

Nielsen's 10 Usability Heuristics

Overview

Jakob Nielsen's ten heuristics are foundational guidelines for designing usable interfaces. They were first published in 1994 and remain highly relevant, serving as a baseline checklist for heuristic evaluation of any digital product.

The 10 Heuristics

- Visibility of system status – keep users informed through immediate feedback.
- Match between system and the real world – speak the users' language, use familiar metaphors.
- User control and freedom – support undo/redo, allow easy exits.
- Consistency and standards – follow platform conventions, reduce learning.
- Error prevention – design to prevent problems before they occur.
- Recognition rather than recall – minimize memory load with visible options.
- Flexibility and efficiency of use – accelerators, customization for expert users.
- Aesthetic and minimalist design – no irrelevant information.
- Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors – clear messages in plain language.
- Help and documentation – necessary, concise, task■focused assistance.

Application Tips

- Use the heuristics as inspection criteria during design reviews.
- Prioritize violations by severity (frequency, impact, persistence).
- Combine heuristic review with user testing for deeper insights.

Key References

Nielsen, J. (1994). Enhancing the explanatory power of usability heuristics. CHI '94 Conference Companion.