



Sony Dream Machine

I have identified something of a designer's faux-pas on this machine which can lead to early morning heart failure. Confused? Let me explain...

When the radio comes on, let's say at 7.30am, for some bizarre reason the LCD display shows the frequency of the radio station instead of the time. The frequency of my chosen station is 103.4 FM (that's Century FM for all you northerners). So you suddenly open your eyes to see the display saying "1034" when it should be saying "0730" which leads to a cry of "oh sh*t" as you leap across the bedroom trying to think of an excuse to tell your boss.

After replaying this cycle of panic followed by overwhelming relief for several days on the trot, you get into the habit of turning the radio off in order to see what time it is, and then turning the radio back on if you actually want to listen to it. Was this product designed on a National Lottery grant or something?

I just can't see why the designers at Sony thought we needed a daily reminder of the frequency of our favourite radio station. When you're waking up in the morning there's only one thing you need to see on the display - and that's the time.

Another example of bad design on this model is that you can only read the time when your head is positioned at eye level with the display. This is because it uses a backlit Liquid Crystal Display (like a digital watch) instead of the Light Emitting Diode displays which are usually used on clock radios. In practice this means that your bedside table must be at exactly the same height as your head on the pillow, or else you won't be able to read the display on this crazy little beast.

But the big problem I have with this machine is the bewildering array of 14

silver buttons on the top. Printed on and around these buttons is a mass of text in tiny grey lettering, much of which is in garbled acronym form and makes little sense to the human operator.

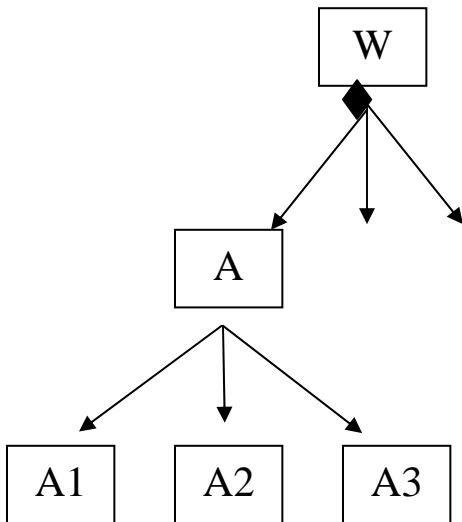
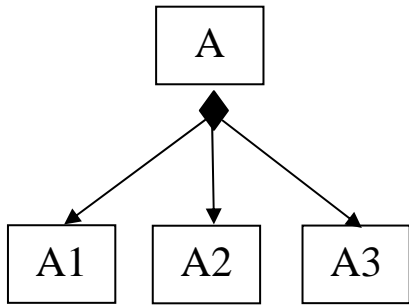
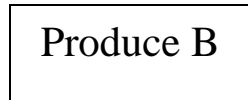
You need to spend a good half an hour studying the manual before you feel even remotely confident with this clock radio. Even then, you never feel totally fluent with the confusing sprawl of buttons, and need to keep the manual by the bedside in order to periodically remind yourself of the function of each cryptically labelled button. The only well designed button is the snooze bar which is thoughtfully positioned along the front and can't be missed by an arm that reaches out to request another ten minutes' sleep.

This machine isn't user friendly. It's like having to learn an entire operating system. Machines like this should be logical and self explanatory. I can't help suspecting that the over-technical styling was a misguided attempt to give the product added appeal. But when you're bleary-eyed in the morning and find yourself taking random stabs at the many buttons (which you can't see without sitting up because they're horizontally mounted) it can be irritating to say the least.

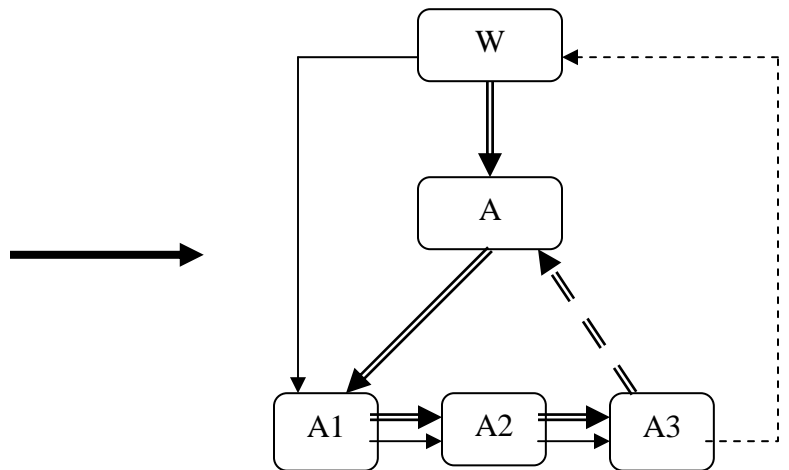
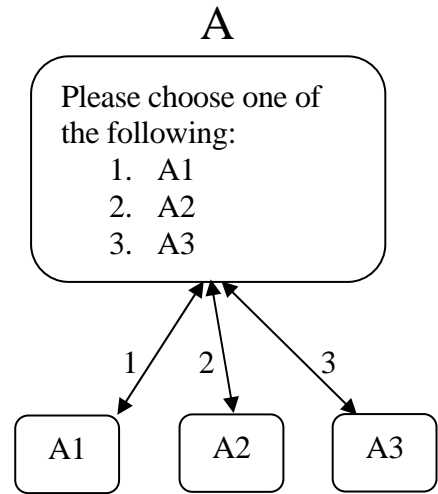
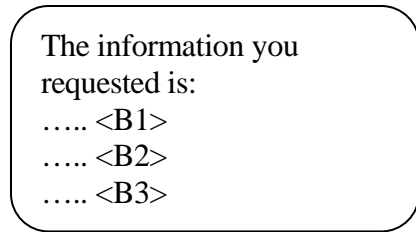
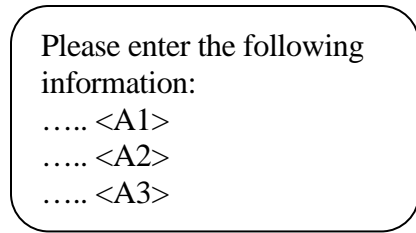
After having tried to live with this machine for six months, it's become obvious to me that Sony didn't "people test" this model - they just cobbled together a load of buttons onto a silver box and hoped for the best. Sorry Sony, but I like more thought to go into my electrical products.

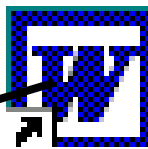
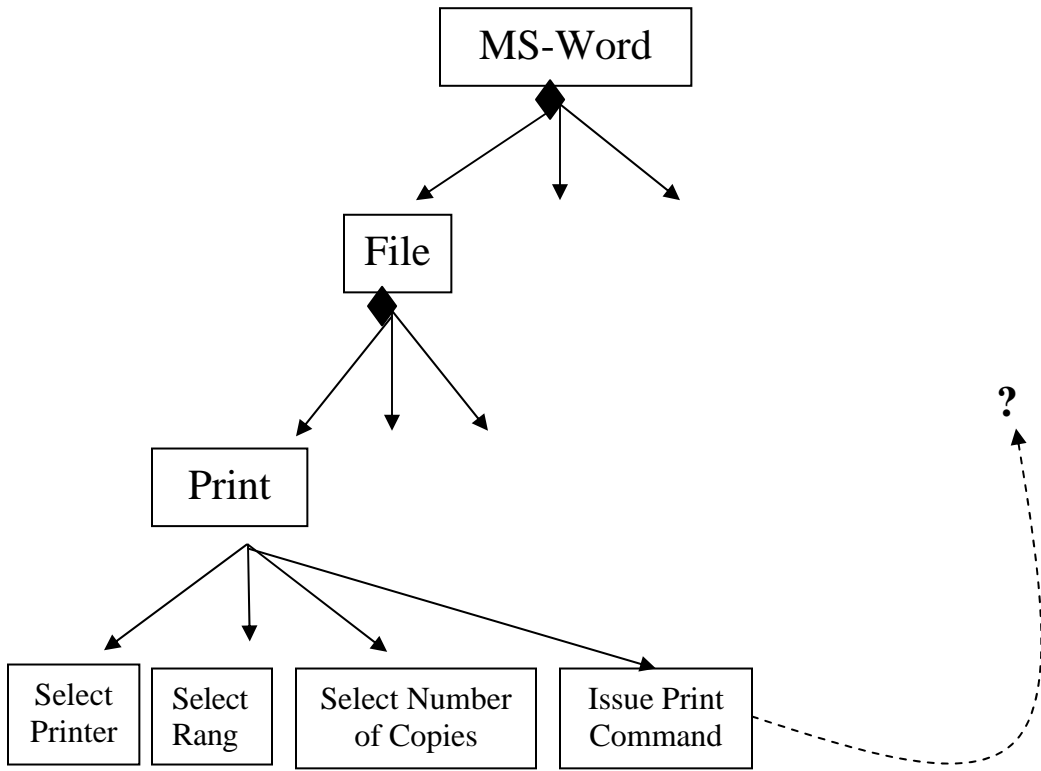
Trust me - I'm not being unduly harsh here - this clock radio is a pain to live with. It gets a big thumbs down from me.

Structure Chart



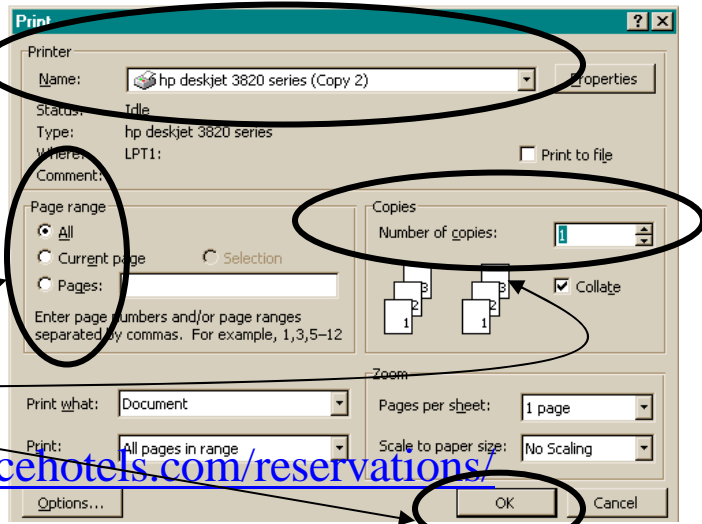
Navigation Diagram



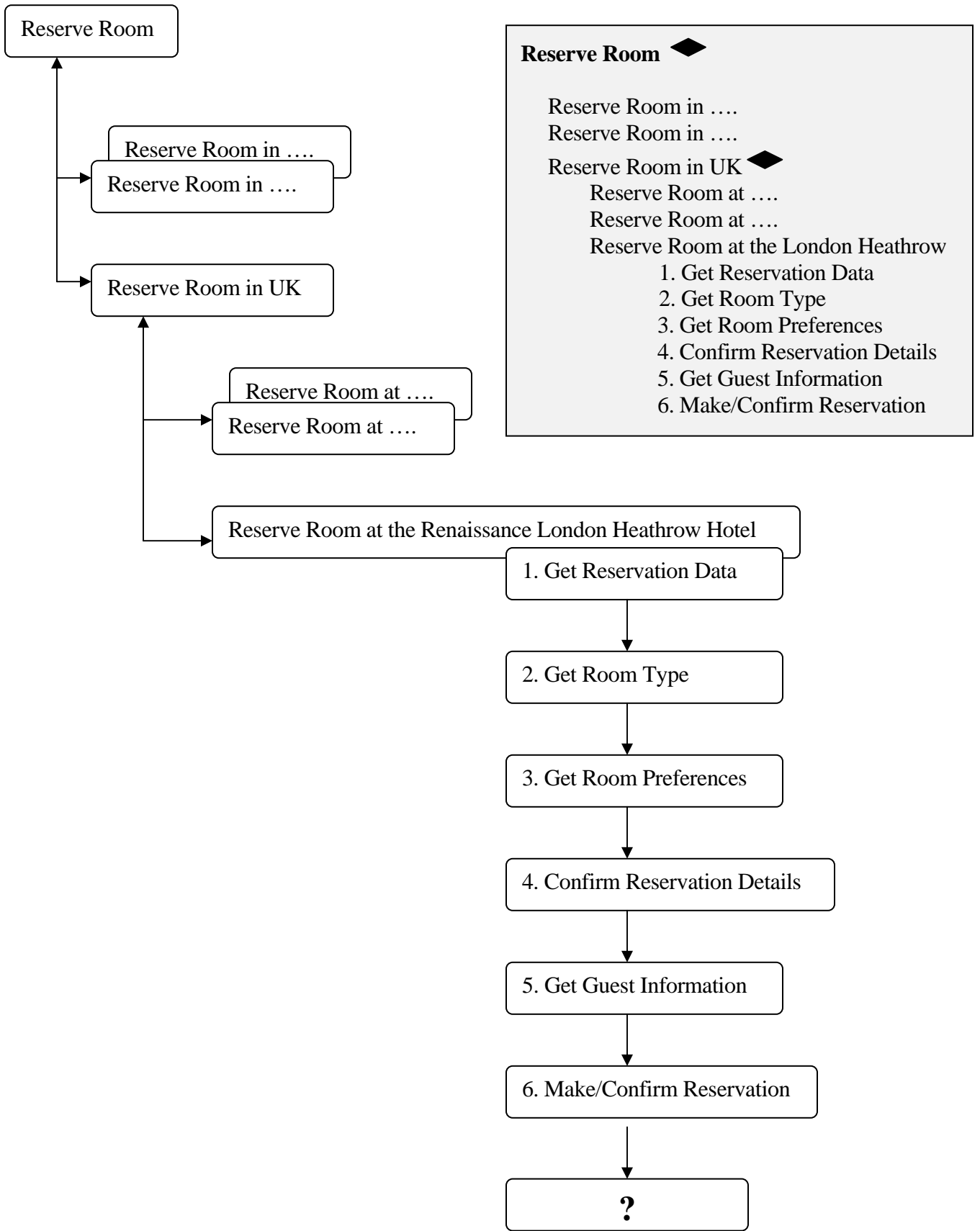


File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Window Help


- New...
- Open...
- Close
- Save
- Save As...
- Save as Web Page
- Web Page Preview
- Page Setup...
- Print Preview
- Print...
- Send To...





<https://www.renaissancehotels.com/reservations/>



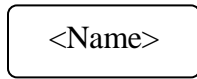
Interface Navigation Diagram: Symbols

Forward flow only 

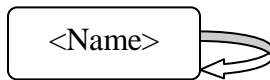
Backward flow only 

Forward/Backward flow 

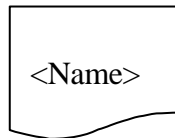
Screen



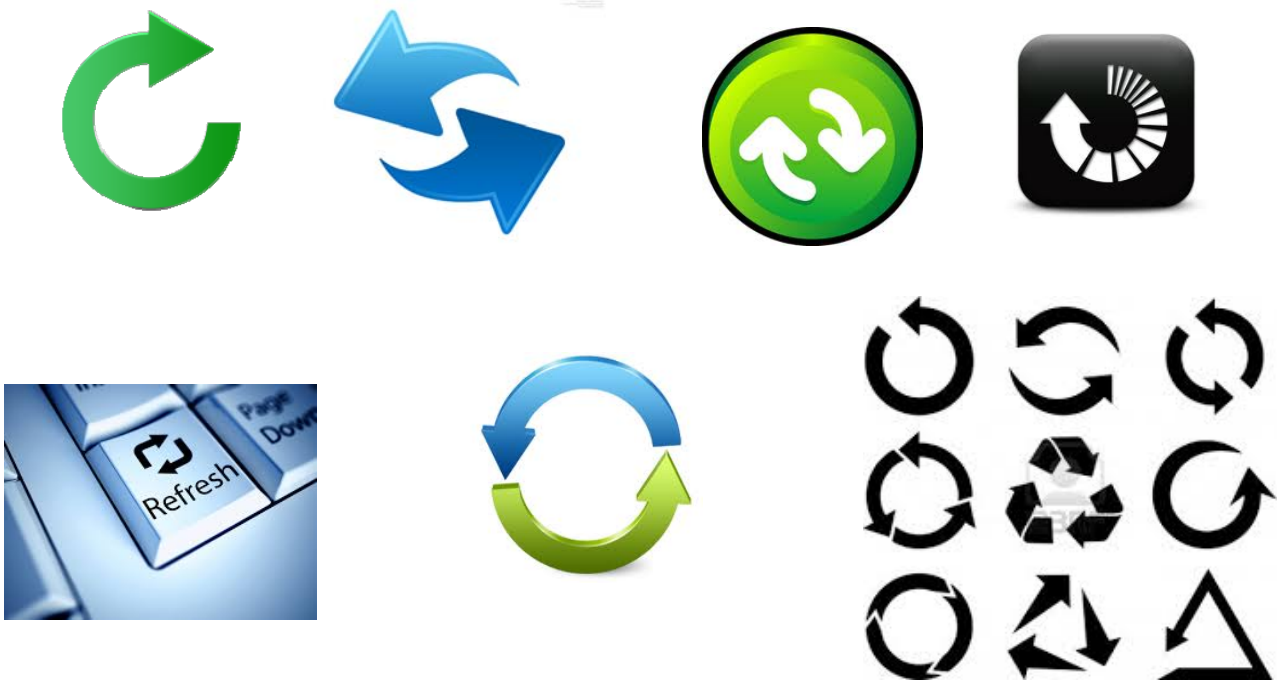
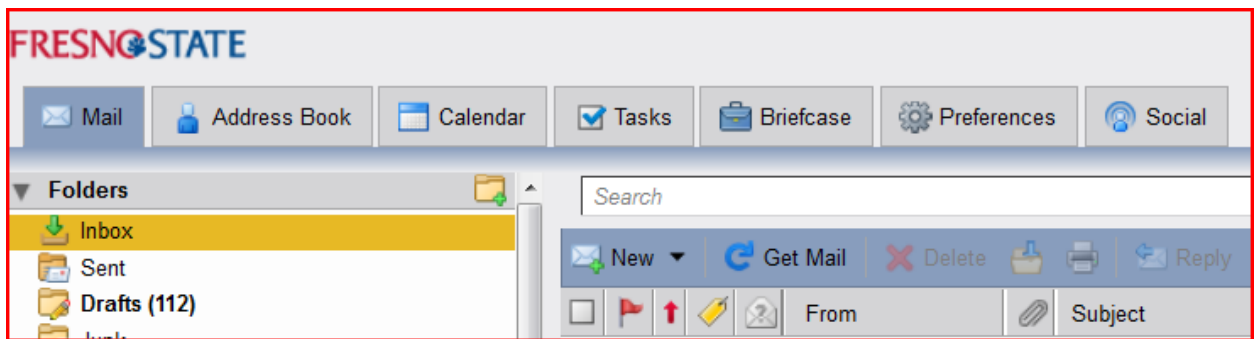
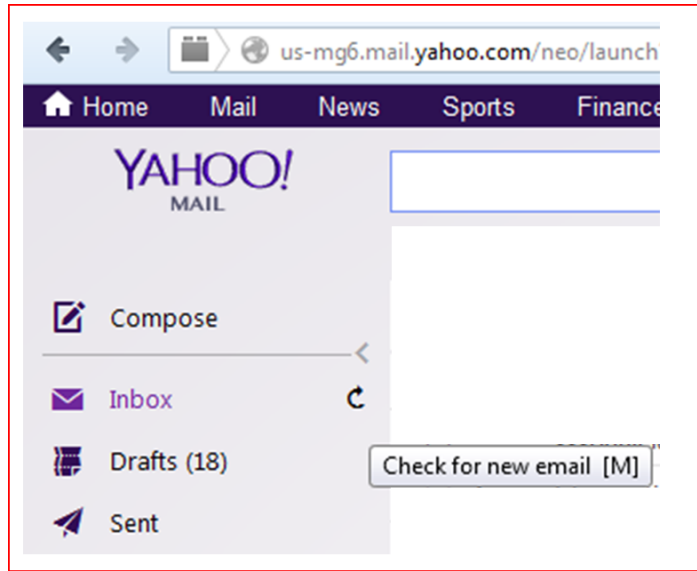
Refresh



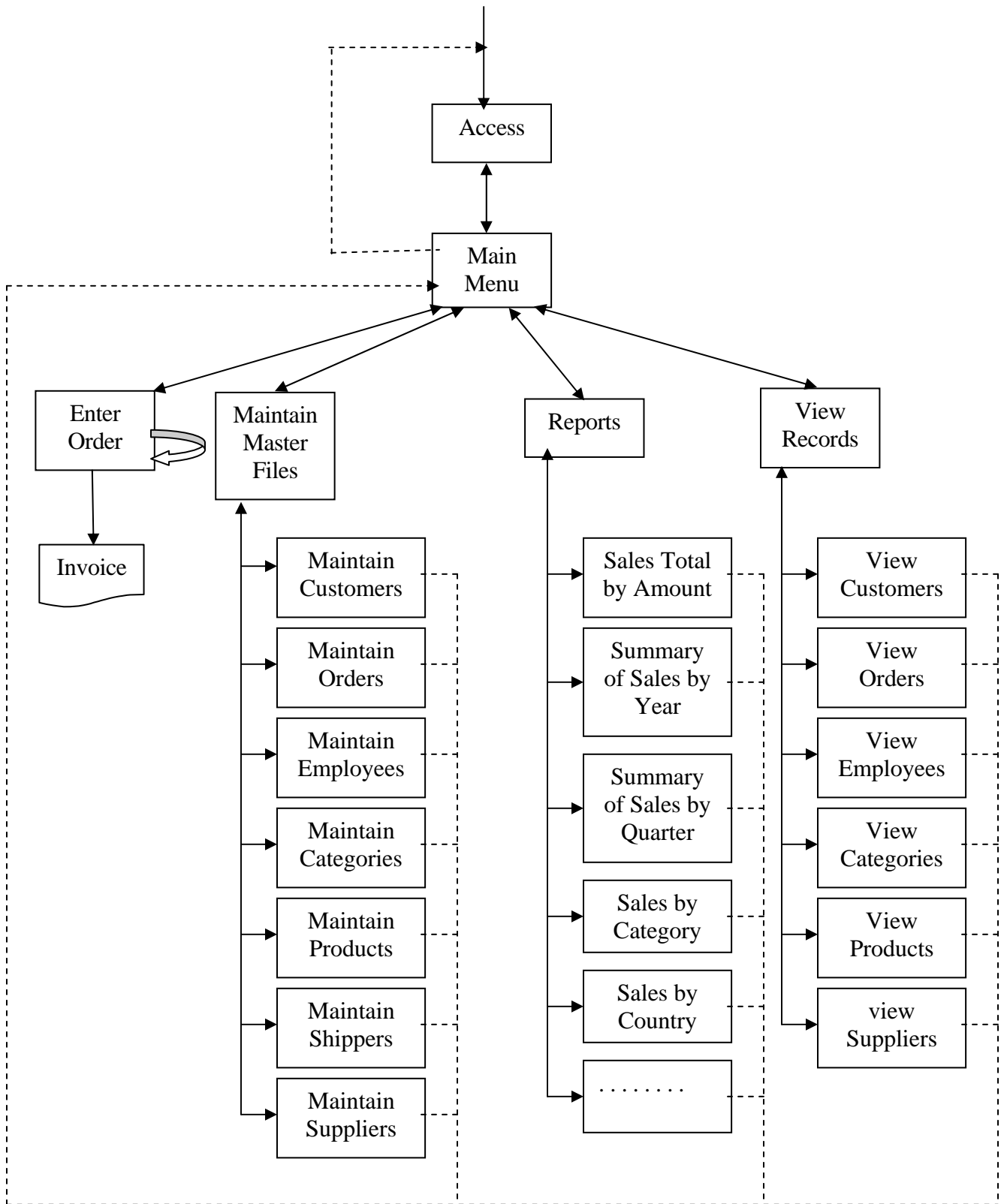
Paper



Refresh Symbols



Interface Navigation Diagram: An Example



User-Interface Design: Quality Control Checklist

Navigation

- Navigation paths support the user work flows (in Hotmail, after the user replies to a message, why is he returned to the text of the message?) and allow for maximal work flexibility (in Hotmail, why should the user have to open a message to respond to it?)
- Navigational instructions are explicit and meaningful. For example, avoid “close form” as a button label as it does not tell the user where they will be going after they close the form.

General Layout

- Screen real estate is used in a balanced way: There are no large blocks of blank space at the expense of jammed activity or cut-off labels.
- There is consistency in terms of
 - screen layout from one screen to another
 - the look and feel of the icons
 - the placement of generic icons (such as return to main menu) on the various screens
 - use of language (one menu item singular, another plural)
 - punctuation
- Correct English is used.

Input

Menus

- A menu is used for a finite and reasonably small (< 10) set of options.
- A hierarchy of menus is used for a finite but relatively large (> 10) set of options.
- Direct data entry is used for an ill-defined and very large (> 100) set of options. (Do you prefer using *Yahoo web site directory* or doing a *Google search*?)
- Menu items are highlighted when pointed to, especially when situated closely.
- Functionality is context-sensitive: A screen contains only those capabilities/buttons that are relevant to the task being performed. (in Hotmail, why is there a “Send” button on the screen for viewing an already sent message? In MS Word, the copy and cut icons are active only when relevant, such as when an object or a portion of text are highlighted.)
- The elements on a menu contain chunks of functionality of more or less the same size.
- Menu options that are logically related are visually grouped together.
- Keyboard-based shortcuts are provided for power users.
- Each specific function is placed under the menu item most logically related to it. (In MS Word, where are print, sort, find, and page-setup located?)

- The user is made aware of the consequences of each action in any of the following ways:
 - Accurate button label
 - Language corresponding to each option, written next to the button, explaining where that option leads to.
 - Use of a bubble or tool tip that shows the consequences of clicking an icon when the cursor passes over that icon.
 - A separate area on screen explaining consequences (How does MS Access show the consequences of selecting a macro?)

Data Entry

- Full English phrases, rather than technical field names, are used for field captions.
- Drop down lists are offered whenever the value of the data to be entered must correspond to one in a set of predefined values.
- The user is made aware of the proper data entry format for each field through the use of:
 - input masks (in making an online credit-card payment, why is the user allowed to enter data in the wrong format and then warned with a confusing error message?)
 - explanatory sample format, such as MM/DD/YYYY (Does 10/2/xxxx refer to the 10th of February or the 2nd of October? In MS Word, does *print pages 205-7* refer to pages 205-207 or pages 7-205?)
- The volume of data entry is minimized through the use of default values
 - retrieved from the system (date, day, time, frequently encountered patterns)
 - retrieved from the database (lookup)
 - calculated by the system (such as extended price)
 - protected/view only fields: raw transaction history + processed history (customer balance)
- Error trapping routines are used to prevent data that is obviously wrong from being entered, such as:
 - Order Date = February 16, 2002 Completion Date = February 12, 2002
 - Customer Discount Percent = 150%
- Process reversal opportunities are offered to the users who change their minds in the middle of a process and want to cancel it, supported by actual process reversal in practice (What happens in Windows Explorer when user presses cancel in the midst of copying files?)
- Intelligent provisions are made for lack of user response in data entry, such as timeouts.

Processing

- Messages are accurate and say what they mean (*Do you want to save this file?* versus *Do you want to save the changes you made to this file?*)
- Error messages are helpful to the user.

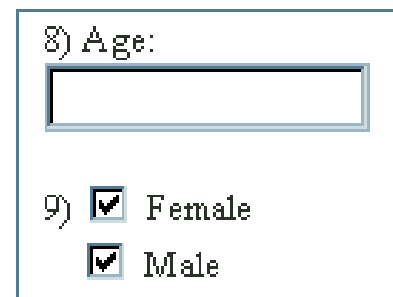
Output

- Only the information relevant to the task being performed is shown (in an email program, why does the “Sent Messages” folder show the sender, rather than the sent-to?!)
- The information shown is meaningful to the user (what does a gray color code mean next to green, red, and navy blue?)
- Information is formatted elegantly
 - Group related elements together
 - Separate unrelated elements using lines or blank spaces
 - Align stacked numbers by the decimal
 - Use meaningful captions
- Users have a choice of output medium: view vs. print
- Information is presented in its most meaningful form: numbers vs. graphs
- The right approach to search is used:
 - when the list of candidates is too large → allow direct search
 - when the list of candidates is small enough → provide a sorted list of candidate items;
 - enable the user to select the sort variable
 - allow for multilevel sorting
- The *drill down* approach is used in the design of performance reports:
The various bits and pieces of output are linked hierarchically, so that it is possible to go from the highest level of aggregation to the highest level of detail.

A highly informative and entertaining web site reference for user interface design: <http://www.iarchitect.com/mshame.htm>

The Interface Hall of Shame is an irreverent collection of common interface design mistakes. Our hope is that by highlighting these problems, we can help developers avoid making similar mistake.

The folks at [Ryka](#), a manufacturer of women's shoes, wanted to be certain that no potential customers could be excluded. Thus, rather than providing option (or radio) buttons to indicate one's gender, they decided to use checkboxes, to allow the potential customer to indicate Male, Female, or, well, both, and for that matter, none. We found this especially interesting given the company motto, "Exclusively for women by women." Inclusiveness must be "in".



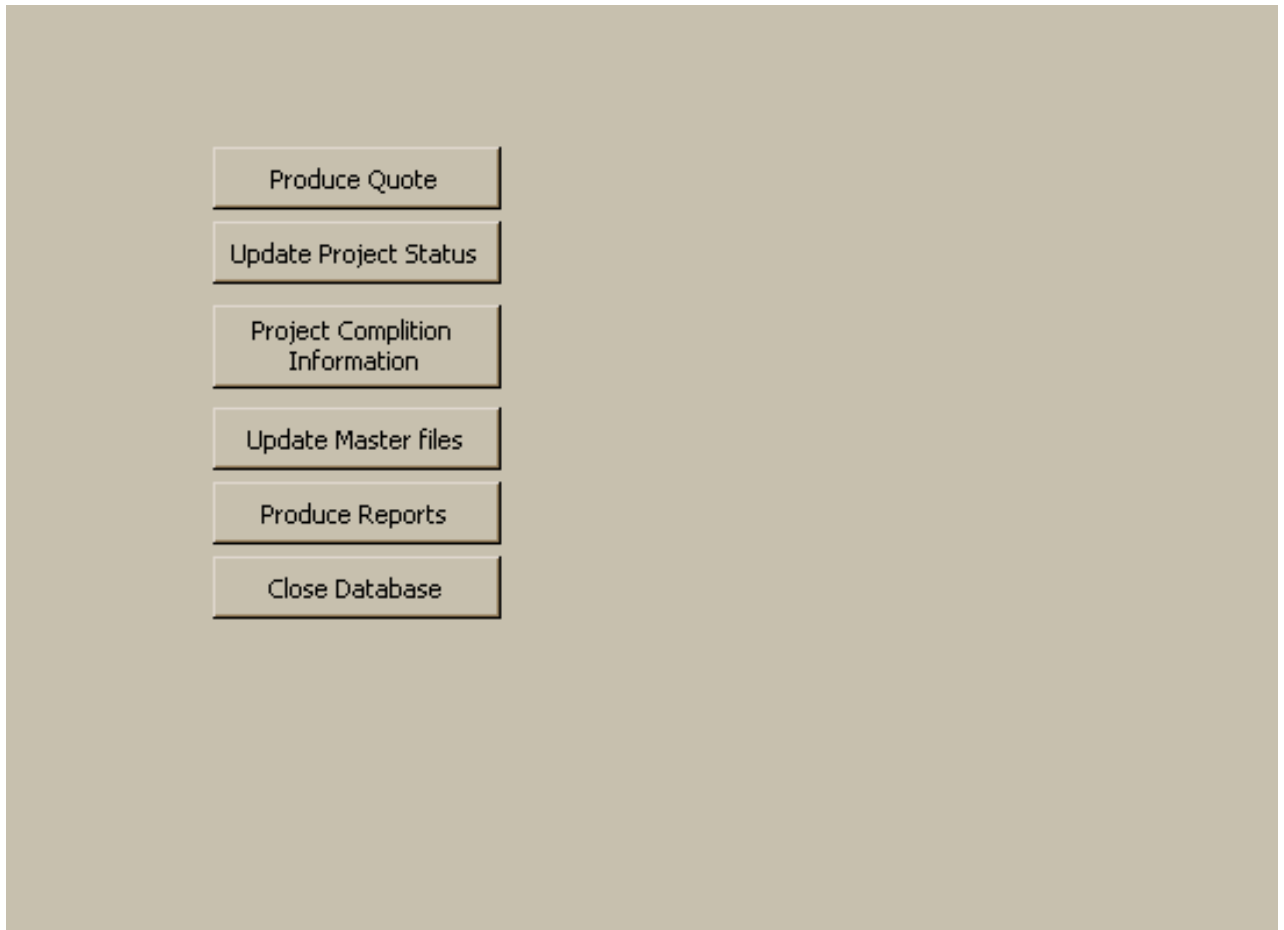
8) Age:

9) Female
 Male

There once was a young man who professed a desire to become a great writer. When asked to define "great," he said, "I want to write stuff that the whole world will read, stuff that people will react to on a truly emotional level, stuff that will make them scream, cry, wail, and howl in pain, desperation, and anger!" He got his dream job.

What do you think he is doing?!

Critique the following main menu of the QuoteManager software application.



Critique the following data entry screen of the QuoteManager software application.

Customer ID Job-No
Order Description Quote Date
Emp-ID Status

Project Labor subform

OrderID	EmpID	Name	EmpHourlyRate	EstimatedHours	Total
▶ 13					

Record: of 1

Job Material Query subform

OrderID	MaterialID	MaterialDescription	MaterialCost	MaterialProfitM	EstimatedUsagePerc	Total
▶ 13						

Record: of 1

Quote

Haiku Error Messages

In Japan, they have replaced the impersonal and unhelpful Microsoft Error messages with Haiku poetry messages. Haiku poetry has strict construction rules. Each poem has only three lines, 17 syllables: five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, five in the third.

Haikus are used to communicate a timeless message often achieving a wistful, yearning and powerful insight through extreme brevity - the essence of Zen:

- : Your file was so big.
- : It might be very useful.
- : But now it is gone.

- : The Web site you seek
- : Cannot be located, but
- : Countless more exist.

- : Chaos reigns within.
- : Reflect, repent, and reboot.
- : Order shall return.

- : Program aborting:
- : Close all that you have worked on.
- : You ask far too much.

- : Windows NT crashed.
- : I am the Blue Screen of Death.
- : No one hears your screams.

- : Yesterday it worked.
- : Today it is not working.
- : Windows is like that.

- : First snow, then silence.
- : This thousand-dollar screen dies
- : So beautifully.

- : With searching comes loss
- : And the presence of absence:
- : "My Novel" not found.

: The Tao that is seen
: Is not the true Tao-until
: You bring fresh toner.

: Stay the patient course.
: Of little worth is your ire.
: The network is down.

: A crash reduces
: Your expensive computer
: To a simple stone.

: Three things are certain:
: Death, taxes and lost data.
: Guess which has occurred.

: You step in the stream,
: But the water has moved on.
: This page is not here.

: Out of memory.
: We wish to hold the whole sky,
: But we never will.

: Having been erased,
: The document you're seeking
: Must now be retyped.

: Serious error.
: All shortcuts have disappeared.
: Screen. Mind. Both are blank.