



# User Interface Design

Prof. Lydia Chilton

COMS 4170

22 January 2025

<http://coms4170.cs.columbia.edu/2025-spring/>

# I'm Lydia.



- I've been faculty at Columbia for 7 years.
- I was originally an Econ major, but I decided I wanted to be able to build stuff that **solve** the problems I was studying in econ, so I switched to CS.
- Research include:
  - AI + Design
  - LLMs for Journalism
  - AI generated Art
- My only hobbies are my girls, Anya (4) and Ksenia (2).

# I've been teaching Web Dev & UI for 16 years

6.470 IAP

home  
lectures  
challenge

## Web Programming

### 2010 Winners

First Place - \$6000

[IronNerd](#)

Daniel Whitlow, Jong-moon Kim

Second Place - \$5000

[NBA Rewind](#)

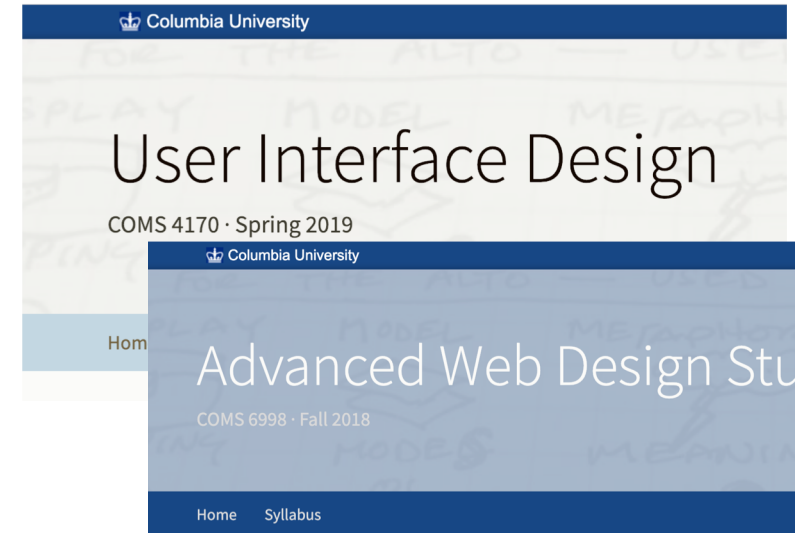
Raymond Ma

Third Place - \$4000

[Lambda Fitness](#)

Ryan Ko, Cai Gogwilt, Jacob Bredthauer

TA'd AI  
courses



**MIT**  
2008 - 2010

**Univ of Washington**  
2012 - 2013

**Stanford**  
2014 - 2016

**Columbia**  
2017 - now

# 4170 Staff

- Prof. Chilton
  - Office hours: Mondays 2:30-3:30 (after class) in CEPSR 612
  - Please come to my office hours! Ask me anything:
    - Programming questions
    - Debugging help
    - Stupid questions
    - Personal questions
    - Anything that will help you learn in this class I will attempt to address in a helpful and judgment free way.
- 28 TAs for ~575 students
  - You'll be put in sections of ~20 students.
  - Get to know your TA and the students in your section!

# Class Goals

- We want you to be able to **build interfaces** that suit and needs and abilities of users.
- We want to convince that **design is process to solve real world problems** in computer science and beyond.
- We want to you be **engaged** in the class by interacting with the staff and your fellow students.
- We want you to make a habit of **thinking about users**.

Why are UIs important?

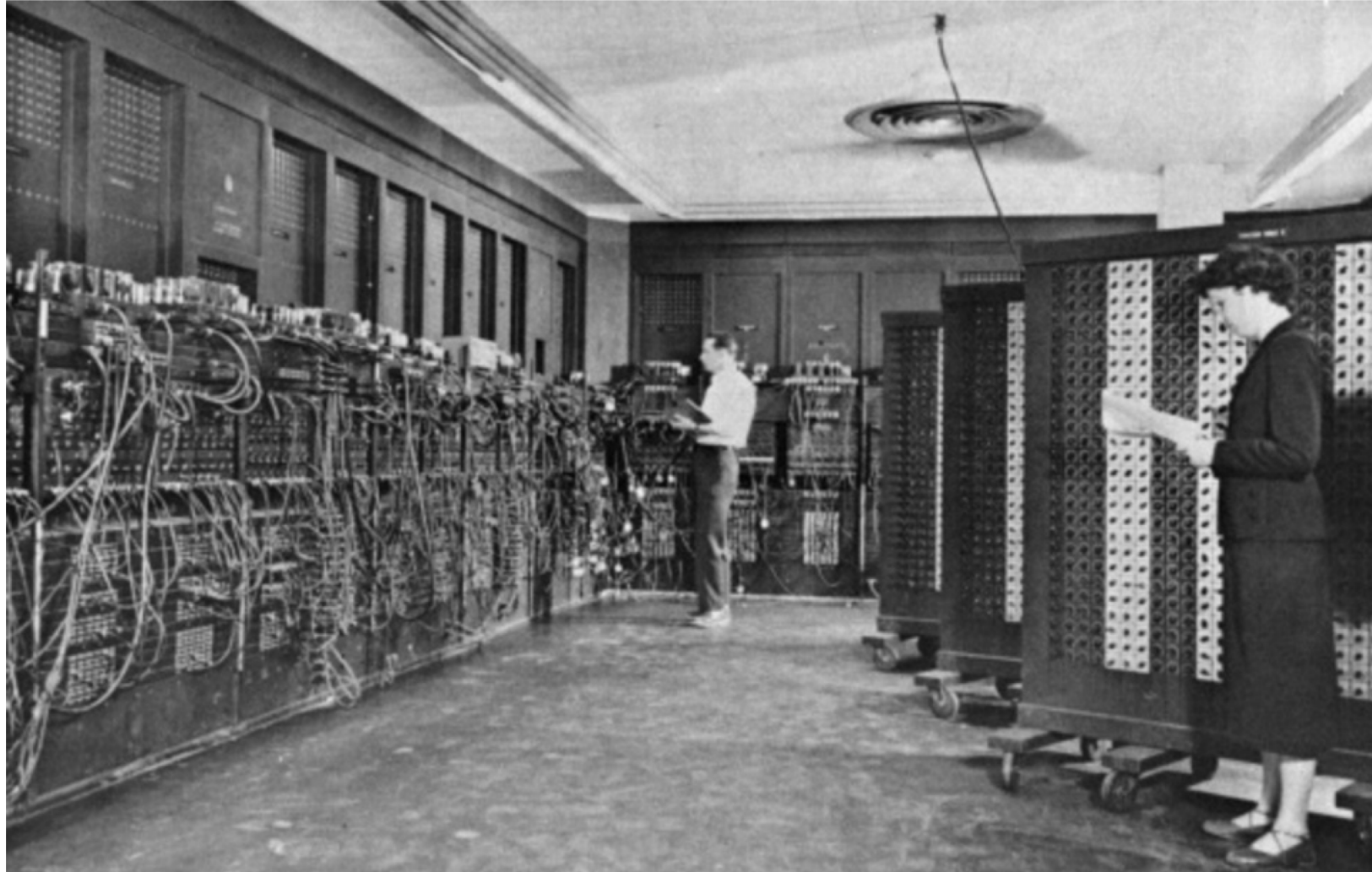
1613 – 1940s

# Computers: people who performed calculations



1940s – 1960s

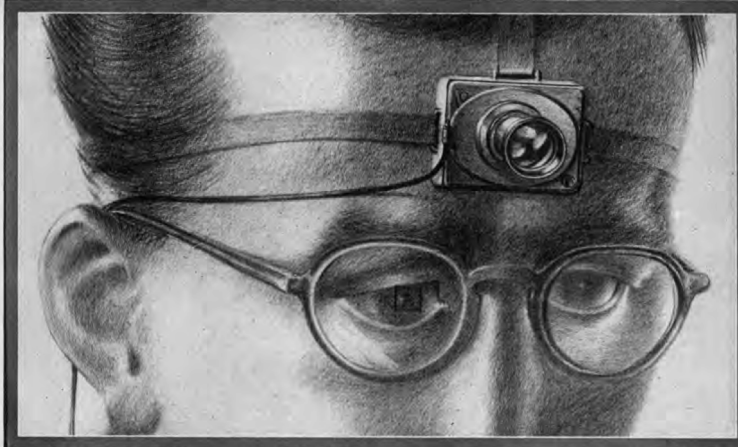
# Computers: Tools for Calculation





# Computers: tools to augment human cognition

## Vannevar Bush's vision of computers



A SCIENTIST OF THE FUTURE RECORDS EXPERIMENTS WITH A TINY CAMERA FITTED WITH UNIVERSAL-FOCUS LENS. THE SMALL SQUARE IN THE EYEGASS AT THE LEFT SIGHTS THE OBJECT

## AS WE MAY THINK

A TOP U. S. SCIENTIST FORESEES A POSSIBLE FUTURE WORLD IN WHICH MAN-MADE MACHINES WILL START TO THINK

by VANNEVAR BUSH

DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT  
Condensed from the *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1945

This has not been a scientists' war; it has been a war in which all have had a part. The scientists, burying their old professional competition in the demand of a common cause, have shared greatly and learned much. It has been exhilarating to work in effective partnership. What are the scientists to do next?

For the biologists, and particularly for the medical scientists, there can be little indecision, for their war work has hardly required them to leave the old paths. Many indeed have been able to carry on their war research in their familiar peacetime laboratories. Their objectives remain much the same.

It is the physicists who have been thrown most violently off stride, who have left academic pursuits for the making of strange destructive gadgets, who have had to devise new methods for their unanticipated assignments. They have done their part on the devices that made it possible to turn back the enemy. They have worked in combined effort with the physicists of our allies. They have felt within themselves the stir of achievement. They have been part of a great team. Now one asks where they will find objectives worthy of their best.

There is a growing mountain of research. But there is increased evidence that we are being bogged down today as specialization extends. The investigator is staggered by the findings and conclusions of thousands of other workers—conclusions which he cannot find time to grasp, much less to remember, as they appear. Yet specialization becomes increasingly necessary for prog-

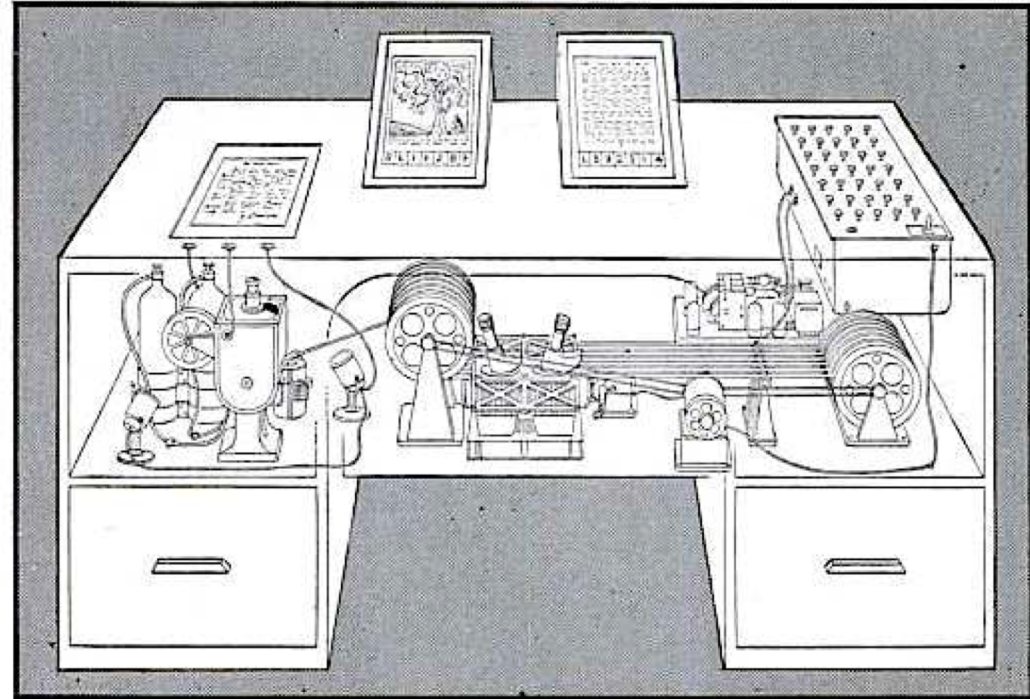
ress, and the effort to bridge between disciplines is correspondingly superficial.

Professionally our methods of transmitting and reviewing the results of research are generations old and by now are totally inadequate for their purpose. If the aggregate time spent in writing scholarly works and in reading them could be evaluated, the ratio between these amounts of time might well be startling. Those who conscientiously attempt to keep abreast of current thought, even in restricted fields, by close and continuous reading might well shy away from an examination calculated to show how much of the previous month's efforts could be produced on call.

Mendel's concept of the laws of genetics was lost to the world for a generation because his publication did not reach the few who were capable of grasping and extending it. This sort of catastrophe is undoubtedly being repeated all about us as truly significant attainments become lost in the mass of the inconsequential.

Publication has been extended far beyond our present ability to make real use of the record. The summation of human experience is being expanded at a prodigious rate, and the means we use for threading through the consequent maze to the momentarily important item is the same as was used in the days of square-rigged ships.

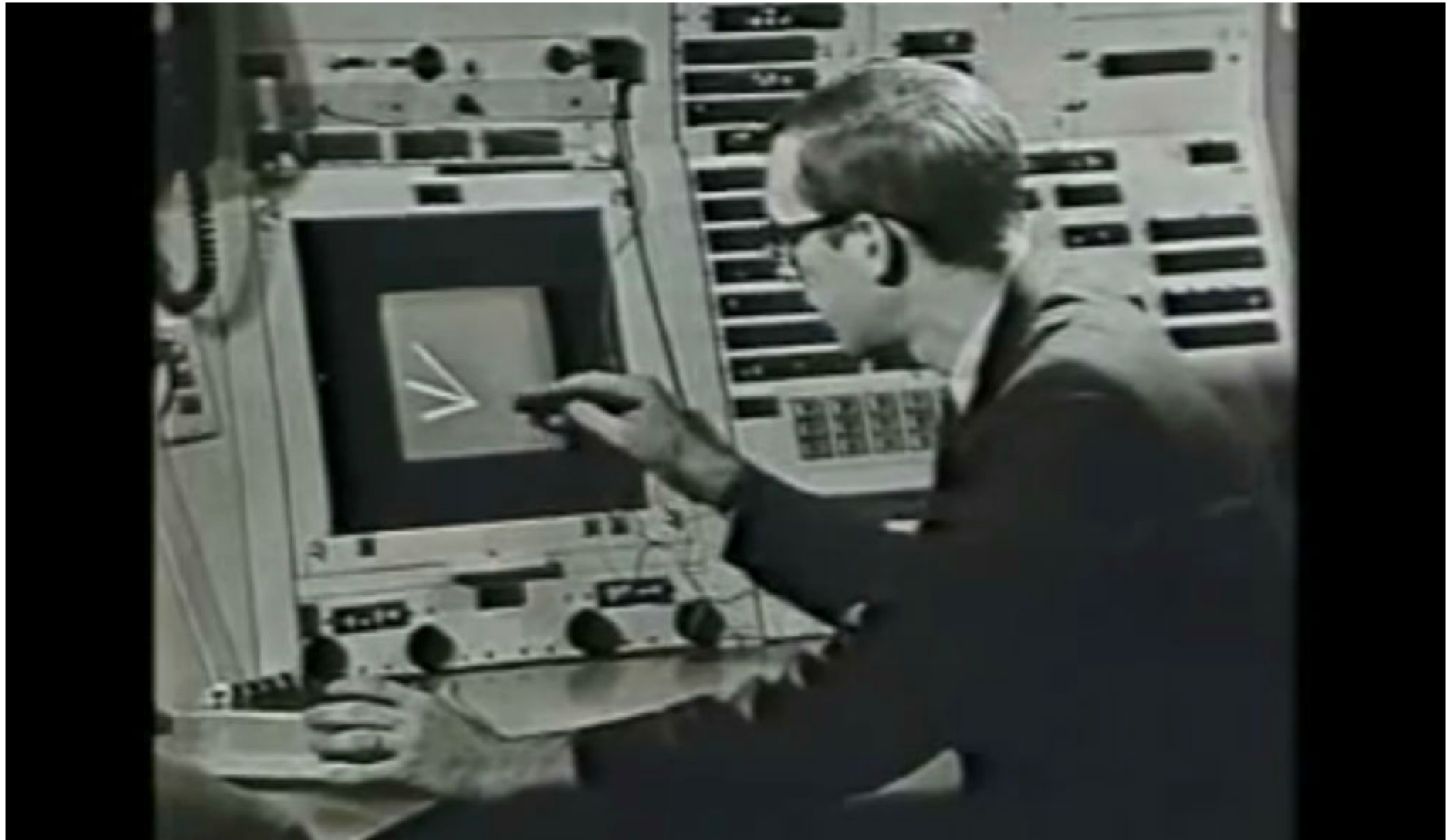
But there are signs of a change as new and powerful instrumentalities come into use. Photocells capable of seeing things in a physical sense, advanced photography which can record what is seen or even what is now, thermionic tubes capable of controlling potent forces under the guidance of



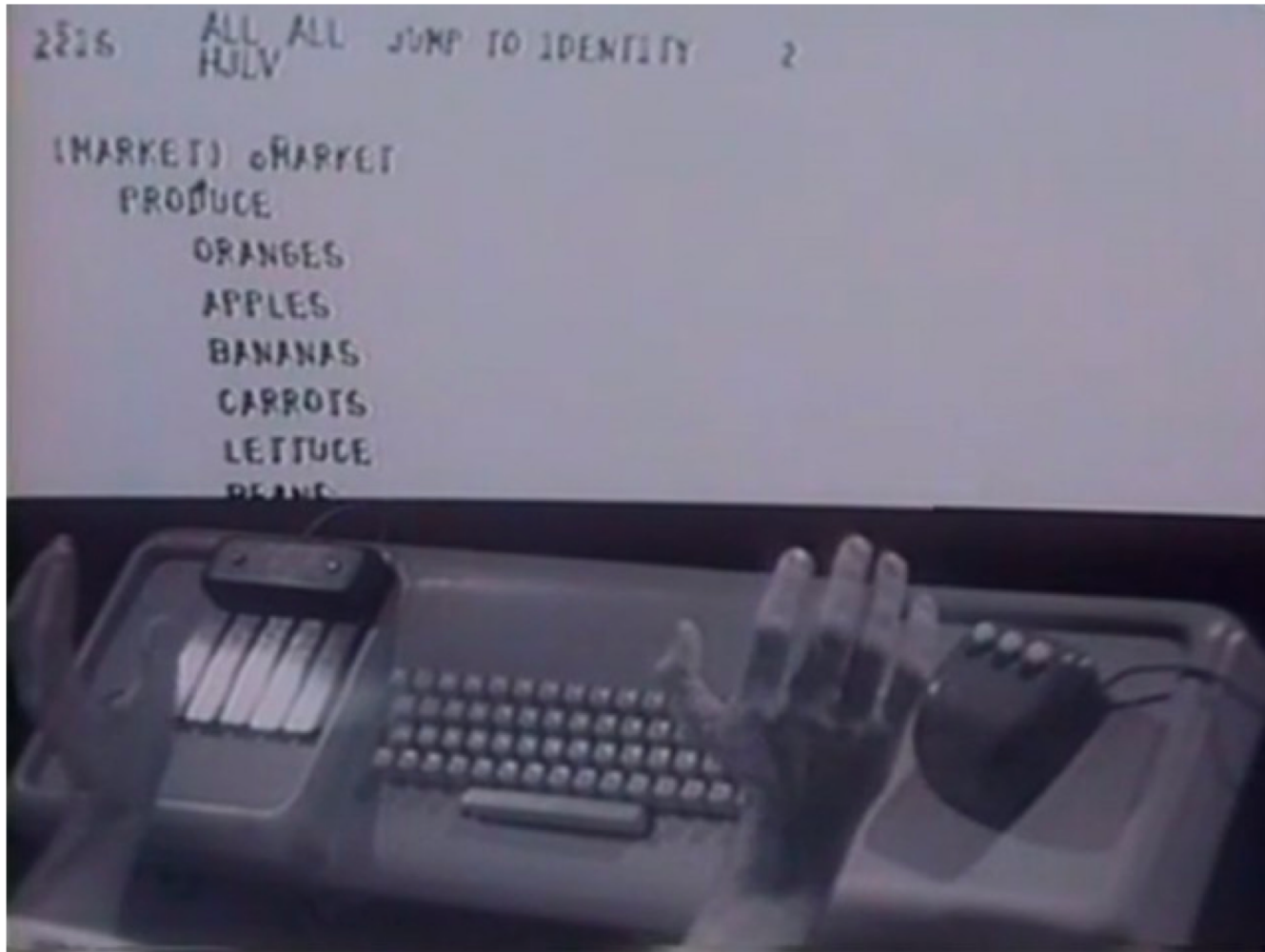
**MEMEX** in the form of a desk would instantly bring files and material on any subject to the operator's fingertips. Slanting translucent viewing screens magnify supermicrofilm filed by code numbers. At left is a mechanism which automatically photographs longhand notes, pictures and letters, then files them in the desk for future reference.

**AS WE MAY THINK** CONTINUED

# 1963: First Graphical User Interface Ivan Sutherland's CAD software, Sketchpad

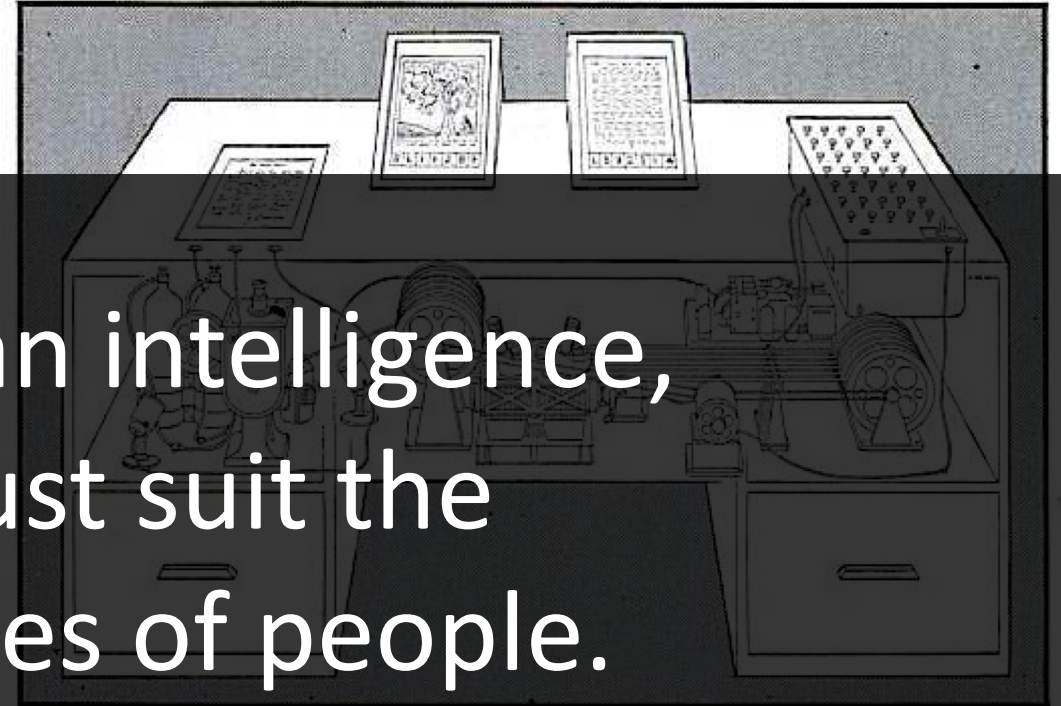
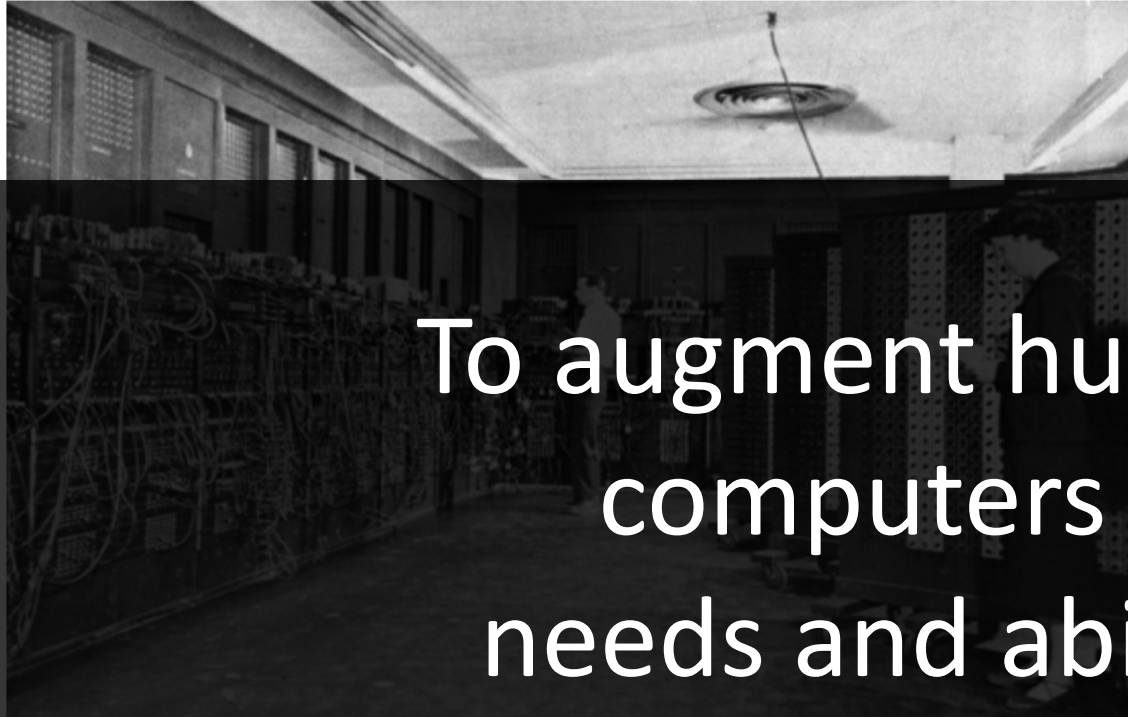


# 1968: Interaction devices for computer use. Douglas Engelbart's mouse



Computers are tools for calculation.

Computers are tools to augment human intelligence.



To augment human intelligence,  
computers must suit the  
needs and abilities of people.

**Computer-centric**  
interface

**Human-centric**  
interface

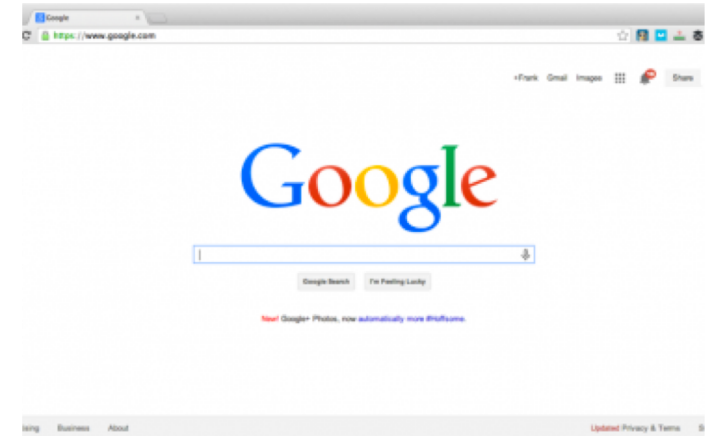
# The Internet: The Rise of Usability



For physical products, users did not get to experience the usability of the product until **after they bought it.**



For desktop software, users call expensive support centers, but the costs aren't "charged" to the software engineers, so they have **no motivation to ship great UIs.**



On the Web, users experience the usability of a site before they have committed to using it and before they buy it.

**UI is now the primary "selling point" of software**

What will we learn?

# Part 1: Understand users and build websites that suit the needs and abilities.

- Learn UI principles and apply them to web programming
- Technologies include: HTML, JavaScript, CSS, JQuery, Bootstrap, Flask.
  - We will teach all these technologies. No web programming experience required.
  - General experience with programming and debugging is required.
- Weekly assignments
- An individual midterm project

# Part 2: Design useable systems through iteration and feedback.

Group project to design and build a website that teaches a concept through interaction and feedback.

- Weekly assignments
- Completed by the group, turned in individually.
- Everyone in the group must have a working copy of the code running on their machine.
- Weekly assignments build up to the final deliverable.



# You will be assigned to a TA group

- Your TA is your mentor. Get to know them!
- Your group will have ~20 students.
  - Some of them will be your project partners.
  - Get to know them!
- You can also come to any office hour you like.

Grading: this class is not curved.

90% ≤ **A** ≤ 100%

No A+ grades will be given

80% ≤ **B** < 90%

This class is designed so everyone can get 100% by showing up and doing the work.

70% ≤ **C** < 80%

60% ≤ **D** < 70%

**F** < 60%

# Grade breakdown

- **Weekly Homework: 60%**
  - 12 homework assignments
  - Each homework worth 5% of grade
- **Individual Midterm Project: 10%**
  - Due Friday March 14<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm.
- **Group Final Project: 20%**
  - Due Monday May 12<sup>th</sup> 11:59pm. No late assignment accepted.
  - At all. Not even one minute late.
- **Design Section Preparation and Participation: 10%**
  - In the design half of the class (after spring break). You will mainly learn by presenting your work and iterating on feedback from your TA.
  - It is essential to come prepared and actively participate.
  - If there is a week where you cannot make the regularly schedule time for your section meeting, email your TA in advance of the meeting and suggest 3 times in the next two days to schedule a make up.
- No final exam

# Weekly HW deadlines

- Generally, assignments are due Tuesdays at 11:59pm.
  - There is a grace period, until 8am Wednesday morning.
- Assignments are meant to take 5-8 hours.
  - For people with web programming experience they often take 2-3 hours.
  - If you are spending significantly longer on assignments, come talk to me or a TA. We can help teach you programming and debugging strategies.
- There is also a short warm-up assignment due Fridays at 11:59pm
  - WTF????

# Warm ups

- Warm ups help you get started early.
- With 500+ people in this class, we can't help everyone on the assignment the night before it's due.
- We at least need to get installation issues out of the way.
- They are short. No more than 1 hr. If it takes you more than one hour, turn in whatever you have at 1 hr and finish the rest on the main assignment.
- If there is something you are having trouble with, email your TA early!
- If you honestly think this will impede your learning rather than help, email me, and we'll work something out.
- Don't use late passes for warm-ups. If you are generally on time with warmups, that's what we care about.

# Late Policy for Homework

- **2 Late Passes:** You may turn in 2 main assignments up to 5 days late with no penalty or excuse needed.
  - You can be sick, you can be at your sister's wedding, you can be celebrating Orthodox Easter Monday with your in-laws, you can be interviewing for a job, you can be scrolling Insta all day.
  - I do not care why. You can manage your own time.
  - In the past, 2 late passes has been a reasonable amount of flexibility to give. If you think you need more (you have 12 religious holidays that all fall on Tuesday nights), email me before HW 1 is due.
  - This cannot be used on the midterm project or the final project.
- Each late assignments must be turned in no more than 5 days (120 hours) after the original deadline. There is no difference between an assignment being 1 hour late or 99 hours late.
- If you are not using a late pass, late assignments will get 10% deduction for every 24 hours late (which is also very generous!)

# Cheating Policy

Can I use generative AI?

Can I use code from the web?

Can I work with my friends?

**Yes. DO IT!**

As long as you can demonstrate understanding, ownership of the code and designs you produce in this class.

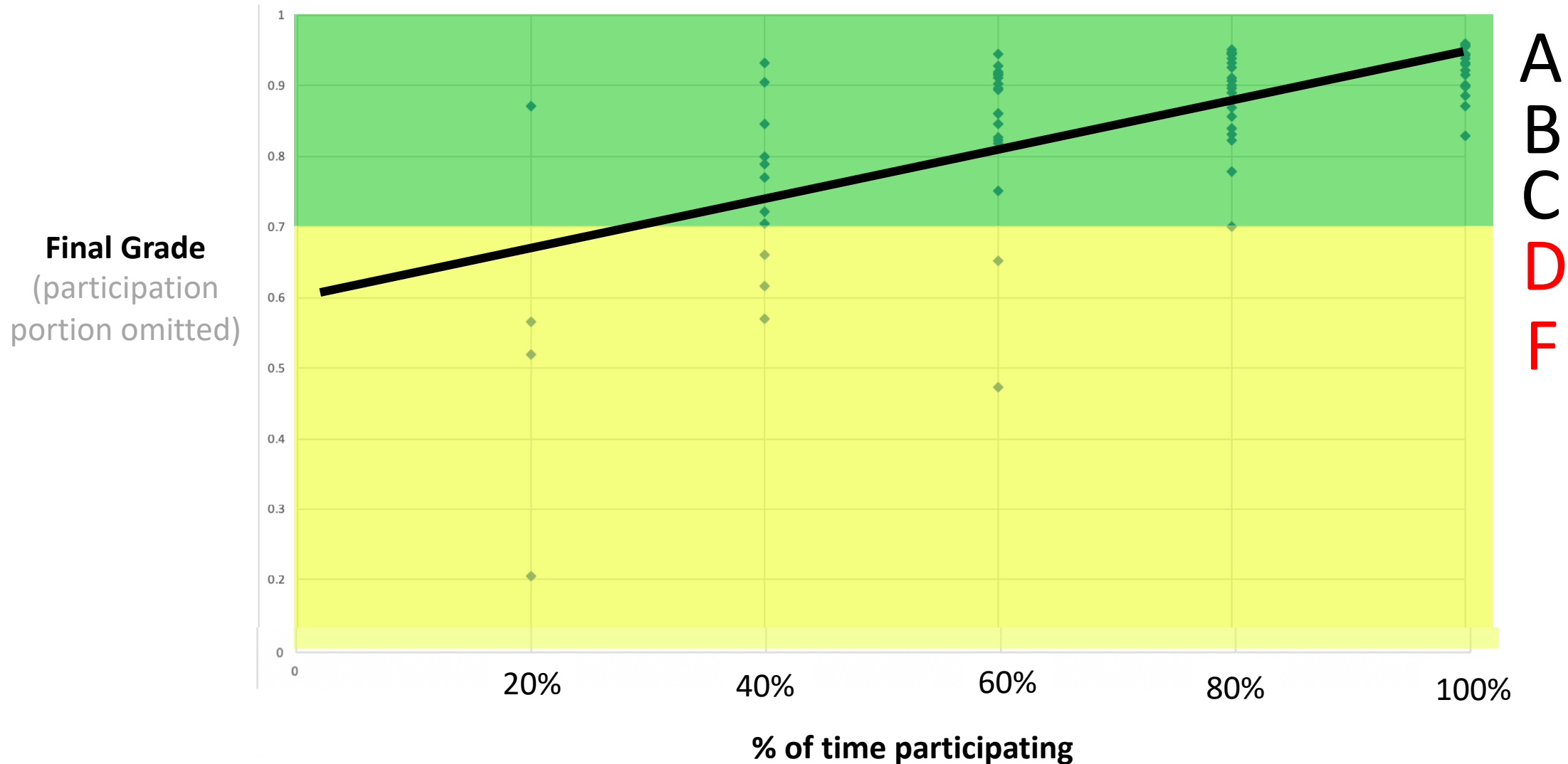
If we have questions about your submission, we reserve the right to have you explain your code and thought process to us.

# Participation is 10% of your grade

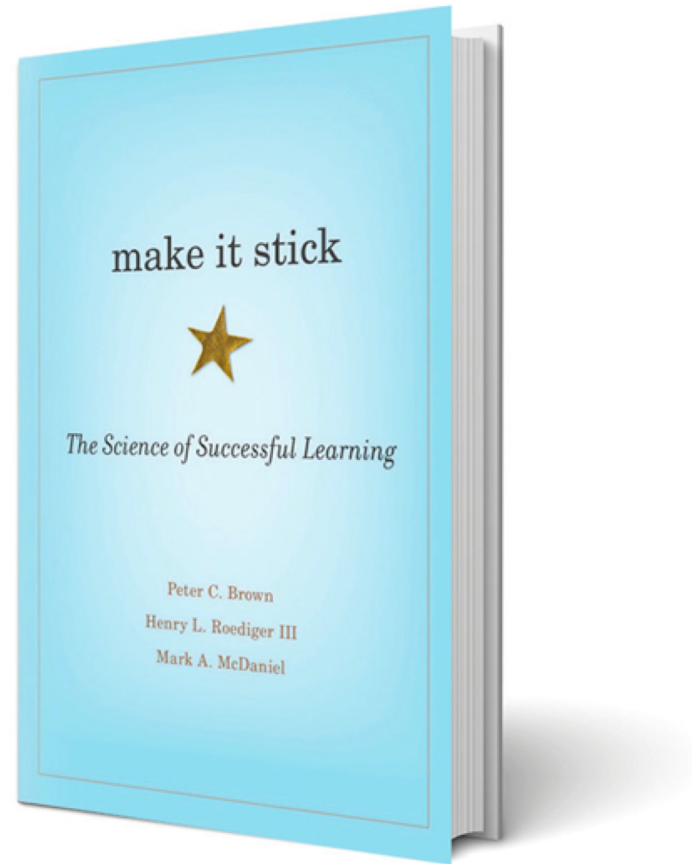
- During the second half of this class, you'll have weekly feedback sessions with your TA.
- These are only effective if you come prepared and participate.
- So there are points for it.
- If you can't make a feedback session, email your TA in advance and suggest 3 times in the next two days to schedule a make up.



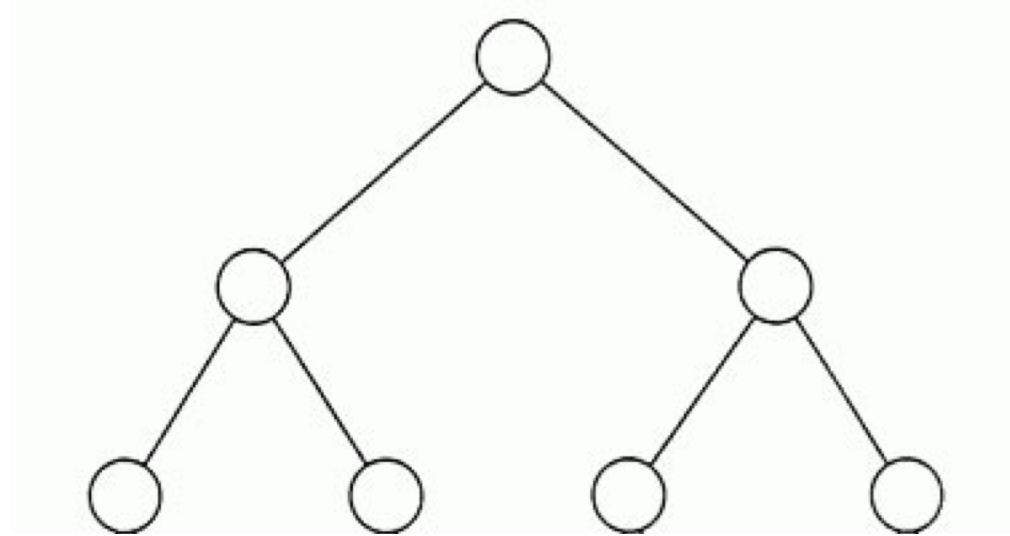
# Why is participation 10% of my grade?



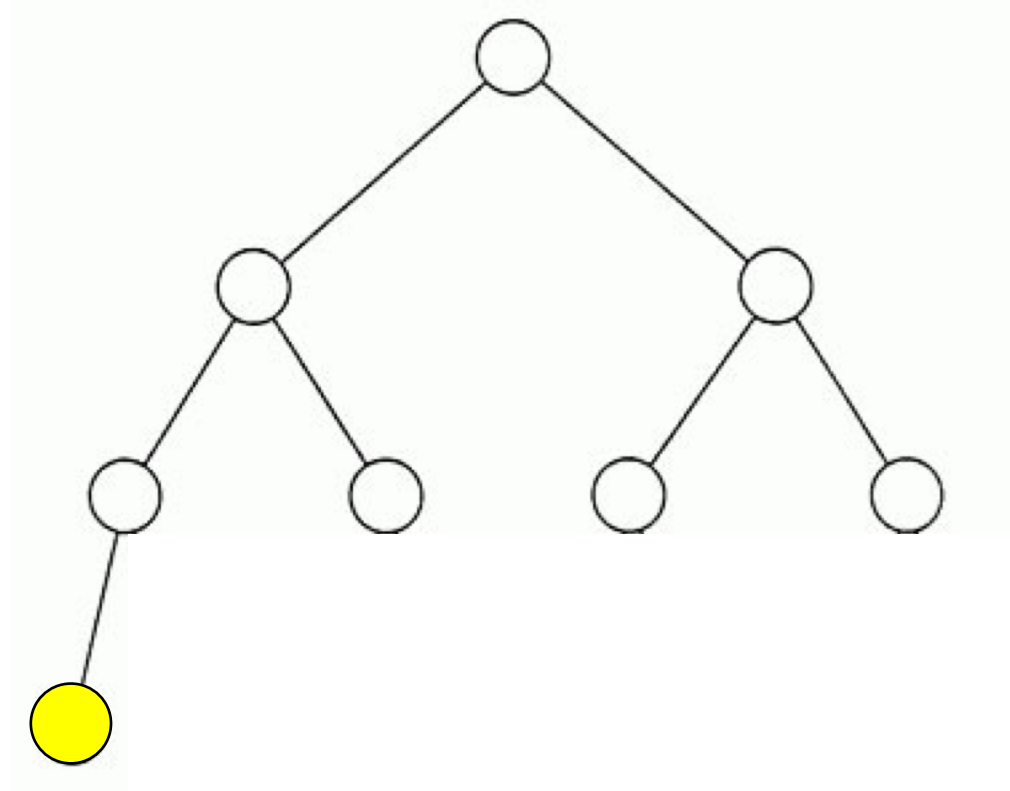
# Two reasons why participation affects learning



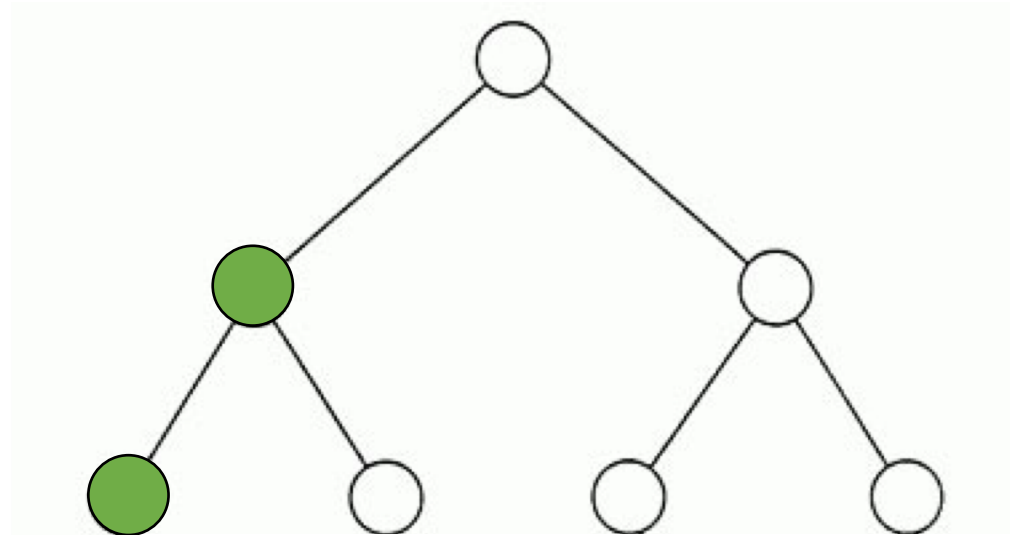
# Human memory is tree-structured



New knowledge gets appended to the tree.

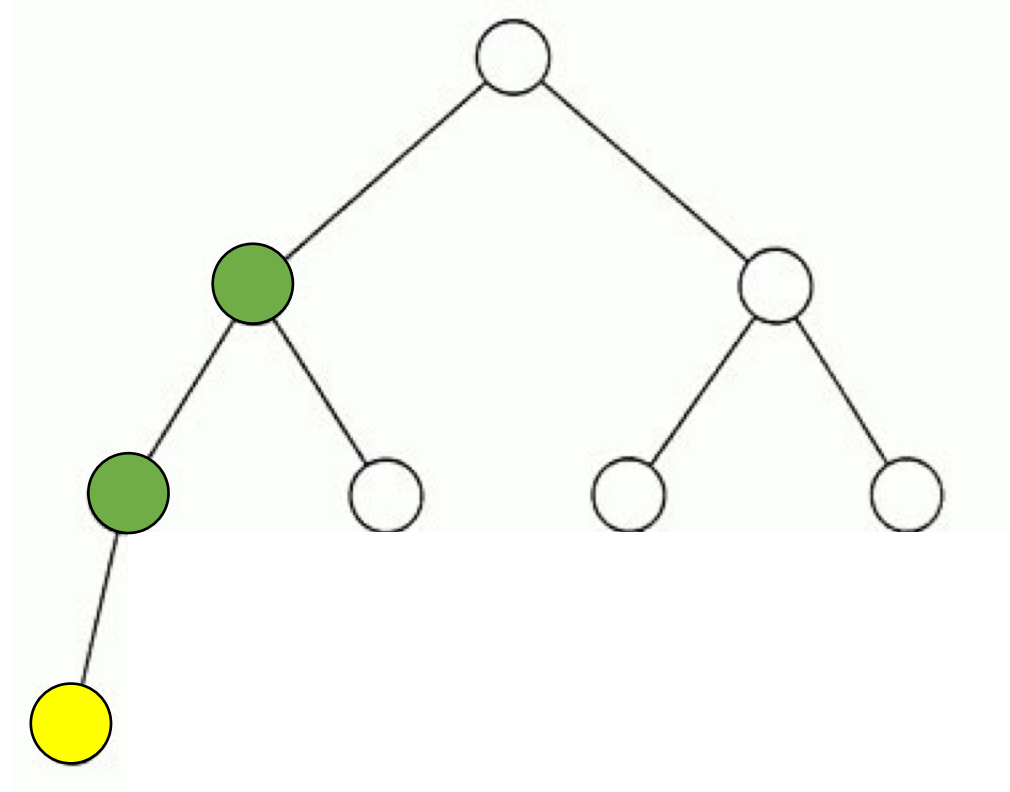


# Where does new knowledge get appended?



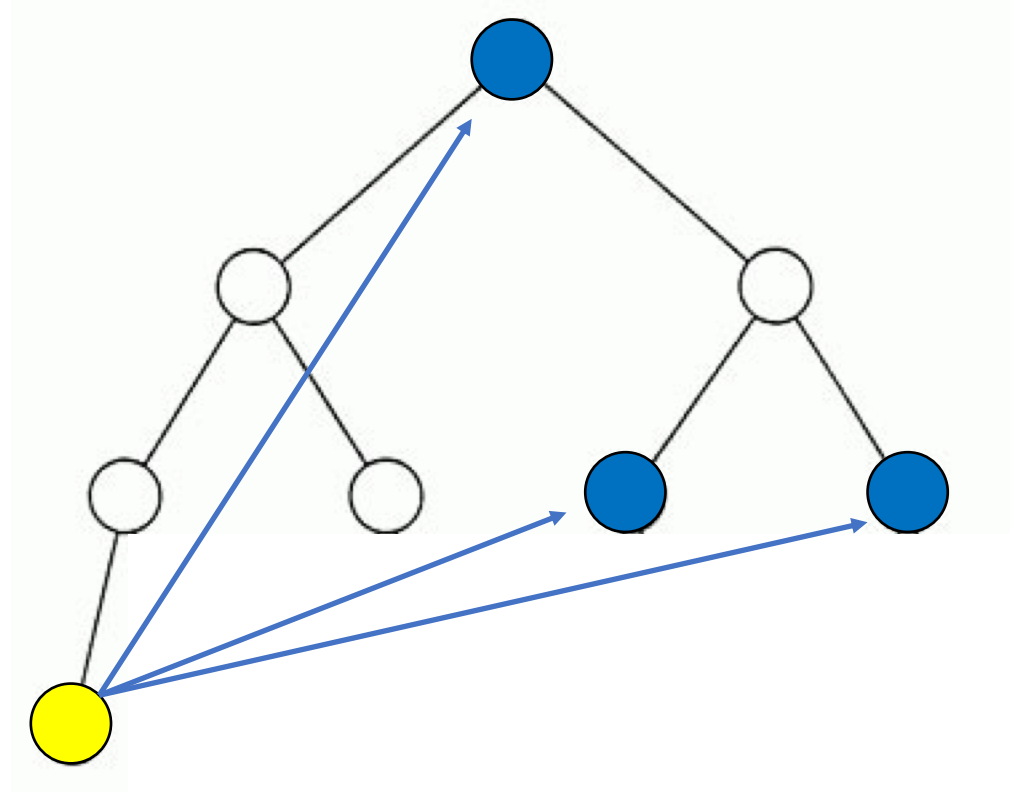
To where nodes of tree are currently active.

1. By guessing about new knowledge before it is presented, you warm up the right place to store it in memory.

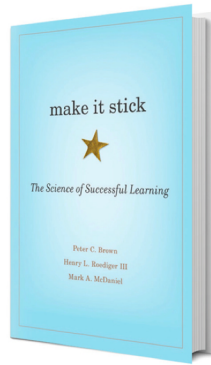


**Generation:** Guessing before you hear the answer

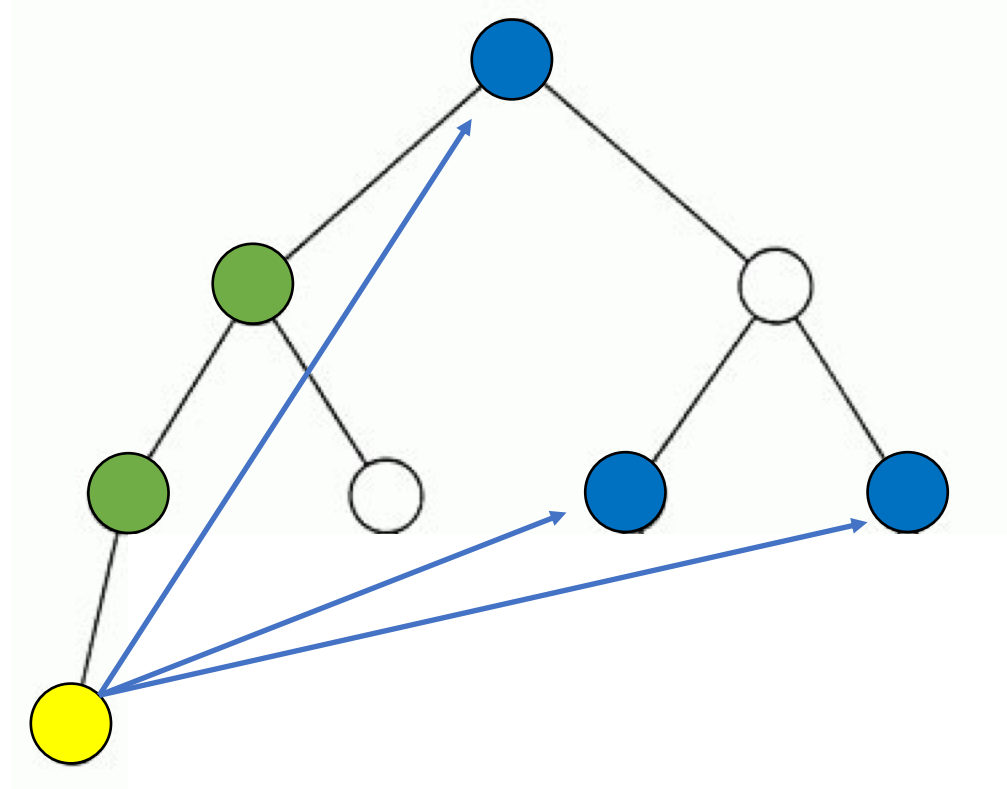
2. Once you hear the new knowledge, connect it to other knowledge so it will trigger at relevant times.



**Elaboration:** Relating new knowledge to old topics.



# Generation & Elaboration



Guess about the new knowledge.  
Must take risks, you will probably be (partially)  
wrong.

Relate new knowledge to old topics.  
This aspect of participation is about providing  
insights.



Our goal is to help you learn useful skills and a profound way of solving real problems.

- We want you to make a habit of **thinking about users**.
- We want to convince that **design is crucial** to CS, the universe and everything
- We want you to be **engaged** in the class. Interact with us and your fellow students.

# Lecture 1: 10 Usability Heuristics

Prof. Chilton

COMS 4170

22 January 2025

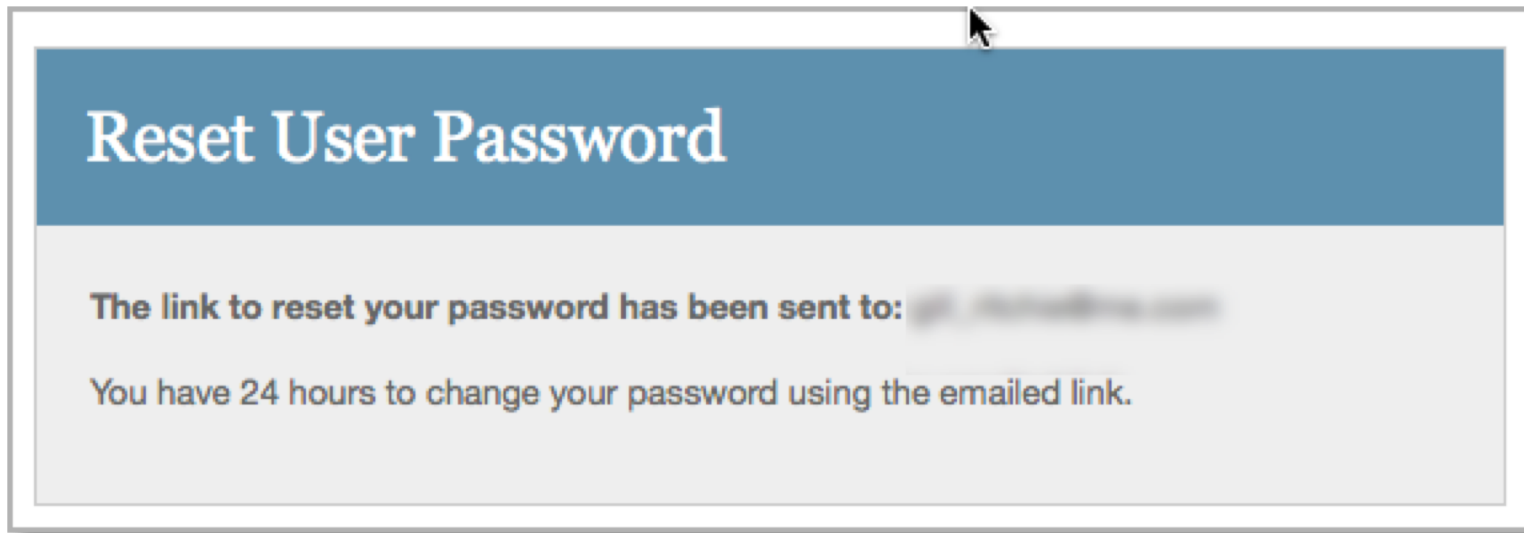
# 1. Visibility of system status

The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.



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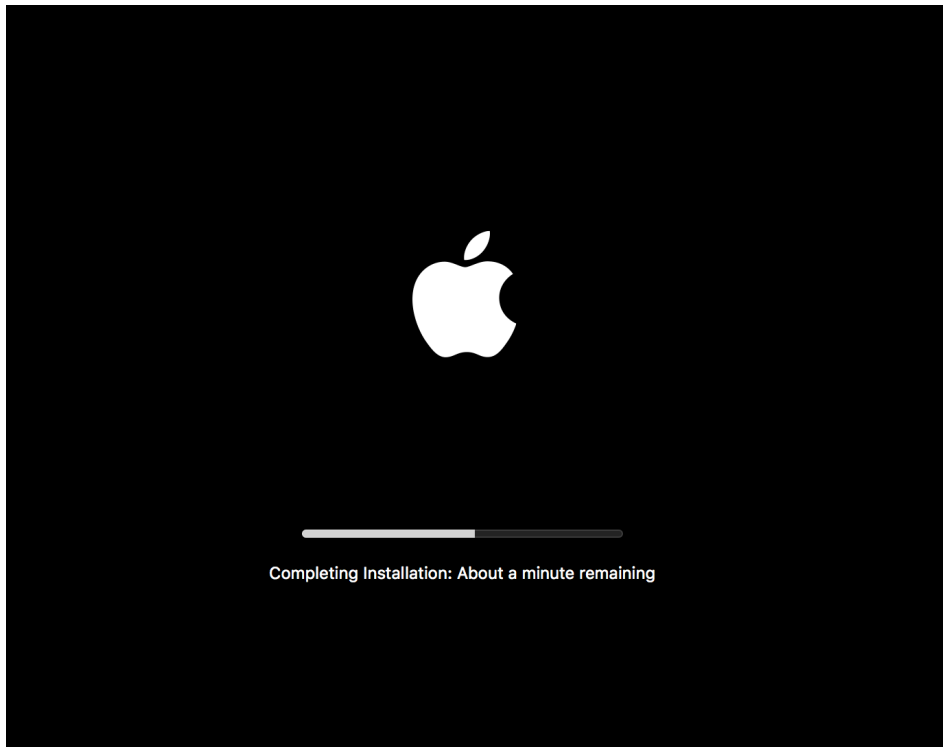
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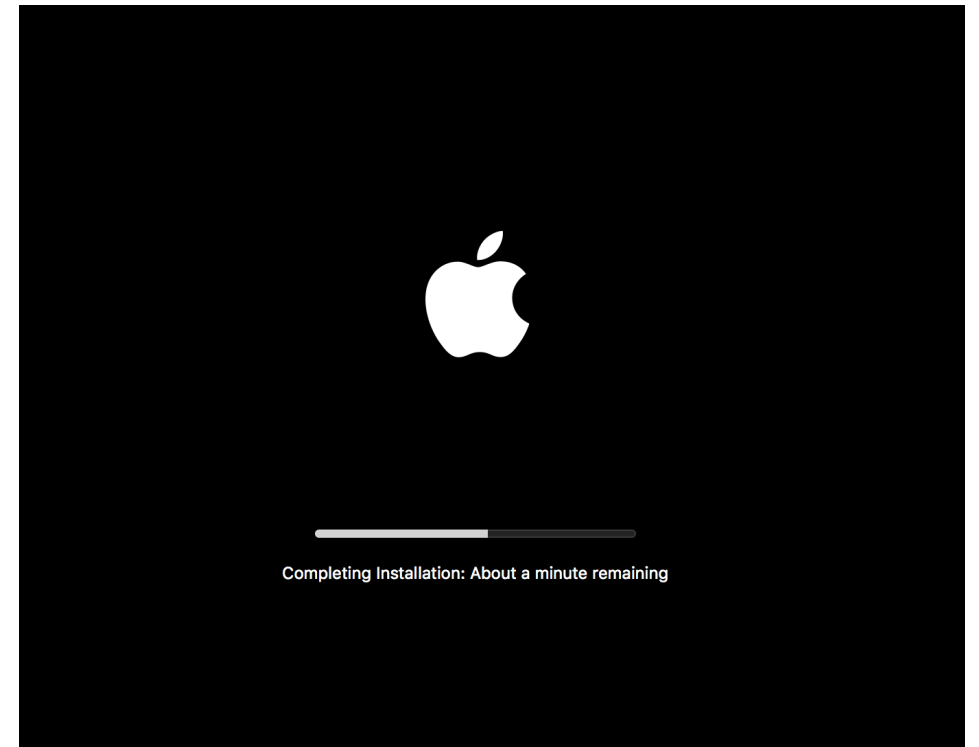


# 1. **Violation:** Visibility of system status

The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.



4 hours later...



# 1. Violation: Visibility of system status

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## Student Services Online

### ► Wait List

[Class Roster](#) | [Contact Us](#)

#### Spring 2022 COMS 4170 W USER INTERFACE DESIGN sec: 001

Instructor: **Lydia Chilton** . List Type: **Self-Managed**. Message: **No**

Students

View/Approve/Deny

Configuration

Change Type/Disable

Message

Update Instructions

Activity

View Wait List Log

**Class capacity:** 385 **Enrollment:** 0 **Approved:** 0 **Waitlist\*** 751

\*Limited registration over the cap is now accepted; however, accepting students over the course cap will not result in a larger room assignment.

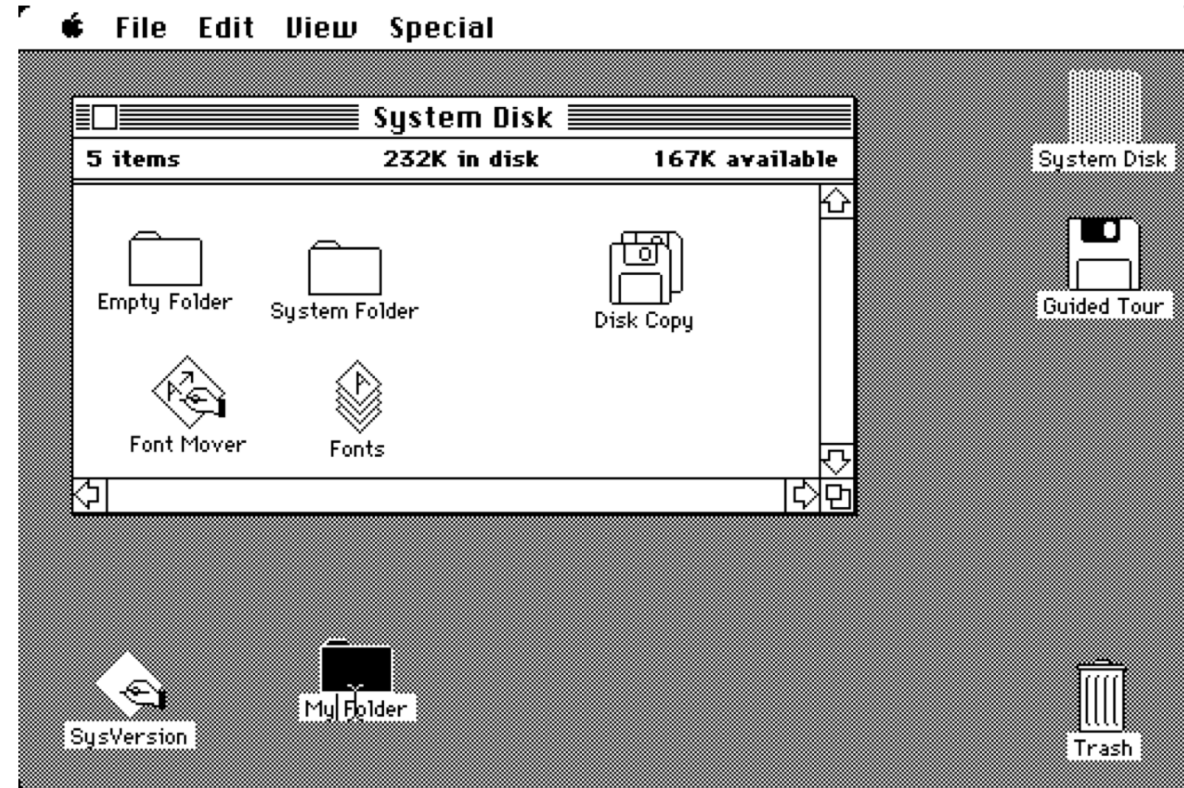
Show All Details

Refresh List

See Wait List Activity

## 2. Match between system and the real world

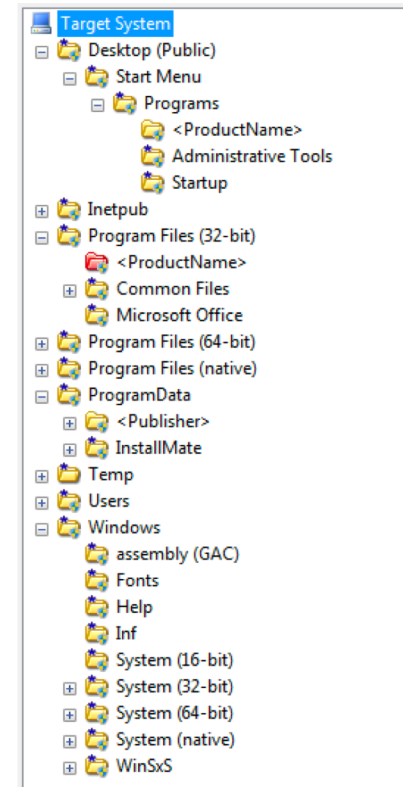
The system should speak the users' language, with words, phrases and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms.





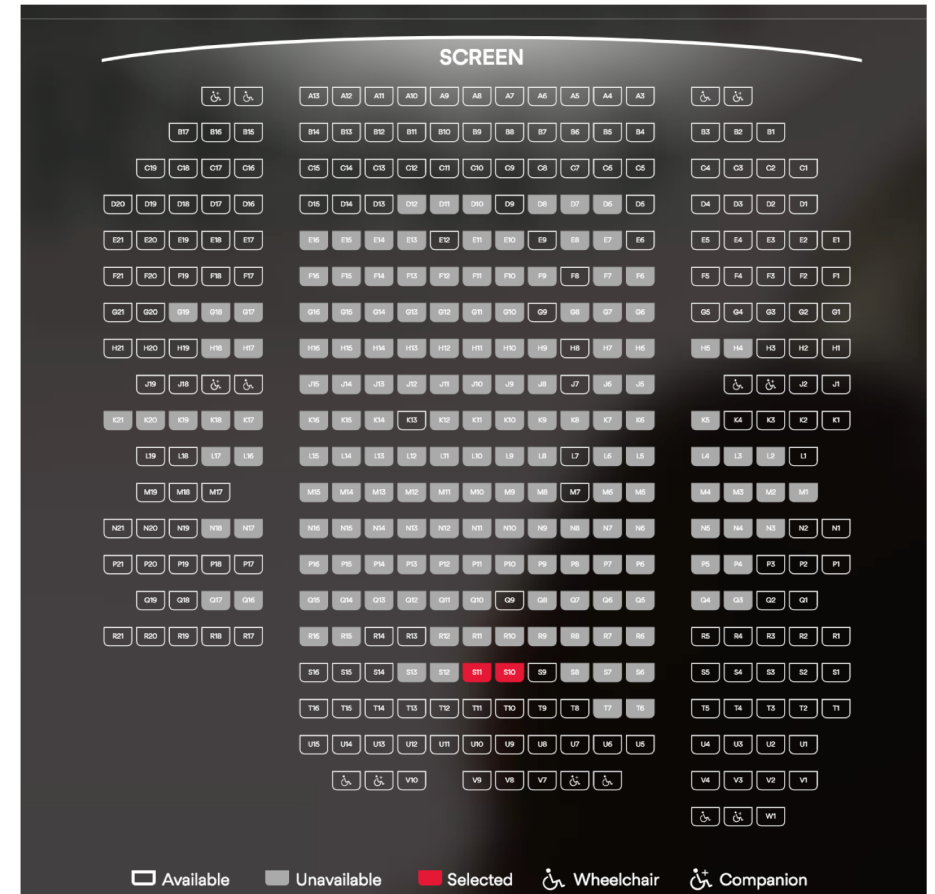
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### **CREAT - create a new file**

(Compatible with UNIX System V C)

#### **Usage:**

```
#include <files.h>  
fd = creat( name, mode );
```

"I'd spell **creat** with an **e**."

# 3. User control and freedom (Navigation)

Users should be able to quickly make choices, correct mistakes or backtrack on choices made. Support undo and redo.

The screenshot shows the Amazon.com interface for a search in the 'Dressers & Chests of Drawers' category. The top navigation bar includes the Amazon Prime logo, a search bar with the current category, and links for Departments, Browsing History, Lydia's Amazon.com, Today's Deals, Gift Cards, Registry, Sell, and Help. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for Amazon Home, Shop by Room, Home Décor, Furniture, and Kitchen. The main content area features a 'Dressers' heading, a 'Best sellers' section with three product cards, and a 'Related to items you've viewed' section. A sidebar on the left is highlighted with a red border and contains the following elements:

- Show results for:**
  - Home & Kitchen
  - Furniture
  - Bedroom Furniture
  - Dressers**
- Refine by:**
  - Material**
    - Wood
    - Metal
    - Manufactured Wood
    - Wicker
    - Glass
    - Leather
    - Vinyl
    - [See more](#)
  - Furniture Finish**
    - White
    - Black
    - Cherry
    - Espresso
    - Oak
    - Walnut
    - Mahogany

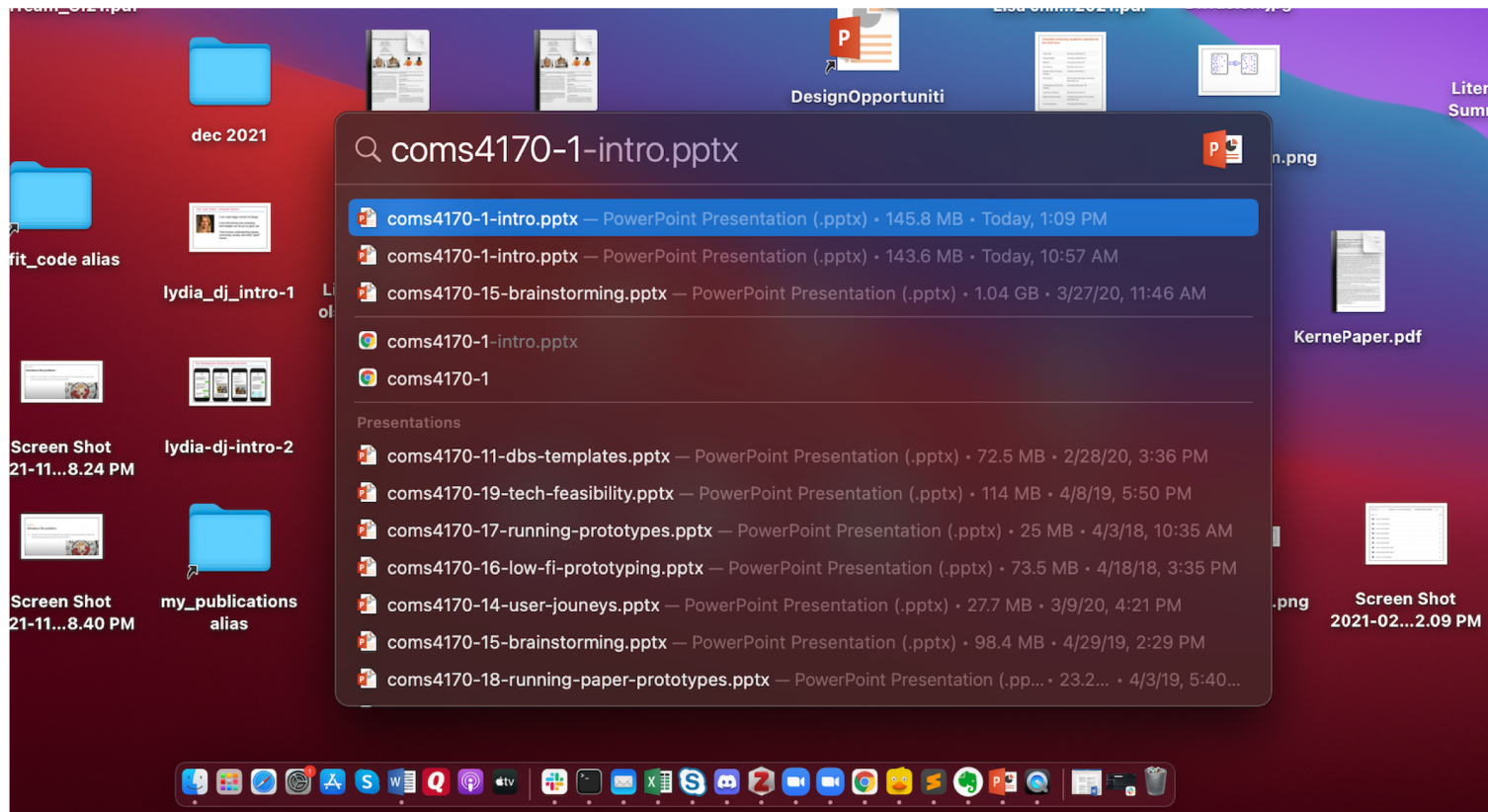
The 'Best sellers' section displays three products:

- Tvilum 70296cj Scottsdale 6 Drawer Double...:** \$163.30, Prime, 1 star rating.
- Delta Children Universal 6 Drawer Dresser...:** \$222.03, Prime, 1,258 star ratings.
- Black Sonoma 6 Drawer Dresser:** Prepac, 537 star ratings.

The 'Related to items you've viewed' section shows three smaller product images.

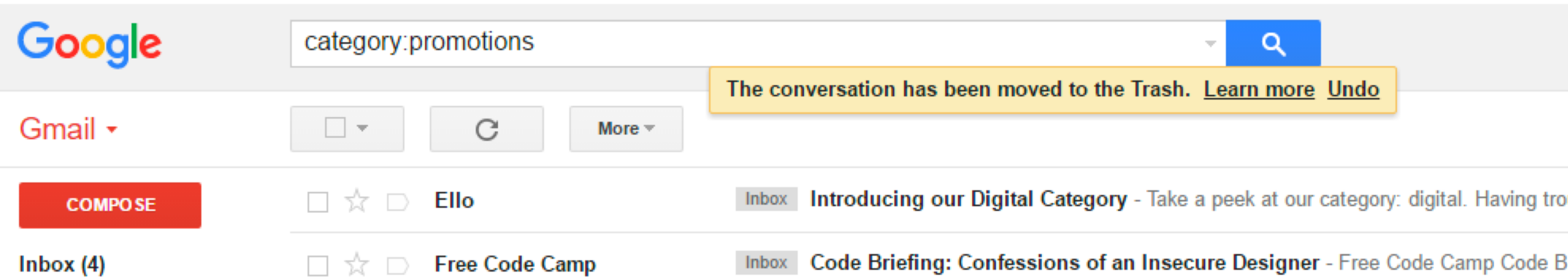
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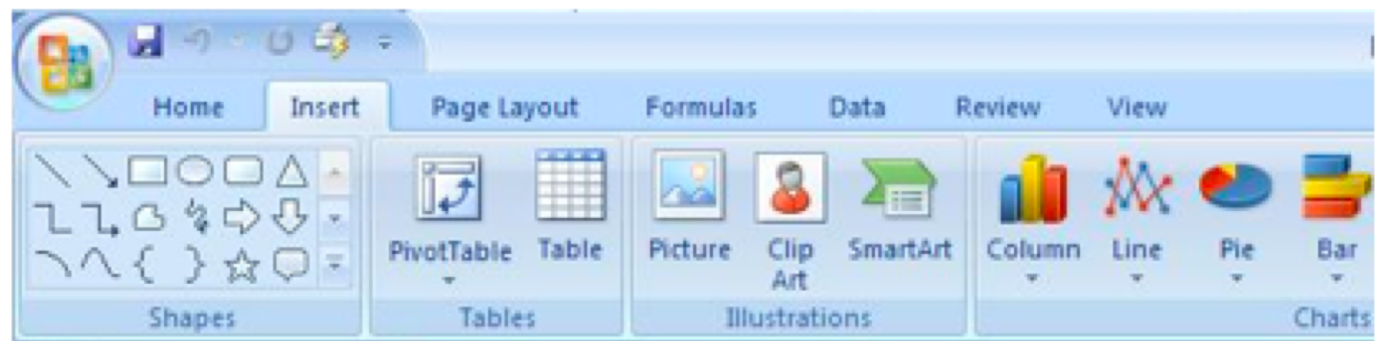
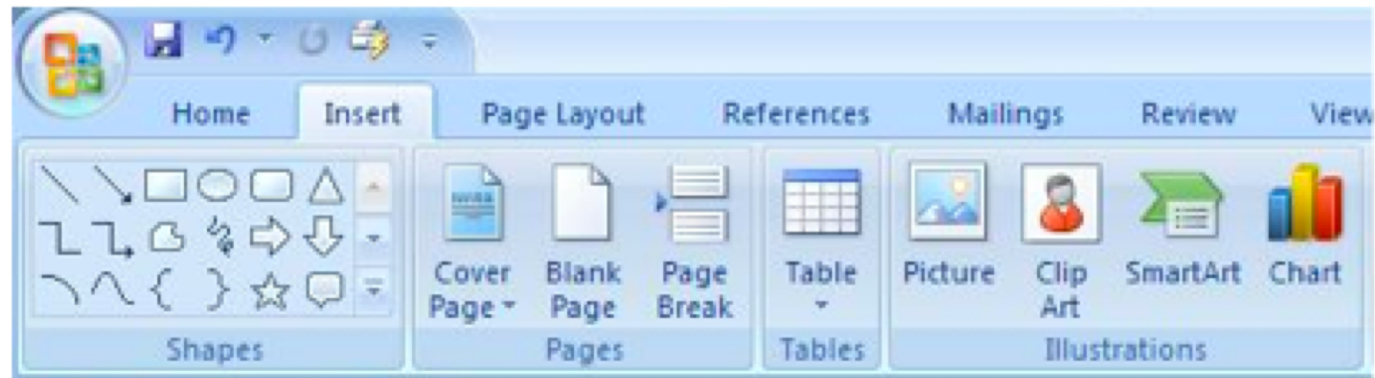
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# 4. Consistency and standards

Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform conventions.



## 4. Consistency and standards

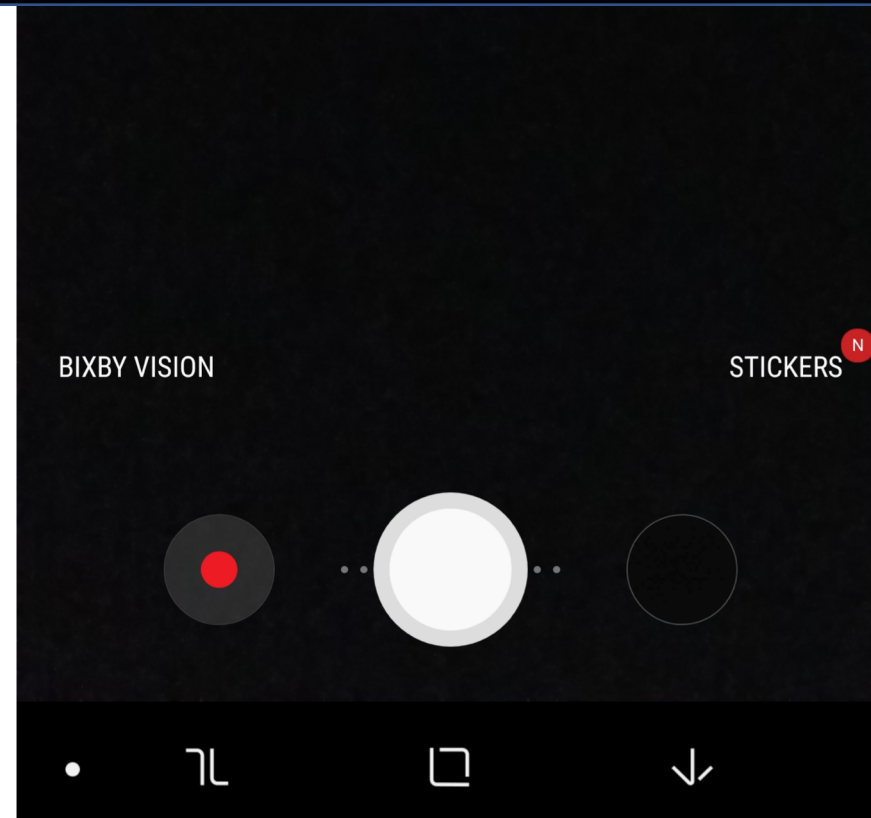
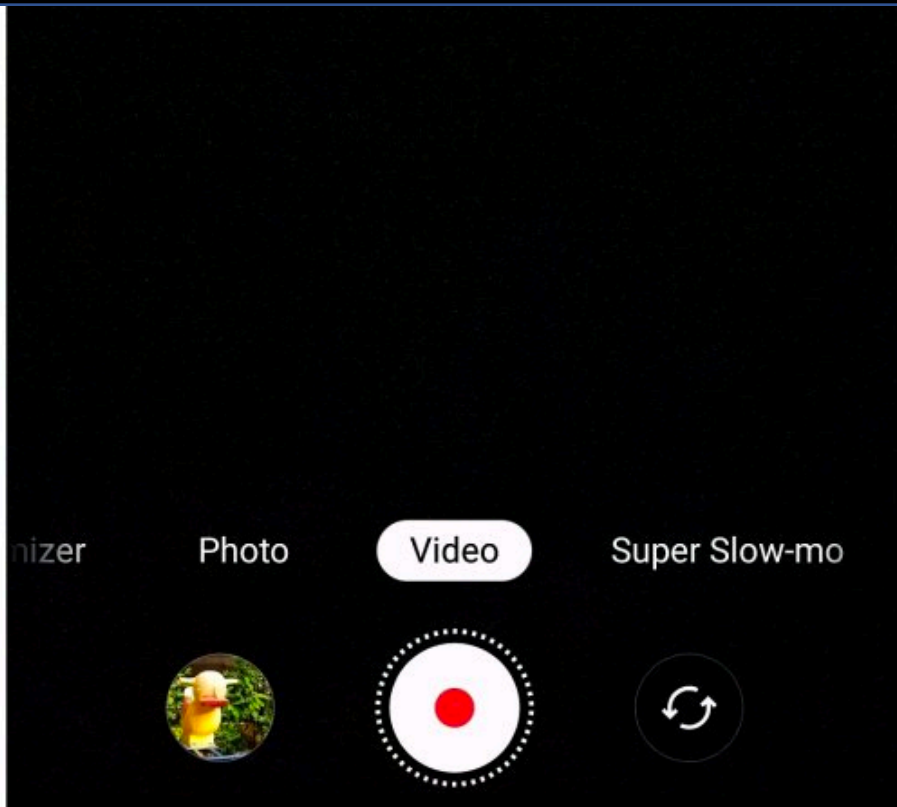
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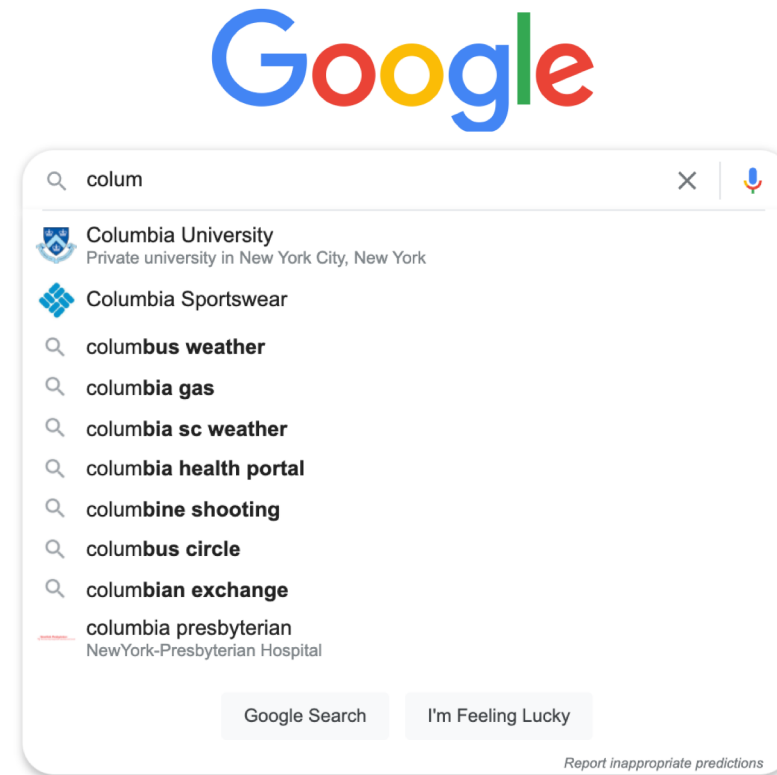
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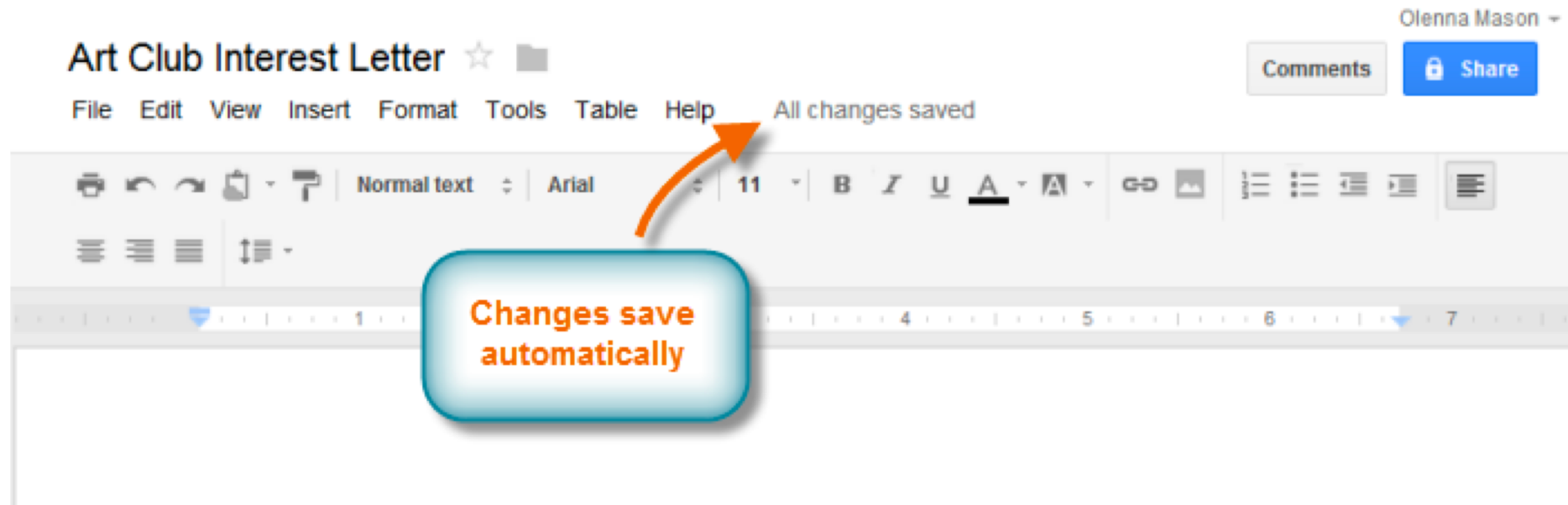
# 5. Error prevention

Even better than good error messages is a careful design which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place.



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## 5. Violation: Error prevention

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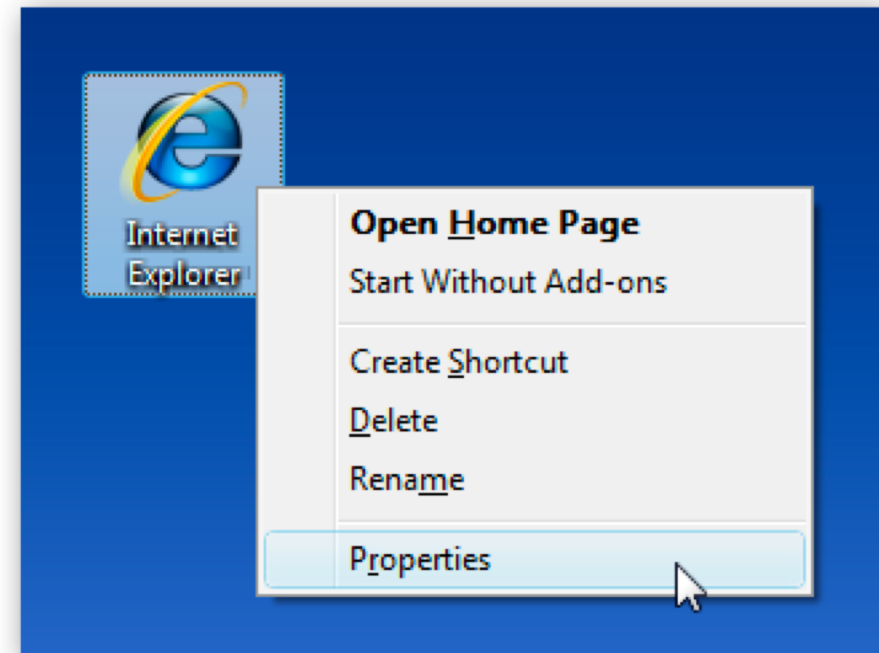
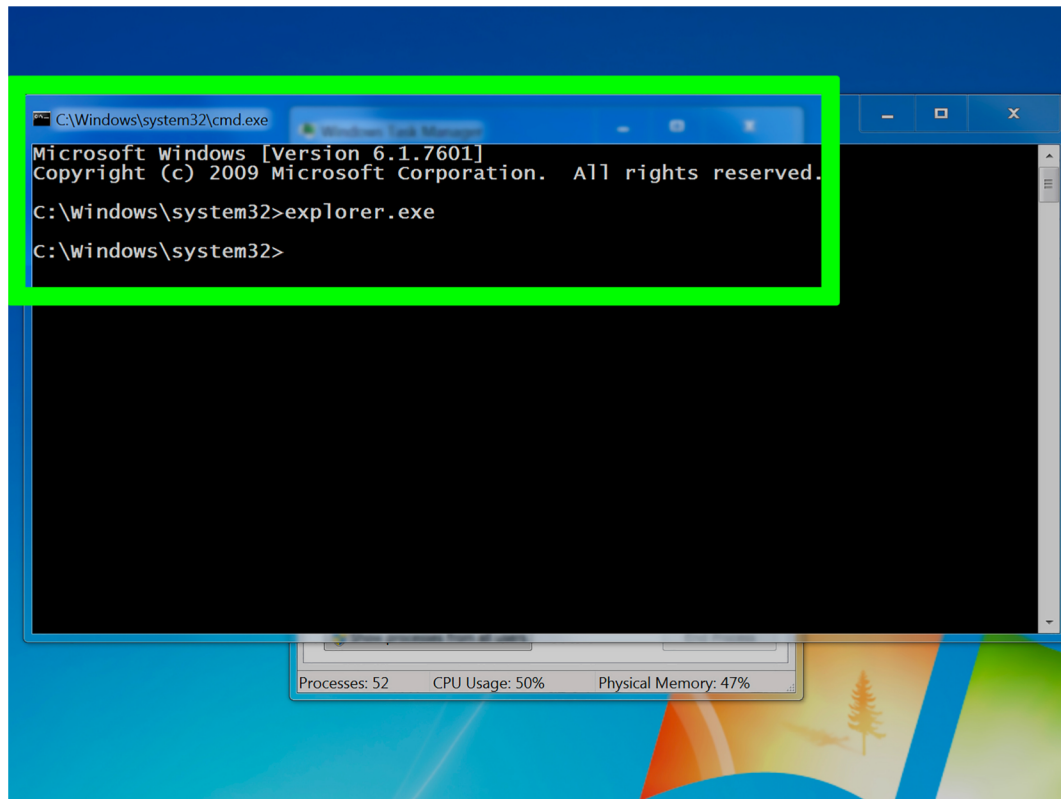
Faculty mailing list  
[Faculty@lists.cs.columbia.edu](mailto:Faculty@lists.cs.columbia.edu)  
<https://lists.cs.columbia.edu/mailman/listinfo/faculty>



Click here to [Reply](#) [Reply to all](#), or [Forward](#)

# 6. Recognition rather than recall

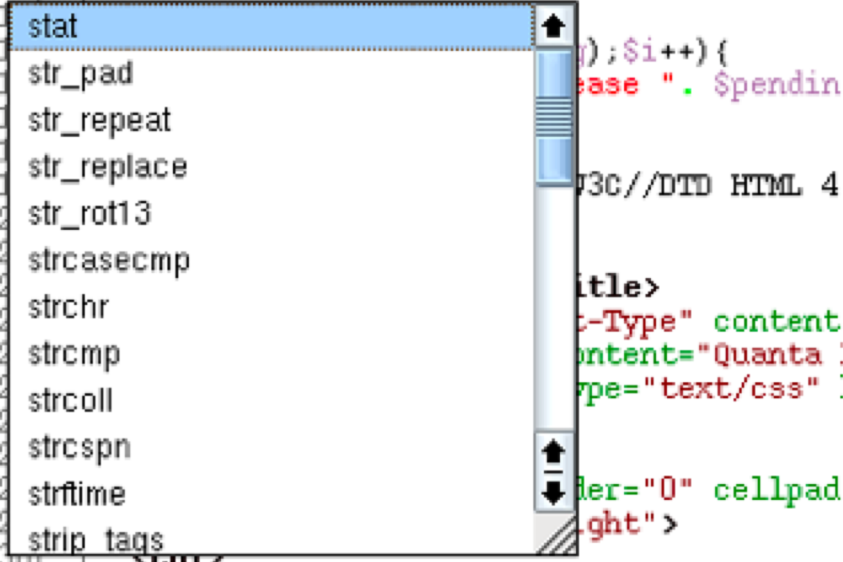
Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another.



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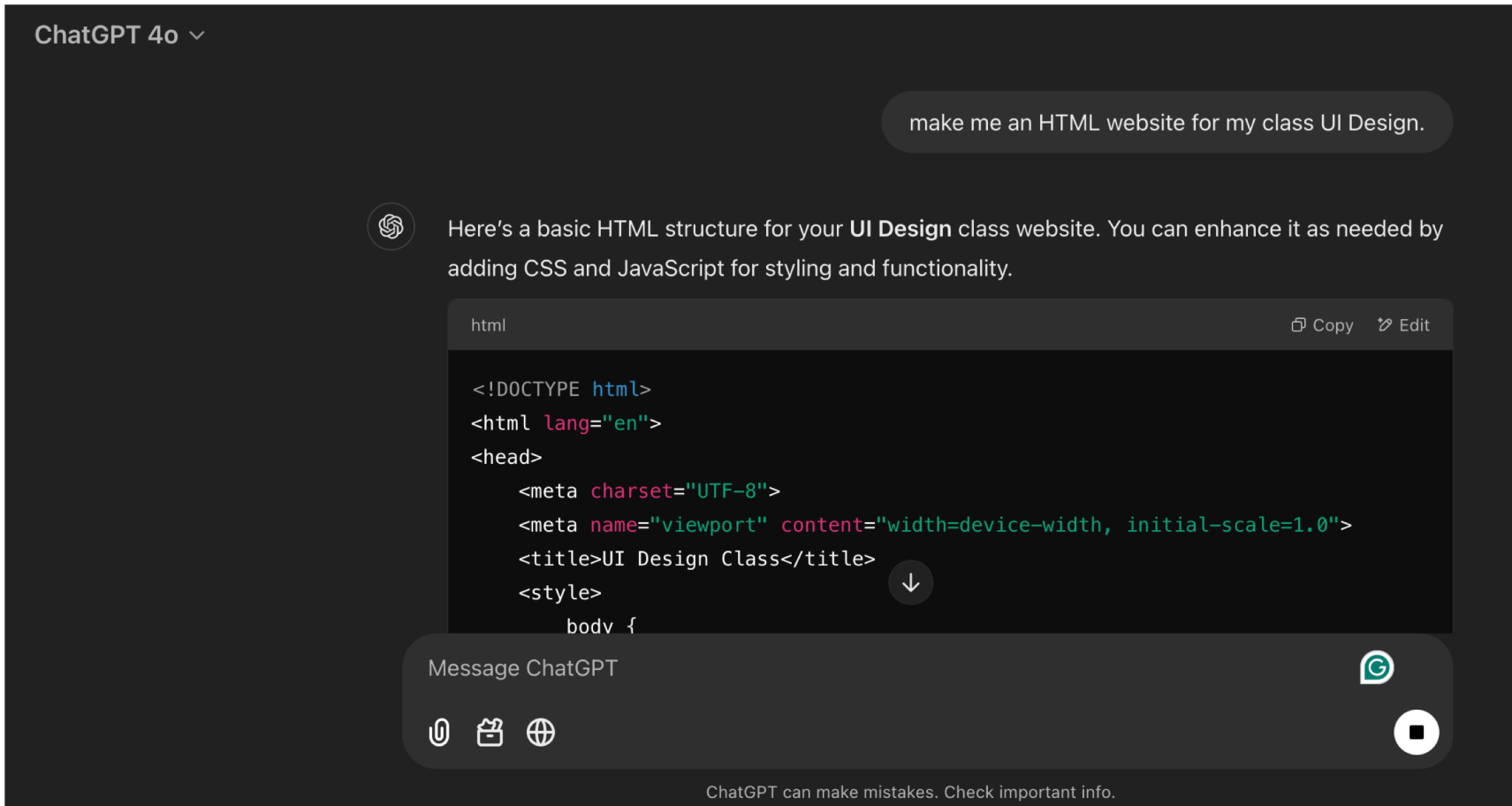
```
12 | $maxcol = 5;  
13 | st  
stat  
str_pad  
str_repeat  
str_replace  
str_rot13  
strcasecmp  
strchr  
strcmp  
strcoll  
strcspn  
strftime  
strip_tags
```



```
); $i++) {  
case ". $pendin  
3C//DTD HTML 4  
title>  
c-Type" content  
content="Quanta :  
ype="text/css" :  
der="0" cellpadding  
ght">
```

# 6. Recognition rather than recall

Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another.



ChatGPT 4o ▾

make me an HTML website for my class UI Design.

Here's a basic HTML structure for your **UI Design** class website. You can enhance it as needed by adding CSS and JavaScript for styling and functionality.

```
html
```

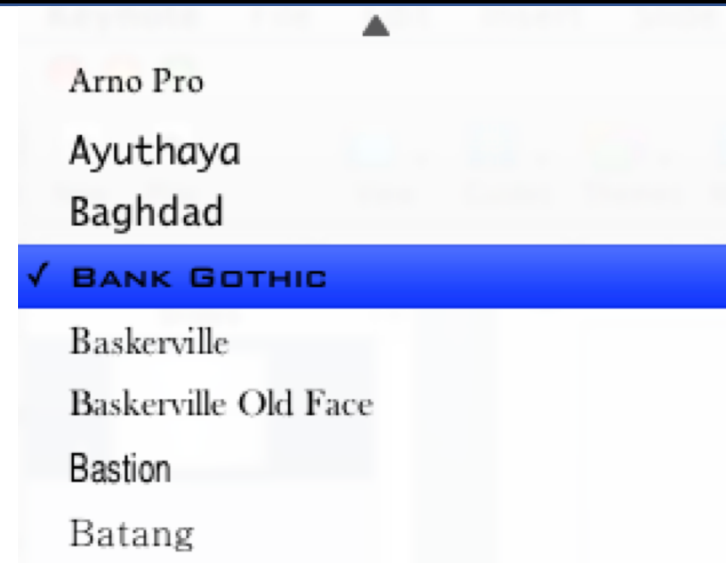
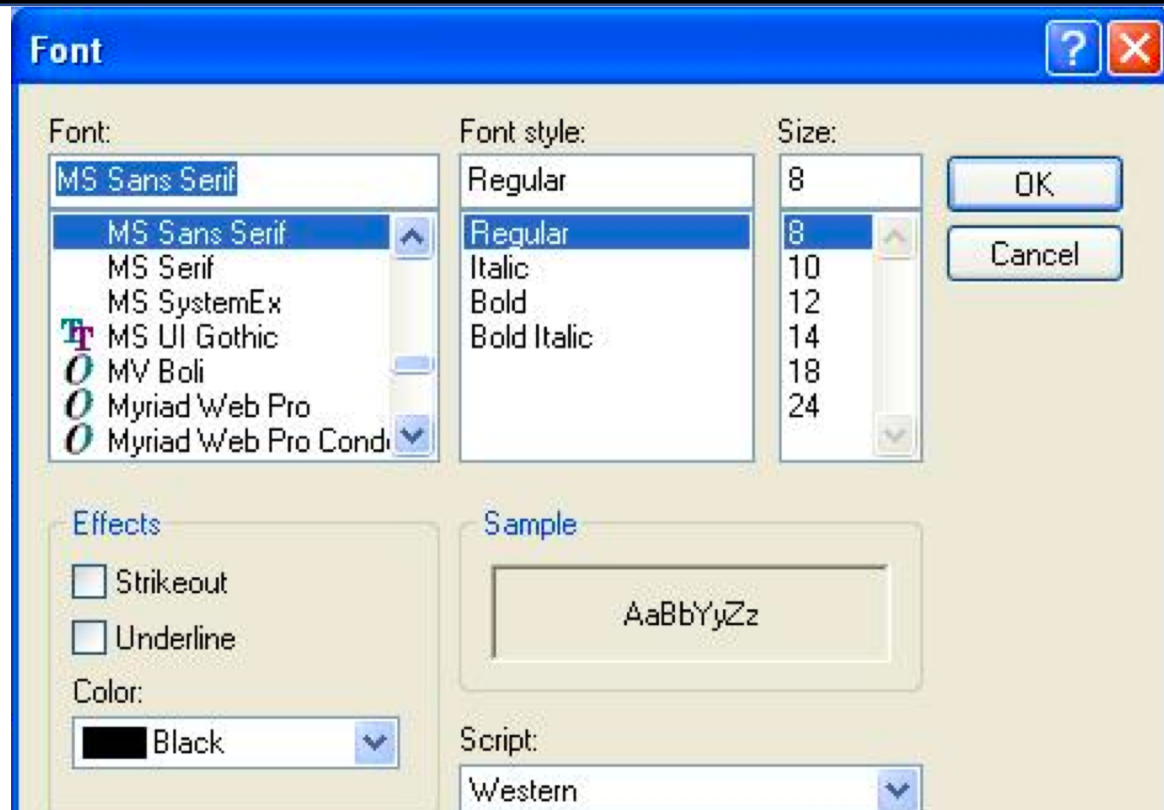
```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html lang="en">
<head>
  <meta charset="UTF-8">
  <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1.0">
  <title>UI Design Class</title>
  <style>
    body {
```

Message ChatGPT

ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important info.

## 6. Violation: Recognition rather than recall

Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another.

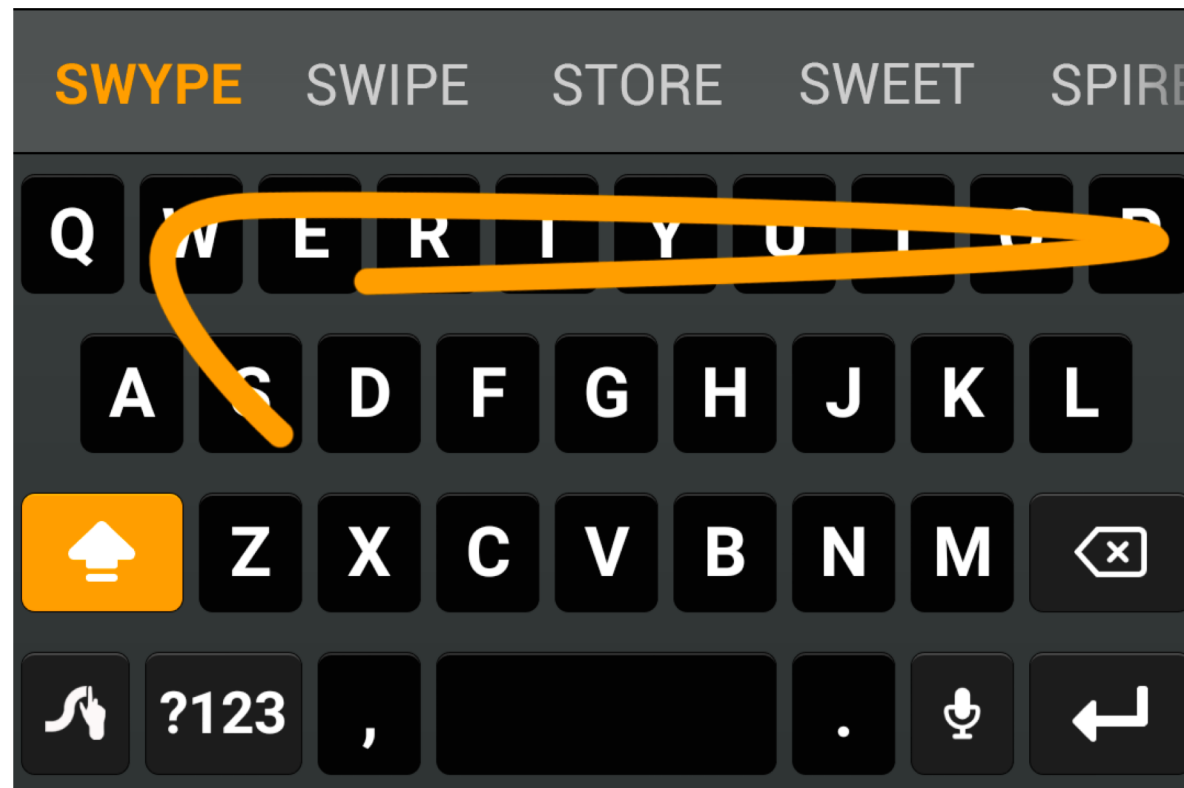


Much better!



# 7. Flexibility and efficiency of use

Accelerators — unseen by the novice user — may often speed up the interaction for the expert. Allow users to tailor frequent actions.



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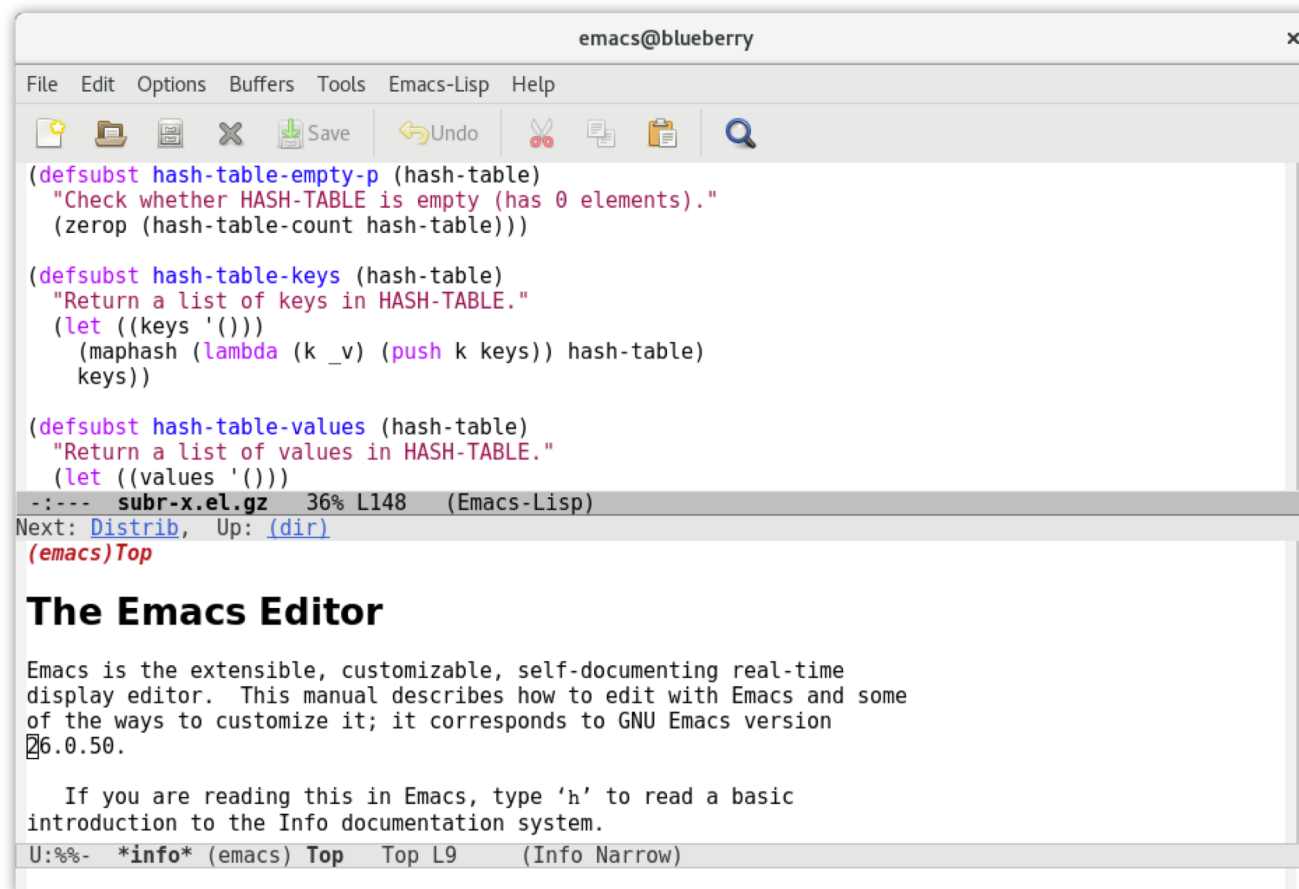
## Common Shortcuts

	Return
Add Action	
New Window	⌘N
Synchronize with Server	⌘S
Clean Up	⌘K
Planning Mode	⌘I
Context Mode	⌘2
Inbox	⌘1
Quick Entry	⌘Space

*Quick Entry's shortcut can be customized in Preferences*

# 7. Flexibility and efficiency of use

Accelerators — unseen by the novice user — may often speed up the interaction for the expert. Allow users to tailor frequent actions.



The screenshot shows the Emacs editor window titled "emacs@blueberry". The menu bar includes "File", "Edit", "Options", "Buffers", "Tools", "Emacs-Lisp", and "Help". The toolbar contains icons for "Save", "Undo", "Cut", "Copy", "Paste", and "Search". The main text area contains the following Lisp code:

```
(defsubst hash-table-empty-p (hash-table)
  "Check whether HASH-TABLE is empty (has 0 elements)."
  (zerop (hash-table-count hash-table)))

(defsubst hash-table-keys (hash-table)
  "Return a list of keys in HASH-TABLE."
  (let ((keys '()))
    (maphash (lambda (k _v) (push k keys)) hash-table)
    keys))

(defsubst hash-table-values (hash-table)
  "Return a list of values in HASH-TABLE."
  (let ((values '()))
    (maphash (lambda (k _v) (push _v values)) hash-table)
    values))
```

Below the code, the status bar shows "subr-x.el.gz 36% L148 (Emacs-Lisp)". The next line of text is "Next: [Distrib](#), Up: [dir](#)". Below this is the heading "(emacs)Top".

## The Emacs Editor

Emacs is the extensible, customizable, self-documenting real-time display editor. This manual describes how to edit with Emacs and some of the ways to customize it; it corresponds to GNU Emacs version 6.0.50.

If you are reading this in Emacs, type 'h' to read a basic introduction to the Info documentation system.

U:%%- \*info\* (emacs) Top Top L9 (Info Narrow)

## 8. Aesthetic and minimalist design

Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.



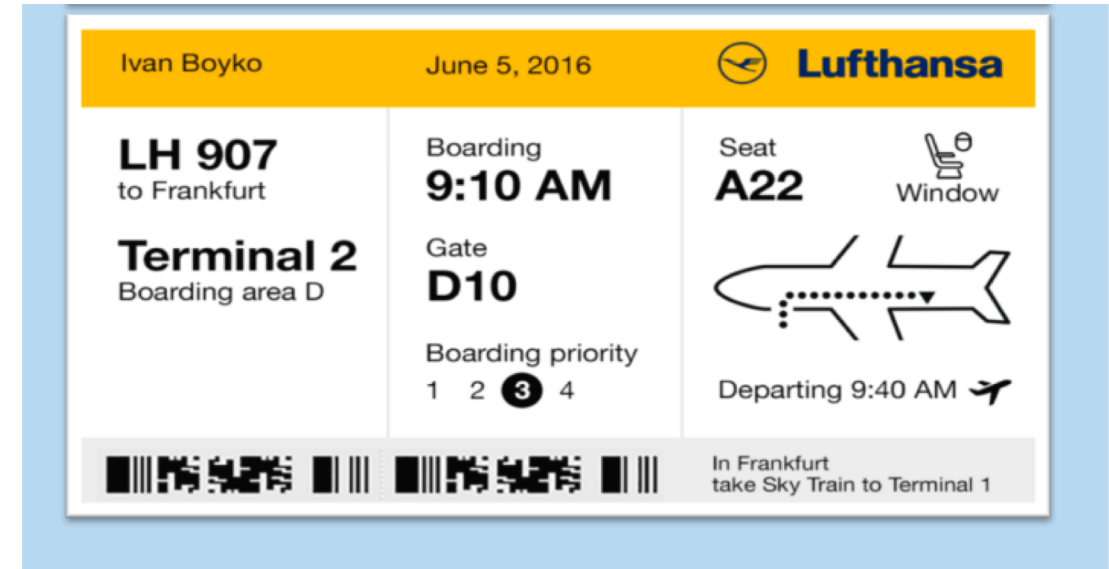
## 8. Aesthetic and minimalist design

Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.



# 8. Violation: Aesthetic and minimalist design

Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.




# 9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors

Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.

Or start a new account


Choose a username (no spaces)

bert

 bert is already taken. Please choose a different username.

Choose a password

\*\*\*

 Passwords must be at least 6 characters and can only contain letters and numbers.

Retype password

Email address (must be real!)

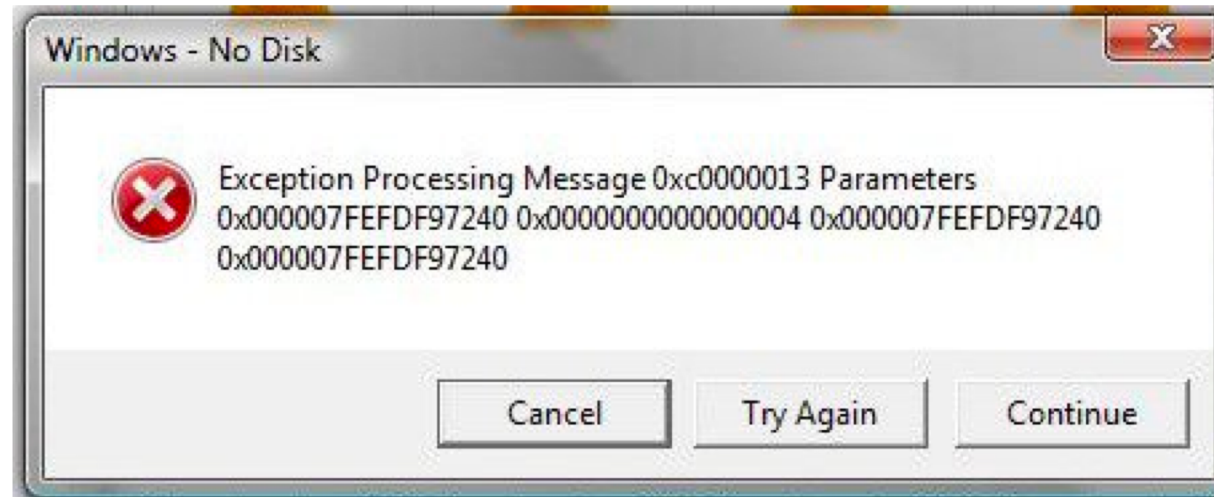
not an email

 The email provided does not appear to be valid

Send me occasional Digg updates.

## 9. **Violation** Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors

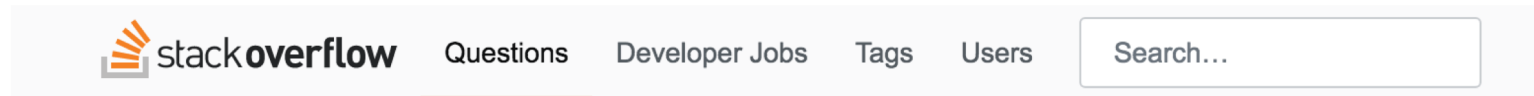
Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.





# 10. Help and documentation

Documentation should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.



## Why is it faster to process a sorted array than an unsorted array?

▲ Here is a piece of C++ code that seems very peculiar. For some strange reason, sorting the data miraculously makes the code almost six times faster.

20283



9442

```
#include <algorithm>
#include <ctime>
#include <iostream>

int main()
{
    // Generate data
    const unsigned arraySize = 32768;
    int data[arraySize];

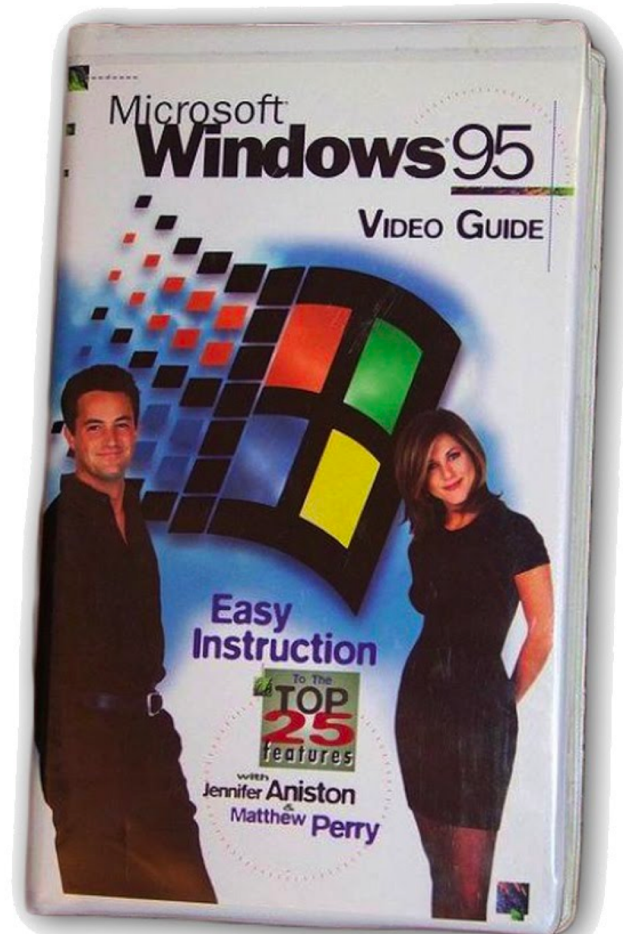
    for (unsigned c = 0; c < arraySize; ++c)
        data[c] = std::rand() % 256;

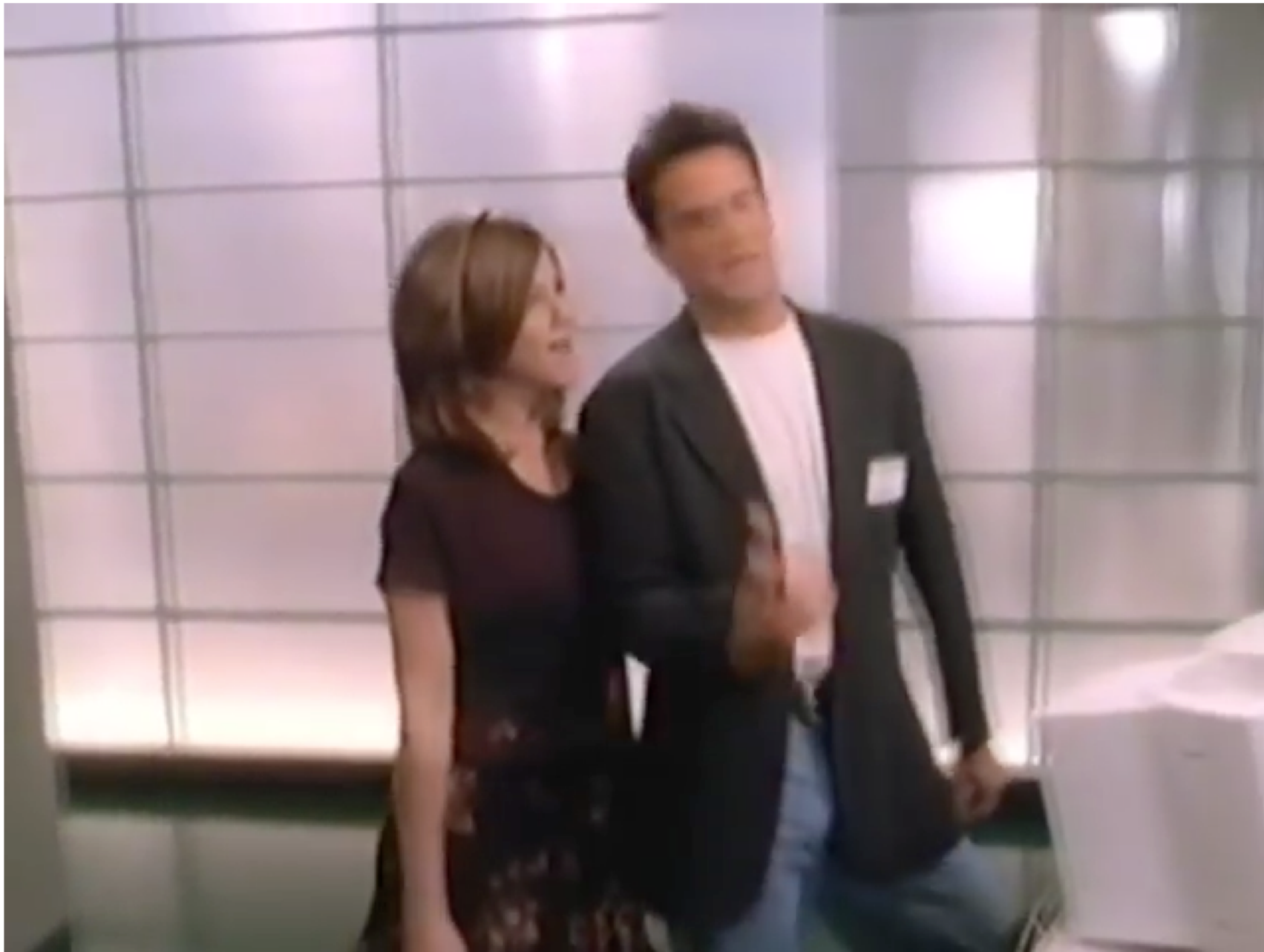
    // !!! With this, the next loop runs faster
    std::sort(data, data + arraySize);

    // Test
```

# 10. **Violation**: Help and documentation:

Documentation should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.





# Nielsen's 10 Usability Heuristics

1. Visibility of system status
2. Match the real world
3. User control and freedom
4. Consistency and Standards
5. Error prevention
6. Recognition rather than recall
7. Flexibility and efficiency of use
8. Aesthetic and minimalist design
9. Recover from Errors
10. Help and documentation

# Homework 1

- Warm up due Friday 11:59pm
  - You can do this now!
- Main due Tuesday 11:59pm
  - You'll need Monday's lecture
  
- Homework is posted on the website:

<http://coms4170.cs.columbia.edu/2025-spring/>

Columbia University

## User Interface Design

COMS 4170 · Spring 2025

Home Grading Syllabus Ed Forum

### Our Goals:

1. Understand users and build websites that suit the needs and abilities.
2. Design useable systems through iteration and feedback.

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**INSTRUCTOR**  
Prof. Lydia Chilton  
OH: Mondays 2:30-3:30 in CEPSR 612  
Please contact staff through [Ed](#) or Slack (coming soon)

**TA OFFICE HOURS**  
The office hours times and locations are on the calendar below. You can view or subscribe to the calendar here: [google calendar](#).  
The calendar include zoom/hangouts links for remote OH.

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**  
**Section 001**  
Monday, Wednesday  
1:10-2:25pm  
IAB 417  
**Section 002**  
Mondays 7-9:30pm, Wednesday TA meetings  
Pupin 428

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### Syllabus

WEEK	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY
1	JANUARY 20 <i>No class</i>	JANUARY 22 Usability Heuristics Lecture Video <a href="#">Homework 1</a>	JANUARY 24 Homework 1 Warm up due
2	JANUARY 27 Information Design	JANUARY 29 Grids and Lavouts	JANUARY 31 Homework 2 Warm up due