

**What role or relevance does a successful alignment of user and developer mental models play in the usability (or not) of skeuomorphic user interface designs?**

## Table of Contents

On mental models

On Usability

Skeuomorph

What it is not?

No longer helps usability

More than necessary

Misses the point of good skeuomorphism

What is it ?

Some good stuff

Some more good stuff

How can it become useful ?

Another way Attractive vs Ugly and fun

What to do with it?

## On mental models

A **mental model** is someone's perception of how a particular process functions on the real world. For system's designers and developers **mental models** play a core role on communication with the users of the systems being designed. The image designers provide to the users can shape the way users interact with a system, and can remarkably increase the satisfaction and efficiency that users get out of using a particular system.

## On Usability

The **usability** of a product measures the level of efficiency at which its consumers learn how to use it to achieve their goals, and how much satisfaction they get out of the interaction with the product.<sup>[1]</sup> There are also several measures that help designers and developers create their products, and determine that the essentials for which their product was designed are fulfilled. This is what Jakob Nielsen, author of the book *Usability Engineering*, refers to as “**usability measures**”, and they are learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors and satisfaction. Each of them represent a different focus of usability that is enhanced depending on the goal of the system at hand.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Skeuomorph

The word **skeuomorph** (derives from the greek skeuos - tool and morph - form)<sup>[3]</sup> is now use to refer to designers technique of resembling features that were necessary for functionality on the original product, but that become ornamental on the designer's version. Numerous websites and computer programs make use of **skeuomorphism** design on their graphical interfaces with the purpose of resembling real objects. **Skeuomorphism** affects designs more than in a merely ornamental way, and sometimes it comes to improve or weak the **usability measures** of designs.

## What it is not?

There might be certain unawareness of what **skeuomorphism** really means and to clarify that I will lay out a couple of examples.

**Skeuomorphism** is the opposite of **mixing metaphors**, but the use of mixing metaphors can still help create useful effect on an interface. For instance, applying a very distinctive purple velvet texture to an element on a design where everything is wooden will give an strong emphasis to that element even though that element was not

originally made out of velvet.  
PIC

<http://sachagreif.com/what-skeuomorphism-is-and-isnt/>

### No longer helps usability

**Skeuomorphic** approach could lead to visual perfectionism rather than improving **usability** and functionality. Emphasizing the visual section of interfaces can lead to the creation of useless elements that will not extend the user understanding of the interface. As a case in point, the animated paper shredder that was used to delete e-tickets in the mobile iOS 6 does not improve the users **mental approach** more than a simple “drag to the trashcan” deletion would. PIC [4]

<http://www.macrumors.com/2012/09/11/apples-designers-clashing-over-tacky-software-skeuomorphisms/>

### More than necessary

<http://www.fastcodesign.com/1670760/will-apples-tacky-software-design-philosophy-cause-a-revolt>

### Misses the point of good skeuomorphism

<http://www.imore.com/its-not-about-html-or-skeuomorphism-its-about-usability>

## What is it ?

<http://sachagreif.com/what-skeuomorphism-is-and-isnt/>

### Some good stuff

<http://www.neowin.net/news/skeuomorphic-design-apple-vs-good-ux>

### Some more good stuff

<http://webdesign.tutsplus.com/articles/design-theory/skeuomorphism-in-interface-design/>

## **How can it become useful ?**

<http://sachagreif.com/what-skeuomorphism-is-and-isnt/>

## **Another way Attractive vs Ugly and fun**

<http://tobiasahlin.com/blog/skeumorphism-and-storytelling/>

## **What to do with it?**

### Works cited

[1] <http://usability.gov/basics/index.html>

[2] Usability Engineering by Nielsen

[3] Wikipedia Skeuomorphism

<http://sachagreif.com/what-skeuomorphism-is-and-isnt/>

[4] <http://www.macrumors.com/2012/09/11/apples-designers-clashing-over-tacky-software-skeuomorphisms/>