

Module-5

User Documentation and Online Help

Topic Covered

User Documentation and Online Help

Introduction, Online versus paper documentation, Reading from paper versus Displays, Shaping the content of the Manuals, Accessing the Documentation, Online Tutorials and animated demonstrations, Online Communities for User Assistance, The Development Process.

Information Search and Visualization

Introduction, Search in Textual Documents and Database Querying, Multimedia document searches, Advanced filtering and Search Interfaces, Information Visualization: Introduction, Data type by task taxonomy, Challenges for information visualization.

User Documentation and Online Help

Introduction

- When it comes to learning about computer systems many people experience anxiety, frustration, and disappointment
- Even though increasing attention is being paid to improving interface design, complex systems can still benefit both paper and online help
- Forms of paper user manuals:
 - Install manual
 - Brief getting-started notes
 - Introductory tutorial
 - Thorough tutorial
 - Detailed reference manual
 - Quick reference card
 - Conversation manual
- Online materials
 - Online manual
 - Online help
 - Context-sensitive help
 - Online tutorial
 - Animated demonstration
 - Guides
 - FAQs
 - Online communities, newsgroups, list servers, e-mail, chat, and instant Messaging

Taxonomy of user documentation, online help, and tutorials

Domain covered by help system

- Description of interface objects and actions (syntactic)
- Sequences of actions to accomplish tasks (semantic)
- Task-domain-specific knowledge (pragmatic)

Degree of integration in the interface (from less to more integrated)

- Online documentation and tutorial: independent interface, even possibly developed by a different company
- Online help: integrated into the interface, separate window usually invoked from a "help" button
- Context-sensitive help: a) user-controlled—depends on where the user points (pop-up box, balloon, tool tip, or ScreenTip), or b) system initiated—the system makes suggestions and sometimes takes action
- Animated demonstrations: usually integrated into the interface

Time of intervention

- Before starting (quick guide, manual, and tutorial)

- At the beginning of the interaction (getting started, animated demonstration)
- During the task (context sensitive, either user- or system-initiated help)
- After failure (help button, FAQs)
- When the user returns the next time (start-up tips)

Media

- Text (paragraphs, with a list of steps)
- Graphics (screen prints can illustrate explanations)
- Voice recording
- Video recording of someone using the interface
- Animation
- Recording of the interface itself in action, with or without annotations
- Simulation environments for computer-based training

Extensibility

- Closed system
- Users can add more information (annotations, synonyms, or translations)

Online versus paper documentation

There are many reasons to have online manuals

1. *Physical advantage:*

- Information is available whenever the information appliance or computer is available. The harsh reality is that many users lose their paper manuals or do not keep them current with new versions of the software.
- Users do not need to allocate physical workspace to opening up manuals. Paper manuals can be clumsy to use and can clutter a workspace.
- Information can be electronically updated rapidly and at low cost.

2. *Navigation features*

- Specific information necessary for a task can be located rapidly if the online manuals offer indexes, tables of contents, lists of figures, glossaries, and lists of keyboard shortcuts.
- Searching for one page in hundreds can usually be done much more quickly on a computer than in a paper manual.
- Linking within texts can guide readers to related materials; linking to external materials such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, translations, and web resources can facilitate understanding.