

ITI0209: User Interfaces

09. Forms

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Forms remain one of the most important types of interactions for users on the web and in apps - they are often considered the final step in the journey of completing their goals. Users should be able to complete them quickly and without confusion.

Forms Consist of

The typical form has the following five components:

- **Structure.** This includes the order of fields, the form's appearance on the page and the logical connections between multiple fields.
- **Input fields.** These include text fields, password fields, checkboxes, radio buttons, sliders and any other fields designed for user input.
- **Field labels.** These tell users what the corresponding input fields mean.
- **Action button.** When the user presses this button, an action is performed (such as submission of the data).
- **Feedback.** User is shown the result of their input through feedback. A message notifies user about the result and can be *positive* - if the form was submitted successfully or *negative* ("The number you've provided is incorrect").

Forms may also have the following components:

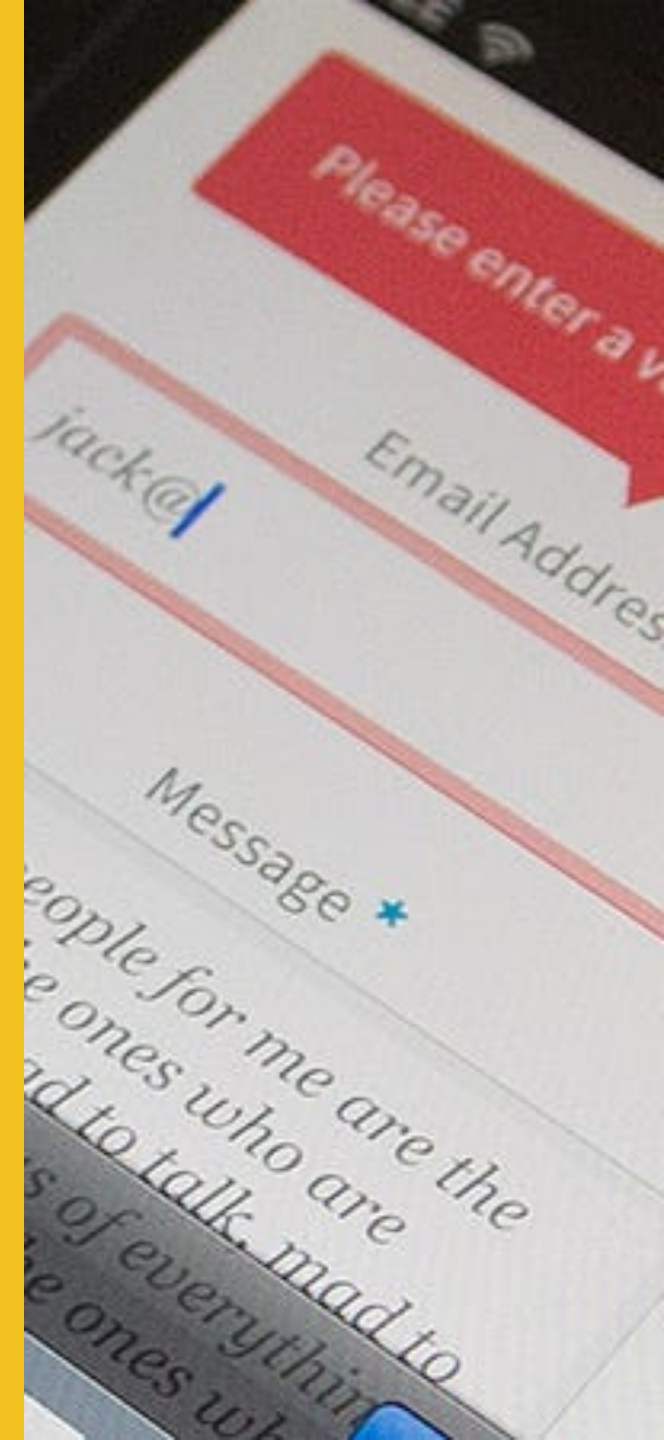
- **Assistance.** This is any explanation of how to fill out the form.
- **Validation.** This automatic check ensures that the user's data is valid.

Regarding form assistance:

You should never need explain to users how to fill out a form - it should be intuitive. If the form is too complicated to fill out, then **redesigning it is your only option.**

Assistance is useful when:

- Introducing unfamiliar concepts: <https://i.imgur.com/rbjD1Ek.png>
- When people wonder why specific data is needed: <https://i.imgur.com/qZe2rn5.png>
- Concerns about security and privacy: <https://i.imgur.com/zsAxYJW.png>
- Helpful information in context: <https://i.imgur.com/38h6gpO.png>



When assistance is too much

Too Much Help Text

The International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number is a unique 15-digit code used to identify an individual GSM mobile telephone. The number can be found on most mobiles by typing in *#06#. If this doesn't work, please call our support center at 1-800-453-4265.

Field Label Interference

Phone Number
The phone number you enter can't be changed after you place your order, so please make sure it's correct.

Error Message Interference

We'll send you a receipt, order updates, and shipping notifications to your email address.

 An email address must contain a single @

Placeholder Hint Misuse

Form Structure

Ask only what is required

Make sure to ask only what you really need. Every extra field you add to a form will affect its conversion rate. Always consider why you are requesting certain information from the user and how you will use it.

Order the form logically

Ask details logically from the user's perspective, not from the application or database's perspective. Typically, asking for someone's address before their name would be unusual.

Form Structure

Group related Information

Group related information into logical blocks or sets. The flow from one set of questions to the next will better resemble a conversation. Grouping together related fields will also help users make sense of the information they must fill in. Compare how it works in the contact information form below.

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:
(Your email address will be your username)

Re-type Email:

Password:
(Min. 8 characters, 1 number, case-sensitive)

Re-type Password:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Phone:
No spaces or dashes

Date of Birth:

Gender:

Security Question:

Security Answer:
(Not case-sensitive)

Personal Information

First Name:

Last Name:

Date of Birth:

Gender:

Account Information

Email:
(Your email address will be your username)

Re-type Email:

Password:
(Min. 8 characters, 1 number, case-sensitive)

Re-type Password:

Security Question:

Security Answer:
(Not case-sensitive)

Contact Information

Address:

City:

State:

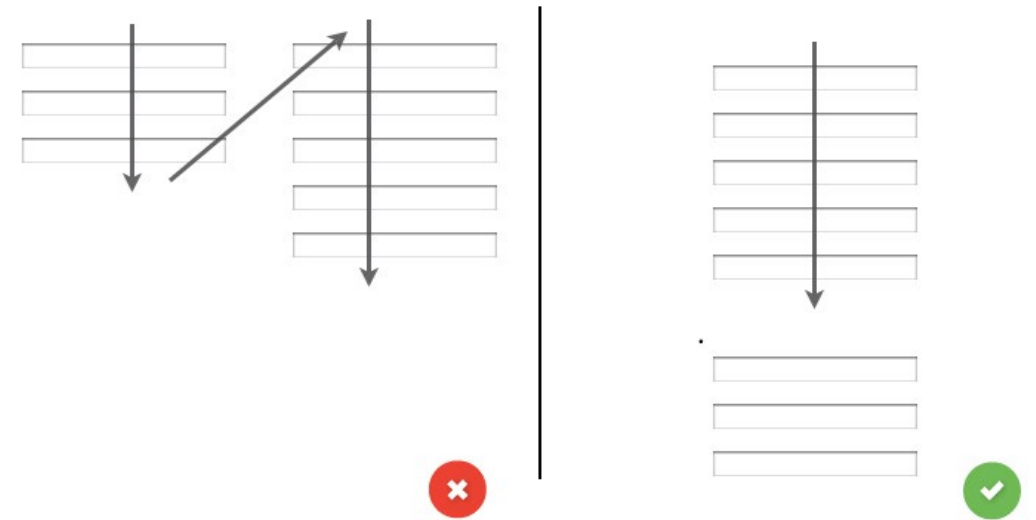
Zip Code:

Phone:
No spaces or dashes

Form Structure

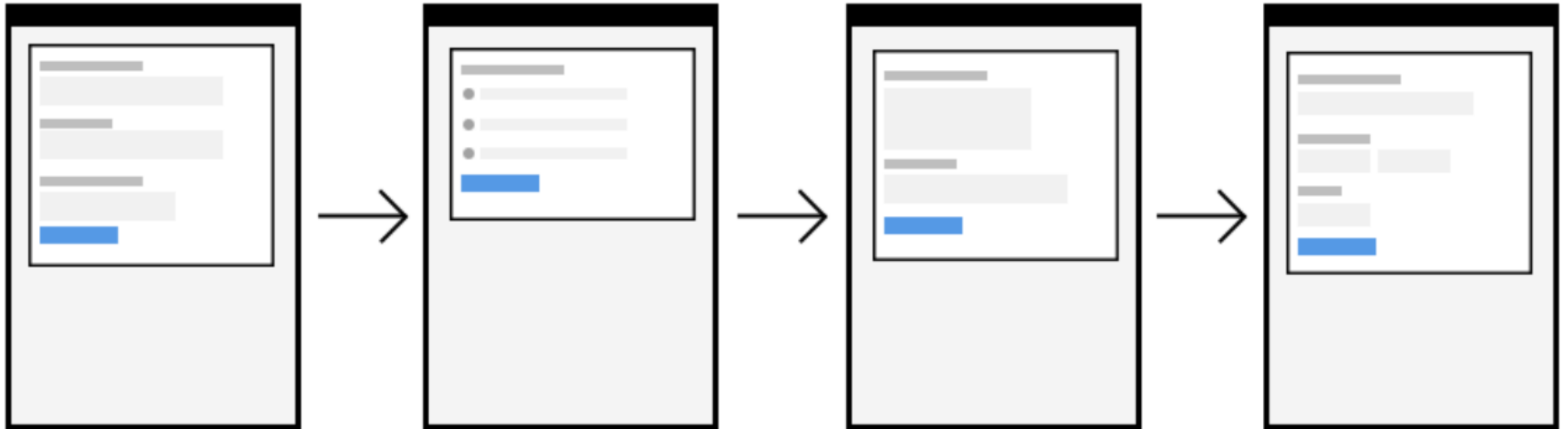
One vs Multiple Columns

If a form has horizontally adjacent fields, then the user must scan in a Z pattern, slowing the speed of comprehension and muddying the path to completion. But if a form is in a single column, the path to completion is a straight line down the page



Form Structure

One Thing Per Page



Form Structure

One Thing Per Page

- People should be able to focus on one thing at a time, that reduces the cognitive burden.
- When users fill in a small form, errors are caught and shown early and often.
- If pages have little on them, they'll load quickly.
- By submitting information frequently, we can save user information in a more granular fashion.
- It adds a sense of progression and increases momentum
- It lets you design interfaces that capitalize on maximal screen space

Form Structure

Back links

Users expect it to take them to the previous page in the state they left it. Research might show you that it's useful to include a back link within the interface itself, and that users will be more inclined to trust it.

< [Back](#)

Mobile number (optional)
So we can notify you about delivery

Continue

Form Structure - Hierarchy

As you begin to organize the fields on your form, you'll have to determine a hierarchy based on three key constraints:

Technical needs: The system may need a particular piece of data before it can gather another piece of information.

User needs: Starting with the easiest questions will keep users committed to completing the form..

Business needs: It may be important to the business to minimize abandonment by creating “milestone submission,” whereby key information is completed by a particular point in the form (a milestone).

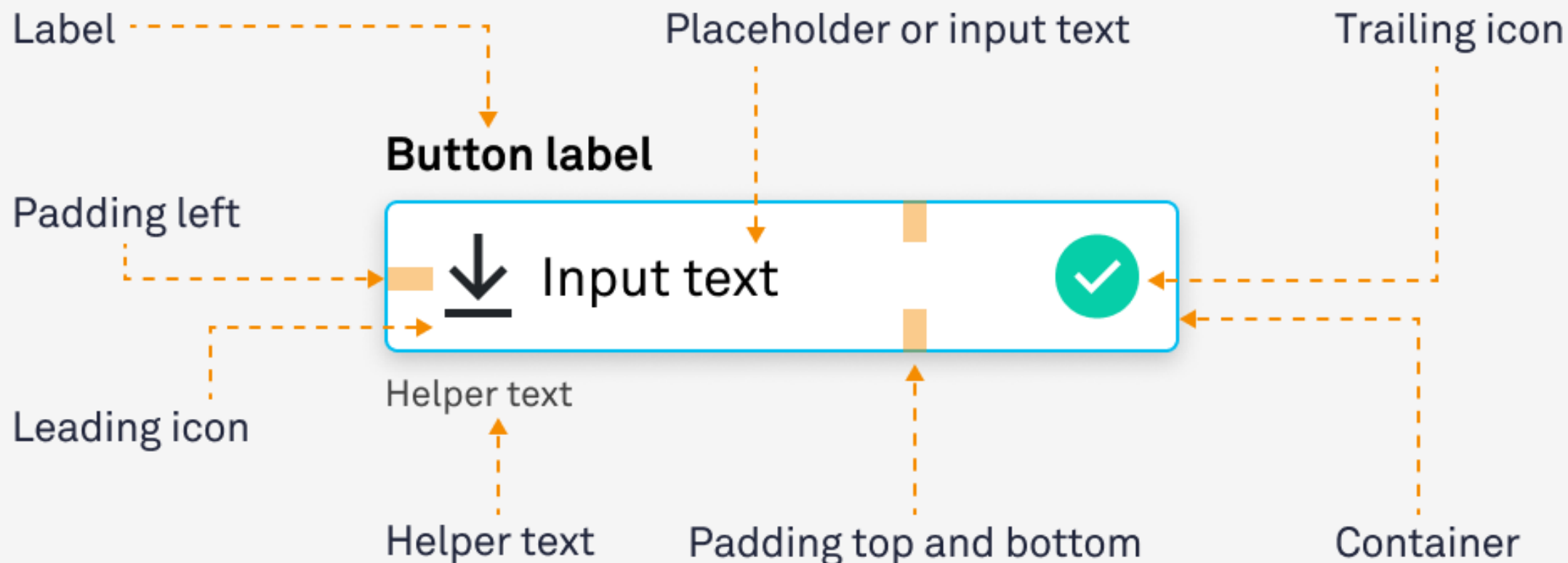
The diagram shows a sample form layout with various fields and a legend on the right side. The form fields include:

- world
- See details
- City view
- Max. 2 guests
- ing
- Separate shower
- Select
- with taxes
- Last 3 rooms!
- 4 adults, 0 kids
- kfast included

The legend on the right side lists the following categories:

- Name + I
- Image
Emotion
Strong d
influenc
- More inf
Decision
- Main A
Select
- Action
Final c
- Clarif
What
gettin

01 The anatomy of a form input field



Input Fields

- A rule of thumb in form design - **shorter is better**. Displaying only five to seven input fields at a given time is a common practice.
- Try to **avoid optional fields** in forms. But if you use them, distinguish the mandatory fields clearly. If you decide to use an asterisk for mandatory fields, show a hint at the bottom of the form explaining what the asterisk is for, because not everyone understands what it means.
- **Avoid setting default values** unless you believe a large portion of your users will select that value. Particularly avoid it for required fields.

Input Fields

Use smart defaults - values set based on information available about the user. Smart defaults can make form completion faster and more accurate. Still, use these with caution,

Billing Address

Country *

First Name *

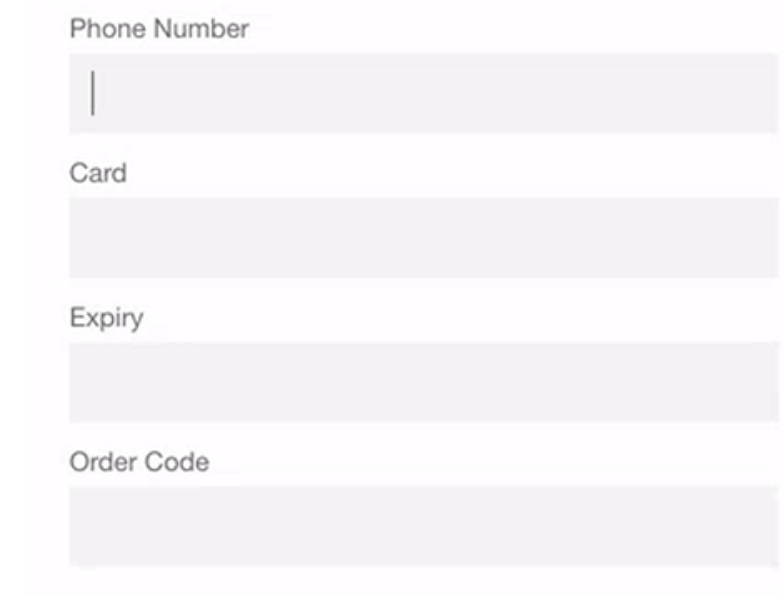
Last Name *

See also: <https://www.shopify.com/partners/blog/cognitive-load>

Input Fields

Use **input masks**. A mask appears once a user focuses on a field, and it formats the text automatically as the field is being filled out, helping users to focus on the required data and to more easily notice errors.

See also: <https://css-tricks.com/input-masking/>



Phone Number

Card

Expiry

Order Code

The image shows a vertical stack of four input fields. Each field is a light gray rectangle with a thin border. The labels 'Phone Number', 'Card', 'Expiry', and 'Order Code' are positioned to the left of each field. The 'Phone Number' field has a vertical cursor on the left side, indicating it is the active field.

Fields on desktop

- Make forms **keyboard friendly**. Users should be able to focus on and edit every field using only the keyboard. Power users, who tend to use the keyboard heavily, should be able to easily tab through and edit fields, all without lifting their fingers off the keyboard.

```
<input type="text" tabindex="1">
```

- Add **autofocus** to input field. Autofocusing a field gives the user an indication and a starting point to quickly begin filling out a form. Provide a clear visual signal that focus has moved there.

```
<input type="text" autofocus>
```

Fields on Mobile

- **Match keyboard to input.** Phone users appreciate apps that provide the appropriate keyboard for text being requested. Implement this consistently throughout the app. <https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/HTML/Element/input#type>
- Use **autocompletion**. Anything that can be done to prevent unnecessary typing will improve the user experience and decrease errors. Autocompletion makes it possible to eliminate a huge amount of typing. <https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/HTML/Attributes/autocomplete>

Autofill

Most modern browsers can automatically fill in form fields, by way of the `autocomplete` attribute. When the user focuses a particular field, the browser checks if it has that information stored — if it does, the user can select it without having to type.

Memorable Dates

A memorable date is one that you remember easily such as your date of birth. Typing six digits unassisted into a text box is much quicker than scrolling, swiping, and clicking.

Otherwise use a date picker

Date of birth

DD MM YYYY

Day

Month

Year

Form Labels

Clearly written labels are one of the primary ways to make a UI more accessible. A good label tells the user the purpose of the field, maintains its usefulness when focus is on the field itself, and remains visible even after the field has been filled in.

The image displays two versions of the Amazon sign-in form to illustrate different labeling practices. The left version shows a form with clear, descriptive labels for each input field. The right version shows a form with less descriptive labels, where the purpose of the fields is less obvious.

Left Screenshot (Clear Labels):


- Header: amazon logo, [Your Account](#) | [Help](#)
- Section: **Sign In**
- Question: **What is your e-mail address?**
- Label: **My e-mail address is:** [input field]
- Question: **Do you have an Amazon.com password?**
- Options: **No, I am a new customer.** / **Yes, I have a password:** [input field]
- Link: [Forgot your password?](#)
- Button: **Sign in using our secure server** [lock icon]
- Section: **Sign In Help**
- Text: Forgot your password? [Get password help.](#)
- Text: Has your e-mail address changed? [Update it here.](#)
- Footer: [Conditions of Use](#) [Privacy Notice](#)
© 1996-2014, Amazon.com, Inc. or its affiliates

Right Screenshot (Less Clear Labels):

- Header: amazon logo
- Section: **Sign in**
- Label: **Email** [input field]
- Label: **Password** [input field] [Forgot Password](#)
- Button: **Sign in**
- Text: By signing in you are agreeing to our [Conditions of Use and Sale](#) and our [Privacy Notice](#)
- Button: **I am a new customer**
- Text: Has your email address changed? [Update it here](#)
- Footer: [Conditions of Use](#) [Privacy Notice](#)
© 1996-2014, Amazon.com, Inc. or its affiliates

Label Alignment

Name
First Last

Date / / 
MM DD YYYY

Phone - -
(###) ### ####

Web Site

Email


RIGHT ALIGNED

- BEST VISUAL CONNECTION BETWEEN LABELS AND FORMS
- GOOD COMPLETION RATES ON SHORT FAMILIAR FORMS
- REQUIRES LESS VERTICAL SPACE
- HARDEST TO READ AND SCAN
- POOR MULTI-LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Name

First Last

Date

/ / 
MM DD YYYY

Phone

- -
(###) ### ####

Web Site

Email

TOP ALIGNED

- BEST COMPLETION RATES
- EASIEST FOR USERS TO "PROCESS"
- BEST FOR MULTI-LANGUAGE SUPPORT
- REQUIRE THE MOST VERTICAL SPACE
- NOT IDEAL FOR VERY LONG FORMS

Placeholders

The `placeholder` attribute is intended to store a hint. It gives users extra guidance when filling out a field

Unlike labels, hints are optional and shouldn't be used as a matter of course.

The placeholder's low-contrast, gray text is hard to read.

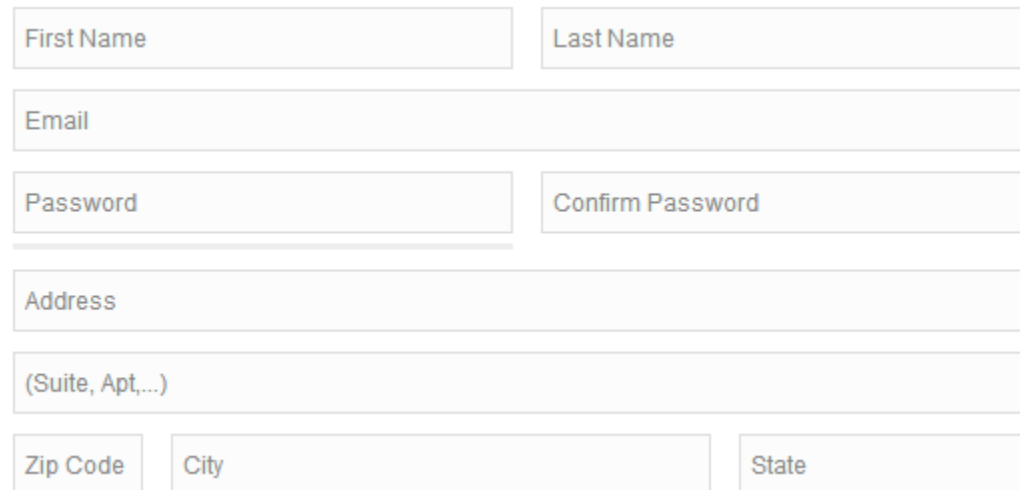
Password

Must be at least 8 characters

Use Label Placeholders with caution

Once the user clicks on the input field, the label will disappear, and so the user cannot double-check that they wrote what was being asked of them. Another problem is that users could mistake placeholder text for prefilled data and, hence, ignore it.

Bad Example:



A form with the following fields and placeholder text:

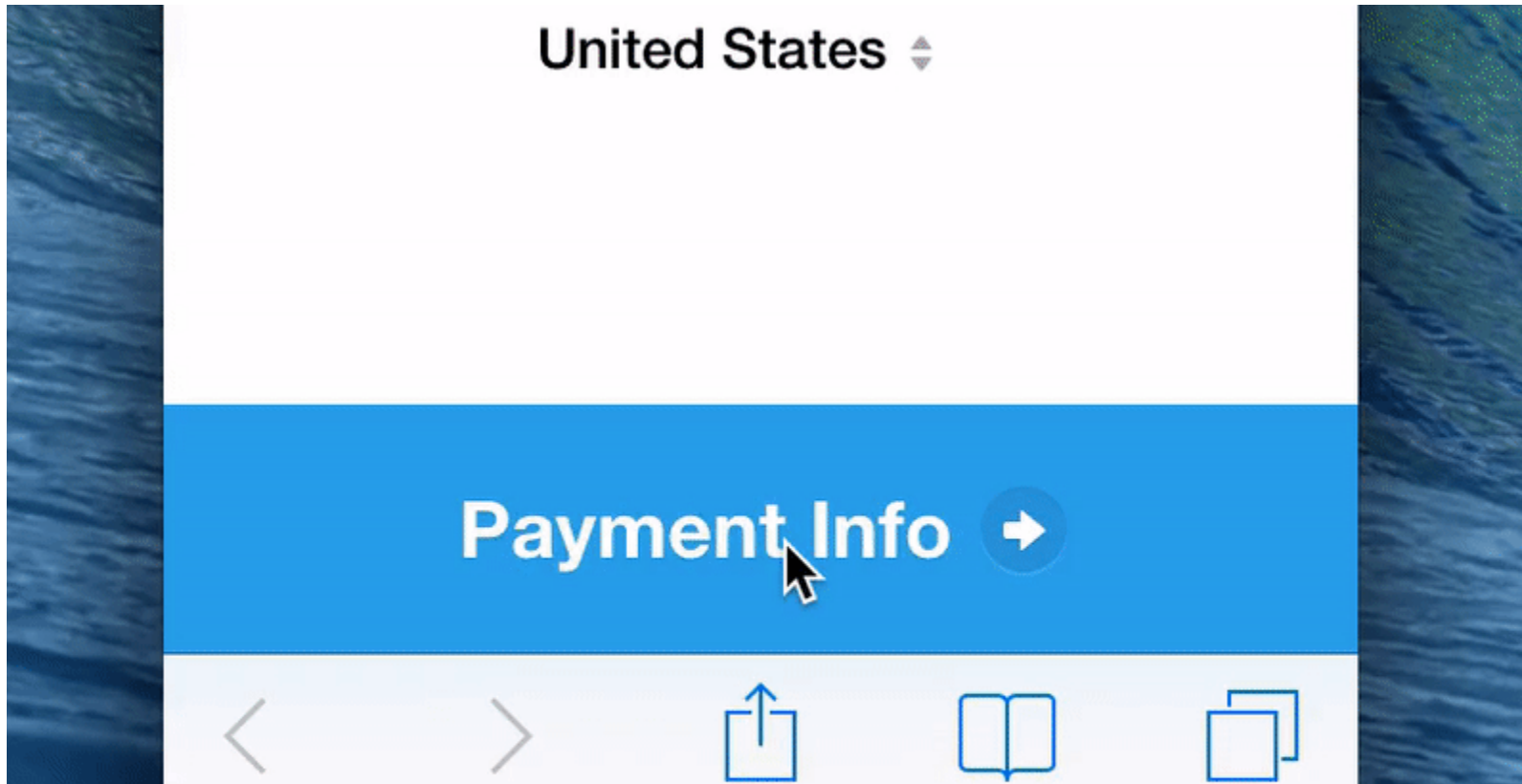
- First Name
- Last Name
- Email
- Password
- Confirm Password
- Address
- (Suite, Apt,...)
- Zip Code
- City
- State

Action Buttons

- **Highlight primary action.** Reducing the visual prominence of secondary actions minimizes the risk of error and reinforces people's path to a successful outcome.
- **Button location.** Complex forms usually need a back button. Make it less accessible so users do not accidentally click it.
- **Button naming.** Avoid generic words such as "Submit" for actions. State what action the button will perform when clicked. The text should explicitly describe the action being taken. And because it's an action, it should be a verb.
- **Avoid multiple actions.** Multiple action buttons distract users from their goal of submitting the form.
- **Make sure buttons look like buttons.**

Visual Feedback

Design the “Submit” button in a way that clearly indicates the form is being processed after the user’s action. This provides feedback to the user while preventing double submission.



Validation

Form validation errors are inevitable and are a natural part of data entry. Error-prone conditions should be minimized, but validation errors will never be eliminated.

Use inline validation. Reward early, punish late.

User Registration

Username

Email

Email Confirmation

Password

Checklist Affirmation Pattern

A variation of live validation involves ticking off rules (marking them as complete) as the user types. This is less invasive than live validation but isn't suited to every type of field.

Password

 Show

- One lowercase character
- One uppercase character
- One number
- One special character
- 8 characters minimum

Checklist for good form error messages

- **Be concise.** Don't use more words than are necessary, don't omit words at the cost of clarity.
- **Be consistent.** Use the same tone, the same words, and the same punctuation throughout.
- **Be specific.** If you know why something has gone wrong, say so.
- **Be human, avoid jargon.** Don't use words like invalid, forbidden, and mandatory.
- **Use plain language.** Error messages are not an opportunity to promote your brand's humorous tone of voice.
- **Use the active voice.** For example, "Enter your name," not "First name must be entered."
- **Don't blame the user.** Let them know what's gone wrong and how to fix it.

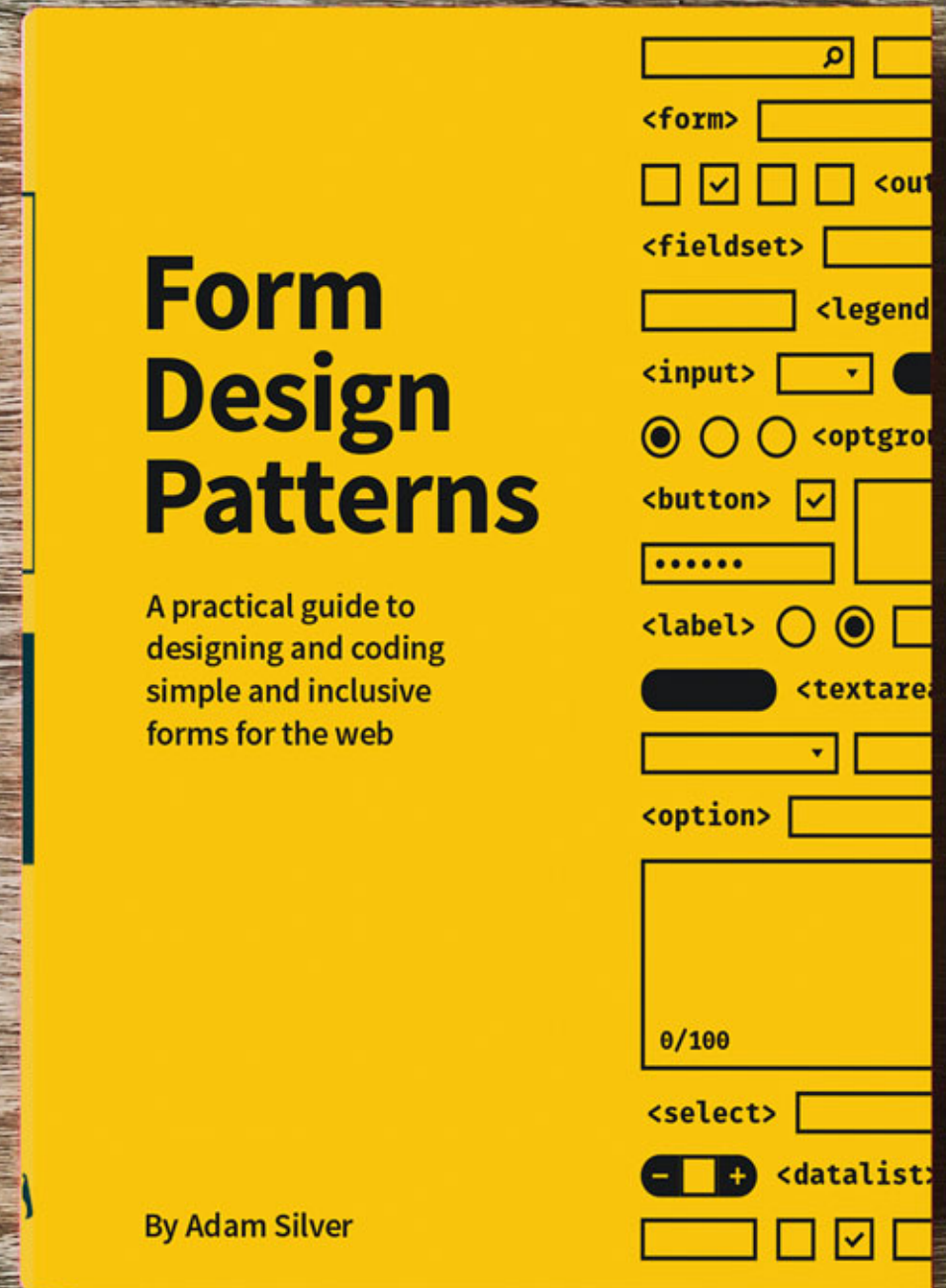
Things to avoid

- Using the placeholder attribute as a mechanism for storing label and hint text.
- Using incorrect input types.
- Styling buttons and links the same.
- Validating fields as users type.
- Disabling submit buttons.
- Using complex jargon and brand-influenced microcopy.

Form Design Patterns

Adam Silver. 2018

<https://formdesignpatterns.com/>



Links

- Designing Efficient Web Forms: On Structure, Inputs, Labels And Actions. <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2017/06/designing-efficient-web-forms/>
- Web Accessibility Tutorials. Forms. <https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/forms/>
- Website Forms Usability: Top 10 Recommendations. <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/web-form-design/>
- Labels and Placeholders: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/form-design-placeholders/>
- Web Form Design: Showcases And Solutions. <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/web-form-design-showcases-and-solutions/>
- Designing for Explicit Choice. <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2015/05/designing-for-explicit-choice/>

Links

- Lesser Known Uses Of Better Known Attributes. <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2025/01/lesser-known-uses-better-known-attributes/>
- Form Design — Main Aspects. <https://uxknowledgebase.com/form-design-main-aspects-7d32db3a69a7>
- Design Better Forms. <https://coyleandrew.medium.com/design-better-forms-96afadca0f49c>
- Designing More Efficient Forms: Assistance and Validation. <https://uxplanet.org/designing-more-efficient-forms-assistance-and-validation-f26a5241199d>

Links

- Form UI Design: 36 Tips & Best Practices. <https://designlab.com/blog/form-ui-design-best-practices>
- A few lessons in form design. Some basic but helpful reminders. <https://uxdesign.cc/a-few-lessons-in-form-design-2279e3bdf5f8>
- Designing Help Text for Form Fields: Real Examples. <https://uicontent.co/designing-help-text-for-form-fields-real-examples/>

Thank you!

