



Excerpt from Scott & Neil: Designing Web Interfaces

Principles and Patterns for Rich Interaction

[6 Tips for a Great Flex UX: Part 5](#)

By Theresa Neil

Reprinted from <http://designingwebinterfaces.com/6-tips-for-a-great-flex-ux-part-5>

Since the book focuses on rich interactions, I want to spend some time on Adobe Flex/AIR.

These tips are based on the best Flex resources I have found, and how you can use them to craft a great user experience. This is part 5 of 6:

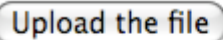
- * [Play With It: 10 Explorers & Galleries](#)
- * [Learn From the Best: 10 Great Flex Apps](#)
- * [Learn From the Rest: 10 Great RIAs](#)
- * [Stock Your Toolbox: 40+ Custom Flex Controls](#)
- * Review Usability Best Practices
- * Avoid Common Mistakes: 10 Anti-Patterns

Part 5: Review Usability Best Practices

Don't forget the usability basics. [Jakob Nielsen's Ten Usability Heuristics](#) are as relevant now as they were in 1999. I stress this because I looked at the Flex showcase recently, and it looks like many of the applications are not built with these best practices in mind.

1. Visibility of system status (Feedback)

The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.

 or [Cancel](#)



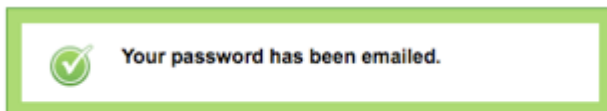
1.0 BaseCamp by 37signals

The upload button is enabled, until clicked. Then it is replaced with a progress indicator until the file has finished uploading



1.1 Picnik

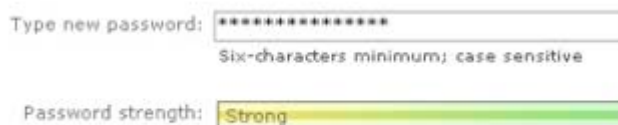
Progress message and indicator shows while the application loads



Theresa Neil sign in

1.2 Tick

A feedback message is displayed when an action is performed

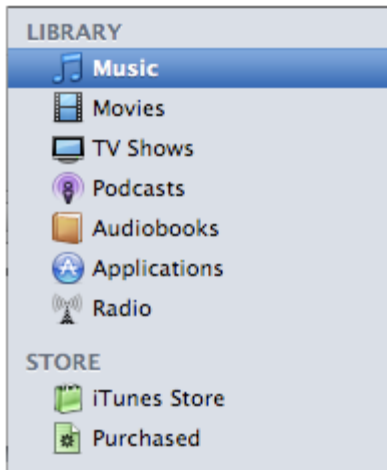


1.3 Windows Live Account

Password strength is shown as the password is entered

2. Match between system and the real world (METAPHOR)

The system should speak the users' language, with words, phrases and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.



2.0 iTunes

Organized as a library that contains your media library: music, movies, shows, audiobooks. Beneath the Library is the Store where you can buy more media to put in your Library.



2.1 Mindomo

The branches and hierarchy of a mind map can be easily reorganized visually in a non-linear manner. An outline would never work, but this matches the paradigm exactly.

3. User control and freedom (NAVIGATION)

Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked “emergency exit” to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue. Supports undo and redo and a clear way to navigate.



3.0 CollabFinder

Search is easy to open, enter info, execute or cancel.



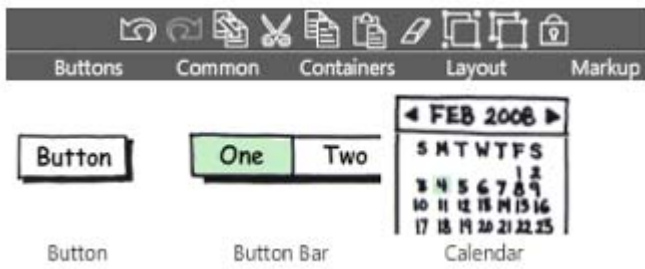
3.1 Wufoo

Clearly marks where the person is and where they can go by showing the selection in each menu



3.2 Pages (Apple’s Word Processing Product)

Cell editing shows row and column ids, and the cells used in the equation. The equation can be saved or canceled.

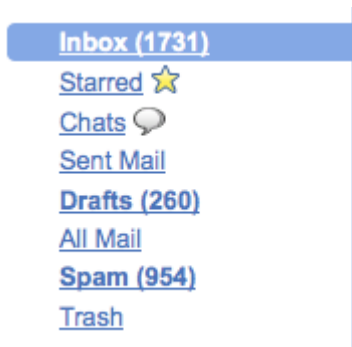


3.3 Balsamiq

Undo and Redo buttons are available in the toolbar, and can also be accessed with the standard keyboard shortcuts

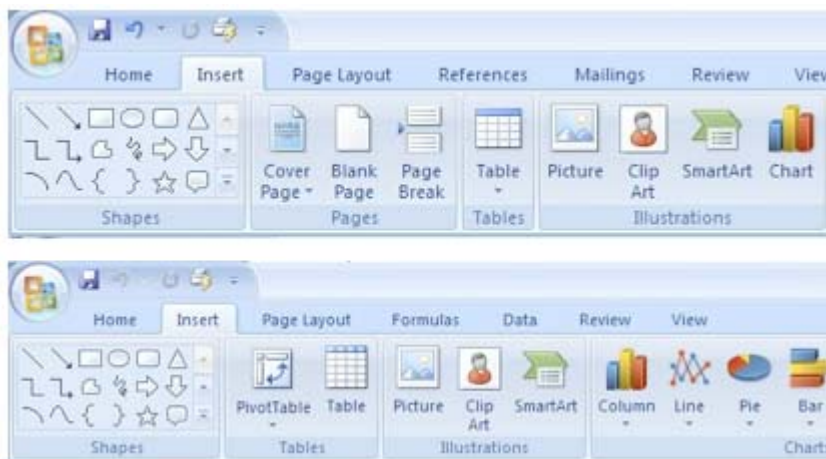
4. Consistency and standards (CONSISTENCY)

Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform conventions.



4.0 Gmail

When Gmail was designed, they based the organizational folders on the same ones used in client email applications: Inbox, Drafts, Sent Mail.



4.1 Microsoft Office

Word, Excel, and PowerPoint all use the same style toolbar with the same primary menu options: Home, Insert, Page Layout... Consistency results in efficiency and perceived intuitiveness.

5. Error prevention (PREVENTION)

Even better than good error messages is a careful design, which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place.



5.0 Yammer

Disables the update button after it is clicked, so the person cannot update the post twice by accident



5.1 Example from “Web form Design:Filling in the Blanks” by Luke W.

Make the primary action prominent with a larger click area. Cancel and secondary actions are just shown as links



5.2 Google Auto Recommend

The auto recommend feature cuts down on mis-spellings



5.3 Wikipedia

Auto focus on input prevents a common source of frustration, typing only to realize nothing is displayed because the field did not have focus

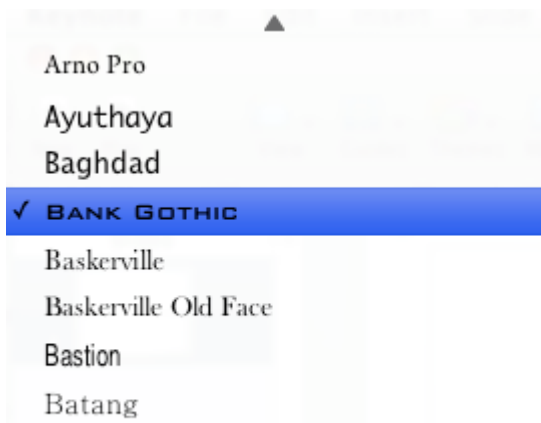
6. Recognition rather than recall (MEMORY)

Minimize the user's memory load. Make objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate.



6.0 Quanta IDE

Type ahead for coding in a development environment



6.1 Keynote

Previews the fonts you can pick from, instead of just the font name

7. Flexibility and efficiency of use (EFFICIENCY)

Accelerators — unseen by the novice user — may often speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users. Allow users to tailor frequent actions.

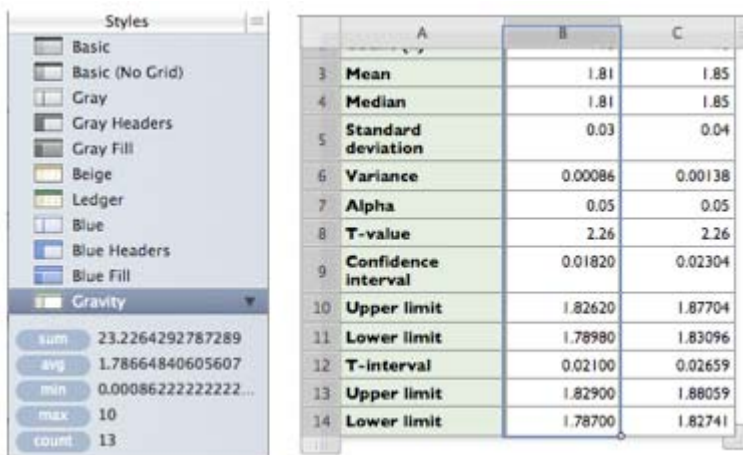
Common Shortcuts

Add Action	Return
New Window	⌘N
Synchronize with Server	⇧⌘S
Clean Up	⌘K
Planning Mode	⌘1
Context Mode	⌘2
Inbox	⇧⌘1
Quick Entry	⇧⇧Space

Quick Entry's shortcut can be customized in Preferences

7.0 OmniFocus

List of keyboard shortcuts and accelerators



The image shows the 'Styles' sidebar on the left of the Numbers application. It lists various styles like 'Basic', 'Gray', 'Blue', etc., and a 'Gravity' section with summary statistics. To the right is a spreadsheet table with columns A, B, and C. The table contains statistical data for a dataset, with rows for Mean, Median, Standard deviation, Variance, Alpha, T-value, Confidence interval, and their respective upper and lower limits.

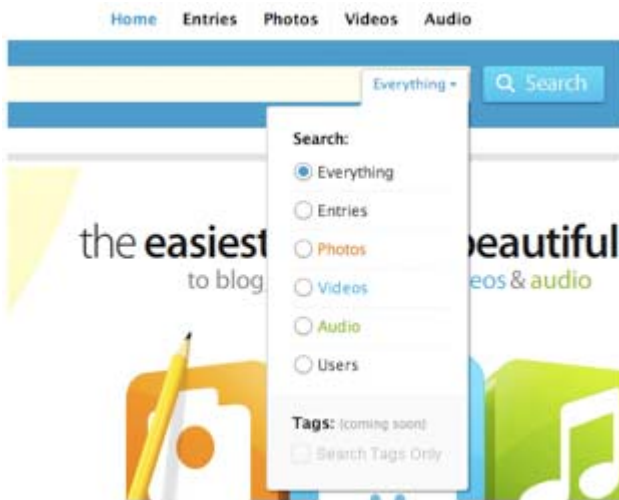
	A	B	C
3	Mean	1.81	1.85
4	Median	1.81	1.85
5	Standard deviation	0.03	0.04
6	Variance	0.00086	0.00138
7	Alpha	0.05	0.05
8	T-value	2.26	2.26
9	Confidence interval	0.01820	0.02304
10	Upper limit	1.82620	1.87704
11	Lower limit	1.78980	1.83096
12	T-interval	0.02100	0.02659
13	Upper limit	1.82900	1.88059
14	Lower limit	1.78700	1.82741

7.1 Numbers- Apple's Spreadsheet product

Previews common function results on the left when a column is selected, more efficient than clicking on an action in the toolbar

8. Aesthetic and minimalist design (DESIGN)

Dialogues should not contain information, which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility. Visual layout should respect the principles of contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity.



8.0 Kontain

Kontain' search menu exemplifies the four principles of visual design:

Contrast: bold text is used for the two labels in the search

Repetition: the orange, blue, and green text match the media types

Alignment : strong left alignment of text, right aligned drop down

Proximity: a light rule is used to separate tags from the other options

Timesheet for Theresa Neil

04 May 2009 - 10 May 2009

CLIENT - PROJECT NAME	Mon May 04	Tue May 05	Wed May 06	Thu May 07	Fri May 08	Sat May 09	Sun May 10	TOTAL
1. [Project Name]					4.00			4.00
2. [Project Name]					2.50			2.50
3. [Project Name]			4.00					4.00
4. [Project Name]			1.00					1.00
5. [Project Name]			1.00					1.00
6. [Project Name]				4.50				4.50
7. [Project Name]			1.00					1.00
8. [Project Name]				1.50	1.00			2.50
9. [Project Name]	10.00	6.00						16.00
10. [Project Name]				2.00	2.00			4.00
Total	10.00	6.00	7.00	6.00	8.50	2.00		40.50

8.1 Harvest

Sufficient padding and spacing keep this timesheet from being a visual nightmare.

Header and footer rows, as well as the summary column use subtly different colors to indicate they are distinct from the content

9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors (RECOVERY)

Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.

Or start a new account

Choose a username (no spaces) bert	bert is already taken. Please choose a different username.
Choose a password ***	Passwords must be at least 6 characters and can only contain letters and numbers.
Retype password 	
Email address (must be real) not an email	The email provided does not appear to be valid
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Send me occasional Digg updates.	

9.0 Digg

Provides immediate feedback with specific instructions



9.1 Humorous 'Page Not Found' Error

Uses a funny image and copy, but provides viable alternatives (article listings and blog link) and a course of action (report it)

10. Help and documentation (Help)

Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.



10.0 Picnik

Contextual help (this is an example of help in the 'Collages' module) tips in Picnik are clear and easy to navigate



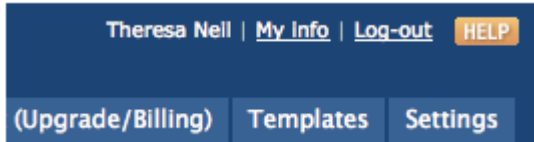
10.1 GoodBarry

Embedded videos can be used to showcase features as well as get people started using the product



10.2 Zenoss

Help tips are displayed on hover, answering the most likely questions about a field or instructions



10.3 BaseCamp by 37signals

Help opens a new browser window/tab with a full set of help resources: search, FAQ, video tutorials, customer forums