

D	I	G
H	U	M
L	A	B

Experiences from NetLab Online Courses

Web Archive Readiness

Asger Harlung



Selected Observations Overview

- 1) The Course and Its immediate Two-way Benefits
- 2) The Question of User Readiness
- 3) Awareness: Do Skills and Ambitions Meet?
- 4) Sketching Out a (Partway) Two-way Solution
- 5) Feedback, Part 1 (= "for now")



Problem/project based course

Researchers work based on specific topics from their actual project, or define a "prototype topic" to represent their general interests.

In a continuous process of ongoing feedback and discussion, they:

- Define data gathering strategies,
- Conduct experiments in existing web archives,
- Preserve online findings of their own in ways suitable to meet their purposes.



Mutual Benefits

The researchers get:

Specific help and feedback for getting further with their work.

Netlab gets:

- Insights into various research purposes and needs,
- Reason to seek out new solutions (then share them in future courses, and in our Tools and Tutorials section),
- A build-up of tips and explanations to preserve and reshare.



Background

Three courses so far:

Experienced users who had already archived content for their needs, but wanted more insight.

Researchers working towards building national or regional archives, or defining specifications for this.

Researchers with little or no understanding of computers and computer programs.



The Question of User Readiness

Computer skill levels – no exact, "official" definition, except perhaps emerging from definitions in OECD surveys.

"PC Driver's License" and similar measurements are not informative.

Skill levels are defined from which programs are known to the user, not by general proficiency or ability to navigate new systems or challenges.

"Inner speech" (Watson J. B., 1913; Lev Vygotsky, 1934)

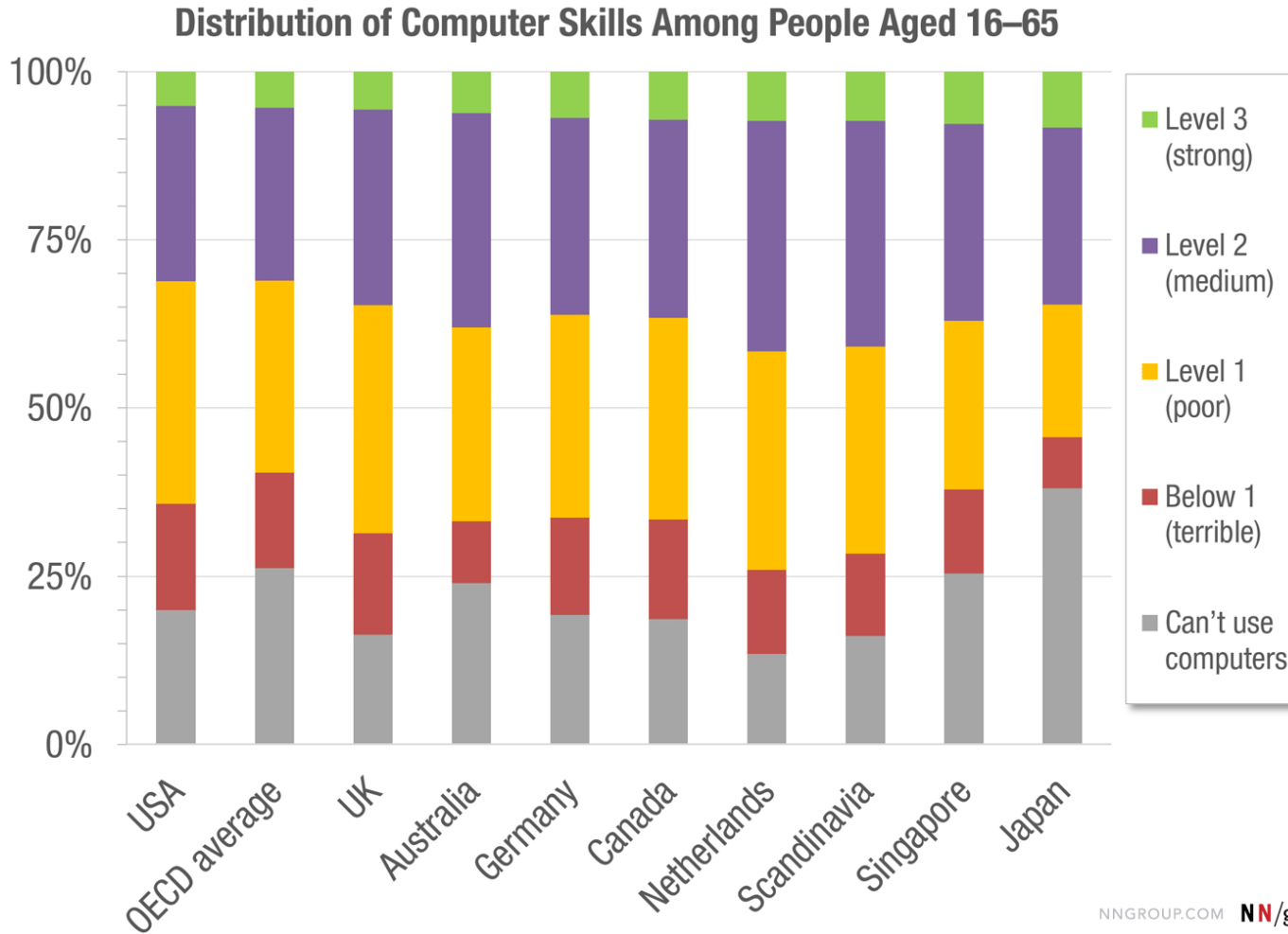
The exact connection between language and thinking is debatable, but:

The better you can describe something, the better you can understand it.

The better you understand it, the better you can solve a problem.



The Question of User Readiness



Jakob Nielsen: The Distribution of Users' Computer Skills: Worse Than You Think (2016)



The Question of User Readiness

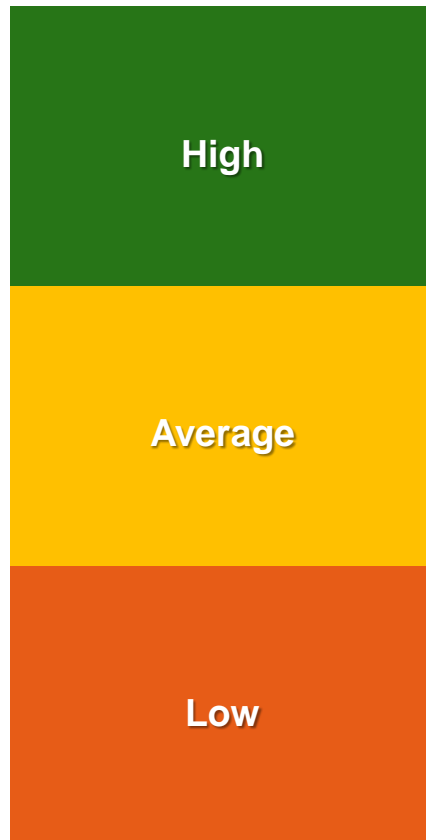
A preliminary working definition:

When facing new tasks – such as archiving data from the web - a user's computer skills equals his/her ability to accurately describe what computers and programs do, where data are stored, and to identify relevant functions for a task in a program interface.



The Question of User Readiness

User skill level



(Defined by daily use)

“If a computer or a program does not behave as I want it to I will reconfigure it at root level (by editing internal program files) if necessary.”

”Installing a new program is no big deal, and except for extremely contraintuitive user interfaces, neither is starting to use it.”

“I get confused when using new functions, operating systems or programs, and if asked to install a new program I am uncertain if what I do is right.”

The Question of Project Complexity

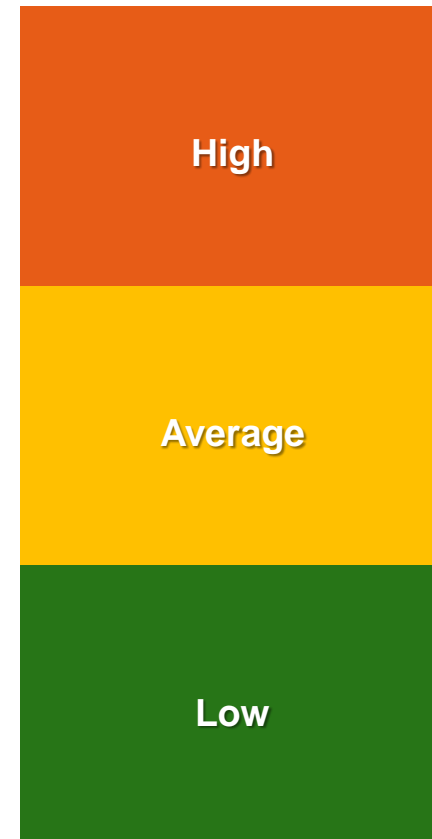
(Defined by need for data, data handling, and interface use)

Charting, measuring, big data analysis, multimedia analyses, complete and immersive listings and typologies.

Finding or preserving a number of relevant examples in ways that ensure necessary levels of content accuracy.

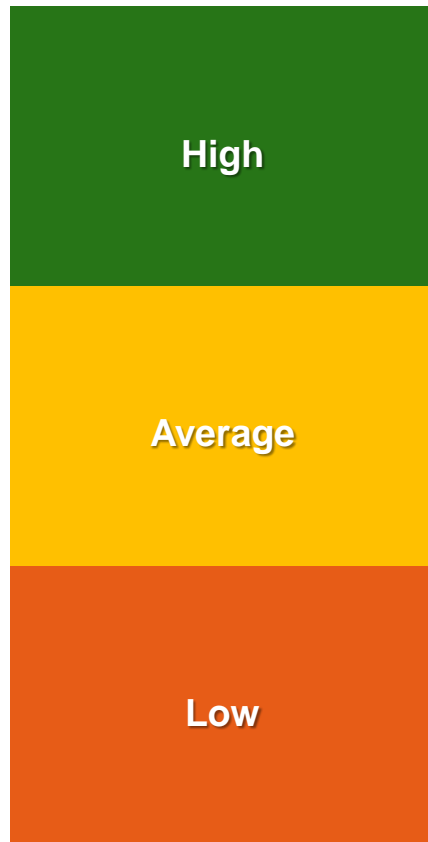
Finding and comparing a few items, either in web archives, or preserving them from online findings.

Project Complexity

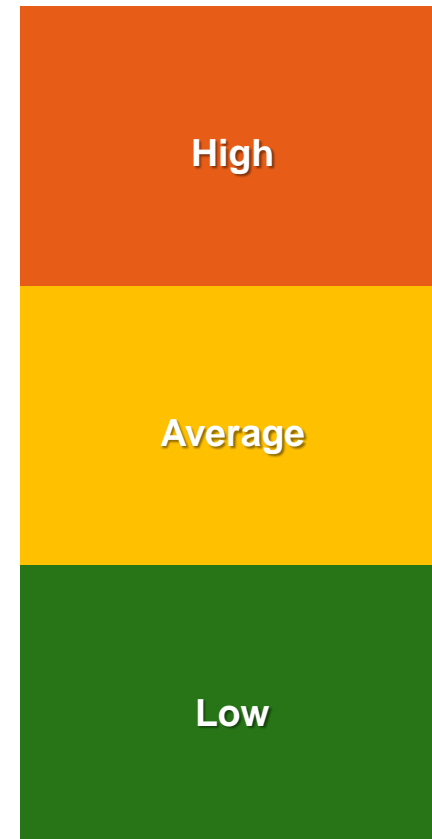


User Readiness vs Project Complexity

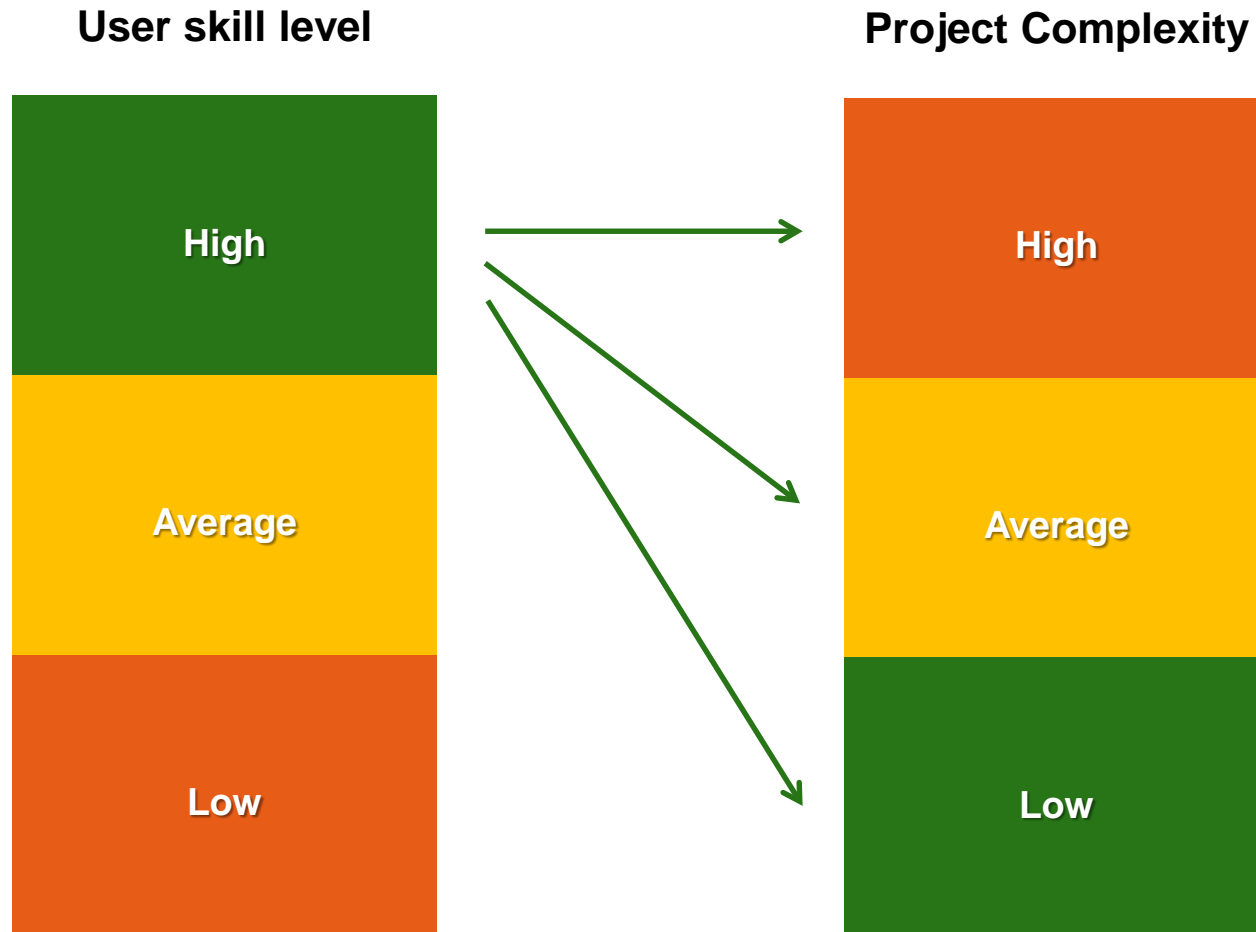
User skill level



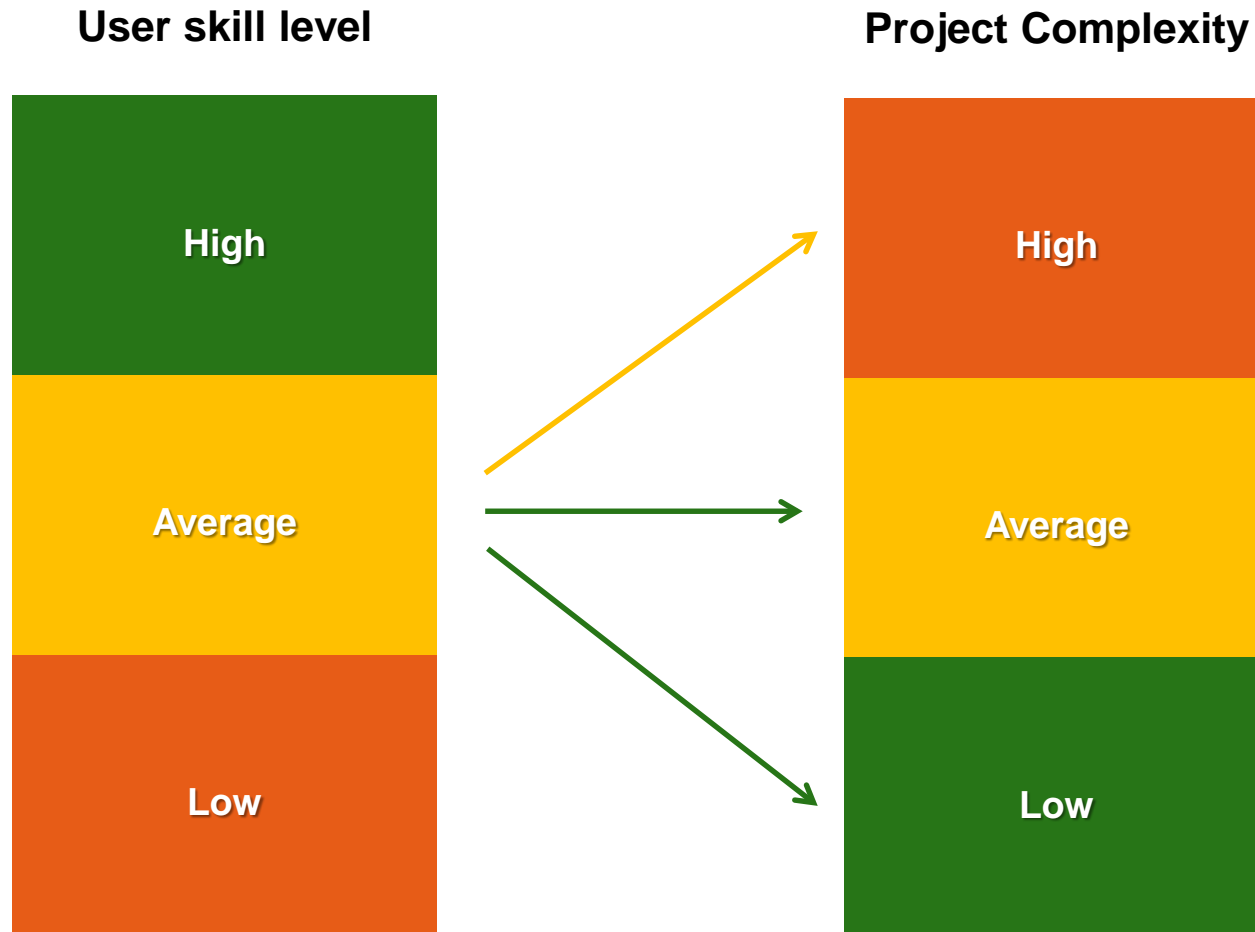
Project Complexity



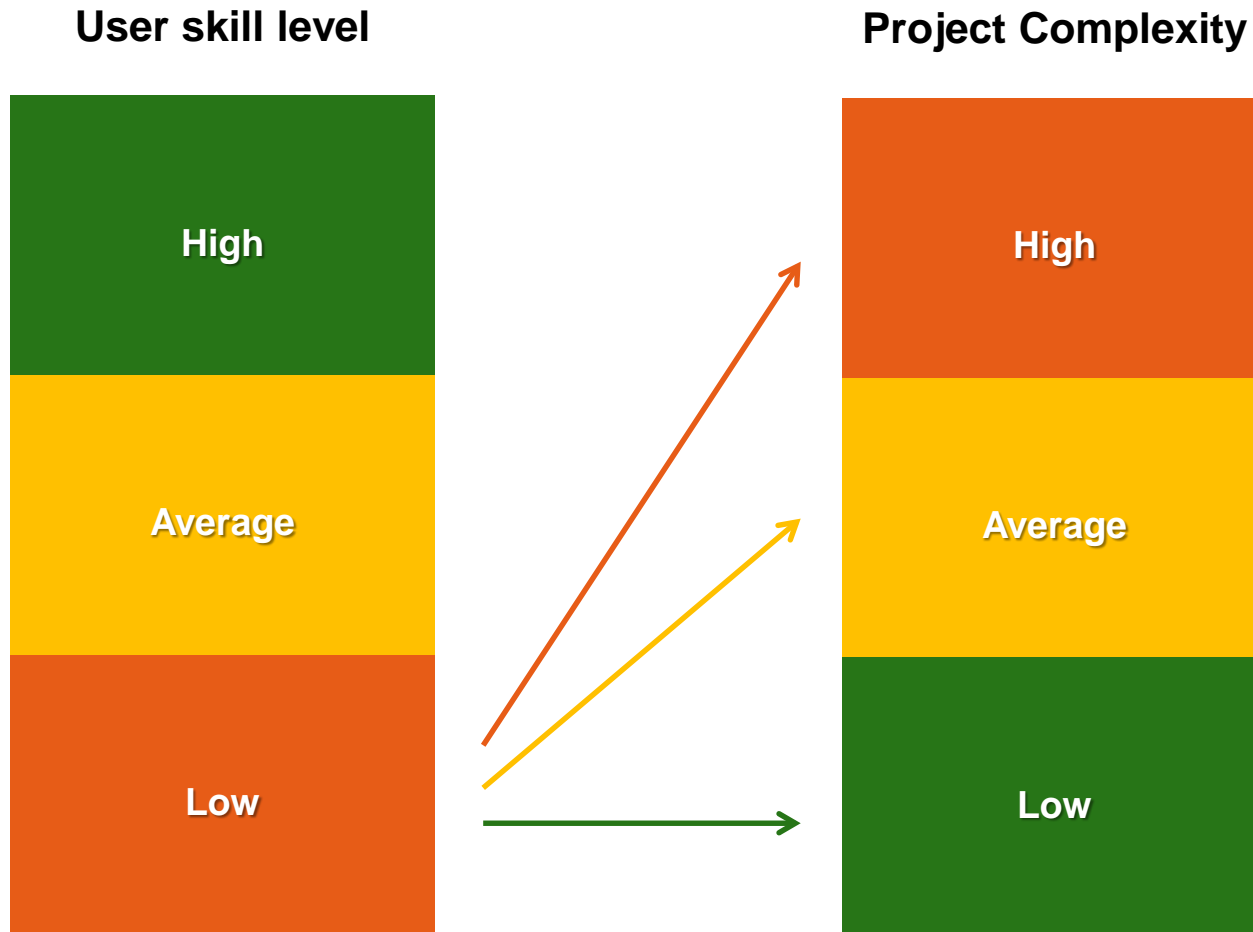
(Back to) The Question of User Readiness



The Question of User Readiness



The Question of User Readiness



Awareness: Do Skills and Ambitions Meet?

Users should have awareness of:

"Are my computer skills on a level suitable for the actual complexity of my project?"

"If no, how can I get there - and will the learning curve be mild, steep, or perhaps too steep?"

Institutions should have awareness of:

"Are the skills necessary for the project in place?"

"If no, can they be obtained within a realistic frame of time and work for the project?"

Both sides:

"What types and levels of help may be drawn upon, in the form of courses, support, external agencies or partners – and how much does this compensate for?"



Awareness: A Responsibility Triangle

User Awareness:

Personal Readiness vs Project Complexity; Tests, Courses, terminology

Archiving Institution Awareness:

Applications, Usability Tests, Levels of Support. Terminology considerations: Low-tech terminology vs "formal" terminology

Research Institution/Program Awareness:

Skill Assessment vs Project Type and Complexity. Necessary skills for data handling etc. should be specified in project descriptions.

Tests, Courses, Support – key words for moving forward!



Preliminary Suggestion: Skill Tests

Idea:

To build and offer **online skill tests** for users, in order to help deciding whether a project demands

- Courses (number, type, extent)
- External help (programmers, data handlers, consultancies)
- And whether a project is realistic at all, in itself, or after "downsizing".

(Based on multiple presentations and research results in the field of e-learning, attention usually goes to **equipment**, however the question of **user skills** in connection with user needs and project complexity is more relevant to projects involving web archives or web archiving. The equipment is in place; the skills may not be).



A Call for Feedback, Part 1

- 1) Immediate responses to thoughts on "user readiness"?
- 2) Immediate responses to thoughts on "skill tests"?
- 3) Possible follow-up, suggestions?

