Dokeos 1.8 Beta2
Usability Evaluation

Basic
User Interface Guidelines

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1 Executive Summary

The usability analysis of Dokeos 1.8 Beta2 showed an inconsistent usage of wording, labels, layout, interface elements and interaction paradigms. As far as possible, this document tries to cover those inconsistencies, and provide guidelines.

Still, it is strongly suggested to create a complete set of guidelines covering further details about the user interface and interaction design which will serve as a reference for programmers.

2 Guidelines

2.1 Navigation

Introduce a consistent navigation scheme.

2.1.1 Breadcrumbs

- The breadcrumb always displays the path down to the current page.

- Start the path at the first sub level of the main categories, that is for example the name of a course in section "My Courses" or "Teachers" in section "Reporting".

- Make sure that link label in the navigation and title in the breadcrumb correspond (e.g. do not label the link "Trainers" and the breadcrumb "Teachers").

- For action dialogs, use action labels (e.g. "Add category" instead of "Category management"). This label should equal the corresponding menu item.

2.1.2 Action Boxes

| | | Campus Homepage | My courses | Reporting | Platform Administration | | | | Users online |

Interface > [=Doc=]

Current directory : root ▾ | 📄 Create a document 📄 Upload a document 📄 Create a directory | 💾 Save (ZIP)

		Type ↑	Name	Size	Date	
☐	📁	images	🔖 3.42M	08.02.2007	✏ ✗ ➡ 💨
☐	📁	audio	0B	08.02.2007	✏ ✗ ➡ 💨
☐	📁	flash	0B	08.02.2007	✏ ✗ ➡ 💨
☐	📁	video	0B	08.02.2007	✏ ✗ ➡ 💨
☐	🔳	example_document.html	💾 3.29k	08.02.2007	✏ ✗ ➡ ☎

select all - unselect all | Delete ▾ | OK

Action boxes (top: general, right: actions in tables). Teacher actions are marked by a slightly different background colour.

- All actions are displayed in action boxes.
- Teacher actions are grouped and marked by a slightly different background colour.

General Action Boxes

- General actions are displayed in action boxes located on top of the page.
- Layout:
  - o Icon and corresponding action label are aligned horizontally and build a unit.
  - o The units are listed next to each other. If the horizontal space does not suffice, the remaining items are moved to new row(s). Make sure that the unit is not split when they are moved to a new line, and if possible split rows along separators.
  - o Make sure the horizontal space between two units is at least double the size of the space between icon and corresponding label (e.g. " ").
  - o Leave at least three times as much space between groups of related actions like navigation versus actions (e.g. "   ") and insert a separator ("|").
  - o Make sure all these distances are equal within and between different sections of Dokeos.
- Format:
  - o By default, do not make action links bold.

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Actions in Tables

- Actions that refer to a specific element represented in a table row are displayed in an extra "Actions" column.

- Teacher actions are grouped and marked by a slightly different background colour.

- Layout:

    o In the column, action icons are aligned horizontally.

    o Make sure the horizontal space between two icons is sufficient to hit them easily with a mouse (e.g. " ").

- Provide a tooltip for every icon.

- The default sequence is

    Edit → Delete → [other actions] → Move up/down → Change visibility

Action versus Navigation Boxes

Navigation box.

- Navigation boxes provide access to (static) sub pages of the current page. In contrast, action boxes provide access to forms.

- Navigation boxes have a title which allows to further categorise groups of related sub pages.

- Inside a navigation box, there may be a second level of categories (e.g. "My Courses" overview).

2.1.3 Direct Interaction

- Allow users to directly interact with each object that can be manipulated. Do not force them to go back to an overview to choose an action.

  For example, when previewing a document, provide an action box above the document offering the equal options as in the overview (in this case edit, delete, move, change visibility).

  In a test, each question should be editable, it should be possible to delete or move it. Same accounts for the different course descriptions.

- Wherever possible, allow in-place editing. That is do not open a form on a separate page, but allow to edit something in-place, e.g. labels or categorical options.

2.2 Forms

A consistent behaviour and a clean look of forms much aids to a higher perceived usability of a software.

Use forms whenever in-place editing is not possible.

2.2.1 Layout

- Use sentence capitalisation for labels: Capitalise the first letter of the first word, and any other words normally capitalised in sentences.

- If a field is required, provide a red asterisk + whitespace in front of the label.

- Below the OK button, provide the hint "* This field is required.".

- For missing required fields, there are two types of error messages: A general error message "The form contains incorrect or incomplete data. Please check your input." and a red hint "This field is required" below the label of the missing field.

- A form is a form. Whenever you have to use it as in-place manipulation is not possible, do not display overview pages below your forms. They may distract the user and limit the clarity of the breadcrumb navigation.

Two Column Layout

Two column layout.

- Two columns is the default layout for forms.

- Provide labels in the left column and align labels right.

- Every label has a colon which is added to the last word of the label without blank space.

- Provide interaction elements in the right column and align them left.

- The distance between left and right column should not be 8 Pixel or 0.5em. It must never be more than 16 Pixel or 1em.

- The distance between vertical fields should be at least 12 Pixel or 0.66em. Only then, the left-to-right relation is communicated by the layout.

- Make sure the vertical distance between unrelated elements is larger than between related ones (e.g. radio or checkbox options). This distance should be 8 Pixel or 0.5em.

- If hints are given, place them below the interaction elements in the right column.

Single Column Layout

Single Column Layout.

- Use single column layout if the major interaction element of the form is an editor and few other options are asked for.

- Place the label above the interaction element and left-align both. Their vertical distance should be 8 Pixel or 0.6em.

- Make sure the vertical distance between two units is larger than between label and input field. This distance should be at least 12 Pixel.

- If hints are given, place them below the label.

2.2.2 Interaction

- In each form, provide a cancel button to explicitly allow the user to cancel changes and return to the previous page.

- For text editors, consider to provide a preview function.

- Currently, there is no interaction element that shows more options or information on demand. Expanders would be useful here.

2.2.3 Form Redirection

- After completing a form, redirect him to the overview page, but anchor the previously edited item.

- After canceling a form, redirect the user to the previous page.

2.2.4 Nesting of Forms

- Nesting of forms is not suggested. Whenever possible, reduce the number of required dialog pages by offering information after a user made a choice, but without a page reload ("Responsive disclosure", see http://designinginterfaces.com/Responsive_Disclosure).

2.3 Wording

Make sure to use a consistent wording users recognise all over the platform.

2.3.1 Page Titles

- Use header capitalisation for page titles: Capitalise all words in the element, with the following exceptions:
  o Articles: a, an, the
  o Conjunctions: and, but, for, not, so, yet …
  o Prepositions of three or fewer letters: at, for, by, in, to …
- Note: Page titles for forms do not use header capitalisation (see below).

2.3.2 Action Labels

- Action labels are imperative, action-oriented and do not contain indefinite articles. E.g. "Create document", "Create agenda item" is right, while "Create an agenda item" is not.
- Use sentence capitalisation for action labels: Capitalise the first letter of the first word, and any other words normally capitalised in sentences.
- Action labels are used as page title for forms.

2.3.3 Variable Names

- Avoid the usage of variable names (embraced by "[= " and "=]").

2.3.4 Modify, Change and Edit

- Decide for one word among modify, change and edit, and use it consistently in the platform. Suggested wording is "edit".

2.4 Hints, Info Boxes and Messages

Dokeos offers a variety of different feedback and information messages.

2.4.1 Hints

- Hints are embedded into page contents and refer to specific interaction elements, e.g. descriptions for single fields in a form, forms or other elements.
- Hints are plain text and shown permanently.
- Hints should be unobtrusive, best is a small font size and possibly a grey font colour.
- Introduce a css class for hints.

2.4.2 Info Boxes

> To create a course description, click on a heading and fill the correct form field.
>
> Click then OK and fill another heading.

Dokeos 1.8 Beta2 info box. Future info boxes should be provided on demand.

- Info boxes display general information about a page, for example it describes the required steps to create a forum.
- As the information given in info boxes consumes a lot of space, it should not be shown permanently. At the same time, users should have permanent access to it for reference.

  Info boxes should therefore be provided on demand, e.g. the info icon might be shown on pages general information is available for. Clicking the icon might open the info box in a movable layer, a close button might close it.

2.4.3 Message

- Messages are displayed on top of the page, centered, between breadcrumb and action

box.

- Messages contain an icon and text, and are displayed in a coloured box.

Success Messages

Success Message.

- Success messages inform the user that an action was performed successfully.

- Success messages are displayed in a green box with a check mark.

- The space required for a one-line success message should be kept free on every page to avoid that the vertical position of the contents is affected when a message appears. This is especially important for in-place editing.

Error Messages

Error message.

- Error messages inform the user that an action was not performed successfully.

- Error messages are displayed in a red box with a cross.

- Make the error text descriptive and provide all necessary information to recover from the error.

- If form data was incomplete, additionally provide a red hint "This field is required" below the label of the missing field.

- The space required for a one-line error message should be kept free on every page to avoid that the vertical position of the contents is affected when a message appears. This is especially important for in-place editing.

Confirmation Messages
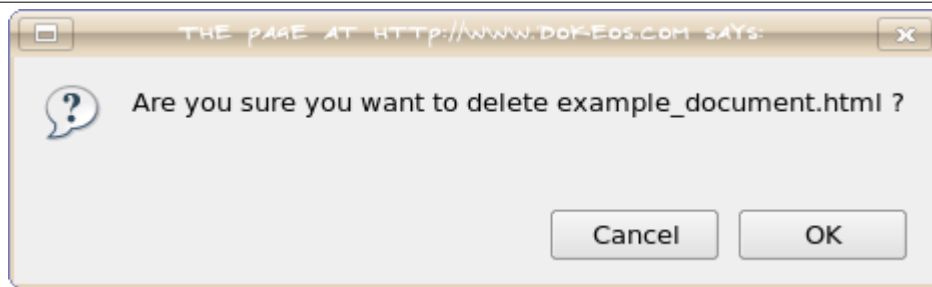
Dokeos 1.8 Beta2 confirmation message. An option "Never ask again" might be useful.

- Confirmation messages are displayed when a user clicked any "delete" link.
- Confirmation messages are native dialogs, asking "Are you sure you want to delete [object name(s)]?". It is important that the object name is given, otherwise the user is not able to verify his choice.
- Consider to provide an option "Never ask again" and an option to revert this optioon in the user settings area.

2.4.4 Start Pages

- When a teacher first enters a section, do not provide example content to show him how to get started.
- Instead, display an info box, e.g. "There is presently no forum in this course" and describe the steps necessary to perform them.
- Display the info box in the content area, if possible in a layer that can be closed. When the first contents are added, close the info box but make it still accessible via an info icon (see above).

2.6 Usage of Space

A flexible page width is often useful, e.g. for editing pages. In other cases, e.g. tables, a flexible page width can hinder readability.

2.6.1 Maximum Width

- Consider to set the maximum overall width of Dokeos to 900 Pixel. This should suffice to display all information, and should as well avoid that the distance between related

contents grows too large.

2.6.2 Table Layout

- Make tables more compact: Instead of providing one item per column, make meaningful groups.

  For example, last name, first name, description and function in the team (coach or teacher) may be summarised in one cell:

John Doe, Professor of Philosophy. Teacher and Coach.

images 3.42 MB, Last modified 8.2.2007

- Allow to sort by variables by providing a Sort by drop-down above the upper right border of the table.

2.7 Default Style

Consider to provide a more visually appealing default style.

2.7.1 Links

- Do not make links bold apart from headings.
- Do not make the breadcrumb bold.
- Provide a mouse-over for invisible links.

2.7.2 Input fields

- Consider to make input fields more visually appealing, e.g. by setting the border to a 1-pixel line in a Dokeos colour.

2.7.3 Formatting

- Consider to make form labels bold to make them more visible.