

Research-Based Web Design & Usability Guidelines

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Current Research-Based Guidelines on Web Design and Usability Issues



[Home: Guidelines](#)

Guidelines Sorting Tool

Developed in Partnership with AARP's [Older Wiser Wired Initiative](#)

Sort the HHS *Guidelines* by clicking on any of these headers: Chapter, Title, Relative Importance, Strength of Evidence, and Relative Score. To learn more, visit [How to Use the Guidelines Sorting Tool Most Effectively](#).

Guidelines by Relative Score

Chapter	Title	Relative Importance	Strength of Evidence	Relative Score
1:2	Use an Iterative Design Approach	●●●●●	●●●●●	25
1:4	Provide Useful Content	●●●●●	●●●●●	25
11:1	Use Black Text on Plain, High-Contrast Backgrounds	●●●●●	●●●●●	25
11:2	Ensure Visual Consistency	●●●●●	●●●●●	25
10:1	Provide Consistent Clickability Cues	●●●●●	●●●●○	20
9:1	Use Clear Category Labels	●●●●●	●●●●○	20
17:2	Ensure Usable Search Results	●●●●●	●●●●○	20
5:2	Ensure the Homepage Looks like a Homepage	●●●●●	●●●●○	20
3:4	Do Not Use Color Alone to Convey Information	●●●●●	●●●●○	20
8:1	Eliminate Horizontal Scrolling	●●●●●	●●●●○	20
17:3	Allow Simple Searches	●●●●●	●●●●○	20
5:1	Create a Positive First Impression of Your Site	●●●●●	●●●●○	20
16:1	Organize Information Clearly	●●●●●	●●●●○	20
2:5	Standardize Task Sequences	●●●●○	●●●●●	20
11:4	Use at Least 12-Point Font	●●●●○	●●●●●	20
14:1	Use Video, Animation, and Audio Meaningfully	●●●●○	●●●●●	20
12:1	Order Elements to Maximize User Performance	●●●●○	●●●●●	20
15:4	Use Mixed Case with Prose	●●●●○	●●●●●	20
16:3	Facilitate Scanning	●●●●○	●●●●●	20

16:4	Group Related Elements	●●●●○	●●●●●	20
10:6	Ensure that Embedded Links are Descriptive	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
10:4	Use Meaningful Link labels	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
6:2	Use Frames When Functions Must Remain Accessible	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
17:6	Design Search Around Users' Terms	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
1:6	Establish User Requirements	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
1:11	Select the Right Number of Participants	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
2:6	Minimize Page Download Time	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
12:2	Display Related Items in Lists	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
7:4	Differentiate and Group Navigation Elements	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
10:7	Repeat Important Links	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
10:5	Match Link Names with Their Destination Pages	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
16:5	Display Only Necessary Information	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
12:4	Format Lists to Ease Scanning	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
1:7	Use Parallel Design	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
12:3	Introduce Each List	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
6:3	Establish Level of Importance	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
1:12	Be Easily Found on the Web	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
10:3	Use Text for Links	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
14:2	Include Logos	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
15:5	Avoid Jargon	●●●●○	●●●●○	16
2:1	Display Information in a Directly Usable Format	●●●●●	●●●○○	15
13:2	Detect Errors Automatically	●●●●●	●●●○○	15
16:2	Put Critical Information Near the Top of the Website	●●●●●	●●●○○	15
2:2	Do Not Display Unsolicited Windows or Graphics	●●●●●	●●●○○	15
13:4	Label Data Entry Fields Clearly	●●●●●	●●●○○	15
9:2	Use Unique and Descriptive Headings	●●●●●	●●●○○	15
13:1	Distinguish Required and Optional Data Entry Fields	●●●●●	●●●○○	15
1:3	Evaluate Websites Before and After Making Changes	●●●●●	●●●○○	15
13:3	Minimize User Data Entry	●●●●●	●●●○○	15
2:13	Design For Working Memory Limitations	●●●○○	●●●●●	15
14:6	Ensure that Images Do Not Slow Downloads	●●●○○	●●●●●	15

9:4	Use Descriptive Headings Liberally	●●●○○	●●●●●	15
1:13	Recognize Tester Bias	●●●○○	●●●●●	15
11:6	Emphasize Importance	●●●○○	●●●●●	15
16:8	Design Quantitative Content for Quick Understanding	●●●○○	●●●●●	15
11:5	Use Familiar Fonts	●●●○○	●●●●●	15
14:9	Use Simple Background Images	●●●○○	●●●●●	15
6:8	Align Items on a Page	●●●○○	●●●●●	15
7:5	Use Descriptive Tab Labels	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
16:7	Format Information for Multiple Audiences	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
1:9	Focus on Performance Before Preference	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
14:3	Limit Large Images Above the Fold	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
5:5	Attend to Homepage Panel Width	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
2:7	Warn of "Time Outs"	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
13:8	Allow Users to See Their Entered Data	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
6:1	Set Appropriate Page Lengths	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
1:8	Consider Many User Interface Issues	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
2:3	Provide Assistance to Users	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
5:4	Enable Access to the Homepage	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
15:3	Use Familiar Words	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
13:7	Label Data Entry Fields Consistently	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
1:10	Set Usability Goals	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
7:2	Use a Clickable "List of Contents" on Long Pages	●●●●○	●●●○○	12
15:6	Make First Sentences Descriptive	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
8:2	Use Scrolling Pages for Reading Comprehension	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
2:10	Provide Feedback When Users Must Wait	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
13:11	Use Radio Buttons for Mutually Exclusive Selections	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
14:8	Graphics Should Not Look Like Banner Ads	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
7:8	Use Appropriate Menu Types	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
6:6	Structure for Easy Comparison	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
14:10	Include Actual Data with Data Graphics	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
15:7	Use Active Voice	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
7:7	Use Site Maps	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
14:5	Label Clickable Images	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
6:4	Place Important Items at Top Center	●●●○○	●●●●○	12
	Do Not Require Users to Multitask While			

2:12	Reading			12
6:7	Use Moderate White Space			12
15:9	Limit the Number of Words and Sentences			12
6:5	Place Important Items Consistently			12
13:14	Use a Single Data Entry Method			12
12:6	Place Important Items at Top of the List			12
11:3	Format Common Items Consistently			10
7:1	Provide Feedback on Users' Location			10
1:1	Set and State Goals			10
5:3	Show All Major Options on the Homepage			10
17:1	Provide a Search Option on Each Page			10
4:1	Design for Common Browsers			10
13:5	Put Labels Close to Data Entry Fields			10
16:9	Use Color for Grouping			10
6:9	Choose Appropriate Line Lengths			10
11:7	Use Attention-Attracting Features when Appropriate			10
1:14	Use Heuristics Cautiously			10
1:15	Use Cognitive Walkthroughs Cautiously			10
14:4	Limit the Use of Images			9
2:9	Use Users' Terminology in Help Documentation			9
13:19	Label Units of Measurement			9
13:12	Use Check Boxes to Enable Multiple Selections			9
9:6	Highlight Critical Data			9
10:13	Use "Pointing-and-Clicking"			9
15:10	Limit Prose Text on Navigation Pages			9
7:6	Present Tabs Effectively			9
10:11	Use Appropriate Text Link Lengths			9
2:8	Reduce the User's Workload			9
2:11	Inform Users of Long Download Times			9
13:18	Provide Auto-tabbing Functionality			9
9:3	Use Descriptive Row and Column Headings			9
17:7	Notify Users When Multiple Search Options Exist			9
3:7	Provide Client-Side Image Maps			9
13:13	Use Familiar Widgets			9

10:14	Clarify Clickable Regions of Images	●●●●○	●●●●○	9
13:9	Display Default Values	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
13:10	Use a Minimum of Two Radio Buttons	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
17:4	Make Upper-and Lowercase Search Terms Equivalent	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
12:5	Start Numbered Items at One	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
5:6	Announce Changes to a Website	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
2:4	Provide Printing Options	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
15:1	Define Acronyms and Abbreviations	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
4:4	Design for User's Typical Connection Speed	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
4:3	Design for Popular Operating Systems	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
10:2	Avoid Misleading Cues to Click	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
4:2	Account for Browser Differences	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
3:2	Design Forms for Users Using Assistive Technology	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
13:6	Label Pushbuttons Clearly	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
10:8	Designate Used Links	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
3:3	Provide Text Equivalents for Non-Text Elements	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
1:5	Understand and Meet Users' Expectations	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
16:6	Ensure that Necessary Information is Displayed	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
7:3	Do Not Create Pages with No Navigational Options	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
10:9	Link to Related Content	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
15:2	Use Abbreviations Sparingly	●●●●○	●●○○○	8
14:11	Display Monitoring Information Graphically	●●○○○	●●●●○	8
8:3	Use Paging Rather Than Scrolling	●●○○○	●●●●○	8
7:9	Keep Navigation-only Pages Short	●●○○○	●●●●○	8
6:10	Avoid Scroll Stoppers	●●○○○	●●●●○	8
15:11	Make Action Sequences Clear	●●○○○	●●●●○	8
3:9	Provide Frame Titles	●●●●○	●●○○○	6
15:8	Write Instructions in the Affirmative	●●●●○	●●○○○	6
13:17	Place Cursor in First Data Entry Field	●●●●○	●●○○○	6
13:15	Partition Long Data Items	●●●●○	●●○○○	6
5:7	Communicate the Website's Purpose	●●●●○	●●○○○	6
14:7	Use Thumbnail Images to Preview Larger Images	●●●●○	●●○○○	6
3:10	Test Plug-ins and Applets for Accessibility	●●●●○	●●○○○	6

13:20	Ensure that Double-Clicking Will Not Cause Problems	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
3:8	Enable Users to Skip Repetitive Navigation Links	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
3:6	Ensure that Scripts Allow Accessibility	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
10:10	Link to Supportive Information	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
10:12	Indicate Internal vs. External Links	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
9:5	Provide Descriptive Page Titles	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
13:16	Do Not Make User-Entered Codes Case Sensitive	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
3:5	Provide Equivalent Pages	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
3:1	Comply with Section 508	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
13:21	Do Not Limit Viewable List Box Options	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
14:12	Introduce Animation	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
5:8	Limit Prose Text on the Homepage	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
14:13	Ensure Website Images Convey Intended Messages	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
17:8	Provide Search Templates	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6
13:25	Use Data Entry Fields to Speed Performance	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/>	5
14:14	Use Images to Facilitate Learning	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/>	5
17:5	Design Search Engines to Search the Entire Site	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
3:11	Synchronize Multimedia Elements	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
13:22	Use Open Lists to Select One from Many	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
2:14	Develop Pages that Will Print Properly	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
9:7	Provide Users with Good Ways to Reduce Options	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
13:23	Prioritize Pushbuttons	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
8:4	Scroll Fewer Screenfuls	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
4:5	Design for Commonly Used Screen Resolutions	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
12:8	Use Appropriate List Style	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
14:15	Emulate Real-World Objects	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
13:24	Minimize Use of the Shift Key	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4
8:5	Facilitate Rapid Scrolling	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	3
1:16	Apply Automatic Evaluation Methods	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	3
3:12	Do Not Require Style Sheets	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	2
3:13	Avoid Screen Flicker	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	2
9:8	Use Headings in the Appropriate HTML Order	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	2

12:7	Capitalize First Letter of First Word in Lists	●○○○○	●●○○○	2
5:9	Limit Homepage Length	●○○○○	●●○○○	2
7:10	Use "Glosses" to Assist Navigation	●○○○○	●●○○○	2



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