

GUI

It may be **GUI**, but it
doesn't have to be
messy!

Leah Guren
In Other WORDS, Israel

Outline

- The role of the GUI in the user experience
- Style issues for GUI text and guidelines for writing effective labels
- The real purpose of system and error messages
- Guidelines for writing effective error messages
- Leveraging your position
- Final Q&A



Part 1: The User Experience

What is the user experience, and how is it affected by the GUI?

GUI

The User Experience: a Goal-oriented Perspective

- Users approach software with specific goals.
- Users want to invest as little time as possible in learning applications.
- The user doesn't know what you know.
- The GUI is the only contact the user has with an application.
- Alan Cooper says, "Users hate dialog boxes."

The Effect of the GUI

- *Cognitive friction* is a major problem in software interfaces.
- Key causes of cognitive friction are:
 - GUIs aimed at developers, not users
 - inconsistencies in wording, design, layout, and interaction
 - not playing by the rules
- Users who are forced to use high-CF products experience more frustration and task failure.

Bottom Line

- Less cognitive friction means better user success.
- Better user success means fewer calls to tech support.
- Fewer calls to tech support means higher customer satisfaction.
- Higher customer satisfaction means better brand loyalty.
- **BRIEF QUESTION PERIOD**



Part 2: GUI Text Guidelines

GUIs have style guides, just the way tech pubs documents do. And writing clear labels should be *our* challenge.

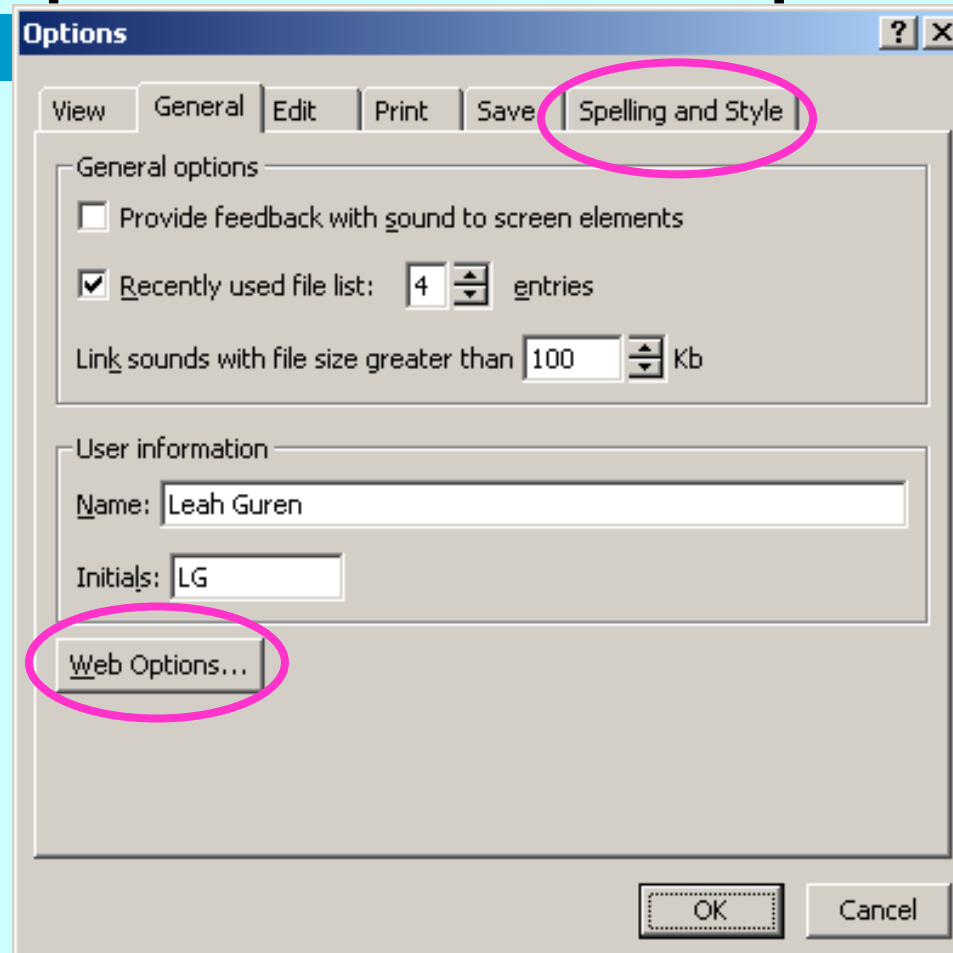
Title Capitalization

- Title capitalization provides an extra visual cue to users that something is a *label*.
- All words are capitalized except for:
 - articles (a, an, the)
 - short prepositions (to, for, of, at, in, on)
 - conjunctions (and, but, or)
 - exception: first and last word ***always*** capitalized

Title Capitalization Elements

- title bar text
- tab titles
- column headings
- buttons
- icon labels
- menu names
- menu commands
- toolbar button labels
- ToolTips
- Web page titles
- Apple only:
 - group box labels
 - list box entries

Title Capitalization Example



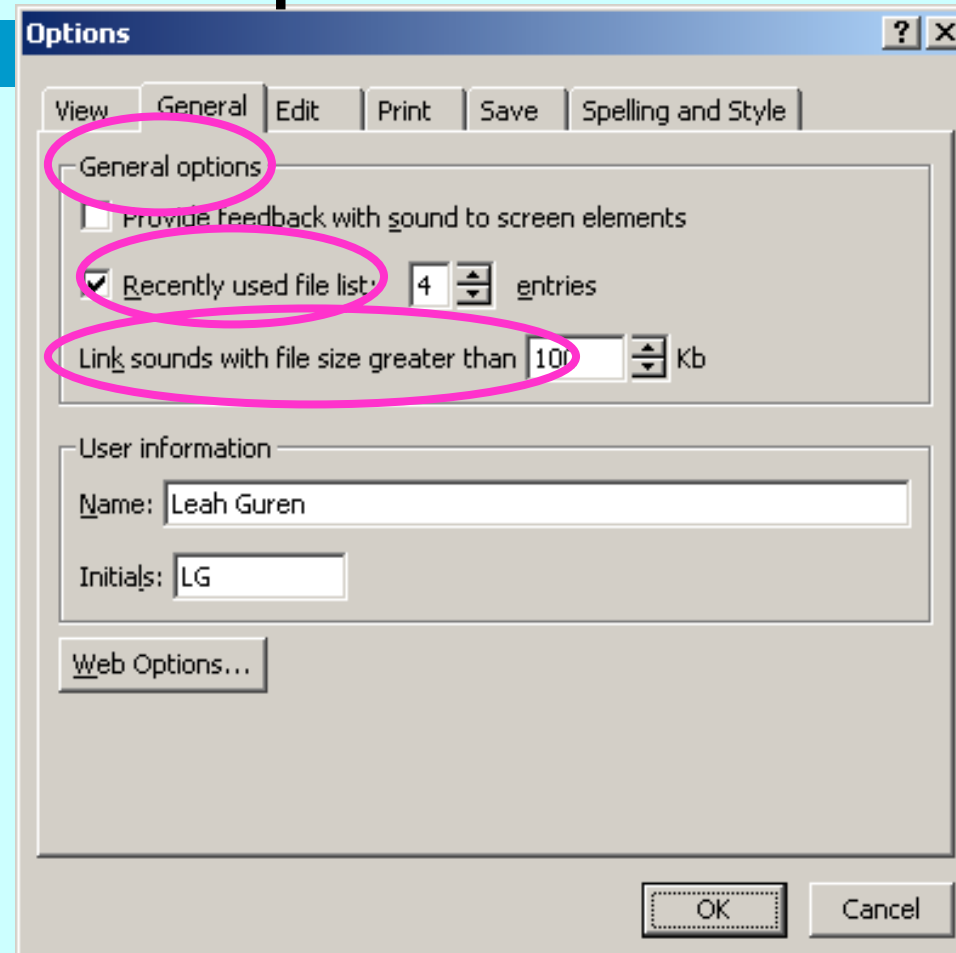
Sentence Capitalization

- Sentence capitalization provides a cleaner look for chunks of text.
- Sentence capitalization is easier to read for meaning.
- Capitalize the first word.
- Capitalize any proper nouns:
 - names of people, places, things
 - names of specific products, interface elements

Sentence Capitalization Elements

- check box labels
- text box labels
- list box labels
- messages
- Microsoft only:
 - group box labels
 - list box entries
- options (radio buttons)
- status bar text
- slider labels
- descriptive text
- file names

Sentence Capitalization Example



Miscellaneous

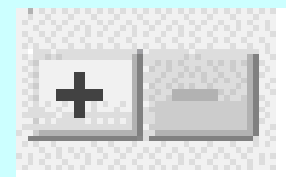
- Use an ellipses (...) for menu commands and buttons that require further user input.
- Use a space between amount and unit of measure:
 - 25 GB
 - 128 KB
 - 1200 dpi

Design for Consistency

- Consistency reduces confusion and speeds user access to functionality.
- Use the same menu command and dialog box title.
- Give all buttons and icons a ToolTip.
- Be consistent in the terminology for a concept.

GUI

Examples of Inconsistency



General Design Guidelines

- Group related features together.
- Label groups (areas) for clarity.
- Use a font large enough for comfortable viewing on high resolution screens.
- Use dialog box and screen space evenly:
 - don't clump elements too close together
 - avoid large empty spaces
- Provide enough space for translation.

Select Labels for Clarity

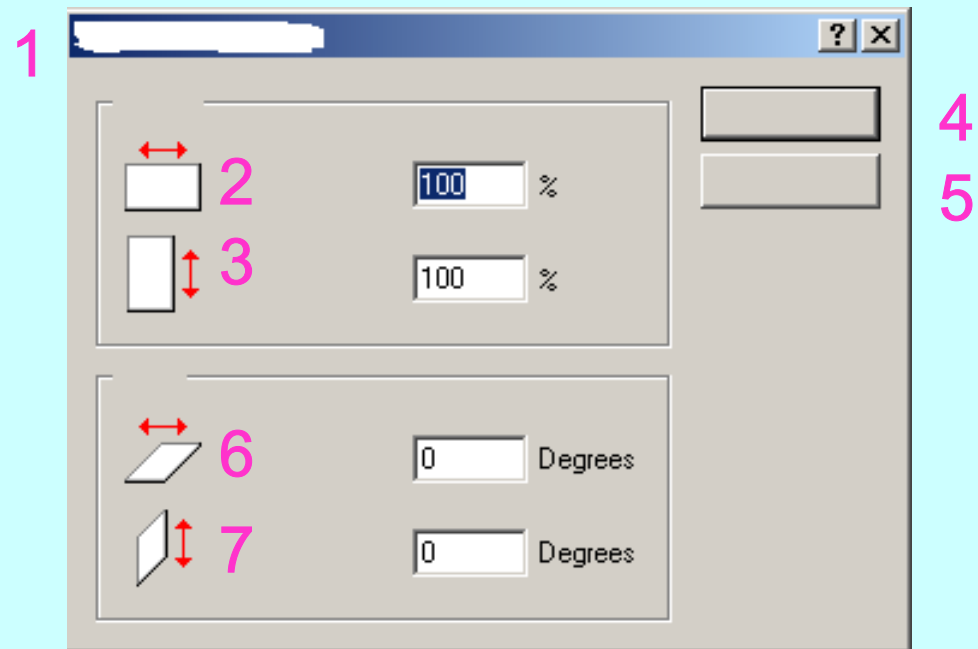
- Use verbs in button names, ToolTips, and menu commands:
 - bad: Color Striation
 - better: Blend Background Colors
- Use labels that are easy to pronounce:
 - bad: Fil3x
 - better: Third Level Filter
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Use terminology appropriate for users.

Add Useful Information

- Labels don't need to be so short that they are cryptic.
- An extra word of explanation can enhance a label.
 - bad: Hide errors
 - better: Hide spelling errors in this document
- Added clarity also helps localization (translation).

Quickie Challenge

Here is a simple graphics tool that supports basic manipulations on raster graphics (bmp, jpg, etc.). This dialog box allows users to distort an image by stretching its length or width, or by twisting it diagonally by either axis. The users reach this dialog box by selecting **Stretch/Skew...** from the Image menu.



BRIEF QUESTION PERIOD



Part 3: The Real Purpose of System and Error Messages

System and error messages are
a necessary evil. But what are
they really for?

What Are System Messages?

- System messages are for:
 - information about what is going on internally
 - visual feedback for confirmation about a process
 - anything that **requires** direct user interaction
- They should *not* be used for:
 - troubleshooting feedback during development
 - lazy design (pushing responsibility onto users instead of the application)

What Are Error Messages?

- Error messages are for:
 - corrective issues that can't be handled internally by the application
 - feedback to let user know that there is a problem
 - immediate information to help the user solve a problem
- They should *not* be used for:
 - testing during development
 - adding helpful information for the developers

How Do Users See Them?

- Users don't differentiate between types of error and system messages.
- All messages are a source of immediate frustration, fear, and loathing!
- Users are already under stress when an error occurs and are less able to decode complex message.
- **BRIEF QUESTION PERIOD**



Part 4: Guidelines for Effective Error Messages

You can reduce user panic by writing *helpful* messages.

Design Issue

- First test: do you really need a message?
- Position and design consistently.
- Use a signal word with the icon.
- Make the signal word a hanging indent.
- Avoid too many different icon/signal-word pairs.
- If you must use an internal error code, make it unobtrusive (small and in a lower corner).

Text Style Guidelines

- Write in complete sentences using proper punctuation and capitalization.
- Avoid exaggerating the problem!!!
- Avoid problematic words:
 - bad: aborted
 - better: canceled

Key Elements

- State the problem, the cause, and the solution.
- If there is more than one possible cause, start with the most common.
- If the solution is complex, refer the user.

Writing for Clarity

- Avoid technical jargon.
- Filter information for the user:
 - stop thinking in binary logic
(that is, “true” ≠ “should be written”)
 - what does the user need to know ***right now?***
- Refer to specific rather than general items:
 - bad: File not found.
 - better: Word cannot find Data4.doc.

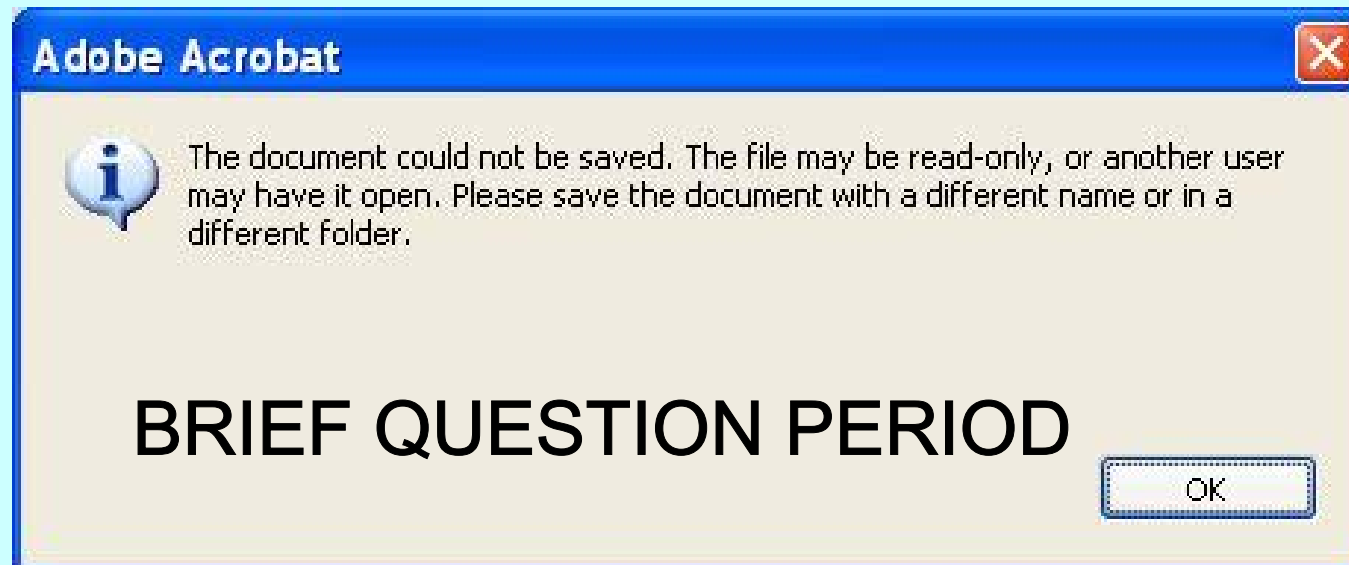
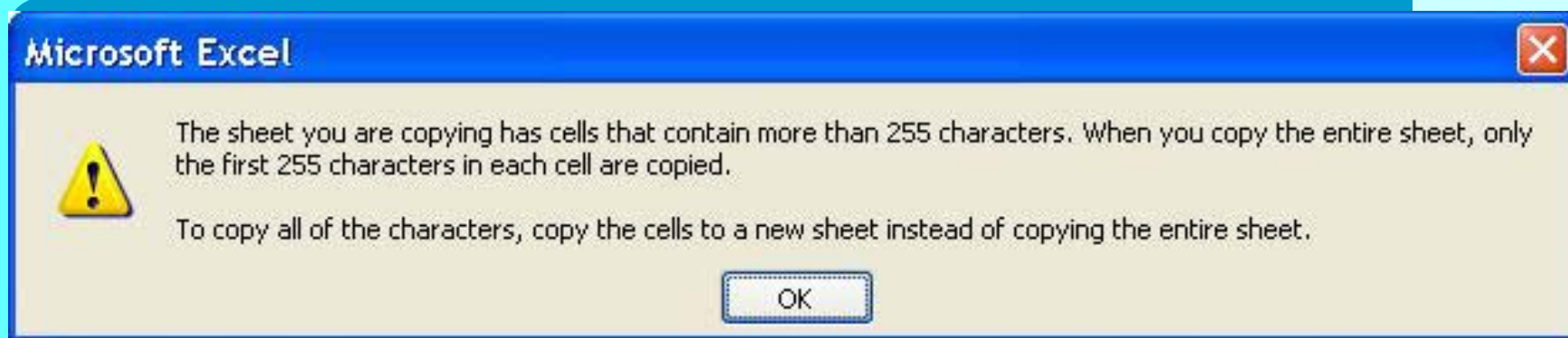
GUI

Example of General Yuckiness



GUI

Examples of Useful Messages





Part 5: Leveraging Your Position

How can you not just survive—
but *thrive*—in today's economy?

Getting Started

- Look at existing style guides for your target platform:
 - Microsoft
 - Apple
 - SUN (Unix)
 - other
- Learn about user cognitive experiences:
 - Alan Cooper, *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum*
 - Donald A. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things*

Be Flexible

- Do not define yourself narrowly:
 - so-so: writer, editor, online Help expert, etc.
 - better: information designer, documentation specialist, etc.
- Don't turn your nose up at "menial" edits.
- Push beyond your comfort zone to learn new technologies and skills.

Sell Yourself in Your Company

- Build support with the developers:
 - you are **freeing** them from tedious tasks, not poaching in their territory
 - you are **helping** them creating a better interface
- Talk user-centrics to product managers.
- Take baby steps:
 - start by **reviewing** prototype of the GUI
 - move on to **editing** the GUI
 - eventually consult in the **development** of the GUI
- Be available as a technical resource.

Questions?

In Other WORDS

Training, Consulting, Technical Writing,
Translation, Graphics, and Placement

Leah Guren

email: leah@words.israel.net

cellular: (+972) 544-853-473

website: www.wordsisrael.com