Module 6

Words, Sentences, Messages and Text Words

Learning Objectives: Understand different text ,messages.

Words

Do not use:

➢Jargon, words, or terms:

• Unique to the computer profession such as filespec, abend, or spool.

• With different meanings outside of the computer profession such as boot or abort.

• Made up to describe special functions or conditions.

➢Abbreviations or acronyms.

• Unless the abbreviation or acronym is as familiar as a full word or phrase.

➢   Word contractions, suffixes, and prefixes.

Words(Conti..)

Use:

- Short, familiar words.

- Standard alphabetic characters.

- Complete words.

- Positive terms .Implicitly negative terms, such as "decrease" should be replaced with positive terms, such as "increase".

- Simple action words; avoid noun strings. for example, "Project Status Listing" say "List Project Status."

- The "more" dimension when comparing.

- Consistent words.

Do not:

- Stack words. Multiple-word phrases are more readable if the entire phrase is on

  one line, not stacked vertically.

- Hyphenate words. For better readability, never break a word between two lines.

- Include punctuation for abbreviations, mnemonics, and acronyms.

Sentences and Messages

Sentences and messages must be:

➢ **Brief and simple.**

➢ **Directly and immediately usable:** Searching through reference material to translate a message is unacceptable, as are requirements for transposing, computing, interpolating, or mentally translating messages into other units.

➢ **An affirmative statement** : Affirmative statements are easier to understand than negative statements. For example, "Complete entry before returning to menu." is easier to grasp than "Do not return to menu before completing entry." *Tell a person what to do* rather than what to avoid

➢ **In an active voice:** The active voice is usually easier to understand than passive voice. For example, "Send the message by depressing TRANSMIT" is more understandable than "The message is sent by depressing TRANSMIT."

➢ **In the temporal sequence of events** : If a sentence describes a temporal sequence of events, the order of words should correspond to this sequence. A prompt should say, "Complete address and page forward" rather than "Page forward after completing address."

➢ **Structured so that the main topic is near the beginning** : Information that must be remembered should be placed at the beginning of a message or sentence

➢ **Parallel construction** :Use the same grammatical structure for elements of sentences or messages that provide the same kind of information. For example, say, "Use this control to select one choice" and "Use this menu to select one option." Not, "To select one choice use this control," and "This menu is used to select one option."

Sentences and messages must be of the proper tone:

- **Nonauthoritarian**: Imply that the system is awaiting the user's direction, not that the system is directing the user. For example, phrase a message as "Ready for the next command," not "Enter the next command."

- **Nonthreatening**: Negative tones or actions, or threats, are not very friendly. Since errors are often the result of a failure to understand, mistakes, or trial-and-error behavior, the user may feel confused, inadequate, or anxious. Therefore, harsh words like "illegal," "bad," or "fatal" should be avoided. For example, instead of saying "Error—Numbers are illegal," say, "Months must be entered by name."

- **Nonanthropomorphic** : Having the computer "talk" like a person should be avoided for several reasons. An attribution of knowledge or intelligence will, first, imply a much higher level of computer "knowledge" than actually exists, creating shattered user expectations. Second, this attribute eliminates the distinction that actually exists between people and computers. Third, many people express anxiety about using computers by saying things like "they make you feel dumb."

➢ **Nonpatronizing :** Patronizing messages can be embarrassing. "Very good, you did it right" may thrill a fourth-grader, but would be somewhat less than thrilling to an adult. Being told "You forgot again" once may be acceptable, but being told three or four times in one minute is another story.

➢ **Punishment and humor :** Until an optimal computer personality is developed, messages should remain factual and informative, and should not attempt humor or punishment. Humor is a transitory and changeable thing. What is funny today may not be funny tomorrow, and what is funny to some may not be to others. Punishment is never a desirable way to force a change in behavior, especially among adults.

Messages

Messages are communications provided on the screen to the screen viewer. Screen messages fall into two broad categories: system and instructional.

➢ System messages are generated by the system to keep the user informed of the system's state and activities. They are customarily presented within message boxes. They reflect the system state, as it exists at that moment in time.

➢ Instructional messages ,sometimes referred to as prompting messages, are messages that tell the user how to work with, or complete, the screen displayed. They may be provided in messages boxes and also within the screen itself.

System messages consist of common messages types such as:

Status messages : It is used for providing information concerning the progress of a lengthy operation. It typically only possesses a Cancel button, to stop the operation being performed. Pause and Resume buttons may also be included, if desired.

Informational messages : It is also called notification messages, provide information about the state of the system when it is not immediately obvious to the user. They may also be used to provide intermediate feedback when normal feedback is delayed. This kind of message is usually identified by an "I" icon to the left of the message.

fig: Information message box

Warning messages: It call attention to a situation that may be undesirable. They are usually identified by an "!" icon to the left of the message. The user must determine whether the situation is in fact a problem and may be asked to advise the system whether or not to proceed. A deletion request by a user is an action that commonly generates a warning message.
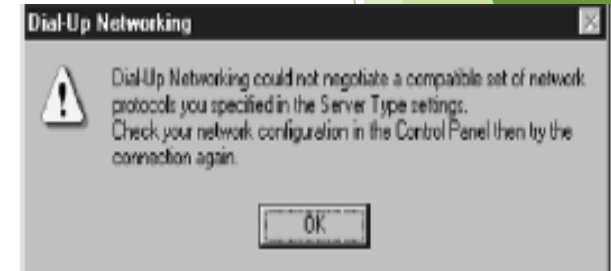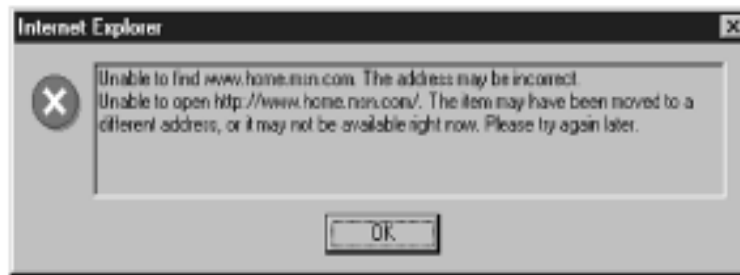
fig: Warning messages

Critical messages: Sometimes called action messages, call attention to conditions that require a user action before the system can proceed. A message describing an erroneous situation is usually presented as a critical message Some products use a "Do Not" symbol while others use a "Stop" sign. An X in a circle is used by Microsoft Windows.

Question messages :Question messages are another kind of message type sometimes seen. A question message asks a question and offers a choice of options for selection. It is designated by a "?" icon preceding the message text.

Instructional Messages: Mostly benefit to the to the novice or casual system user. Instructions for these kinds of users must be more detailed than for experienced users. Experienced users usually require only cryptic reminders. To balance the needs of a wide range of users with varying experience levels, accessing instructions through a Help function is the best solution.

Location: Locate instructions at strategic points on screens. Placed at spots just preceding the controls or elements to which they apply. Never, however , place an instruction on one screen that applies to elements on a following screen. They will not be remembered.

Visual differentiation : Display instructions in a manner that visually differentiates them from all other screen elements. This will allow them to be easily ignored by users who do not need them.

Text

Text, by a very general definition, is any textual element that appears on a screen, including field captions, headings, words, sentences, messages, and instructions.

Presenting Text

Fonts:

➢ Use plain and simple fonts.

➢ Choose a minimum point size of 12 to 14.

➢ Use proportional fonts.

Width:

➢ Include no more than 40 to 60 characters on each line.

➢ A double column of 30 to 35 characters separated by five spaces is also acceptable.

➢ Do not right-justify.

➢ Do not hyphenate words.

Text(Conti…)

Content:

- Use headings to introduce a new topic.

- Separate paragraphs by at least one blank line.

- Start a fresh topic on a new page.

- Use lists to present facts.

- Emphasize important things by:

  • Positioning.

  • Boxes.

  • Bold typefaces.

  • Indented margins.

Miscellaneous:

- Use paging (not scrolling).

- Provide a screen design philosophy consistent with other parts of the system.

Writing Text

Sentences and paragraphs:

➢ Use short sentences composed of familiar, personal words.

• Cut the excess words.

• Try to keep the number of words in a sentence to 20 or less.

➢ Cut the number of sentences.

➢ Use separate sentences for separate ideas.

➢ Keep the paragraphs short.

➢ Restrict a paragraph to only one idea.

Style:

➢ Use the active writing style.

➢ Use the personal writing style, if appropriate.

➢ Write as you talk.

➢ Use subjective opinion.

➢ Use specific examples.

➢ Read it out loud.

Window Title

- All windows must have a title located in a centered position at the top.
- Exception: Windows containing messages.
- Clearly and concisely describe the purpose of the window.
- Spell it out fully using an uppercase or mixed-case font.
- If title truncation is necessary, truncate it from right to left.
- If presented above a menu bar, display it with a background that contrasts with the bar.

Conventions

- Establish conventions for referring to:
- Individual keyboard keys.
- Keys to be pressed at the same time.
- Field captions.
- Names supplied by users or defined by the system.
- Commands and actions.

Sequence Control Guidance

➢ Consider providing a guidance message telling how to continue at points in the dialog when:

• A decision must be made.

• A response needs to be made to continue.

➢ Consider indicating what control options exist at points in the dialog where several alternatives may be available.

➢ Permit these prompts to be turned on or off by the user.

References:

- The Essential Guide to User Interface Design Second Edition, Wiley.
- An Introduction to GUI Design Principles and Techniques ,Wilbert O. Galitz

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