

User Interface (UI) Design

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Overview

- What is UI?
- How to design UI?
 - Design principles
 - Data display guidelines
- Miscellaneous

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What Is UI?

- An effective communication medium between a human and a computer

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Primary Styles of UI

- Direct manipulation
 - the user interacts with objects on the screen
 - E.g., drag a file to a “trash bin”
- Menu selection
 - E.g., select the “delete” on menu for a file
- Form fill-in
 - E.g., fill a file name and click “delete” button

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Primary Styles of UI (Cont.)

- Command language
 - Type in delete command with the filename as a parameter
- Natural language
 - Type in natural language description, which will be parsed and executed
 - E.g., "delete the file named xxx"

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What Is UI Design?

- Definition
 - Following a set of interface design principles, design identifies interface objects and actions and then creates a screen layout that forms the basis for a user interface prototype
- Goal
 - Easy to understand, learn, and use

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Typical UI Design Errors

- lack of consistency
- too much memorization
- no guidance / help
- no context sensitivity
- poor response
- arcane/unfriendly

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Mandel's Three Golden Rules

Mandel [Man 97]

- Place the user in control
 - “What I really would like is a system that reads my mind”
- Reduce the user's memory load
 - The more a user has to remember, the more error-prone the interaction will be
- Make the interface consistent
 - “Things that look the same should act the same”

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Place the User in Control

- Define interaction modes (UI) which do not force users into unnecessary actions
 - E.g., spell check
- Provide flexible interaction
 - E.g., keyboard commands, mouse movement
- Allow user interaction to be interruptible or undoable
 - E.g., Automatic save, undo, redo

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Place the User in Control (Cont.)

- Allow for streamline interaction as skill levels advance (customization)
- Hide technical details from user

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Reduce the User's Memory Load

- Reduce demand on short-term memory
 - E.g., autofill, single sign-on
- Establish meaningful defaults
 - "N/A", "Please specify..."
- Define intuitive shortcuts
 - E.g., "alt-P" to invoke "print" function

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Reduce the User's Memory Load (Cont.)

- Base visual layout on a real-world metaphor, when possible
 - E.g., bill pay process: checkbook + check register
- Disclose information in stages
 - Use hierarchy for choices

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Make Interface Consistent

- Allow understanding of current task in context
 - Window titles, graphical icons, consistent color usage, forward, backward
- Maintain consistency across a family of SW products
- If users have expectations from past interactive models, try not to make changes

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Eight Golden Rules of Dialog Design

Schneiderman, 1982

- Strive for consistency
- Enable frequent users to use shortcuts
- Offer informative feedback
- Design dialogs to yield closure
- Offer simple error handling
 - Try to make serious errors impossible
- Permit easy reversal of actions
- Support internal locus of control
- Reduce short-term memory load

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Kinds of Users

- Novice
 - Have little knowledge about usage
 - Use small vocabulary of familiar terms
 - Give informative feedback
- Knowledgeable intermittent users
 - Know task but may forget specific details
- Frequent users
 - Want to accomplish tasks rapidly with a few keystrokes or clicks

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Getting User Attention

- Use sparingly in an interface:
 - Intensity (e.g., boldface vs. regular font)
 - Marking (e.g., underlining)
 - Size (only 4 font sizes)
 - Choice of fonts (≤ 3)
 - Blinking
 - Inverse video
 - Color (≤ 3)
 - Audio

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Error Handling

- Describe the problem in the language user can understand, in non-judgmental manner
- Provide constructive advice for recovery
- Indicate any negative consequences
- Message associated with visual or audio cue

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Help Facility

- How does user request help?
- How is help presented?
 - Separate window, 1-2 line suggestion at a fixed screen location, pointer to document
- How does user return to normal mode?
- Is help flat or structured?

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How to Design UI?

- Understand what users need
 - Types of users?
 - Tasks users will perform with the system
 - Use-cases
 - Design task is similar to design of rest of the system
 - Offer interactions that “fit” users requirements