

A Beginner's Guide to

Web Form Design

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Short Introduction

What is in this guide?

This guide will provide an overview of some of the most basic considerations that constitutes good web form design.

What is a web form?

A web form is an online page which contains elements that allows user input. Examples of these elements are actions, help text, submit button, etc.

Why are web forms important?

Web forms are important because they are a vital connection between consumers and producers, or in other words, "a deal closer".

Design Principles

Design Principles

Design principles are a guiding light for any solution. When it comes to form design, these are the design principles everybody should strive for:

1. Minimize the pain

Completing a form should be as easy and simple as possible.

2. Highlight a path to completion

The concept of forms is to get them filled in so make sure people know how to accomplish that.

3. Consider the context

Forms are not independent. Consider the audience, application, business etc., in which the form will be part of.

4. Consistent communication

A web form needs to speak with one voice. Several sectors in the form process such as technology, marketing, security etc., should synchronize.

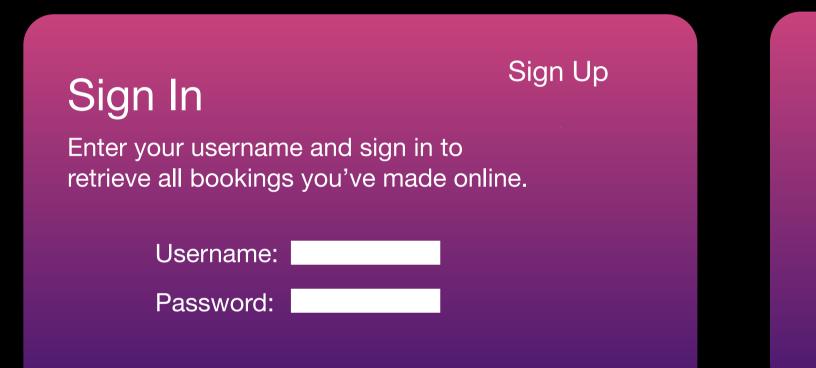
What to include

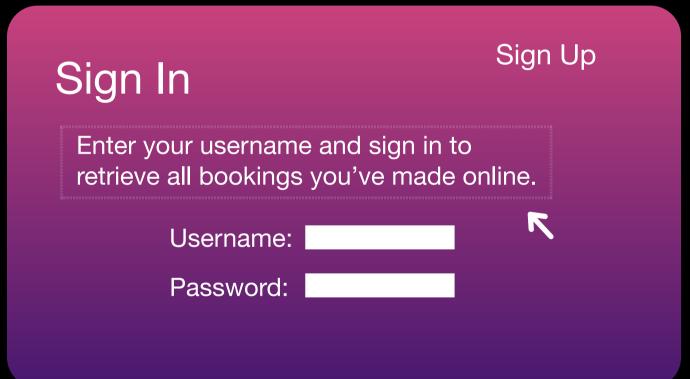
What to include

1. Title the form

In order to illuminate a path to completion, tell people what form they are filling out and what they accomplish by completing it.

It's crucial that form titles match what they are part of because most users tend to not read long descriptions of what the form does.





2. Clear scan lines

Clear scan lines is often a forgotten consideration.
In this example I will illustrate one good and one bad practice when it comes to forms with clear and non-clear scan lines.

Form A has some clear lines between content but it disturbs the path to completion with the zigzagging eye movements.

Form A

Jane, please confirm this transaction.

You're about to send

£500

To: johndoe@hotmail.com

Email

Email subject: Roadtrip money

Note: Thanks for the trip! Let's do it again sometime.

Shipping Information

• Ship to: P. Sherman 42 Wallaby Way, Sydney

or: add a new address

• I'm not shipping anything, no address required.

Send the \$500



Jane, please confirm this transaction.

£500

You're about to send

To: johndoe@hotmail.com



Email

Email subject: Roadtrip money

Note: Thanks for the trip! Let's do it again sometime.

Shipping Information

• Ship to: P. Sherman 42 Wallaby Way, Sydney

or: add a new address

• I'm not shipping anything, no address required.

Send the \$500



Form B has a clear scan line that starts at the first information point and ends at the primary acton, allowing users to quickly retrieve all the information they need.

So even though Form A has some clear distinctions between content, Form B provides a clear path to completion because users can just follow a straight line down.

Form B

Jane, please confirm this transaction.

You're about to send

£500

To: johndoe@hotmail.com

Jane, please confirm this transaction.

You're about to send

£500

To: johndoe@hotmail.com

Check Payment Details

Payment Details

Pay to: johndoe@hotmail.com

Amount: 500\$

Email subject: Roadtrip money

Note: Thanks for the trip! Let's do it again sometime.

Shipping Information

• Ship to: P. Sherman 42 Wallaby Way, Sydney Add Address

No shopping address required

Send the \$500

Edit Transaction Cancel Transaction

Check Payment Details

Payment Details

Pay to: johndoe@hotmail.com

Amount: 500\$

Email subject: Roadtrip money

Note: Thanks for the trip! Let's do it again sometime.

Shipping Information

Ship to: P. Sherman 42 Wallaby Way, Sydney Add Address

No shopping address required

saction Cancel Transa

3. Web form

Every web form has at least three elements:

- Labels
- Input fields
- Actions

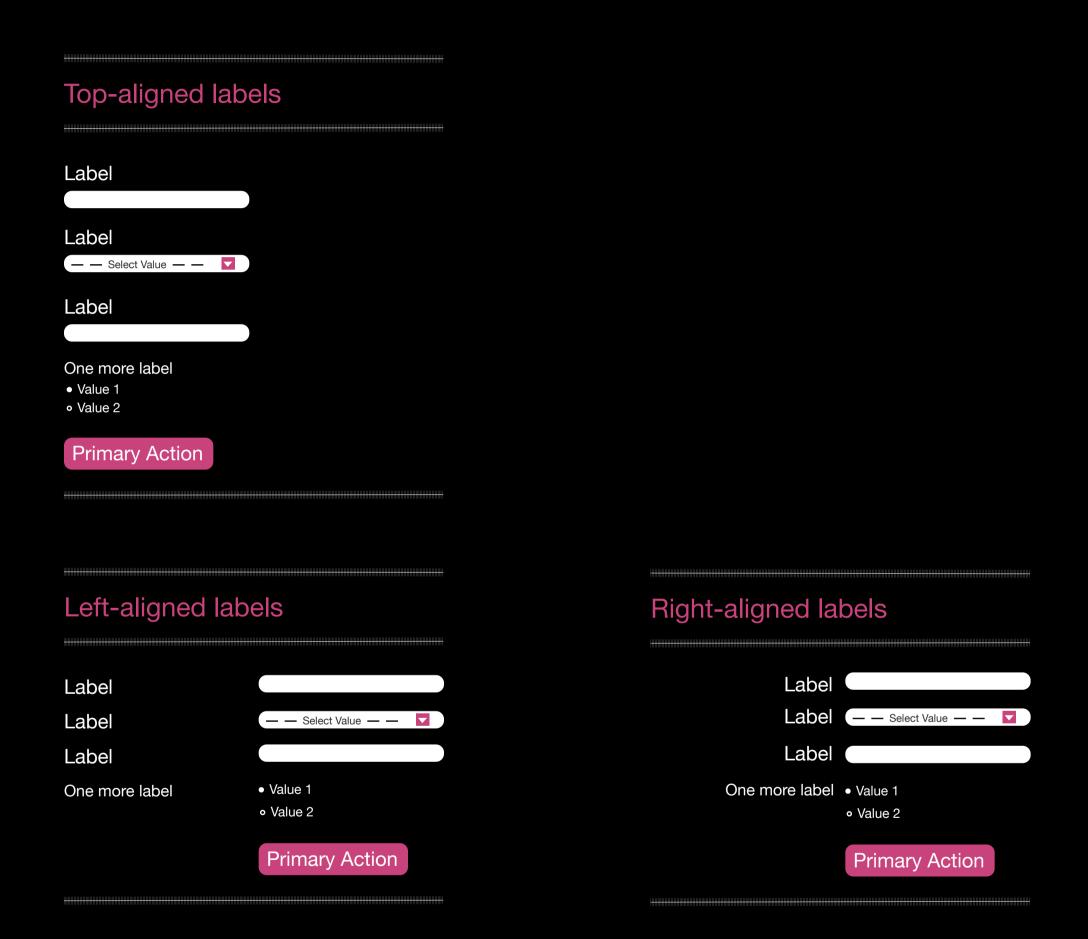
Labels asks questions.

Input fields allows users to answer questions.

Actions allows users to submit those answers.

A very common question in web form design is "Should I top, right or left-align the labels for input fields?"

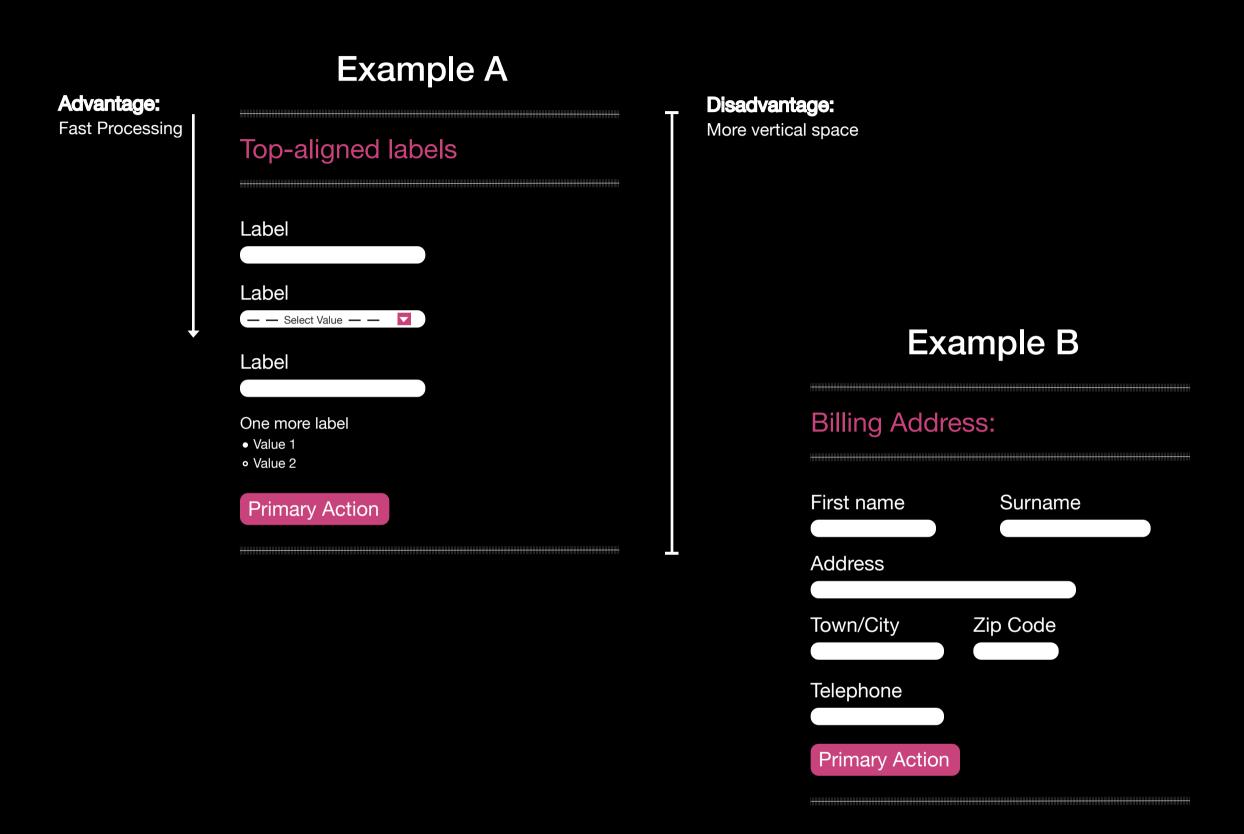
The answer to that is very simple; It depends.



Of the three elements, top-aligned labels tends to be completed the fastest because they are closest aligned and users can follow a straight line down, as shown in Example A.

Another advantage is that top-aligned labels can provide a great horizontal connection between forms and input fields, as shown in Example B.

However, top-aligned labels take up additional vertical space. So if you're working with limited vertical space, you might want to reconsider this form element.



Right-aligned labels are closely aligned and, as a result, can be completed quickly.

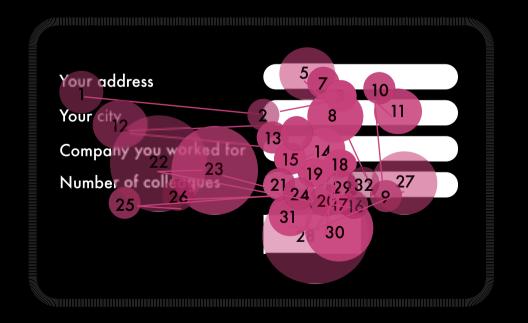
However, in Example C, the distance between the left labels and input fields reduces the efficiency of a quick overview on required information.

That said, if you want to minimize the amount of vertical space your form uses, right-aligned labels can provide quick completion. In fact, as shown in Example D, the eye-tracking data by Matteo Penzo shows that right-aligned labels were twice as fast as left-aligned labels.

Example C

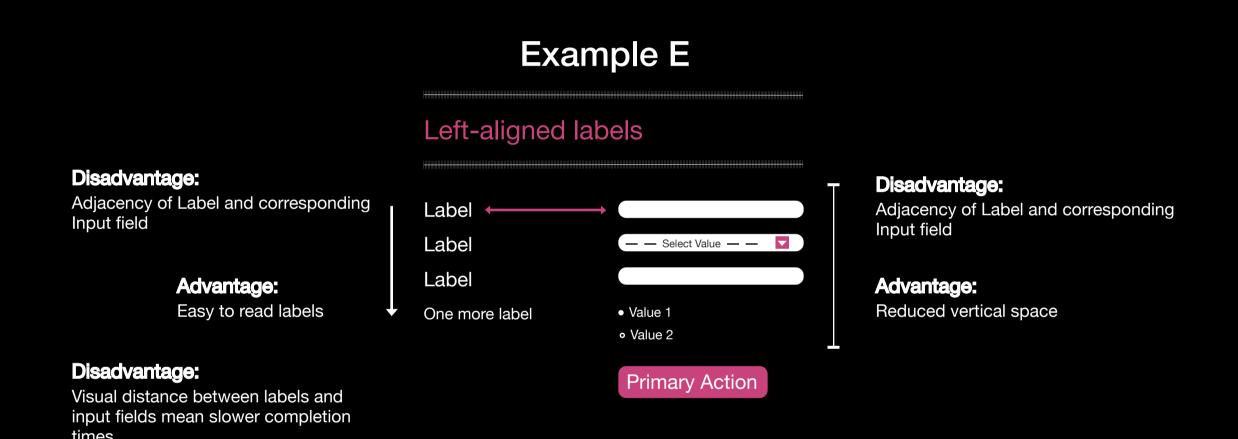


Example D



Lastly, left-aligned labels is the best choice for readability and successful completion.

However, as shown in Example E, leftaligned labels often create large spaces between labels and input fields. This causes longer eye movements for users reading the form, and by default slows their completion.



Best and worst practices

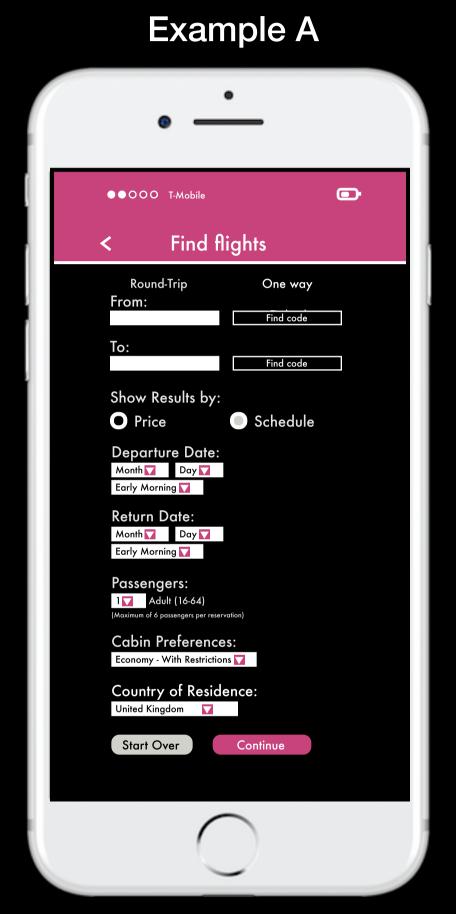
Best and worst practices

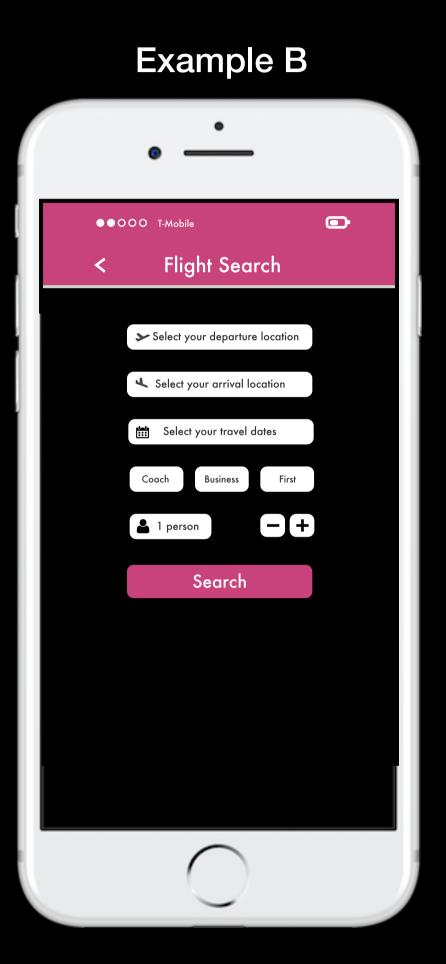
1. Number of fields

A rule of thumb in web form design is less is more.

Every field you make users fill out slows the completion time. Therefore, try to minimize number of fields as much as possible.

Example A and B shows the same information but Example B has minimized the number of fields as much as possible to ease the effort on the user's part as opposed to Example A.





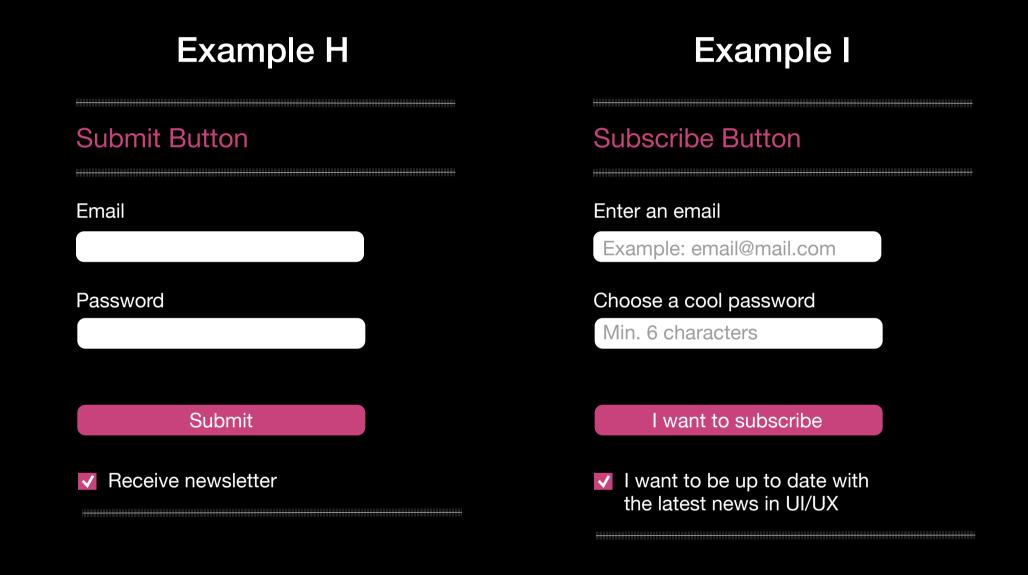
2. Form Copy

Clear communication through form copy is absolutely essential for good web form design.

Not attributing clear information in your form can lead to slower completion time as users will be more likely to be confused and worsen the experience.

A common example of this strategy is the use of the "Submit" button as opposed to the "Subscribe to newsletter" button.

Example H shows vague labels that the user might struggle to understand while Example I uses the desired result as opposed to the action the user will take.



3. Hover state

Hover state or field focus can be a visual element that helps users know where they are in the form.

An example of that is to activate the first input field in the form, so users know where to start. From there, the users can move around while the fields changes colour depending whether the user has clicked on it or not.

Example J has a hover feature and give users a hint regarding where they are by highlighting the field line below. Example K is trickier because the users need to actively check if they're filling out the correct field.

Example J	Example K
Hover	Non-hover
Full name	Full name
John D	John D
Email	Email
examplemail@gmail.com	examplemail@gmail.com
Password	Password
•••••	***************************************

Summary

Summary

1. Title the form

Make sure users know what they accomplish by fillling out the form.

2. Clear scan lines

Provide a clear path to completion so users can quickly gather all necessary information.

3. Web form

A web form consists of labels, input fields and actions.

4. Labels

Top-aligned labels has the fastest completion time because they're closest aligned.

5. Number of fields

Try minimizing the number of input fields as much as possible to fasten the completion time.

6. Hover state

Hover state is a visual element that can help users know where they are in the form.