



Twitter hashtags:  
@cybertext  
#writersUA

# USER INTERFACE TEXT

11 March 2012

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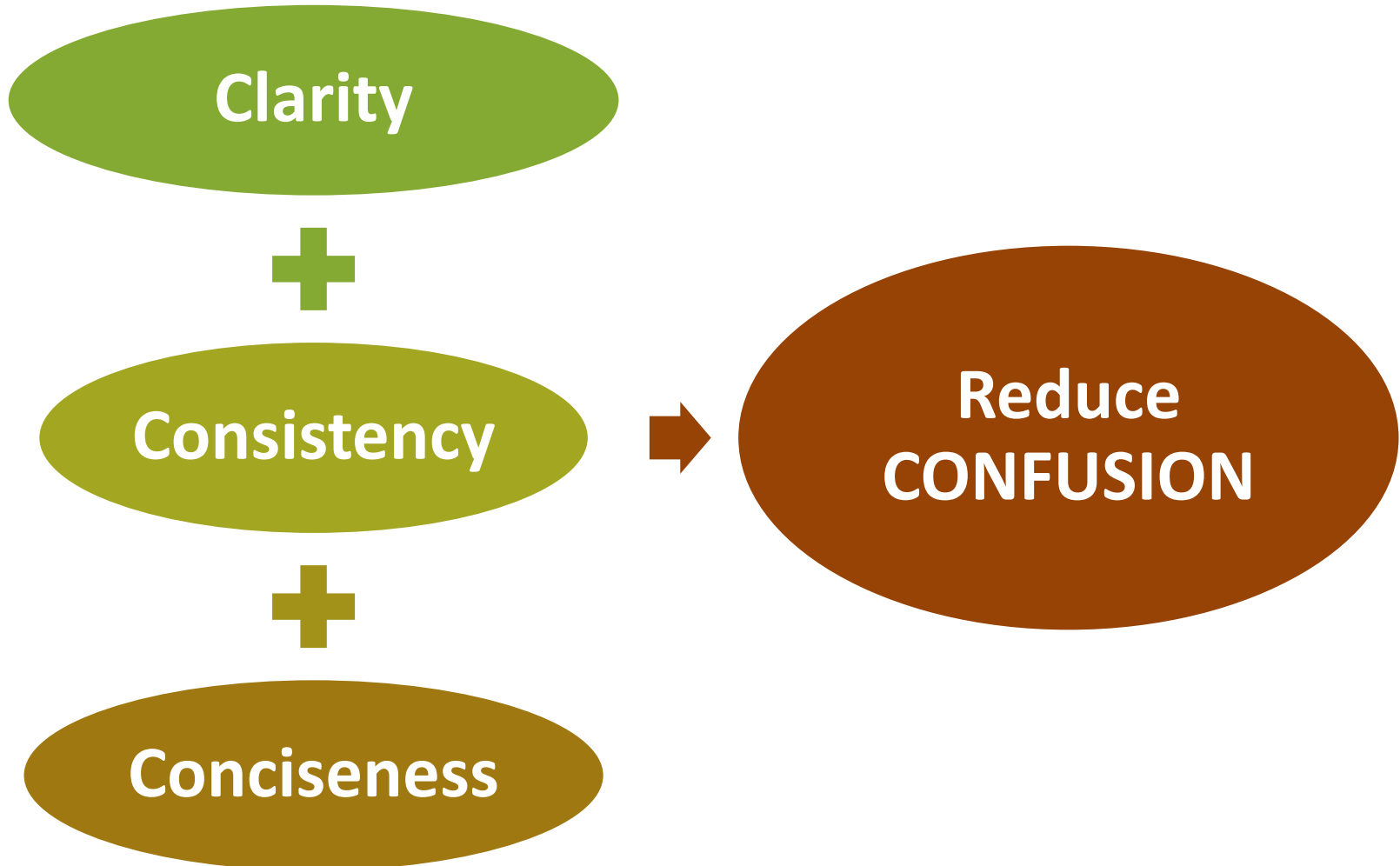
# Principles of reviewing UI text

## Takeaways:

- ❑ The three C's of good communication—clarity, consistency, conciseness—all reduce confusion
- ❑ Less is more—it's not about text volume

# Three C's of communication

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# 'Less is more...'

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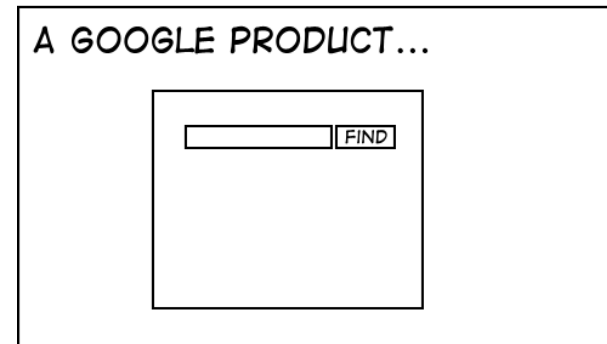
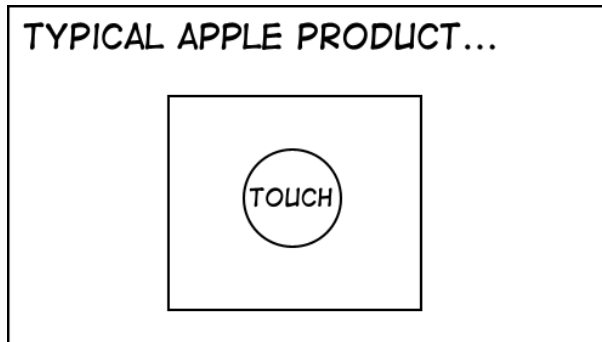
From:  
'Developing  
User Assistance  
for Mobile  
Applications' by  
Joe Welinske,  
*Intercom*,  
November  
2011 (p. 9)

'Effective UA for [mobile] apps is more about **crafting words and phrases** ... about spending more time coming up with **precisely the right words**.

During the editing process, the emphasis must be on **strictly limiting** the **volume** of text while **maintaining quality and usefulness**.'

# Product interfaces: 'Less is more'

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YOUR COMPANY'S APP...

FIRST NAME: <input type="text"/>	TYPE CD: <input type="text"/>	4 - K
LAST NAME: <input type="text"/>	TQP STAT: <input type="checkbox"/>	AA2-
SSN: <input type="text"/>	FT/PT: <input type="checkbox"/>	DK9B
ID: <input type="text"/>	VER: <input type="text"/>	KKAP
PHONE 1: <input type="text"/>	CAT CD: <input type="text"/>	CN3
PHONE 2: <input type="text"/>	CITY: <input type="text"/>	AA-9
ADDR 1: <input type="text"/>	STATE: <input type="text"/>	NEW
ACCT #: <input type="text"/>	ZIP: <input type="text"/>	DEL
ORD #: <input type="text"/>		

OKAY APPLY SAVE LINDO HELP DELETE EDIT  
SELECT BROWSE ERRORS

STUFFTHATHAPPENS.COM BY ERIC BURKE

© Eric Burke: <http://stuffthathappens.com/blog/2008/03/05/simplicity/> and <http://stuffthathappens.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/simplicity.png>

# UI text elements

## Takeaways:

- ❑ UI text is throughout the application, including places you mightn't think of
- ❑ Spelling is only one of many UI text checks you need to do
- ❑ Consider the global nature of apps

# Where to look: The usual suspects

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<b>Bars</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Title bars, status bars</li></ul>
<b>List items</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Menus, selection lists</li></ul>
<b>Labels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grouping boxes, ribbons, fields, columns</li></ul>
<b>Error messages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Validation, system; correct icon?</li></ul>
<b>Icons and buttons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Labels, tooltips, graphics</li></ul>
<b>Wizards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Installation and others</li></ul>
<b>Hyperlinks/navigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid 'click here'</li></ul>
<b>User assistance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On interface, online Help</li></ul>
<b>Mobile apps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Under navigation icons</li></ul>

# Just the links, ma'am

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## Internal navigation

- Menus, submenus; breadcrumb trails; sidebars; headers/footers; sitemap; browse sequences (Next, Previous, etc.)

## External navigation

- URLs; mailto links; internal and external files (e.g. PDFs, videos); FTP links

## Page navigation

- Text hyperlinks (w/in page, w/in app, to external location, pop ups, expand/collapse, Back to Top); images, image maps; links to Help (go to TOC, page, field, web?)

## Link mechanisms

- Same link types → consistent display mechanisms (e.g. underline, color, etc.)



# What to check for

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## Spelling

- Misspellings, typos
- English: which version?

## Correctness against style guide

- Punctuation, capitalization (e.g. sentence/title case)
- Font size, family, weight
- Terminology

## Language and structure

- Plain language appropriate for users
- Parallel structure and consistent wording (e.g. gerunds vs imperatives)
- Impact of other languages on text display
- Avoid abbreviations

# Dialog boxes: example

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## Issues:

- ❖ Mostly title case (readability)
- ❖ Access keys don't work in tabs or items (usability)
- ❖ Excess words (readability)

System Windows Reports & Forms Banking Sales Purchases Inventory Security

- Display the To Do List when opening your company file
- Save Window Sizes and Locations
- Show Currency Symbols in Windows
- Select and Display Account Name, Not Account Number
- Select Items by Item Name, Not Item Number
- Select Cards by Card ID, Not Card Name
- Use Easy-Fill When Selecting From a List
- Wrap Text to Show Full Descriptions in Transactions
- The Enter Key Works Just Like the Tab Key When Entering SOME Data
- Display Accountant Link Code in Edit Accounts
- Show Field Help When Hovering Over a Field
- Automatically Check Spelling in Text Fields Before Recording Transactions [System-wide]

# Installation messages: examples

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## Issues:

- ❖ Sentence structure (readability)
- ❖ Unintelligible (readability)
- ❖ Excess words (readability)



Optimizing the application, it may take several minutes. Please wait...

### Realtek High Definition Audio Driver - InstallShield Wizard



Please be noticed the installer will remove the original driver in your system before start the installation of new driver. Once after the original driver removed, go back to the original driver package to click setup.exe again. This will make the new driver installed.

Do you want to continue the installation of new driver ?

Yes

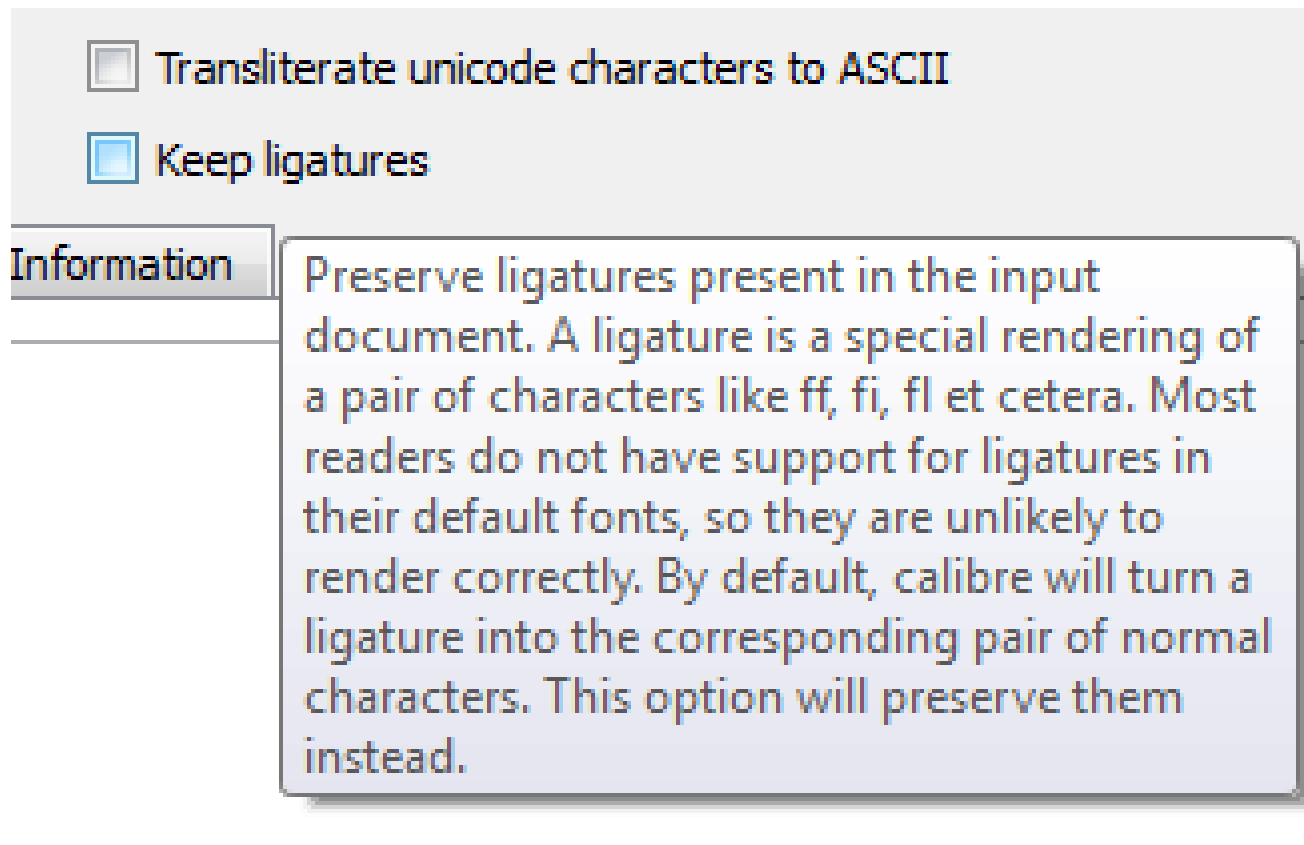
No

# UA as a tooltip: example

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## Pros:

- ❖ No special Help button—avoids issues with linking the dialog to the Help
- ❖ Hover to get help—easy to use and don't have to leave the app



# Will the app be translated?

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- ❖ Design must take into account:
  - Right-to-left languages (e.g. Hebrew, Arabic)
  - Double-byte languages (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Korean)
  - Long labels (e.g. German)
  
- ❖ Default language used:
  - Hard-coded or in linked resource files?
  - Anything culturally specific?

# Test text display: Web/mobile apps

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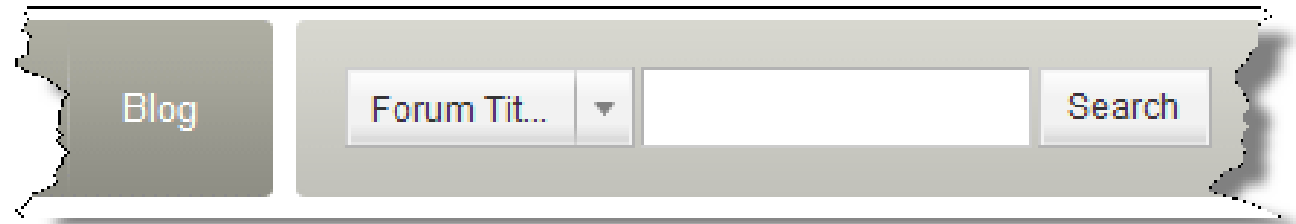
- ❖ Test in the main browsers:
  - Turn off JavaScript, cookies, frames, images, etc.— what happens?
  - Resize the browser window
  - Resize fonts
  - Apply other browser/Windows settings (color schemes, CSS)
- ❖ Test on various devices (large and small)
- ❖ Test at different resolutions (large and small)

# Text placement vs other objects

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## Issues:

- ❖ Unfortunate placement (reputation)
- ❖ Resizing doesn't change it



# Test text display: Desktop apps

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- ❖ What happens to the text when you:
  - Change the screen resolution
  - Change the OS's color scheme (can you?)
  - Resize all resizable windows
  - Install on other devices (e.g. phones, tablets)
  
- ❖ Do the new settings hold:
  - For the current session only?
  - On shutdown and restart?

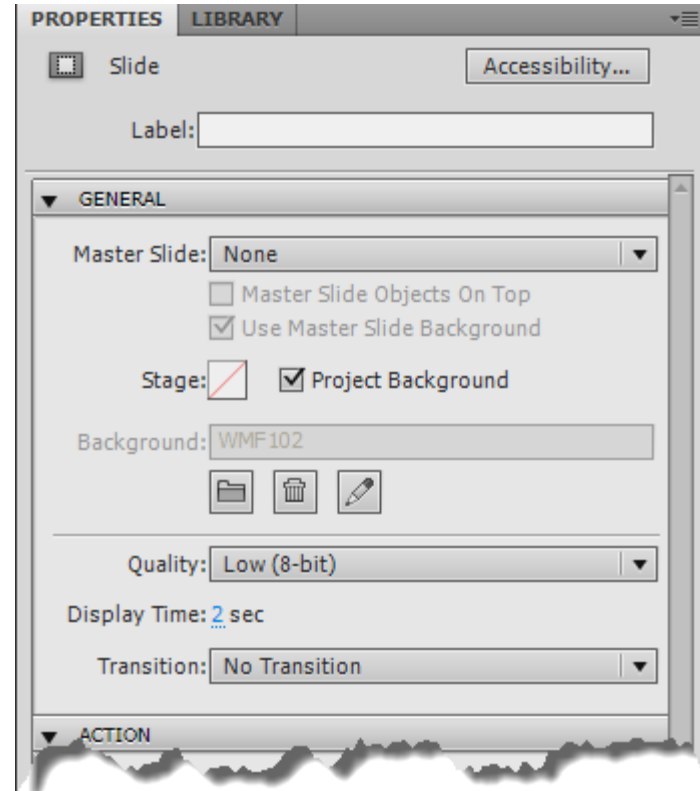


# Can you change the scheme?

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## Issues:

- ❖ Black/gray text, blue links on various grays
- ❖ Small text
- ❖ Upper case, with drop-shadow
- ❖ Miniscule icons (see top right)
- ❖ Cannot change color scheme or resize text



Adobe  
Captivate 5.0  
(actual size)

# Summary: You should be able to identify...

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- Incorrect grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Unclear or potentially misunderstood user prompts and error messages
- Illogical task flows
- Inconsistently labeled buttons, icons, fields, dialog boxes
- Inconsistently placed buttons, icons, fields, dialog boxes
- Required or unnecessary tasks, fields, dialog boxes
- Inconsistencies between dialog boxes

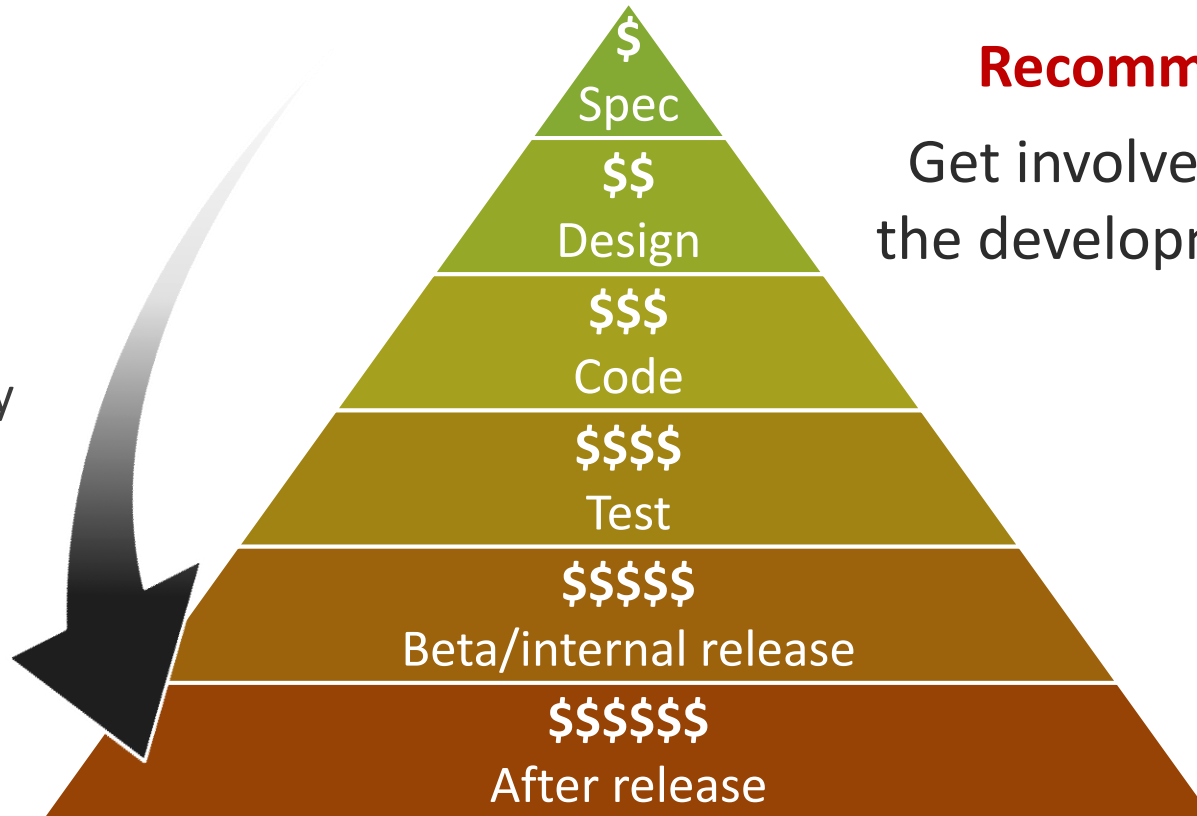
(Adapted from: <http://writeorrevisedaily.wordpress.com/2012/01/04/add-value-to-gui-design/>)

# Getting your message across

## Takeaways:

- ❑ It's much cheaper to fix issues early
- ❑ It's about making a better product for everyone
- ❑ Legislative compliance may force changes to your product

The cost of making even simple changes increases exponentially over time



**Recommendation:**  
Get involved EARLY in the development cycle

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## Development costs over time

# Communicating your findings

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It's not about you...

- ...it's about improving the USER'S experience

Offer constructive suggestions/alternatives

- Avoid emotive and unsubstantiated comments like "It's ugly", "I don't like it"

Be assertive, not aggressive

- Always back up an assertion with a reason

# Some convincing reasons

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## Legislation/standards:

- W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG): <http://www.w3.org/WAI/GL/>
- US: *Rehabilitation Act 1973* (incl. Section 508)
- UK: *Equality Act 2010*
- Canada (Ontario only): *The Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2002*
- Australia: *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*

# Communication methods

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## Bug tracking software

- Use what the developers use (get 'write' access to their system; learn how to use it)
- Follow up—make your voice heard

## Checklists

- You can't remember everything, every time

## Animations

- 'Show and tell'
- 'A picture is worth a thousand words'

## Documents

- Use screen shots, callouts, comments

# Sell your skills

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- ❖ Build relationships with developers, project managers, team leads
  
- ❖ Convince them you can:
  - Help them create a better interface for ALL users
  - Free them from tasks they may find tedious (e.g. checking spelling, writing tooltips/error messages)
  - “Walk the ‘user advocate’ walk”

(adapted from Leah Guren’s “*It may be GUI...*” <http://www.cowtc.com>)



# Tools and resources

Takeaways:

- ❑ Use a style guide
- ❑ Your eyes and brain are the best tools you have

# Style guides

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- ❖ Use development's style guide, if there is one...
- ❖ If not, consult those for your platform
- ❖ No style guide? Write one!

- Downloadable Microsoft style guides for languages other than English:  
<http://www.microsoft.com/Language/en-US/StyleGuides.aspx>
- Links to hundreds of style guide resources for various platforms:  
<http://cybertext.wordpress.com/2009/08/11/user-interface-style-guides/>

# Capture and edit

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- ❖ Learn how to use screen capture (static and animated) tools and their editing/mark-up features

## Examples:

- SnagIt, Camtasia, Jing: <http://www.techsmith.com>
- Acrobat, Captivate: <http://www.adobe.com>
- Screenr: <http://www.screenr.com/>

# Other resources

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- ❖ *American English vs. British English for Web Content:*  
<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/american-british-english.html>
- ❖ *The Evolution of Fail Pets: Strategic Whimsy and Brand Awareness in Error Messages:*  
<http://uxmag.com/articles/the-evolution-of-fail-pets>
- ❖ *Who writes the words?:*  
<http://www.simple-talk.com/community/blogs/roger/archive/2011/11/11/104284.aspx>
- ❖ *Who should write the words in user interfaces:*  
<http://communicationcloud.wordpress.com/2011/09/27/who-should-write-the-words-in-user-interfaces/>
- ❖ *Writing microcopy:*  
<http://bokardo.com/archives/writing-microcopy/>

# Error message text examples

## Takeaways:

- ❑ Where possible, tell the user:
  - what happened
  - why it happened
  - how to fix it (or how to get help to fix it)
- ❑ Use plain language in error messages

# Error messages 1

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## Issues:

- ❖ Sentence structure (readability)
- ❖ No possible reasons given (frustration)



System error happened please call our  Customer Service Team.

### menu

#### Menu

Compose message  
Get new mail  
Settings  
Manage folders  
Address Book  
Log out

### Menu

#### Result

Your message has not been sent. Something went wrong.

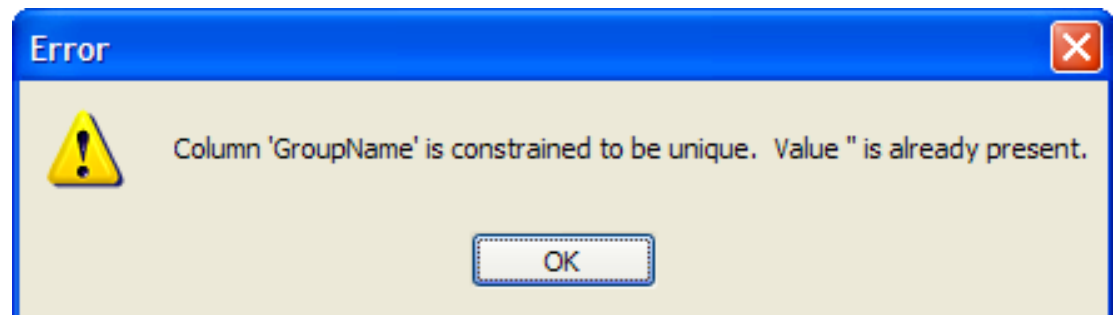
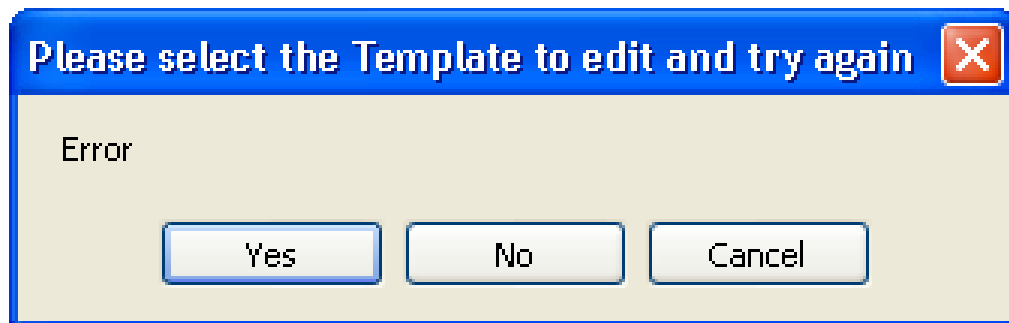
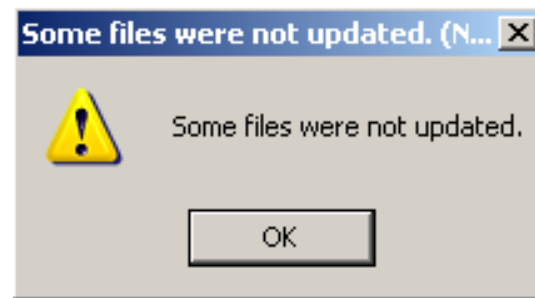
Back to INBOX

# Error messages 2

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## Issues:

- ❖ Repeated text (readability)
- ❖ Title bar and message swapped (readability)
- ❖ Incomprehensible choices (frustration)
- ❖ Programmer-speak (readability)

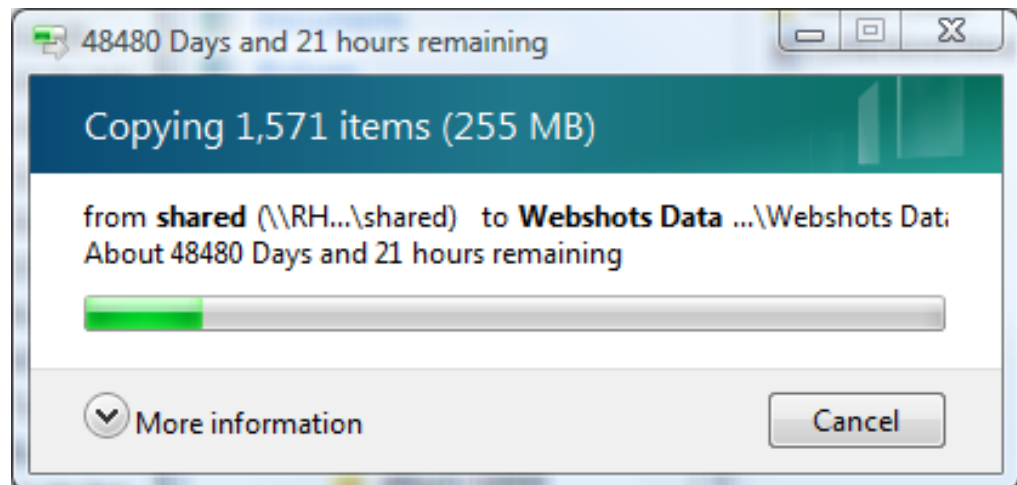
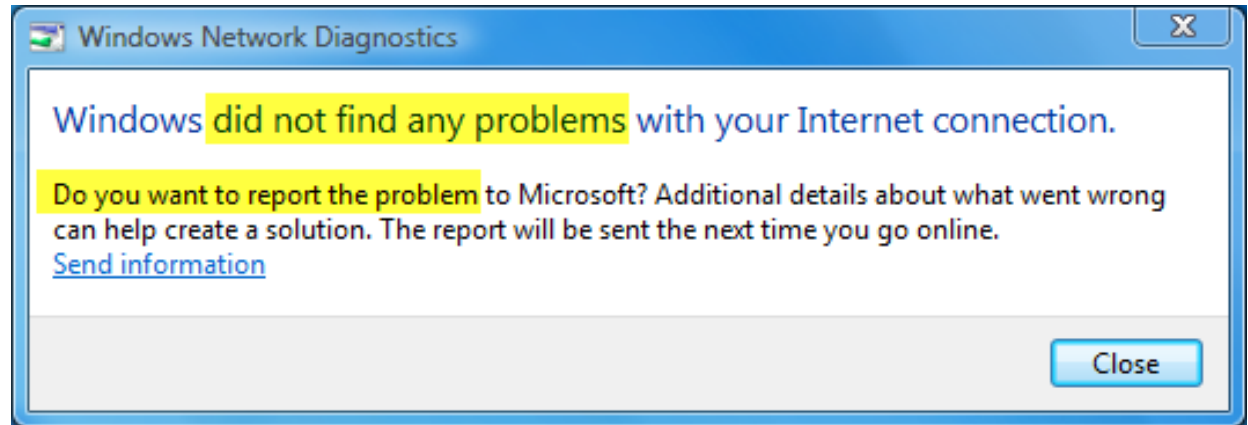


# Error messages 3

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## Issues:

- ❖ Conflicting information (frustration)
- ❖ Inappropriate time scale (readability)
- ❖ Inconceivable time (frustration) [48480 days = 133 years!]



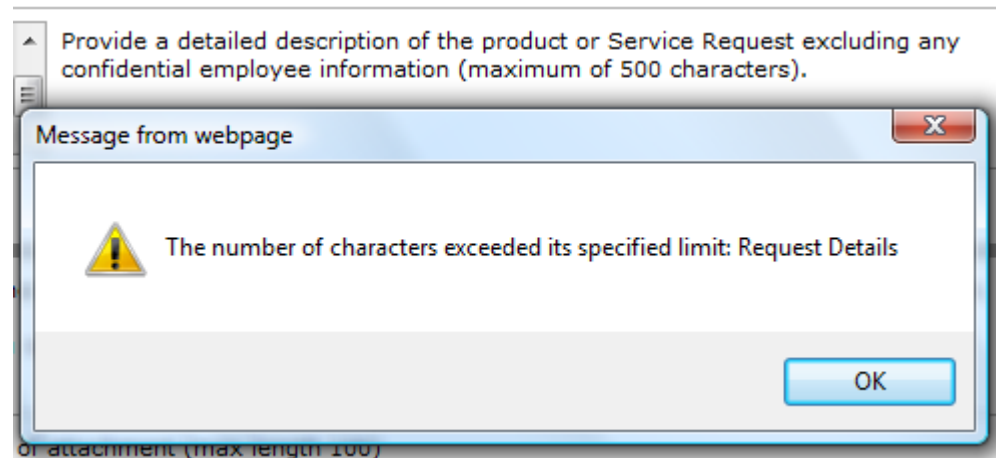
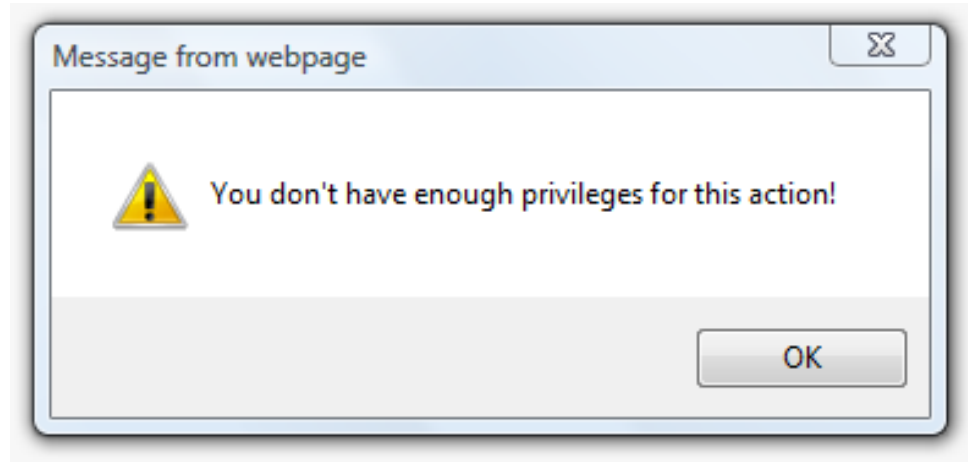


# Error messages 4

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## Issues:

- ❖ Demeaning (anger/frustration)
- ❖ No indication of how many characters already entered (frustration)

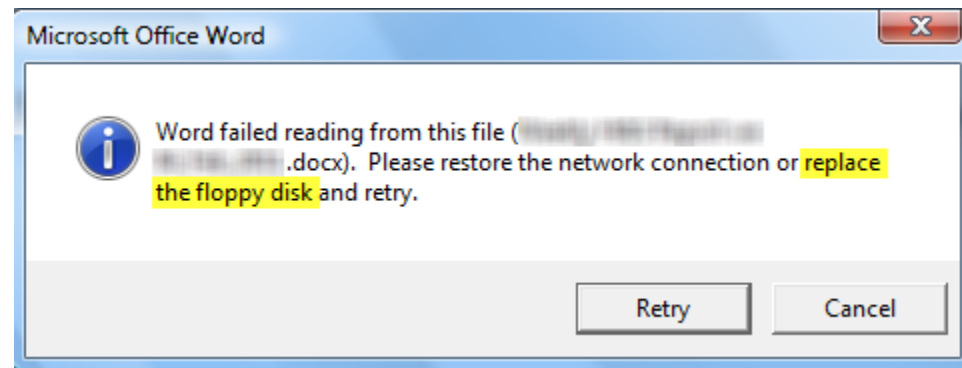
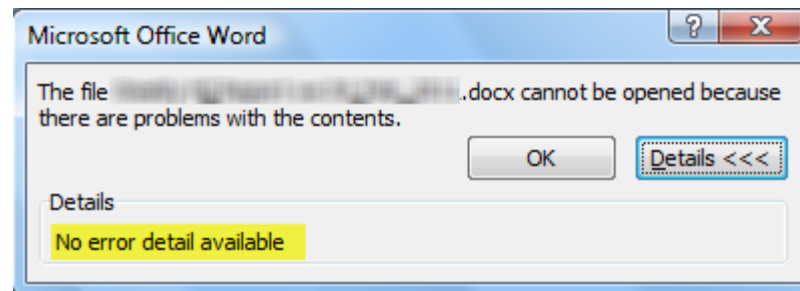
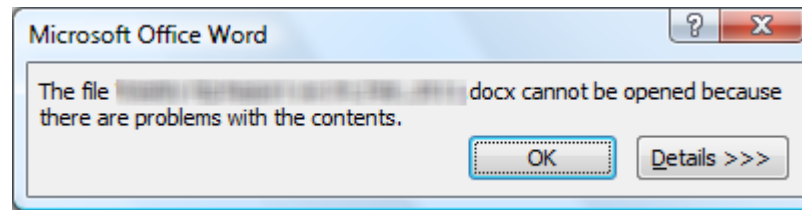


# Error messages 5

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## Issues:

- ❖ No details given when expected (frustration)
- ❖ Dated instructions (reputation)



# Error messages 6

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## Issues:

- ❖ No sample format (frustration)
- ❖ No definition of 'digits' (usability)

## Kudos:

- ❖ UI text explains exactly what's needed

Please provide the most convenient phone number through

(08) 1234 5678

PHONE NUMBERS MUST BE 10 DIGITS

Phone Number

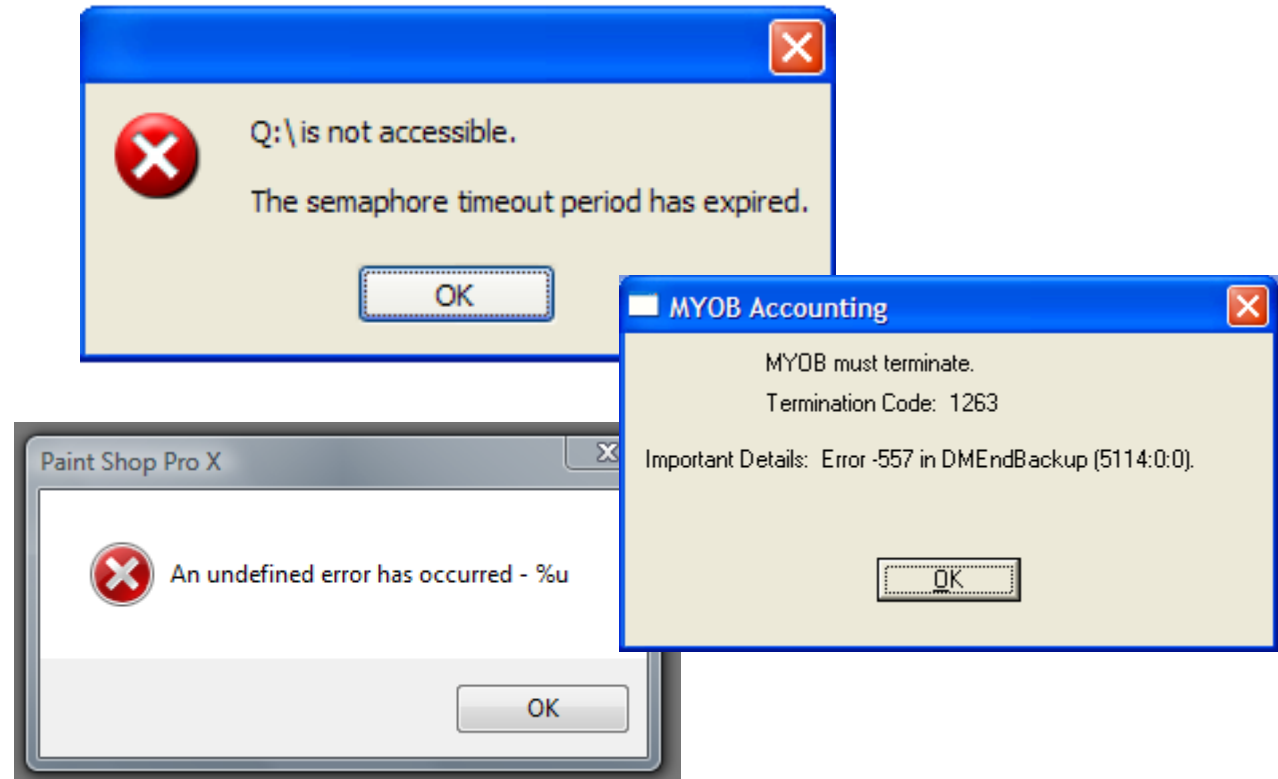
*Include area code & number.  
US example: 800-555-5555  
International include country  
code: 01-44-555-123456*

# Error messages 7

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## Issues:

- ❖ Unintelligible (readability)
- ❖ Programmer-speak (readability)



# Examples of good UI text

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## Kudos:

- ❖ Single error list for multiple input errors; all readable
- ❖ User clicks '?' and gets examples of correct format/valid values for field based on existing input

## The form you submitted contained the following errors

The username you submitted must be at least 4 characters long  
The screen name you chose is not available  
The password you submitted must be at least 5 characters long  
You must submit an email address  
You must click the "agree to terms of service" checkbox  
[Return to Previous Page](#)

AUSTRALIA

• To change your country or territory, please change your selection at the top of this form.

**Sample postal codes of the selected country/region:**  
2060, 3171, 6430, 4000  
**Valid values for 'WA':**  
6000 to 6999, 0872

# Thank you

Any questions?

Contact me:

- ❖ [rhonda.bracey@cybertext.com.au](mailto:rhonda.bracey@cybertext.com.au)
- ❖ <http://www.cybertext.com.au>
- ❖ <http://cybertext.wordpress.com>