Usability Heuristics by Jakob Nielsen

From *Usability Engineering*, J. Nielsen, 1993
More information available at: http://www.useit.com/papers/heuristic/heuristic_list.html

1. **Visibility of system status**
   The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.

   When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:
   - Are users being made aware of what is going on?
   - For user action, is appropriate feedback being provided within reasonable time?

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2. **Match between system and real world**
   The system should speak the users' language, with words, phrases and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.

   When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:
   - Is the language used simple?
   - Are the phrases, concepts used familiar to the user?

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3. **User control and freedom**
   Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked "emergency exit" to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue. Support undo and redo.

   When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:
   - Are there ways to allow users to easily leave the unexpected page/state?

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4. **Consistency and standards**
   Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform conventions.

   When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:
   - Are ways of performing similar actions consistent?

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5. **Recognition rather than recall**
Make objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate.

When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:

- Are objects, actions and options are always visible?

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6. **Help users recognize, diagnose and recover from errors**
Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.

When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:

- Are error messages provided?
- Do the error messages describe the problem in plain language and suggest a way of solving it?

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7. **Error prevention**
Even better than good error messages is a careful design which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place.

When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:

- Is it easy to make errors?
- Where and why?

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8. **Flexibility and efficiency of use**
Accelerators -- unseen by the novice user -- may often speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users. Allow users to tailor frequent actions.

When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:

- Accelerators are shortcuts (e.g. keyboard shortcuts).
  Are such accelerators provided for expert users to carry out tasks more quickly?

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9. **Aesthetic and minimalist design**
Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.

When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:

- Is any unnecessary and irrelevant information provided in the web page?

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10. Help and documentation

Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.

When evaluating a user interface for this heuristic, ask these questions:

- Is help information provided?
- Can help information be easily searched and easily followed?