Improving Tech Comm Using Road Signs & Everyday Experiences

Stephanie Saylor
Yellow Duck Technologies, Inc.

18 January 2022
Agenda

- Introduction
- Review principles in *The Design of Everyday Things*
- Practice Norman’s principles in real life
- Apply life experiences to technical communication and usability
- Discussion
Introduction

We’re all overwhelmed sometimes; we can still observe our surrounding.

“Two of the most important characteristics of good design are discoverability and understanding,”
- Donald Norman
Norman’s principles

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions
Affordance

The relationship between a physical object and a person.

- It’s a relationship, not a property.
- Think “needs to” or “is for”
Signifiers

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

Signifiers communicate where the action should take place.
Flags & More
Semiotics

- A child should be able to draw them from memory
- Provide meaningful symbolism
- Only use 2 or 3 basic colors
- Be distinctive
- No letters, no writing

Source: Roman Mars, 99percentinvisible.org
More Semiotics

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions
Signifiers

Some signifiers are meant to be ignored.

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions
- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions
Hint Text & Error Messages

Hint text can subconsciously help users prevent errors.

Password

Include at least 8 characters, one upper-case letter, one lower-case and a number.
Mapping

The relationship between the elements of two sets of things.

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions
Constraints

Guide actions and ease interpretation

- **Physical** - actual barriers
- **Logical** - spatial layouts that guide behavior
- **Cultural** - culturally allowable actions
- **Semantic** - actions that rely on the meaning of the situation (and the world)

Source: Wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_mapping
Force functions

A situation in which the actions are constrained so that failure at one stage prevents the next step from happening

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

Source: [https://medium.com/@AukaPay](https://medium.com/@AukaPay)
“Much of our everyday knowledge resides in the world, not in the head”
– Donald Norman
Notice everything
Examples

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

18 January 2022
playground.

“Found it!” called Kellan.

And then they went to the...

grocery store.

“I’ve got crackers,” Kellan said.

“Yum, yum!” Peter crunched.

And then they went to the...
Examples

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

Subscribe today

Get 30% off your first month of a subscription with promo code COUPON30

Get it

My subscriptions
Examples

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

- Use plain language
- Vary sentence length
- Leave ample spacing between topics
- Divide information into useful sections

Source: "Star Wars: The Old Republic Comic #2, Threat of Peace"
Remember to help users

- Think about translation
- Use bullets and lists
- Headings help chunk information
Examples

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

18 January 2022

#STC-PMC
www.stc.org
http://www.stcpmc.org
Cookbooks are great how to guides

Well-designed recipes follow many of the practices we strive for in technical communication.

- Plain language
- Listing prerequisites
- Illustrations of what to expect

Source: The Student Cookbook by Harry Wright
Infographics

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

Source: https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/florence-nightingale-data-viz-pioneer/
Infographics

Visual representations of information.

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

- Use illustrated characters and bold colors to grab attention
- Make them simple, not overloaded with graphics or content
- Enforce active voice (as much as possible)

Source: https://visme.co/blog/what-is-an-infographic/
“Enjoy yourself. Walk around the world examining the details of design. Learn how to observe. Take pride in the little things that help: think kindly of the person who so thoughtfully put them in.”

– Donald Norman
Sources


How the Michael Bay approach to road signs can reduce auto accidents. Scuiletti. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/action-packed-road-signs-may-decrease-accidents

Interactive Design Foundation Literature Topics https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/affordances


What is an Infographic? Sheikh. https://visme.co/blog/what-is-an-infographic/