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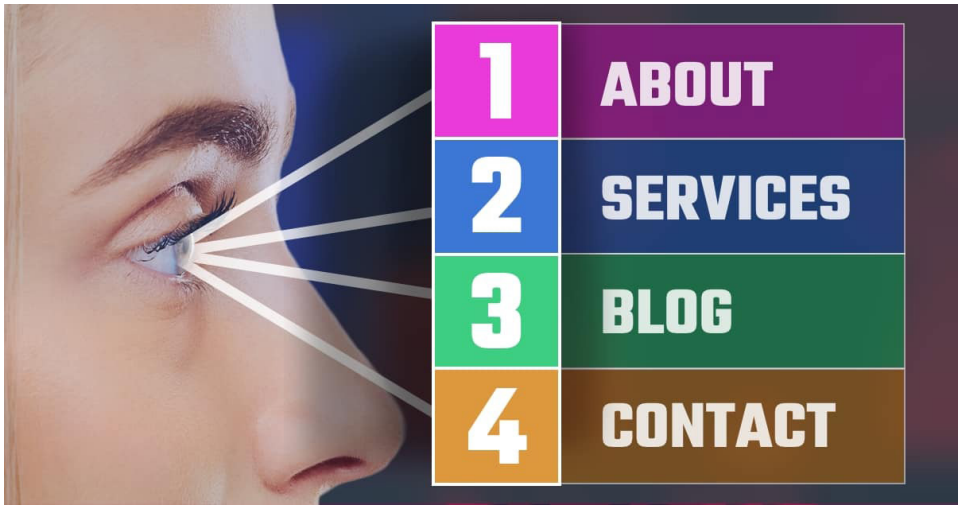
NICK KOLENDA

CONTENTS

UX GUIDELINES

1

UX GUIDELINES



SHOW 4 OPTIONS OR FEWER IN CHOICES

Four items are a critical threshold because of parallel individuation.

Humans feel choice overload.

Too many options? We give up.

But how many is too many? I think **4 options** is the threshold.

Look at these squares:

(see fig 1)

You see 4 items. But your brain doesn't need to count them. It knows that 4 items exist immediately. It's called *parallel individuation* (Gallivan et al., 2011).

Humans possess this ability up to 4 items, but it collapses with 5 items:

(see fig 2)

Five items are a critical threshold in which options feel like "a lot" — an unknown quantity that is large enough to require counting.

Therefore, choices feel difficult with 5+ options.

HOW TO APPLY IT

What if you need to show 5+ options?

Well, you just need to *group* them.

Consider this navigation menu on HubSpot:

(see fig 3)

It groups **12 links** into **4 sections**.

This choice is now two mini-decisions:

1. Which **section** should I view? (4 options)
2. Which **link** should I click? (3 options)

(see fig 4)

Despite 12 options in total, this choice *feels* easy because each mini-decision stays within the confines of parallel individuation.

The Takeaway: Categorize options into small groups that contain no more than 4 options. Even randomly

assigned groups can work (Mogilner, Rudnick, & Iyengar 2008).

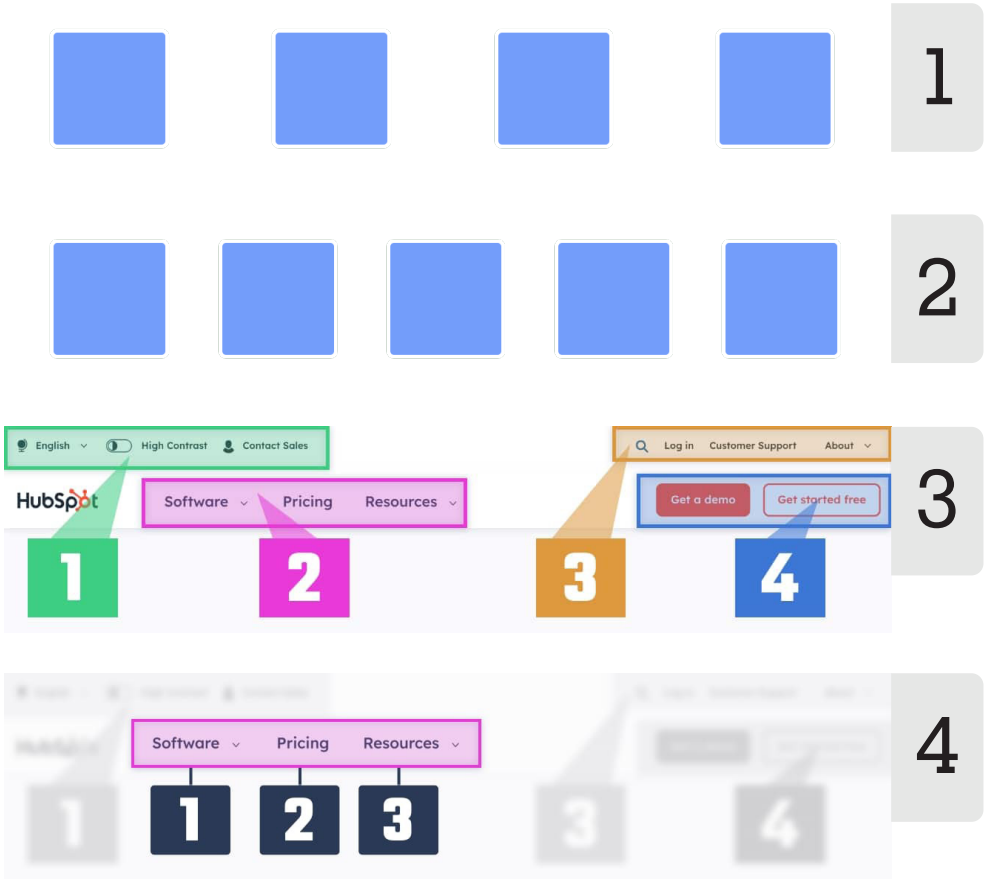
EXCEPTIONS

3. **Specific Searches**. Choice overload is less prevalent when people are looking for a specific option. It's called *top-down attention*.

4. **Pleasurable Choices**. Contemplating each item in a restaurant menu could feel good. In this scenario, perhaps more options are better.

Gallivan, J. P., Chapman, C. S., Wood, D. K., Milne, J. L., Ansari, D., Culham, J. C., & Goodale, M. A. (2011). One to four, and nothing more: nonconscious parallel individuation of objects during action planning. Psychological science, 22(6), 803-811.

Mogilner, C., Rudnick, T., & Iyengar, S. S. (2008). The mere categorization effect: How the presence of categories increases choosers' perceptions of assortment variety and outcome satisfaction. Journal of consumer Research, 35(2), 202-215.



COMMUNICATE IN RELATIVE TERMS

2 days ago is easier to understand than July 25.

Users think in relative terms.

Compare any stimuli (e.g., dates, prices, usage) to meaningful baselines.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Show Incremental Units of Time**. Sure, users might have sent a message *today*. But indicating the current date (e.g., July 1) will unnecessarily force them to calculate the current date. Instead, gradually expand the *relative* duration: 10 seconds ago (then *minutes*, *hours*, *days*, *weeks*, *months*, *years*).

→ **Compare Usage to the Average Norm**. Help users compare their current electricity bill to the average amount they spend.

(see fig 1)

INDUCE ANY SENSATION DURING PRODUCT USAGE

Sensations imply that a product is working.

Some products have uncertain results.

How can you tell if a lotion is truly working?

Well, add a physical sensation

Researchers tested two herbal balms.

The only difference? One tingled.

Sure enough, the tingling balm seemed better: Only 33% of people bought the regular balm, whereas 58% of people bought the tingling balm after trying it (King et al., 2024).

Same with other products. Customers were willing to pay:

→ **$13.03** for a regular headwrap
→ **$20.71** for a headwrap with a *cooling* sensation

Sensations imply that a product is working:

> *...[sensations] improve consumers' ability to perceive an inflow of (otherwise invisible) benefits from the product to their body, giving consumers a metacognitive sense that the product is improving their body ("The tingle tells me that the product essence is now flowing to my body"; King et al., 2024).*

In fact, this enhancement is so extreme that it changes behavior.

Researchers gave participants a muscle-enhancing gel. Participants who felt a tingle could hold a 5 lb. weight for a longer duration (King et al., 2024).

When possible, help customers infer that your product is working by adding sensations:

→ Sensory feelings (e.g., tingling, cooling, warming)
→ Sounds (e.g., buzzing, humming)
→ Attachments that "click" into place

PLACEBO SENSATIONS

Can't add a sensation? Try describing events that will happen anyway.

After applying the sunscreen, it should:

→ *...feel slightly cold*
→ *...feel moist*
→ *...disappear fully*

Frame these expected outcomes as evidence that your product is working.

DIGITAL SENSATIONS

Imagine clicking an important button:

→ Transfer money
→ Delete data
→ Submit job application

Sure, you might see a "thank you" message. But did it *really* happen? How can you tell?

In these scenarios, loading screens can be useful. Even if you don't need them.

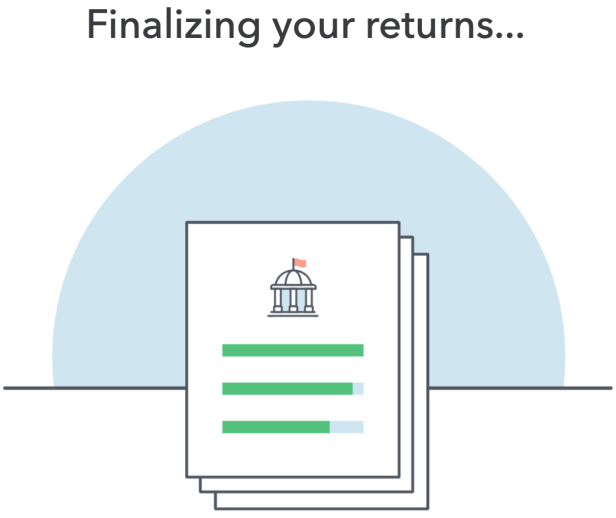
For example, TurboTax shows a lengthy animation after you submit taxes:

(see fig 1)

It becomes a tingling sensation. You believe that something is truly happening during this moment, so you feel confident in the accuracy and efficacy of this action.

King, D., Auschaitrakul, S., & You, Y. (2024). Felt something, hence it works: Merely adding a sensory signal to a product improves objective measures of product efficacy and product evaluations. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 1-19.

1



MAXIMIZE COMPATIBILITY FOR ALL INPUTS AND SCENARIOS

Adapt your interface to different experiences that users will encounter.

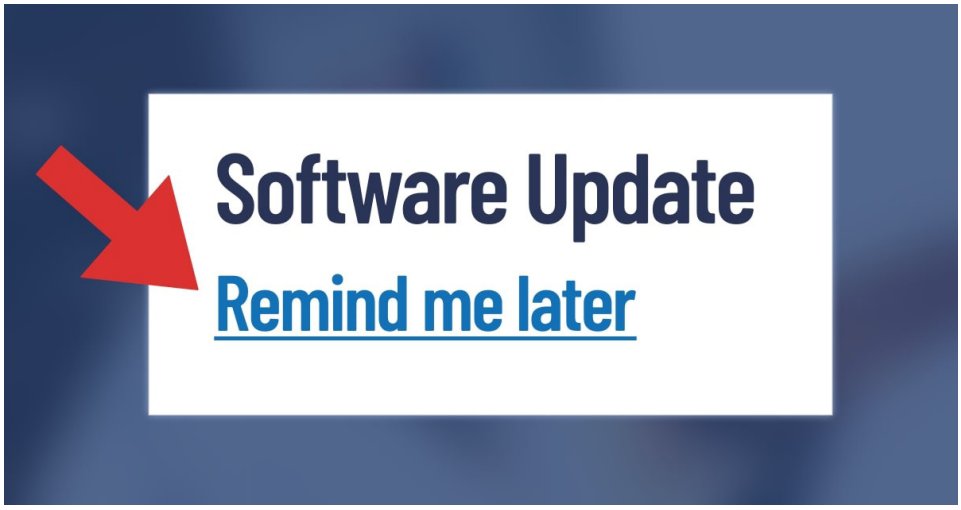
Users interact differently.

Your interface should be able to handle any extreme use cases.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Handle Inputs With Improper Formatting**. Users will make mistakes. Ideally, your interface should predict these mistakes and accommodate them (e.g., spelling errors in search fields).

(see fig 1)



ACCOMMODATE THE USER'S GOAL OR WORKFLOW

Let users control the appearance, timing, ordering and general preferences.

Different users will need different interactions.

Your interface should handle these varying needs.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Let Users Control the Appearance**. Let them choose rows or grids.

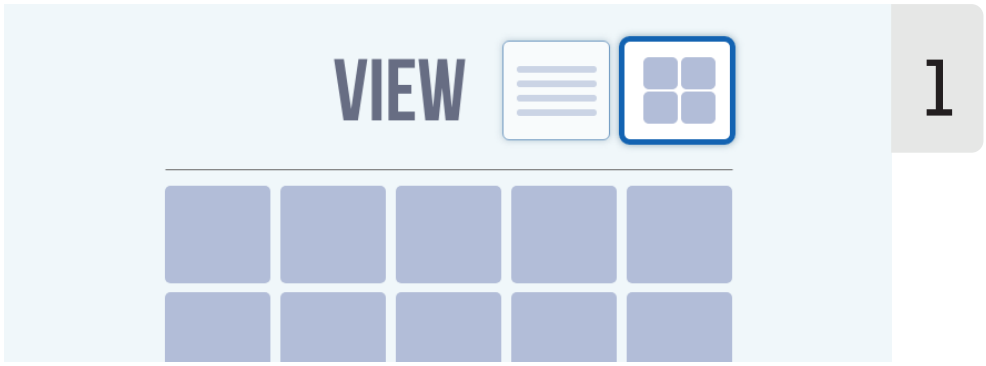
(see fig 1)

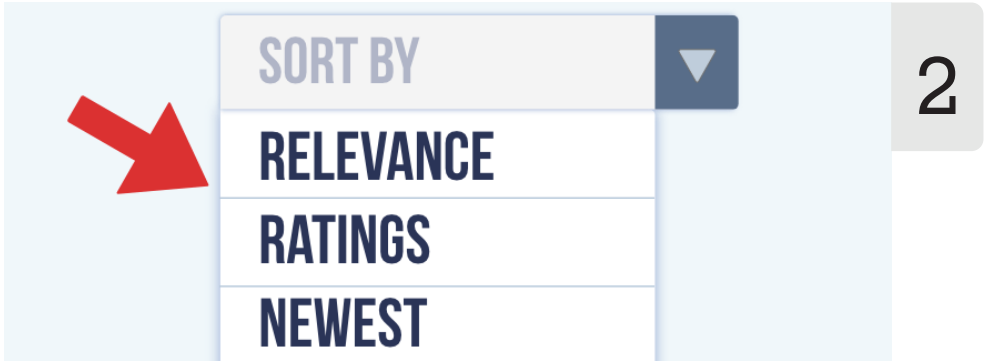
→ **Let Users Control the Order of Elements**. Whether it's relevance, rating, date, etc.

(see fig 2)

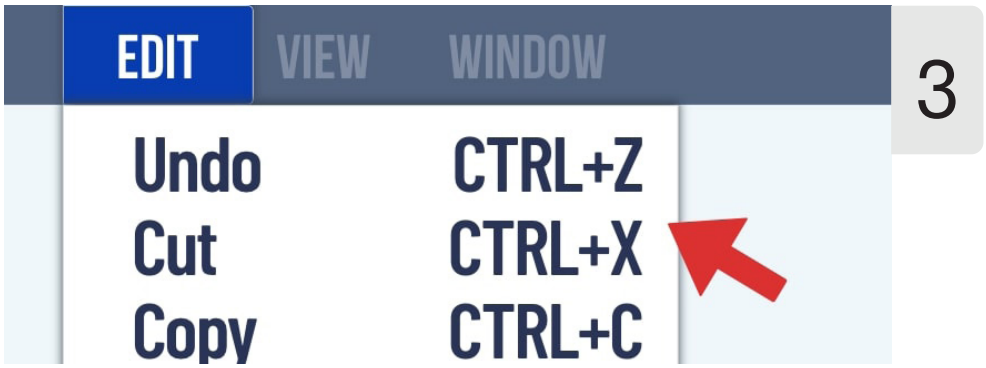
→ **Offer Multiple Ways to Accomplish a Task**. Add keyboard shortcuts for common interactions.

(see fig 3)

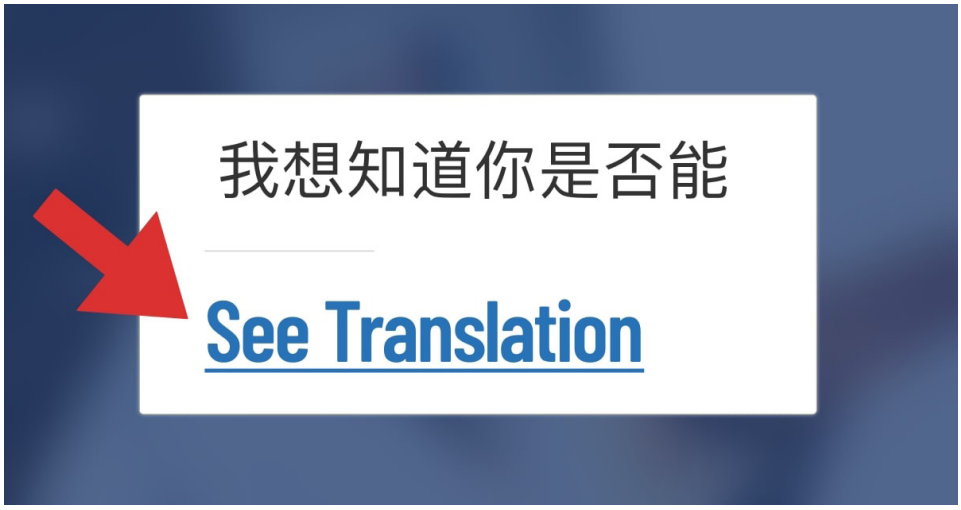



SORT BY
RELEVANCE
RATINGS
NEWEST

2


EDIT
VIEW
WINDOW
Undo CTRL+Z
Cut CTRL+X
Copy CTRL+C

3



ACCOMMODATE THE USER'S KNOWLEDGE OR SKILL LEVEL

Clarify unfamiliar terms, languages, or meaning.

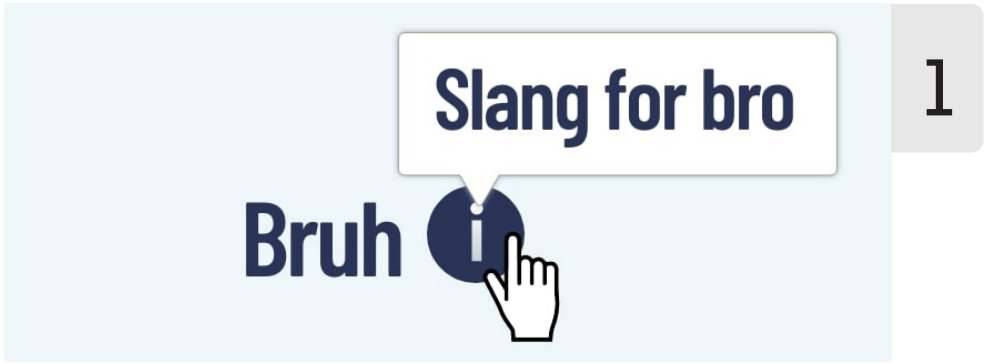
Users vary in their ability and knowledge.

Your interface should handle these different levels.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Help Users Understand Unfamiliar Terms**. Add tooltips or clarifying messages to jargon.

(see fig 1)



1

EXTEND MOVABLE PATHS AND CLICKABLE AREAS

Help users jump across menus or click small items.

Programming adheres to stringent rules.

But users stray from these rules. And your interface needs to accommodate this real-world behavior.

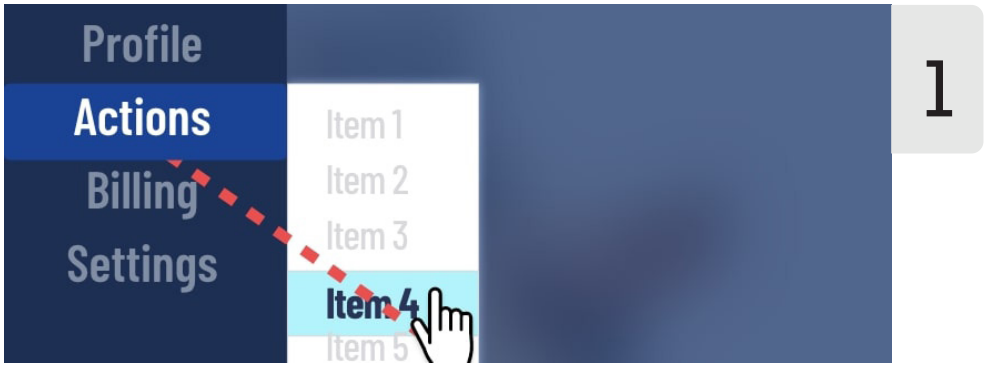
HOW TO APPLY

→ **Add Hover Flexibility in Menu Interactions**. Delay closures by a few milliseconds.

(see fig 1)

→ **Enlarge the Clickable Area of Small Buttons**. Any clickable element should at least 40 x 40 pixels

(see fig 2)



1

2

HELP USERS RESOLVE THE ISSUE

Provide instructions or a link to documentation.

Try to fix errors for users.

But if you can't, help them solve errors themselves.

HOW TO APPLY

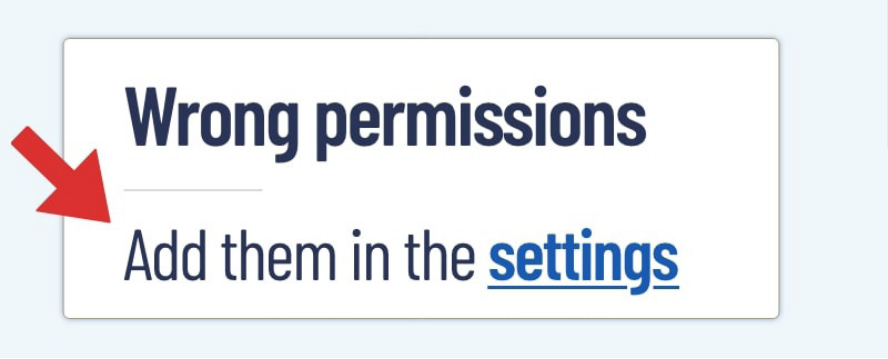
→ **Provide Instructions in Error Messages**. You might need an error code for developers, but try to add instructions for users as well — even if it's a link to support.

→ **Point Users Toward Support or Documentation**. Add a link to relevant page that could help them overcome it.

(see fig 1)

→ **Avoid Saying "You" in Error Messages**. It feels antagonistic.

(see fig 2)



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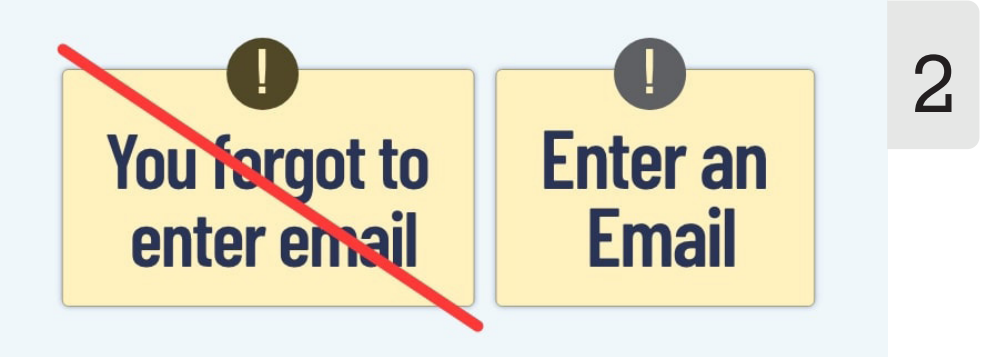

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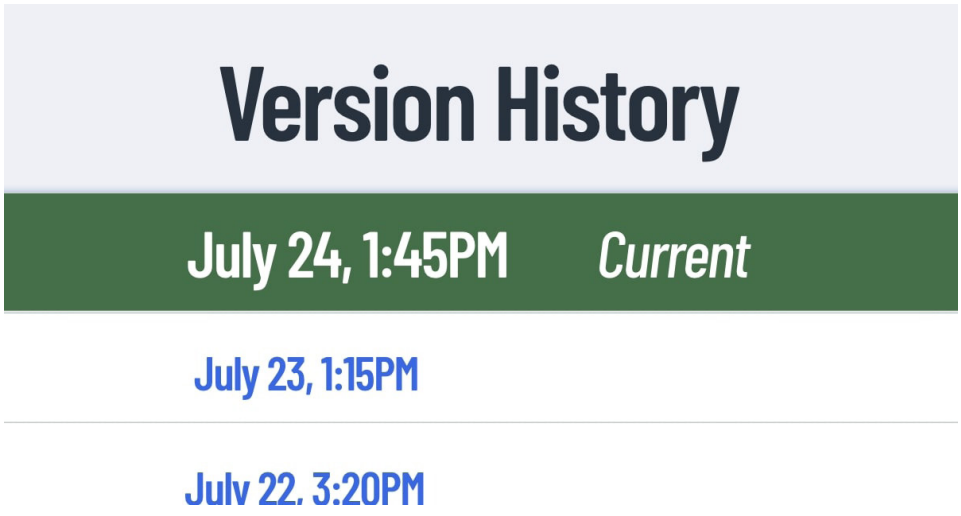


PROVIDE EASY WAYS TO REVERT OR ESCAPE

Help users return to a previous state of the interface.

Interfaces are like roads.

Users might travel down a road, then realize it's the wrong direction.

Help them return to a previous road.

HOW TO APPLY

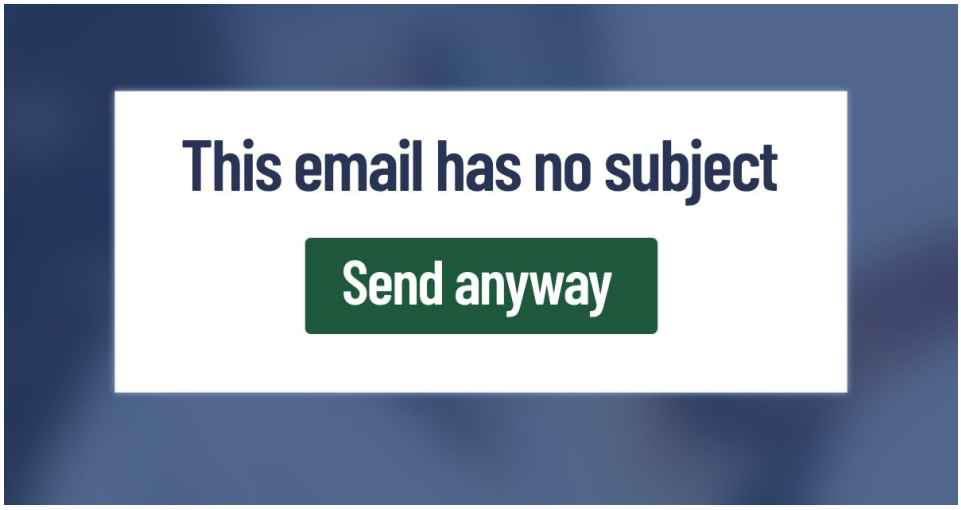
→ **Let Users Undo Multiple Levels of Action**. Store a backlog of their actions.

(see fig 1)

→ **Skip Confirmations in Easily Reversible Decisions**. Confirmations can become annoying. Provide undos when possible.

(see fig 2)

2



MONITOR SIGNALS THAT ARE TYPICAL IN ERRORS

Verify that unusual input was intentional.

Users make mistakes.

Help them catch these mistakes.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Monitor Wording That Contradicts Intent**. Did they say "I attached" in an email without attaching anything?

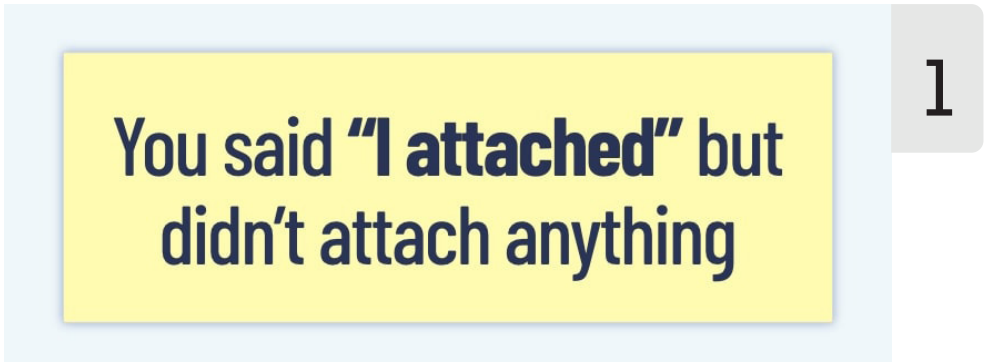
(see fig 1)

→ **Monitor for Inactivity**. Have they been watching Love Island for 10 hours? Check on them.

(see fig 2)

→ **Verify That a Repeated Action Was Intended**. Are they sending the same amount of money again?

(see fig 3)



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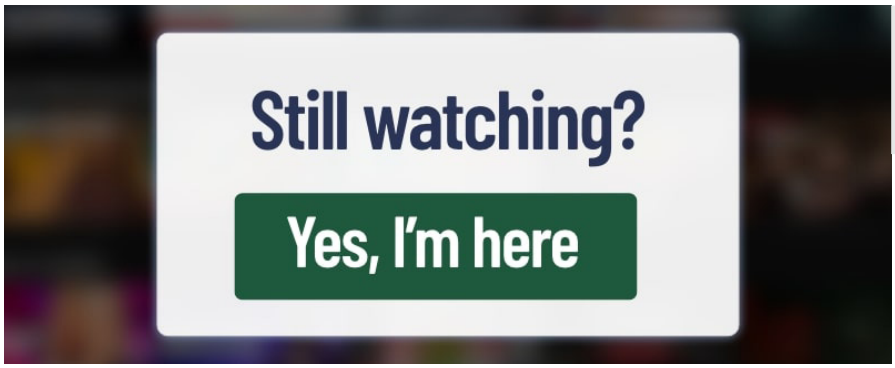
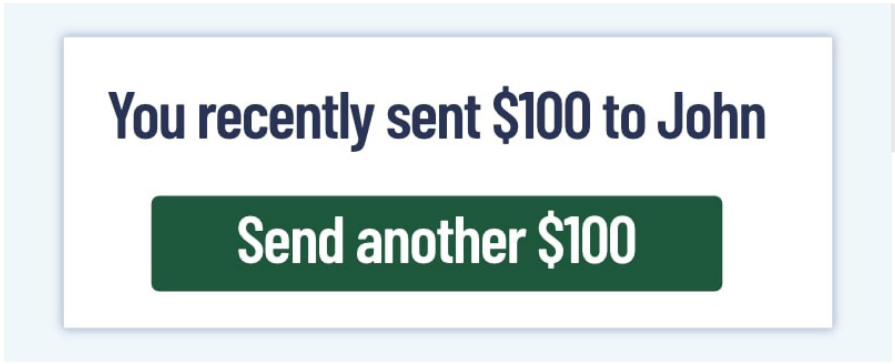
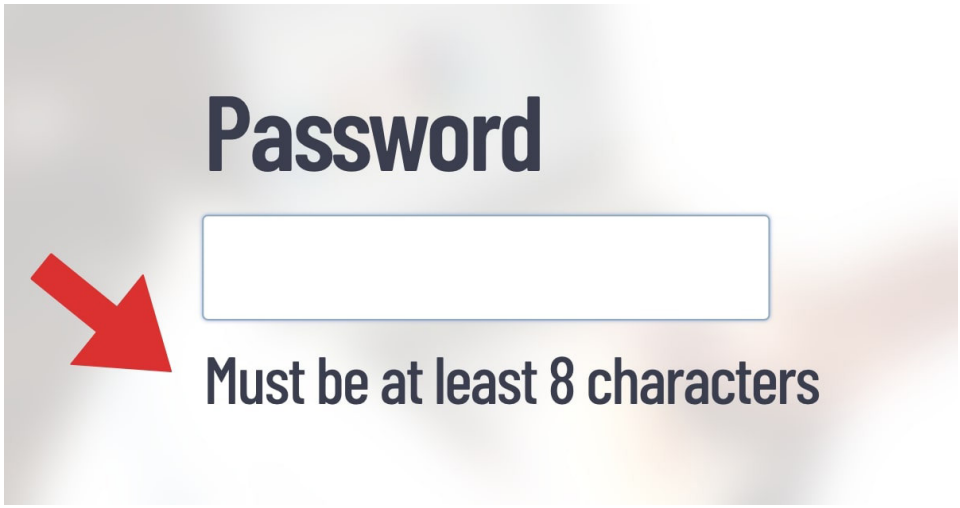

Still watching?
Yes, I'm here

2


You recently sent $100 to John
Send another $100

3



COMMUNICATE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR AN INTERACTION

Describe the materials, format, and any other requirements.

Users might need to submit information in a certain way.

Tell them these requirements.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Indicate the Format**. Is it a PDF, PNG, JPEG? Any max file size?

(see fig 1)

→ **Populate the Units or Parameters**. Is the currency USD?

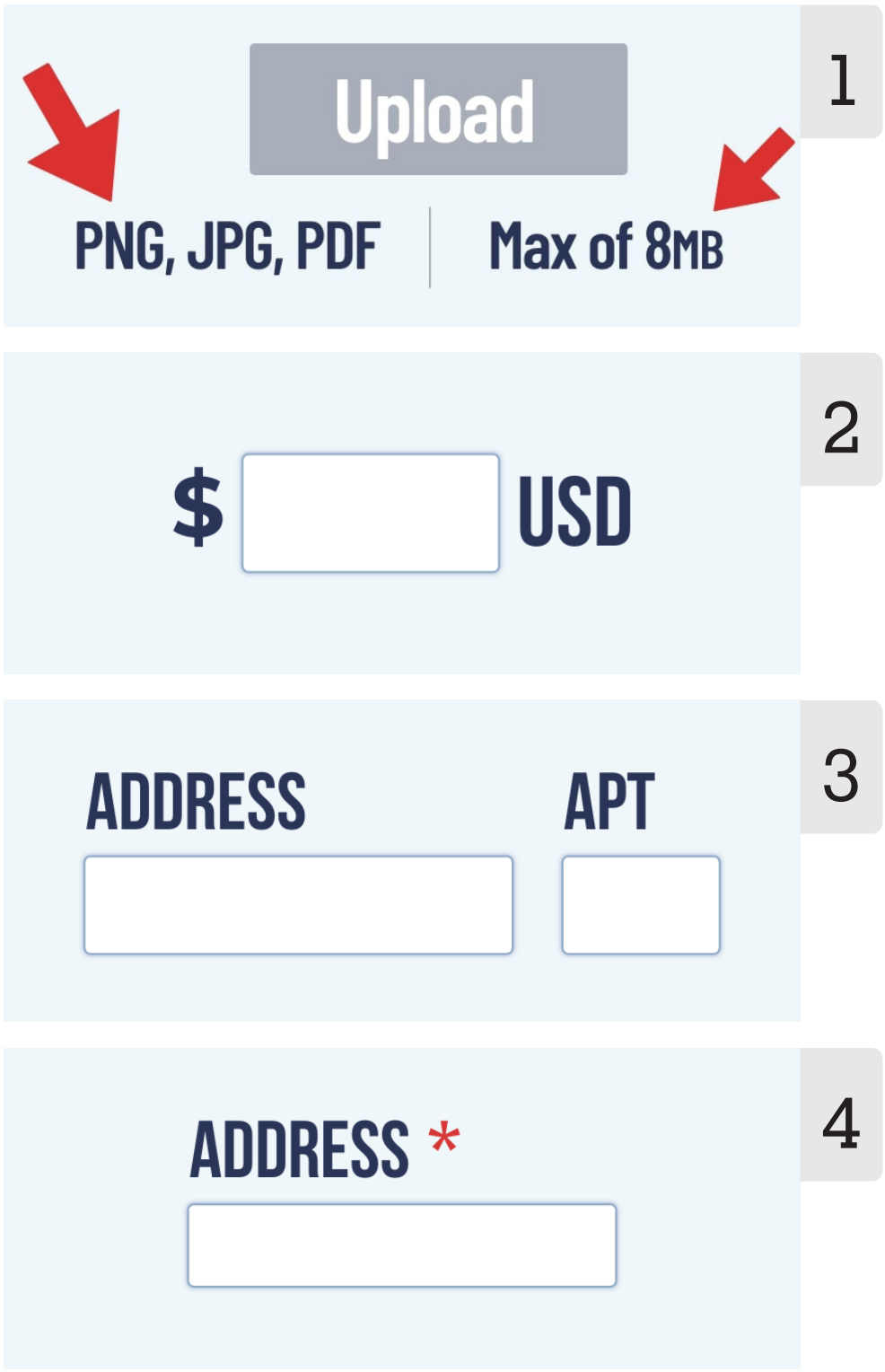
(see fig 2)

→ **Match Form Sizes With Input Sizes**. Is the apartment unit separate from the address field?

(see fig 3)

→ **Indicate Which Elements Are Required**. Is the address field required?

(see fig 4)


Upload
PNG, JPG, PDF
Max of 8MB
1
$
USD
2
ADDRESS
APT
3
ADDRESS *
4

PREVENT THE POSSIBILITY OF ERRORS

Only offer acceptable choices and enable functions only when relevant.

Error messages should be a last resort.

Strive to make them unnecessary.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Disable Buttons When Users Click Them**. Prevent duplicate clicks.

(see fig 1)

→ **Only Offer Inputs That Are Acceptable**. Limit calendar dates to available slots.

(see fig 2)

→ **Enable Functions Only When Necessary**. Not relevant? Not enabled.

(see fig 3)

→ **Structure Text Fields to Match the Input**. Don't make users guess whether a dash is needed (and remove a dash if they enter it).

(see fig 4)

→ **Add Constraints to Irreversible Changes**. Force them to type "DELETE" to delete something important.

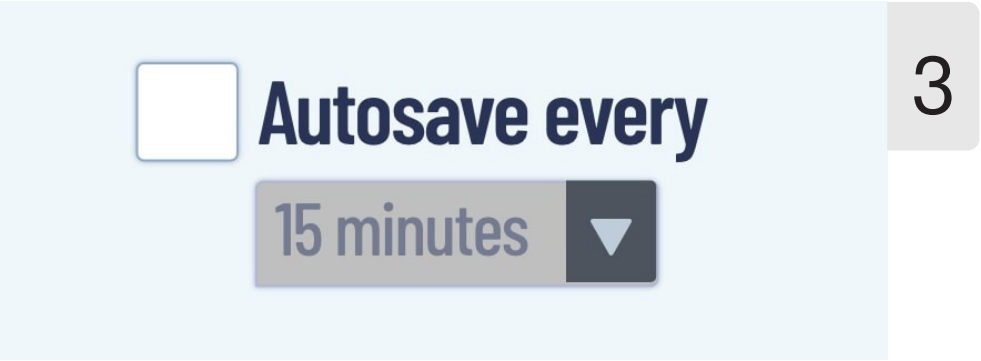
(see fig 5)


BUY NOW
BUY NOW

1


1 2 3 4 6 7 8
8 9 10 11 12 13 14
15 16 17 18 19 20 21
22 23 24 25 26 27 28

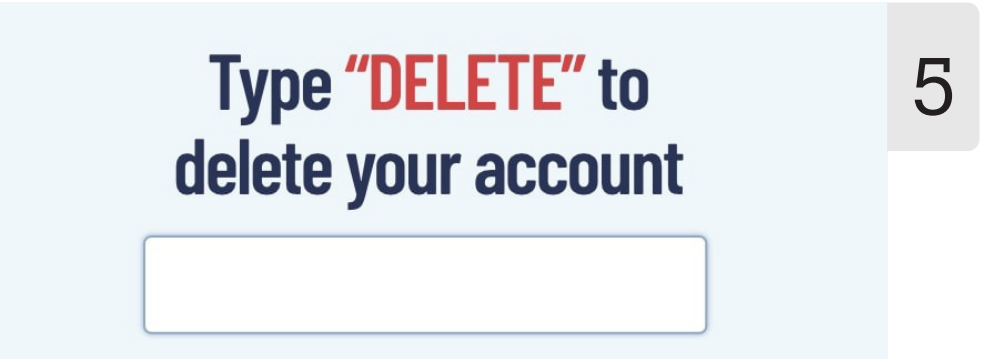
2


Autosave every
15 minutes

3


SERIAL NUMBER
–

4


Type "DELETE" to
delete your account
5

PLACE FREQUENT INTERACTIONS CLOSER TO USERS

Push likely answers closer and keep frequent interactions visible.

Do users perform the same interaction repeatedly?

Make it easer to perform this action.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Keep Frequent Interactions Visible**. Don't collapse them in a menu.

(see fig 1)

→ **Predict Then Prefill Input Fields**. Users can always change it.

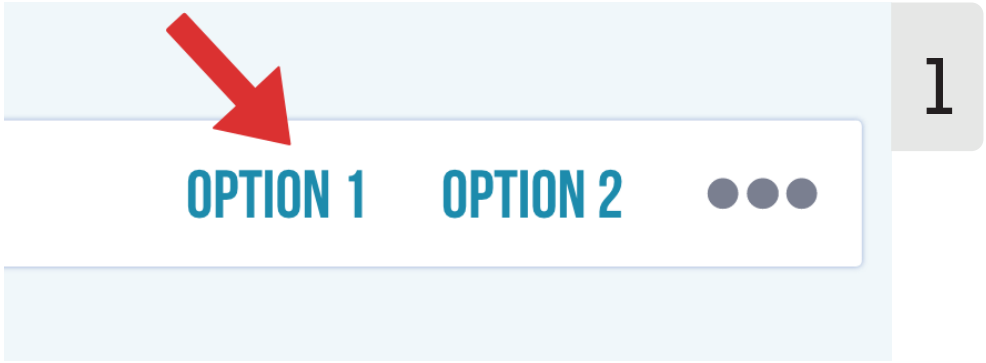
(see fig 2)

→ **Help Users Complete Their Input**. Give them real-time suggestions.

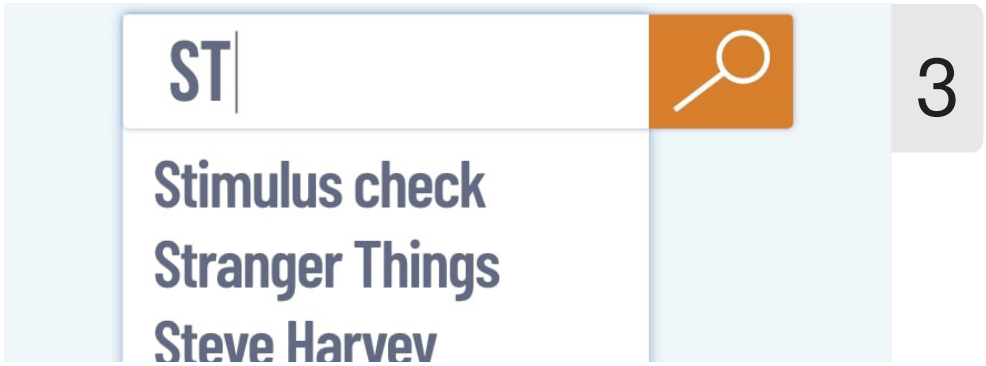
(see fig 3)

→ **Keep Pertinent Information Up Front**. Tell users whether a product is out of stock before they needlessly visit the product page.

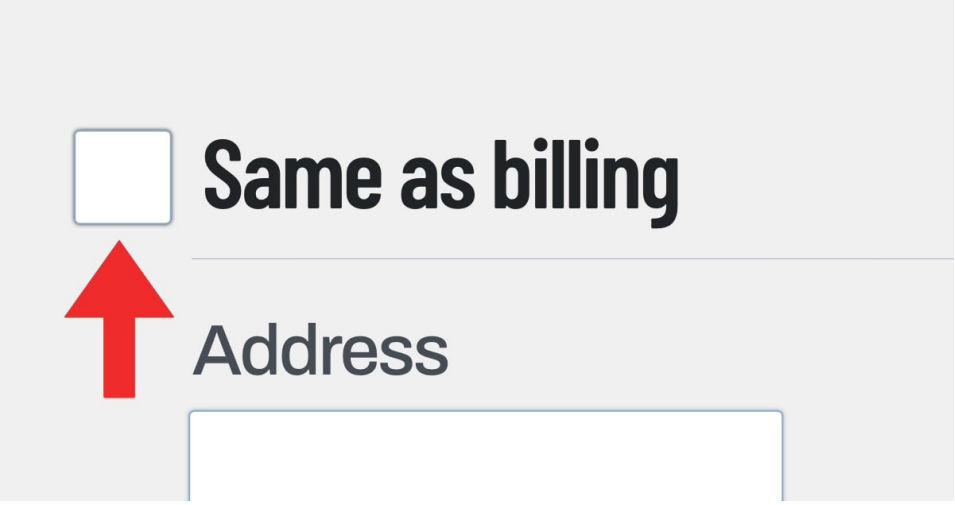
(see fig 4)


1
OPTION 1
OPTION 2


2
United States


3
ST
Stimulus check
Stranger Things
Steve Harvey


4
BUY NOW
OUT OF STOCK



MINIMIZE REDUNDANT TASKS

Let users duplicate input and monitor for excessive interactions.

Look for repeated interactions.

Then make them easier to perform.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Let Users Duplicate Past Input**. Have users created something on your platform (e.g., document, spreadsheet, survey)? Let them duplicate an item to build from this template.

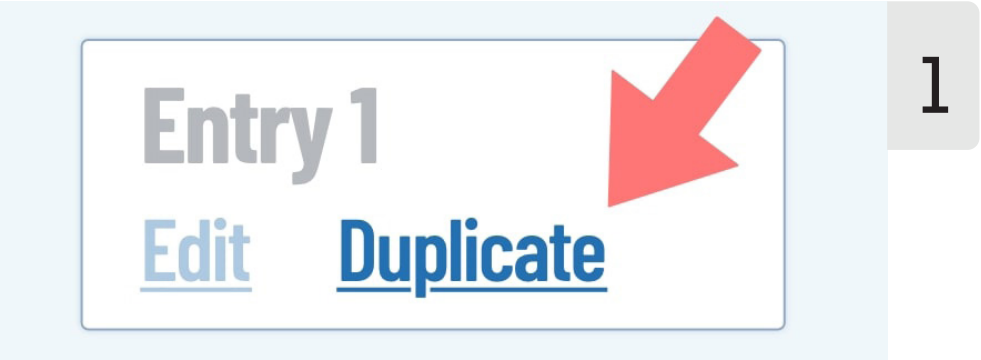
(see fig 1)

→ **Preserve Input During Interface Changes**. Was their password wrong? Maybe they forgot a character. Keep the existing input to prevent them from starting over.

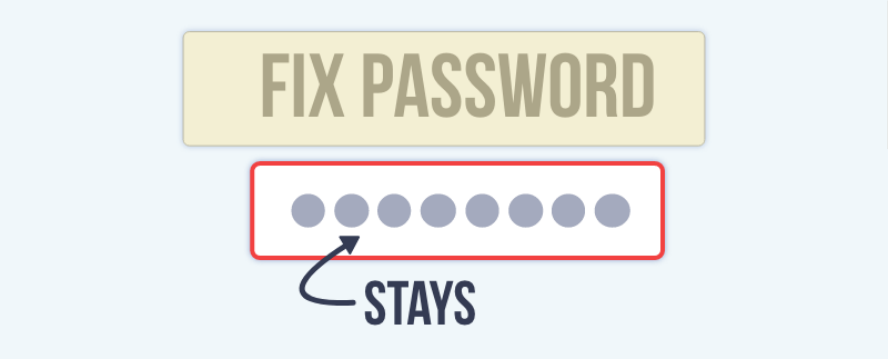
(see fig 2)

→ **Monitor Excessive Input or Repetitions**. Need to fast forward a video? Increase the speed of fast forwarding exponentially with the duration of this interaction.

(see fig 3)

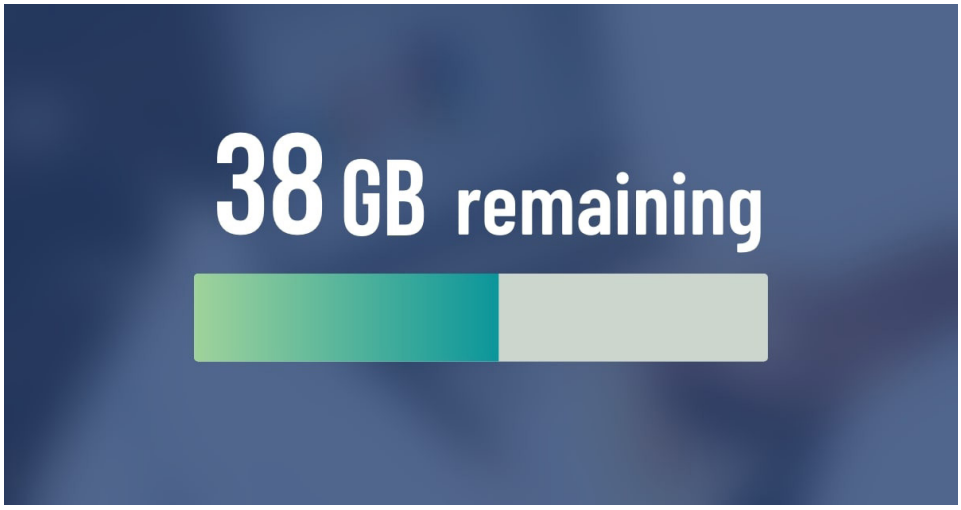


1



2

3



MINIMIZE RELIANCE ON CALCULATIONS AND MEMORY

Perform calculations for them and keep important information visible.

Users don't want to think.

So don't make them.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Show the Number of Items in a Group**. Tell them how many items belong in each category.

(see fig 1)

→ **Keep Form Labels Visible**. Avoid disappearing placeholders. Place static labels outside of fields or move placeholders to the top of the field after users focus on it.

(see fig 2)

→ **Let Users Copy Information**. Don't force them to manually type repeated information.

(see fig 3)

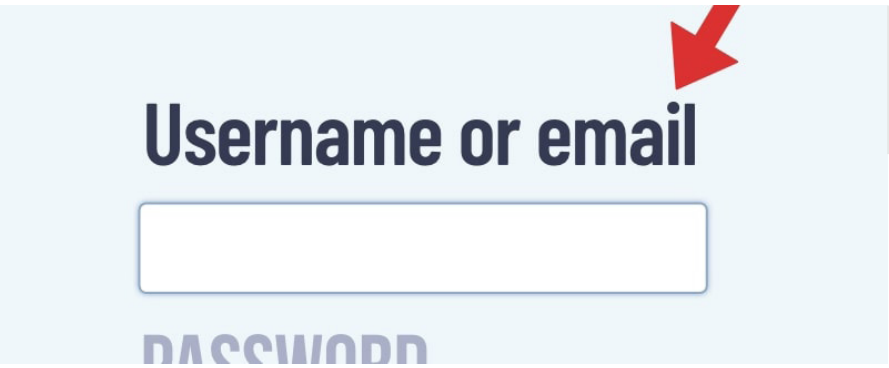
→ **Indicate Which Items Users Have Already Viewed**. And help them find new content.

(see fig 4)

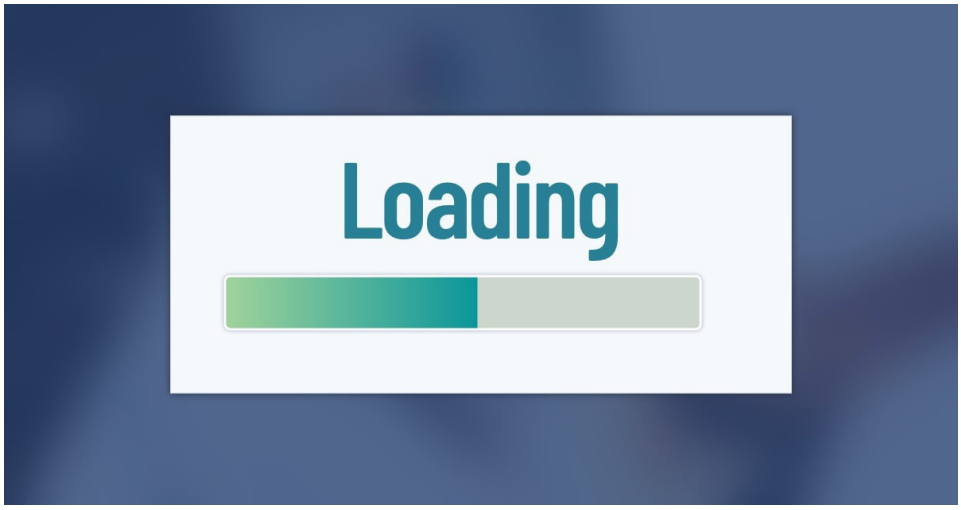
→ **Minimize Credentials That Are Specific to the Interface**. Users already possess an email. Don't force them to remember a unique username.

(see fig 5)


Arrivals (15)
Departures (12)
See 42 reviews
1
NAME
NICK
2
Discount Code
3244
COPY
3
ARTICLE 1 DESCRIPTION NEW
ARTICLE 1 DESCRIPTION
ARTICLE 1 DESCRIPTION NEW
4



5



MINIMIZE THE DETRIMENTS OF WAITING

Use blue colors, keep users engaged, load the UI skeleton, and start the progress above zero.

All users need to wait.

But you can *enhance* these waiting times.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Decrease Their Arousal With Cool Colors**. Loading seems faster with blue (Gorn et al., 2004).

(see fig 1)

→ **Keep Users Engaged While They Wait**. Distract them with a task.

(see fig 2)

→ **Align Machine Downtime With User Downtime**. Perform lengthy tasks when they won't be disruptive.

(see fig 3)

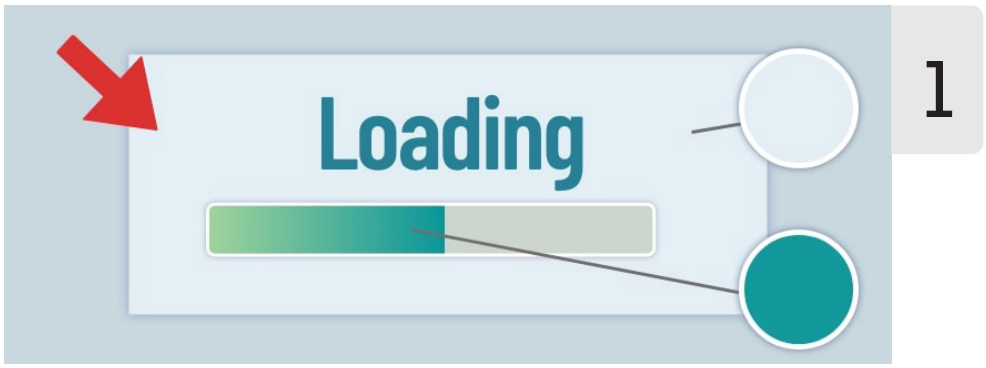
→ **Populate Loading Elements With Placeholders**. These skeleton screens decrease perceived loading time.

(see fig 4)

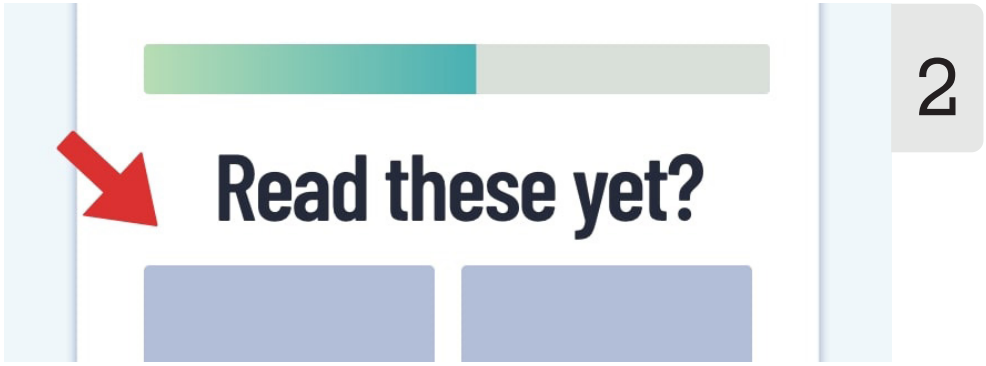
→ **Start Progress Above Zero**. Zero feels deflating. Start at 1% or above.

(see fig 5)

Gorn, G. J., Chattopadhyay, A., Sengupta, J., & Tripathi, S. (2004). Waiting for the web: how screen color affects time perception. Journal of marketing research, 41(2), 215-225.


Loading

1


Read these yet?

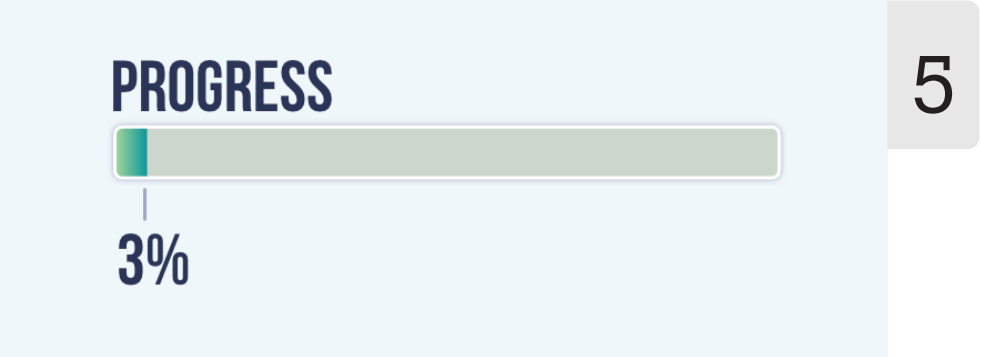
2


Software Update
It will run between
2:00 - 5:00 AM

3


My House: Will It Blend
2,000 VIEWS - 1 YEAR AGO

4


PROGRESS
3%
5

NUDGE USERS IN UNKNOWN DECISIONS

Help users by suggesting options, showing typical answers, or teaching them how to extract value from your platform.

Users face moments of indecision.

Gently *nudge* them toward answers or solutions without forcing them to think.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Suggest a Starting Point**. Give them ideas for search queries (e.g., books, games, movies) instead of leaving an empty field.

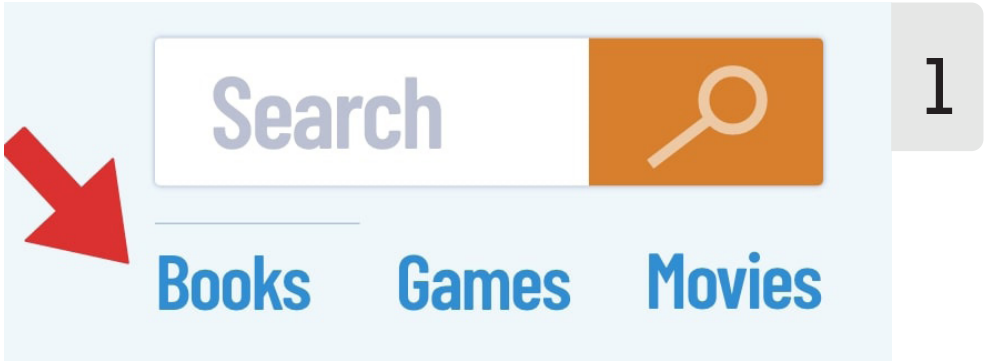
(see fig 1)

→ **Show the Typical Answer.** Don't leave an empty field for an unspecific budget for ads. Tell them that "most people start with $10/day."

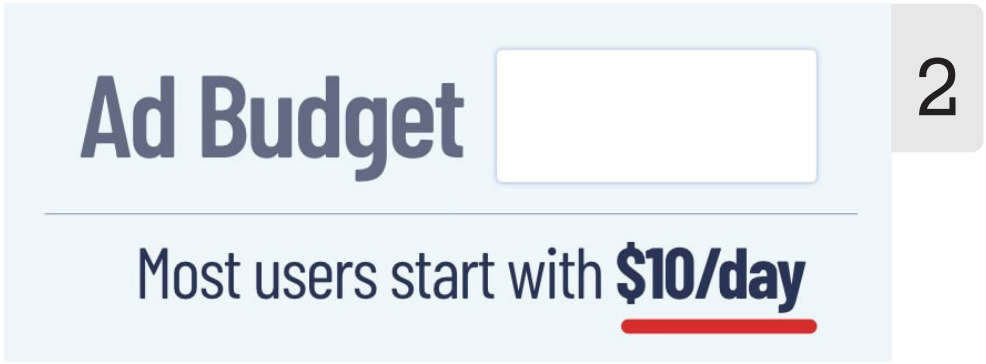
(see fig 2)

→ **Push Users Toward Value**. Tell people who to follow on your social platform instead of leaving them to figure it out.

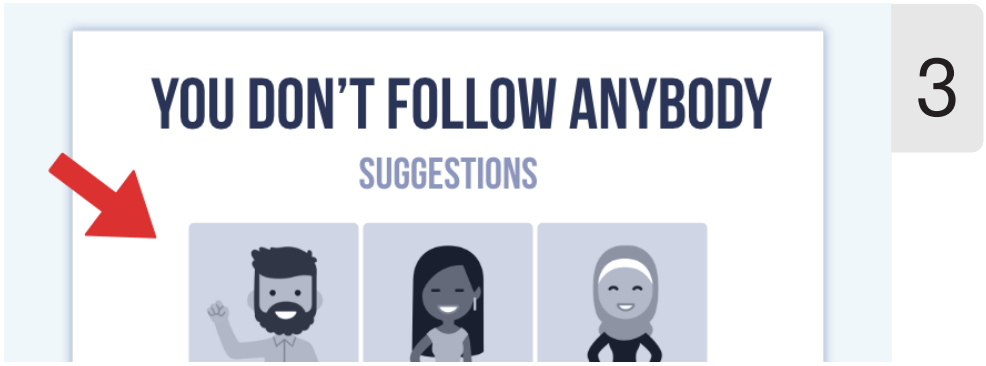
(see fig 3)


Search
Books
Games
Movies

1


Ad Budget
Most users start with $10/day

2


YOU DON'T FOLLOW ANYBODY
SUGGESTIONS

3

MATCH THE USER'S EXPECTATIONS

Your page should contain words and image that users expect to find.

Users possess expectations when they visit a page.

And your page should match these expectations.

WHY IT WORKS

→ **Processing Fluency**. Any contradiction feels unpleasant, and they attribute these negative feelings to your content.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Choose Colors That Are Semantically Meaningful**. Green for good actions; red for bad actions.

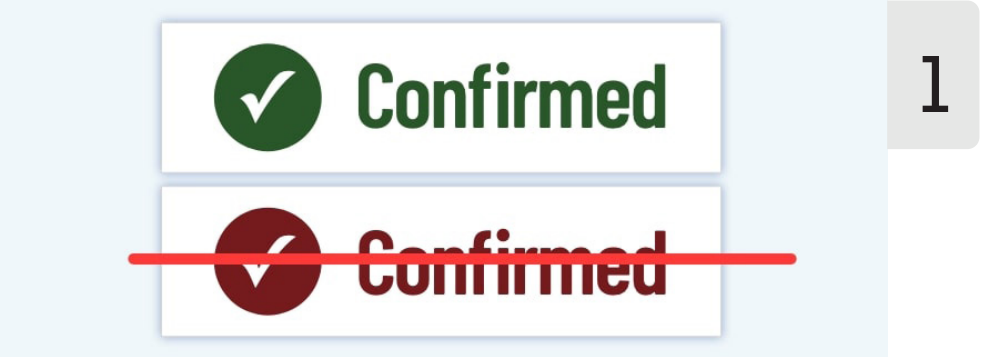
(see fig 1)

→ **Show the Primary Essence Upon Loading**. If users click a "pricing" page, what do they expect to see? Prices. Well, show them prices upon loading the page.

(see fig 2)

→ **Adhere to a Consistent Layout**. Any adjustments will contradict their expected interactions.

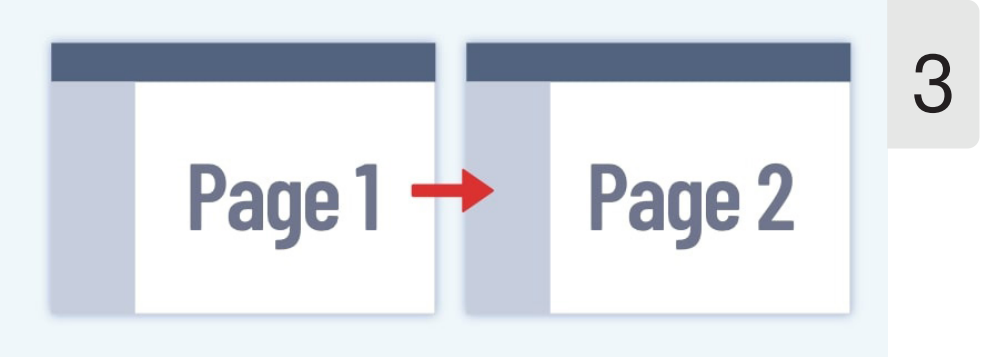
(see fig 3)


Confirmed
Confirmed

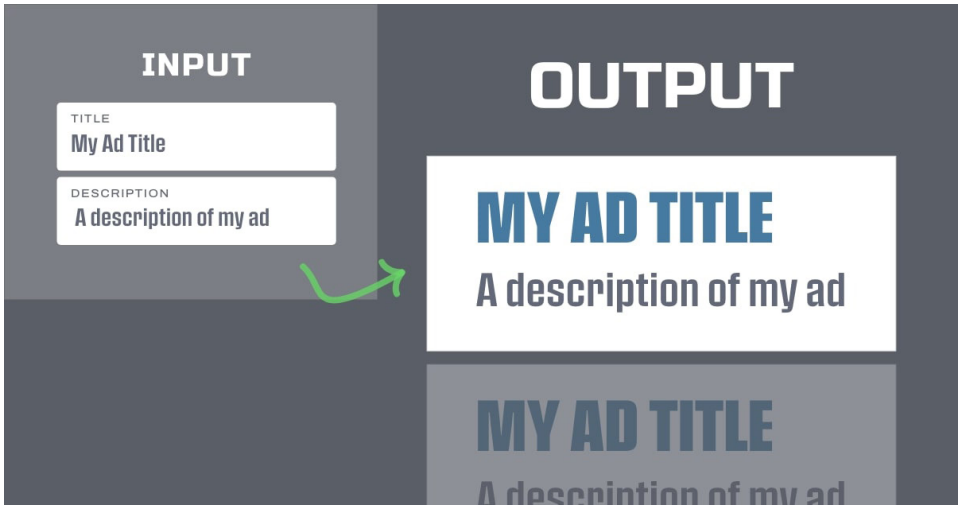
1


PRICING
BEST VALUE
FREE
BASIC
PRO

2


Page 1
Page 2

3



COMMUNICATE THE OUTCOME OF INTERACTIONS

Help users understand exactly what will happen.

Some interactions are ambiguous.

Reduce this ambiguity as much as possible.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Indicate the Next Item in a Sequence**. What's the next article in a queue?

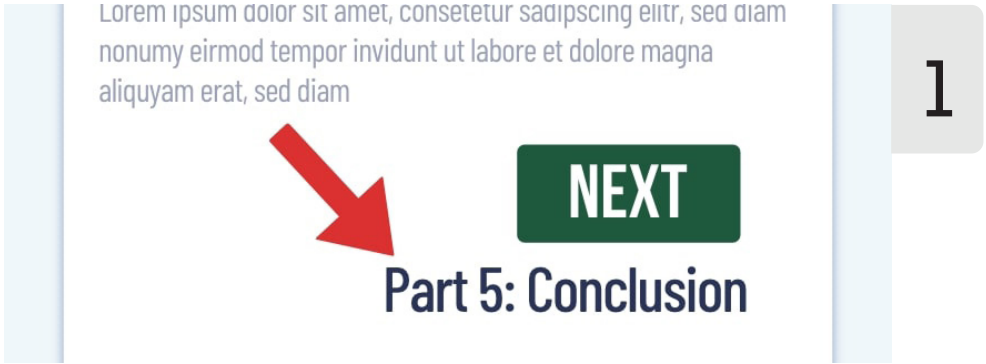
(see fig 1)

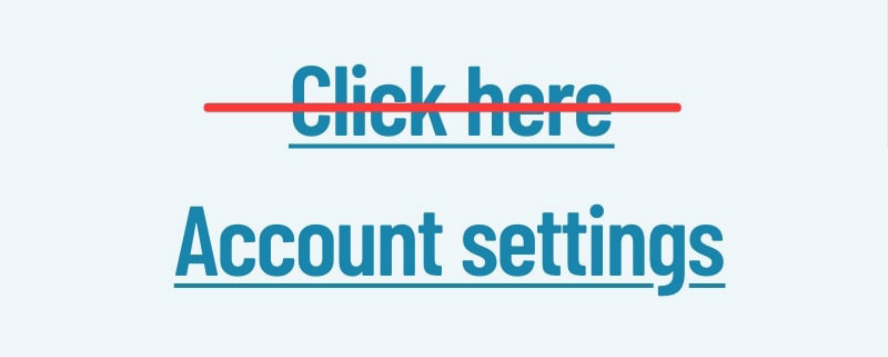
→ **Describe the Destinations of Links**. Use descriptive anchor text.

(see fig 2)

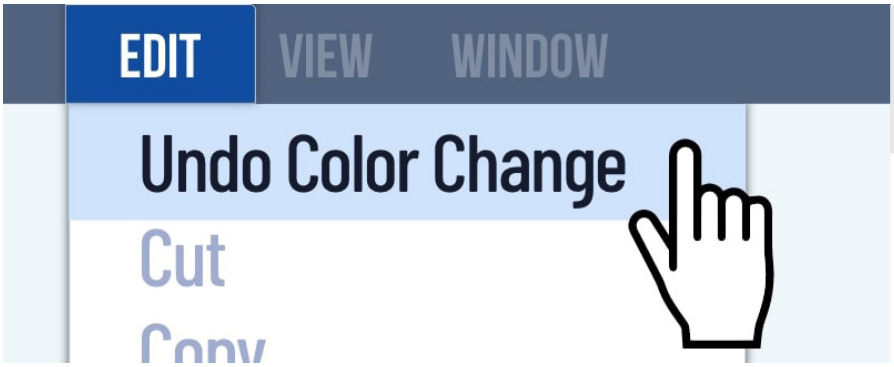
→ **Specify Which Interaction Will Occur**. Undo is more ambiguous than undo color change.

(see fig 3)

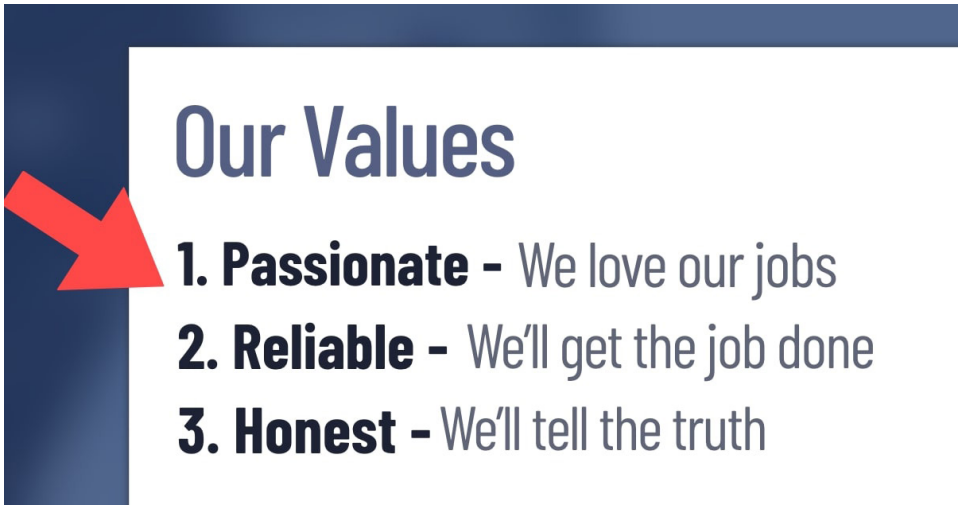



Click here
Account settings

2


EDIT
VIEW
WINDOW
Undo Color Change
Cut
Copy

3



HELP USERS SKIM CONTENT

Embrace their skimming instead of forcing them to evaluate information in-depth.

Users will always skim.

Don't fight it. *Embrace* it.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Insert the Main Takeaway into Headlines**. Users can extract takeaways from content-filled headlines.

(see fig 1)

HELP USERS FIND THEIR LOCATION

Add breadcrumbs and other markers.

Interfaces can feel disorienting.

Help users find and navigate to relevant pages.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Add Breadcrumbs**. Show the current sequence of links that brought them to the current page.

→ **Communicate the Current Phase of Interactions**. Has their product shipped yet?

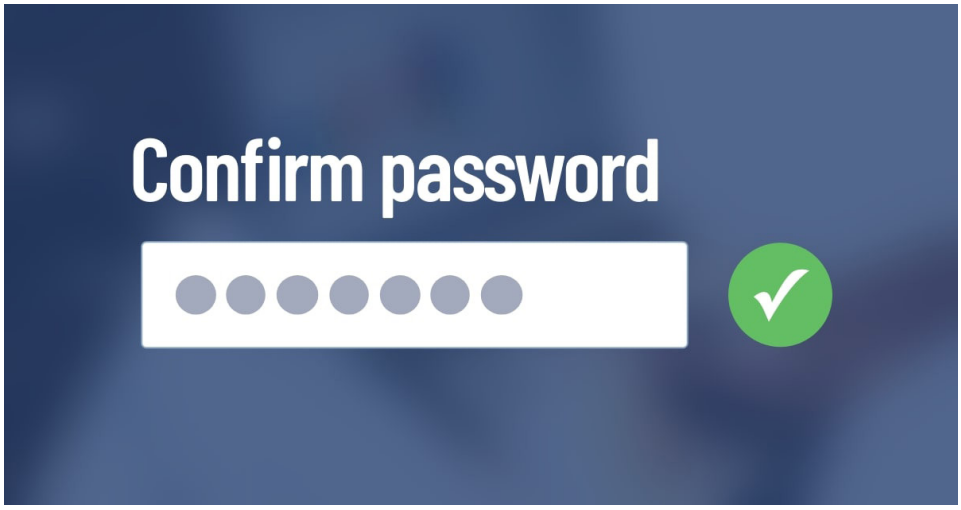
(see fig 1)

→ **Indicate the Location of the Cursor**. Help them find their location within form fields.

(see fig 2)

1


NAME
NICK
2



PROVIDE FEEDBACK DURING AND AFTER INTERACTIONS

Users should know whether their interaction has been (or will be) successful.

Users need assurances.

Indicate whether any interaction was a success or failure.

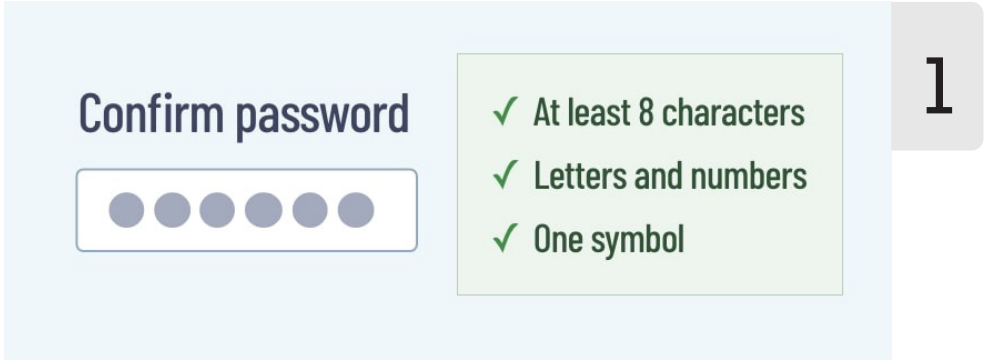
HOW TO APPLY

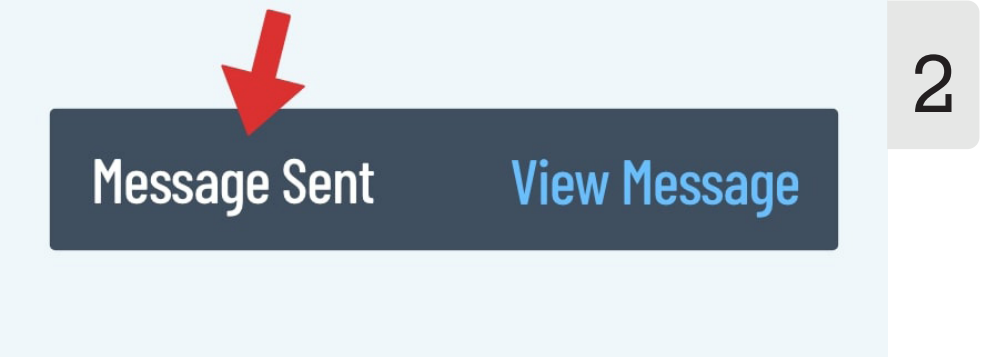
→ **Indicate Whether an Interaction Will Be Successful**. Inform users whether they provided the right criteria for their password before they erroneously submit.

(see fig 1)

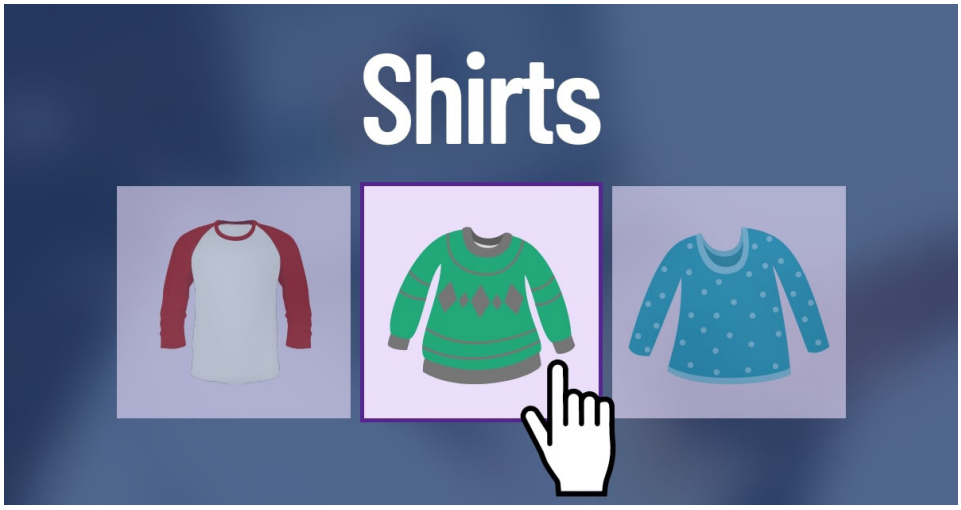
→ **Indicate Whether an Interaction Was Successful**. Users may have clicked "send" on their message. But was it truly sent? Tell them.

(see fig 2)





2



INDICATE WHICH ITEMS ARE INTERACTIVE

Users should know which items they can click or interact with.

Interactions should be intuitive.

Users should know whether they can interact with items.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Change the Cursor**. On hover, etc.

(see fig 1)

→ **Change the Element**. Change a button color, etc.

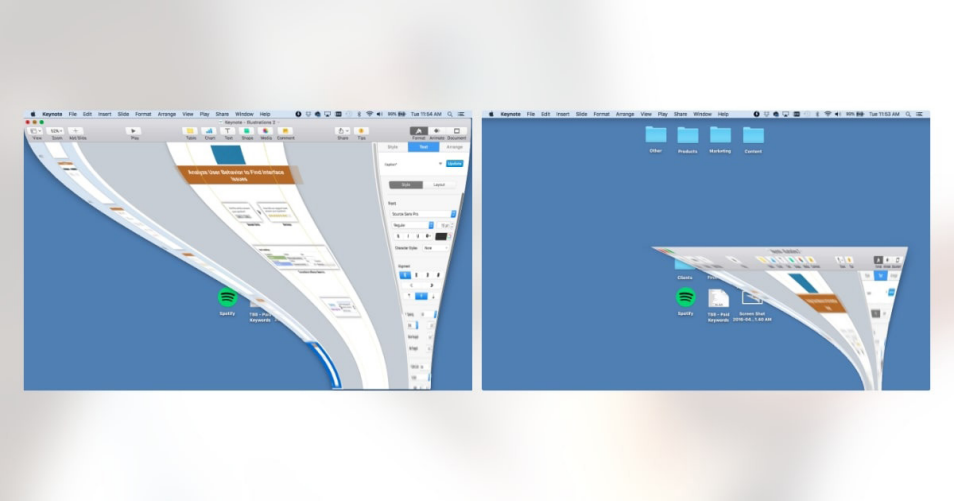
(see fig 2)

→ **Indicate Which Element Will Receive the Interaction**. Sometimes it's difficult to see in small items.

(see fig 3)

2

3



DEPICT CHANGES WITHOUT DISRUPTING THE USER

Help users notice elements that changed.

Changes will occur in your interface.

Users should notice these changes without disrupting their current experience.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Prevent Changes From Blocking Other Functions**. Volume changes shouldn't block content.

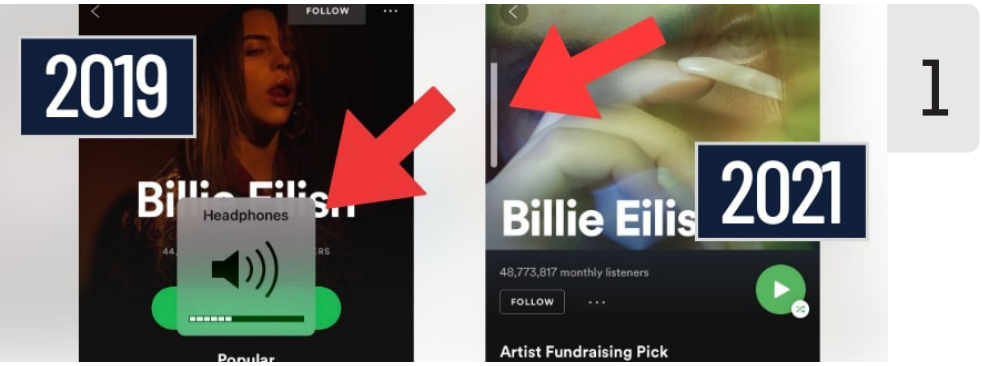
(see fig 1)

→ **Indicate Which Items Have Changed**. Which field do they need to fix?

(see fig 2)

→ **Warn Users When a Timed Function Will Occur**. Let them know before a timeout occurs.

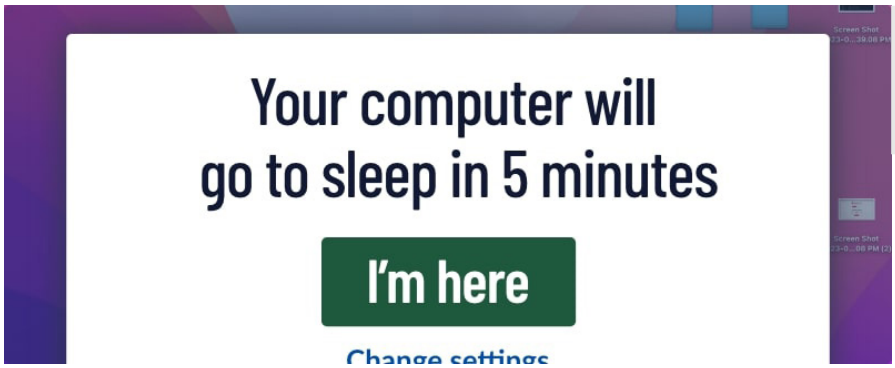
(see fig 3)



1


FIX EMAIL
WRONG@EMAIL.COM
*

2


Your computer will
go to sleep in 5 minutes
I'm here

3

COMMUNICATE HIDDEN SECTIONS OF INTERFACES

Extend elements beyond the screen to communicate that more information exists.

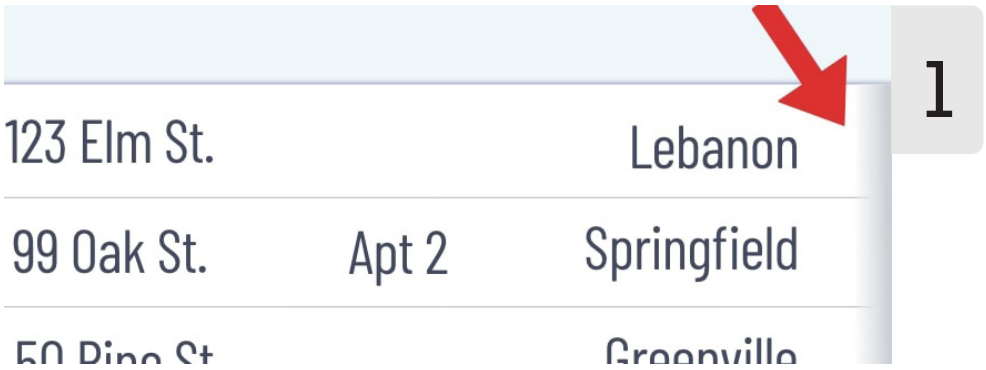
Screens are getting smaller.

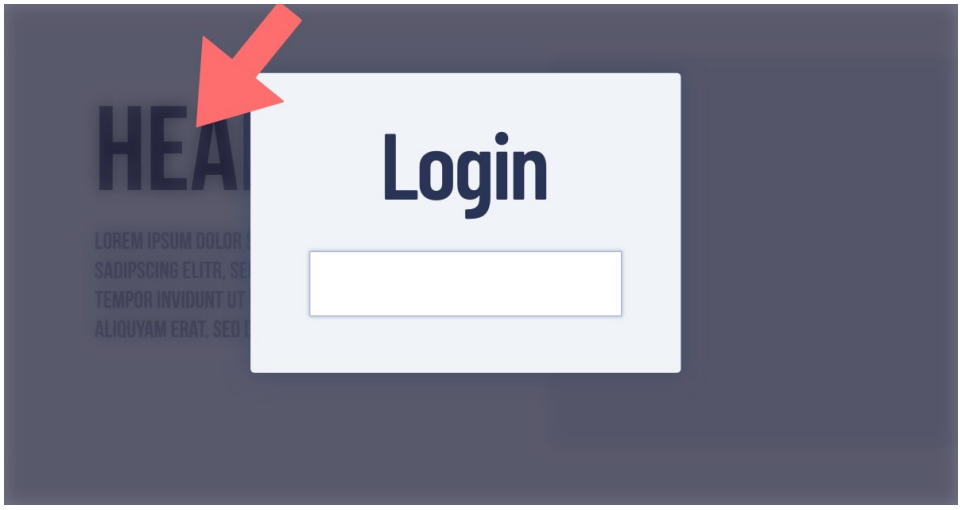
Content will inevitable exist outside viewports, and users should be able to recognize this existence.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Avoid a Self-Contained Viewport**. Visible breaks can imply that more content exists.
→ **Convey Depth Through Fades or Shadows**. Users should perceive more rows or columns in a table.

(see fig 1)





HIDE OR REMOVE UNNECESSARY ELEMENTS

Reduce the saliency of peripheral information.

Attention is precious.

Push attention to focal items, while limiting the peripheral content from diluting their attention.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Omit Self-Explanatory Instructions**. Users don't need to be told to fill out fields. Just show the fields.

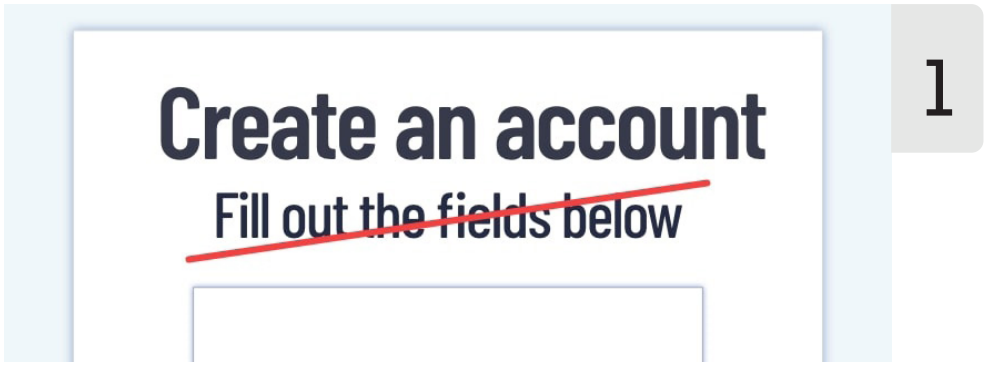
(see fig 1)

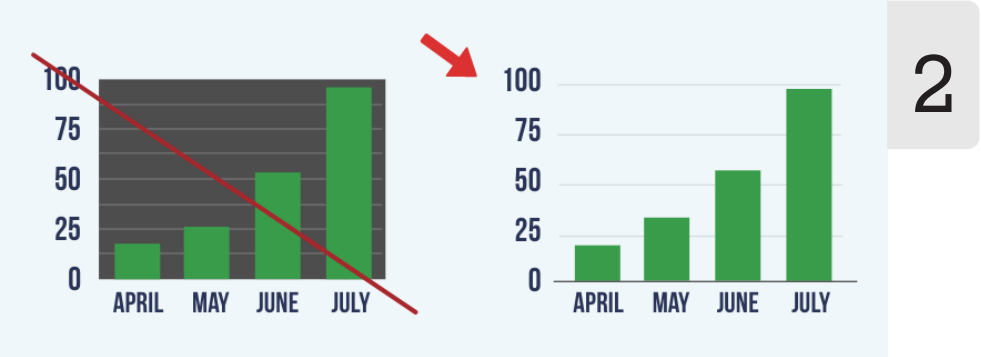
→ **Maximize Data-Ink Ratios**. Fewer distractions can reveal the key findings.

(see fig 2)

→ **Hide Peripheral Details in Expandable Mediums**. Collapse information in toggles when space is constrained (e.g., mobile).

(see fig 3)




100
75
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APRIL
MAY
JUNE
JULY
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APRIL
MAY
JUNE
JULY

2


Headline
Headline
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet,

3

GROUP SIMILAR ELEMENTS WITHIN INTERFACES

Group related items by proximity, color, shape, and other visual traits.

Users will group your interface into sections.

Help them perceive these groups with *gestalt principles of grouping* (e.g., proximity, color, shape).

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Push Headlines Closer to Their Sections**. Headlines seem ambiguous if they appear in the middle.

(see fig 1)

→ **Keep Labels Close to Their Elements**. Form labels should be nearby.

(see fig 2)

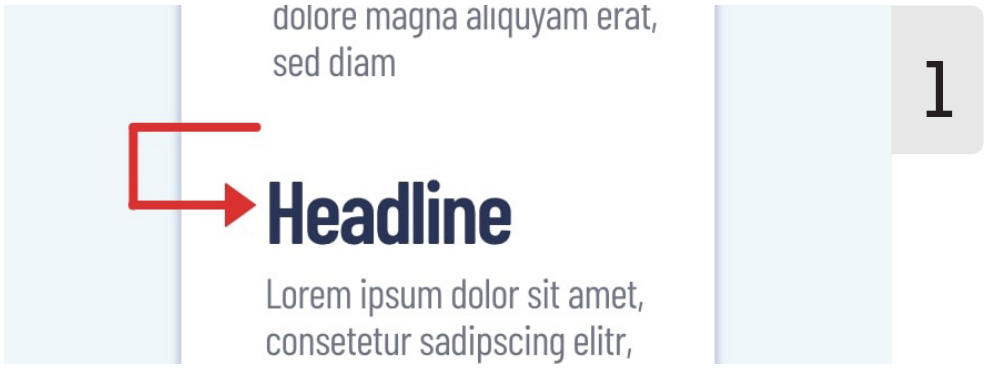
→ **Divide Long Lists Into Sections**. A subtle line can make a list seem organized, even if the groups are randomly divided (Mogilner et al., 2008).

(see fig 3)

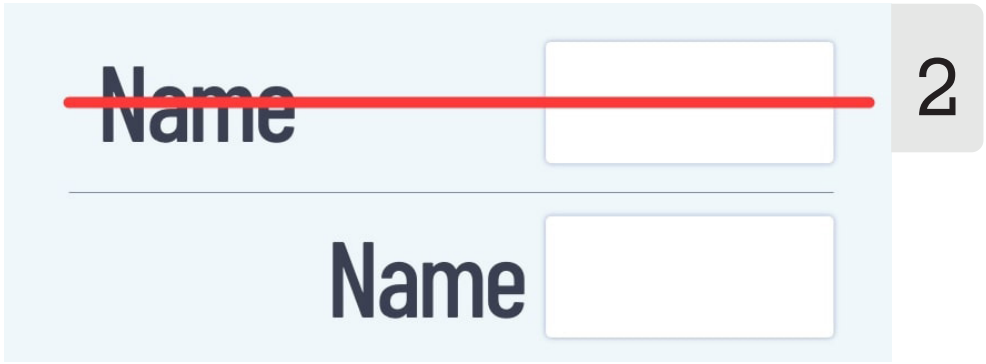
→ **Distinguish Powerful Functions to Minimize Slips**. A delete function should look vastly different to prevent unnecessary interactions.

(see fig 4)

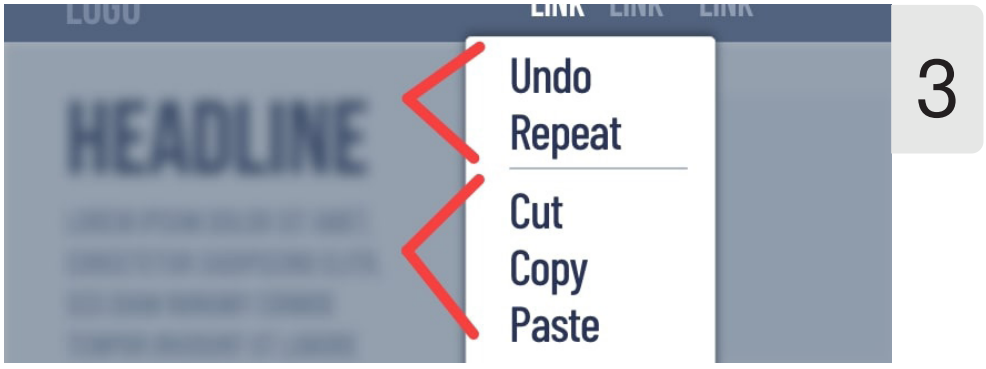
Mogilner, C., Rudnick, T., & Iyengar, S. S. (2008). The mere categorization effect: How the presence of categories increases choosers' perceptions of assortment variety and outcome satisfaction. Journal of consumer Research, 35(2), 202-215.


dolore magna aliquyam erat,
sed diam
Headline
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet,
consetetur sadipscing elitr,

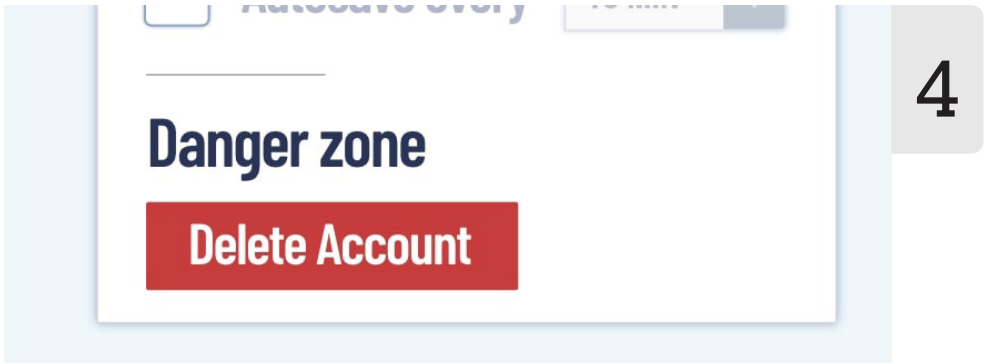
1


Name
Name

2


HEADLINE
Undo
Repeat
Cut
Copy
Paste

3


Danger zone
Delete Account

4

CREATE A VISUAL ENTRY POINT

Users should know where to look first.

Guide the user's attention.

Emphasize a focal point in your viewport so that users know where to look first. Without an entry point, users feel overwhelmed and uncertain what to do.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Reduce the Saturation of Nearby Elements**. Subheadlines should be a lighter font weight or color.

(see fig 1)

INSERT THE USER'S PHOTO INTO THE INTERFACE

Bridge the gap between the real and digital world.

Ask customers to upload a profile photo on your website.

Why?

→ **Implicit Egotism.** Customers prefer stimuli related to themselves. If you display their photo in a navigation menu, you activate positive emotions on every page of your website (see Pelham, Mirenberg, & Jones, 2002).
→ **Personal Connection**. This photo bridges the gap into the digital world. If customers see their photo near a product, they can imagine buying and using this product because they are physically (and thus conceptually) closer to it.

Other takeaways:

→ **Optimize the Photo Quality**. Customers are more likely to buy something when they see a photo that makes them look attractive. They feel more confident, and they attribute this confidence to the purchase decision (Jiang, Xu, Gorlin, & Dhar, 2021).

Jiang, Z., Xu, J., Gorlin, M., & Dhar, R. (2021). Beautiful and confident: how boosting self-perceived attractiveness reduces preference uncertainty in context-dependent choices. Journal of Marketing Research, 58(5), 908-924.

Pelham, B. W., Mirenberg, M. C., & Jones, J. T. (2002). Why Susie sells seashells by the seashore: implicit egotism and major life decisions. Journal of personality and social psychology, 82(4), 469.

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