

App design considerations for middle school students (ages 11-14)

Middle school students are more tech-savvy and seek a balance between fun, social interaction and independence, when it comes to app designs. This age group navigates through various digital products and services with a clear goal in mind but their behavior differs from that of an adult in 3 important ways: a lower reading level, simpler methods when searching for information and low levels of patience and tolerance.

Modern & sleek design:

Use a more mature and modern design with a clean interface. Avoiding childish graphics and opting for a mix of vibrant yet sophisticated colors would be the best approach.

Advanced Navigation:

We can introduce slightly more complex navigation like tabs, hamburger menus, since this age group is more technologically advanced and can handle it. The navigation should still be simple and have clear call-to-action buttons.

Responsive and adaptive layouts:

The design should be responsive and should work well on smartphones and tablets, since they are the more popular devices. It should incorporate interactive features like drag-and-drop, touch interactions, and animations to maintain engagement. Middle schoolers enjoy challenges and rewards, so including gamification elements like badges, points or achievements could enhance user experience.

Independence:

Content should encourage problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking. Quizzes and trivia should include interactive storytelling that challenges cognitive skills.

Educational and entertaining:

The app content should align with the middle school curriculum standards, like STEM activities, while keeping it entertaining.

Inclusive design:

Ensuring the app is accessible to children with disabilities (visual, auditory, motor) by including features like text size, captions, screen reader compatibility. Use clear visual cues and audio feedback for interactions. Provide translations and language support, especially for a diverse target audience.

- Limit the amount of text to reduce distractions, boredom and frustration
- Display information in small, clear blocks with plenty of white space around it

- Use simple words, short phrases , images, visual formats like bullet points.
- Use large fonts, which are easier to notice when browsing quickly or distractedly.
- Do not use a condescending or childish tone.

Correct color scheme:

Vibrant but mature colors:

According to research, rich, saturated colors like teal, deep orange, blue, green and purple are highly favored by pre-teens as they convey a sense of maturity while still being fun and engaging. Avoiding overly childish tones like pastel pinks and baby blues.

Contrasting colors for readability:

Use high-contrast color combinations to ensure text and icons are easily readable. Eg. pairing a dark background with bright white or yellow text can enhance visibility, especially on mobile screens. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) recommends using contrast ratios of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text to ensure accessibility.

<https://www.gammaux.com/en/blog/designing-for-different-age-groups/>

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<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/usability-of-websites-for-teenagers/>

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