

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF
UX / UI



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

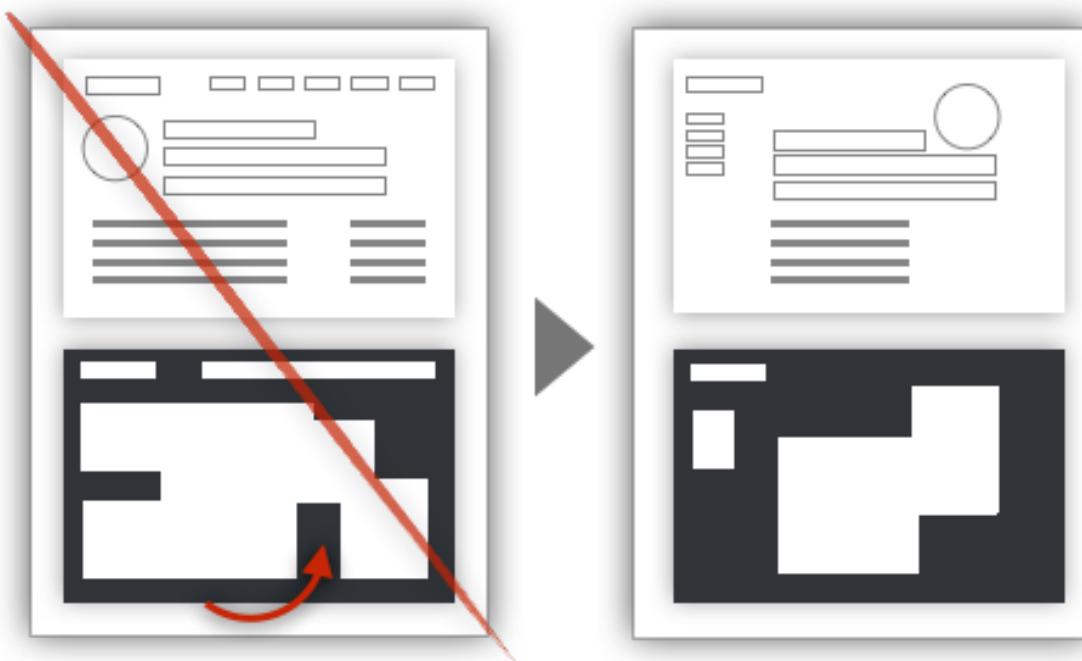
It irks me to admit it...but this PDF could be more usable. I lack the technical skills to structure an image-intensive PDF. So use this PDF as a reminder of the importance of UX/UI skills (and read the web version for a cleaner structure).

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

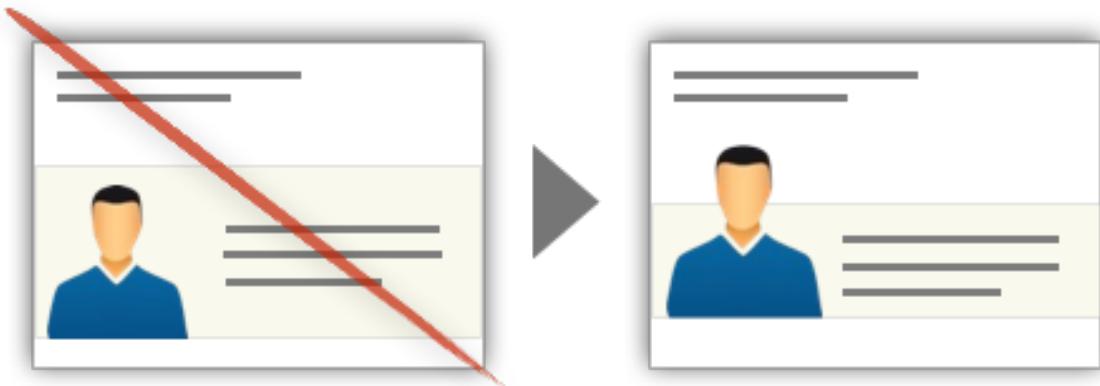
**TACTIC:**

Use a One Column Layout



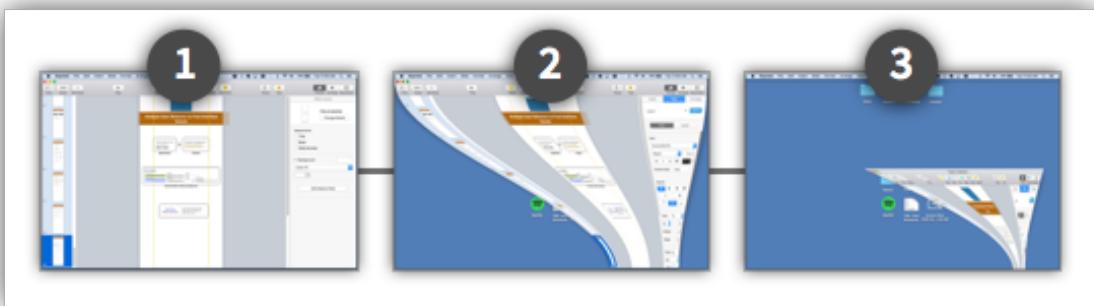
TACTIC:

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



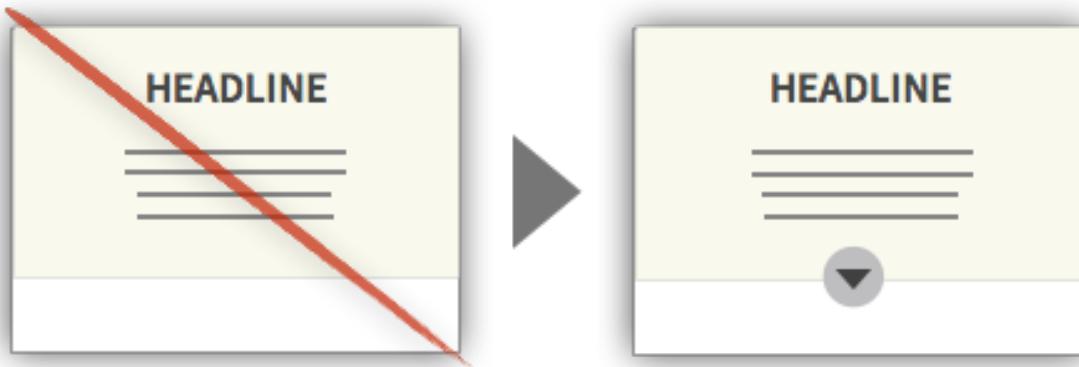
TACTIC:

Add a Shadow to Indicate Depth



TAUTIC:

Indicate More Content With Words or Graphics



TAUTIC:

Include Important Data on Product Listing Pages



TAUTIC:

Provide Useful Information on Hover



TA TIC:

Expose Frequently Used Functions



TA TIC:

Display Primary Data or Statuses in a Dashboard



TA TIC:

Create a Front-End Style Guide

Primary

Buy
Active Inactive

Secondary

Buy
Active Inactive

BUTTONS

HEADING 1
HEADING 2
HEADING 3
Heading 4
Body Content

TYPOGRAPHY

Radio Buttons

- Unchecked
- Checked
- Disabled

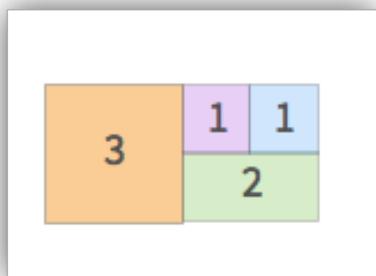
Checkboxes

- Unchecked
- Checked
- Disabled

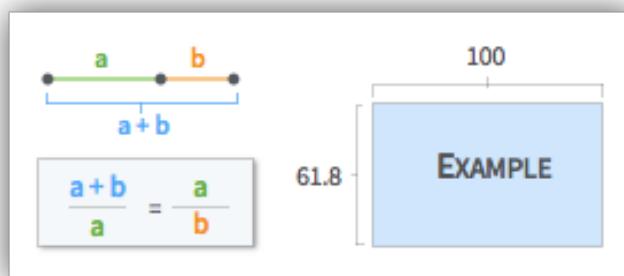
FORM ELEMENTS

TAUTIC:

Construct Designs Using Mathematical Principles



FIBONACCI SQUARES



GOLDEN RATIO

TAUTIC:

Add Tooltips to Coach Novice Users Without Disrupting Expert Users



TAUTIC:

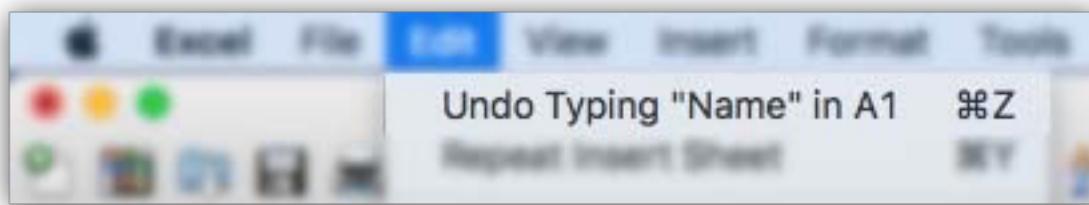
Use One-Window Drilldowns on Small Devices



NAVIGATION & MENUS

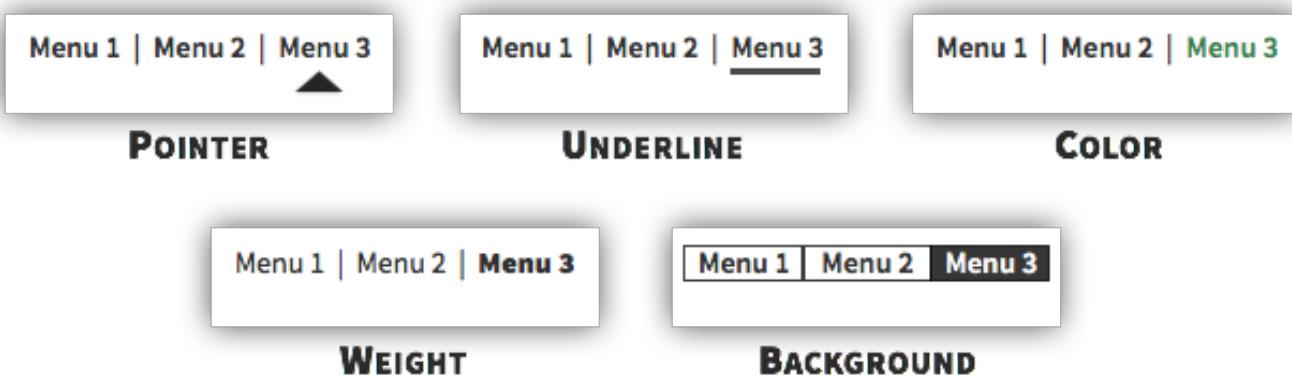
TACTIC:

Use Smart Menu Items to Clarify Actions



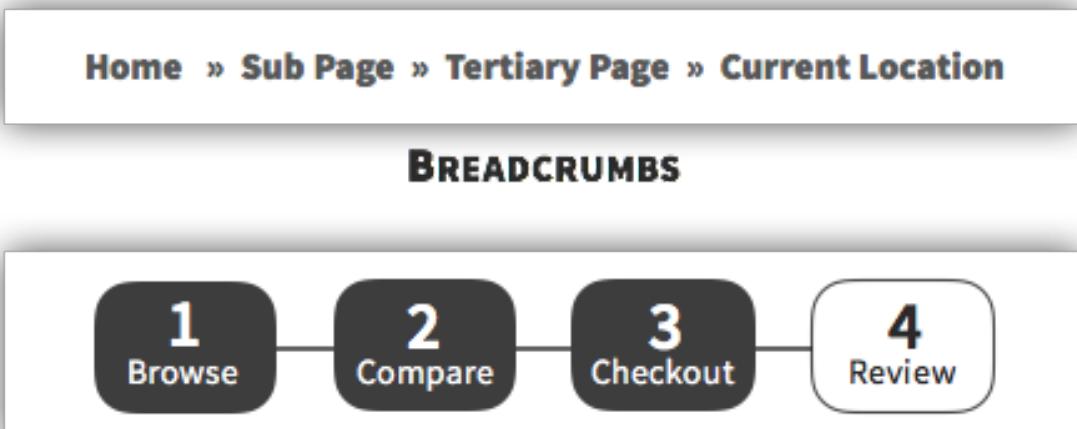
TACTIC:

Highlight the Section Within the Navigation Menu



TACTIC:

Provide Breadcrumbs or Sequence Maps in Complex Interfaces



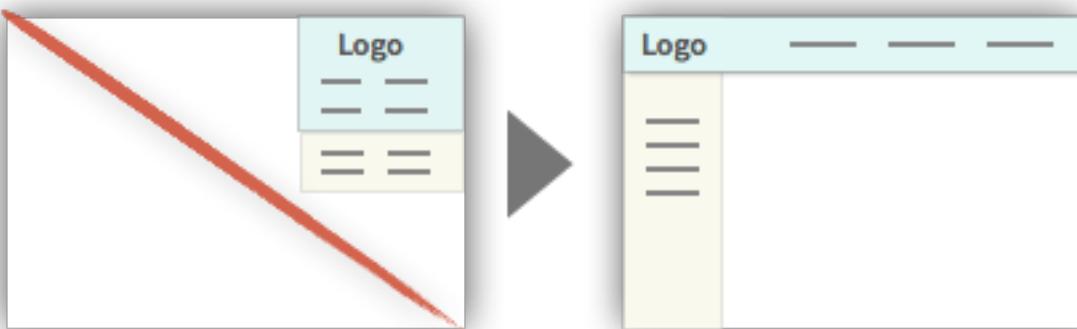
TACTIC:

Create Tight Categories Within Navigation Menus



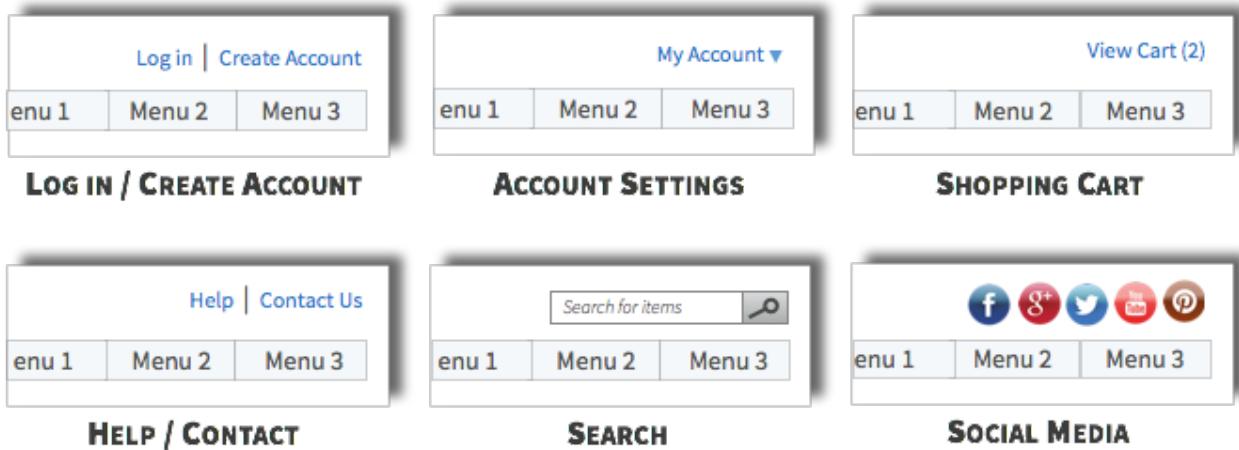
TACTIC:

Use Conventional Navigation Menus



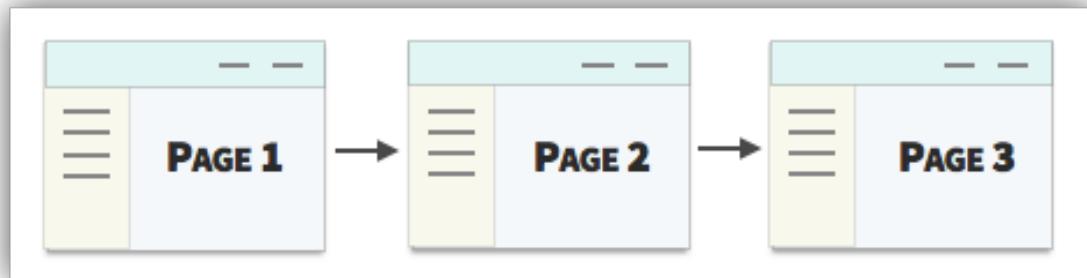
TACTIC:

Put Utilities in the Top Right Corner



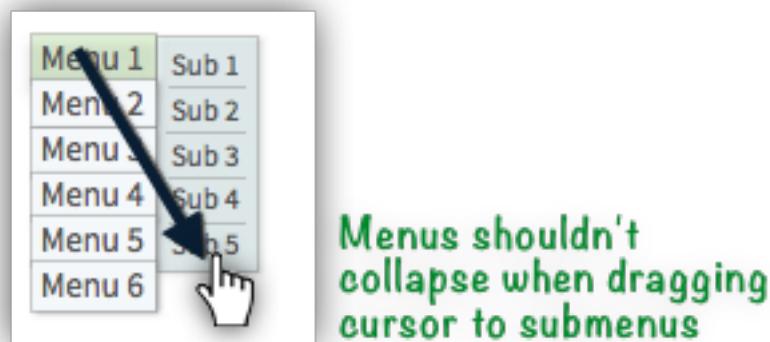
TACTIC:

Keep Navigation Menus in the Same Position



TACTIC:

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



TACTIC:

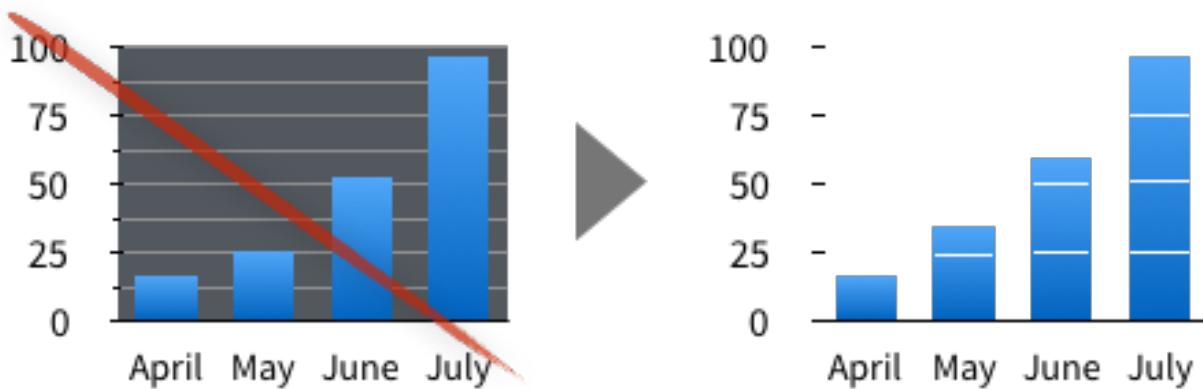
Hyperlink the Entire Menu Option Container



IMAGES & GRAPHICS

TACTIC:

Maximize Data-Ink Ratios in All Imagery



TACTIC:

Hyperlink Complementary Icons and Images

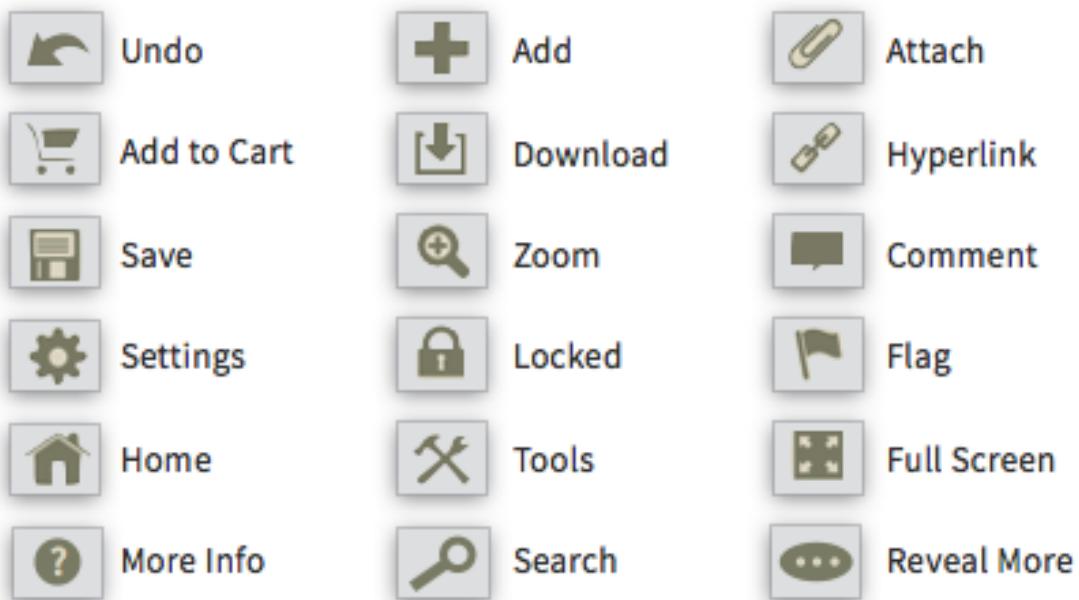


Clicking this image brings visitors to their order history

TACTIC:

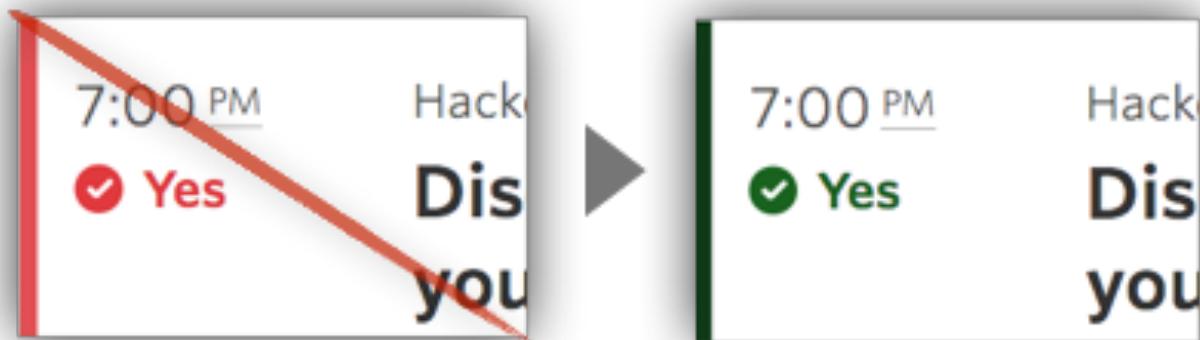
Use Icons and Symbols to Convey the Meaning of an Interaction

Recognizable Icons and Symbols



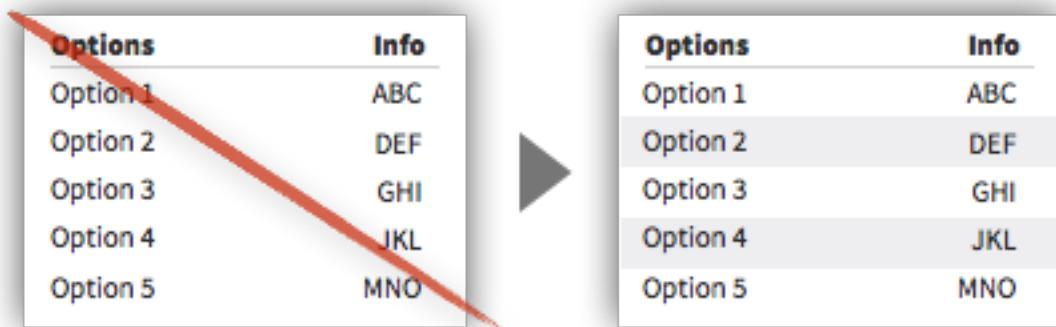
TACTIC:

Choose Colors That Are Semantically Congruent



TACTIC:

Add Row Stripes to Your Tables



TEXT & HEADLINES

TACTIC:

Add Visual Contrast to Page Headlines



WEIGHT



SIZE



COLOR



ALIGNMENT



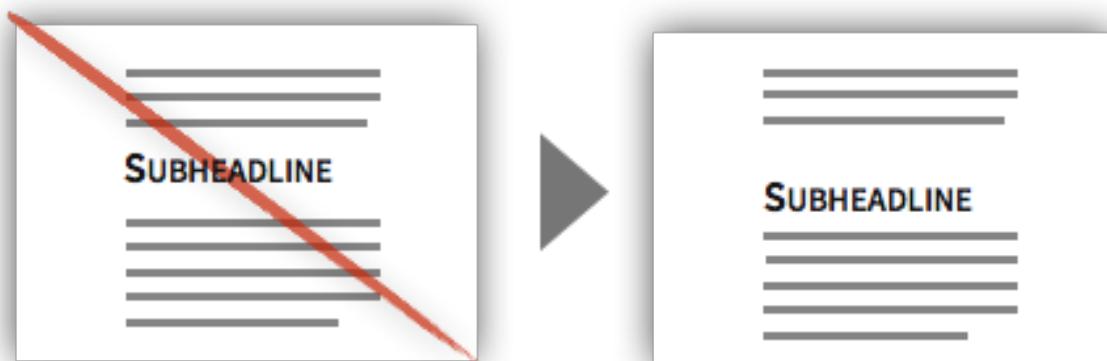
ISOLATION



BACKGROUND

TACTIC:

Position Headlines Closer to Respective Sections



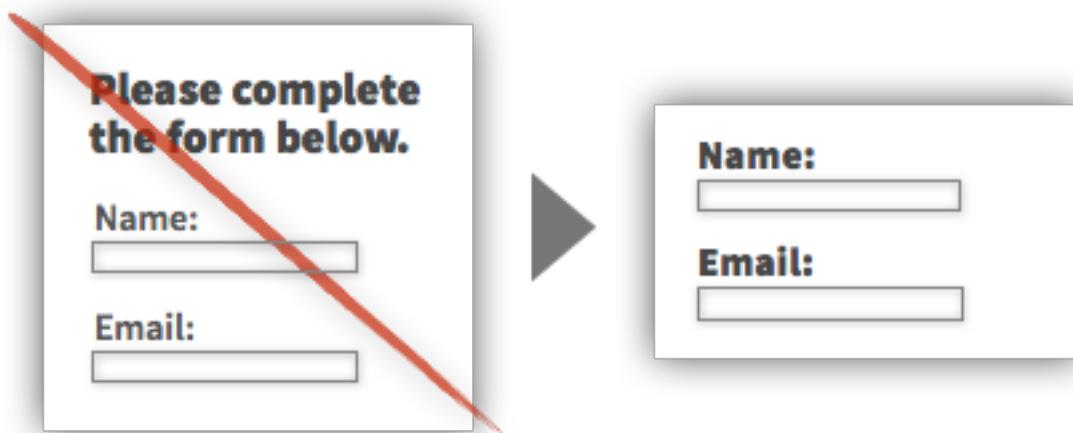
TAUTIC:

Constrain Headlines to Respective Sections



TAUTIC:

Remove Redundant or Self-Explanatory Instructions



TAUTIC:

Speak the Language of the User, Not the System



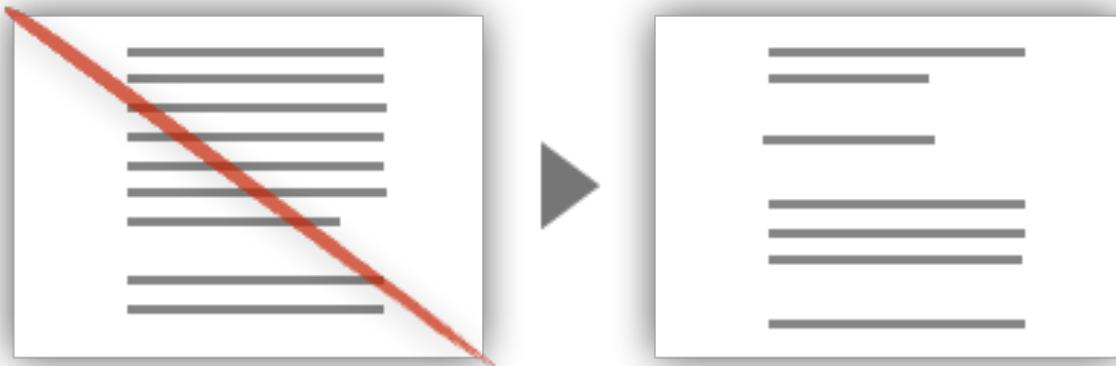
TACTIC:

Offer a Translate Button When Foreign Languages Appear



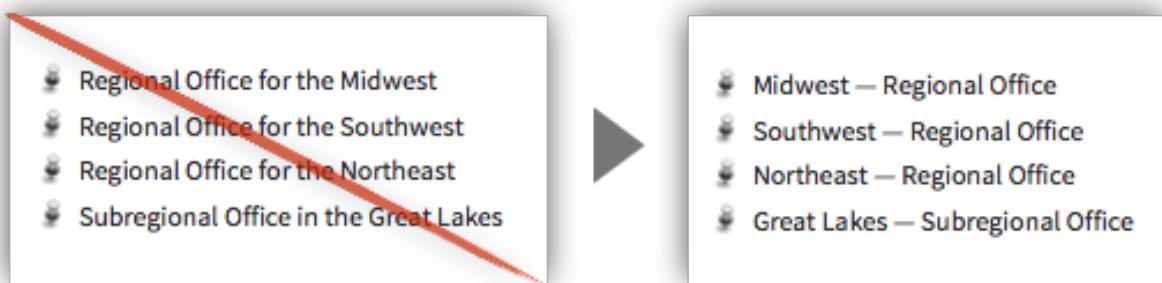
TACTIC:

Keep Paragraphs Short and Highlight Key Terms



TACTIC:

Position Important Information at Beginning of List Items



TACTIC:

Write Standalone Subheadlines



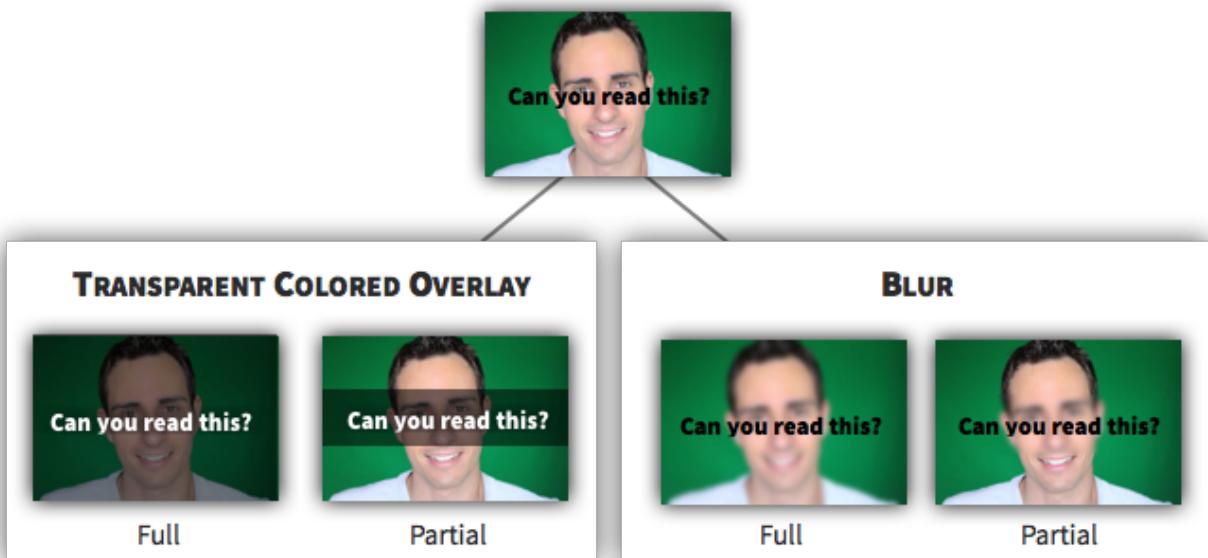
TACTIC:

Break Up Text With Visual Variety



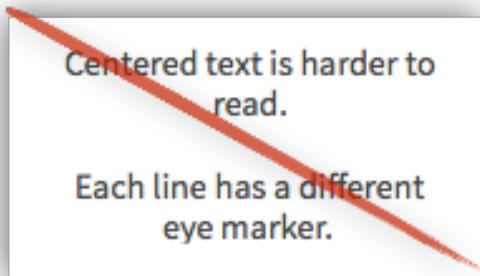
TACTIC:

Create Strong Contrast Between the Text and Background



TACTION:

Left Align the Majority of Body Text



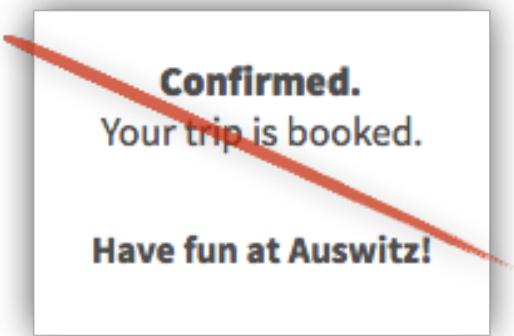
TACTION:

Choose Contrasting Fonts



TACTION:

Resolve Unfavorable Outcomes in Automatically Generated Messages



FORMS & INPUT ELEMENTS

TACTIC:

Filter or Jump to Items That Users Are Searching

The diagram illustrates a search interface. On the left, a search bar contains the letters "st" and a magnifying glass icon. Below it is a list of names: Abigail, Brianna, and Christopher. A large red diagonal slash is drawn across this entire section. An arrow points to the right, leading to a second search interface. This second interface has a search bar with "st" and a magnifying glass icon. Below it is a list of names: Stanley, Stephanie, and Steven.

TACTIC:

Create Smart Defaults Based on Frequently Chosen Input

TACTIC:

The diagram illustrates a dropdown menu. On the left, it shows a dropdown button with the label "Country:" above it. The dropdown menu lists several countries. An arrow points to the right, leading to a second dropdown menu with the same label "Country:". In this second dropdown, the option "United States" is highlighted, indicating it is the selected default value.

Position Common Answers At the Top of Drop Down Lists

The diagram illustrates a dropdown menu. On the left, it shows a dropdown button with the label "Country:" above it. The dropdown menu lists several countries. An arrow points to the right, leading to a second dropdown menu with the same label "Country:". In this second dropdown, the option "United States" is positioned at the top of the list, above other countries like Afghanistan, Albania, and Algeria.

TACTIC:

Let Users Log In Via Username or Email



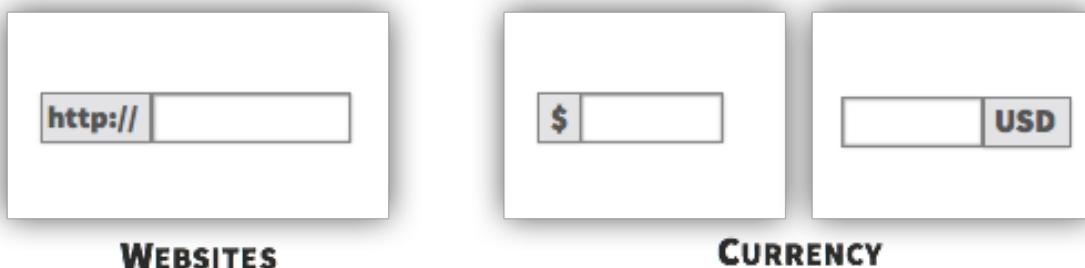
TACTIC:

Give Real-Time Password Requirements and Feedback



TACTIC:

Prepopulate Form Elements With Universal Parameters



TACTIC:

Indicate Required and Optional Form Elements

The diagram illustrates the evolution of a user interface for indicating required form elements. On the left, a red 'X' is drawn over a form containing three input fields labeled 'Email', 'Password', and 'Phone'. A large grey arrow points to the right, leading to a revised version of the form. In the revised version, the 'Email' and 'Password' fields now have a red asterisk (*) preceding the label, signifying they are required fields. The 'Phone' field remains without an asterisk, indicating it is optional.

TACTIC:

Show a Preview of the Output Based on the Current Input

The diagram shows the evolution of a publishing interface. On the left, a red 'X' is drawn over a single-step interface. It features a text area labeled 'Your Work' with three horizontal lines for input, and a prominent orange 'Publish »' button below. A large grey arrow points to the right, leading to a two-step process. The first step is identical to the original: 'Your Work' with three lines and a 'Publish »' button. The second step is a separate box titled 'What it will look like...', which displays a preview of the published output with three horizontal lines.

A screenshot of the AdWords interface for creating a new ad. The form includes fields for 'Headline' (containing 'My Amazing Headline'), 'Description line 1' (containing 'My product is sahweeet.'), 'Description line 2' (containing 'You should try it.'), and 'Display URL' (containing 'website.com/product'). To the right of the form, a box titled 'Ad preview:' shows a live preview of the ad's appearance: 'My Amazing Headline', 'website.com/product', 'My product is sahweeet.', and 'You should try it.'. A green curved arrow points from the text 'AdWords gives a real-time preview of the user's input' down towards the preview box.

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

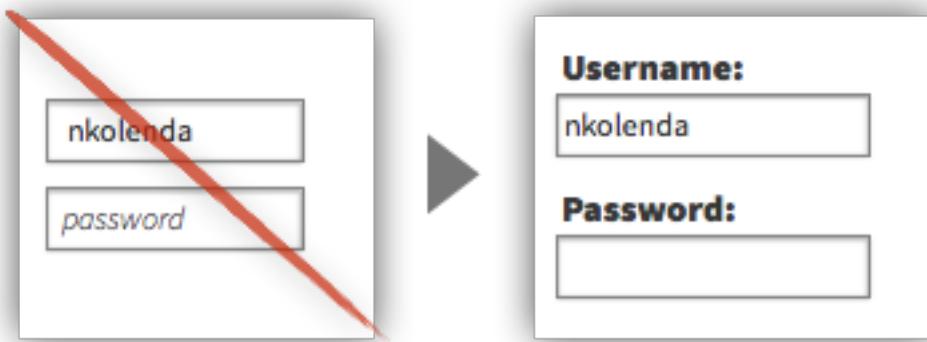
TACTIC:

Provide a Curated List of Common Search Terms



TACTIC:

Keep Form Labels Visible At All Times



TACTIC:

Position Placeholder Text Outside the Form Element



TAUTIC:

Align Form Labels Directly Adjacent to Elements

The diagram illustrates a design improvement for form fields. On the left, a red diagonal line with a large 'X' is drawn across a form containing five fields: Name, Email, Business Name, State, and Zip / Postal Code. Each field has its label positioned to its left. A large grey arrow points to the right, leading to a second version of the form. In this revised version, the labels are moved directly adjacent to their corresponding input fields, creating a cleaner and more intuitive layout.

TAUTIC:

Use Form Elements That Accept Various Formats of Input

This diagram shows how accepting various input formats can prevent user errors. On the left, a red diagonal line with a large 'X' is drawn across a form. It features a 'Date:' label above a text input field containing '5/3/2016'. Below the input, the message 'X Wrong format' is displayed in red. A large grey arrow points to the right, leading to a revised version of the form. In this version, the same date '5/3/2016' is accepted without error, and the message '✓ You're good' is displayed in green below the input field.

TAUTIC:

Display Results That Solve the Searcher's Need

The diagram illustrates three types of search results based on the specificity of the query. On the left, under the heading 'GENERIC SEARCHES', a search for 'books' is shown. The results are general: 'Here are some popular categories of books' followed by three small thumbnail images. In the middle, under the heading 'CATEGORICAL SEARCHES', a search for 'dan brown' is shown. The results are categorized: 'Here are some popular books by Dan Brown' followed by three small thumbnail images. On the right, under the heading 'SPECIFIC SEARCHES', a search for 'da vinci code' is shown. The results are specific: 'Da Vinci Code (Book)' and 'Da Vinci Code (Movie)', each accompanied by a small thumbnail image.

TAUTIC:

Use Search Fields That Handle Typos, Synonyms, and Variants



0 results for negtiation

But here are 42 results for **negotiation**

TYPOS



0 results for arguing

But here are 42 results for **negotiation**

SYNONYMS

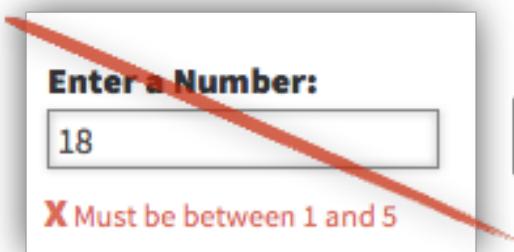


Here are 42 results for **negotiation**

VARIANTS

TAUTIC:

Only Offer Inputs That Are Acceptable



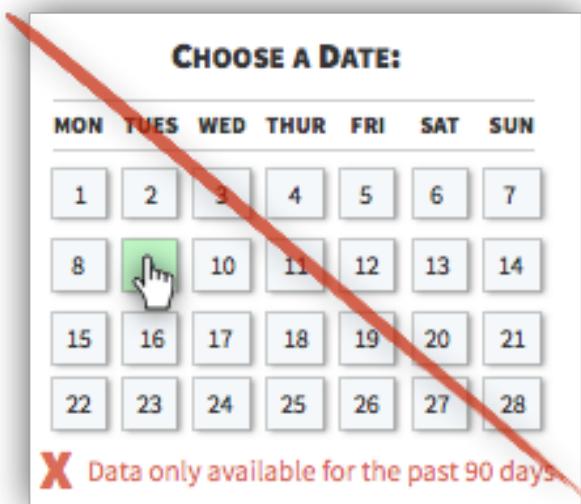
Enter a Number:

X Must be between 1 and 5

A grey arrow points from the first input field to a second input field.

The second input field is a dropdown menu with the following options:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4** 
- 5



CHOOSE A DATE:

MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8		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

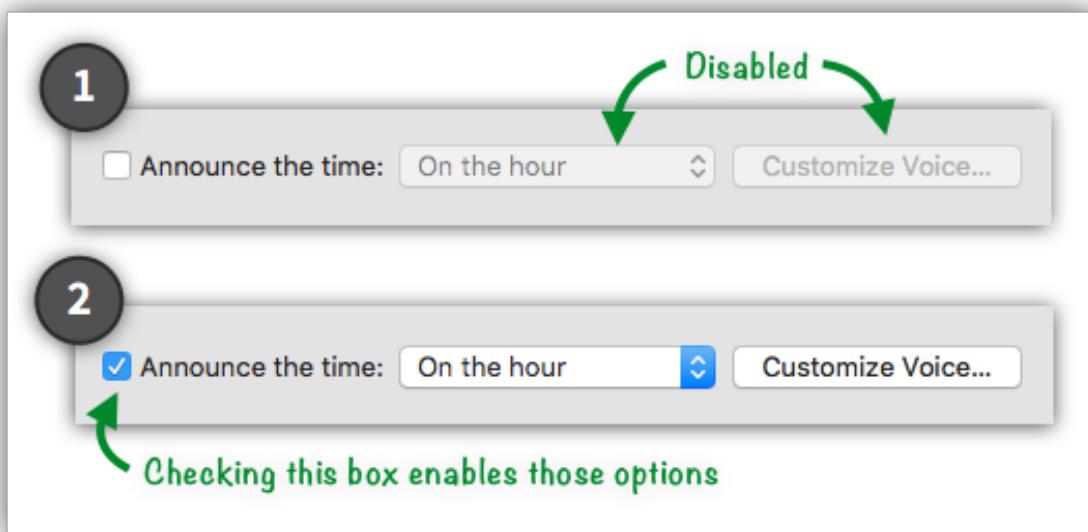
A grey arrow points from the first date input field to a second date input field.

The second date input field is a grid of dates:

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

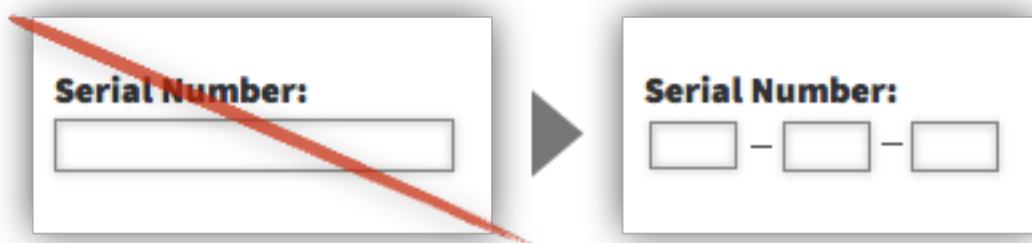
TAUTIC:

Use Responsive Enabling or Disclosure in Form Elements



TAUTIC:

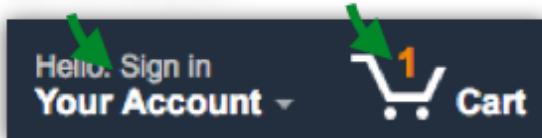
Structure Text Fields to Match the Required Input



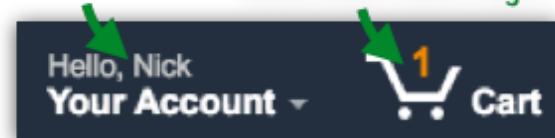
TAUTIC:

Save Data That Users Enter

Guests can add to their cart on Amazon...



...and Amazon retains those items when users log in



TAUTIC:

Display the User's Recent Searches



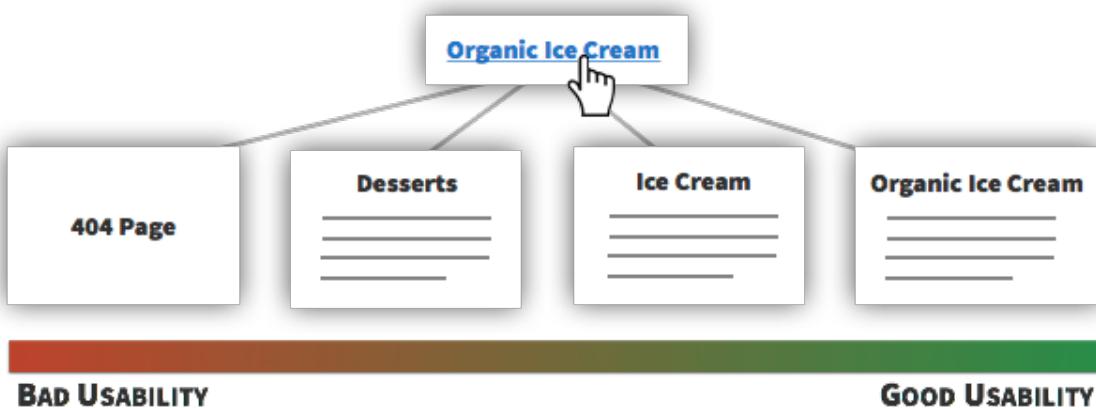
LINKS & BUTTONS

TACTIC:

Use Descriptive Button Labels

**TACTIC:**

Maintain Congruency Between Links and Target Pages

TACTIC:

Indicate Which Items the Cursor is Hovering Over



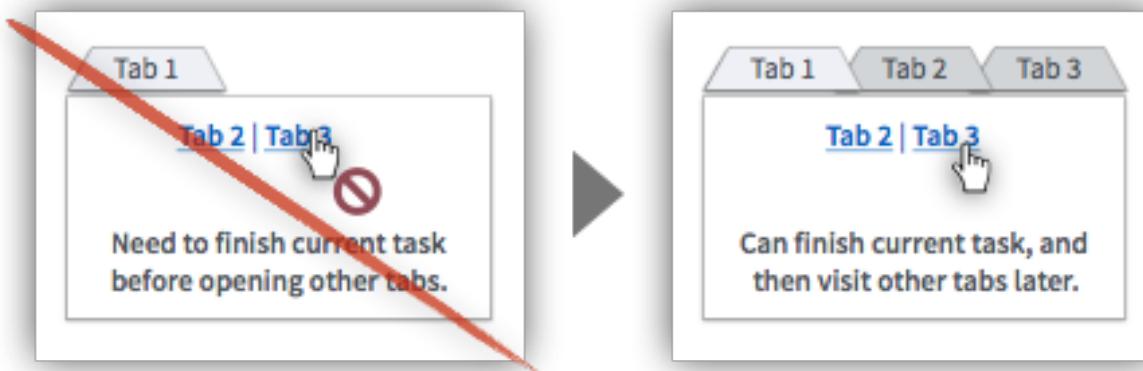
TAUTIC:

Design Buttons Using 3D Characteristics



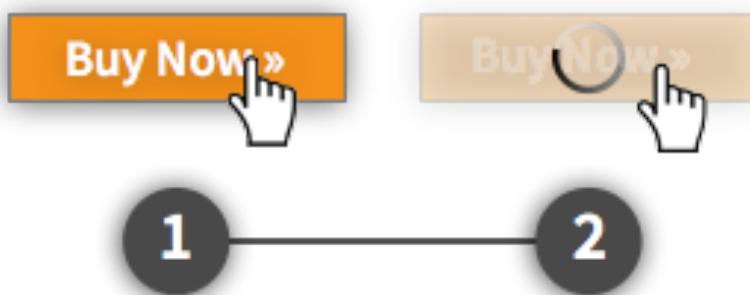
TAUTIC:

Let Users Open Pages in New Tabs



TAUTIC:

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

The image shows two examples of linking UI elements. On the left, under 'MENUS', a green-highlighted menu item 'Menu 2' has a hand cursor pointing at it, with a dropdown menu showing 'Sub 1' and 'Sub 2'. On the right, under 'ITEMS', a table lists four options: 'Option 1' (ABC), 'Option 2' (DEF), 'Option 3' (GHI), and 'Option 4' (JKL). Each option has a hand cursor pointing at it.

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

Clicking this
image brings
visitors to their
order history

The image shows a user interface snippet. On the left, a green callout bubble points to a yellow package icon with a curved arrow. To the right, there are two sections: 'Orders' (View & Modify Recent Orders) and 'Order History' (View Your Kindle Orders, Download Order Reports). A hand cursor is shown pointing at the 'Your Orders' button in the 'Orders' section.

Orders
View & Modify Recent Orders

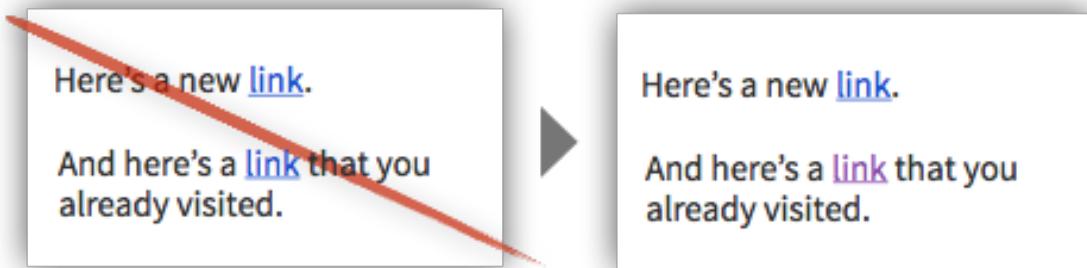
Your Orders >

Order History
View Your Kindle Orders
Download Order Reports

ICONS

TACTIC:

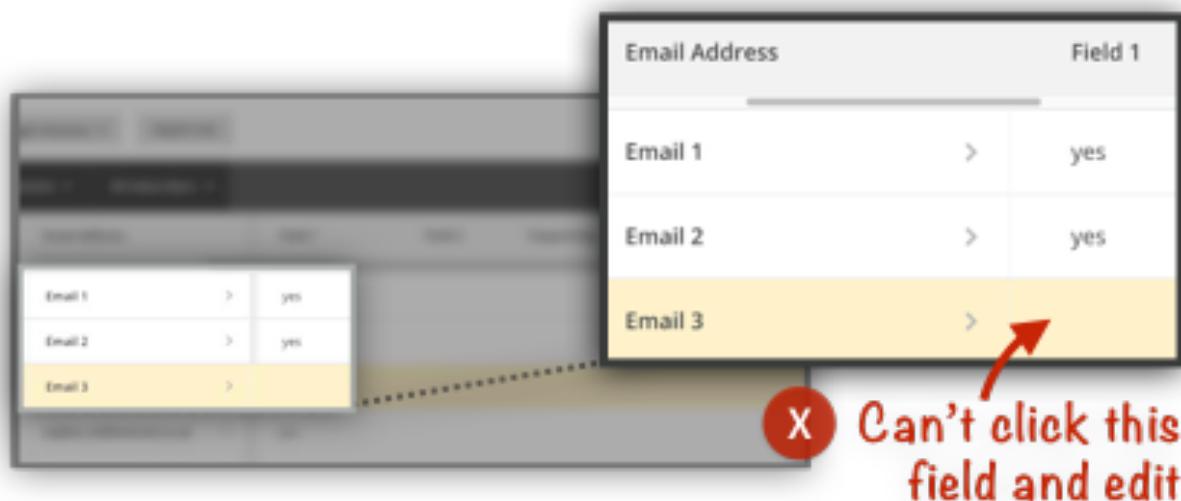
Use Different Colors for Visited Links



TABLES & DATA

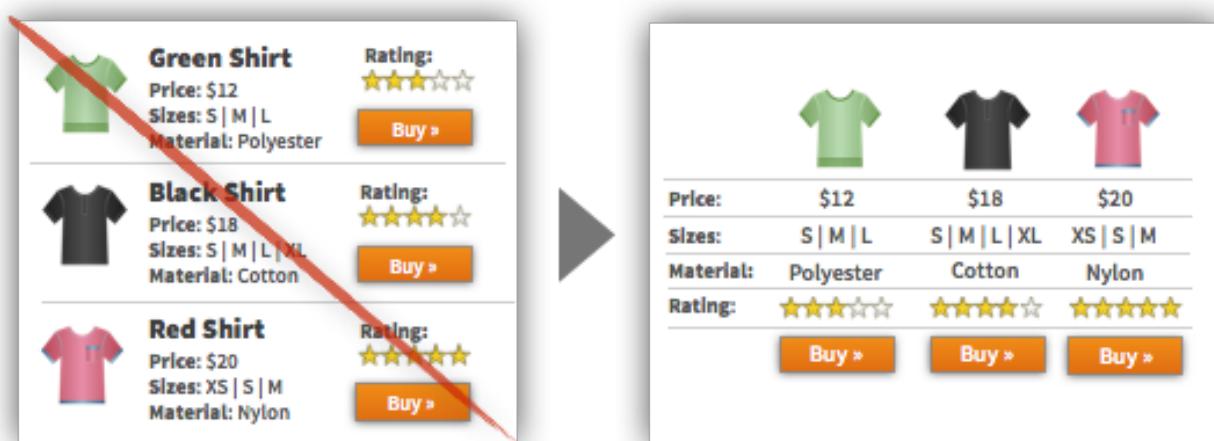
TACTIC:

Let Users Directly Edit Data



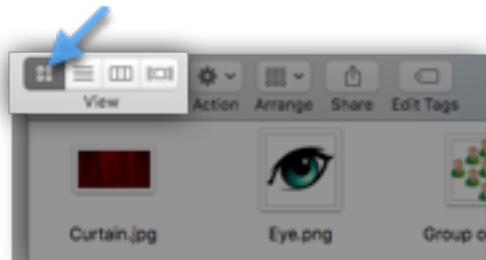
TACTIC:

Merge Congruent Data to Help Users Compare Items

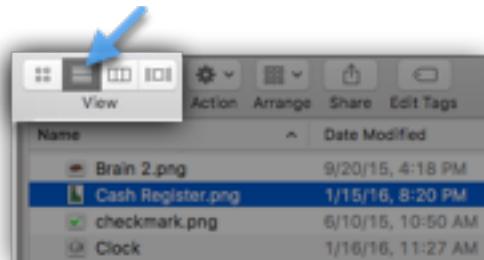


TACTIC:

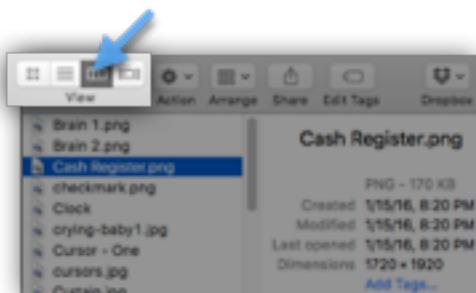
Let Users Control the Appearance of Data



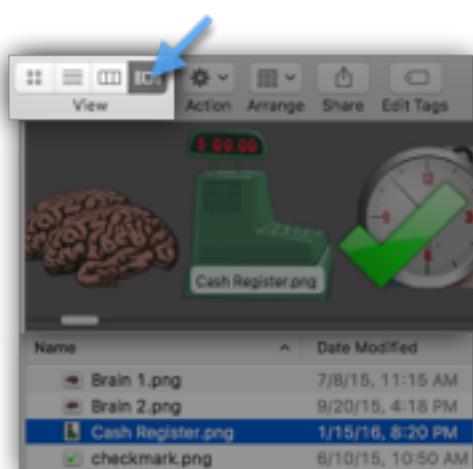
ICONS



LIST / DETAILS



COLUMNS



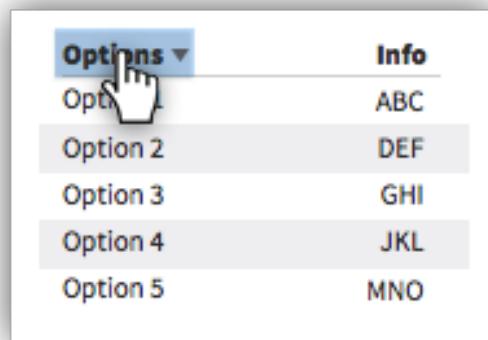
FLOW

TACTIC:

Let Users Control the Order of Data



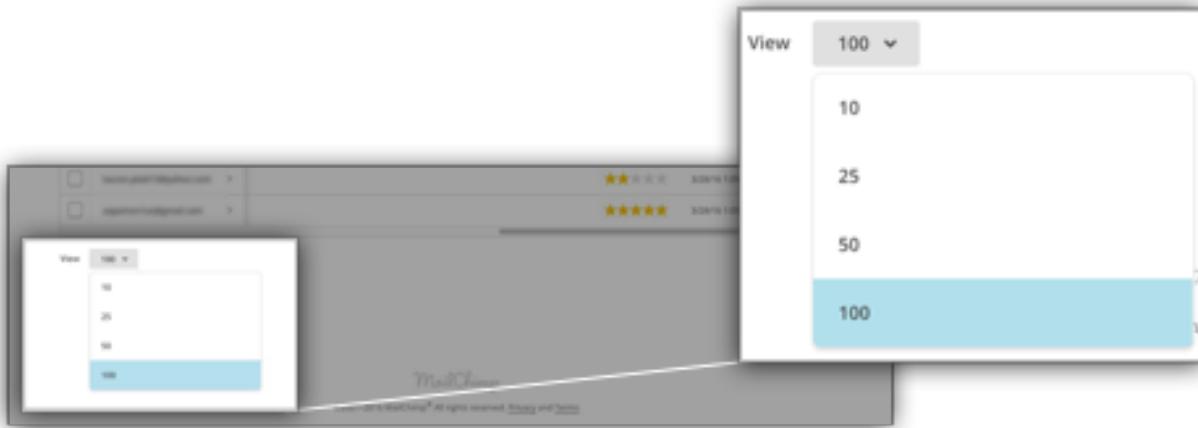
DROP DOWNS / FILTERS



COLUMN HEADERS

TACTIC:

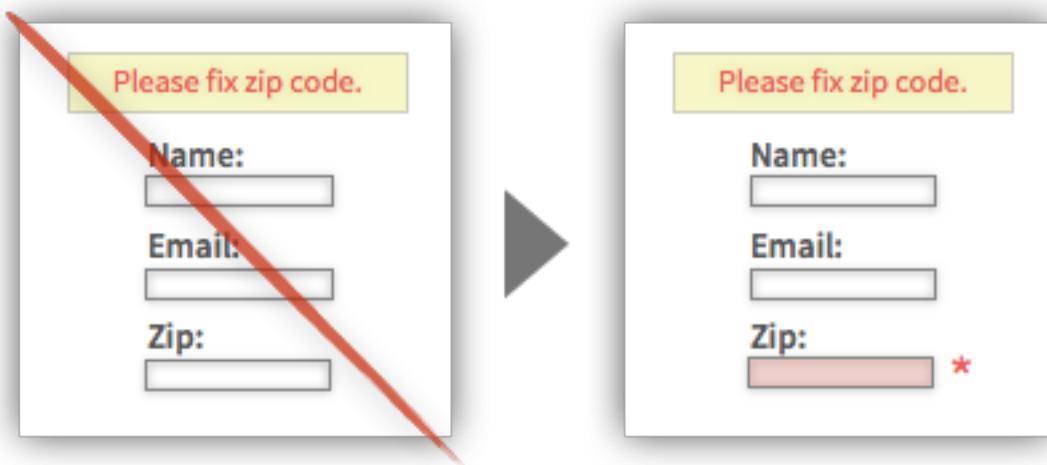
Let Users Control the Quantity of Data



ERRORS, ALERTS, & LOADING

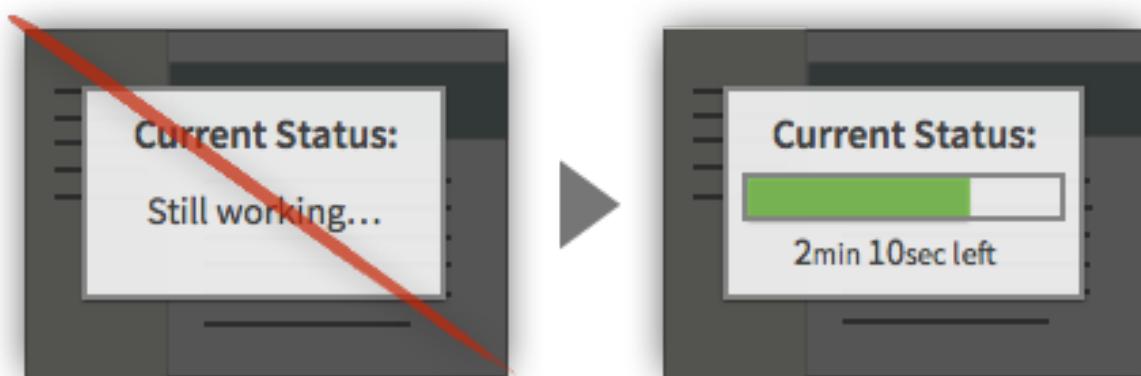
TACTIC:

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



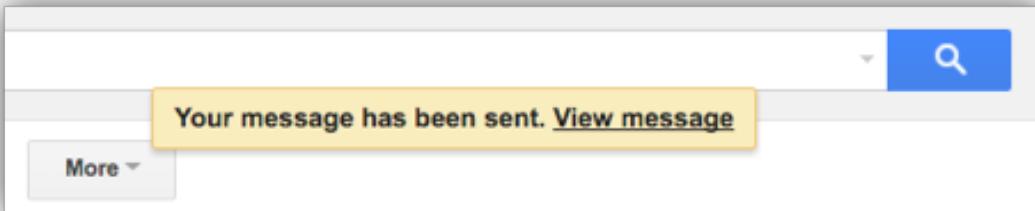
TACTIC:

Start Progress Bars Above 0%



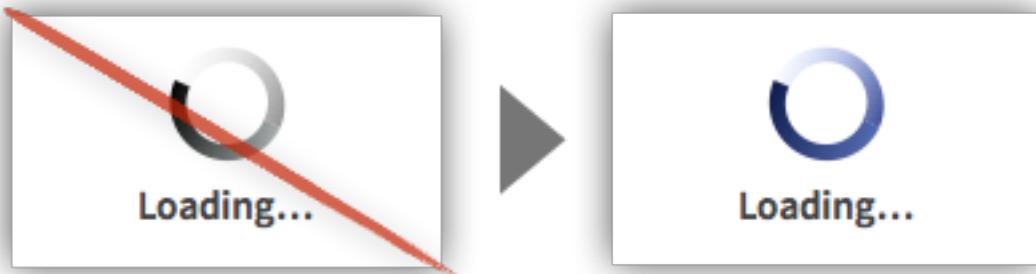
TACTIC:

Display Success Messages After Important Interactions



TACTIC:

Use Cool Colors in Loading Animations to Decrease Arousal



TAUTIC:

Keep Users Engaged During Lengthy Waiting Periods



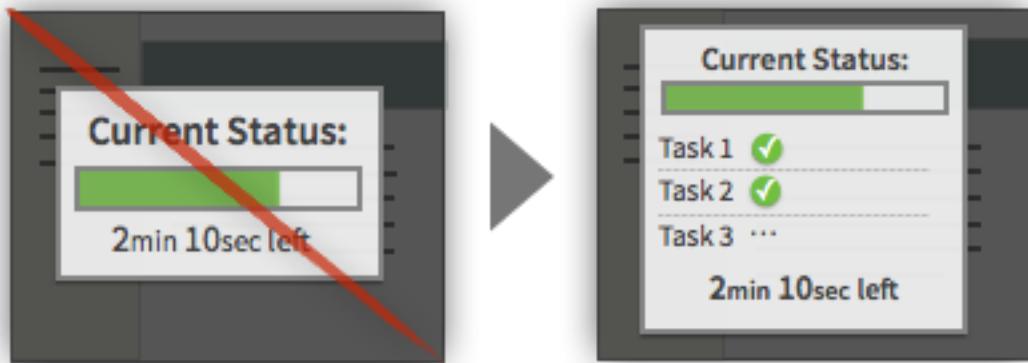
TAUTIC:

Prevent Users From Uploading Files That Are Incompatible



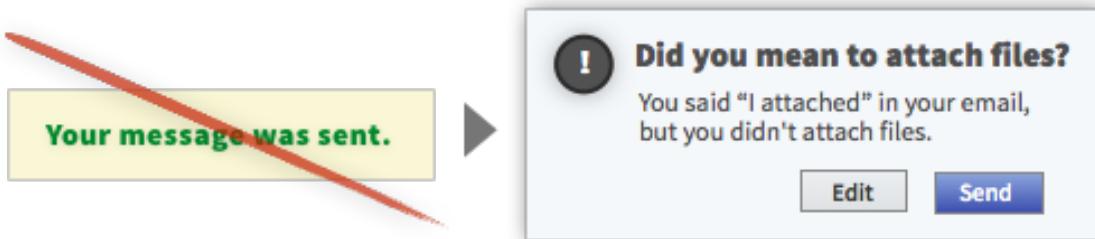
TAUTIC:

Display a Running Tally of Tasks Occurring



TAUTIC:

Search for Wording That Contradicts User Intent



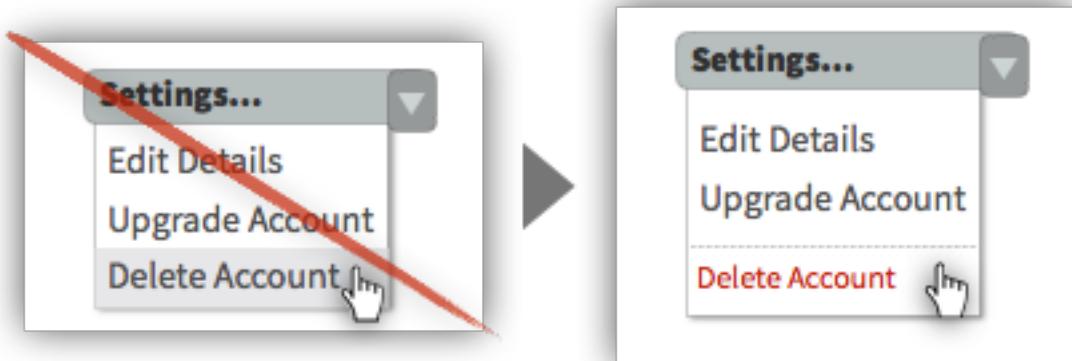
TAUTIC:

Remind Users if They've Already Purchased an Item



TAUTIC:

Separate Powerful Functions by Space or Color



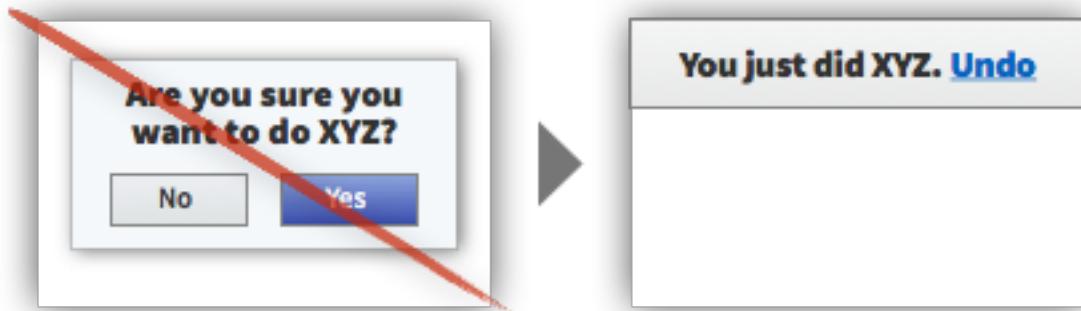
TAUTIC:

Add Constraints to Significant Irreversible Changes



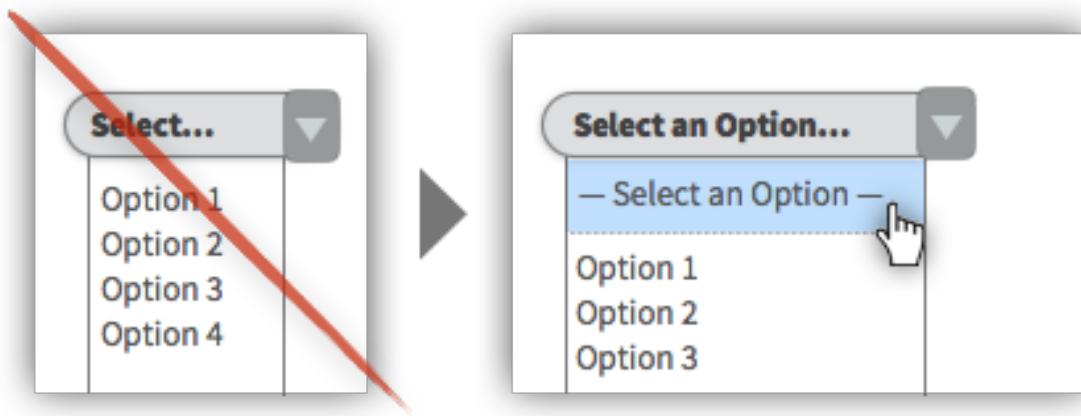
TAICTIC:

Use Undos Rather Than Confirmations



TAICTIC:

Offer an Escape Hatch on All Pages and Functions



TAICTIC:

Explain the Reason for Validation Errors



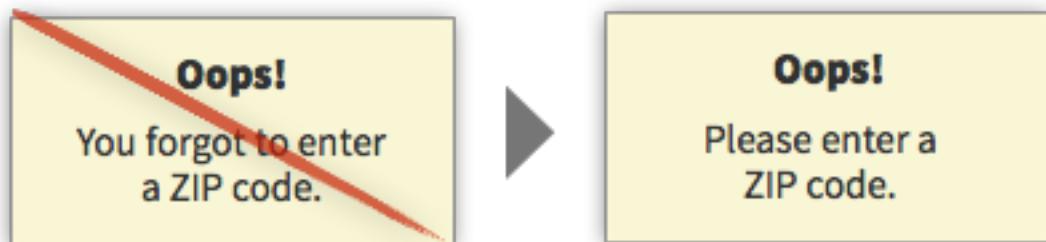
TACTIC:

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

How did our support team
answer your question?



BINARY DATA

RATINGS

TACTIC:

Create Alerts for Increases in 404 Errors

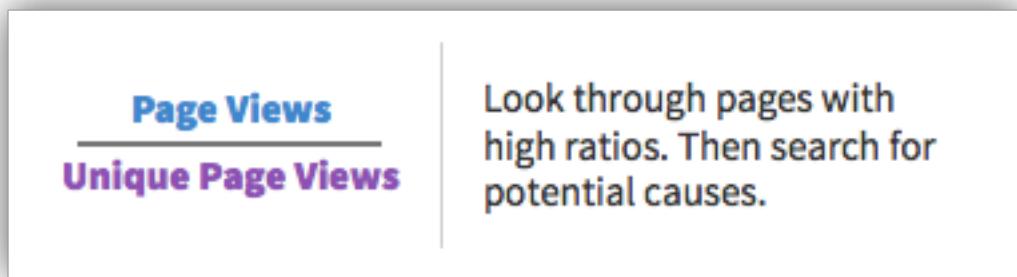
Alert Conditions

This applies to	Condition	Value
Page Title	Matches regular expression	404
Alert me when	Condition	Value
Pageviews	% increases by more than	15 %
	Compared to	Previous day

CUSTOM ALERT IN GOOGLE ANALYTICS

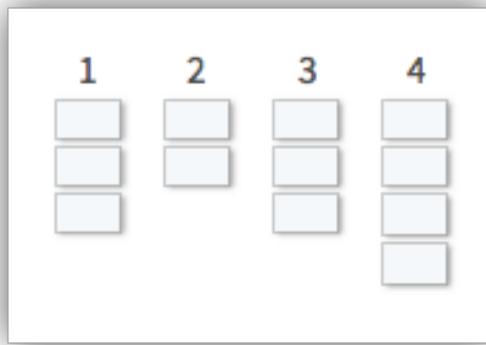
TACTIC:

Identify Pages Where Users Are Pogo-Sticking

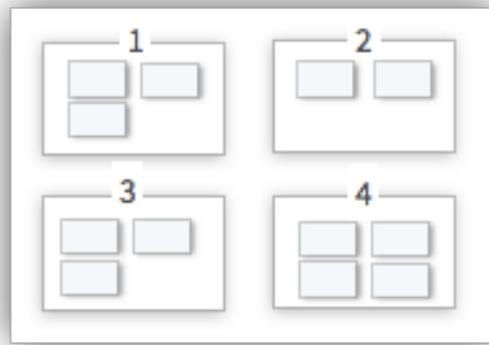


TACTIC:

Use Card Sorting to Construct the Information Architecture



OPEN CARD SORTING

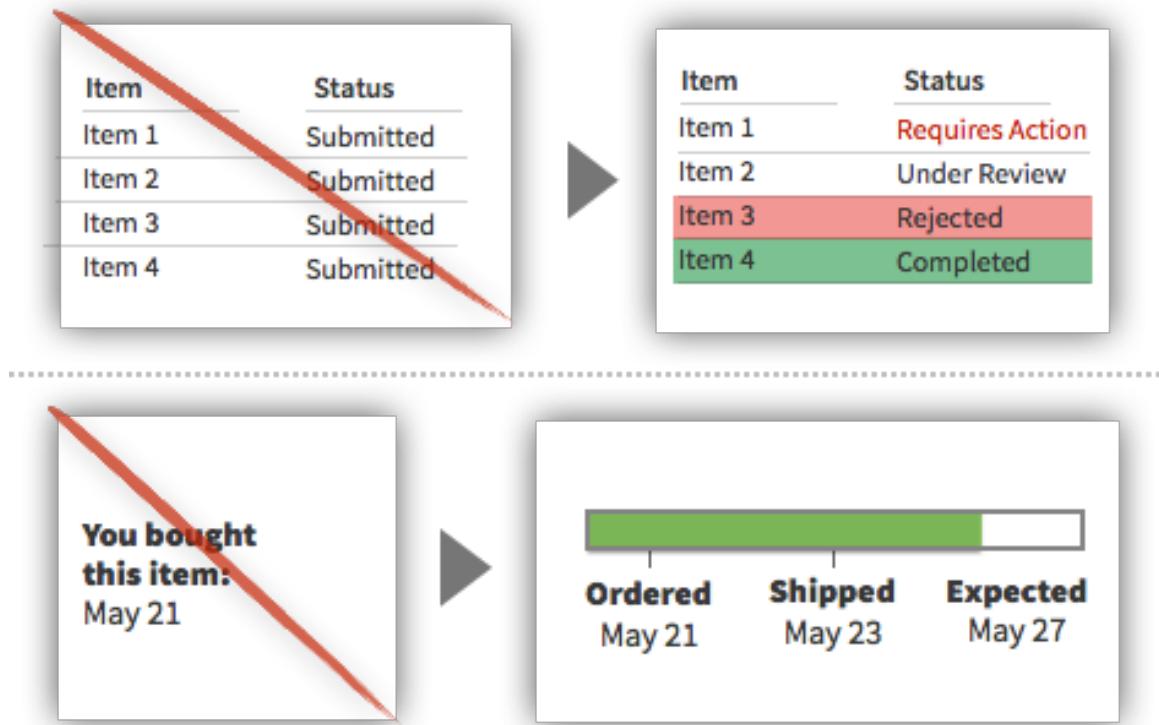


CLOSED CARD SORTING

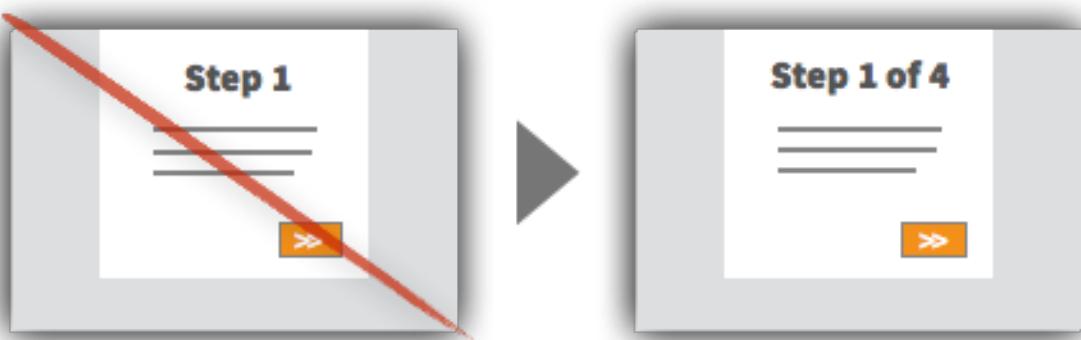
MISCELLANEOUS

TACTIC:

Communicate the Current Phase of Complex or Lengthy Interactions

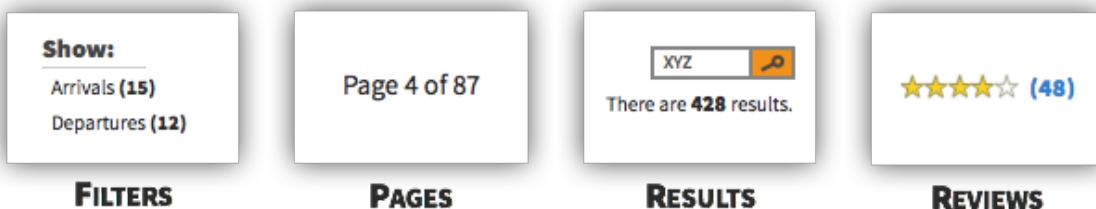
**TACTIC:**

Reveal the Number of Steps Within a Sequence



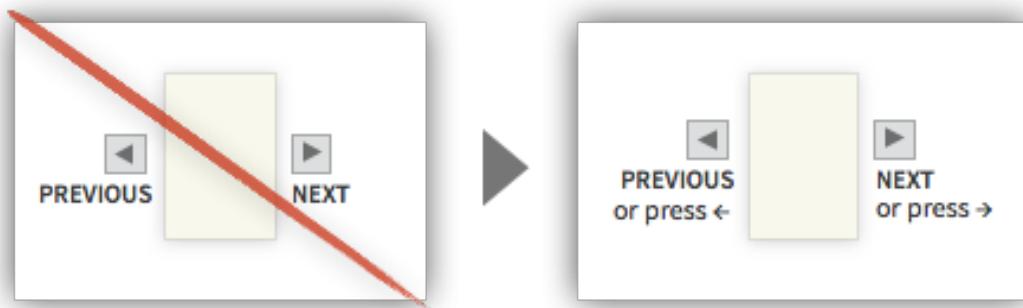
TACTIC:

Reveal the Number of Items in a Category



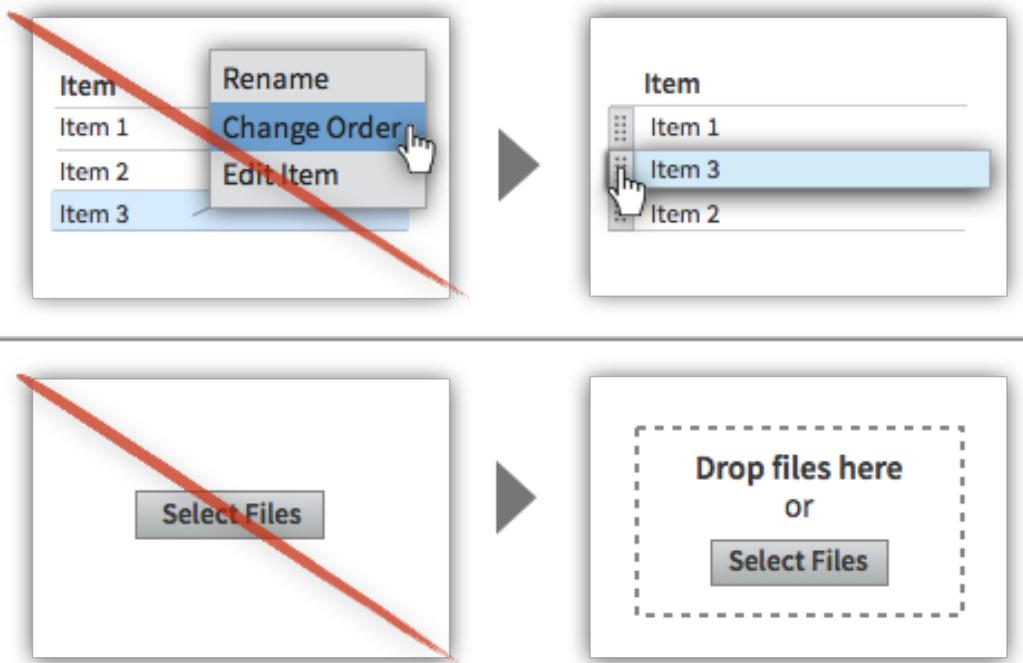
TACTIC:

Offer Keyboard Shortcuts for Repetitive Functions



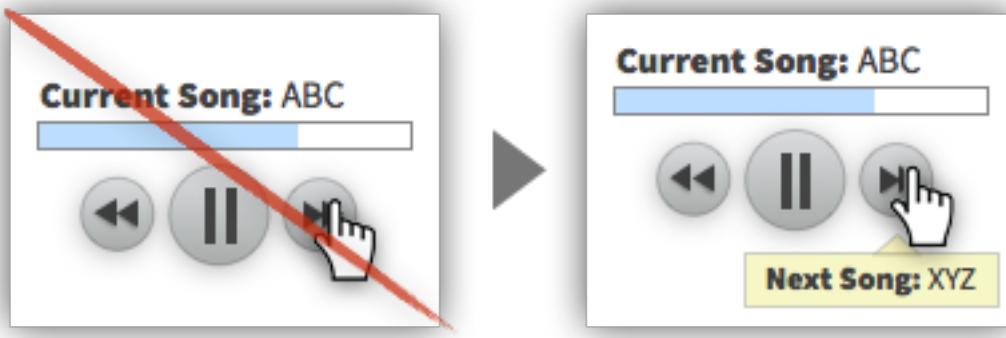
TACTIC:

Let Users Drag and Drop Elements



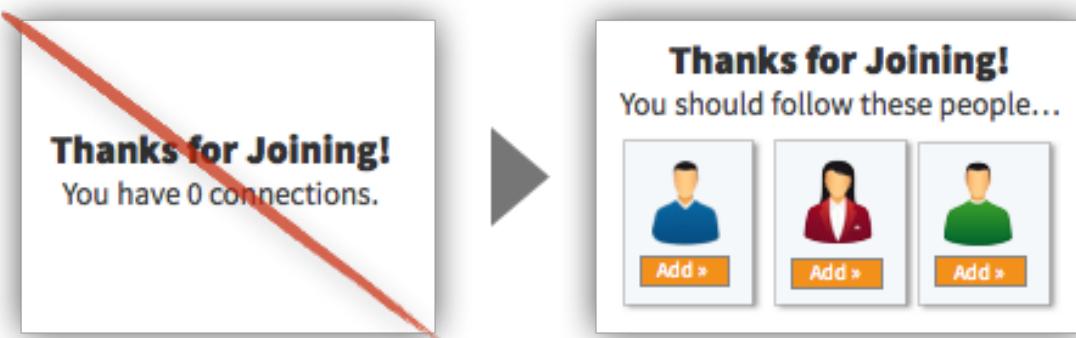
TAICTIC:

Indicate or Preview the Next Item in a Sequence



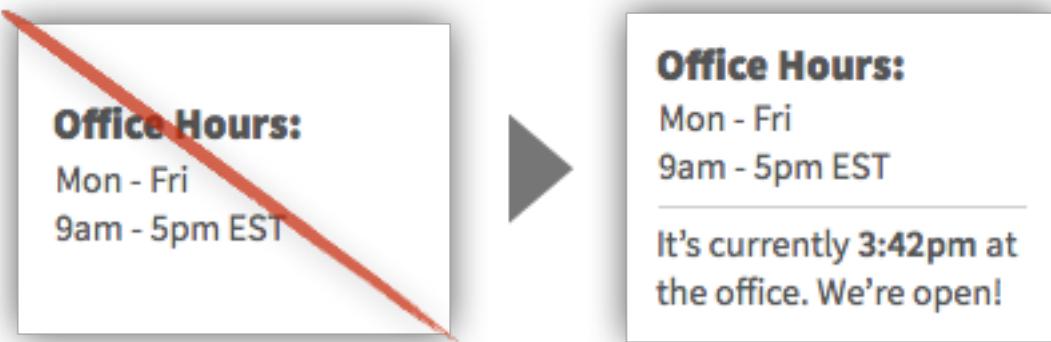
TAICTIC:

Provide Quick Wins During Onboarding



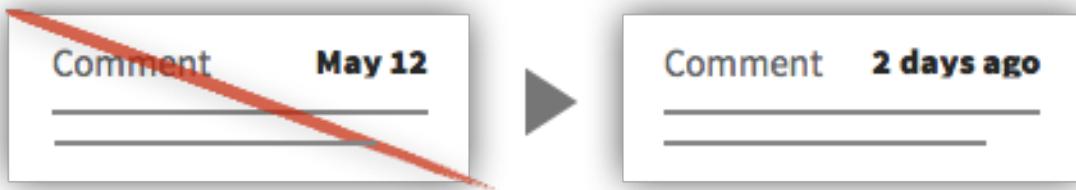
TAICTIC:

Indicate Whether Your Office is Open or Closed



TACTIC:

Indicate the Recency of Events



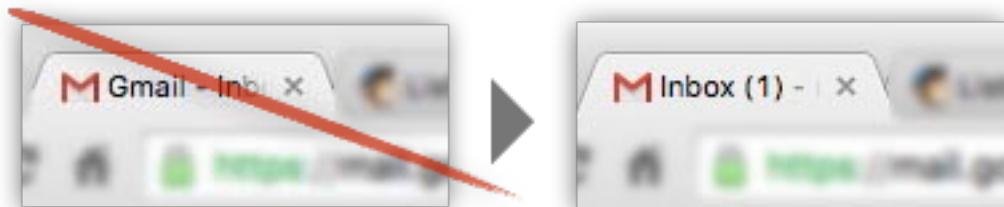
TACTIC:

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



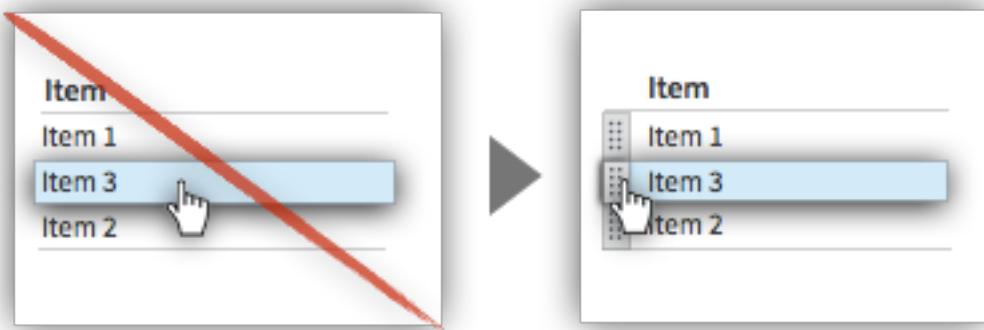
TAUTIC:

Add Copy Buttons to Movable Input



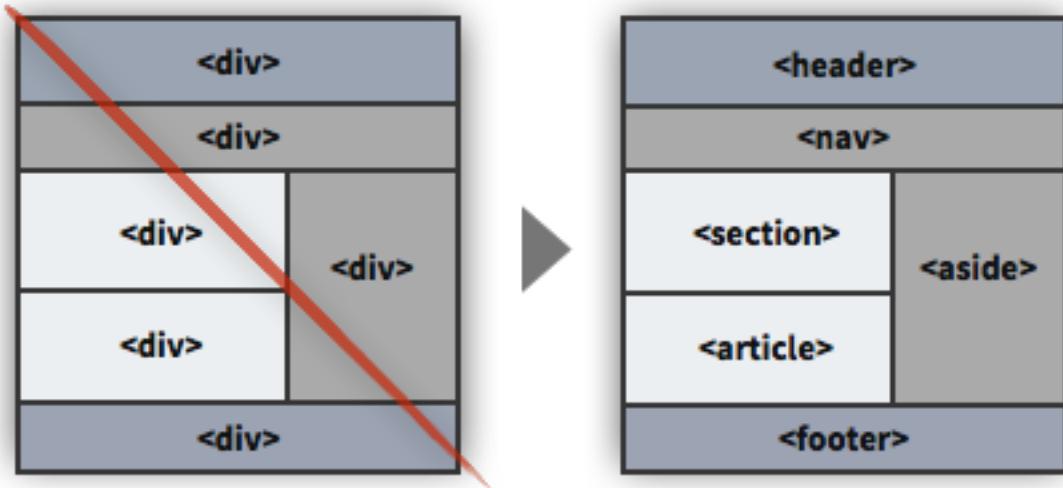
TAUTIC:

Add Dotted Textures to Drag and Drop Elements



TAUTIC:

Use Semantic Labels in HTML5



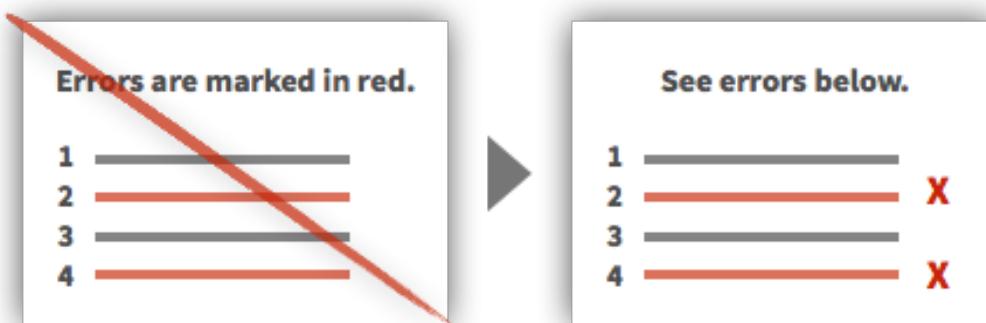
TACTIC:

Use the Proper Amount of Onboarding



TACTIC:

Use Multiple Cues to Communicate Information



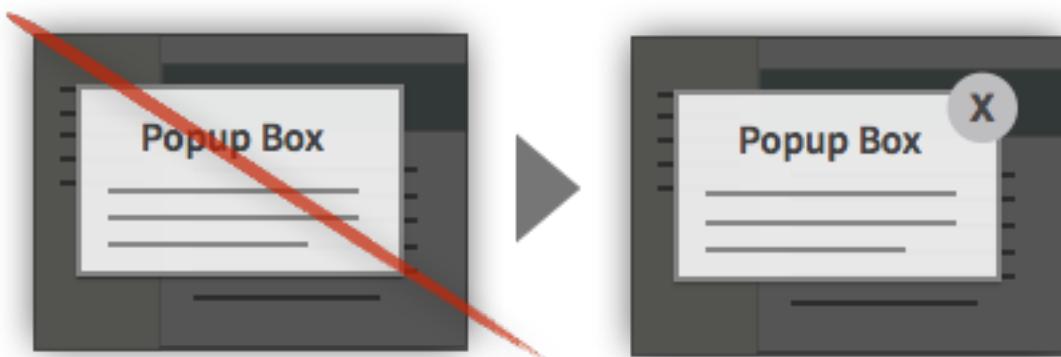
TAUTIC:

Customize Instructions for the User's Browser



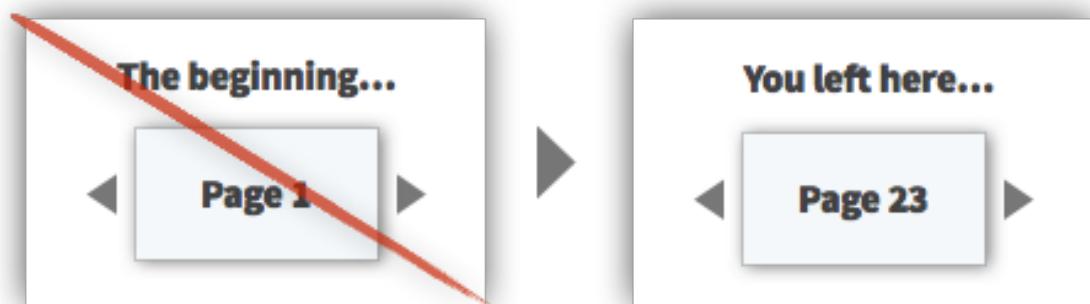
TAUTIC:

Provide a Visible Close on Popups and Modal Boxes



TAUTIC:

Let Users Return to the Same Position in a Sequence



TAUTIC:

Indicate Which Items Users Have Already Viewed

