

A Beginner's Guide to

Web Form Design

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Summary

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.

Sign In

Sign Up

Enter your username and sign in to retrieve all bookings you've made online.

Username:

Password:


Sign In

Sign Up

Enter your username and sign in to retrieve all bookings you've made online.

Username:

Password:



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:

or: [add a new address](#)

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

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:

or: [add a new address](#)

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

Form B has a clear scan line that starts at the first information point and ends at the primary action, 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 shipping 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 shipping address required

Send the \$500 Edit Transaction Cancel Transaction

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.

Top-aligned labels

Label

Label

Select Value

Label

One more label

Value 1

Value 2

Primary Action

Left-aligned labels

Label

Label

Select Value

Label

One more label

Value 1

Value 2

Primary Action

Right-aligned labels

Label

Label

Select Value

Label

One more label

Value 1

Value 2

Primary Action

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.

Advantage:
Fast Processing

Example A

Top-aligned labels

Label

Label

Select Value

Label

One more label

- Value 1
- Value 2

Primary Action

Disadvantage:
More vertical space

Example B

Billing Address:

First name

Surname

Address

Town/City

Zip Code

Telephone

Primary Action

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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.

Disadvantage
Reduced readability

Example C

Right-aligned labels

Label

Label

Label

One more label

Primary Action

Advantage:
Adjacent Label and corresponding Input field

Advantage:
Reduced vertical space

Example D

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

However, as shown in **Example E**, **left-aligned 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**.

Example A

This screenshot shows a flight search interface titled "Find flights". It includes a status bar at the top with "T-Mobile" and a battery icon. The form has a header with a back arrow and the title. Below the header, there are two radio buttons for "Round-Trip" (selected) and "One way". The "From:" field has a "Find code" button next to it. The "To:" field also has a "Find code" button. There are two radio buttons for "Show Results by:" with "Price" selected and "Schedule" unselected. The "Departure Date:" section has three dropdown menus for "Month", "Day", and "Early Morning". The "Return Date:" section also has three dropdown menus for "Month", "Day", and "Early Morning". The "Passengers:" section has a dropdown for "1" and a label "Adult (16-64)" with a note "(Maximum of 6 passengers per reservation)". The "Cabin Preferences:" section has a dropdown for "Economy - With Restrictions". The "Country of Residence:" section has a dropdown for "United Kingdom". At the bottom, there are two buttons: "Start Over" and "Continue".

Example B

This screenshot shows a simplified flight search interface titled "Flight Search". It includes a status bar at the top with "T-Mobile" and a battery icon. The form has a header with a back arrow and the title. Below the header, there are three input fields with placeholder text: "Select your departure location", "Select your arrival location", and "Select your travel dates". Below these fields are three buttons: "Coach", "Business", and "First". Below these buttons are a button for "1 person" and two buttons for "- +" to adjust the number of passengers. At the bottom, there is a large "Search" button.

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.

Example H

Submit Button

Email

Password

Submit

☒ Receive newsletter

Example I

Subscribe Button

Enter an email

Example: email@mail.com

Choose a cool password

Min. 6 characters

I want to subscribe

☒ I want to be up to date with the latest news in UI/UX

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

Hover

Full name

John D|

Email

examplemail@gmail.com

Password

.....

Example K

Non-hover

Full name

John D|

Email

examplemail@gmail.com

Password

.....

Summary

Summary

1. Title the form

Make sure users know what they accomplish by filling 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.