Glossary of Usability Terms

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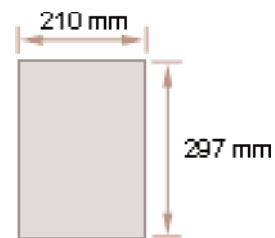
Glossary of Usability Terms

A

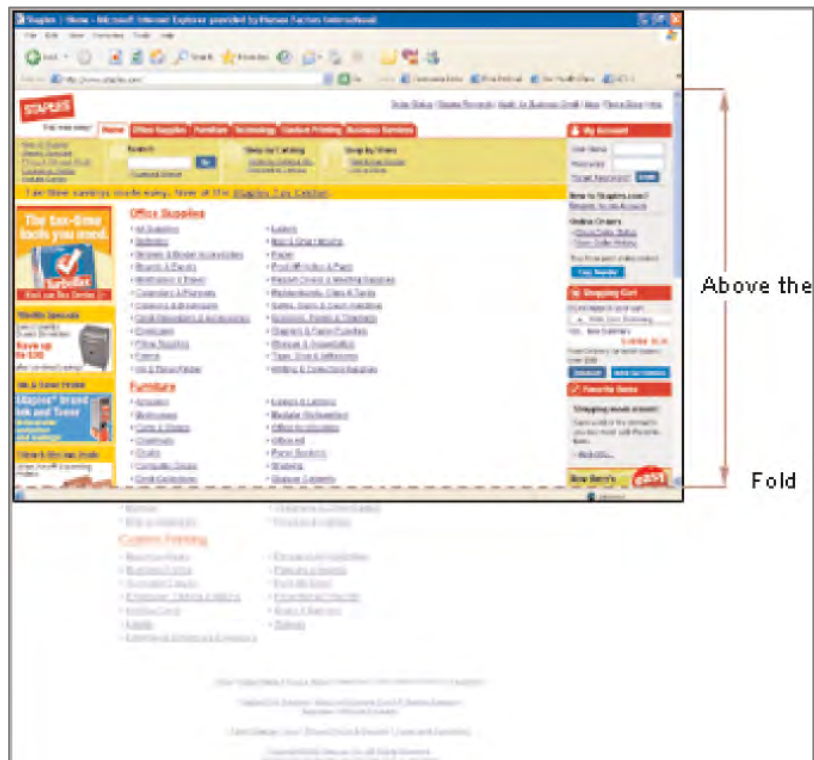| A4 Paper Size	A4 paper size A standard paper size (210 x 297 mm) widely used in countries using the metric system.

A4 Paper

| A-B Test	Live-site testing technique where a percentage of site visitors are shown an alternate version of a design. The effectiveness of the two designs is then compared.

Above-the-Fold	For Web pages, the area that is visible upfront before scrolling the page. The term is derived from the space as seen on the front page of a newspaper when folded in half. Most important matter is placed above the fold.

Accelerator Keys	Shortcut keystrokes that instantly perform an operation.
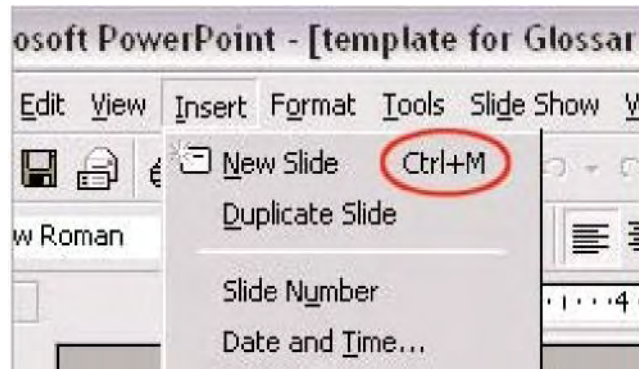
Pressing "Ctrl" and then "M" in MS PowerPoint™ inserts a new slide.

Accessibility	Access to everyone regardless of disability. Barrier-free design. An area of expertise focused on delivering products to individuals with disabilities, who may be using their own assistive technology.
Accordion Menu	A navigation control where the user expands a navigation option to see the sub-navigation options under it, collapsing any previously expanded navigation option.
Accumulator	A graphic widget that allows the selection of multiple items from a list into a new functional group. Also called a list builder or add-remove control
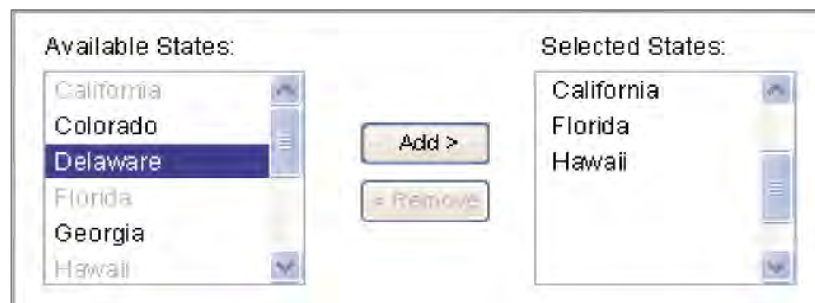
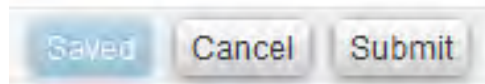|	
Achromatopsia	Most severe form of color weakness. Achromatopsia (also known as rod monochromatism) is true color blindness (individual has no cones), resulting in only the ability to see black, white, and shades of gray. It is not as common as other types of color weakness.
Acronym	A word such as "NATO" and "NASA" formed from the initial letter or letters of each of the successive parts or major parts of a compound term.

Active Voice	A sentence structure where the subject performs the action of the verb and the object receives the action. For example, "The user selects the drop-down box." Active voice differs from the passive voice wherein the subject receives the action, e.g., "The drop-down box is selected by the user." (Also see Passive Voice.)
Adaptive Design	Implementation of designs that allows them to adapt to different form factors, such as PC, tablet, or mobile device. Delivered via pre-defined screen sizes (not fluid layout). See also "Responsive design".
Advanced Prototype	A reasonably detailed, full-scale, and usually working model of a new application or Web site used to test the effectiveness of the application or site. (Also see Early Prototype.)
Affinity Diagram	A group decision-making technique designed to sort a large number of ideas, concepts, and opinions into naturally related groups. Used in documenting task or content relationships, often created from card sort activities or group brain storming
Affordance	When a control behaves as its appearance suggests. For example, a push button is said to have good affordance when it looks clickable. A pushbutton that does not look clickable or a non-clickable image that looks like a pushbutton, are examples of poor affordance. Good affordance provides intuitive interaction.
Aliasing / Anti-Aliasing	The process of filling out the jagged edges of an image or typeface with additional pixels. The color of the pixels is averaged between the type color and the background. (Also see Anti-Aliasing.)
Alignment Points	Implicit (not visible) vertical lines along which elements align on an interface.

ALT Text	ALT text In HTML, a short text description of an image. It is added to aid non-graphical browsers, and appears if the image cannot be displayed.

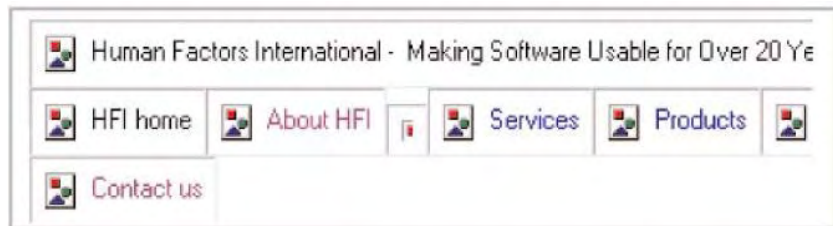|	
Analogous Colors	Any 3 consecutive color segments on the wheel.
Anomalous Trichromats	A specific type of color weakness based on reduced sensitivity to green or red. Cones are activated by different proportions of the three wavelengths than a normal trichromat ("standard" vision)
Anti-Aliasing	The process of filling out the jagged edges of an image or typeface with additional pixels. The color of the pixels is averaged between the type color and the background. (Also see Aliasing.)

Aliasing   Anti-Aliasing

Anthropometry	The measurement of the human body size and distributions of physical dimensions in a population.
Ascender	Ascender In typography, the upward vertical stem on some lowercase letters, such as "f" and "b," which extends above the x-height.

Ascender line marks the top of ascenders

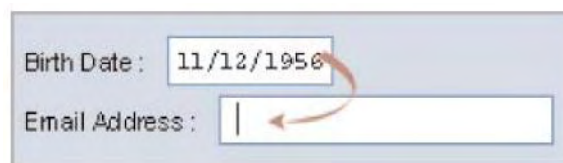|	
Assistive Technology	Any technology or product designed to assist an individual with a disability in using a website or application. For example, a JAWS screen reader or VoiceOver iPhone app are assistive technologies.
Attention	The cognitive process of concentrating on one selected aspect of the environment while ignoring others.
Auto Complete	A process whereby a drop-down list, combo box, or text entry field fills in once the user has typed enough characters to have a complete match. (Also known as Auto Suggest)
Auto Correct	A feature that corrects common and obvious input errors (such as spelling). It may ask the user to confirm the correction if the error is uncommon or has more than one possible correction.
Auto Tab	A feature that automatically takes the cursor to the next text entry field after the user reaches the end of the previous field without having to hit "Tab." Cursor automatically moves to the next box after reaching the end of the previous box.

B

Baseline	In typography, the imaginary line upon which a line of text rests. Baseline marks the base of the text.
Behavioral Response	Actions performed by a person as a conscious reaction to external or internal stimuli. (Also see Visceral Response and Reflective Response.)

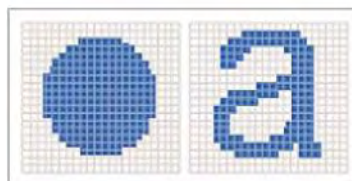|	
Belt and Suspender Rule	A metaphor for using attributes one at a time. For example, make the header bold or increase the font size; not both. When using a belt, one doesn't need suspenders. Belt and suspender rule: To show font hierarchy, increase font size, or make text bold; not both
Benchmark Testing	Testing an application against a set of standard best practices or established criteria.
Bias	A one-sided viewpoint, inclination or a partial perspective. An interviewer might inadvertently bias an interviewee's answers by asking a "loaded" question, in which a desired answer is presupposed in the question.
Biomechanics	The study of the mechanical function and dynamics of the muscular-skeletal system.
Bitmapped	A font or graphic image made up of a pattern of pixels in a rectangular grid. Bitmaps are aliased (see Aliasing). The stair-step effect is produced by the square shape of the pixels, and enlarging such an image magnifies this effect. (Also see Vectored.) Bitmapped image and font Vectored image and font

Bounded Field / Unbounded Field	The ability of a control to allow for freeform entry versus forced selection from a set of options. A bounded field (e.g., list box) forces selections making it less error prone than a text entry field, which supports freeform entry. A text field with a format mask gives the field a bounded quality, making it less error prone (e.g., date fields with format slashes).
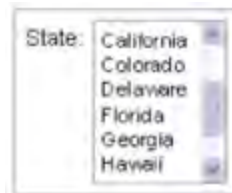
Bounded Field   Bounded Field with   Unbounded Field

Format Mask

Braille Keyboard	A device that converts text from a computer application or Web page into Braille, allowing a visually impaired person to use a computer.
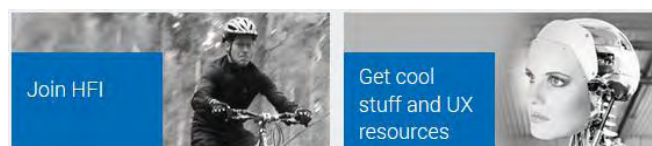
Braille Terminal

Branding	The deliberate process of creating individuality and market value around the concept of a product name. Effective branding efforts enable companies to convey distinctiveness and value to their various audiences.

Branding Elements	Elements such as graphics, text, theme, etc. used to create branding.

Branding Elements

Breadcrumbs	An auxiliary form of navigation consisting of a trail of links, indicating where the user is in the site hierarchy, and also allowing the user to navigate back up one or more levels.

Trail of links from the home page to the current page

C

**Canonic Perspective** A standard, preferred or common way of viewing or depicting an object.

Card Sorting A technique to investigate how users tend to group. The users are given a set of cards containing individual item names and are told to sort them into related piles and label the groups. Card sorting provides insight into the user's mental model and suggests the structure and placement of items on a Web site.

Card sorting technique to identify users' mental model of information architecture

Cascading Menus A hierarchical menu system that appears as the user highlights individual items in the menu. The number of levels in the hierarchy can vary. A cascading menu hides site content and can require a high degree of manual dexterity to manipulate, causing frustration as the number of levels increases.
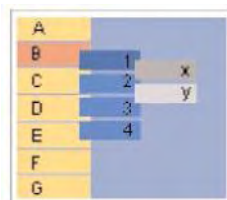
Cascading Menus

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) A mechanism for specifying how a Web page looks without affecting its HTML structure. Styles define attributes such as color, font size, alignment, and spacing. The term cascading is used because more than one Style Sheet can affect the same page. CSS standards were created by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

Causation A relationship between an event (the cause) and a second event (the effect), where the second event is a consequence of the first event.

Checkbox

A control, in the shape of a small box, used in forms or dialog boxes that users can check or uncheck to agree or disagree with the text written next to it. Checkboxes are independent of other checkboxes (as opposed to radio buttons which are mutually exclusive). Thus the user can make multiple choices from a group of selections.
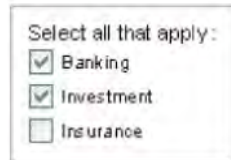
Checkbox

Chromatic Aberration

The blurring of colors in an image caused by the unequal refraction of light rays of different colors passing through a lens, whereby all the colors do not focus at a single point, e.g., our eye cannot focus red and blue light on our retina, causing chromatic aberration.

Chromatic Aberration with red and blue text

Chromostereopsis

The visual effect of vibration or floating when the eye is attempting to accommodate at extreme ends of the color spectrum (e.g., when reds and blues are placed side by side).

Chromostereopsis

Click Stream

The trail of mouse clicks made by a user while performing a particular task. It often refers to linking from one page to another on the Web.

Cognitive Friction

A term relating to the relative difficulty of a task and the mental effort required to complete it. Tasks that present choices and actions in accordance to the user's expectations are considered as having a low level of friction, while those that require deliberation are said to be high in cognitive friction.

Cognitive Processing	The process of a user applying their knowledge, memory, and judgment when experiencing a design, and then taking an action
Cognitive Walkthrough	A design evaluation in which team members review all screen elements in the context of various tasks (e.g., "How many users will click this button for task A? What happens when they do?").
Color	Also known as Hue. Color is how different wavelengths of visible light are perceived by the eye. It is an attribute used to describe the wavelengths of light reflected from an object. Cones are the color receptors in the eye.
Color Weakness	A partial inability to distinguish or perceive colors. See also Achromatopsia, Anomalous Trichromats, Cone Monochromats, and Dichromats.
Color Wheel	Tool used by visual designers to make fundamental color combination choices.
Combo Box	A combination of a text entry field and a dropdown list to allow users to either select from existing options or type a completely new entry. Drop-Down Combo Box
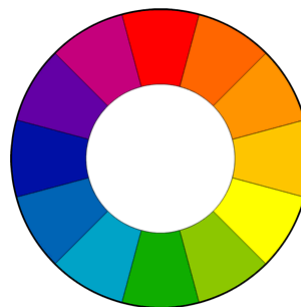
Common Area	The Gestalt principle of grouping that states that items grouped within an area (e.g., using a background plane) tend to be perceived as belonging together.

Grouping by Common Area

Comparison Tests	Usability test that compares two or more designs. Examples might be comparing alternative wireframes, comparing before and after designs, or a comparing a design against competitor designs.
Complementary Colors	Colors that are directly opposite each other on the color wheel.
Computer Expertise	Also called Technological Expertise. A relative comfort with technology; adeptness while using a computer or advanced technology. (Also see Domain Expertise.)
Concept Sketch	An outline drawing to indicate ideas about how to solve a specific design problem. It excludes the level of detail that goes into the final product. Concept sketches are used at the beginning of the design process to quickly explore different ideas and to narrow down to an effective design.
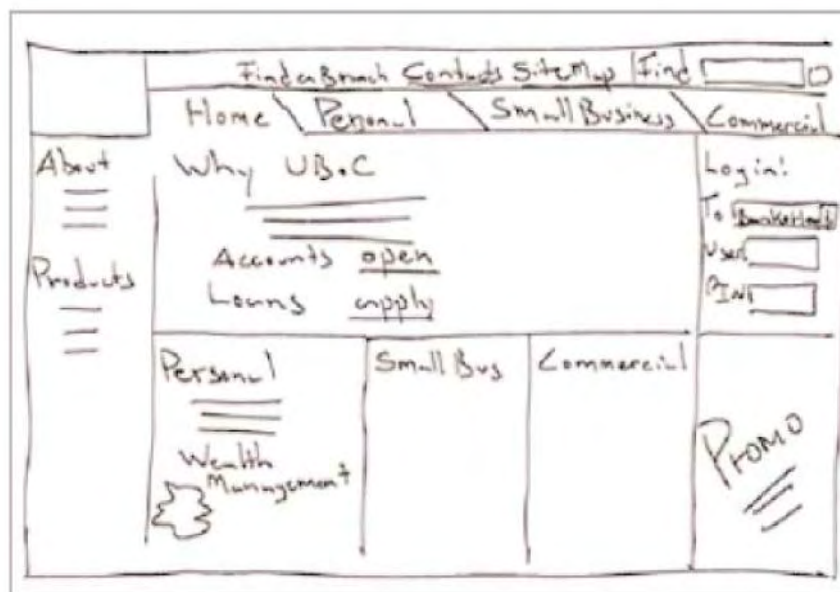
Concept Sketch

Conceptual Model	A model constructed by the users in their mind to understand the working or the structure of objects, based on their mental model and previous experience, to speed up their understanding. Also called mental model.
Cone Monochromats	A specific type of color weakness resulting in people who can only see one color. Blue cone monochromacy is characterized by poor central vision and color discrimination.
Confirmation Bias	The tendency to search for, notice, and interpret information in a way that confirms one's beliefs or opinions.
Connectedness	The Gestalt principle of grouping that states that items connected with visual elements (e.g., lines) tend to be perceived as belonging together. Grouping by Connectedness
Content Design	A term given to a set of design areas that focuses on the information value of content, as opposed to the presentation of it. The content topics include editorial style, internationalization, and accessibility. The term content design intends to differentiate these topics from other topics for purposes of evaluation and development.
Content Graphic	A type of graphic designed for the purpose of providing specific content, as differentiated from graphics that add aesthetic value or brand value. Examples of content graphics include complex charts, maps, and product photographs. Of all the graphic types, content graphics are the most likely to serve as a destination in their own right, as opposed to a marker for entry into information (e.g., icon). Complex Chart Map Product Photograph

Context Effect	The effect of surrounding elements on the perceived meaning or use of an isolated element. For example, the meaning of an individual link. The meaning of the word "Advanced" is perceived in context with "Search"
Context Sensitive Popup Menu	A short list of choices or instructions with information that is customized for a particular area of a program, appearing on screen in a small window.
Contextual Inquiry	A direct data gathering method in which the usability analyst shadows an end user through their day/ tasks. Helpful for developing a clear understanding of both the context of the tasks and a compressive environmental analysis.
Conversion Rate	Percentage of users who take a specified action, such as sign-up for an account or purchase a product
Cookies	A small file with user-specific information that the server writes to the user's hard disk for later access. Intended as a mechanism for customization (remembering favorite purchases and wish lists, storing shopping cart contents, etc.).
Correlation	A statistical relationship between two variables or two sets of data. A correlation might be positive (as one variable increases, the other increases) or negative (as one variable increases, the other decreases). Note that correlation does not imply that one variable's movement causes the other to move (causation).
Cross Checking (Cross Validation)	Error checking technique usually applied to forms that compare two or more field inputs.

D

Data Gathering	Any technique used to gather data from actual (or potential) end-users of a product. Data gathering techniques can be direct or indirect and conducted with individual end-users or groups of end-users.

Decision Table
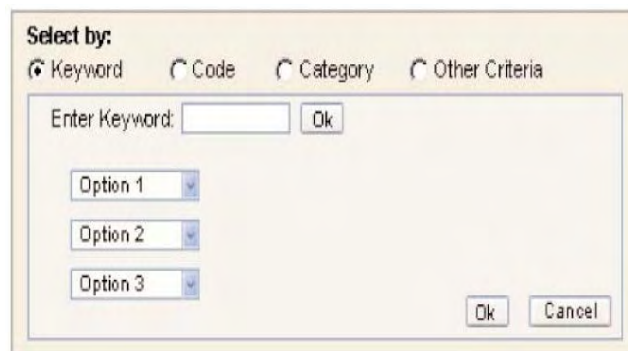
An information mapping technique that simplifies complex logic presented in textual form by re-writing it as a visual table.

If the order is...	And pay experience is...	Then...
Equal to or below credit line	————————————→	Approve Order
Above credit line	Good	
	Bad	Reject Order

Table to aid faster decision making

Deferred Create

Refers to the technique of reusing an area of a page or window for dynamically displaying content based on a user's selection.

Dialog that appears after selecting "Keyword"

Dialog that appears after selecting "Code"

Descender	In typography, the portion of some lowercase letters, such as "g" and "y," which extends or descends below the baseline?

Descender line marks bottom of descenders

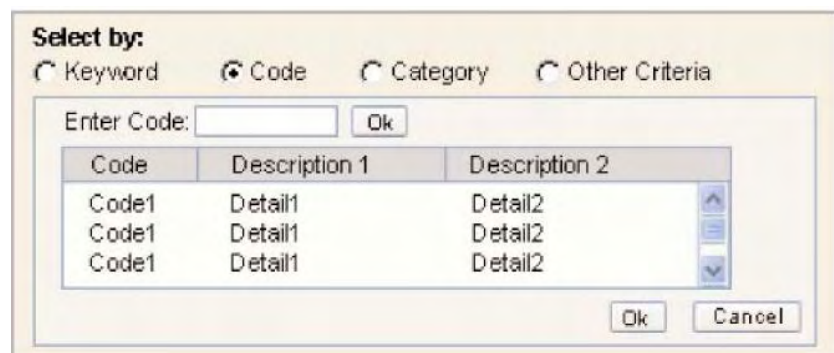|	
Design Validation	A post hoc evaluation that ensures the design has the functions and elements identified as necessary in the user analysis. Tests the correspondence of the design with the end users' actual needs.
Design Verification	The process of confirming that the interface, as built, corresponds with the design that was specified. In contrast, design validation tests correspondence of the design with the end users' actual needs.
Detailed Design	A step in the design process that follows high-level structure, navigation, and architecture design. It focuses on presentation, content, and interaction issues. Advanced prototypes are generated to test detailed page elements such as controls, color, graphics, and wording.
Deuteranopia	A specific type of color weakness based on the reduced ability to perceive colors within the green spectrum. Reportedly the most common type of color weakness.

As seen by person with normal vision

As seen by person with Deuteranopia = Red Green Deficiency

Device Switching	Term for when a user needs to switch between two input devices, such as switching between the keyboard and a mouse, or the keyboard and a touch screen.

Dichromats	Color weakness in which the person is missing one of the three cone systems, resulting in reduced ability to perceive that color. Protanopia results in missing long-wavelength pigment (red), therefore they see a predominance of blue and yellow. Deuteranopia results in missing medium wavelength (green). Tritanopia results in missing short wavelength (blue).
Direct User Data	User data collected through direct, face-to-face interaction with end users. Methods include direct interviews, focus groups, and usability roundtables. (Also see Indirect User Data.)
Disabled (button / control)	Reference to a button or control that is "grayed-out" and currently not available for the user to access, but may be available when certain conditions are met (such as filling in all fields required to submit a form).
Domain Expertise	Knowledge of a particular topic. For example tax preparers have domain expertise in income tax preparation and income tax law. Domain expertise is subject matter expertise, and is distinct from technological expertise.
Drop-Down List Box	A list of limited options that is displayed below a field after clicking it, to avoid errors and save keystrokes.

Drop-Down List Box

E

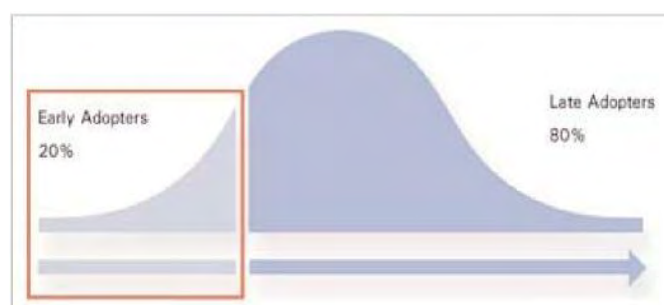|	
Early Adopters	Individuals who integrate new technologies in their lifestyle as soon as they are available—often well before the general public begins to use the technology.

Individuals who use the product early in its lifecycle

Early Prototype Testing	Simple and low-cost testing techniques. Usually done early in design. Early prototype testing has less formal controls and structure.
Efficiency	A usability metric that captures how easily a task is completed with a given interface (e.g., time for completion, number of key-strokes for completion). Must be measurable in quantitative terms.
Environmental Profile	A snapshot of the circumstances external to the users and their tasks, which affect their accomplishing their goals with the system. Includes the setting, circumstances, and physical systems used. (Also see Task Profile and User Profile).
Error Analysis	A component of task analysis, which strives to identify the frequency and types of errors that occur for a specified set of task flows. Can include Errors of Omission, Errors of Commission, Sequence Errors, or Timing Errors.
Error Detection	Point at which an error is detected during user input. Error detection can be field-level (after each field is entered,) or form-level (after the entire page / form has been completed).
Error Handling	Process for automatically correcting errors for a user or informing the user of the error and what needs to be fixed. Error messages are used to inform the user when they need to fix an error.
Error of Commission	A type of error in which a user performs an act incorrectly. This could involve providing an incorrect input, for example. (Also see Error of Omission and Sequence Error.)
Error of Omission	An error in which a user fails to perform a specific task or step (Also see Error of Commission and Sequence Error.)
Error Rate	Number, frequency, or proportion of errors (relative to correct completions) for a given task or interface.
Executive Champion	A person in an organization who takes upon themselves the task of advocating usability and encourages products to be designed with the end-user's needs in mind.
Expectancy Test	An early usability test to evaluate the initial mental model of the user and their expectations about what the application or site would do. This test is usually done prior to a performance test.
Explicit Save	A data-saving feature that requires the user to clearly state that the data needs to be stored in the memory. (Also see Implicit Save.)

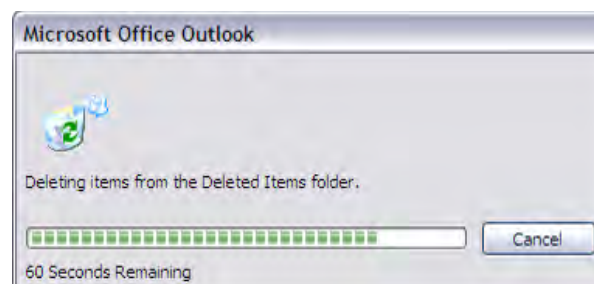|	
Eye Tracker	An electronic apparatus which enables researchers to observe at what a subject's eyes fixate and movements between fixations.
Eye-tracking	Design evaluation tool used to determine where participants are looking or not looking on a screen, and how long they look at particular locations.

F

Facilitated Workshops	Meetings in which developers and users convene to discuss aspects of an interface under development. Sometimes called Joint Application Development (JAD) sessions.
False Bottoms	Something that looks like the end of a page, but isn't.
Feature Centric	Refers to a mindset that focuses primarily on a checklist of features offered by a product rather than on its usability.
Feature Creep	Excessive provision of features in a product in an attempt to make it more technologically competitive but failing in usability.
Feedback Message	Communication to the end user that an action is in progress or has been completed. Confirmation messages are a kind of feedback message. See also Error Handling. Feedback Message
Fitts' Law	A model of human movement which predicts that the time needed to move to a target varies with the distance to and size of the target. Fitts' Law is often applied to computer mouse movements.
Fixations	In human eye movement, the periods when the eyes stop or hesitate in order to focus or gaze upon a visual object.
Focal Points of Design	The four focal points of design that evolve during the design process are navigation, content, presentation, and interaction design.

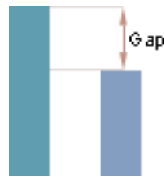|	
Focus Groups	A direct data gathering method in which a small group (8–10) of participants are led in a semi-structured, brainstorming session to elicit rapid feedback about an interface under development. Focus group data is most useful for generating new ideas or functions for an interface, rather than evaluating an existing one. Group dynamics often make focus group data suspect.
Fold	The line below which a Web page cannot be first visible without scrolling. (Also see Above-the-Fold.)
Font	Set of type characters that are all of one style. Style elements include X-height, proportional vs. monospaced, and serif vs. sans serif.
	Point size is not a style element of font.
Footer Links	Part of global navigation. Links at the foot or bottom of a Web page that provide access to general information, such as copyright, contact, security, and privacy policy information.
Formative Testing	Testing the design during development to answer and verify design decisions. Results are used to modify the existing design and provide direction. Usually done with paper prototypes. (Also see Summative Testing.)
Fovea	The area of the inner eye, directly behind the pupil, which is responsible for sharp vision and most color perception.
Foveate	To angle one's eyes so that the area of one's visual field covered by the foveae envelopes a displayed object.
Free Exploration Test	A usability test in which participants are asked to use the site without scenarios in order to procure more realistic data on how the site is typically explored. This test provides useful insights on how choices are made on a site.
Functional Allocation	The distribution of task responsibilities across humans and technology for a given task or function.
Functioning Prototype	A design prototype that functions almost like a final product. Such a prototype is used in usability tests especially where navigation is the most critical.

G

Gambler's Fallacy	The mistaken belief that if an event has occurred more frequently than normal, it will happen less frequently in the future, and vice-versa.

Gap Analysis	A technique used to determine the difference between a desired state and an actual state, often used in branding and marketing. Gap analysis may address performance issues or perception issues. Smaller gaps are better. Gap between actual and desired states
General Adaption Syndrome	The body's 3-stage, short- and long-term reactions to stress: (1) Alarm (fight or flight); (2) Resistance (bodily adaption to the stressors and attempts to reduce the stressors' effects; (3) Exhaustion (bodily resistance is depleted and the immune system might be impaired).
General Presentation Rules	The guidelines within a standard that define the presentation rules for the screens including: use of branding elements, color, layout, editorial style, graphics, and typography.
Gestalt Principles	A set of principles developed by the Gestalt Psychology Movement that established rules governing how humans perceive order in a complex field of objects. Gestalt principles of visual organization state that objects near each other, with same background, connected to each other, or having similar appearance are perceived as belonging to a group. (Also see Common Area, Connectedness, Proximity and Similarity.)
Global Navigation	Refers to page links that appear on every page, usually in the header or footer. It provides site-wide access to universal content or functions. (Also see also Footer Links and Utility Links.)
Graphics	Visual elements on a screen that help the user understand the content. May also provide aesthetic "feel" to the interface. The different types of graphics include: • Layout graphics • Navigation and control graphics • Icon graphics • Data and content graphics • Marketing & e-Commerce graphics

Grid Systems	A system of horizontal and vertical lines providing the underlying structure for page layout and design.

Single Column Grid   Two Column Grid

H

Headlines	Brief descriptive text provided as an introduction to more detailed content. Usually presented in larger point size or bold to make it distinct from the detailed content. Attention-grabbing hooks (journalistic hooks) are a special kind of headline intended to capture the reader's attention by piquing their curiosity rather than conveying introductory content.
Heuristics	Established principles of design and best practices in interface design, used as a method of solving usability problems by using rules of thumb acquired from human factors experience.
Heuristic Evaluation / Review	Also known as an expert review. Systematic inspection of a user interface design, measuring it against a set of usability heuristics in order to identify and prioritize usability problems. Comparison of a site with a very short and simple set of general principles. Heuristic reviews are quick and tend to catch a majority of the problems that will be encountered by users. However, expert reviews seldom use real end-users, so they may miss some interface issues.
Hick-Hyman Law	Demonstrates the relationship between the time it takes someone to make a decision and the number of possible choices he or she has. More choices will increase decision time.

Hierarchical Drill-Down	Also known as Hub-and-Spoke design. Navigation structure where the user navigates down into one area of the design, then back to the main screen. Used when the user does not frequently have to navigate between areas of the design. (Also see Hub-and-Spoke and Basic Navigation Structures.)

Hierarchical Drill-Down

Hierarchical Structures (In Information Architecture)	A set of various levels of groups and subgroups for categorizing items, often used to organize the content on a web site.

Hierarchical Structures

High-Level Structure	The architectural structure of an interface design. Most easily seen with a diagram of the entire design, all its pages, and their inter-relationships.

High-Level Structure of a design showing its pages and their inter-relationships

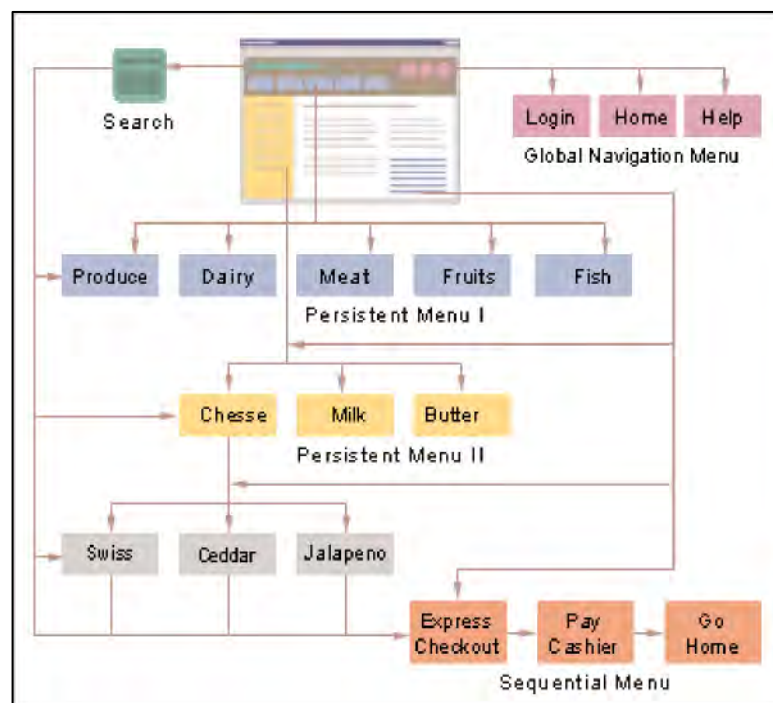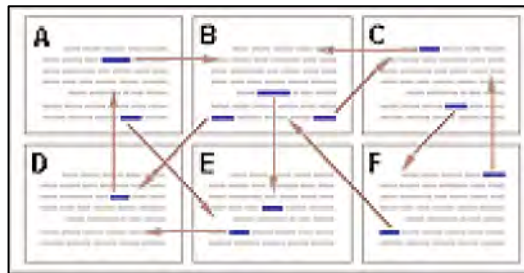|	
Hooks	In journalism, a hook is a technique used for writing headlines to grab the reader's attention. For example, a question: Would you like to lose ten pounds this week?
Horizontal Prototype	Prototypes that display a wide range of features without fully implementing all of them. Horizontal prototypes provide insights into users' understanding of relationships across a range of features.
Hues	The frequency of the wavelength of color; what we normally refer to as the color of an object. Various hues in a color palette
Human Factors Psychology	The study of the predispositions and constraints in human cognition, perceptual and motor systems in the context of interface development. That is, exploration of ways to develop safe and efficient technology and other artifacts such that they provide the best fit for human interaction.
Hybrid Navigation Model (Hybrid Structure)	The combination of basic navigation models (e.g., a hierarchical drill-down with a persistent model) that supports a user's task flow. Hybrid structures are typical of complex designs and often strive to flatten the information hierarchy to reduce the number of steps to content. Hybrid Navigation Model using a combination of basic navigation models

Hypertext Structures (In Information Architecture)	Cross-linked structures within a Web site or application. Hypertext structures are typically used to enhance navigation within hierarchical silos when the silos are not discrete.

Structure of pages linked with hypertext

I

Icon Graphic	A type of graphic representing an action or object. Icon graphics are also used to augment navigation provided by links. They are different from graphics that purely offer content or add aesthetic brand value. They are usually selectable.

Windows™ Icons   Web Icons

Image Map	A graphic that contains selectable links or target areas.

Image Map with selectable regions

Imperial Measurement System	A measurement system involving the use of yards, feet, and inches. Used by the United States and some English-speaking countries. The rest of the world uses the metric system.

Implicit Save	A data-saving feature that automatically saves data in the memory while it is entered and does not require the user to explicitly perform a save action. (Also see Explicit Save.)
Index Pages	Supplemental navigation that allows the user to select a letter of the alphabet and see content available that begins with that letter.

Indirect User Data	User-centered data gathering methods that do not involve face-to-face interactions with the users. Data may originate from surveys, user analysts, or marketing efforts. (Also see Direct User Data.)
Information Architecture	Part of the conceptual design stage primarily associated with defining an organization for site content (but can include characterizing task flow or task relationships within a content organization). Includes the processes of defining site hierarchies, content organization, and labeling schemes for all types of menu systems, and the techniques for creating and evaluating them.
Insufficient Contrast	When the color of an object, such as text, is not different enough from the page's background color, the user may have difficulty seeing the object.
Interaction Design	A term given to a set of design areas that focuses on the interaction value of content, as opposed to its presentation or information value. The interaction topics include user interface controls, error handling, and feedback systems. The term "interaction design" is intended to differentiate these topics from other topics for purposes of evaluation and development.
Interactive Voice Response (IVR)	An interface system that accepts human voice as input mechanism, translates it into recognizable commands, and reacts accordingly.
International Organization for Standardization (ISO)	A worldwide umbrella organization, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, that establishes non-proprietary standards. In the United States, the ISO is represented by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

Internationalization	The process of generalizing a product so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions without the need for re-design. It is the process of designing the implementation of a product that is as culturally and technically neutral as possible, and that can then be localized easily for a specific culture or cultures. (Also see Localization.)
Interviews	One-on-one interactions between end-users and usability analysts, designed to elicit the users' conceptual model of a system, the tasks and task flows, or other issues related to design. Direct interviews are the best way to capture user-centered data.
Intranet	A private network, based on Internet technology, providing vital information to employees of a company or organization.
Inverted Pyramid Writing	A form of writing where conclusions are presented right at the beginning or top of the pyramid, and the details and fine points at the bottom. This enables the reader to stop at any moment without missing the main points of the document.

Inverted Pyramid Writing

Irregular Shapes	Any shape that appears to have less symmetry on one or more axes.
Iterative Testing	Testing repeatedly as the design converges on a proper decision.

J

Joint Advisory Design (JAD) Sessions	Meetings in which developers and users convene to discuss aspects of an interface under development. Sometimes called facilitated workshops.

K

Kerning	Adjusting the amount of space between characters so that the text displays with optimal legibility (or with the desired effect).

Adjusting letter spacing for improved legibility

Knowledge Training	Training that provides information about a particular subject through lectures consisting of a broad outline of the topics involved. This is meant only for creating awareness of the subject. (Also see Skills Training.)

L

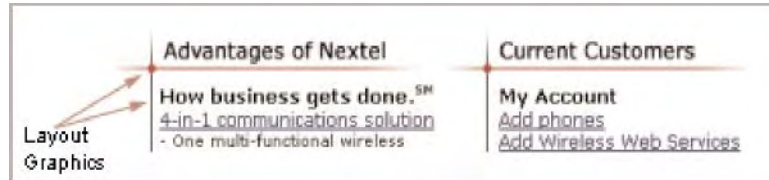|	
Labeling Systems	The selection and placement of labels that best accommodate navigation.
Landing Page	A page reached through a direct link from another page, email, or advertisement.
Late Adopters	Individuals who are slower to adopt new technologies. They are typically more challenging to design for, because they tend to be more distracted by poor interface usability. (Also see Early Adopters.)
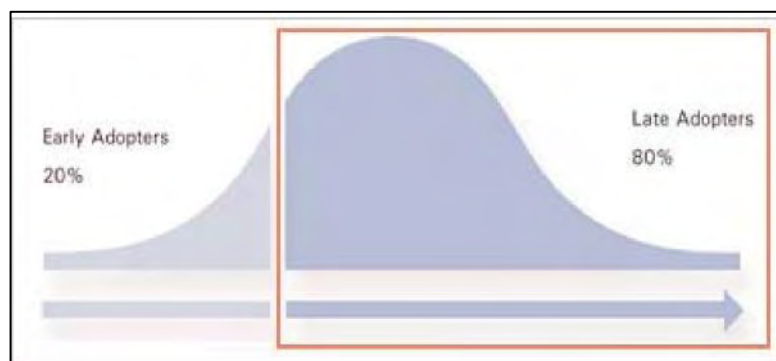
Individuals who use the product late in its lifecycle
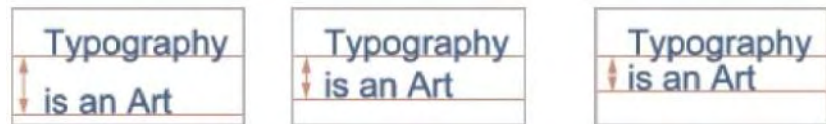
Layout Graphic	Graphics that help delineate, group, or divide content. A type of graphic designed for the purpose of organizing content, making it easy to comprehend or scan. Layout graphics are typically subtle and are least commented on by users. They can be used to support a brand or theme.

Graphics that are used to arrange content on a page

Leading	Leading is the vertical space between lines of text. Also called line spacing. It directs the eye horizontally along the text line.

Extra Leading   Optimum Leading   Crunched Leading
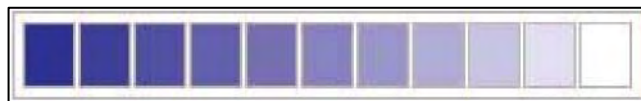
Leaf Node	The last node in a tree structure that contains no further data or links. In navigation terms, it is the last page in any hierarchical structure. It is farthest from the home page and does not lead to any other page.
Learnability	A usability metric that measures how easy it is to begin productively using an application or interface. That is, how much if any training is required?
Lightness	The light or dark appearance of a color, i.e., the amount of perceived light present. (Also see Luminance.)

Lightness

Likert Scale	A type of survey question where respondents are asked to rate the level on which they agree or disagree with a given statement on a numeric scale, e.g., 1–7, where 1 = strongly agree and 7 = strongly disagree. (Also see Rating Scale.)

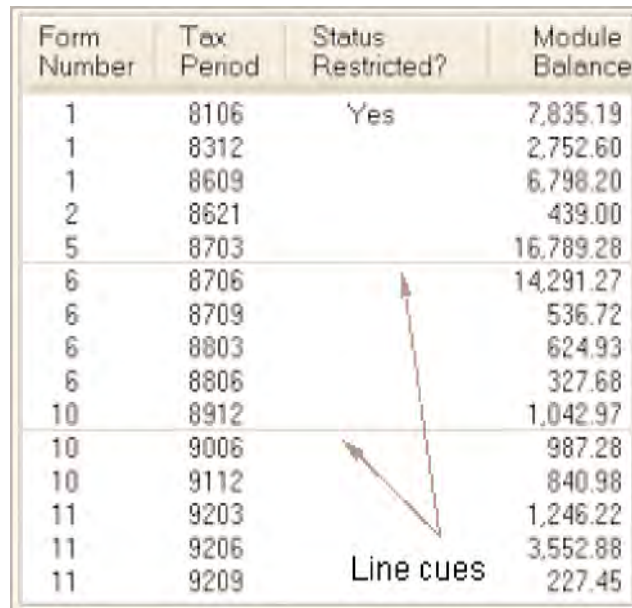|	
Line Cues	A line placed strategically, usually between every five or six rows of text, to aid visual scanning.

Line Cues

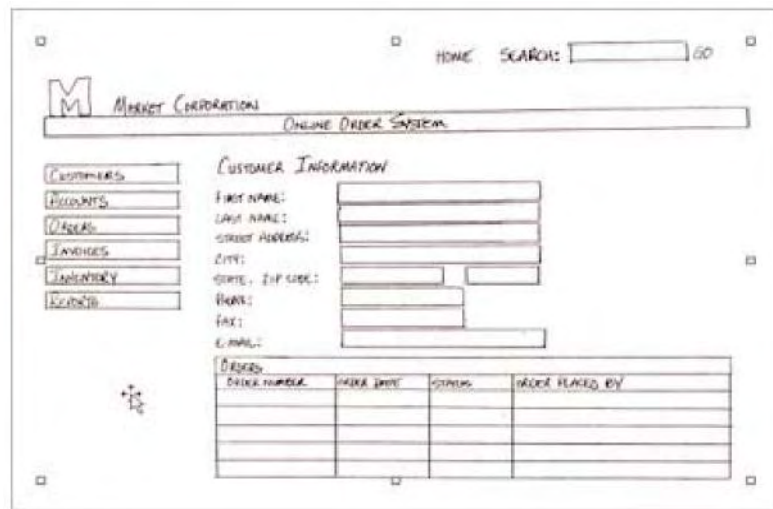|	
Line Length	Refers to the number of characters per line, not the numeric measurement of the line.
Link	Text that navigates the user to another screen, or takes an action. Links are primarily used for navigation and have a consistent visual presentation that is distinct from "normal" text.
Liquid Layout	An interface design technique in which the horizontal layout of content changes based on how the user adjusts their application or browser window. See also Static Layout.
Live Site Analysis	Refers to a range of techniques used to evaluate live Web sites including expert reviews (for general design issues and consistency checks), user performance testing, split-site studies, surveys, server log analysis and competitive analysis.
Localization	The process of adapting a product to meet the linguistic, cultural, and other requirements of a specific target environment or market (or locale).

Lo-Fi Prototypes	Paper, PowerPoint®, or other non-interactive mock-ups of an interface developed early in design. Useful for evaluating the effectiveness of the navigation infrastructure and labels.

Non-interactive mockups in early stages of design

Long Term Memory	The capacity for storing large amounts of information in the mind for indefinite periods of time.
Luminance	The measurement of intensity of light. The subjective experience is brightness. (Also see Lightness.)

M

Margin of Error	A criterion, based on sample size, which helps determine the level of confidence you can have in your research findings.
Marketing Graphic	A type of graphic designed for the purpose of enforcing or establishing brand, including the company logo.
Masked Data Entry Control	A specialized input control that aids the user in entry by providing formatting characters in the control (e.g. a phone number entry field that automatically formats the area code as distinct from the remaining numbers).

Automatically formatted area code in a phone number field

Memorability	A usability metric that measures how easy it is to remember how to use an application or interface after a period of non-use. Memorability metrics assume that users have used the interface successfully before.

Mental Model	A representation of how a user thinks about their environment and interacting within that environment. Mental models are based on the user's previous experience and help speed up their understanding and the way they accomplish tasks.
Method of Loci	A method of memory enhancement which uses visualization of physical locations ("loci") to organize and retrieve information. A person could imagine storing information in discrete places in a room for example, and retrieving it later by visualizing those places in the room.
Metric System	A measurement system involving the use of meters, liters, and kilometers. Used by most of the world (except the United States and some English-speaking countries, which use the Imperial measurement system).
Modal Dialog Box	Refers to a mode of a page or window that guides the user interaction. A modal window requires the user to finish interaction on that page before a new page can be accessed (e.g., a dialog box that requires OK or Cancel to be selected before interaction can return to the primary window). A non-modal window allows for continued interaction with other application windows while the non-modal window remains open.

Modal Dialog Box

Moderated Usability Testing	A usability test in which a moderator provides instructions and information about tasks to be performed. The moderator also observes and participates as needed during the entire test.
Monochrome	Black and white or a single color with black.

Monospaced Font	Typeface attribute in which every letter occupies the same lateral space, thus the "I" has lots of room while the "m" is cramped. This font is commonly used for input fields on forms, and in selected applications; but otherwise, it is the least readable category of type. (Also see Proportional Font.)

Amazing Letters — Times New Roman Font

Amazing Letters — Courier New Font

Courier New is a monospaced font - each character has equal width

Motor Response	Any action taken by the user in response to their environment (e.g., the visual presentation of a design) and the cognitive processing they perform.
Muller-Lyer Illusion	An optical illusion consisting of sets of arrow-like figures. The arrow shaft with outward-facing lines will seem longer.

N
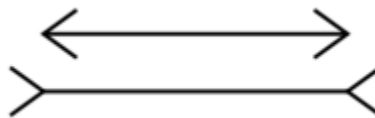
Navigation Design	Based on task design and information architecture definitions developed in conceptual design, navigation design marks the first formal step of design. It includes the development of wire frames and graphical mock-ups to test the design structure and visual direction. A set of core navigation pages are designed, tested, and iterated during this stage to ensure that the user interface structure is sound before investing in detailed design.
Negative Advertising	The result of poor usability: unsatisfied users who tell others to avoid a site or process because of their bad experience.
Negative Space	Also known as white space. Space on the screen or page where there is no content, or unused white space in a design.
Notebook Tabs	Visual design used to display persistent navigation. It approximates the appearance of folders (or notebooks) with tabs to represent each section.
Numeric Format Rules	Rules for formatting numeric values in data entry fields.

O

Oculometer	An electronic apparatus which enables researchers to observe at what a subject's eyes fixate and movements between fixations.
Operationalized Variable	A variable or metric that has been defined clearly enough to be observed and measured in a way that is replicable.
Organization Structures	Relationships between content and groups.
Orienting Response	A reflex as a response to something novel that occurs, where the individual stops what he is doing and turns his sensors to the source of stimulation.

P

Page Flow	Refers to the arrangement of elements on a page suggesting a hierarchy or sequence. Also refers to the sequence of pages or screens a user experiences as they accomplish a task. Arrangement of elements on a page suggesting hierarchy
Page Template	A working model of a type of page / screen that provides a framework for designing and implementing individual instances of that page / screen. Templates encourage consistency and prevent reinventing the wheel.
Page Types	A term used to refer to a set of page components that together form a page designed to satisfy specific user requirements (e.g., a search and results page allows a user to query a database and review the results of the query). Page types form the basis of an effective standard.

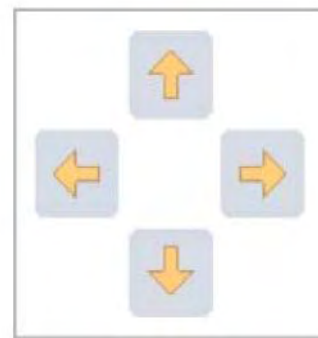|	
Paper Prototypes	Non-interactive mock-ups of an interface developed early in design. Useful for evaluating the effectiveness of the navigation infrastructure and labels. (Also see Lo-Fi Prototypes.)
Parallel Construction	Using the same format for every text or graphic composition, especially when constructing lists. E.g., items should be all sentences or all phrases, not a combination of the two. If an item starts with a verb, use the same verb format throughout. For example, action-object phrasing for menu items should be followed consistently for individual menu items within a group (e.g., view report, create new report, edit report, and search report).
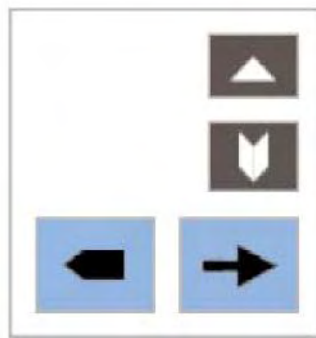
Inconsistent construction of icons   Parallel construction of icon

|	
Parse	To separate into component parts.
Passive Voice	The voice of a verb tells whether the subject of the sentence performs or receives the action. In the passive voice, the subject receives the action of the verb. For example, the drop-down box is selected by the user. Passive sentences are generally longer, more complex, and more difficult to process cognitively. (Also see Active Voice.)
Path Analysis and Usage Statistics	In the Web environment, various tools that yield a wealth of information about users' behavior on the site.
Pattern Recognition	The process of identifying meaningful objects within a visual field.
Performance Data	Data that focuses on user behavior and/or how (well) users complete a task. Did the user get the right answer? Usability tries to focus on performance data rather than preference data. (Also see Preference Data.)

Persistent Navigation	Navigation structure where the user navigates across a range of tasks or content in conjunction with one another. Used when the user frequently has to navigate between areas of the design.
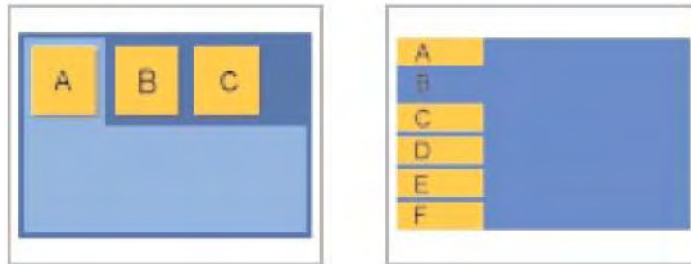
Navigation structures with persistent context

Personas	A concrete characterization of a single user group through a synthesis of the user, task, and environment profiles of that group. It provides detailed example of the potential end-user that represents a specific target audience type. Personas help developers think in terms of users by providing insight into how they might use the product.

Paula Grey
Professional Staff Member, Senate Agriculture Committee
- 42 years old
- Divorced, 1 child
- Law degree
- Very comfortable using a computer, intermediate internet user, with high-speed connection at work and at home for daughter
- Uses email extensively; accesses Web for about 2 hours a day for work.

Persona of a user of a government site

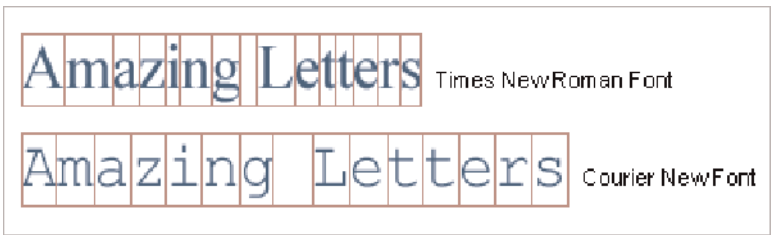|	
Phi Phenomenon	An optical illusion of perceiving separate objects to be continuous motion, when viewed in succession quickly. The PHI phenomenon explains why light bulbs, arranged in a circle, seem to rotate when actually one light after another is simply blinking once.
Population Stereotype	An established knowledge that a set of people have about the world, causing them to have strong expectations about how things should work, such as turning a knob or opening a door. People may thus be unpleasantly surprised if such expectations are not met with.
Practicality Test	A test of the task flow's feasibility, given the nature of the users and their environment.

Preference Data	Data that focuses on user perceptions. Did they feel that the task was easy? Do they like the way the interface works? Usability tries to focus on performance data rather than preference data. (Also see Performance Data.)
Presentation Design	A term given to a set of design areas that focuses on the presentation of information, as opposed to its information value. Presentation topics include layout, color management, graphics, and typography. The term "presentation design" is intended to differentiate these topics from other topics for purposes of evaluation and development.
Primacy	People tend to recall the first items in a list better than items in the middle or bottom of a list, when that information is relatively simple or presented slowly.
Probes	The technique used in in-depth interviews to explore the interviewee's emotions about the given topic. The questions asked gently nudge the interviewees to disclose their feelings, e.g., "How do you feel about shopping online?"
Progressive Disclosure	An interaction design technique that provides information in sequence across a number of steps with increasing level of detail as requested by the user, to reduce information overload on the user.
Proportional Font	A category of type with variable horizontal space between each character. The shape and width of the character determine the amount of space needed on either side of it. This makes it easier and more pleasing to read. (Also see Monospaced Font.)

Times New Roman is a proportional font - width of each character adjusted for optimum readability |
| **Protocol Simulation (User Performance Testing)** | Individual users are asked to complete a series of representative tasks using a prototype. While they work, they talk out loud. This gives the researcher a clear understanding of the users' thought processes. (Also see Think Aloud Protocol.) |

Prototypes	Any representation of the design that can be used for evaluation. High fidelity prototypes are closer in appearance and behavior to the likely final design than low fidelity prototypes.
Proximity	The Gestalt principle of grouping that states that items that are placed close together tend to be perceived as belonging together.

Proximity

Psychodynamics	A science that studies an individual's interaction of various conscious and unconscious mental or emotional processes, the response to the input from the senses and pre-programmed instincts, and how the interaction influences personality, behavior, and attitudes.
Psychographics	A social group analysis that uses demographic data to study and measure people's attitudes, values, lifestyles, and opinions.
Psychological Refractory Period	The time it takes to stop doing an activity and start doing something else.

Q
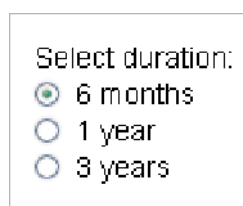
Quick Links	Supplemental navigation that promotes content in the information architecture. Quick links bring attention and provide fast access to important, popular, unpredictable, or seasonal information or tasks.

R

Radio Button	A control in the shape of a small circle, used in forms or dialog boxes, which users can click to select one out of a group of choices. Radio buttons (based on the metaphor of a car radio), unlike checkboxes, are mutually exclusive. The user automatically deselects an option by selecting another.

Radio Button

|	
Rapid Serial Visual Presentation	Presentation of words individually, so that text can be read without needing to scan. The resulting reading speeds can be several times higher than normal reading, but it can be uncomfortable.
Rating Scales	A testing tool used to capture the user's' subjective impressions. For example, measuring users' satisfaction with a feature may have responses that range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." (Also see Likert Scale.)
Readability	Readability is the ease which text can be read and understood. (Also see Reading Grade Level.)
Reading Grade Level (RGL)	The level of education required by the user in order to understand particular content. It is important to adapt your writing to the appropriate reading grade level (e.g., grade 6) of your target users.
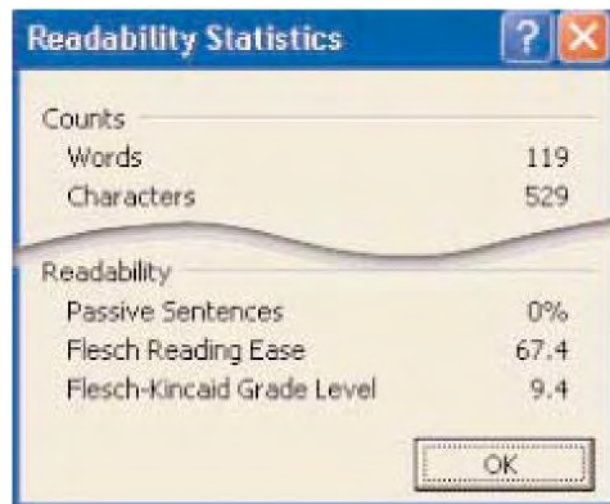
Reading Grade Level as analyzed by Microsoft Word™ with the spelling check tool

Recall (Pure Recall)	Retrieving information from long-term memory without being cued. An example is answering an essay question on a test. Recall is considered more difficult than recognition.
Recency	People tend to recall the last or most recent items in a list better than items at the top or middle of a list, when that information is relatively complex or presented quickly.

Recognition	Retrieving information from long-term memory in response to a sensory cue. One recognizes the sensory input if one finds a match between the input and stored memory. An example is answering a multiple-choice question, where one would recognize one choice as the correct answer. Recognition is considered easier than recall.
Reconstructive Memory	Memory works by combining actual recollections with logic and with more-recently acquired content. This causes long term memory to be somewhat unreliable.
Reflective Response	Thoughtful, contemplative reaction by a person to any external or internal stimuli. (Also see Behavioral Response and Visceral Response.)
Reliability	The consistency or precision of a measure. A measure is reliable if it produces similar results under consistent conditions.
Remote Usability Test	A usability test in which the facilitator, participant, and observers are in different locations. Remote tests prove to be a good option in case of budget and time constraints. They allow more diversity, but limit the observation of non-verbal behaviors.
Representative Sampling	The process of determining and selecting a group of participants from a larger population that represents your target market. Factors that cause sample to be non-representative - Sampling error, Coverage error, Non-response error, and Measurement error.
Research and Planning	The first stage of user-centered design, characterized by an evaluation of precursor designs and the gathering of business and user objectives for a new design. Typically includes setting business goals, defining user requirements, and understanding brand objectives.
Responsive Design	Implementation of designs that allows them to adapt to different form factors, such as PC, tablet, or mobile device. Delivered via fluid layouts, flexible media, CSS and JavaScript. (Also see Adaptive Design.)
Response Surface	An analytical representation of multidimensional data that depicts interpolation between data points such that it is easy to visualize and spot trends.

Restricted Character Set	A set of characters from which some alphabets and numbers are omitted in order to avoid being confused with others due to their similarity when written in uppercase, lowercase, or sound when read. The most common bad actors omitted from alpha-numeric codes are "I" which may be confused with the number 1 or lowercase "L," and "O" with the number zero.
Return on Investment (ROI)	A monetary evaluation of benefits relative to the effort or expenditure invested; a measure of how much return, usually measured as profit or cost savings, results from a given use of money. In the context of usability, ROI is the monetary (or other) benefit gained as a result of an investment in good usability design.
Reverse Card Sort	A usability testing technique, opposite to that of a card sort, where participants are given a list of items to see if they can figure out where to find them. Their success validates the self-evidence of the navigational structure of a design. (Also see Card Sort.) Categories have already been made and labeled appropriately.
Rollovers	An element on a page is replaced by a new element when the mouse rolls over it, e.g., in a navigation button bar, as the mouse passes over each button, the original image is replaced with a modified version of that image.

S

Saccades	In human eye movement, the periods when the eyes rapidly scan within the vertical or horizontal planes of the visual field.

Sans Serif	A category of type where the font characters are without serifs. Serifs are the cross-lines at the end of a font character stroke. Sans serif fonts are more readable for isolated text such as labels and instructions. (Also see Serif.)

Font without Serifs - Tahoma

Font with Serifs - Georgia

Satisficing	A theory of human problem solving that says people minimize expended effort by using shortcuts to make decisions. For instance, humans tend to select the first correct answer they encounter rather than rationally and systematically evaluating all possible answers prior to selection. This concept was first presented by Herb Simon.
Saturated Color	Saturation refers to the amount of the hue present, relative to gray.

Saturated Color

Scenario	A concrete, often narrative, description of a user performing tasks in a specific context sufficiently detailed that design implications can be inferred.
Scent	Cues provided in an interface to help people trace and navigate to desired information. Ambiguous cues provide false or insufficient "scent."
Schema (Pl. Schemata)	A cluster of human memory that is described as a pattern of connections of neurons in the brain with nodes and links that are so strong that they can be retrieved together as a single memory unit. In essence, it is a packet of information based on knowledge and experience.
Screen Readers	Software applications that interpret the text displayed on a computer monitor and convert it to speech or Braille for disabled users, e.g., Jaws®.

Screener	A questionnaire, used at the outset of a usability test, containing criteria for participant selection such as user, task, and environment profiles, demographics, etc. These act as filters to ensure selection of only suitable participants for the study.
Search	Primary navigation model used when the user knows exactly what they are looking for. The user enters search criteria and the system returns a search results page (also called a "Search Engine Results Page (SERP)".
Secondary Windows	Windows that appear in front of the main application or browser window providing access to supporting information, such as calculators, definitions, help content, or details. Functionality in secondary windows is limited, focusing on the user doing their micro-task and returning to the main window.
Segments	A defined subset of a population in which subset members have important traits in common. In User-Centered Design approaches, users are grouped into segments, also called personas, and a user-interface is designed to support them.
Selective Attention	The cognitive process of concentrating on one selected aspect of the environment while ignoring others.
Sensory Information Memory	Sensory input which is stored just long enough to be transferred to short-term memory. Sensory memory is considered to be an automatic response rather than a cognitive process.
Sequence Error	A specific error type in which a user attempts to complete a component of a modal or ordered task out of sequence, resulting in a system error, e.g., A B D C.
Sequential Navigation	Primary navigation model used when the user needs to accomplish a well-defined process by following steps in a sequential order. It is typically used to control / direct the user's actions and prevent errors.
Serif	The cross-lines or strokes at the end of a font character stroke. Sans serif fonts do not have serifs. (Also see Sans Serif)

Sans Serif   Serif

Font without Serifs – Tahoma   Font with Serifs - Georgia |
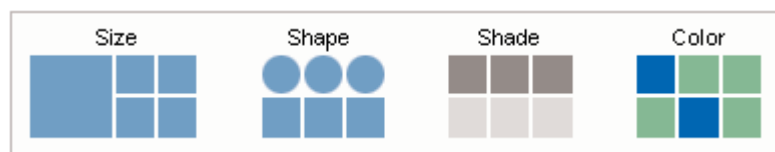| **Short Term Memory** | The capacity for holding a small amount of information in the mind in an actively available state, for a short period of time. |

Signal Detection Theory	The study of how humans or machines discern between information-bearing patterns (known as stimuli or signals) and random patterns of distraction (known as noise).
Signal / Noise Ratio	The proportion of meaningful content to extraneous interference. Writing is more powerful when the signal (message) is high and the noise (verbiage) is low. Maximize the signal/noise ratio.
Significance	The probability that an effect is not due to chance alone.
Similarity	The Gestalt principle of grouping that states that items with the same size, shape, color or shade tend to be perceived as belonging together. (Also see Gestalt Principles, Common Region, Connectedness and Proximity.)

Grouping by Similarity

Site Map	A map of the web site, displaying the navigation structure and the interrelationship between pages.
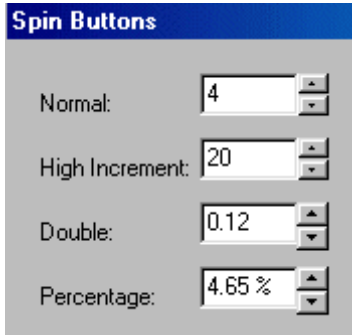
Site map of a site showing navigation and levels

Skills Training	Training for a professional that focuses on imparting knowledge through participatory activities in order to gain proficiency in a particular field. (Also see Knowledge Training.)
Slider	Interaction control where the user can select an option or setting between two end-points along a continuous spectrum.
Small Field Tritanopia	The fact that the fovea is mostly insensitive to blue. Therefore, blue text or icons are somewhat harder to see then other colors.

Spatial Memory	The part of memory responsible for retaining information about one's environment and special orientation.
Spin Button	A control to make a single choice from a sequential list, with up and down arrows to increase or decrease the measure in the selection. Such a control is provided if there is a clear up or down sequence within choices (such as numbers, length).

Spin Button

Stakeholder	Any individual who has vested interests in the design project and its outcome, including clients, managers, software developers, designers, marketers, distributors, store-owners, and almost everyone involved with the product.
Standards Design	The process of developing a standard including the development of exemplar page types, general presentation rules, and guidelines for how to use the standard.
Statement of Work (SOW)	A contractual document specifying the work activities or tasks to be conducted for successful completion of a project. Used by a contractor to size, plan, and complete a project, and used by the organization that procures the services to monitor and control the project.
Static Layout	A page and screen layout technique in which the horizontal layout of content does not change based on how the user adjusts their application or browser window. This results in the need to horizontally scroll to see all the content in small windows or seeing empty gutters in large windows. (Also see Liquid Layout.)
Storyboards	Sketches or other visuals that help depict the design concept you have planned.
Stroop Effect	When the name of a color is presented in a different color (e.g., the word "red" is presented in blue), it is harder and more error-prone to name that color.

|	
Style Guide	Set of rules that provide a reference for creating the look and feel of a design by clearly defining the conventions of each instance in the design. For an interface, style guides may contain rules for graphic layout grids, exact size and spacing of elements, fonts, colors, interactive behavior, text messages, and labels.
Subjective Rating	A rating that is based on an individual reaction or opinion, feelings, desires or priorities, often measured on a Likert scale to allow for a quantitative measure.
Summative Testing	Testing done to measure the success of the design in terms of human performance and preference. (Also see Formative Testing.)
Surveys	An indirect user-centered analysis method for gathering information from a large number of users. Issues in survey design include: reaching a representative sample, participant self-filtering, question development and measurement bias, attracting enough responses.
Systems Analysis	Reducing a system into its simpler constituents for the purpose of better understanding of the whole system, its function, and the functions of its constituents. The constituents include personnel, hardware, and software, and the functions include both system operation and maintenance functions.
T	
Task Analysis	The process of evaluating a task or activity to determine the criteria for successful completion. Task analysis also serves to optimize task efficiency by reflecting the users' understanding and expectations of the task.
Task Depth	The number of vertical levels of a hierarchical structure.
Task Design	Part of the conceptual design stage; refers to the design of a task flow using various formats (task lists, task flow diagrams, etc.) prior to prototyping. Task design follows a task analysis and embodies the new task flow—these flows can be tested for practicality before any formal page design has been done.

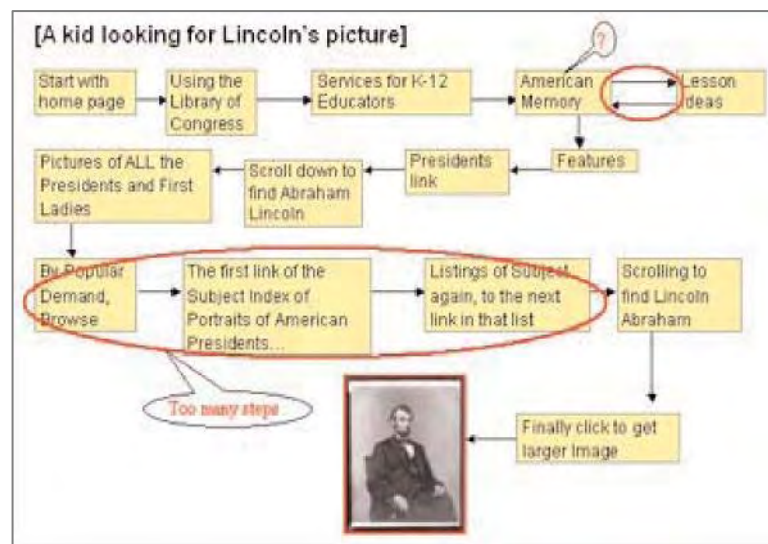|	
Task Flow Diagrams	Diagrams that show the various user tasks and their inter-relationship.
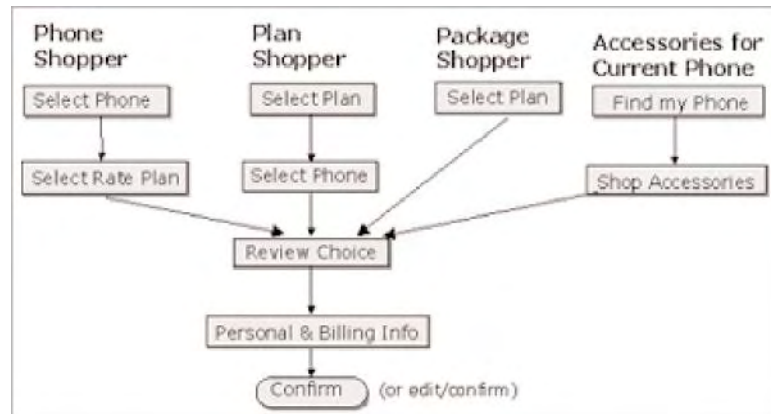
Diagrams showing integration and inter-relationships of tasks

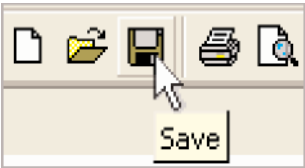|	
Task Flow Problems Map	A diagram that maps out problems in the task flow of a design.

Mapping problems on a task flow

Task Panels	Portions of the screen where a particular task is performed, e.g., in a search and display screen, usually the search task panel occupies one portion of the screen while the results occupies another. Task panels allow navigation across tasks using persistent elements displayed on every page.
Task Profile	An overview of a given task outlining the task characteristics that impact usable design, including importance, frequency, sequence, dependency, flow, and mission criticality. (Also see Environmental Profile and User Profile.)

Task Statement	One representation for documenting tasks in user-centered statements should include an actor, an action, and a goal or outcome, e.g., user task analysis. Task enters address; manager runs report.
Textbox	Basic user interface control that allows the user to enter text. Can be single line or multi-line.
Thematic Graphic	A type of graphic designed for the purpose of reinforcing a theme carried throughout the site, e.g., the picture of a beach might enhance the theme of vacation.

Picture of a beach enhancing the theme of a beach vacation

Think Aloud Protocol	An interview strategy in which participants are asked to narrate their activities as they simultaneously complete a task so that the interviewer can develop a better understanding of the users' mental model, decision criteria, and expectations for a task or task flow. (Also see Protocol Simulation.)
Thumbnail Images	Miniature, thumbnail-sized images that can be enlarged if desired (usually by clicking). Using thumbnail images instead of large graphics saves space and may reduce file size.
Tight-Loop Projects	Projects that have frequent tests throughout the system development life cycle. These projects have the greatest chance of success.
Tool Tip	A small context window that appears when the user lingers over a control with the mouse pointer, containing a small description of the basic functionality of the control.

Tool Tip

Toolbar	A bar that contains buttons for the most commonly used commands in an application. Typically, a toolbar appears under a menu bar.

Toolbar in Microsoft™ Office

|	
Topology Study	Study of a system showing the relationships of the system-specific parts.
Touch Screen	Interaction technique where the user directly interacts with elements on a screen by touching them.
Tree Menu	Presentation style for a hierarchical menu where navigation options can be expanded to show the sub-navigation options that are below them.
Triadic Colors	Colors that are separated by 120 degrees on the color wheel.
Typeface Families	Collections of typefaces that are designed and intended to be used together, e.g., Universe - bold, condensed, extra bold, ultra thin, extended, italic, etc.
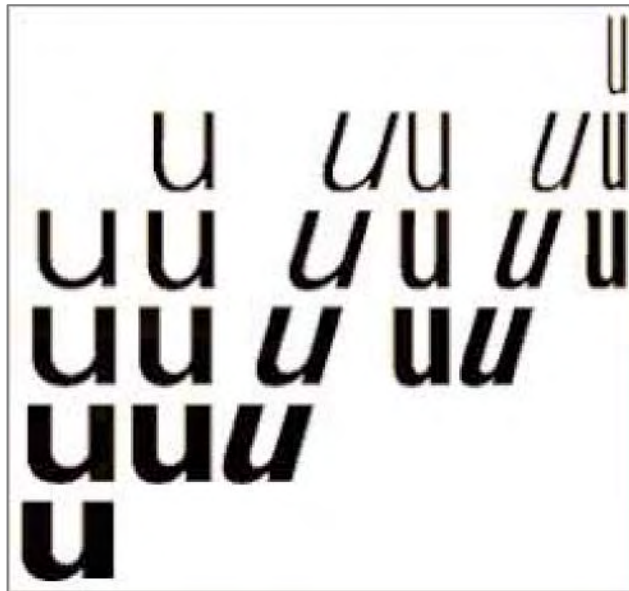
Universe Typeface Family

Typography	The process of selecting styles and sizes of type and arranging them in order to create an effective layout.

U

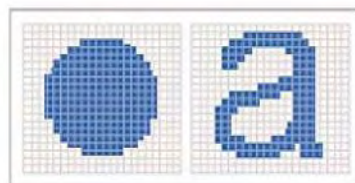|	
Unbounded Field	The ability of a control to allow for freeform entry versus forced selection from a set of options. (Also see Bounded Field.) Unbounded Field
Unique Selling Proposition (USP)	An exclusive message that concisely describes a product against its competition, and which the business or brand can use consistently in its advertising and promotion to achieve a cutting edge in the market.
Un-Moderated Usability Testing	Each participant interacts with a design from his or her location with a computer. Instructions and information about tasks to be performed are provided in a special area of the browser. Special buttons may be added to the browser to enable participants to provide additional information via small questionnaires. No moderator is involved.
Usability Criteria	Benchmarks such as formal measurements that serve as a target for the level of usability of a product. Metrics may include how fast a user can perform a task, number of errors made on a task, learning time, and subjective ratings.
Usability Roundtable	A meeting in which a group of end users is invited to bring specific work samples and discuss the validity of an early prototype.
Usability Test	Investigative methods to determine the ease of use of a product, primarily involving observation of potential users actually interacting with the product and measuring the results.
Usability-Centric	Refers to a mindset that focuses primarily on usability rather than features.
Use Case	A list of steps defining the interaction between a user and system.
User Experience (UX)	Overall experience of users as they try to accomplish their tasks. Broader than usability, user experience relates to interactions outside of a single application. For example, user experience of purchasing a mobile phone involves exploring options, finding and purchasing a phone, receiving and unpacking it, as well as initialization of the phone.

User Interface (UI)	It's the interaction of humans and machines.
User Interface Structure	A term used to refer to the basic content organization of the site and its navigation model. Different from the page level content, the user interface structure defines the containers for content and means for navigation to it.
User Profile	A general description of a user group for a specific interface. Typically includes characteristics that may influence design choices, such as: demographic characteristics, education, language, computer expertise, domain experience, motivation, or expectations. (Also see Environmental Profile and Task Profile.)
User Satisfaction	A metric of usability that focuses on how well the user perceives the interface to work and how well it meets his/her needs.
User-Centered Analysis	A method of collecting data to develop an understanding of user intentions and interface use patterns. User-centered analysis provides concrete data to prioritize and drive interface design.
User-Centered Design (UCD)	Design methodology in which interviews and empirical tests of users needs determine the characteristics of a design or computer application.
Utility Links	Also known as "header links." Part of global navigation. Links placed at the top of the screen that provide access to administrative or operational content, such as contact, help, login, and account information.
V	
Validity	The extent to which a study answers the question it is intended to answer. Also, the extent to which a measure or a test measures what it is supposed to measure.
Vectored	A font or graphic image that is stored and displayed as a geometric entity with vector information (magnitude and direction) rather than points. Since they are mathematical representation of images rather than a matrix of pixels, they occupy less file space and are easy to scale. (Also see Bitmapped.)

Vectored Image and Font   Bitmapped Image and Font

Vertical Prototype	Prototypes that display just a few complex features of a product and almost completely implement only these features. Vertical prototype tests provide insights into users' understanding of the complexity, issues, and problems of a specific feature. (Also see Horizontal Prototype.)
VIMM (Visual, Intellectual, Memory, Motor)	Model of systematically approaching user interface design where the design is intended to optimize the experience and limit the load on each of these four human systems.
VIMM Model	Best practices and design principles organized into Vision, Intellect, Memory and Motor categories. VIMM models are used to organize and bring focus to Expert Reviews and to UI design.
Visceral Response	Impulsive or instinctive reaction that comes from within one's mental or spiritual being. (Also see Behavioral Response and Reflective Response.)
Visual Affordance Test	A usability test to investigate users' expectations about possible interaction with an interface by just looking at the interface.
Visual-Cognitive Processing	Description of how the brain takes visual input and processes it through schemata and mental models to determine its meaning.
Visual Design	Area of design focused on the visual presentation of a design. Visual design supports and enhances the function of the design.
Visual Hierarchy	Refers to the overall page layout and its ability to lead the users' attention through the page elements. Effective visual hierarchies create an appropriate balance in composition that draws users to top levels of the hierarchy while optimizing visual access to important page level elements. (Also see Page Flow.)
Visual Link Analysis	A modeling procedure which anticipates a generalized visual scan and then optimizes the design to make that visual scan more efficient.

W

Wake-Up Call	A significant event, report, or situation that brings an issue to immediate attention and alerts one to possible negative repercussions if status quo continues and no steps are taken to control the current situation.

Watermark	A graphic design appearing as background. Copyright images are usually watermarked.

Watermark

Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)	World Wide Web Consortium recommendations for creating web pages, and web browser and authoring software that can be used by everyone on any web capable device.
Web Design Standard	A set of guidelines developed for a large web development team to ensure consistency and good design across pages within and between web sites. Effective web standards include the design of page types and general presentation rules as well as rules of how and when to use the guidelines.
Web Log	A record of web site use reported by a tool such as WebTrends. Web logs typically show most visited directories and pages, where users enter the site, what words they searched for to find the site and their path through the site.
White Space	See "Negative Space"
Widgets	Slang term for controls and displays.
Wiki	A collaborative Web site whose content can be quickly edited with simple formatting rules by anyone who has access to it. "Wiki," developed by Ward Cunningham in the mid-1990s to provide collaborative Web discussions, means "quick" in Hawaiian. The term Wiki can also refer to the collaborative software used to create such a site.
Window Thrashing	Rapid manipulation of windows caused by limited display resource, wasting users' time in activating, resizing, repositioning, or orienting to the new window.

Wireframing	The process of sketching designs as iteratively more realistic representations of the final product. • Low-fidelity wireframes are further from the look-and-feel of the final design. They are created and modified quickly to allow for rapid iteration • High-fidelity wireframes are closer to the look-and-feel of the final design. They take longer to create and modify, but allow for investigation of detailed design issues.
Wizard	Instructional help in an application, site, or system development environment that guides the user through a series of question-and answer steps to accomplish a task. Following is an example of a wizard for interest calculation.
World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)	An international community that develops open standards to ensure the long-term growth of the Web.
Writing Style	Choices content writers make about how the content and tone will appeal to users. Can be informal or formal and supports the design's goals.
WYSIWYG	"What You See Is What You Get."

X

X-Height	The height of the lowercase letter "x" in any given font. Larger x-heights make the font appear larger and hence increase readability.

Y

Yerkes-Dodson Law	Psychologists Yerkes and Dodson demonstrated, in 1908, the relationship between physiological arousal (stress) and performance: Performance increases with arousal, but only to a point. When arousal is too high, performance decreases.

Z

Zeigarnik Effect	The tendency to remember things better if they were left incomplete.