Making Your Websites Usable: Ten Tips

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What is usability?
- Ease of use
- Ease of learning
- Fitness for purpose
An effective website

Overall principles
- Be intuitive
- Be familiar
- Be consistent
- Be appropriate
- Be functional
- Be polite
- Be supportive
**Match the system to reality**

- Follow real world conventions
  - Make information appear in a natural and logical order
    - By use
    - By category
- Don’t include information that is irrelevant or rarely needed
  - Every extra unit of information diminishes the impact of others

**Simple and natural language**

- Speak the user’s language
- Words, phrases, and concepts should be familiar
  - Not system-based
  - Not library-based
Be consistent and follow standards

Be consistent
  - Don’t make the user guess
  - Consistency
    • Content
    • Terms
    • Buttons

Follow standards
  - Follow conventions
Allow for flexibility and enhance efficiency

- Use accelerators
  - Short cuts
    - Designed for the expert user
  - Control key combination

- Allow users to tailor frequent actions
  - Allow for customization
Use aesthetic and minimalist design

- Extraneous information distracts and slows people down
- Prune rarely needed information
  - Create a click-out to this information
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Keep the user informed

- Two most important things to know
  - Where am I?
  - Where can I go next?
- Make sure each page is branded
- Indicate which section it belongs to
- Links to other pages should be clearly marked

We might not like it, but at least we know what is going on.
Allow for recognition

• Rather than recall
• Make objects, actions, and options visible
• Do not rely on the user “remembering” what to do
  – Instructions should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate

Help users recover from errors

• Provide ways to recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors
• Error messages should be
  – Expressed in plain language (no codes)
  – Precisely indicate the problem, and
  – Constructively suggest a solution
• Provide an "emergency exit" for functions chosen by mistake
What?

Error prevention

- Careful design to avoid errors is better than good error message design.
- Ways to prevent input errors:
  - Full-featured, GUI-style widgets
  - JavaScripts to prevent some errors before users submit
    - But you still have to double-check after submission.
Help and documentation

- Best systems require no documentation
- Help should be integrated
- Tips for help and documentation
  - Should be easy to search
  - Focused on the user's task
  - List concrete steps to be carried out
  - Keep it brief and to the point!

Finally...

- Don't lie to the user!
  - Don't refer to missing information
  - Remove bad links on a regular basis
  - Correct links that are misleading
Thank you!

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