UI design principles
Lecture 19
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Goals and non-goals

• **Goals:**
  
  - efficient, easy, enjoyable completion of task

• **Non-goals:**
  
  - Exposing functionality with minimal code
  
  - Providing any many features as possible
  
  - Giving users what they think they want
    
    “If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse.”
Principle 1:
Know your user
Design to your user

• Frequent or occasional?
• Novice or knowledgeable?
• Training?
• Don’t design for yourself—you are not the user
Novice users

- Gentle learning curve: **discoverability**
  - Way for user to find all functionality
- Protection from dangerous actions
- Clarity: simple displays, consistency with other applications and real world
  - E.g., using icons as metaphors
Discoverability

Know your user.
No loaded guns
Frequent/power users

- Optimize for *efficient interaction*
- Powerful actions, short interaction sequences (e.g., hotkeys)
- Rapid response times
- Rich controls, shortcuts for common actions
- Exploit muscle memory
- Information-rich displays
- Customization and macros

Know your user.
Expert UI

Know your user.
Principle 2:
UI is a dialogue
UI: good conversation partner?

• Ratify actions quickly

• Be responsive (e.g., highlighting affordances)

• Show progress on longer actions
Conversations

• Identify use cases to figure out what users will have to do.

• Eliminate unnecessary user actions (e.g., needless confirmation dialogs)

• Aim for short interactions with clear progress: intermediate goal satisfaction

• User testing to find your blind spots (as developer).

• May need testing scripts for human testers to achieve coverage.
Interaction paradigms

- Direct manipulation: the UI is the underlying data/behavior model
  - User view: Model = View = Controller
  - Implementation: Model ≠ View ≠ Controller
- I/O: UI generates output when input provided (UI ≠ model)
  - e.g., menus, submitted forms, command shells

Know your user. UI is a dialogue.
Direct manipulation vs. I/O

Know your user. UI is a dialogue.
Interaction time scales

• 1/60s: biologically imperceptible: faster than neurons
• 1/30s: fast enough for continuous-feedback tasks (e.g., mouse tracking)
• 1/10s: imperceptible delay for discrete actions, e.g. button clicks.
• 1/2s: fast but noticeable (ok for command-response interaction)
• 1/2s–5s: increasingly annoying but user stays focused
• 5s–10s: User starts to lose attention.
• 10s–1 min: User becomes distracted and productivity declines. App needs to support parallel activities.
• >1 min: Significant loss of productivity. User leaves for coffee.

Know your user. UI is a dialogue.
• Modes: states of UI that restrict interactions.
  • Good: restricted context-sensitive vocabulary simplifies user interaction
  • Bad: can be confusing and can trap users
• Moral: use judiciously
When modes go bad: cascading dialogs

Know your user. UI is a dialogue.
xfig: the context-sensitive mouse

Know your user. UI is a dialogue.
Principle 3: Aid Memory

“The advantage of a bad memory is that one enjoys several times the same good things for the first time.”

— Friedrich Nietzsche
Rule of 7

• Humans can hold at most 7 things in their head at once

⇒ Avoid long menus, arrays of buttons

Know your user. UI is a dialogue. Aid memory.
Spatial memory

• Human spatial memory is amazingly good (e.g., memory palaces).
  ⇒ Good UIs exploit it

• Each window or dialogue or mode is a “place” for interaction
  • make it a nice place to be
  • avoid unnecessary places/modes
  • make navigation easy, obvious

• Big-picture views strengthen spatial sense

Know your user. UI is a dialogue. Aid memory.
Muscle memory

• Frequent users don’t need to look – UI is programmed into their muscles

⇒ action needs to activate functionality should be consistent

• e.g., gray out menu items instead of removing them
Context-sensitive help

• Help should be about what user is doing now.

⇒ task-focused rather than feature-focused (unlike most modern apps!)

⇒ modes provide context
Principle 4: Visual design matters
Avoid visual clutter

Know your user. UI is a dialogue. Aid memory. Visual design matters.
Avoid visual clutter

- Use space shading, color instead of lines to organize
- Use low-contrast separators
- Maximize information/ink ratio
Good use of color and contrast?
Use high contrast, avoid chromatic aberration

This text is probably not very pleasant to read. And it gets harder if the font size is small.

Know your user. UI is a dialogue. Aid memory. Visual design matters.
Visual consistency

• For novice users, be consistent with existing apps and real world

• For expert users, be internally consistent
  • e.g., buttons that navigate vs. buttons that change state vs. buttons that expose new information
  • write style guide for developers

Know your user. UI is a dialogue. Aid memory. Visual design matters.
Visual features

• Shape (up to 15)
• Color (up to 24)
• Size, length, thickness: up to 6.
• Orientation: up to 24
• Texture
• Differing color perception!

⇒ can only complement other sources of information.

Know your user. UI is a dialogue. Aid memory. Visual design matters.
UI design principles

• Know your user.

• UI is a dialogue.

• Aid memory.

• Visual design matters.