CineFiles Expert Usability Review

Table of Contents
Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 1
  Brief Overview of CineFiles .................................................................................................................. 1
  Goals of Expert Review ....................................................................................................................... 2
  Methodology ......................................................................................................................................... 2
  Heuristic Evaluation ............................................................................................................................. 2
  Home Page .......................................................................................................................................... 2
  Search .................................................................................................................................................... 3
    Standard Search .................................................................................................................................. 4
    Page Viewer ....................................................................................................................................... 4
    Advanced Search .................................................................................................................................. 6
    Search Summary .................................................................................................................................. 8
  Browsing ................................................................................................................................................ 8
  Portal for Educators ............................................................................................................................. 10
    Methodology ....................................................................................................................................... 10
    Portal Review ..................................................................................................................................... 10
    Recommendations for the Portal for Educators ............................................................................... 12
  Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 13
  Recommendations for Future Evaluation .............................................................................................. 13
  Summary of Recommendations ............................................................................................................ 14

Introduction

Brief Overview of CineFiles
CineFiles is the online film document image database created, owned, and maintained by the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. The BAM/PFA mission is to foster artistic innovation, intellectual exploration, and social commentary through their exhibition programs and archival collections. The museum was founded in 1963 following artist and teacher Hans Hofmann’s donation of forty-five paintings and $250,000 to the University; today BAM/PFA’s collection contains more than 16,000 art objects and 14,000 films and videos and is supported in part by grants from institutions such as the National Endowment for the Humanities and individuals.

The online database CineFiles contains more than 50,000 scanned images of movie posters, reviews, press kits, newspaper articles, and other unique past and present documents for films of more than 150 major international directors. By providing citations for all documents and page images for the documents with copyright clearance, CineFiles serves educators, filmography instructors and students, humanities researchers, and general public and enables them to search for film-related materials dated from 1900s to the present.

Goals of Expert Review
The original CineFiles website was created in 1996 and was mostly used by the students and scholars from the UC Berkeley Film Studies program. In 2006, the PFA Library received a three-year grant from IMLS to expand the range of users to include students and educators in History and Humanities. Achieving this goal required the online database not only to add another 15,000 documents that have direct relevance to History and Social Sciences, but also to provide the new users with the means of searching for relevant documents, browsing through the collection, and obtaining some guidance and recommendations about utilizing the found resources in the classroom.

I was tasked with performing an expert usability review of the CineFiles website to look for potential problems with usability and notice what could be improved for its both old and new target user audiences.

Methodology
I performed an evaluation by focusing on the website presentation and its search and browsing capabilities, while paying attention to specific usability points related to the needs of filmography instructors, students, and humanities educators. I did not use a specific usability evaluation heuristic but focused on these major portions of user experience adapted from the standard web site usability evaluation heuristics:

- Home Page
- Search and Browsing
- Portal for Educators

Heuristic Evaluation

Home Page
The CineFiles website is very well designed. Its visual aesthetics is clear, crisp, and succinct.

In fact, due to a thoughtful page layout and effective use of color, a first-time visitor is guided through the CineFiles home page so efficiently that it was somewhat difficult for me to point out a single element that could either escape attention or did not have a clear meaning. Some minor adjustments I suggest all have to do with possible visual layout improvements:

The changes may result in a page that looks like this, with search options being more visible and with the project and sponsor information on the bottom looking more visually balanced:

Search
Since the search is a critical component for the success of the site it is essential to provide tools that will enhance the ease of use of the system and increase the efficiency of searching.

The quality and quantity of results returned by searching CineFiles is highly satisfactory.
The flow of user interactions with the system while searching is strongly intuitive and very flexible. For example, when viewing individual pages of a document, clicking the Back button brings a user one level up to the list of documents, instead of scrolling back through the pages of a document that he might have been viewing for a while. This is a great solution because this is what CineFiles users would intuitively grasp while in the process of viewing documents. Another example, demonstrated by the following screenshot, is that when viewing the pages of an individual document, the user is provided with the ability to either flip through the document pages by clicking arrows on top of the page display or to click directly onto any of the thumbnails shown in the Document Pages section on the bottom left. Depending on what portion of the page the viewer’s eyes are currently focused at he may select either one of these options without giving it much thought. Providing users with that kind of ability is one of the greatest achievements for a user interface design.

**Standard Search**

One usability issue is that the search query words are not preserved when displaying the search results. It is recommended for all types of search engines to support iterative search by facilitating the ability of its users to easily modify existing search criteria without forcing the user back to the page from which they started their search. Therefore, my design recommendation is for the interface to display a search query box pre-populated with the searched keywords on the results page.

**Page Viewer**

Another usability issue which also has to do with enabling a more efficient way of searching is the lack of clarity for the option View page in separate window. Consider a potential user trying to read and evaluate the usefulness of a resource that she found when searching for documents about an early movie by Alfred Hitchcock. When, during the search process, the user clicks onto the title of a possibly interesting document she will see the document citation, page thumbnails, and the image displayed:
The option for the users who wish to view an original size of the image is to click the View page in separate window option. Clicking this option opens an original (which is usually a much larger size) image view where users can resize the image if they wish:
An issue with the View page in separate window option is that it is not clearly explained. The intended use of this option is not only to allow the viewers to conveniently resize and view an image of a document, but also to enable them to quickly print out a single page (out several) instead of downloading the document as a PDF and using the printer options to print out a single page. My recommendation is to rename it and make it more visible by increasing the size of all icons (including the Download document as PDF and Next Page options). A rough draft of this suggestion shows a much more visually identifiable document and page options:

A Web2.0 solution for this issue could be to employ the magnification option: make the displayed page image to react to the mouse hovering over it by magnifying its size by 10%-15% and making the image to follow the mouse movements to enable an easy scrolling in any direction. That will simplify the mechanics of viewing the contents when the magnified page does not fit into the display window.

Advanced Search
My final recommendations for search are for the advanced search option.

The users get redirected to the advanced search page after they select either Search by Film or Search by Document option on any page wherever search is available. While being able to appreciate the significant challenges of the task of designing a complex page layout that would help guiding the CineFiles users through the Advanced Search functionality, I was able to identify a couple of usability issues. One has to do with how well the users are informed about being redirected to the Advanced Search page and the way that the Search Tips are placed on the page:
While the majority of the CineFiles users would not have trouble finding the Advanced Search query input boxes on this page, the placement of elements could be also made more visually coherent by moving the Search Tips to either right to or below the Advanced Search options. While there might be various approaches to visually organizing the information on this page, the ultimate goal is to clearly group all of the related elements together and to clearly distinguish between the advanced and standard searches.

After being redirected to the Advanced Search page, the users need to be informed about what page they are looking at, because the system should always keep users informed through appropriate feedback about what is going on and where they are currently at. This could be achieved by pre-populating the Search by option with previously selected values Film Title or Document.

The final recommendation for the Advanced Search is to support the iterative search by facilitating the ability to easily modify existing search query without forcing user back to the previous page. It could be achieved by displaying the advanced search form with all the query search boxes pre-populated with the searched. One possible implementation of this suggestion is to display the advanced search options right under the standard search options on the results page:

While the resulting page may look busy, I believe that the users will remain capable of easily navigating between the standard and advanced search forms and would appreciate the convenience of having their query terms on display.

Search Summary
CineFiles search is easy to use and it returns a satisfactory quantity of highly relevant results. The results are easy to view and sort by title, date, or directory and then to drill down through to the document level. The documents have a convenient viewing, scrolling, and downloading options, especially once the meaning of the View page option becomes clear. The visual presentation is appealing, clear, and consistent throughout the site. One thing that could significantly increase the efficiency of searching is displaying the original search queries. It will let the users to see the keywords they entered and also let them easily modify the previous queries. Addressing other, moderately important usability issues would also help to improve the quality of user experience, by providing a better explanation of the value for viewing the page in a separate window, explaining the page status change due to Advanced Search page redirection and organizing the Advanced Search information on a page in a more visually clustered way.

Browsing
Browsing is important, especially since it helps first-time visitors, as well as people who are not sure how to begin their searches, to orient themselves and get a sense of what kinds of materials they can expect to find. The website home page masterfully (effectively and intuitively) guides the visitors towards browsing, while not deterring them from searching:
The browsing functionality is highly intuitive, efficient, and pleasant to use. The only two design recommendations are to pre-populate the Browse Lists *Browse by* option with the previously selected option and to use the same wording/order and highlight the new browse option *Directors with complete filmography* in the Browse Options section on the left side of the results page:

Each of the browsing categories is well-populated and the selection always seems to be meaningful, even in the case of a possibly very subjective categorization by the *Genre Terms*:  

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The genres are highly subjective depending on the background and focus of each researcher, so it would be great to enable researchers to apply tagging as the means to make search and browsing experiences more flexible and rewarding.

Finally, the materials presented through the clickable movie poster on the Home Page are extremely interesting. But it was not immediately apparent that even more of the Featured Documents could be found via the Browse Lists option. To provide visitors with more featured documents, I recommend adding the Browse Lists function to the document page that is shown after the user clicks a movie poster from the Home Page.

**Portal for Educators**

**Methodology**
To evaluate the Portal from the educators’ point of view, I looked at how well some of the Portal target users will be able to perform a couple of their typical tasks. The users and their tasks were:

- A high school teacher who is looking for teacher-friendly resources such as classroom group discussion questions and lesson plans.
- A Women’s Studies university professor focused on films created by women of color looking for documents she can assign to her students as a reading resource. The documents may include the titles of films created by women of color and any related information such as where the films were distributed, interviews with directors, posters, and press kits.

**Portal Review**
The Portal for Educators link is conveniently located on the Main Page; it is highly visible and its purpose is clearly described:
Portal for Educators
Film recommendations for a variety of themes and topics, resource guides for select films and links to other resources.

Copyright Resources Project
Information on working with copyright-protected materials in a digital environment.

Take Our Survey
Your feedback helps sustain and improve CineFiles.

Support CineFiles
All gifts, large and small, help CineFiles grow this relevant and important project. Thank you!

BAM/PFA
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive

Themes and Topics
Recommendations for films organized by themes culled from the California Content Standards. The themes have been adapted to a broader framework, so that the list can be useful to all educators.

Resource Guides
The guides in this section are intended as models of how to use the resources on CineFiles and might be used to enrich the classroom viewing experience. We hope to expand this section in the future.

The **Themes and Topics** section header is clickable, while the rest is its description. The page that it leads to contains a well-populated and easy to understand classification of films by topics which could be of interest to all types of the Portal target users. The Women’s Studies professor, for example, would find the *Women in the African-American community* or the *Rights and Resistance Movements, Women’s Rights* topics especially relevant.

The **Useful Links** section of the Portal page contains only four links. The top link is leading to a page which explains the challenges and novel approaches to copyrighted materials protecting while sharing them via CineFiles. Three other links lead to independent websites providing highly helpful information about utilizing media resources in the classroom, including the Center for Media Literacy core concepts for analysis and production of media and the Library of Congress sample film and video classroom usage models.

The **Resource Guides** section contains a description and the links to the models of use for specific CineFiles resources. This section is clearly just a start and is meant to become much larger. The few links shown are good examples of the guides that could be utilized for the Portal target users. The models are well-written and seem to be easy to apply in a classroom. Having more of them would be extremely useful for the high school teachers looking for classroom group discussion guides.

**Recommendations for the Portal for Educators**
1. The Copyright Resources Project link is clearly important and therefore deserves its own section. To make users to take a better notice of it, I suggest to add the section description, similar to Themes and Topics.

2. Renaming of the Useful Links section to better reflect its purpose might become more important as the contents of the Portal expands in the future and the whole page becomes more busy.

3. The Themes and Topics section is easy to use and contains a satisfactory quantity and quality of teaching resources. Further usability study is recommended to find out how it can better serve the needs of its target users, including school teachers and university professors.

4. Having more guides of the same excellent quality in the Resource Guides section would clearly serve the needs of the Portal users. The section’s presentation would most likely need changing as the list expands.

Conclusion
It was an extremely rewarding experience to use the new and improved CineFiles collection of film documents. The power of films in society can be enormous, and this collection empowers the progressive researchers of humanities and students of filmography in their work.

Recommendations for Future Evaluation
Further usability study is recommended to find out how CineFiles and its Portal for Educators can better serve the needs of its target users, including school teachers and university professors.
### Summary of Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Page</td>
<td>Search options need to be clustered visually</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Horizontally align Advanced Search box and widen Standard search box</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Page</td>
<td>Support CineFiles section needs to be more visually clustered</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Move Give Now button upward</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Page</td>
<td>Lower section need better white space balancing</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Spread the project info section wider</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Search</td>
<td>Users have to go back to modify search query</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Display a search query box pre-populated with the searched keywords on the results page</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Search</td>
<td>Not clear how to view a larger document page</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Rename it, provide explanation, and make it more visible by increasing the size of all accompanying icons</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Search</td>
<td>Users are assumed to know how to resize a browser window’s contents</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Remind them how to do it</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Search</td>
<td>Users are not informed enough about being redirected to Advanced Search page</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Display an advanced search menu option pre-populated on the page that users are redirected to</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Search</td>
<td>Standard Search and Advanced Search options and tips could be made more clearly distinguishable</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Clearly group these elements together and to distinguish between the advanced and standard search</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Search</td>
<td>Users have to go back to modify search query</td>
<td>Mod/High</td>
<td>Display the advanced search options and the search query box pre-populated with the searched options and keywords on the results page</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browsing</td>
<td>Users have to go back to modify browsing options</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Display the previously selected option</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browsing</td>
<td>Browse Options on the left side might be confusing</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Use the same wording/order and highlight the new browse option in the Browse Options section on the left side of the results page</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browsing</td>
<td>Not apparent that Browsing could be used to find the Featured Documents</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>After the user clicks the movie poster on the home page, add the pre-populated Browse Lists menu option to the results page that is shown</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portal for Educators</td>
<td>The Useful Links section is not named clearly enough and contains the Copyright link that belongs to a different section</td>
<td>N/A, user feedback needed</td>
<td>Move Copyright into a separate section with an appropriate name. Rename the Useful Links to reflect the purpose</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portal for Educators</td>
<td>Small number of resources in the Resources Guide section</td>
<td>N/A, user feedback needed</td>
<td>Add more high-quality resources</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>