


THE PSYCHOLOGY OF **UX / UI**

A stylized illustration of a tablet with a black bezel, set against a dark blue background. The tablet screen is filled with a purple-to-blue gradient and displays the book's title in white and yellow text.

125 TACTICS
TO OPTIMIZE YOUR
SITE'S USABILITY

NICK KOLENDA

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF USER EXPERIENCE

Nick Kolenda

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INTRO

This PDF summarizes the 125+ usability tactics in this article:
www.nickkolenda.com/user-experience

However, you should **read the original article first**. For two reasons:

REASON 1: THE ORIGINAL HAS THE FRAMEWORK

The original article organizes tactics by strategy. And that framework will give you a better grasp of UX/UI principles. Plus, it includes a few explanations and clarifying notes throughout.

REASON 2: THIS PDF IS LESS USABLE

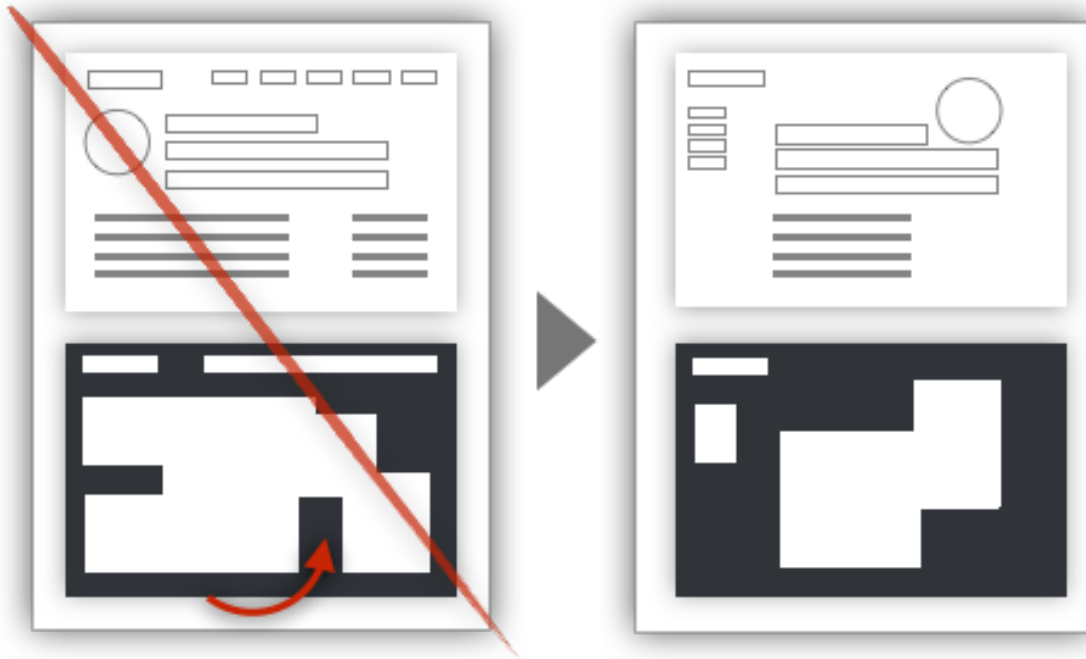
It irks me to admit it...but this PDF could be more usable. I lack the technical skills to structure an image-intensive PDF. So use this PDF as a reminder of the importance of UX/UI skills (and read the web version for a cleaner structure).

HOWEVER, this PDF will be easier to reference than the original article. This PDF organizes the tactics by design elements (e.g., forms, buttons, etc.). So whenever you design those elements in your interface, simply reference the section(s) in this PDF.

LAYOUT & DESIGN

TACTIC:

Avoid Trapping Negative Space in the Composition



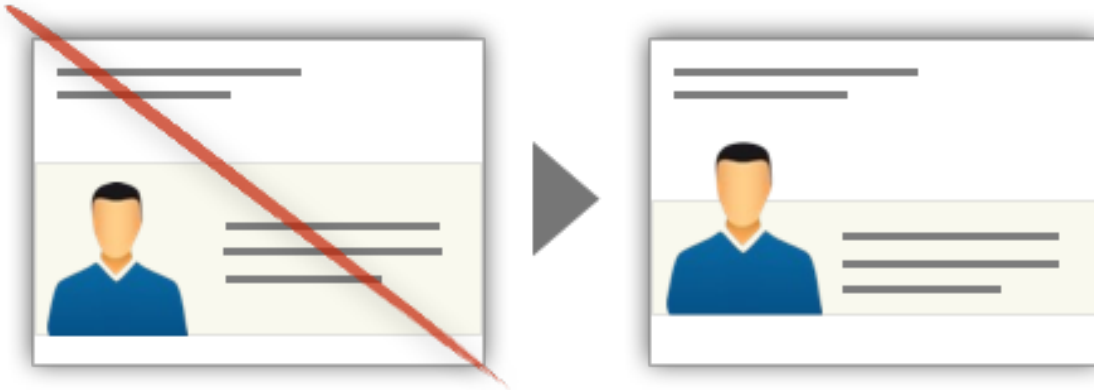
TACTIC:

Use a One Column Layout



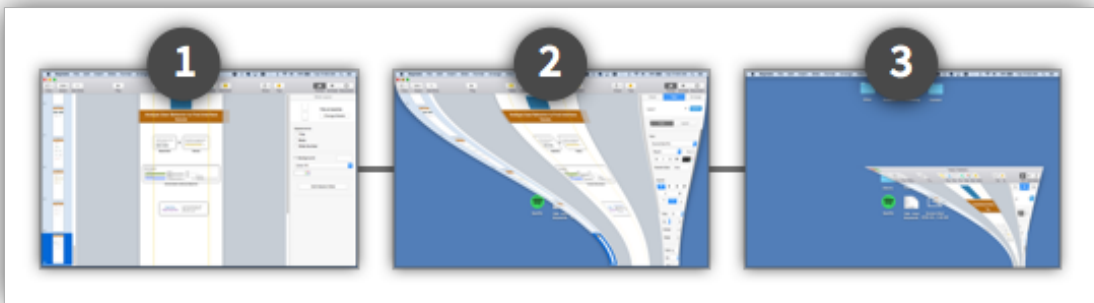
TACTIC:

Overlap a Design Element to Emphasize Continuity



TACTIC:

Visibly Animate Transitions in the Interface



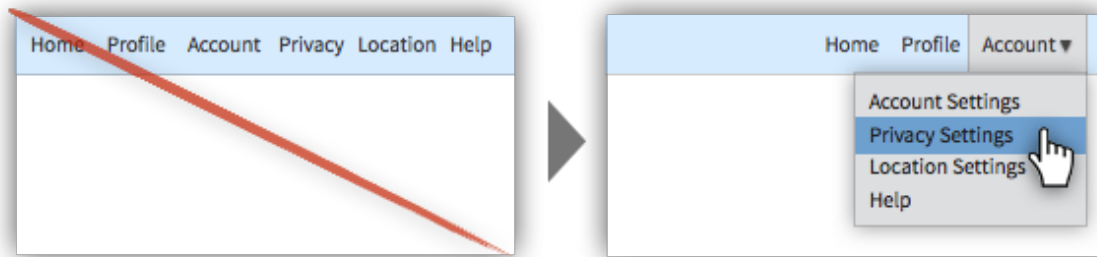
TACTIC:

Remove Unnecessary Borders From Design Elements



TACTIC:

Hide Infrequent But Necessary Settings, Features, and Information



TACTIC:

Extend Elements Through the Fold



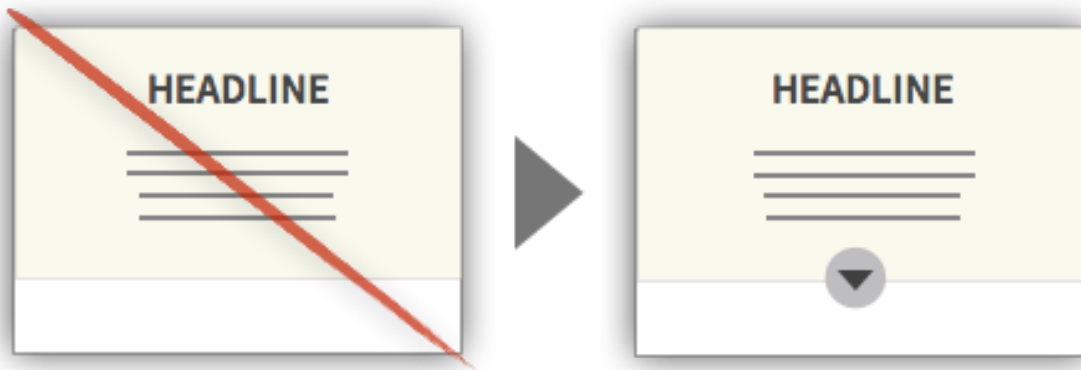
TACTIC:

Add a Shadow to Indicate Depth



TACTIC:

Indicate More Content With Words or Graphics



TACTIC:

Include Important Data on Product Listing Pages



TACTIC:

Provide Useful Information on Hover



TACTIC:

Expose Frequently Used Functions



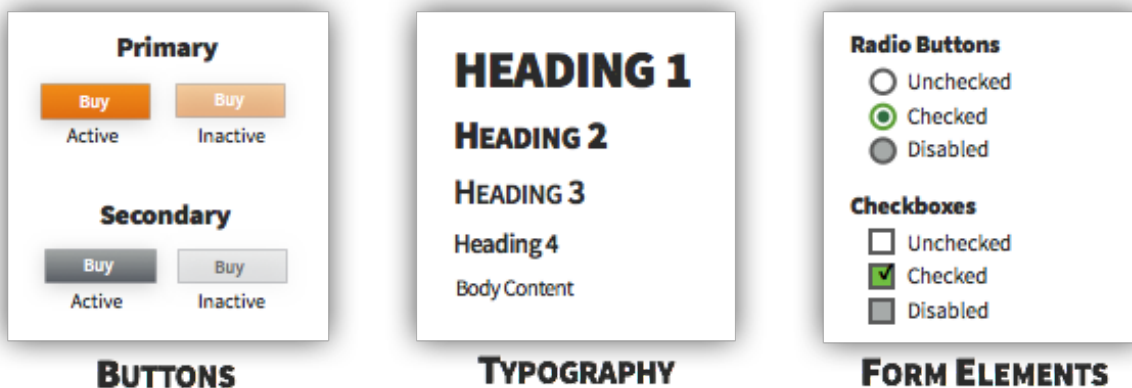
TACTIC:

Display Primary Data or Statuses in a Dashboard



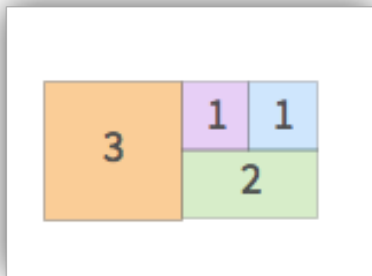
TACTIC:

Create a Front-End Style Guide

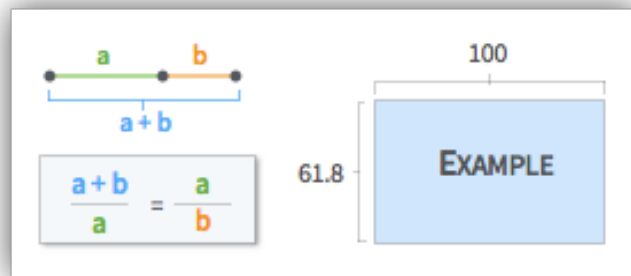


TACTIC:

Construct Designs Using Mathematical Principles



FIBONACCI SQUARES



GOLDEN RATIO

TACTIC:

Add Tooltips to Coach Novice Users Without Disrupting Expert Users



TACTIC:

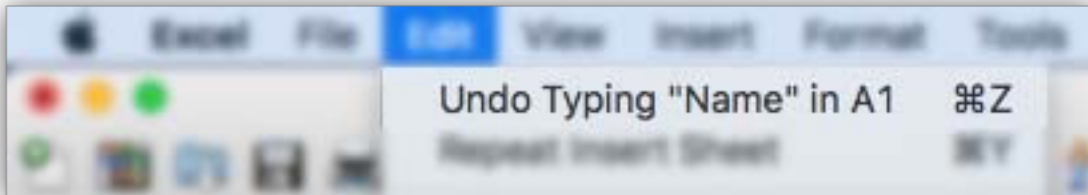
Use One-Window Drilldowns on Small Devices



NAVIGATION & MENUS

TACTIC:

Use Smart Menu Items to Clarify Actions



TACTIC:

Highlight the Section Within the Navigation Menu



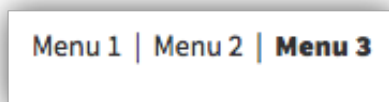
POINTER



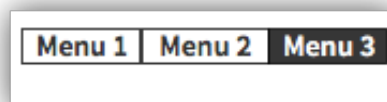
UNDERLINE



COLOR



WEIGHT



BACKGROUND

TACTIC:

Provide Breadcrumbs or Sequence Maps in Complex Interfaces

Home » Sub Page » Tertiary Page » Current Location

BREADCRUMBS



SEQUENCE MAPS

TACTIC:

Create Tight Categories Within Navigation Menus



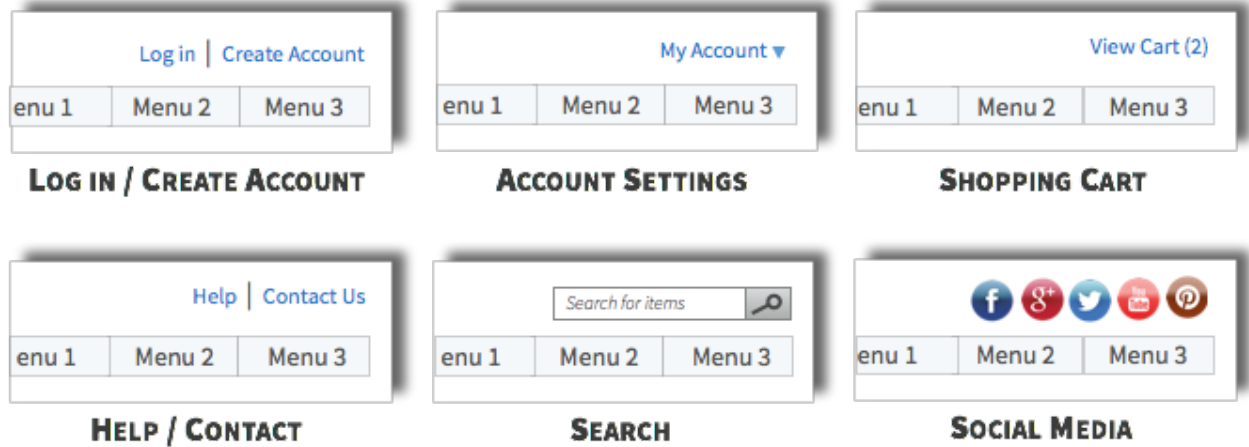
TACTIC:

Use Conventional Navigation Menus



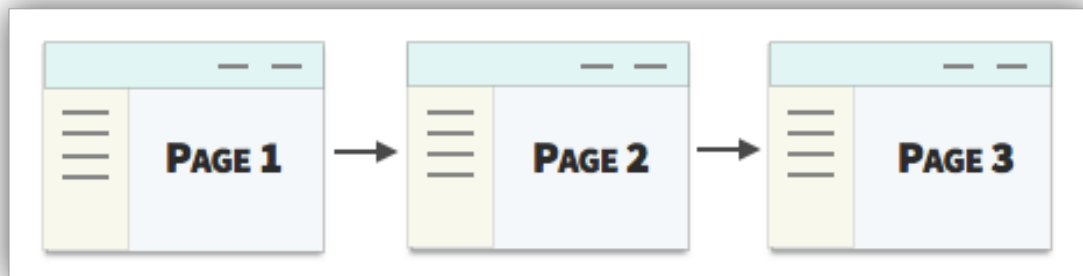
TACTIC:

Put Utilities in the Top Right Corner



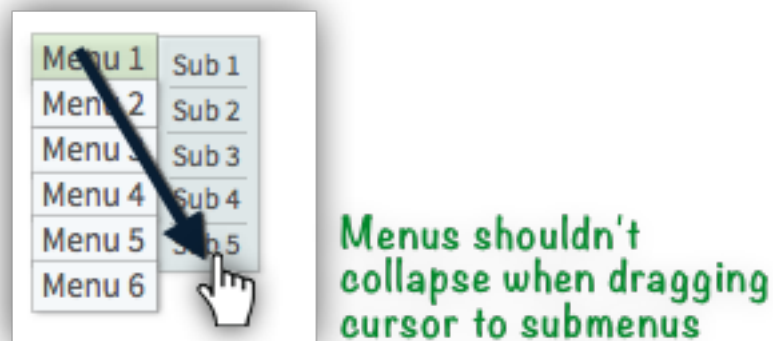
TACTIC:

Keep Navigation Menus in the Same Position



TACTIC:

Add a Slight Delay to Hover Pop Ups and Drop Down Menus



TACTIC:

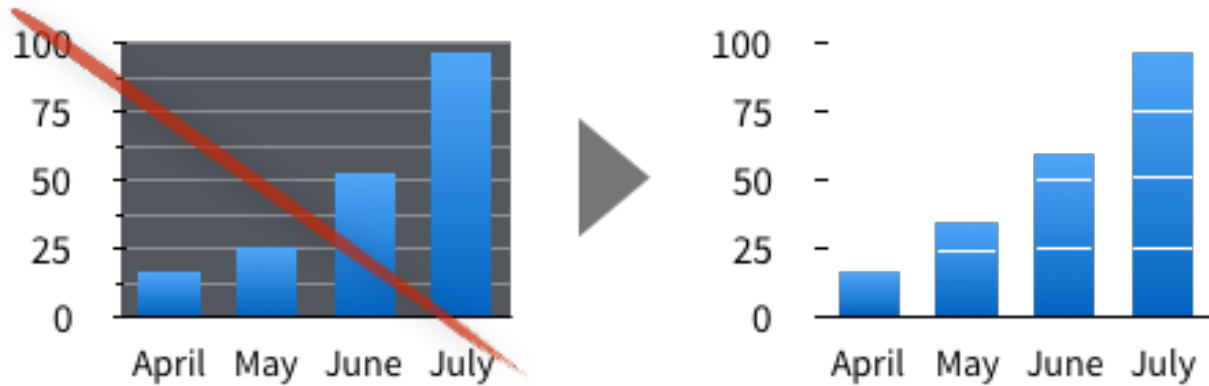
Hyperlink the Entire Menu Option Container



IMAGES & GRAPHICS

TACTIC:

Maximize Data-Ink Ratios in All Imagery



TACTIC:

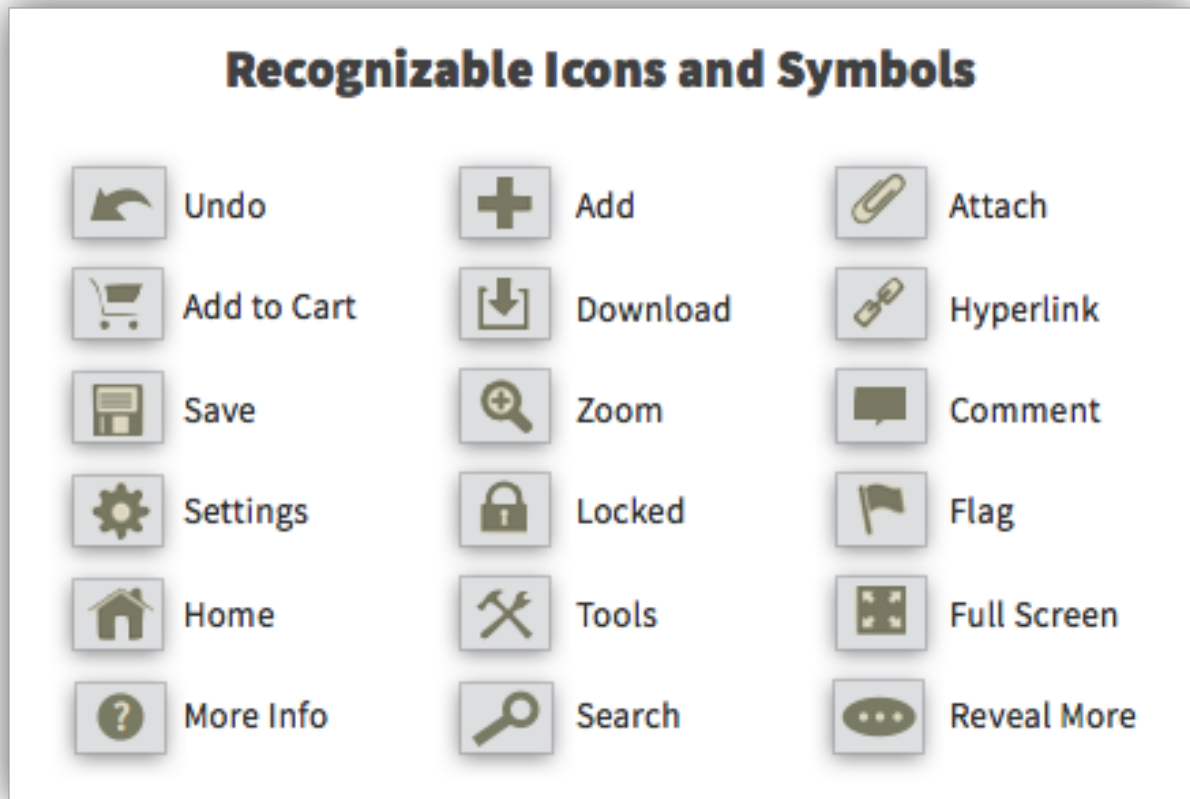
Hyperlink Complementary Icons and Images



Clicking this image brings visitors to their order history

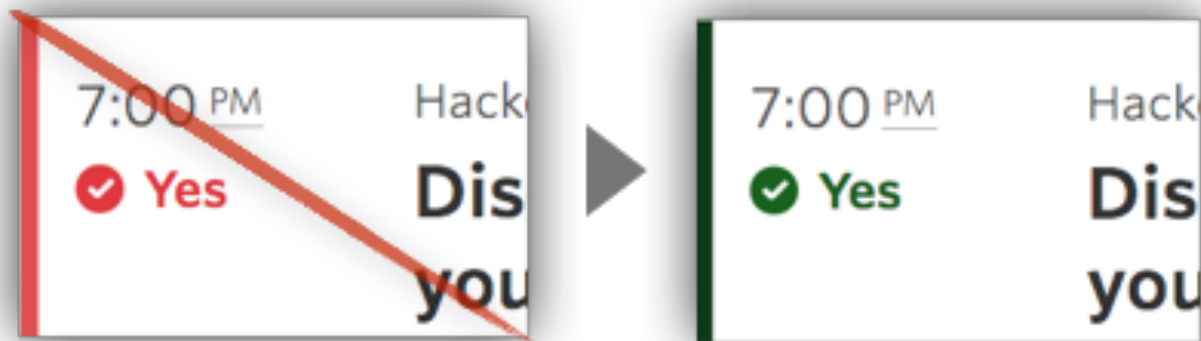
TACTIC:

Use Icons and Symbols to Convey the Meaning of an Interaction



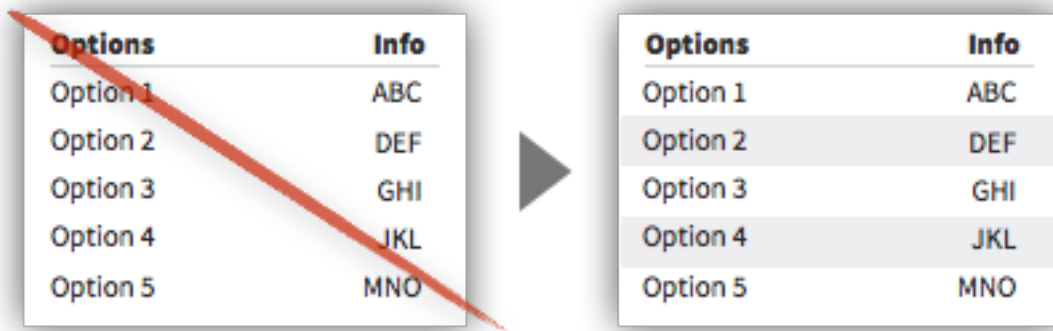
TACTIC:

Choose Colors That Are Semantically Congruent



TACTIC:

Add Row Stripes to Your Tables



Options	Info
Option 1	ABC
Option 2	DEF
Option 3	GHI
Option 4	JKL
Option 5	MNO

Options	Info
Option 1	ABC
Option 2	DEF
Option 3	GHI
Option 4	JKL
Option 5	MNO

TEXT & HEADLINES

TACTIC:

Add Visual Contrast to Page Headlines



WEIGHT



SIZE



COLOR



ALIGNMENT



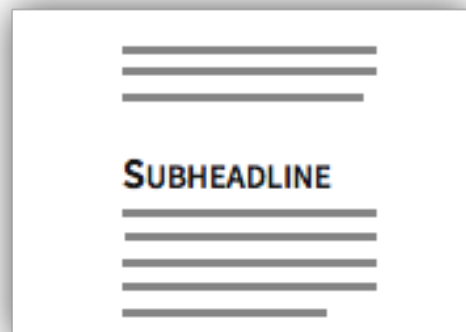
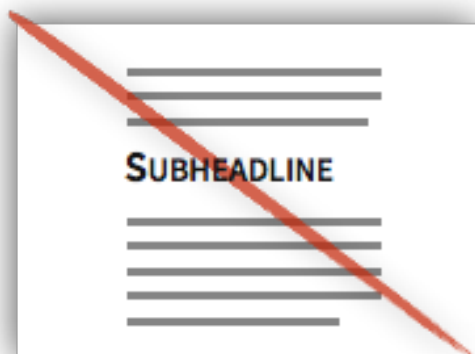
ISOLATION



BACKGROUND

TACTIC:

Position Headlines Closer to Respective Sections



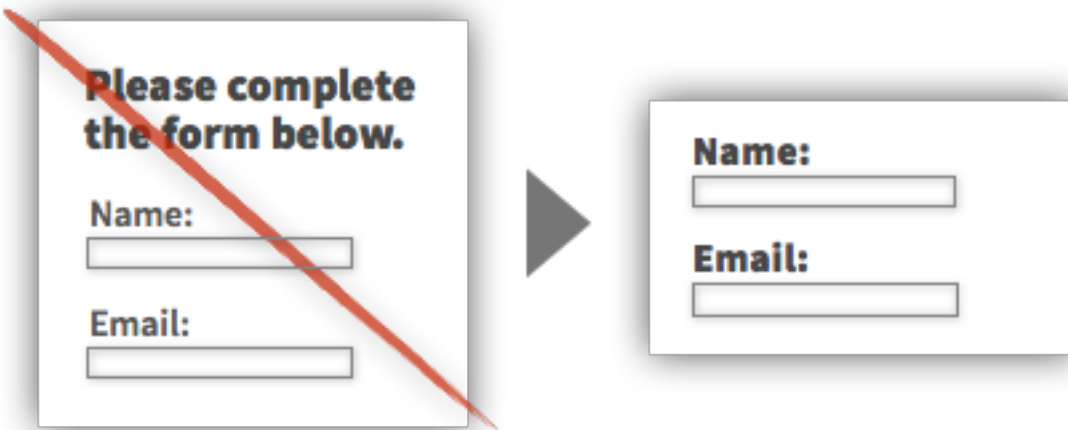
TACTIC:

Constrain Headlines to Respective Sections



TACTIC:

Remove Redundant or Self-Explanatory Instructions



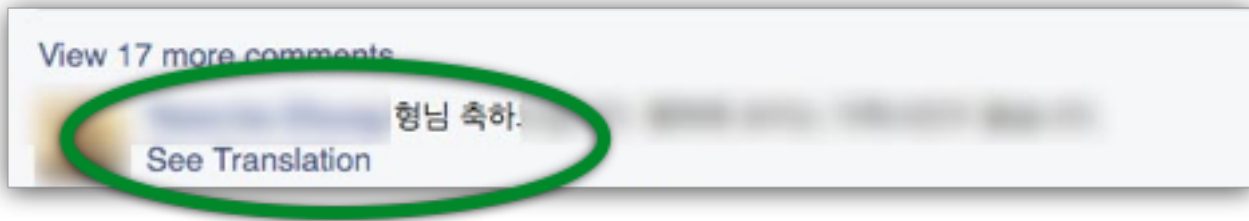
TACTIC:

Speak the Language of the User, Not the System



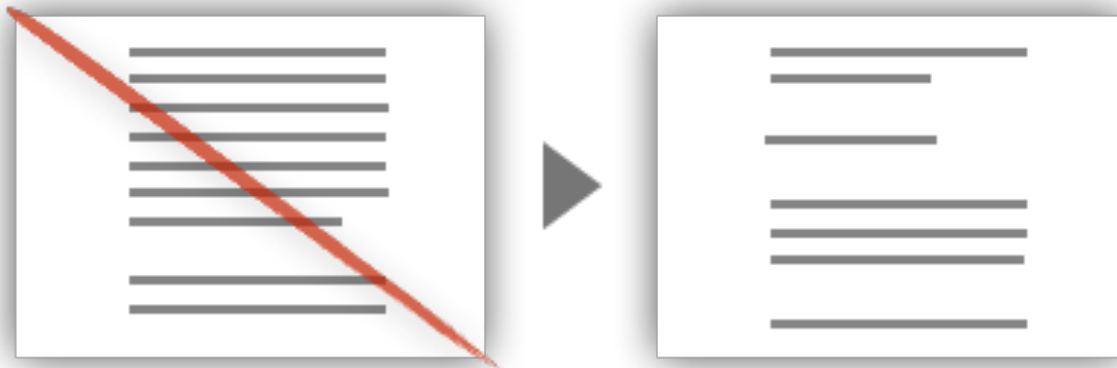
TACTIC:

Offer a Translate Button When Foreign Languages Appear



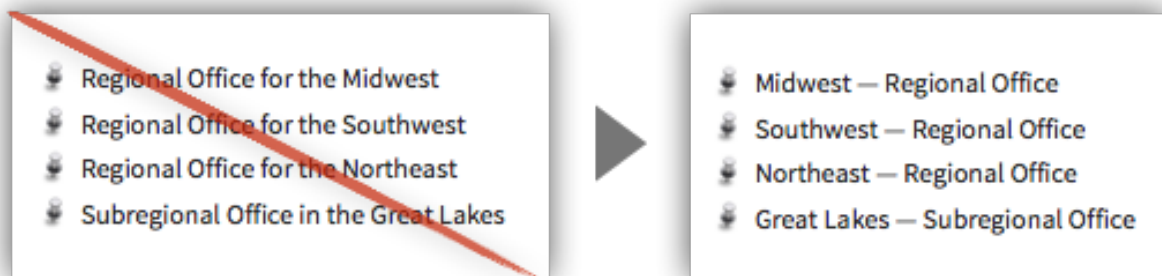
TACTIC:

Keep Paragraphs Short and Highlight Key Terms



TACTIC:

Position Important Information at Beginning of List Items



TACTIC:

Write Standalone Subheadlines



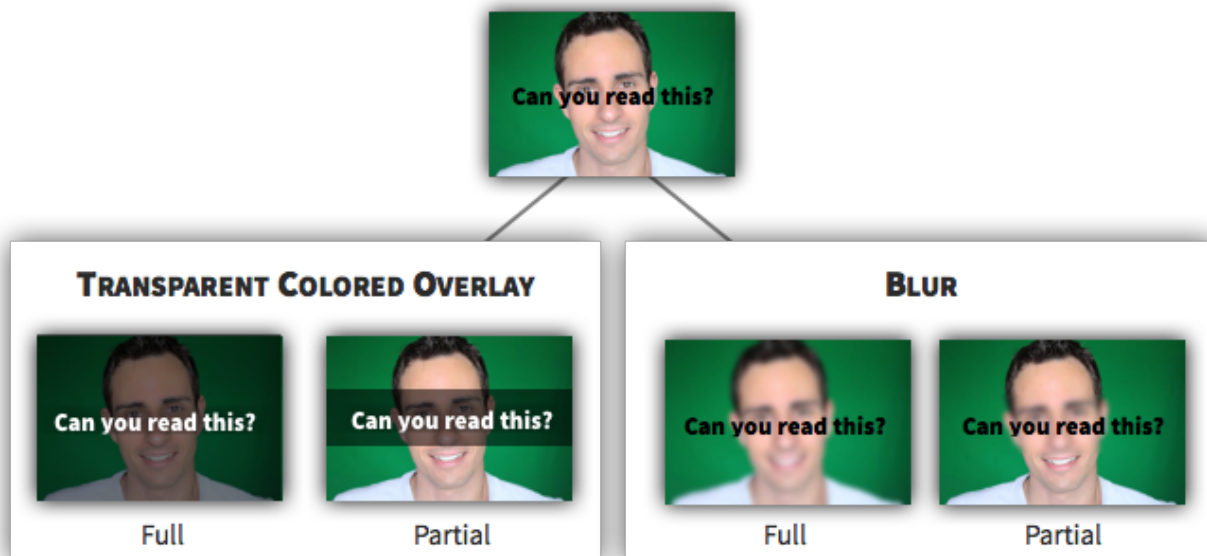
TACTIC:

Break Up Text With Visual Variety



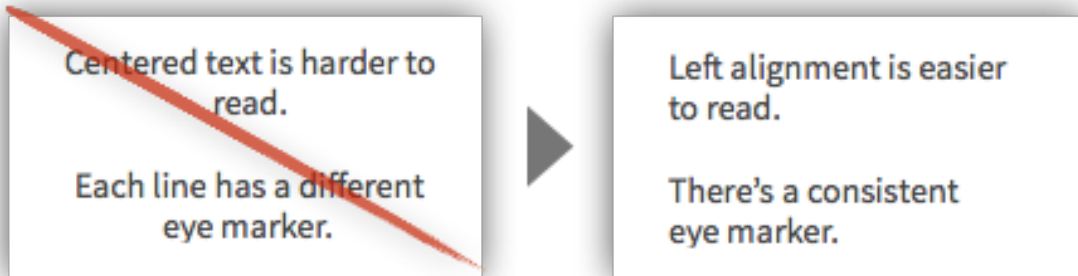
TACTIC:

Create Strong Contrast Between the Text and Background



TACTIC:

Left Align the Majority of Body Text



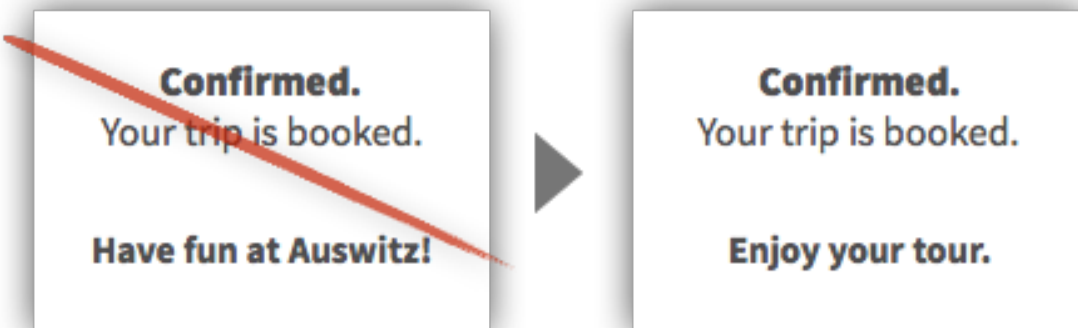
TACTIC:

Choose Contrasting Fonts



TACTIC:

Resolve Unfavorable Outcomes in Automatically Generated Messages



FORMS & INPUT ELEMENTS

TACTIC:

Filter or Jump to Items That Users Are Searching



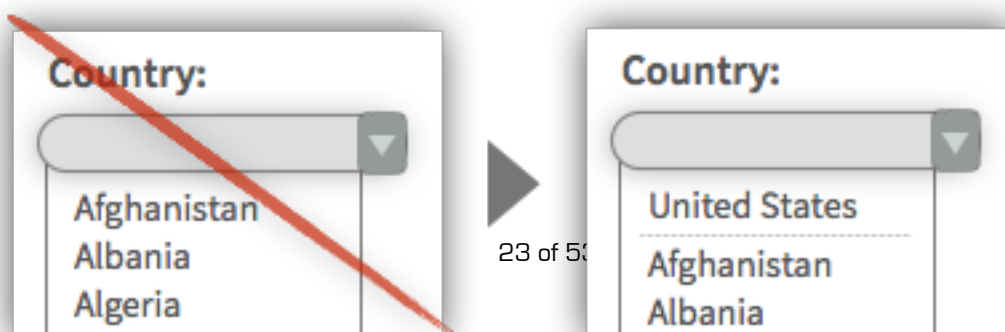
TACTIC:

Create Smart Defaults Based on Frequently Chosen Input

TACTIC:



Position Common Answers At the Top of Drop Down Lists



TACTIC:

Let Users Log In Via Username or Email

The diagram illustrates a change in login form design. On the left, a form with two fields, 'Username:' and 'Password:', is crossed out with a large red diagonal line. An arrow points to the right, where a new form is shown. This new form has two fields: 'Username or Email:' and 'Password:'.

TACTIC:

Give Real-Time Password Requirements and Feedback

The diagram shows a password field being enhanced with real-time feedback. On the left, a simple 'Password:' field with masked characters is crossed out with a red diagonal line. An arrow points to the right, where the same field is shown with a callout box titled 'MUST HAVE:'. The callout lists requirements with green checkmarks for 'one letter', 'one number', and 'not the username', and red X marks for 'one capital letter' and 'at least 8 characters'.

TACTIC:

Prepopulate Form Elements With Universal Parameters

The diagram shows three examples of form elements prepopulated with universal parameters. The first example, labeled 'WEBSITES', shows a text input field with 'http://' prepopulated. The second and third examples, labeled 'CURRENCY', show a text input field with '\$' and 'USD' prepopulated respectively.

TACTIC:

Indicate Required and Optional Form Elements

The diagram illustrates a design tactic for form elements. On the left, a form with three input fields labeled 'Email', 'Password', and 'Phone' is crossed out with a large red diagonal line. An arrow points to the right, where the same form is shown without the red line. In this version, the 'Email' and 'Password' labels are preceded by a red asterisk (*), indicating they are required fields. The 'Phone' label is followed by the word '(optional)' in italics, indicating it is an optional field.

TACTIC:

Show a Preview of the Output Based on the Current Input

The diagram illustrates a design tactic for showing a preview of the output based on the current input. On the left, a form titled 'Your Work' with several horizontal lines for text input and an orange 'Publish »' button is crossed out with a large red diagonal line. An arrow points to the right, where the same form is shown without the red line. In this version, the 'Publish »' button is orange, and a new light blue box titled 'What it will look like...' is added to the right of the form, showing a preview of the output based on the current input.

The diagram also shows a real-world example of this tactic in Google AdWords. On the left, a form with four input fields is shown: 'Headline' (with a question mark icon), 'Description line 1' (with a question mark icon), 'Description line 2' (with a question mark icon), and 'Display URL' (with a question mark icon). The inputs are: 'My Amazing Headline', 'My product is sahweeet.', 'You should try it.', and 'website.com/product'. On the right, an 'Ad preview:' box shows the resulting ad: 'My Amazing Headline' (in blue), 'website.com/product' (in green), 'My product is sahweeet.', and 'You should try it.'. A green arrow points from the 'Ad preview:' box to the 'Description line 1' input field.

AdWords gives a real-time preview of the user's input

TACTIC:

Provide a Curated List of Common Search Terms



TACTIC:

Keep Form Labels Visible At All Times



TACTIC:

Position Placeholder Text Outside the Form Element



TACTIC:

Align Form Labels Directly Adjacent to Elements

The diagram illustrates a design tactic for form alignment. On the left, a form with labels 'Name:', 'Email:', 'Business Name:', 'State:', and 'Zip / Postal Code:' is shown with a large red 'X' over it, indicating it is incorrect. In this incorrect version, the labels are left-aligned and not directly adjacent to the input fields. An arrow points to the right, where the same form is shown correctly. In the correct version, each label is right-aligned and placed directly adjacent to its corresponding input field, creating a clean, aligned layout.

TACTIC:

Use Form Elements That Accept Various Formats of Input

The diagram illustrates a design tactic for form elements. On the left, a form with the label 'Date:' and an input field containing '5/3/2016' is shown with a large red 'X' over it. Below the input field, the text 'X Wrong format' is displayed in red, indicating that the form is not accepting this input format. An arrow points to the right, where the same form is shown correctly. In this correct version, the input field contains '5/3/2016' and the text '✓ You're good' is displayed in green below it, indicating that the form is accepting this input format.

TACTIC:

Display Results That Solve the Searcher's Need

The diagram illustrates a design tactic for search results. It shows three search result cards side-by-side, each with a search bar and a magnifying glass icon. The first card, labeled 'GENERIC SEARCHES', has a search bar with 'books' and shows 'Here are some popular categories of books' with three placeholder boxes. The second card, labeled 'CATEGORICAL SEARCHES', has a search bar with 'dan brown' and shows 'Here are some popular books by Dan Brown' with three placeholder boxes. The third card, labeled 'SPECIFIC SEARCHES', has a search bar with 'da vinci code' and shows two results: 'Da Vinci Code (Book)' and 'Da Vinci Code (Movie)', each with a placeholder box. The labels 'GENERIC SEARCHES', 'CATEGORICAL SEARCHES', and 'SPECIFIC SEARCHES' are centered below their respective cards.

TACTIC:

Use Search Fields That Handle Typos, Synonyms, and Variants

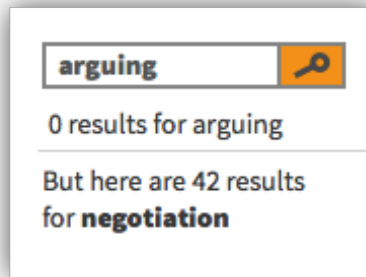


negtiation 🔍

0 results for negtiation

But here are 42 results for **negotiation**

TYPOS



arguing 🔍

0 results for arguing

But here are 42 results for **negotiation**

SYNONYMS



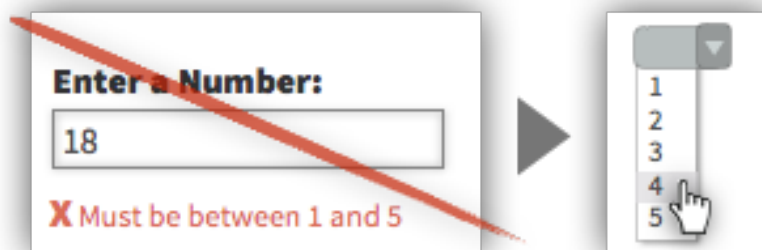
negotiating 🔍

Here are 42 results for **negotiation**

VARIANTS

TACTIC:

Only Offer Inputs That Are Acceptable

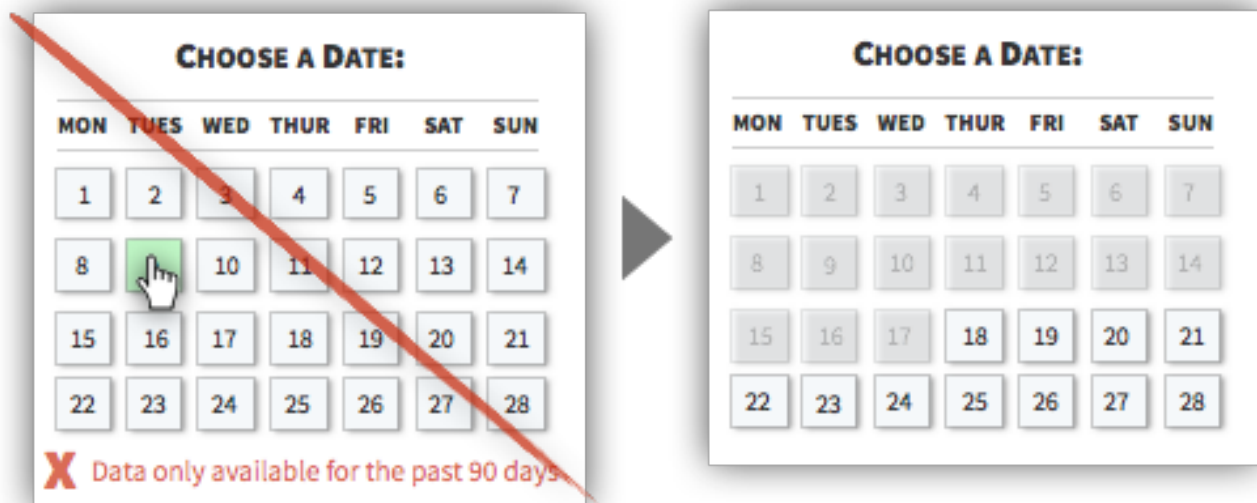


Enter a Number:

18

X Must be between 1 and 5

1
2
3
4
5



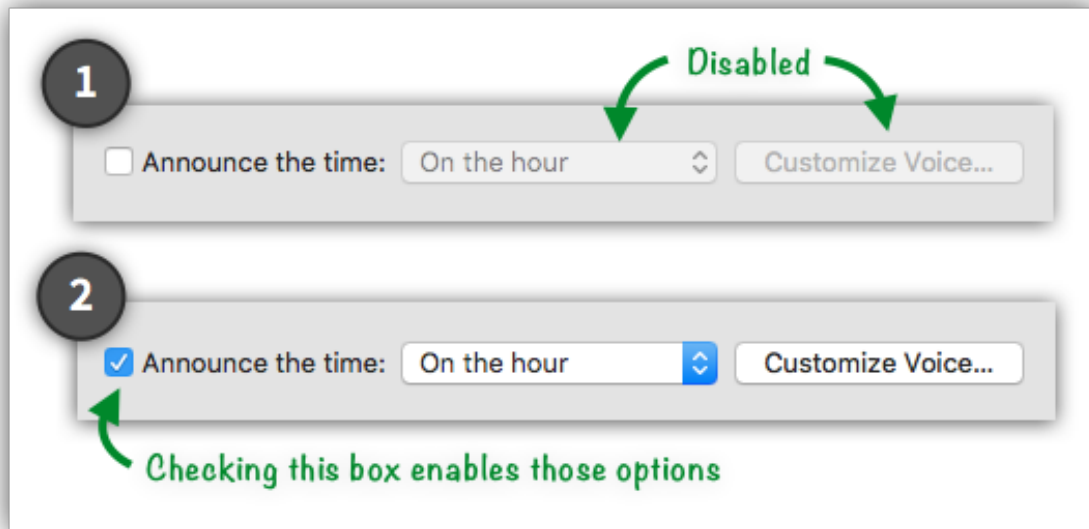
CHOOSE A DATE:

MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

X Data only available for the past 90 days

TACTIC:

Use Responsive Enabling or Disclosure in Form Elements



TACTIC:

Structure Text Fields to Match the Required Input



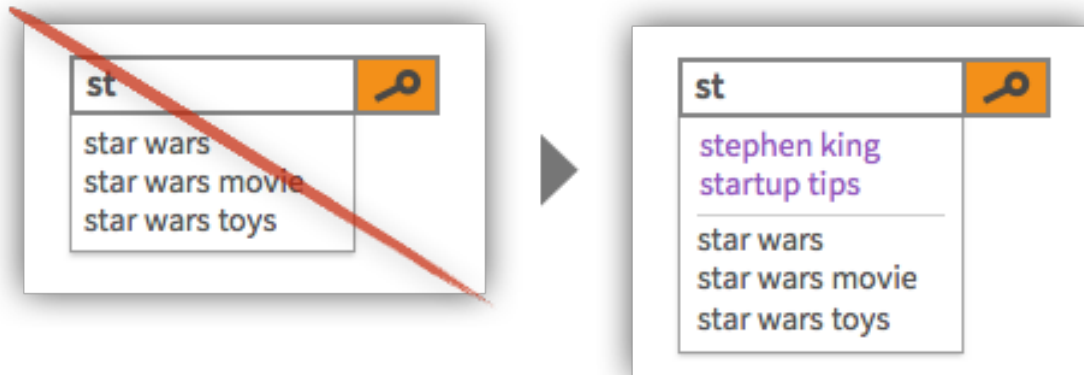
TACTIC:

Save Data That Users Enter



TACTIC:

Display the User's Recent Searches



LINKS & BUTTONS

TACTIC:

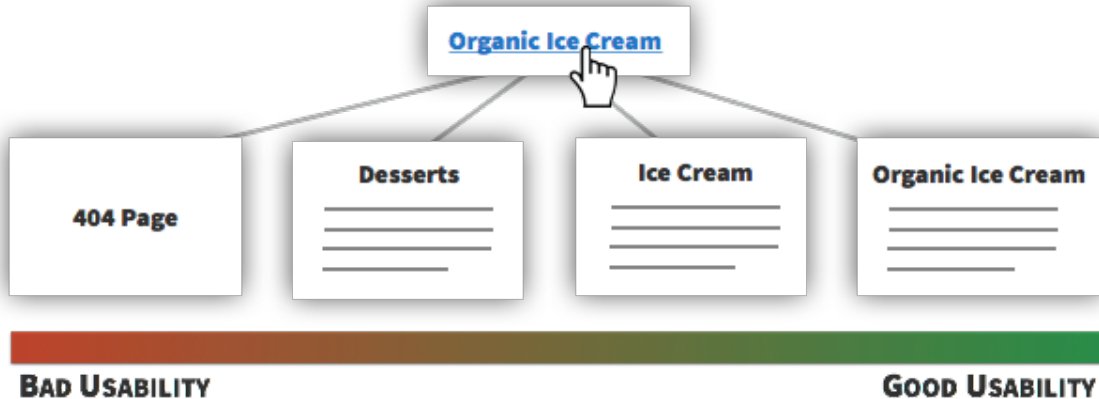
Use Descriptive Button Labels



TACTIC:

Maintain Congruency Between Links and Target Pages

TACTIC:

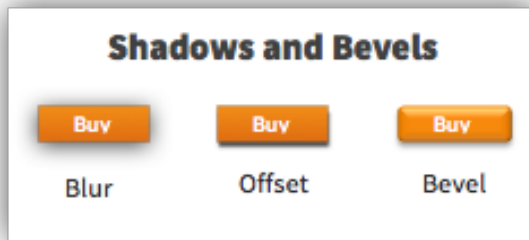


Indicate Which Items the Cursor is Hovering Over



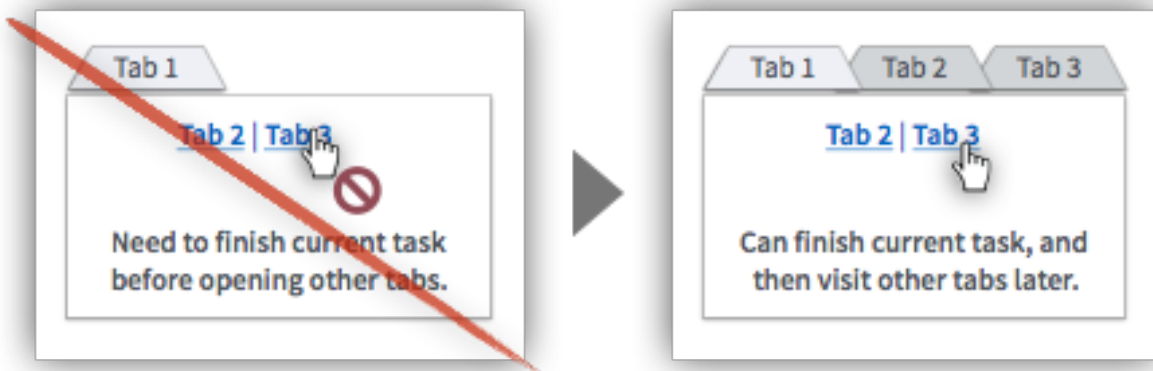
TACTIC:

Design Buttons Using 3D Characteristics



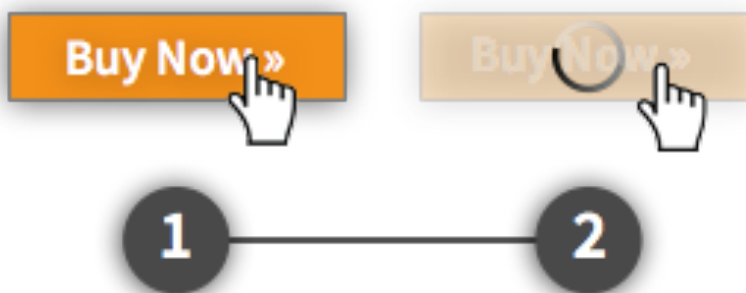
TACTIC:

Let Users Open Pages in New Tabs



TACTIC:

Remove, Disable, or Replace Buttons When Users Click Them



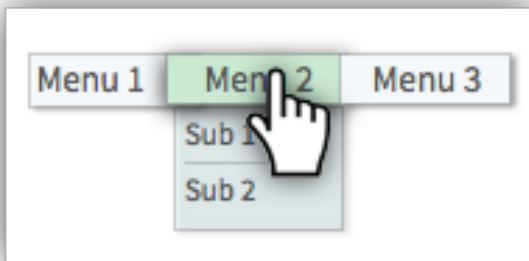
TACTIC:

Add a Transparent Border to Small Buttons



TACTIC:

Hyperlink Primary Menus, List Items, and Complementary Icons



MENUS

Options	Info
Option 1	ABC
Option 2	DEF
Option 3	GHI
Option 4	JKL

ITEMS

Clicking this image brings visitors to their order history



ICONS

TACTIC:

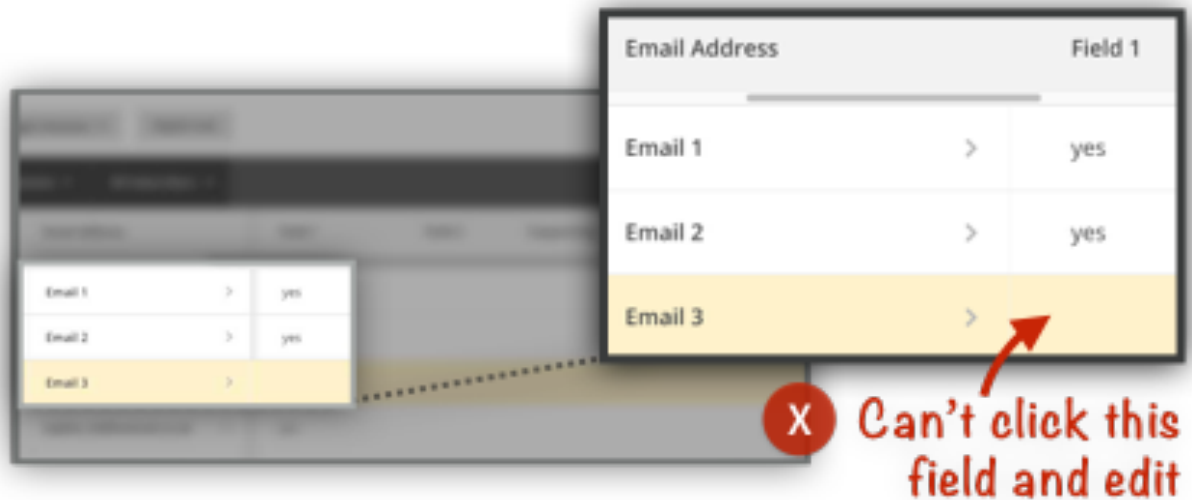
Use Different Colors for Visited Links



TABLES & DATA

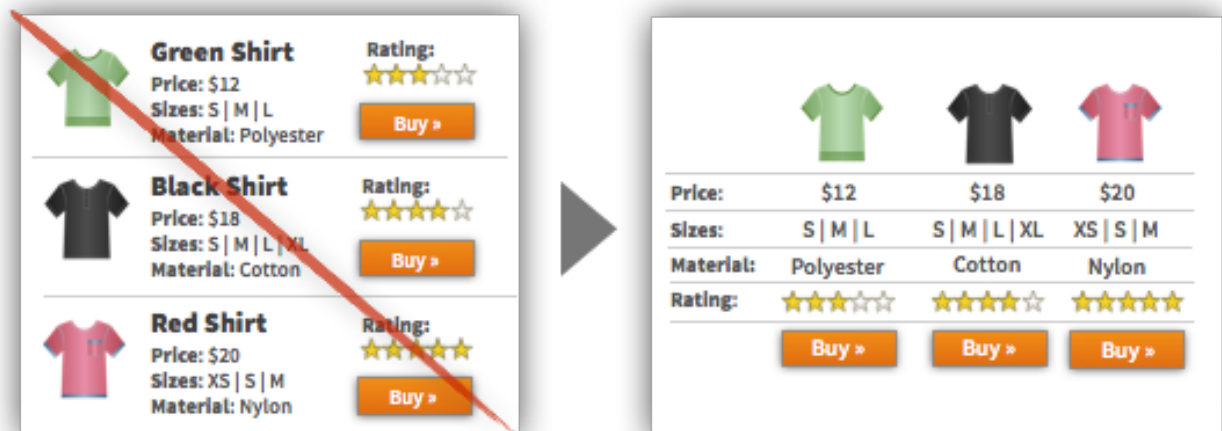
TACTIC:

Let Users Directly Edit Data



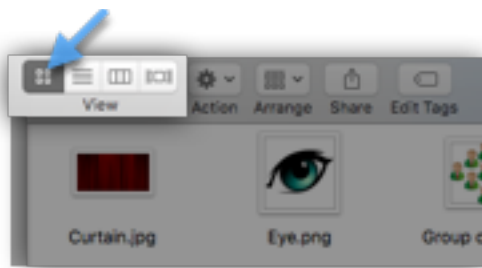
TACTIC:

Merge Congruent Data to Help Users Compare Items

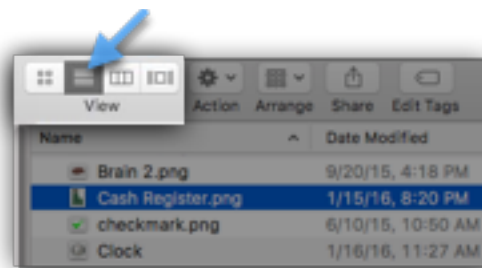


TACTIC:

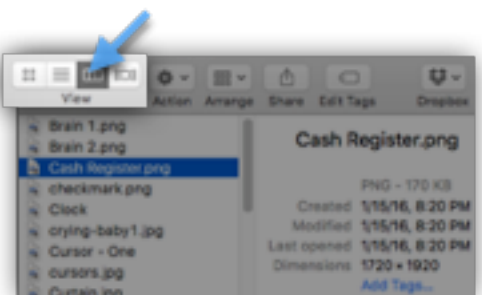
Let Users Control the Appearance of Data



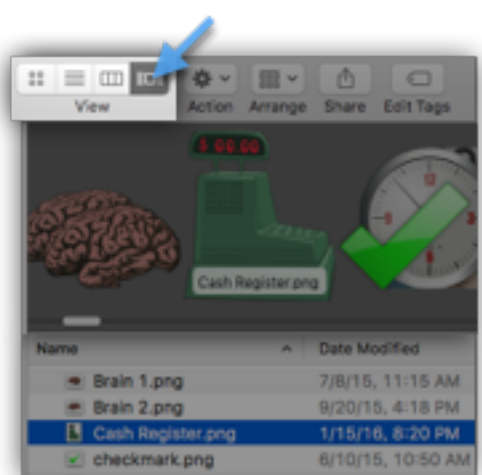
ICONS



LIST / DETAILS



COLUMNS



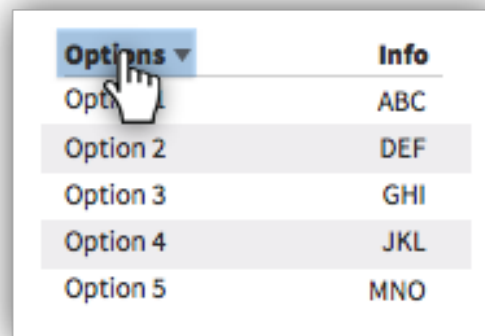
FLOW

TACTIC:

Let Users Control the Order of Data



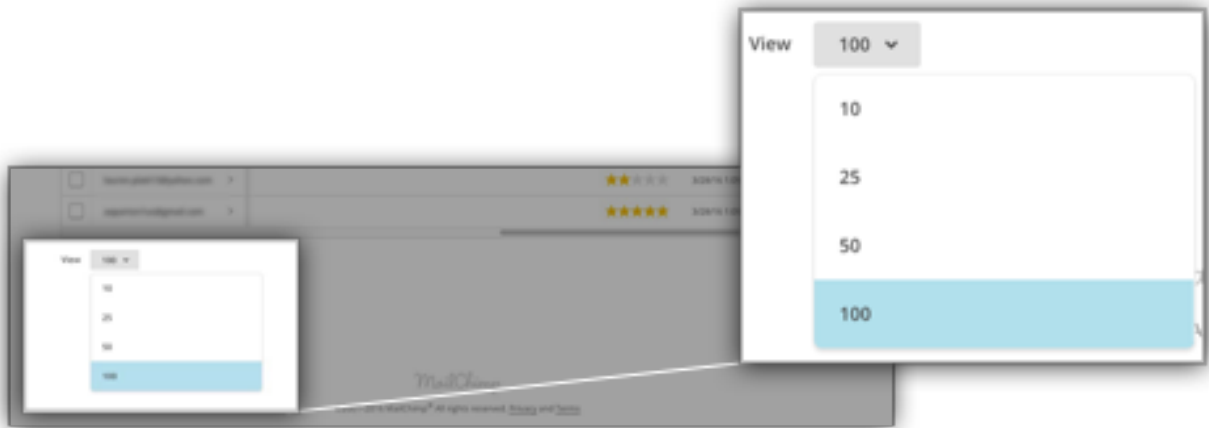
DROP DOWNS / FILTERS



COLUMN HEADERS

TACTIC:

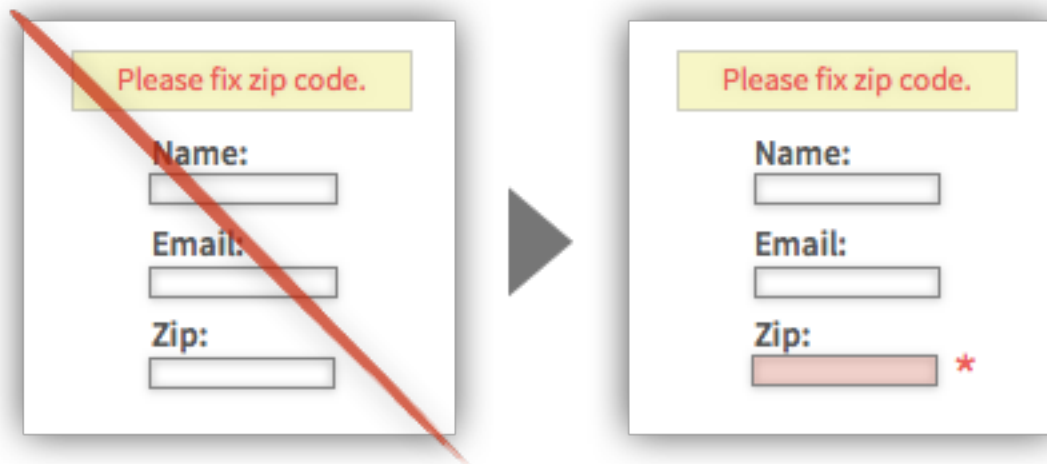
Let Users Control the Quantity of Data



ERRORS, ALERTS, & LOADING

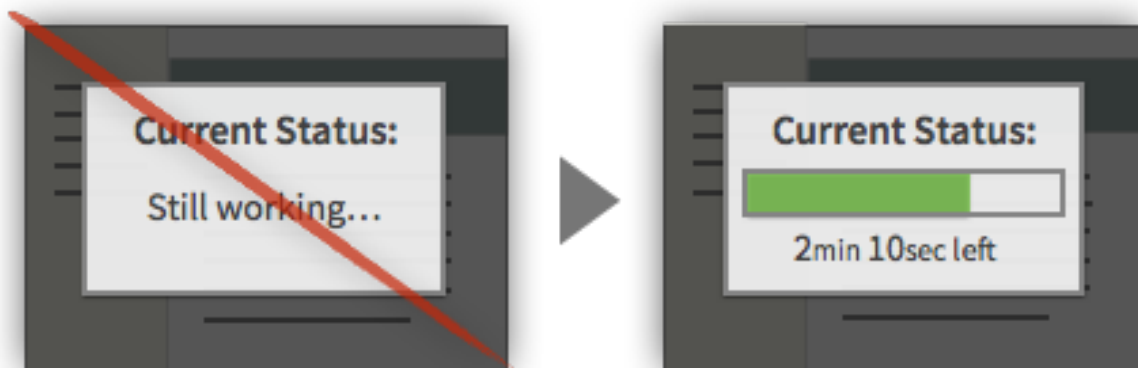
TACTIC:

Differentiate Elements That Triggered an Error



TACTIC:

Display Current Progress and Time Remaining on Machine-Driven Tasks



TACTIC:

Describe the Input That You Require From Users



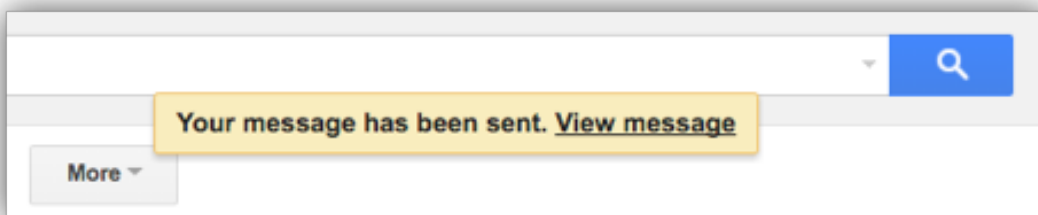
TACTIC:

Start Progress Bars Above 0%



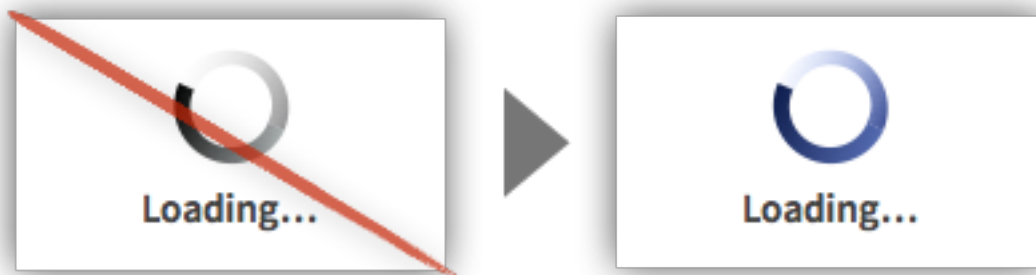
TACTIC:

Display Success Messages After Important Interactions



TACTIC:

Use Cool Colors in Loading Animations to Decrease Arousal



TACTIC:

Keep Users Engaged During Lengthy Waiting Periods



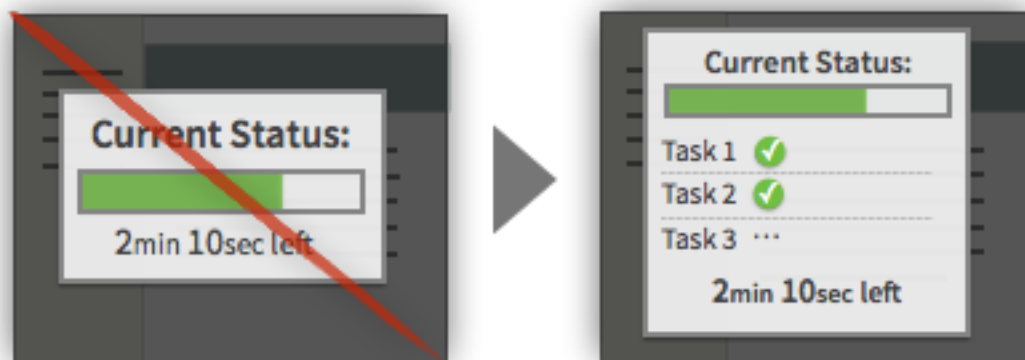
TACTIC:

Prevent Users From Uploading Files That Are Incompatible



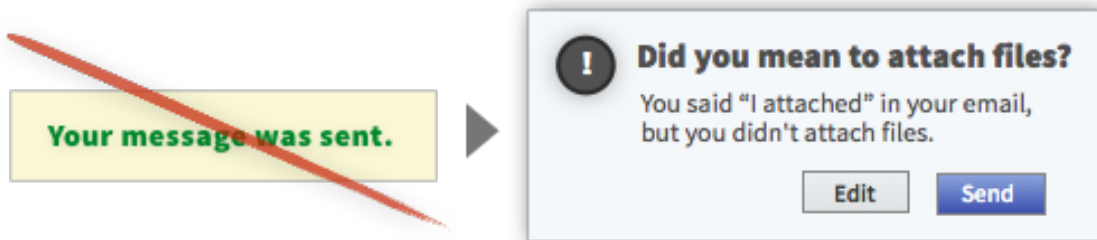
TACTIC:

Display a Running Tally of Tasks Occurring



TACTIC:

Search for Wording That Contradicts User Intent



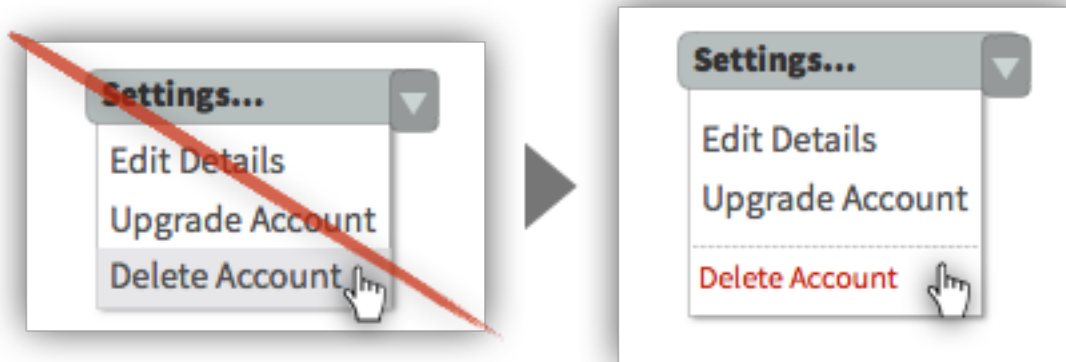
TACTIC:

Remind Users if They've Already Purchased an Item



TACTIC:

Separate Powerful Functions by Space or Color



TACTIC:

Add Constraints to Significant Irreversible Changes



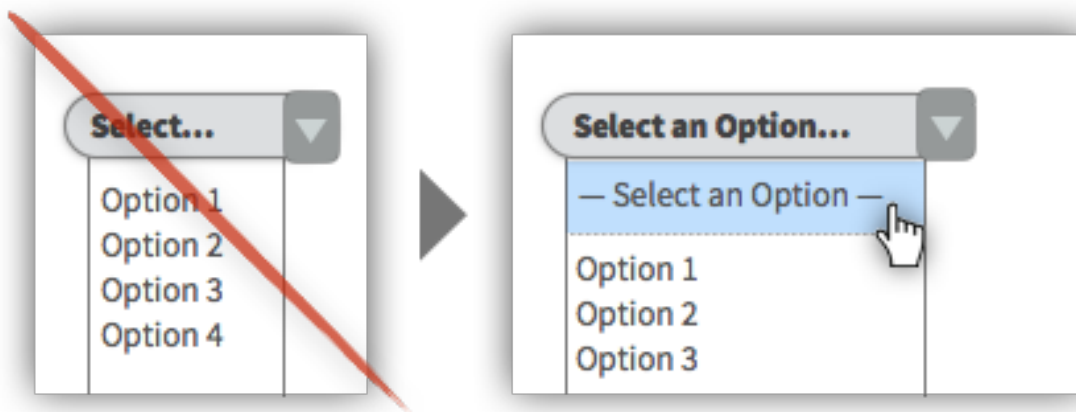
TACTIC:

Use Undos Rather Than Confirmations



TACTIC:

Offer an Escape Hatch on All Pages and Functions



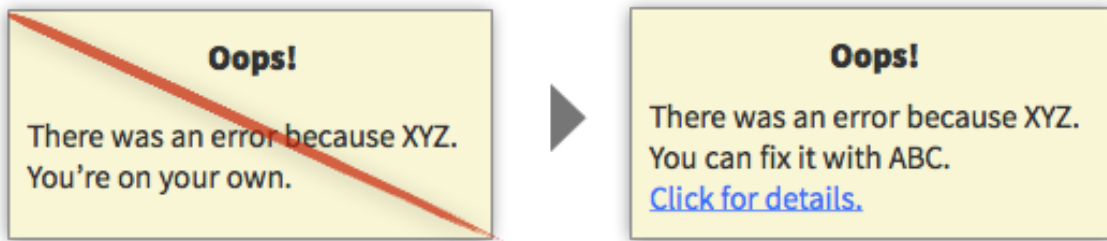
TACTIC:

Explain the Reason for Validation Errors



TACTIC:

Point Users Toward Documentation or Support for Complex Errors



TACTIC:




Avoid Saying "You" in Error Messages



RESEARCH & PLANNING

TACTIC:

Construct Personas to Identify Specific Workflows

			
AGE:	22	37	59
JOB:	Student	Lawyer	Doctor
EDUCATION:	BA	JD	MD
WEB USAGE:	School	Shopping	Research
WEB SKILL:	Advanced	Average	Poor
PAIN POINTS:	Money	Time	Accuracy

PERSONAS

TACTIC:

Gather User Feedback in Appropriate Places

Did this article answer
your question?

No

Yes

BINARY DATA

How did our support team
answer your question?



RATINGS

TACTIC:

Create Alerts for Increases in 404 Errors

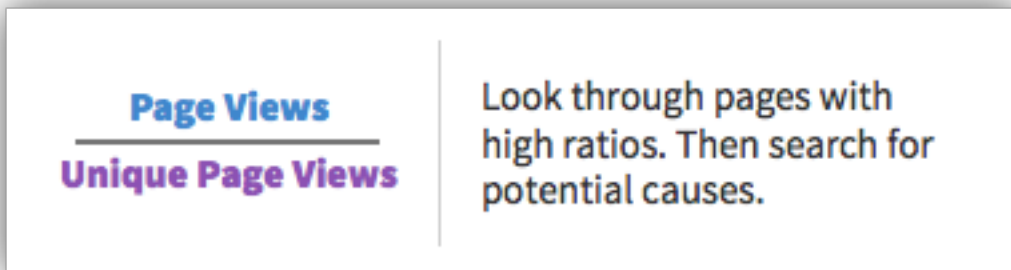


The screenshot shows the 'Alert Conditions' configuration in Google Analytics. It is divided into two sections. The first section, 'This applies to', has 'Page Title' selected in the dropdown, with the condition 'Matches regular expression' and the value '404'. The second section, 'Alert me when', has 'Pageviews' selected in the dropdown, with the condition '% increases by more than', the value '15 %', and 'Compared to' set to 'Previous day'.

CUSTOM ALERT IN GOOGLE ANALYTICS

TACTIC:

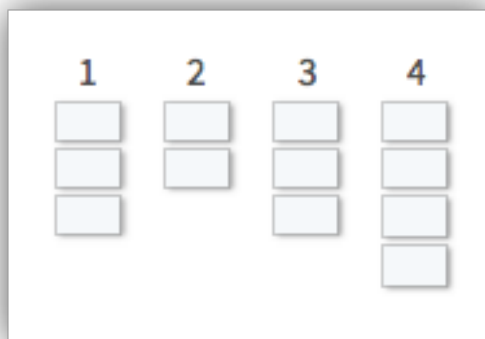
Identify Pages Where Users Are Pogo-Sticking



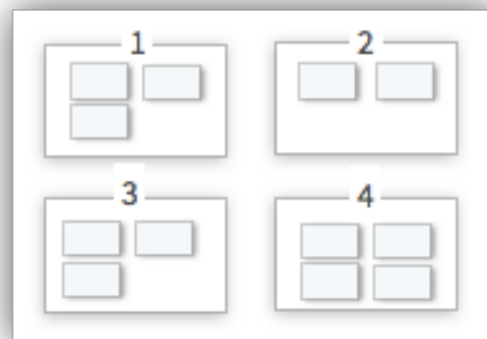
The diagram shows a box with two main parts. On the left, the formula $\frac{\text{Page Views}}{\text{Unique Page Views}}$ is displayed, with 'Page Views' in blue and 'Unique Page Views' in purple. On the right, the text reads: 'Look through pages with high ratios. Then search for potential causes.'

TACTIC:

Use Card Sorting to Construct the Information Architecture



OPEN CARD SORTING

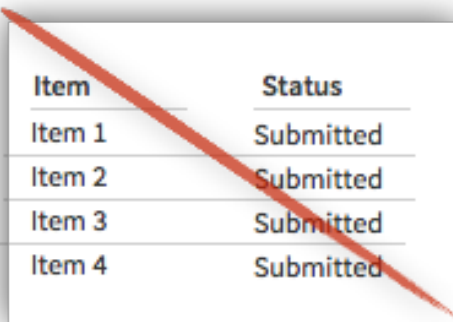


CLOSED CARD SORTING

MISCELLANEOUS

TACTIC:

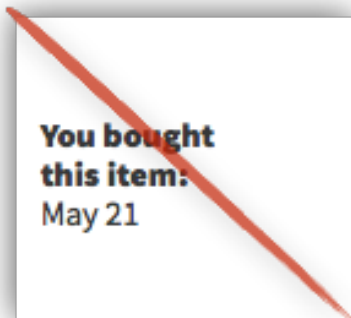
Communicate the Current Phase of Complex or Lengthy Interactions



Item	Status
Item 1	Submitted
Item 2	Submitted
Item 3	Submitted
Item 4	Submitted

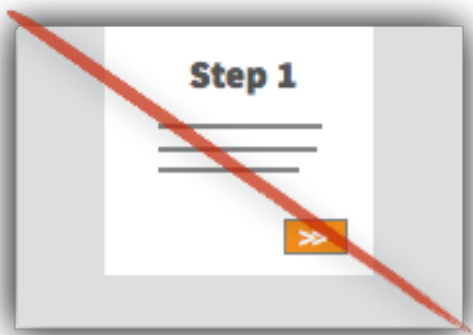


Item	Status
Item 1	Requires Action
Item 2	Under Review
Item 3	Rejected
Item 4	Completed



TACTIC:

Reveal the Number of Steps Within a Sequence



TACTIC:

Reveal the Number of Items in a Category



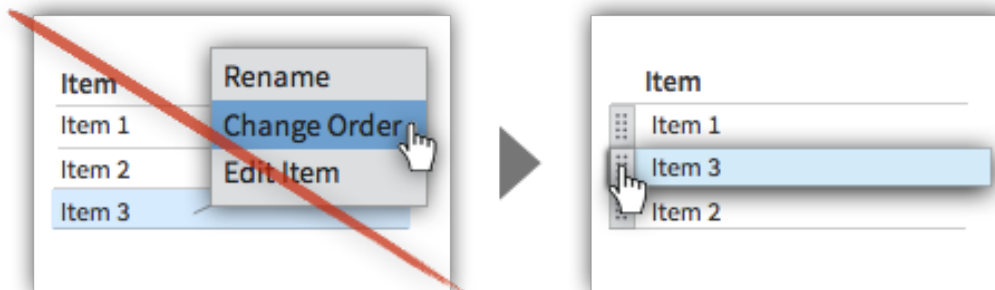
TACTIC:

Offer Keyboard Shortcuts for Repetitive Functions



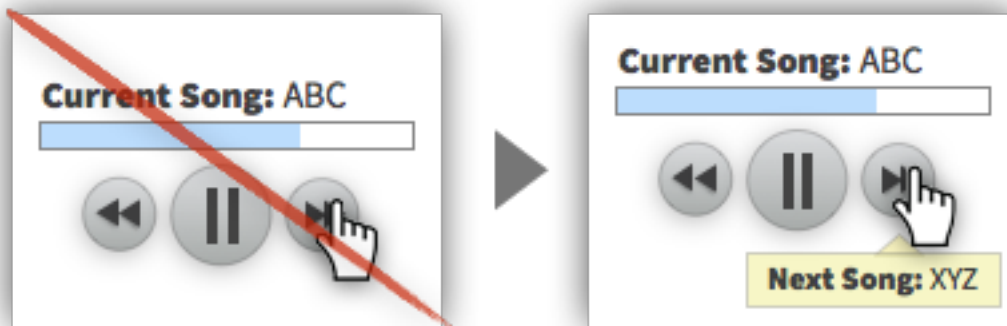
TACTIC:

Let Users Drag and Drop Elements



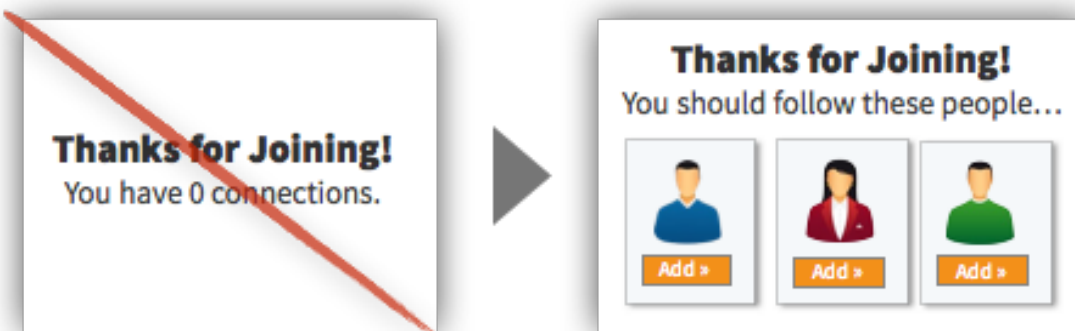
TACTIC:

Indicate or Preview the Next Item in a Sequence



TACTIC:

Provide Quick Wins During Onboarding



TACTIC:

Indicate Whether Your Office is Open or Closed



TACTIC:

Indicate the Recency of Events



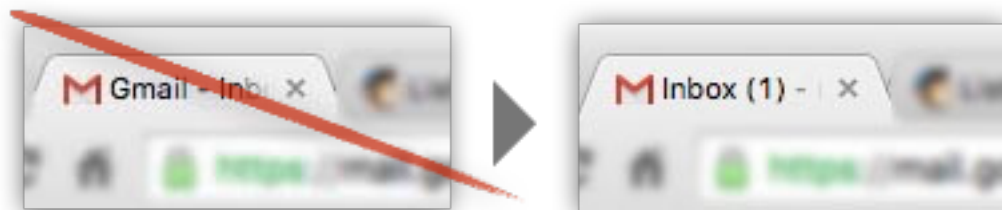
TACTIC:

Indicate the Number of Items Remaining



TACTIC:

Put Descriptive Terms at the Beginning of the Browser's Page Title



TACTIC:

Indicate the Options That Most Users Choose



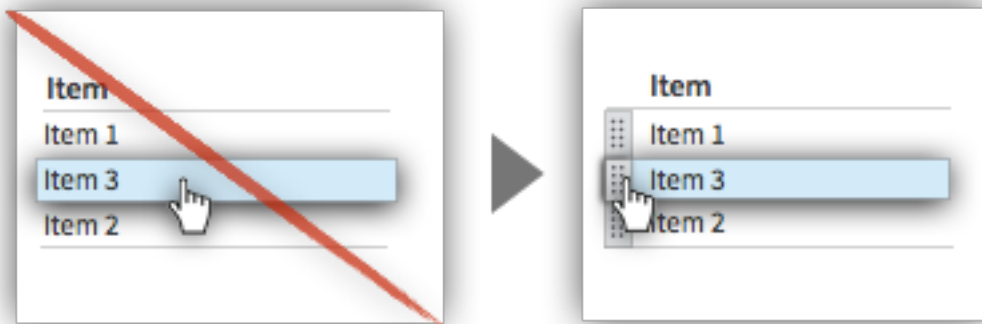
TACTIC:

Add Copy Buttons to Movable Input



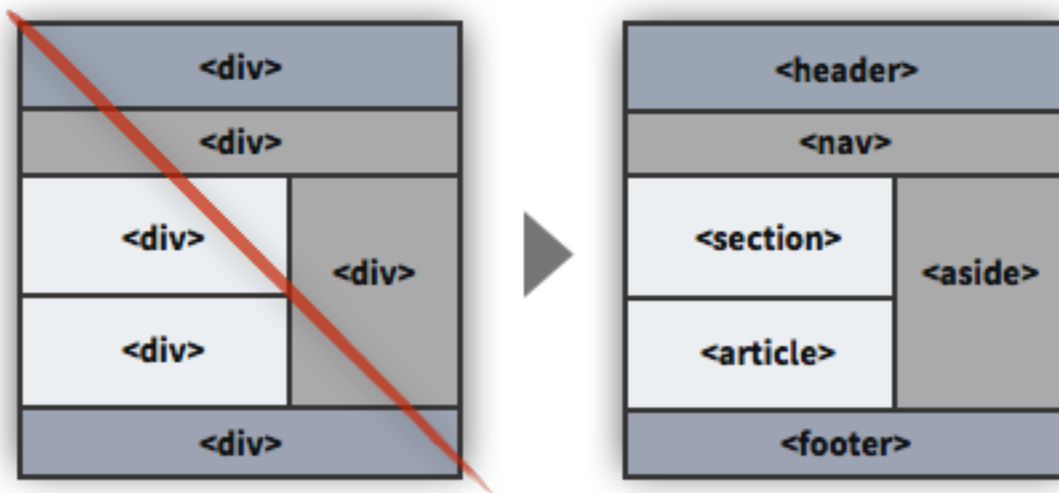
TACTIC:

Add Dotted Textures to Drag and Drop Elements



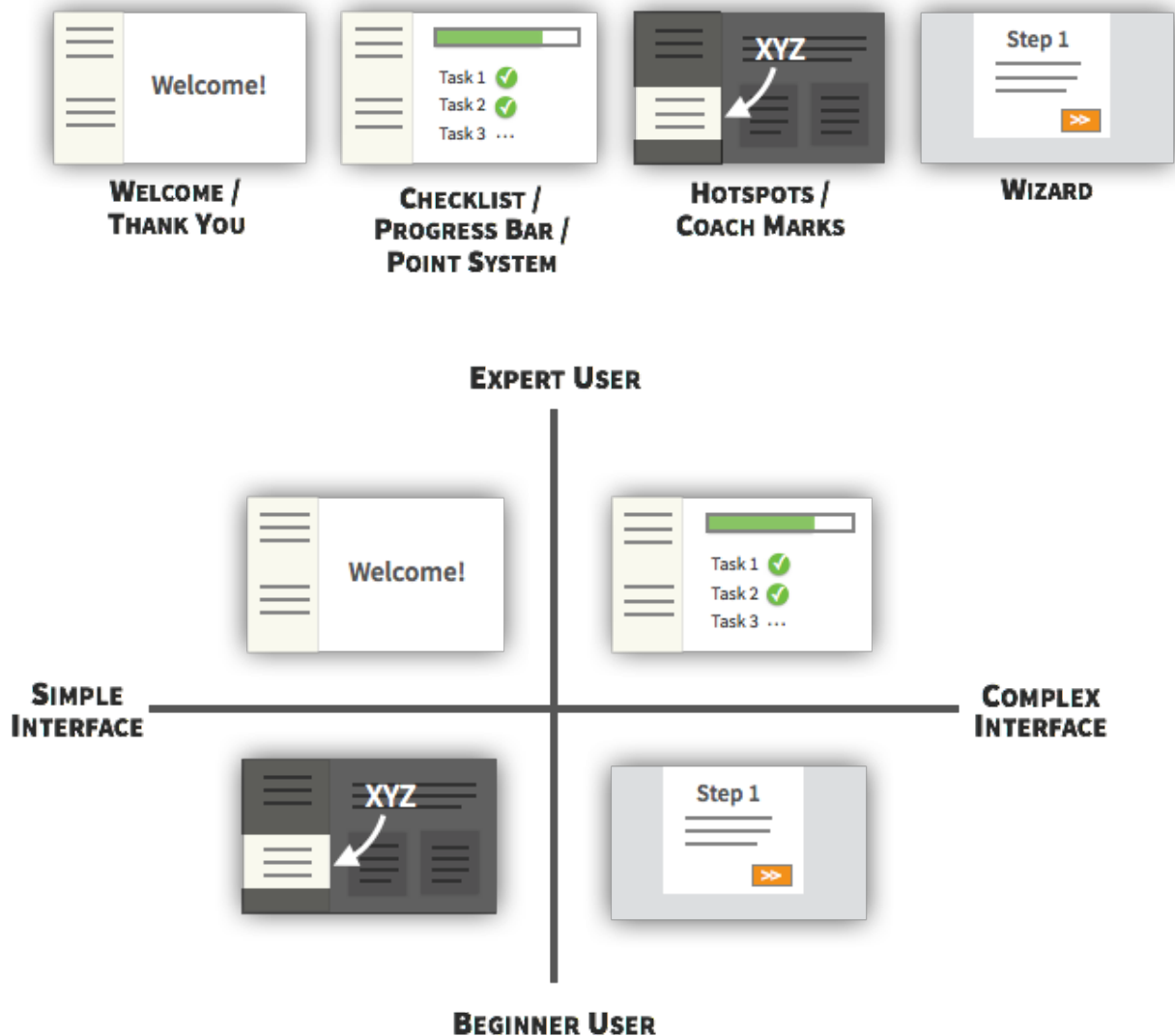
TACTIC:

Use Semantic Labels in HTML5



TACTIC:

Use the Proper Amount of Onboarding



TACTIC:

Use Multiple Cues to Communicate Information



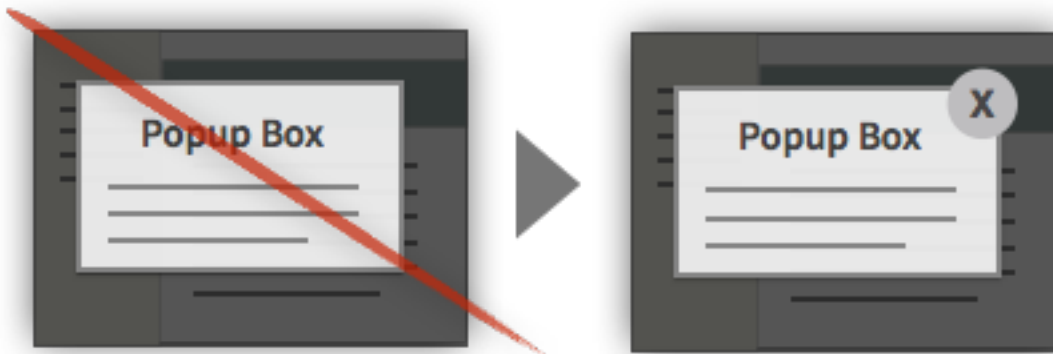
TACTIC:

Customize Instructions for the User's Browser



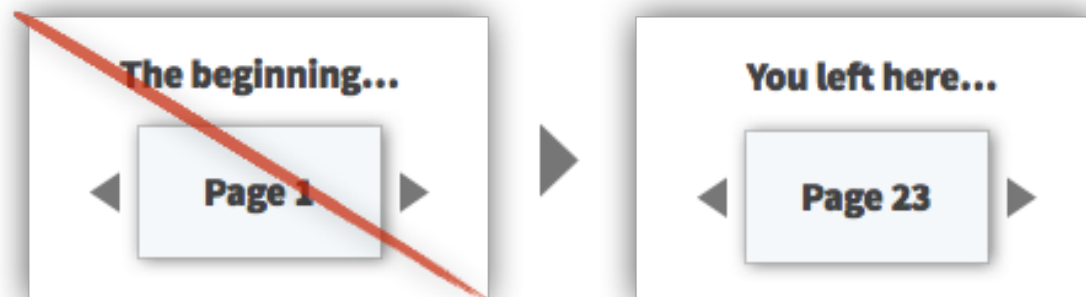
TACTIC:

Provide a Visible Close on Popups and Modal Boxes



TACTIC:

Let Users Return to the Same Position in a Sequence



TACTIC:

Indicate Which Items Users Have Already Viewed



Videos	Length
ABC	XXX
DEF	XXX
GHI	XXX
JKL	XXX

Videos	Length	Viewed
ABC	XXX	
DEF	XXX	👁
GHI	XXX	
JKL	XXX	👁