

# Web Site Design

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SWE 632

User Interface Design and Development

Nielsen, Ch 4

## Usability of Web Site Design

- Users only find information they are searching for on web sites about 42% of the time
- When given an interactive task, they can only accomplish the task about 26% of the time!

## “Introductory” Web Pages

When a web site is not complete:

- Don’t tell users what is not yet available – it is frustrating
- Don’t release a web site until it is ready

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## Web Site Home Pages

- Many web sites have a “home page” – the introductory landmark page to the company or organization
- Home pages should look different from interior web pages
  - No HOME button
  - State purpose of the entire web site
  - Provide a directory of the web site
  - Include a search facility
- All interior web pages must link to the home page

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## Search Facilities

- More than 50% of the users start by searching
- The search should be in the web site, not the entire WWW
- Make the search available on all pages
- People do not understand boolean:  
    *“I am interested in SWE 632 and CS 650”* should be:
  - 632 OR 650but most people will enter:
  - 632 AND 650Do not use boolean operators in the search facility

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## Screen Width

- Try not to design to a specific width – keep the HTML as flexible as possible
- Users do not like to scroll horizontally
- If you have to specify the width:
  - 600 is reasonably safe
  - Remember to leave room for browser borders
  - Put information that is not particularly important on the right side of the screen

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## URL Design

- Unfortunately, we must type and remember URLs
- Help the users avoid typos:
  - Do not use upper case in domain, directory, or file names
  - Underscores require the shift key – hyphens are better, but not much
  - Avoid zeros (0 or O?) and ones (1 or l)?
  - Do not add unnecessary directories
  - Choose short, common words
  - Use standard abbreviations
- Use URL aliasing to be error tolerant :
  - Allow x.com and www.x.com (<http://www.catalog.gmu.edu/>)
  - Provide aliases for common misspellings
- Use the standard “html”, not the non-standard “.htm”
- Fully specify URLs in HTML links:
  - Do not use this: `cs.gmu.edu/~offutt`
  - Do use this: `http://www.cs.gmu.edu/~offutt/`

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## Summary

**Professional HTML designers have  
accumulated these pearls of wisdom over  
many, painful, years**

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