DON'T MAKE ME THINK
by Steve Krug

Don't Make Me Think!
Krug's First Law of Usability

Don't create questions in the user's head.

Questions like: is that a clickable link, or just text? Why is the 'Jobs' button called 'Jobs-o-Rama'? Is that an ad, or part of the site? Where do I start?

Such split-second mental chatter creates **'cognitive workload',** which can add up and encumber the experience. Hence, ensure using the website requires no thinking whatsoever – it is self-evident.

But occasionally, a website does merit thinking *(e.g. it's novel)*. In that case, strive to make it self-explanatory via tiny variations of color, text or appearance. Ensure everything can be figured out at a glance.

OK. This looks like the product categories...

Memory, Modems... There it is: Monitors. *Click*

...and these are today's special deals.

Jobs!
Click

Jobs

Hmm.
[Milliseconds of thought]
Jobs.
Click

Employment Opportunities

Hmm. Could be Jobs.
But it sounds like more than that.
Should I click or keep looking?

Job-o-Rama

How We *Really* Use the Web
Scanning, satisficing, and muddling through

Users don't read pages, they scan them. Why? Because they're usually in a hurry, interested in just a fraction of the content, and have gotten good at it.

Instead of weighing all choices, users mostly plunge into the first reasonable option. Why? We are usually in a hurry, there is not much penalty for guessing wrong, weighing options may not improve our chances, and guessing is more fun.

Users still cling to their back buttons
There's not much of a penalty for guessing wrong. Unlike firefighting, the penalty for guessing wrong on a website is just a click or two of the back button. The back button is the most-used feature of web browsers.

We're creatures of habit
If we find something that works, we stick to it. Once we find something that works — no matter how badly — we tend not to look for a better way. We'll use a better way if we stumble across one, but we seldom look for one.

WHAT WE DESIGN FOR...   THE REALITY...
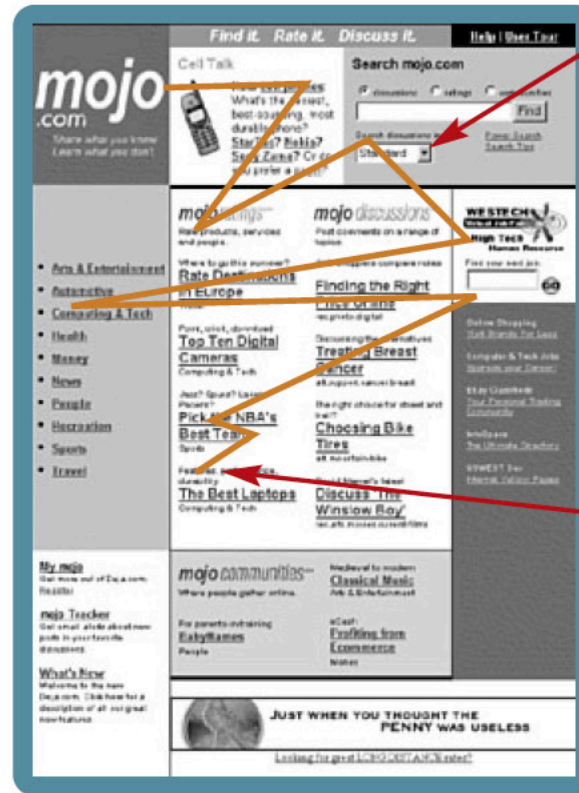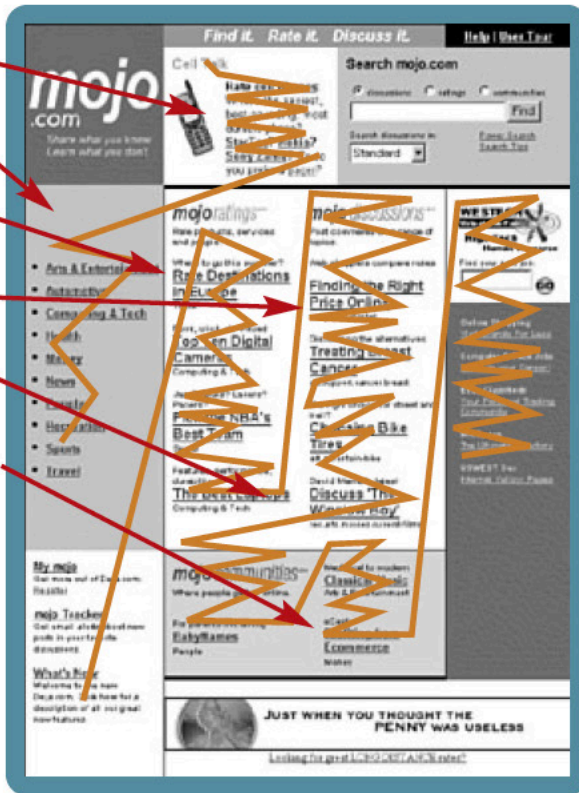

Read

Read

Read

Read

[Pause for reflection]

Finally, click on a carefully chosen link

Look around feverishly for anything that

a) is interesting, or vaguely resembles what you're looking for, and
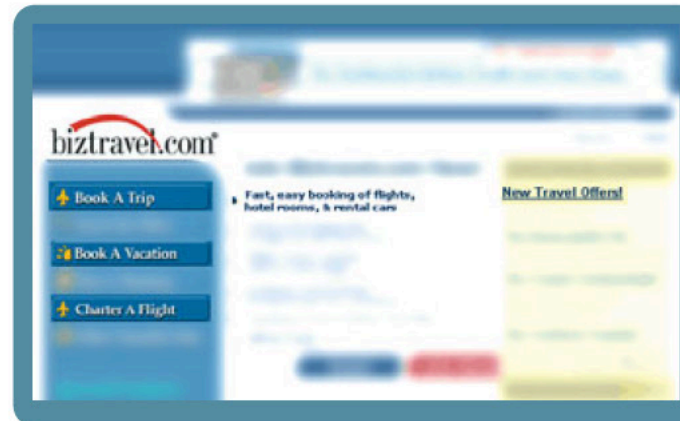
b) is clickable.

As soon as you find a halfway-decent match, click.

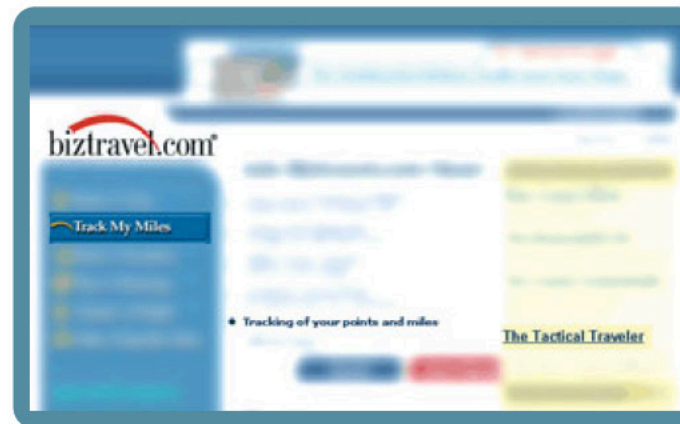If it doesn't pan out, click the Back button and try again.
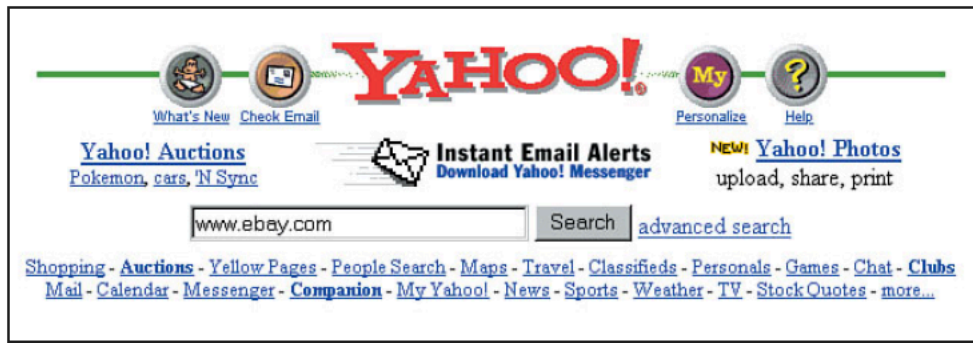
Most Web designers would be shocked if they knew how many people type URLs in Yahoo's search box.

How We *Really* Use the Web
Scanning, satisficing, and muddling through

While muddling through may work sometimes, it tends to be in-efficient and error-prone.

If users don't muddle through:

There's a much better chance that they'll find what they're looking for, which is good for them and for you.

There's a better chance that they'll understand the full range of what your site has to offer—not just the parts that they stumble across.

You have a better chance of steering them to the parts of your site that you want them to see.

They'll feel smarter and more in control when they're using your site, which will bring them back. You can get away with a site that people muddle through only until someone builds one down the street that makes them feel smart.

Billboard Design 101
Designing for scanning, not reading

As users whiz past, increase usablilty through:

Strong consideration to following a convention (if one exists) at every step.

Allowing slight inconsistency if it creates clarity.

Notice how, in newspapers, some things are *prominent* (the scoop), some are *grouped* (sections), and some are *nested* (paragraphs spanned by a heading). Use similar visual hierarchies.

Clearly define areas, so users can quickly find what they want.

Make it easy to tell what's a link or a button.

Keep the noise down, making sure *everything* isn't shouting for attention.

Write text optimized for scanning. Make effective use of headings, bullets, paragraphing, and highlighting.

Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral?
Why users like mindless choices

Number of clicks vs. thought put into clicks

Sites and apps strive to minimize clicks around a central task *(e.g. 3 clicks to the 'book it' button on Airbnb)*. One can do better. The number of clicks actually *don't matter* if no thought goes behind each click, and no uncertainty exists regarding where each click will lead. A rule could be: three mindless, unambiguous clicks equal one thoughtful click.

Therefore, when presenting a difficult choice to the user, divide it into simple clicks. In the rare instance where the choice can't be elegantly broken down, provide accompanying guidance which is:

Brief.
Visually noticeable.
Available precisely when needed.

Omit Needless Words
The art of not writing for the Web

Get rid of half the words on each page, then get rid of half of what's left.

A text-heavy page looks daunting, since the user subconsciously assumes that reading everything is compulsory. Just like a machine has no unnecessary parts, a website or app should have no unnecessary text. A heuristic is: get rid of half the words on each page, then get rid of half of what's left.

The following is especially prone to excess:

Happy talk: text containing banal platitudes suggesting how great the app is. It's just a whole lot of 'blah blah blah…'.

Instructions: users read these only after several failed attempts. Strive to make the page self-explanatory, so minimum instructions are needed.

Street Signs and Breadcrumbs
Designing Navigation

Using a website is like in-store shopping:

Users look for something specific.
They browse, or ask for help *(i.e. 'search' for a keyword)*.
If browsing, users look at signage for clues.
They leave if frustrated.

But websites are also unlike real-world stores:

Hard to tell how big a website is, and thus when to stop looking for something.
Must memorize important locations conceptually *(or via bookmarks)*. Cannot retrace
physical steps, like in the real-world.

Hence intuitive page navigation is a must-have, for it not only helps users find stuff, but
also reveals site content and leaves a good impression.

TOOLS   **HOUSEWARES**   **LAWN AND GARDEN**

POWER TOOLS   **HAND TOOLS**   **SANDING AND GRINDING**
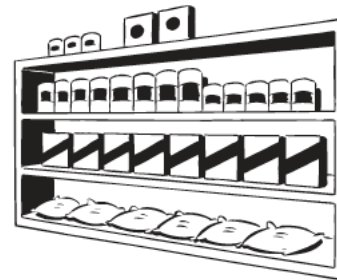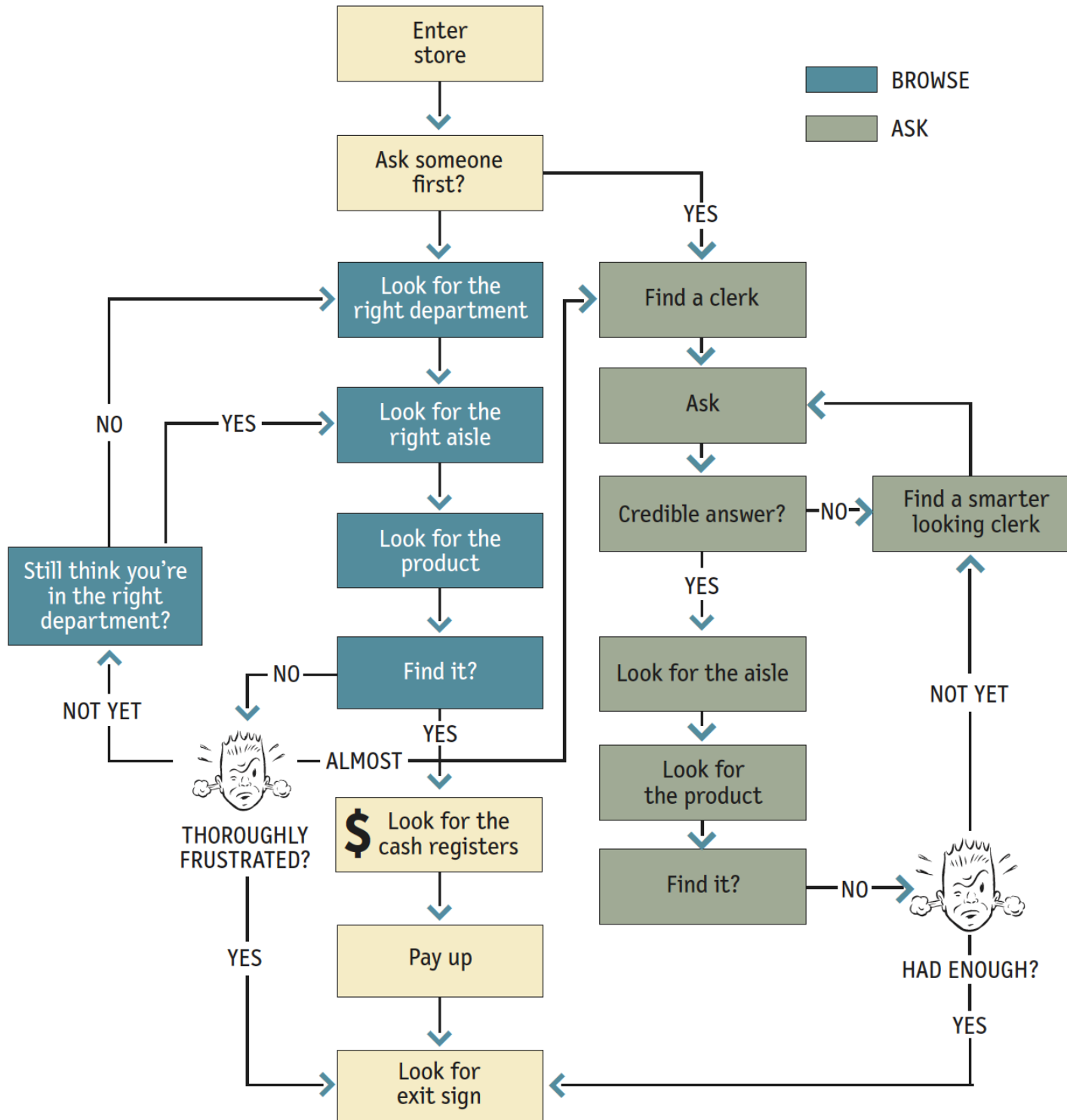
Housewares	Tools	Yard and Garden

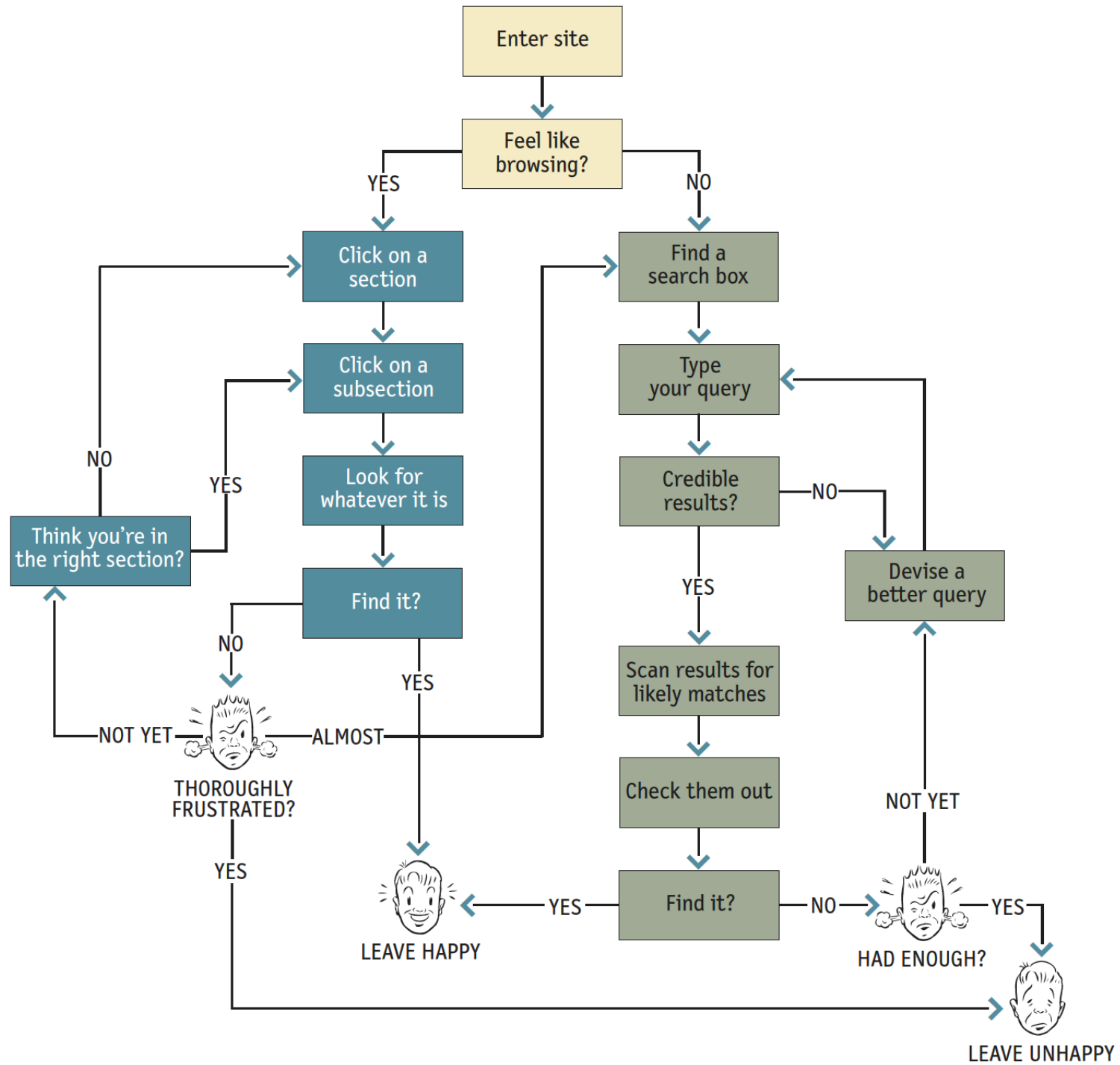| Housewares	Tools	Yard and Garden
Power Tools	Hand Tools	Grinding/Sanding

42cc Chain Saw
6.5hp Log Splitter
6.75hp Mower
Backpack Blower
Brushcutter
Gas Blower/vac
Pro 51cc Chain Saw

Street Signs and Breadcrumbs
Designing Navigation

Useful conventions for navigation are:

The logo typically appears on the top-left of *every page*, and redirects to 'Home'.

Every page has a prominently-displayed *name* which frames its related content and matches what you clicked to get there.

Primary links typically appear at the top, local links typically appear on the left margin.

The top navigation *persists* throughout the site *(exception: pages with forms)*.

Utilities *(e.g. FAQs, help, jobs)* are split between the persistent navigation and the footer and shouldn't be as prominent as the primary navigation.

The current location is vividly *highlighted* on navigation bars of the page.

Breadcrumbs appear at the top. The navigation should show at least the top two levels before resorting to breadcrumbs.

A search box exists on *every* page.

Site ID

Sections

Utilities

GAP

MEN'S | WOMEN'S | GIFTS | SHOPPING BAG | CHECKOUT | HELP

What's New | Jeans | Shirts/Polos | Leather/Outerwear | GapBody Underwear
Men's Sale | Khakis | T's | Activewear/Logo | Loungewear/Sleepwear
Pants/Shorts | Sweaters | Accessories

Subsections
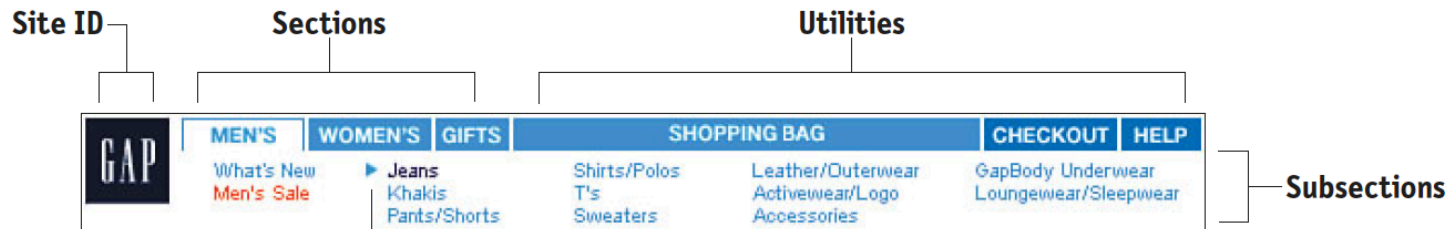
"You are here"
indicator

Page name — JEANS

Local navigation
(Things at the
current level)

jeans
worker jeans-twill new
slim fit jeans
original fit zip fly jeans
original fit jeans
easy fit jeans
boot fit jeans
dark wash boot fit jeans
boot fit cords
leather boot fit jeans
loose fit jeans
vintage cut jeans
relaxed fit jeans
baggy fit jeans
wide leg jeans
worker jeans
carpenter jeans
easy fit jean shorts
carpenter jean shorts sale

You are not signed in.   Register Sign In

GAP

MEN'S | WOMEN'S | GIFTS | SHOPPING BAG | CHECKOUT | HELP

What's New | Jeans | Shirts/Polos | Leather/Outerwear | GapBody Underwear
Men's Sale | Khakis | T's | Activewear/Logo | Loungewear/Sleepwear
Pants/Shorts | Sweaters | Accessories

$100
gets you click for
$20 details

JEANS
view as images ⊕

jeans
worker jeans-twill new
slim fit jeans
original fit zip fly jeans
original fit jeans
easy fit jeans
boot fit jeans
dark wash boot fit jeans
boot fit cords
leather boot fit jeans
loose fit jeans
vintage cut jeans
relaxed fit jeans
baggy fit jeans
wide leg jeans
worker jeans
carpenter jeans
easy fit jean shorts
carpenter jean shorts sale

jean jackets
jean jacket
leather jean jacket

More **sizes**.
More **fits**.
More **options**.

pants@gap.com

Now more jeans sizes,
washes, and fits online—
plus tools to help you shop.

SELECT A TOOL BELOW:

find the right size | find the right wash | find the right fit

Hassle-free returns: return it to any Gap store or by mail.
Questions? Feedback? Email us or call 1-800-GAP-STYLE anytime.

sites: [gap | gapkids | babygap]
services: [help | store locator | site directory | company | gift services]

www.gap.com

Small text
version

sites: [gap | gapkids | babygap]

services: [help | store locator | site directory | company | gift services]

Street Signs and Breadcrumbs
Designing Navigation

Trunk Test

If you've been blindfolded and locked in a car trunk, you should be able to answer these questions about a site immediately when your blindfold is removed:

What site is it?
What page am I on?
What major sections does this site have?
Where can I go from here?
Where am I in relation to the rest of the site?
Where can I go to search?

The First Step to Recovery is Admitting that the Home Page is Beyond Your Control
Designing the Home Page

A home page should answer:

What is this?

What do they have here?

What can I do here?

Why should I be/stay here?

It should show you how to get what you want from the site, tempt you with things you didn't know you were looking for, show you how to get started, and also give a good impression.

The First Step to Recovery is Admitting that the Home Page is Beyond Your Control
Designing the Home Page

The home page is tough, because everyone tries to pull it in a different direction. It must accomplish/contain the following:

Site identity and mission.
Hierarchy - give an idea of what the site contains.
Search box.
Teasers for content.
Current content.
Promotional offers.
Shortcuts for the most frequently viewed data.
Registration/login.

The First Step to Recovery is Admitting that the Home Page is Beyond Your Control
Designing the Home Page

A home page is also the place where you need to spell out the big picture.

Remember not to write too much, and include these elements:

Tagline - next to the site id, sums up the whole site.
Welcome blurb - a terse description of the site.
Be sure to test the home page with other people who are not 'blind' to the site because they've been looking at it as much as you have.

A good tagline is clear and informative, normally between 5-10 words, and also convey what's different about your site, rather than vague, generic text. A tagline conveys a value proposition, it is not a motto.

Usability as Common Courtesy
Why your Web site should be a mensch

Think of users as having a reservoir of goodwill; if you deplete it, they might leave, and perhaps never return.

Don'ts

Don't hide information users want.

Don't make people jump through any more hoops than they absolutely must.

Don't punish the user for not doing things your way, *e.g. entering a phone number in a particular format.*

Don't ask me for information you do not need.

Don't be phony.

Don't get in the way of using the site with fancy features.

Don't make an amateurish looking site.

I enter the site.

My goodwill is a little low, because I'm not happy that their negotiations may seriously inconvenience me.

I glance around the Home page.

It feels well organized, so I relax a little. I'm confident that if the information is here, I'll be able to find it.

There's no mention of the strike on the Home page.

I don't like the fact that it feels like business as usual.

There's a list of five links to News stories on the Home page but none are relevant.

I click on the Press Releases link at the bottom of the list.

Latest press release is five days old.

I go to the About Us page.

No promising links, but plenty of promotions, which is very annoying. Why are they trying to sell me more tickets when I'm not sure they're going to fly me tomorrow?

I search for "strike" and find two press releases about a strike a year ago, and pages from the corporate history about a strike in the 1950s.

At this point, I would like to leave, but they're the sole source for this information.

I look through their FAQ lists, then leave.

Usability as Common Courtesy
Why your Web site should be a mensch

Do's

Make the things people want easy to do, and obvious.

Tell people what they want to know.

Put some effort into it - users will see it and appreciate it.

Know, and show, answers to common questions.

Add extra touches, like printer friendly pages.

Make it easy to back up and try again in case of user errors.

Apologize, if the site simply doesn't do something a user wants.

Accessibility and You

How many opportunities do we have to dramatically improve people's lives just by doing our job a little better?

If something confuses most people who use your site, it's almost certain to confuse users with accessibility issues.

By "accessibility", we mean making it so that, for example, a visually impaired person using a screen reader will be able to navigate and utilize your site.

You should make your site accessible, because of "how extraordinarly better it makes some people's lives".

One very simple test is to view the site with a greatly increased font size, and see if it still looks ok.

Accessibility and You

How many opportunities do we have to dramatically improve people's lives just by doing our job a little better?

Getting accessibility right is difficult, but there are a few things you can do immediately:

Fix the usability problems that confuse everyone.

Add alt text to all images.

Put your web site content in the order that a screen reader should read it, and use CSS to adjust its position.

Make sure forms work with screen readers, using the HTML label element

"Skip to Main Content" link at the beginning of each page.

Ensure that it's possible to navigate by keyboard alone.

Don't use JavaScript without a good reason.

Allow text to resize and create flexible layouts.