

BIT 2nd Year

Semester 3

IT 3405

User Interface Design

Chapter 10 - User Support

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Recognize the importance of user support system
- Describe different user supports and their features
- Learn the steps in developing a help manual

Sub Topics

- 10.1. Types of user supports
- 10.2. Features of user supports
- 10.3. Interactive user supports
- 10.4. Writing help manual

10.1.

TYPES OF USER SUPPORTS

Introduction

There is often an implicit assumption that if an interactive system is properly designed it will be completely intuitive to use and the user will require little or no help or training

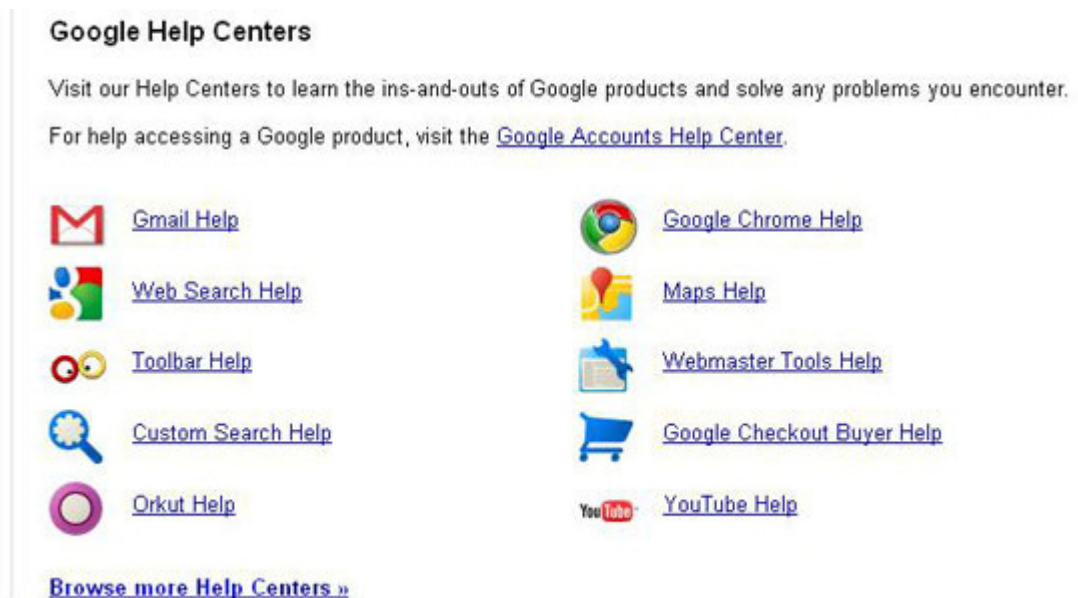
The user will require assistance at various times and design this help into the system.

Users need different types of support at different times. Hence, the design, implementation and presentation of help system are very important

Introduction

We see many terms and types of help systems used in the context of system: "Help," "Support," "FAQ," "Docs," "Knowledge Base," etc. All these intend to provide assistance to users.

Breaking them into topics and subtopics when the help system is large



Types of user support

quick reference

- a reminder to the user of the details of tools he is basically familiar with and has used before.
- It may, for example, be used to find a particular command option, or to remind the user of the syntax of the command.

task specific help

- Task-specific help is required when the user has encountered a problem in performing a particular task or when he is uncertain how to apply the tool to his particular problem.
- The help that is offered is directly related to what is being done.

Types of user support

full explanation

- The more experienced or inquisitive user may require a full explanation of a tool or command to enable him to understand it more fully.
- This explanation will almost certainly include information that the user does not need at that time.

tutorial

- This is particularly aimed at new users of a tool and provides step-by-step instruction of how to use the tool, using some working through examples.

Quick Reference



<http://www.writersua.com/articles/quickref/index.html>

Quick Reference

- it is like a short version of a manual, which shows information of hundreds of pages in one page.
- The most important information will be shown using few words with clarity.
- Situations where quick reference guides will be helpful.
 - One-time setup : The product requires one time set-up process which will work continuously afterwards
 - Limited functionality : The product has a small set of tasks
 - Core tasks: The users perform core tasks of the system very often
 - Transition from legacy systems
 - Large documentation set
 - Busy users

Quick Reference

- Challenges that will be faced when developing a quick reference guide
 - Time and associated cost to create
 - Limited reuse of content
 - Learning curve
 - Accommodating requests to add more
 - Localization
- Advantages of having a quick reference guide
 - Communication is simple
 - Can develop design skills
 - Perfect solutions for handouts
 - People will actually read and review
 - Using the documentation is easy

Help Advantages

1. Customer Satisfaction

- The main advantage of a help desk is to improve customer satisfaction.
- Customers know exactly where to go for information because the contact information is clearly visible on product brochures and company websites.
- Some companies outsource their help desk services to offshore companies.

Help Advantages

2. Quality Improvement

- Help desks can contribute to improve the quality of a company's products or services.
- When customers call a help desk, specialists typically fill out problem reports describing the call.
- Companies can use software to tabulate and track these reports from initiation to resolution.
- Designers can review these problem reports to implement improvements.
- If several customers call with the same problem, the help desk might alert quality control and possibly senior management so that the company can fix the problem quickly.

Help Advantages

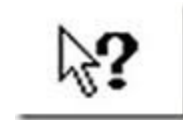
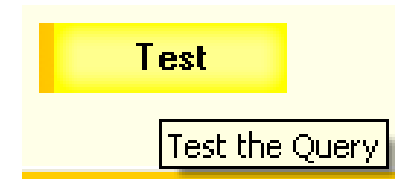
3. Process Efficiencies

- A central help desk department means customer support calls come to the same people.
- This enables staff members to build on their skills and become experts in several technical areas, which in turn leads to faster problem resolution.
- Help desks are often part of corporate information technology departments, which can enhance process efficiency

Context Sensitive Help

This can be implemented using,

- Tool-tips
 - provide a terse brief narrative of a GUI widget
 - display a complete topic from the help file
- Button
- Changing the pointer shape to a question mark



<http://www.answers.com/topic/context-sensitive-help#ixzz1nV4qeHan>

Context Sensitive Help

Mainly there are two types of context sensitive help.

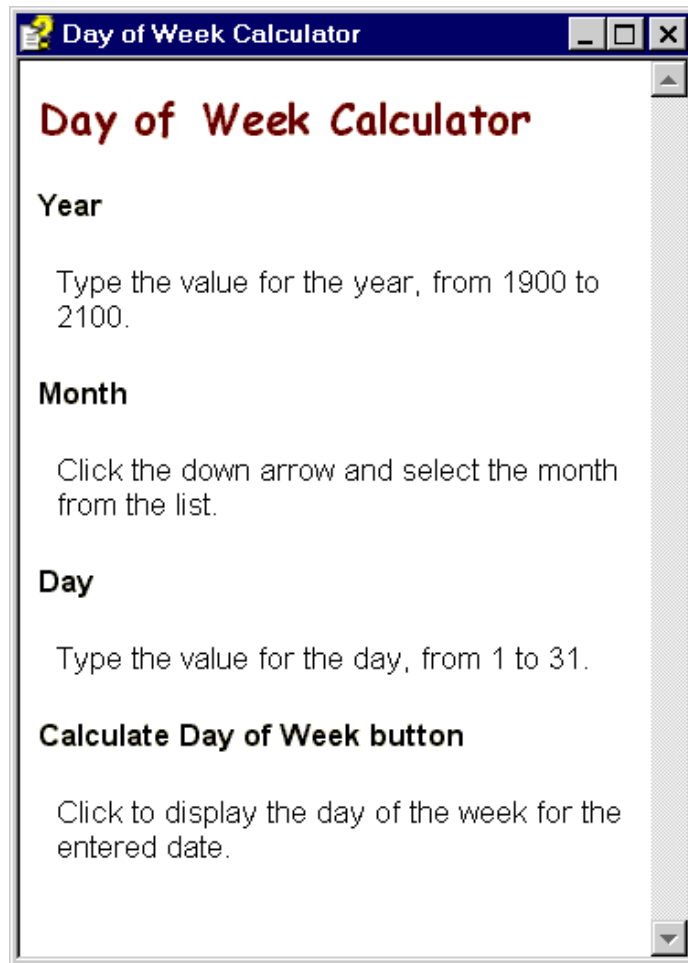
1. Window level context sensitive help

- This displays help in a specific window.
- It can also be designed to display the table of contents and other navigational features.

2. Field level context sensitive help

- This displays one help topic for each object.
- It displays either in a specific help window or in a popup.
- This is easier for the user because the help will be shown at the request.


Context Sensitive Help

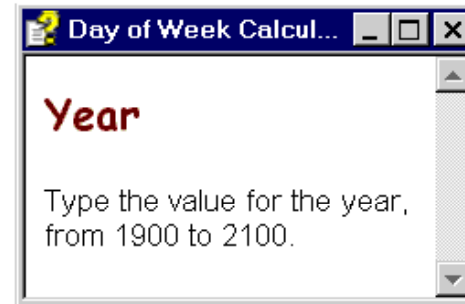


Window level context view help

Lists the available folders and files. To see where the current folder is located in the hierarchy of folders on your computer, click the arrow.

The box below lists the folders and files in the selected location. To open any folder or file, click its name in the list.

To open the folder one level higher, click  on the toolbar.



Type the value for the year,
from 1900 to 2100.

Field level context sensitive help

10.2.

FEATURES OF USER SUPPORTS

Features of User Support

Availability

- User should be able to access the help system without quitting the application, and it should be available on the demand

Accuracy and completeness

- User should be able to get help according to actual functionality/behaviour of the system. When the version upgraded is done, this is a common issue with the help system

Consistency

- Different description between different parts of the help system and paper documentation should not be appeared

Features of User Support

Robustness

- User should be able to get help based the error or wrong actions committed

Flexibility

- allows user to interact in a way appropriate to experience and task. In some cases, hypertext based help systems is a flexible approach

Unobtrusiveness

- Help system should not prevent the user continuing with work

Help Systems

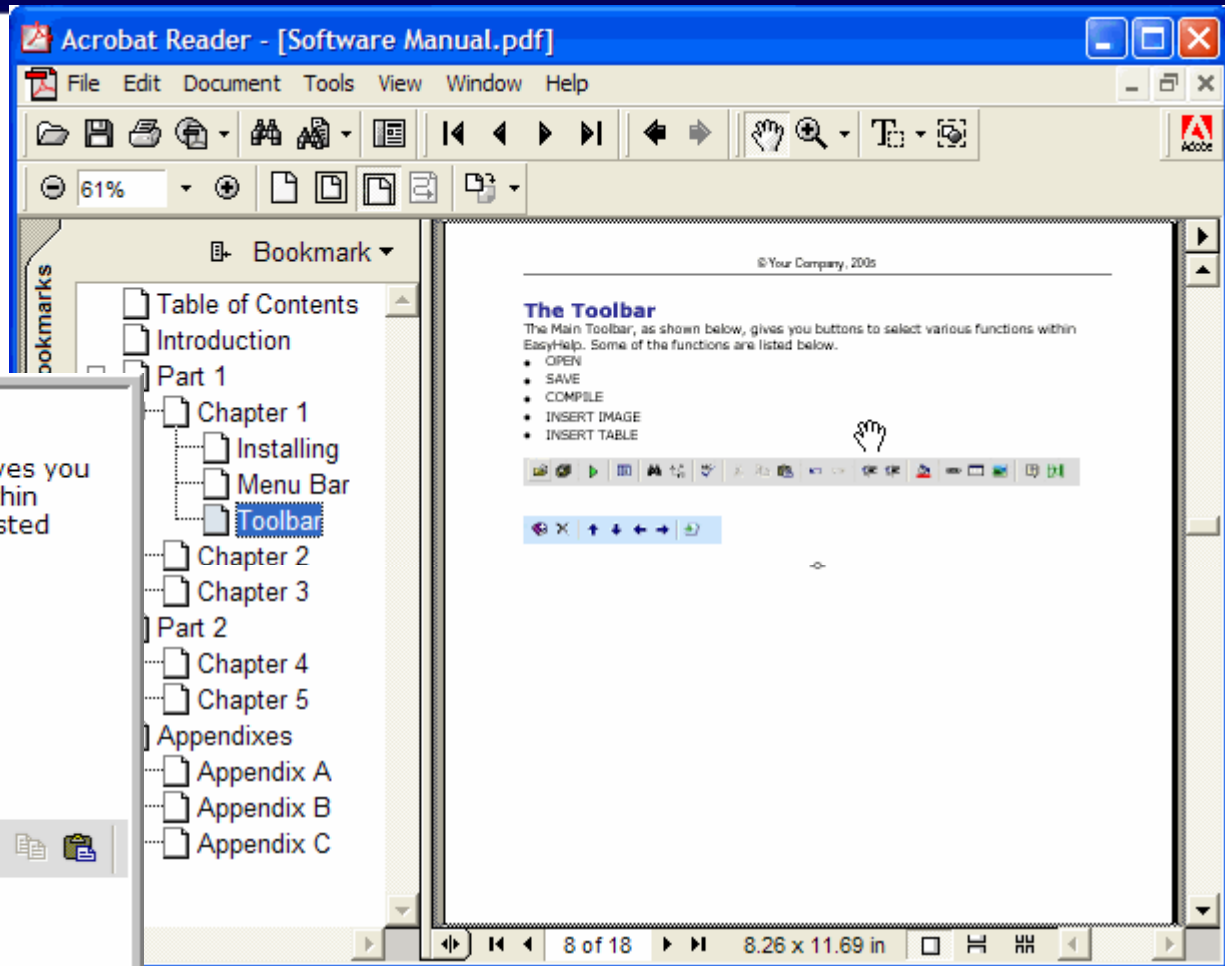
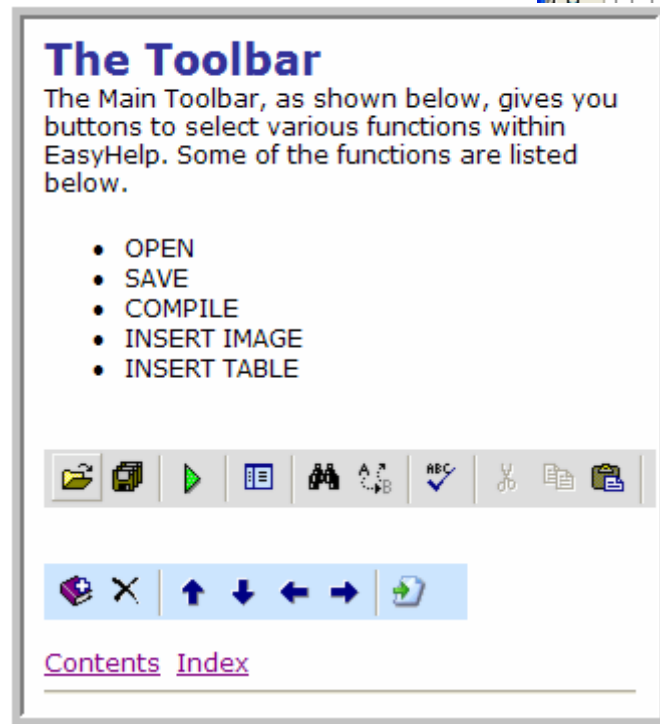
- **Help Window**

- These are the help windows that are use to display some descriptive information with regard to a control.
- Specialty in this help system is we can not add any images to these windows in addition to texts.
- Example of a help system: Microsoft Office Help

- **Help documents**

- This help systems are produces PDF files that are platform independent.
- Benefit in these help systems is it is familiar for the users to use and easy to sear content.
- Example of a PDF help system: Stata reference manuals
- <http://www.stata.com/manuals13/gsw4.pdf>

Help Systems



Why help systems?

- If the user doesn't know all the services provided by the system they can use help center and get aware of what else can be done with the system.
- If the user doesn't know how to begin the interaction with the system they can use the help center.
- If they don't understand what are the special icons or buttons are for then user can get help from the help center.
- Because of the poorly designed help systems most of the time users get in to the wrong track so finally they decide not to use the help system any more.

Why sometimes users do not use help system?

- Poor user interface design
- Users unaware that there is a help system
- Takes too long to access
- Users expecting one kind of information and getting something different
- User is an expert in the field and need less help
- Poor usability

Developing help system

Rule 1: Don't force users to move between topics to solve a problem

Rule 2: Only index the main theme of each Help topic

Rule 3: Don't require users to make a conscious decision to access Help

Rule 4: Only include images when they add value

Rule 5: Write topics that answer users' questions

Rule 6: Don't be a slave to consistency

Rule 7: Don't be tempted to provide too much information

reference

http://www.ellisonconsulting.com/downloads/Seven_Golden_Rules_of_Online_Help_Design.pdf

Designing documentation level help

- Use clear structure with headings to provide signposting.
- Organize information according to user tasks.
- Keep sentences short, to the point and jargon free. Use simple but unpatronizing language.
- Set out procedures in order and number steps. Highlight important steps.
- Use examples where possible.
- Support searching via an index, contents, glossary and free search.
- Include a list of error messages.
- Include Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) with clear answers.

10.3. INTERACTIVE USER SUPPORTS

Offering Effective Online User Support

What types of assistance should you offer your web users?

- Contextual Help
- Frequently Asked Questions or Knowledge Base
- Training Media files such as video, audio or presentations
- Online User Guides
- User Forums/Message Boards

Interactive Assistance

- Email
- Real Time Chat/Conferencing
- Online Help Desk or Ticketing System
- Phone

Interactive User Support: wizards and assistants

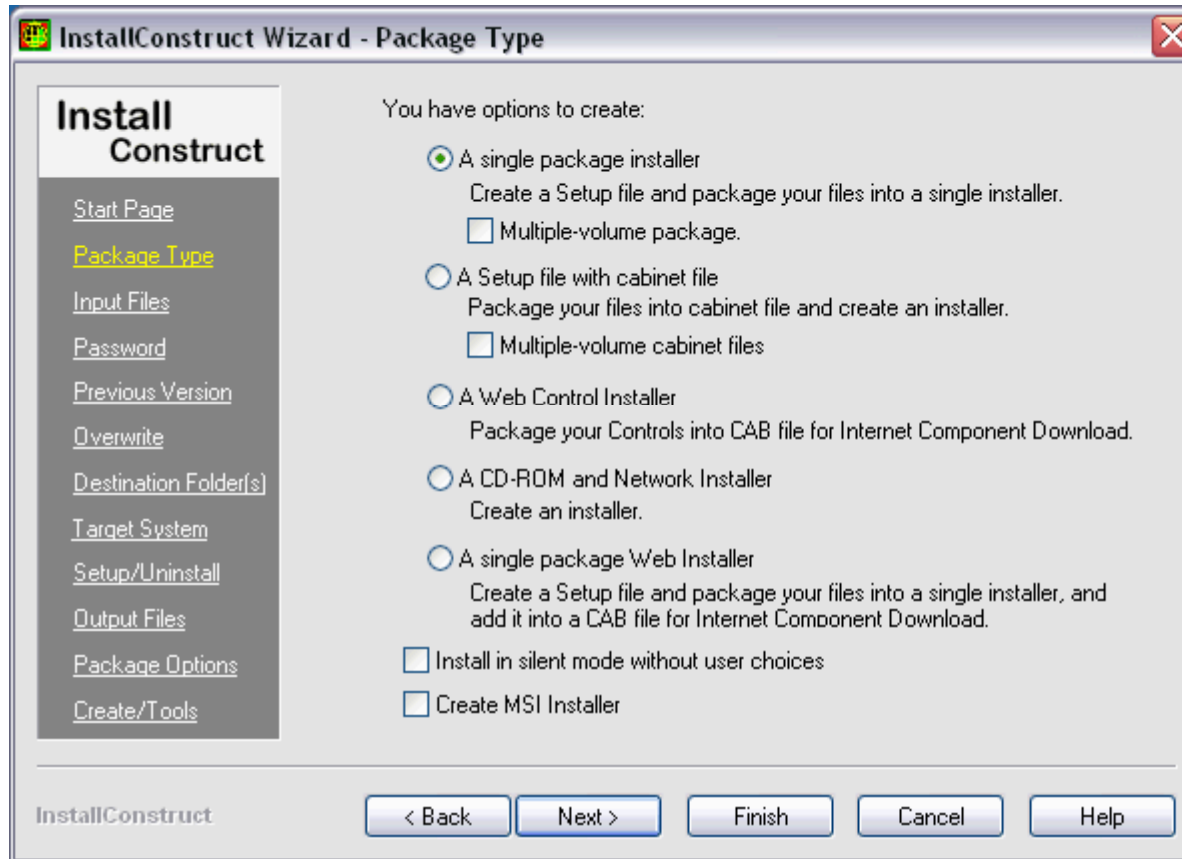
wizards

- task specific tool leads the user through task, step by step, using user's answers to specific questions
- example: MS Office Wizard to resumé
- useful for safe completion of complex or infrequent tasks
- constrained task execution so limited flexibility
- must allow user to go back

assistants

- monitor user behaviour and offer contextual advice
- can be irritating e.g. MS paperclip (office 97)
- must be under user control e.g. XP smart tags

Wizard



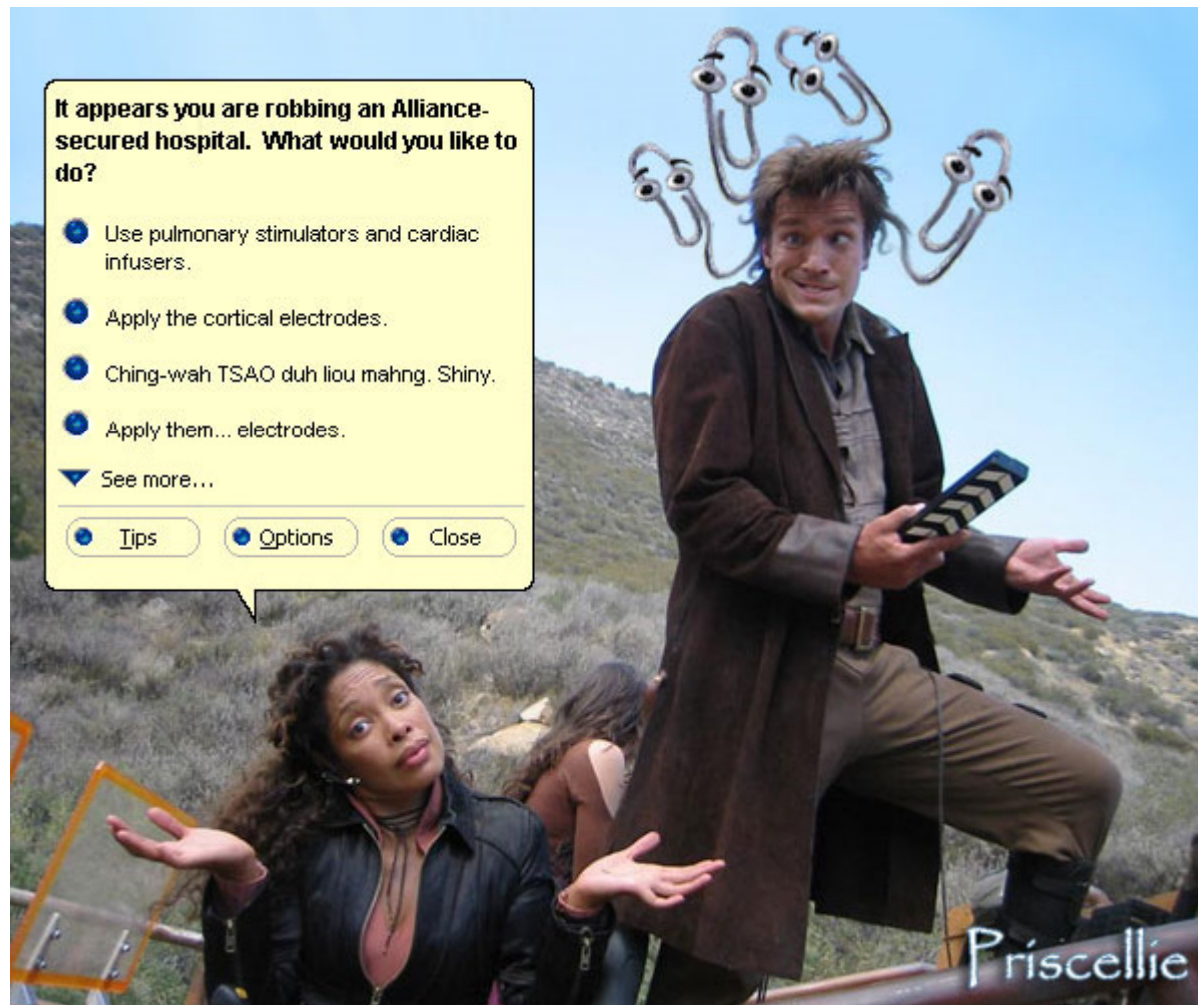
What is a Wizard?

- This is also called a setup assistant which provides the user with a series of dialog boxes or forms so the user can get the tasks done easily. This will guide the user through predefined steps, that will make complex and unfamiliar tasks easy.
- Few characteristics of wizards
 - Provides a form or set of forms that gathers information from the user
 - Provides navigation buttons (such as the standard Next, Previous, Cancel, and Finish buttons) that make it possible for the user to move back and forth between pages
 - Provides the ability to launch the wizard either from a command bar control or by creating a new document based on the wizard

Wizards

- Advantages of using wizards
 - It's easy to use
 - It's good for the beginners
 - You can give detailed instructions on each frame of the wizard
 - Saves time because the user does not have to think about where the information is placed in the final document.
- Disadvantages of using wizards
 - Time consuming
 - Lack of flexibility

Interface agents



Interface agents

- Due to the strong negative responses from users as well as Microsoft employees the default assistant clippy feature was turned off by default in Office XP.
- However Clippy ends up in Office as a floppy disk ejecting pin for Macintosh computers.

Some reasons for the above negative response:

- Annoying and distracting characters (Some users claim that, "The agents are cute the first time, silly the second time, and an annoying distraction the third time")
- Poor market performance
- Users' lower feelings of control and self-reliance (Users should have the feeling of they did the work, not some magical agent)
- Lazy programmers and quickly references (agents make programmers lazy, because then the program has the right to be quirky)
- can deceive, confuse, and mislead users

Interactive Agents

an interactive instant messaging agent built by Colloquis, Inc.

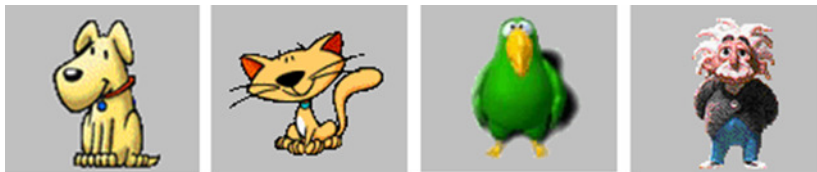
<http://www.wikihow.com/Use-SmarterChild-to-Find-Information-Through-Instant-Messenger>

This agent can search for you, fill on-line forms for you and answer your queries.

Interactive agent called 'Peddy' from Microsoft. Microsoft's intent is that this interactive agent can be authored for educational and a variety of other uses. You can get more information from this link:

<http://ldt.stanford.edu/~slater/pages/agents/main.htm>

MS agents called Merlin, Genie, and Robby. Merlin is the only one included on Windows® operating system. There are more information about MS agents in this web page: <http://rainbow.arch.scriptmania.com/merlin/index.html>



What is the Adaptive Help Systems?

Use knowledge of the context, individual user, task, domain and instruction to provide help adapted to user's needs.

In detail:

Adaptive help systems attempt to address problems of users by adapting the help that they provide to the individual user who is making the request and by actively suggesting alternative courses of action of which the user may not be aware.

They are special class of Intelligent Systems

Ask someone

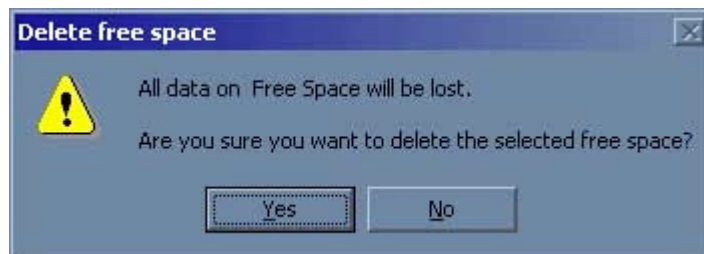
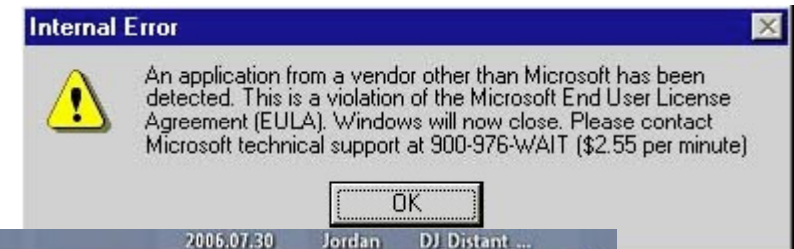
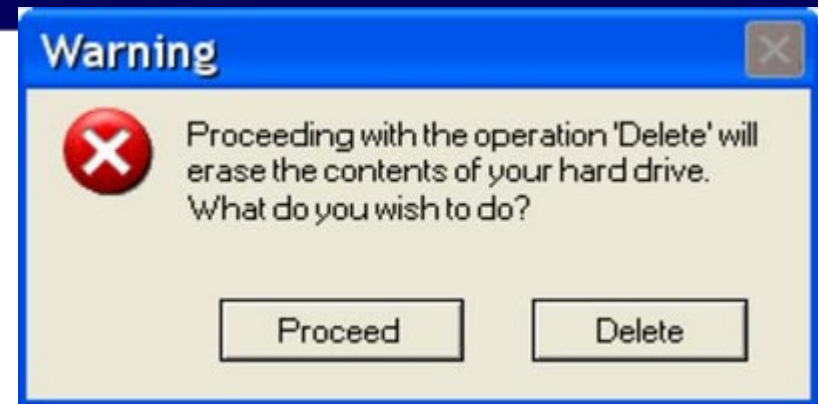
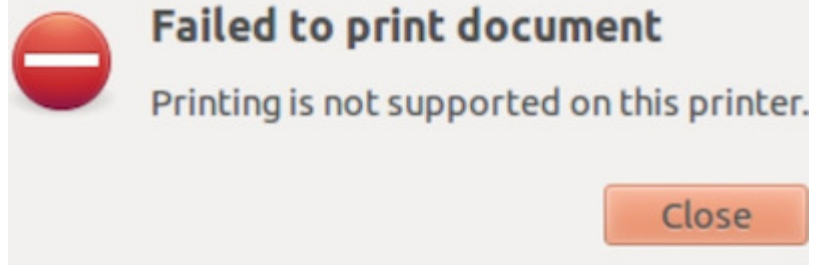
- When you have a problem, you may prefer to ask how to do it by someone rather than searching documentation.

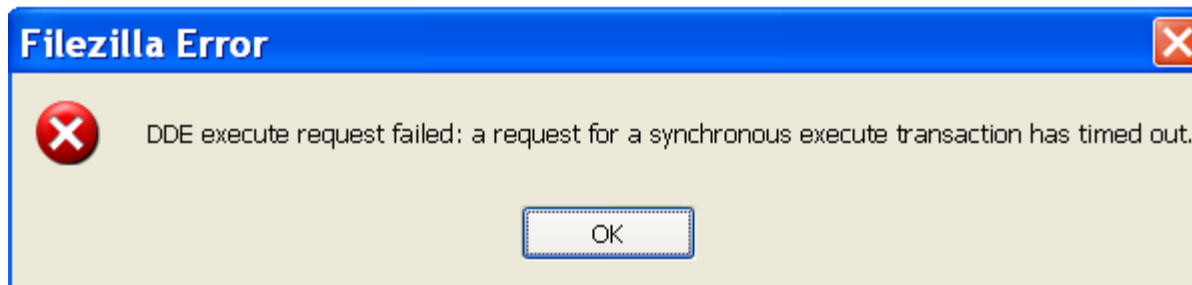
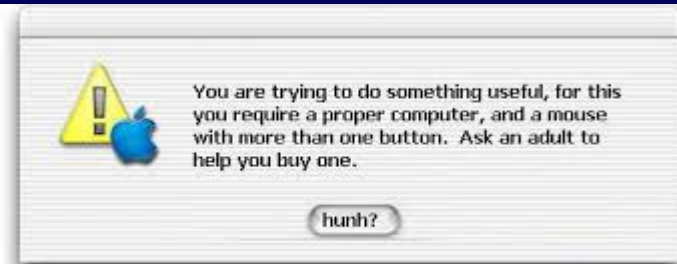
Someone = local expert

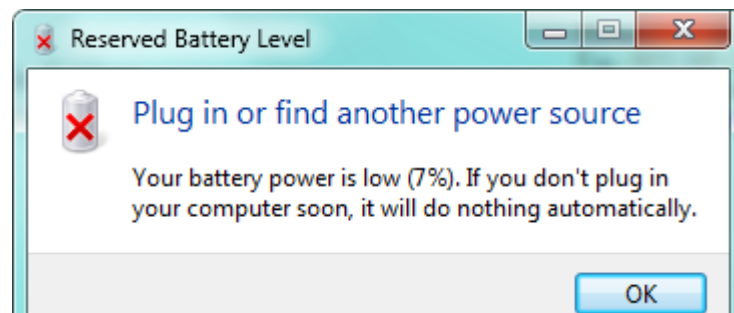
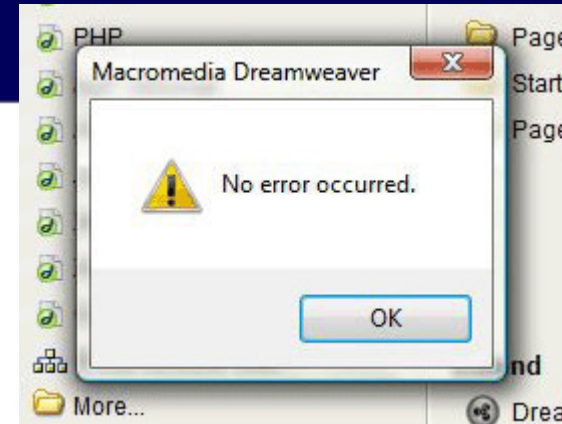
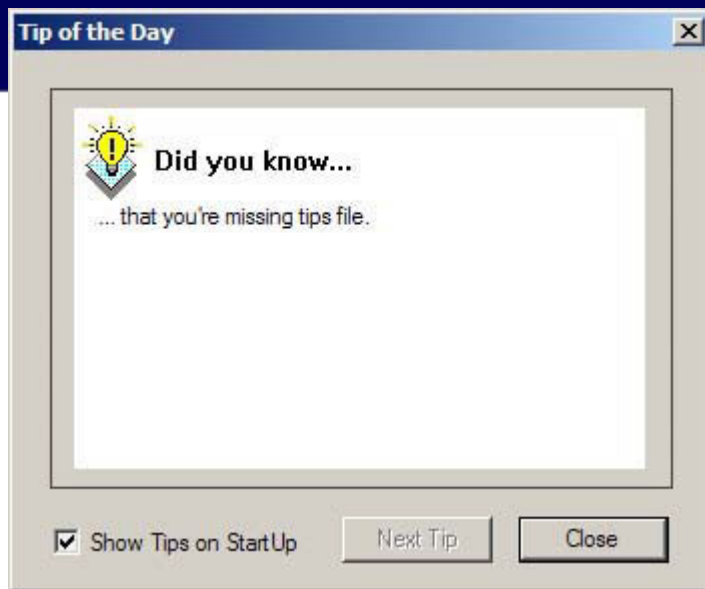
- These local experts could help you depending on your background as well as the problem in hand.
- This is the real world adaptive system.

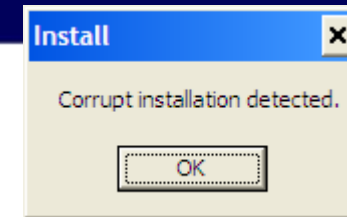
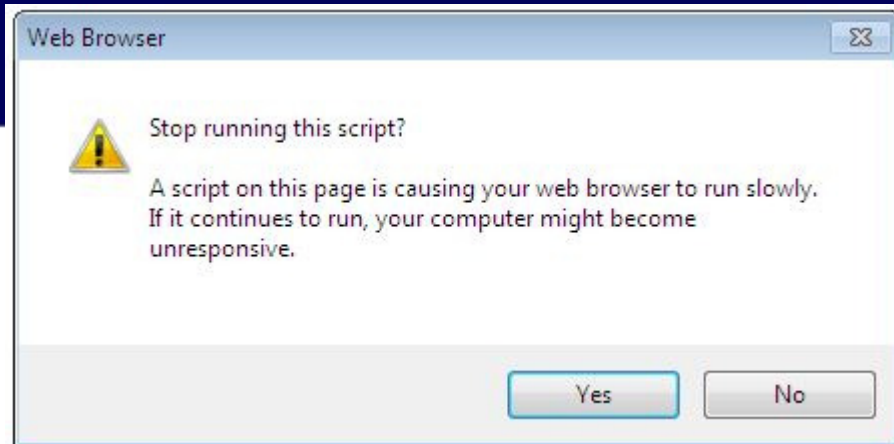
10.4. WRITING HELP MANUAL

Poor Help Messages









Writing Proper Help Messages

- It is important to write clear and understandable messages to maintain the proper interaction at all levels of users
- Users need to understand the terminology that is familiar to them
- Avoid using technical terms
- Message should help the user to solve the problem
- Message should be based on the context of the problem

Help Documents Vs. System Documents

Identify the target users

Help Documents - End Users

System Documents - Administrators or Maintenance Staff

Objectives

- Help Docs. : Problem-oriented and Task specific
- System Docs. : System-oriented and general requirements

Not a replacement for bad design but essential requirement

- A perfect system may not require a help facilities

Writing Style: People do not like to read manuals

They need a help to solve the problem

Integral part of the system, not a separate thing

People perform better with improved help documentation

Guide to writing help manuals

Table of contents (ToC)

Very important section

Mapped to static structure (e.g. Menu sysetem)

Index - important quick reference

Each section:

- Explain reason(s) for concepts in the section
- Describe concept in task-domain semantic terms
- Show computer-related semantic concepts
- Offer syntax

Try to predict common states and problems

Anticipate errors

Keep reading level simple

Develop manuals early and pilot test

Iteratively refine

Prof. K. P. Hewagamage



User Interface Design (UID)

