultural clashes.



In **Canada and UK**, personal space is important; the participant might get uncomfortable if you approach closer than about two feet.



In **Canada**, the French and English parts of the country have retained some of their ancestral customs: French Canadians greet each other by kissing, while English-speaking Canadians usually shake hands.

## 'Thinking aloud' is very difficult in some cultures and too easy in others

In some places there's a need to work hard to get test participants to share their thoughts, and in others a need to work really hard to get them to not share quite so much.



The **Brazilians** and **Irish** love to talk, so thinking aloud is no problem!



**Chinese** users are often not willing to talk while doing the tasks. For example, they'd say "I will insert the picture." And then they will do that without saying anything, even if there are problems. After that, they may talk about the problems they had, or may need to be prompted.



**Indians** typically think aloud. When conducting groups it is advisable to stress the need to talk one at a time, otherwise it is hard to understand what is going on.



For **Germans** and the **British**, small talk at the front of sessions is very important to get participants warmed up. The quality of the feedback increases significantly once they are made comfortable in this way. Similarly, in **Finland**, plan an informal pre-session introduction with undemanding conversation and coffee to 'break the ice.'



In the **UK**, some participants are direct, while others may be more circumspect. In some cases, participants have struggled with tasks and yet are still politely positive about it.

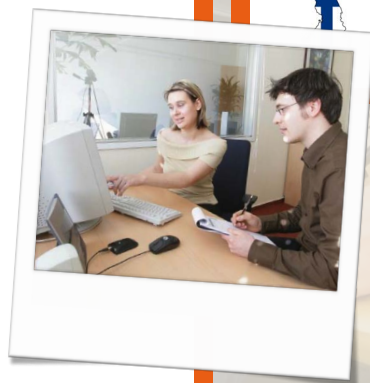


In **Japan**, there is a cultural bias for men not to say "I don't know" or "I don't understand," as answers such as these are seen to make them seem less intelligent in the eyes of others.

In Japan, there is a huge tendency to choose the middle rating when answering surveys and questionnaires. Most of the time participants will choose the most average rating, as it is uncommon to show strong feelings towards most things. Thus the extreme ends of surveys, such as "Very good / I like it" or "Very bad / I don't like it" are rarely picked.



In **Poland**, people tend to be shy. If you don't ask them about something they will not tell you, even when it is visible that they do not feel comfortable with the testing subject. For this reason, the sessions may last longer than expected.



**Italians** like to express their opinion on everything - they are experts in all matters and when you ask to think aloud during a task, you always get opinion on the layout!  
Italians have no problem expressing negative opinion. Often it seems they are never satisfied. The researcher, especially during a qualitative research, must be able to interpret the sense of negatives.



**Russians** are typically not critical about products and services from well-known foreign brands. This dates back to a time when commercial products were deficient and products from abroad were considered high quality by default. To receive objective feedback, hide foreign brand names from participants.



**Koreans** usually don't express their own mind/thinking overtly. Therefore, it's advisable to run a practice thinking aloud activity before the test session.



**Finns** do not generally speak openly about their feelings towards something or towards new ideas. However, if the discussion opens up, participants will give their very honest and pure opinions.



## Make sure it's OK to record sessions



While you can video in most countries (providing you follow the appropriate guidelines), it's not so in all countries.



In the **US**, there is sensitivity to facial recordings for healthcare studies. A work-around is to focus the camera on the participant's hands (instead of face) while they are using a healthcare device.



The **Japanese** in general tend to be quite conscious about privacy. Participants are sensitive about having their faces captured on video. However, this is not a major problem as Japanese participants tend to be less expressive in their facial expressions during testing. Privacy laws are very strict in Japan, and if a participant has their face recorded, privacy disclaimers must be signed beforehand.



In the **United Arab Emirates**, permission to video female participants will probably not be granted, so it is best to avoid such a requirement.





# Interpreting results

## Don't get lost in translation



The language barrier is the most obvious hurdle in testing in another country. Using interpreters presents interesting challenges when conducting a usability test. Is there a need to translate results from one language to another? In real time or after? How about real time video streaming or recordings? Also consider who's watching or interpreting the information, their background, and cultural frame of reference? These are some of the many questions that should be asked when translating and interpreting the results of usability testing from other cultures.

In some countries, an interpreter is required even if the participant speaks English, primarily to compensate for heavy accents, to explain any local nuances, and to allow the participant feedback to be as natural as possible.

Well-trained translators are generally available, and it is recommended to schedule them long before the day of testing. The cost for simultaneous translation is usually relatively expensive.

Another factor to consider is the preparation of testing materials in different languages. English is usually the common language used to communicate (even when neither of the countries speak English, for example Germans briefing Poles). The actual translation of the materials is usually done locally. Some companies do translation themselves with trusted translators, and send materials out in English and the local language.



In **Spain**, the majority of projects are for non-Spanish speaking people. Laboratory facilities are specifically designed for simultaneous translation. Spanish and the English tracks are recorded simultaneously so the client can listen to both.



In **France**, a full transcript in foreign language is rarely done because it can be so expensive (up to 400 Euros per hour). The preference is usually to translate highlights only.



In **Finland**, it may be easier to have discussions in the local language and present the main findings in English if necessary.



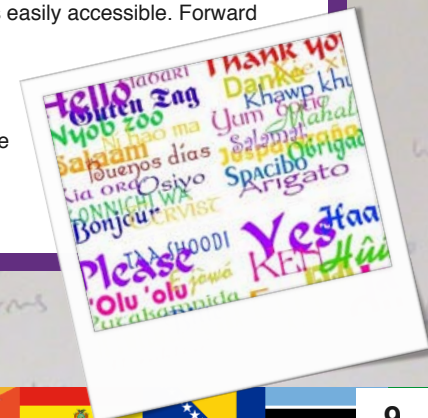
In **Japan**, simultaneous translators can cost approximately \$2,000 USD for a day of testing.



In **Australia**, good translators are not always easily accessible. Forward planning is necessary.



In **Poland**, professional translation is possible to almost every foreign language.



# World map

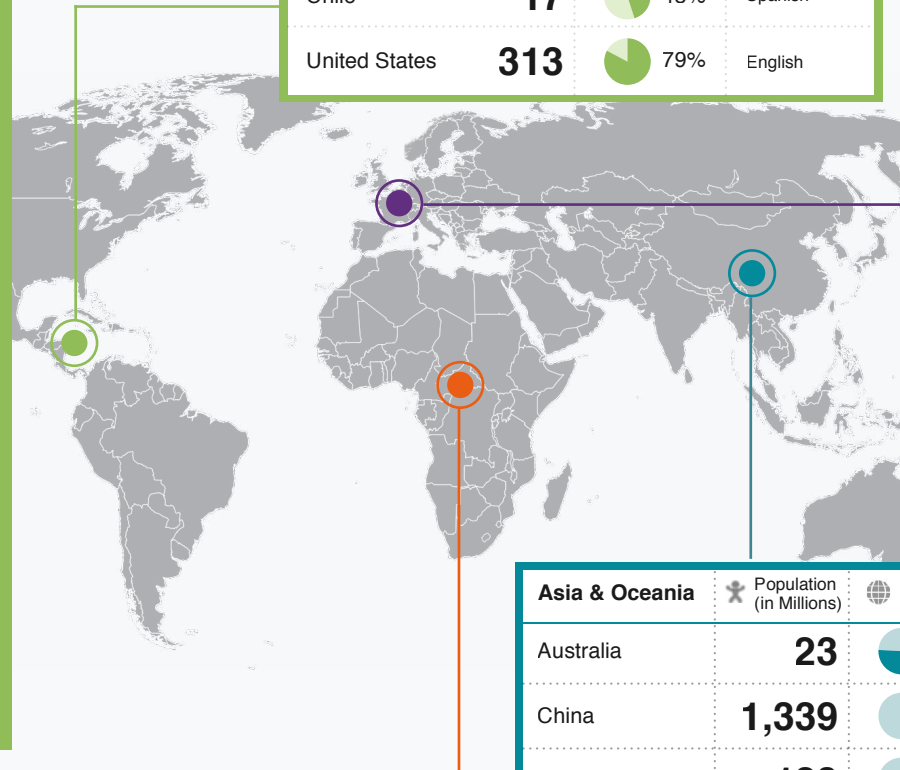
## Choose locations to match target groups

Consider which areas to include in your study, as there are often vast differences between locations within a country.

There are some common themes, such as the difference between cities and rural areas, but often there are more subtle differences, too. Language is one variable.

Different regions may have different concentrations of financial services, government, industry, media, etc., so depending on your requirements you'll need to choose carefully. Access to the internet varies between countries (and regionally within countries), potentially influencing people's responses to technology.

When travelling between cities, take into account that 'a short distance' could be interpreted differently. For instance, in **Russia**, St Petersburg is considered very close to Moscow. In practice, it could take 4 hours by speedy train!



Americas	Population (in Millions)	Internet users	Main Languages
Brasil	190	41%	Brazilian Portuguese
Canada	34	82%	English, French
Chile	17	45%	Spanish
United States	313	79%	English

Europe	Population (in Millions)	Internet users	Main Languages
Czech Republic	11	69%	Czech, Slovak + 11 other
Denmark	6	89%	Danish
Finland	5	87%	Finnish, Swedish
France	63	80%	French
Germany	82	82%	German
Ireland	5	70%	Irish Gaelic, English
Italy	60	54%	Italian
Poland	38	48%	Polish
Russia	142	43%	Russian (100+ languages & dialects)
Spain	46	67%	Spanish, Catalan
Switzerland	8	84%	German, French, Italian, Romansh
The Netherlands	17	91%	Dutch
United Kingdom	62	85%	English, Welsh

Africa & The Middle East	Population (in Millions)	Internet users	Main Languages
South Africa	51	12%	Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, Swazi, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu
Turkey	74	40%	Turkish, Kurdish, Zaza, Arabic, Laz

Asia & Oceania	Population (in Millions)	Internet users	Main Languages
Australia	23	76%	English
China	1,339	34%	Mandarin, Min, Cantonese, Wu
Japan	128	80%	Japanese
New Zealand	4	83%	English, Maori
South Korea	48	84%	Korean
India	1,210	8%	Hindi, English, + 26 regional

References:

Population:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_by\\_population](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population)

Internet users by country:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Internet\\_users\\_by\\_country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_users_by_country)





## To read more :

<http://www.globaluserresearch.com>

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The UXalliance is an international network of local user experience experts providing global coverage for user research and user experience design. 24 leading user experience firms around the world are part of the UXalliance.

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