Usability Factors in Website Design: A Case Study in Developing a New Literary Journal

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Introduction

The field of usability is a fertile one for technical communicators looking to expand their skillset and expertise. This study applies the skills of technical communication to a field with little to no current research on usability and human factors, namely, online literary journals. The usability factors identified from a detailed literature review were then applied in developing a website prototype for a new literary journal. A usability test was conducted and the results analyzed to confirm the effectiveness of these best practices and to identify additional usability factors. Recommendations for technical communicators are then discussed regarding how best to incorporate usable design when developing content using the website as the primary medium.

Methodology

- Content analysis of 35 current literary journals to survey the designs currently in use

- Creation of prototype

- First round of quantitative usability testing with four participants

- Revision of prototype

- Second round of quantitative usability testing with two participants

- Qualitative debriefing interview with each participant
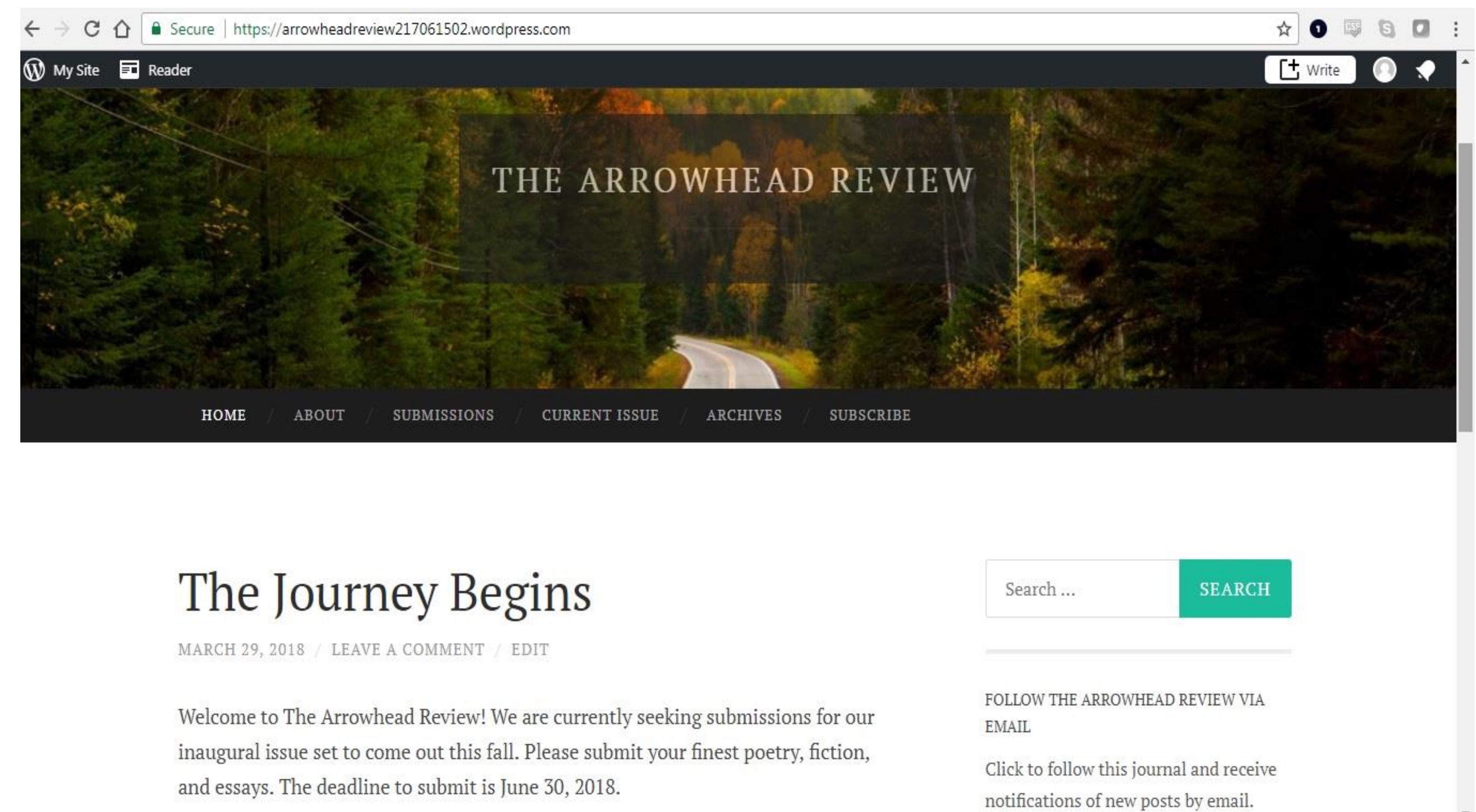

Figure 1: The Arrowhead Review homepage

Usability Factors

- Recognition rather than recall

- Cognitive load

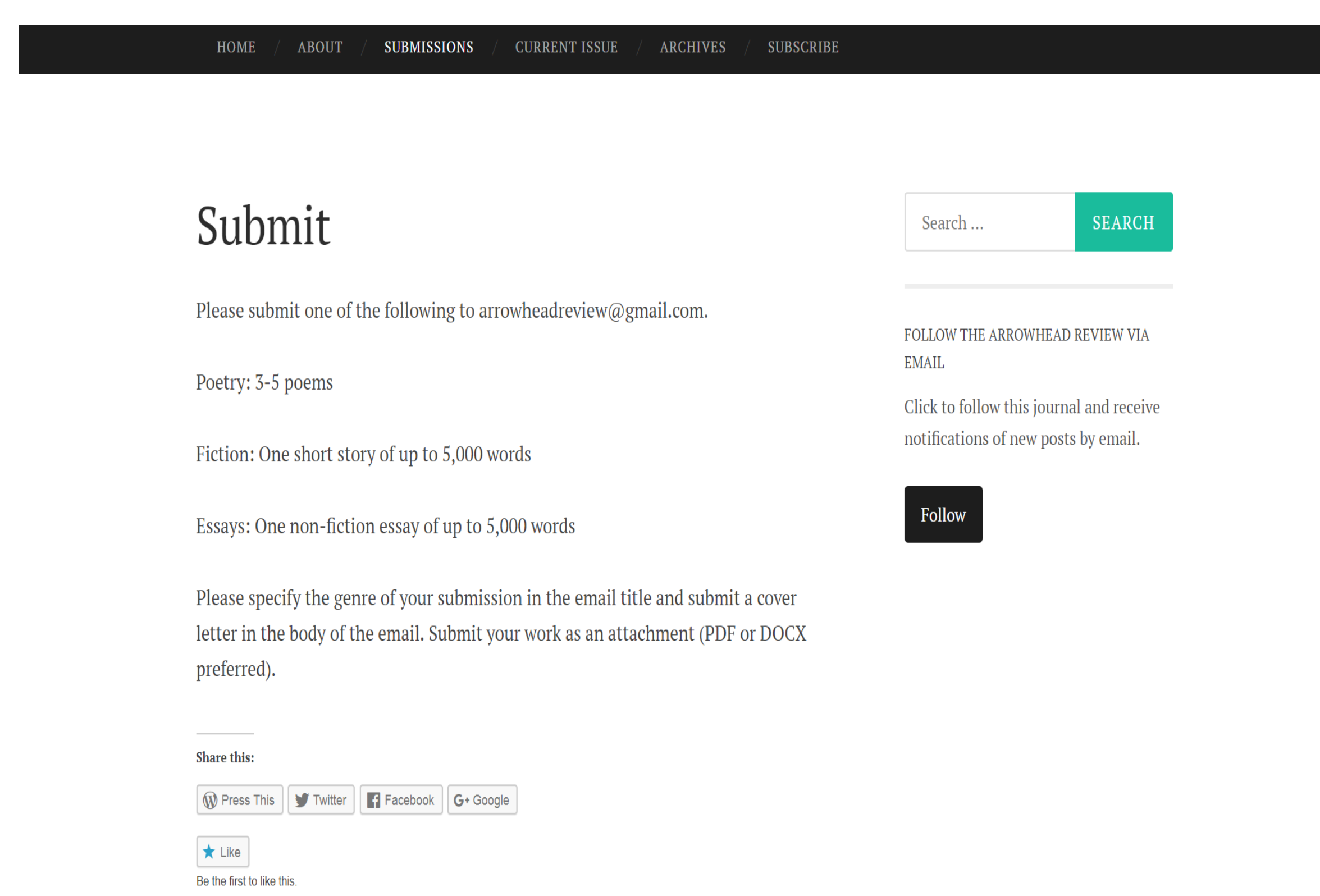- Flexibility and efficiency of use

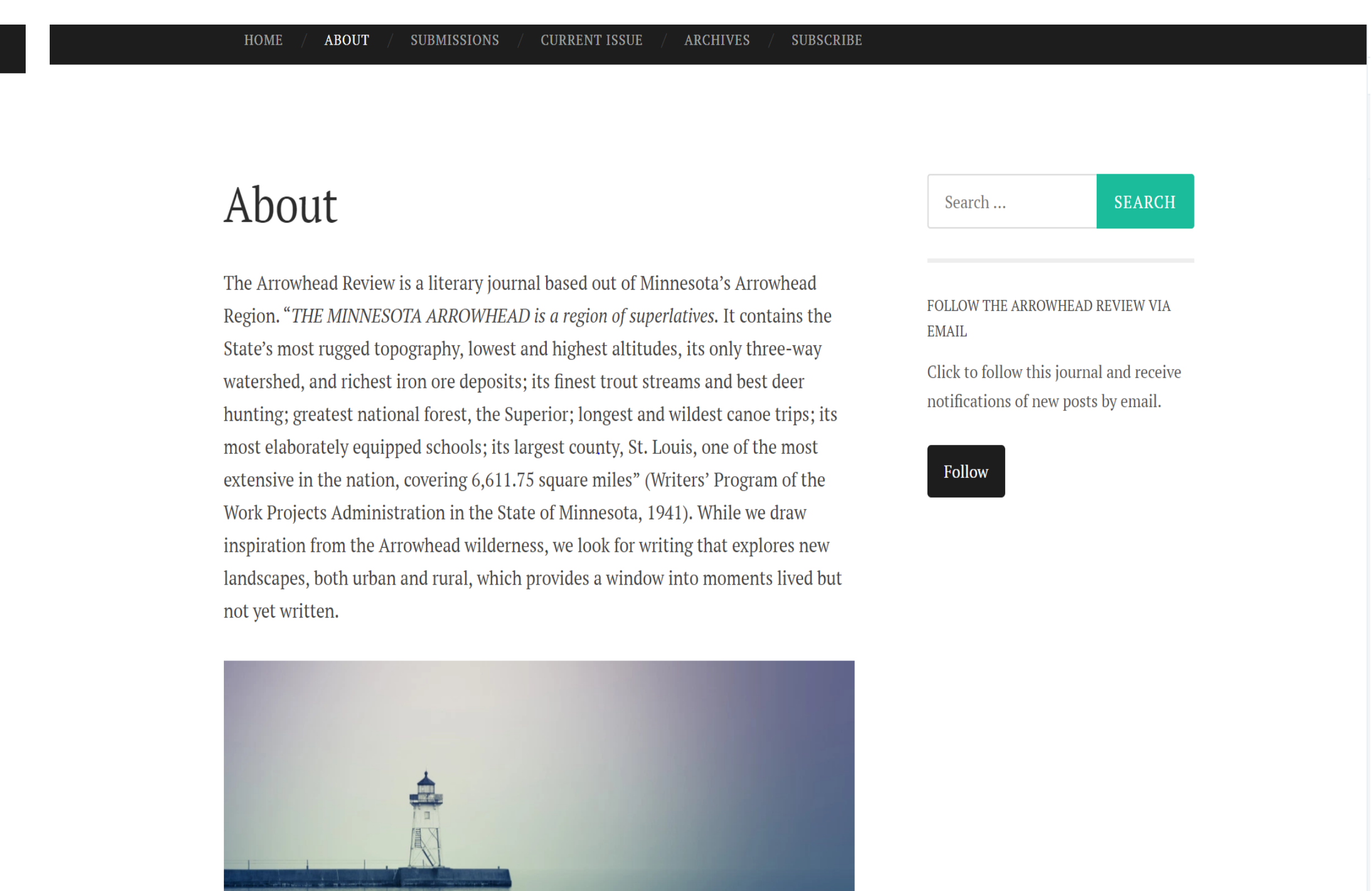Figure 2: The Arrowhead Review submit page

Figure 3: The Arrowhead Review about page

Results

Table 1: Usability test results for reader user group

Reader User Group	Time on Task (min) The Minnesota Review	Success / Error Rate	Time on Task (min) The Threepenny Review	Success / Error Rate
Participant 1	02:44	Success	01:30	Success
Participant 2	03:01	Success	03:50	Error
Participant 3	02:56	Success	02:38	Success

Table 2: Usability test results for writer user group

Writer User Group	Time on Task (min) The Minnesota Review	Success / Error Rate	Time on Task (min) The Threepenny Review	Success / Error Rate	Time on Task (min) The Arrowhead Review	Success / Error Rate
Participant 1	05:45	Success	06:15	Success	03:38	Success
Participant 2	04:46	Success	05:58	Success	03:12	Success
Participant 3	04:21	Success	06:02	Success	03:26	Success

Recommendations

- Menu design and website navigation should offer direct pathways to content
- Instructional material should be written with concision to reduce the cognitive load of the user

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