

GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNING USER INTERFACE SOFTWARE

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SUMMARY	5
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	5
INTRODUCTION	6
INFORMATION SYSTEMS	6
USER-SYSTEM INTERFACE	7
USER INTERFACE SOFTWARE	7
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE USER INTERFACE	8
DESIGN PRACTICE	9
DESIGN GUIDELINES	10
GUIDELINES ORGANIZATION	11
APPLYING THE GUIDELINES	13
ROLE OF GUIDELINES IN SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT	14
REFERENCES	15
GLOSSARY	33

1 DATA ENTRY 39

1.0 Data Entry: General	41
1.1 Position Designation	53
1.2 Direction Designation	59
1.3 Text	60
1.4 Data Forms	70
1.6 Graphics	84
1.7 Data Validation	100
1.8 Other Data Processing	101
1.9 Design Change	105

2 DATA DISPLAY 106

2.0 General	109
2.1 Text	118
2.2 Data Forms	128
2.3 Tables	134
2.4 Graphics	141
2.5 Format	175
2.6 Coding	180
2.7 Display Control	193
2.8 Design Change	210

3 SEQUENCE CONTROL 210

3.0 General	214
3.1 Dialogue Type	224
3.2 Transaction Selection	262



- 3.3 Interrupt 268
- 3.4 Context Definition 271
- 3.5 Error Management 274
- 3.6 Alarms 278
- 3.7 Design Change 279

4 USER GUIDANCE 279

- 4.0 General 283
- 4.1 Status Information 294
- 4.3 Error Feedback 301
- 4.4 Job Aids 308
- 4.5 User Records 318
- 4.6 Design Change 320

5 DATA TRANSMISSION 321

- 5.0 General 323
- 5.1 Preparing Messages 326
- 5.2 Addressing Messages 329
- 5.3 Initiating Transmission 334
- 5.4 Controlling Transmission 338
- 5.5 Receiving Messages 341
- 5.6 Design Change 346

6 DATA PROTECTION 346

- 6.0 General 351
- 6.1 User Identification 358
- 6.2 Data Access 361
- 6.3 Data Entry/Change 364
- 6.4 Data Transmission 370
- 6.5 Design Change 372

Comment: Some security experts recommend that passwords of nonsense material be composed by a computer and arbitrarily assigned to users, in order to make it more difficult for intruders to guess a password. Such measures will confound legitimate users more often than they will impede intruders, and are not recommended here. A better approach would be to keep passwords memorable, for initial system access, and then impose some auxiliary procedure to authenticate user identity in applications where passwords are considered insufficient protection.

Reference:

CSC-STD-002-85

Haskett 1984

6.1/4 Changing Passwords

Allow users to change their passwords whenever they choose.

Comment: A user may sometimes suspect that a password has been disclosed, and thus wish to change it.

Comment: In addition to optional changes by users, it may also be good security practice for a system to enforce password changes for all users at periodic intervals.

Reference:

CSC-STD-002-85

6.1/5 Private Entry of Passwords

When a password must be entered by a user, ensure that password entry can be private; password entries should not be displayed.

Comment: Covert entry of passwords will prevent casual eavesdropping by onlookers. This represents an exception to the general recommendation that all entries should be displayed.

Comment: In the interests of security, it might be noted that passwords should also not be retained in readable form in computer memory, although this is not an issue of user interface design.

Reference:

MS 5.15.2.2.3

CSC-STD-002-85

See also: 1.0/3

6.1/6 Limiting Unsuccessful LOG-ON Attempts

Impose a maximum limit on the number and rate of unsuccessful LOG-ON attempts that will provide a margin for user error while protecting the system from persistent attempts at illegitimate access.



Comment: Legitimate users will sometimes have difficulty completing a successful LOG-ON, perhaps due to inattention, or a faulty terminal, or faulty communications. Occasional LOG-ON failures of that kind should be tolerable to the system, with the user simply invited to try again.

Comment: A record of continuing failure by any particular user to complete successful LOG-ON procedures, including password entry and other tests of claimed user identity, may indicate persistent intrusion attempts. Repeated LOG-ON failures might thus be grounds for denying access to that user. Access might be denied temporarily for some computer-imposed time interval, or indefinitely pending review by a system administrator. The occasional inconvenience to a legitimate user may be tolerable in the interests of increased system security. Analysis of this tradeoff between convenience and security can determine the number and rate of LOG-ON failures that will be tolerated in any particular system application.

Reference:

CSC-STD-002-85

See also: 6.0/2

6.1/7 Auxiliary Tests to Authenticate User Identity

When system security requires more stringent user identification than is provided by password entry, devise auxiliary tests that can authenticate user identity without imposing impractical demands on users' memory.

Comment: Various means have been proposed for authenticating user identity, including the use of secret algorithms known only to each individual user. If computer-generated cues and user responses can be protected cryptographically from eavesdropping, a practical scheme might be to require a user to respond to a word association test individually devised by that user for this purpose.

Reference:

Haskett 1984

6.1/8 Continuous Recognition of User Identity

Once a user's identity has been authenticated, ensure that whatever data access/change privileges are authorized for that user will continue throughout a work session.

Exception: In special instances a user's data access/change privileges might reasonably change as a result of succeeding transactions, e.g., if computer analysis indicated suspicious or otherwise abnormal behavior.

Exception: A user might reasonably be required to repeat procedures for authentication of identity when resuming work after some specified period of inactivity.