

Podcast Usability Guidelines

For the Symposium on Usability, Information Design, and Information Interaction to Communicate Complex Information

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Album Art Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Includes podcast name and logo image	Feedback	3-4
Easily identifiable in smaller sizes (MP3 player screens, podcast thumbnails,...) from a few inches to about two feet (for instance, on a MP3 player held at arm's length).	Feedback	3-4
Enables quick identification of the podcast by the album art when the episode comes up.	Feedback	3-4
Provides enough information on topic to engage.	S&E	0-2
Stimulates user interest.	S&E	0-2
Provides a simple, clean, clear, and straightforward design with podcast name and logo.	EEE, Users & Use, D&D	1-3
Displayed consistently across all episodes.	Consistency	2-3

Album Text Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Is complete and provides user with all the information needed to identify the podcast series and episode (both name and number).	Feedback, EEE, Users & Use, D&D	3-4
Includes a transcript or show notes that allows the user to navigate the episode, including time/place location of information should the user want to skip segments or access a particular segment.	Feedback, EEE, Users & Use	1-2
Stimulates user interest. Episode title, podcast title and more should be interesting.	S&E	0-3
Provides enough information on topic to engage.	S&E	0-2
Provides necessary information for users' context.	Users & Use	2-3
Provides information, especially podcast name, episode number and name, consistently across all episodes.	Consistency	3
Includes show notes or transcript.	Doc	1-2

Pre-Intro Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Exists. These are common, but not all podcasts have them.	Feedback	3-4
Includes episode name, topic if not obvious from the name or the name is too close to another episode's name, and podcast name.	Feedback, EEE, Users & Use	3-4
Stimulates user interest. Episode title, podcast title and more should be interesting and presented in an engaging way (interested, non-monotone voice, for instance).	S&E	0-3
Is short and to the point—ideally less than 10 seconds.	EEE, Users & Use	1-3
Delivers necessary information (podcast title, episode name, possibly episode number) and nothing more.	D&D	2-3
Provides podcast name, episode number and name consistently across all episodes.	Consistency	3

Theme Music Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Provides backup support for the identity of the podcast. Not required, the identity can be handled in other ways, but severity increases if other identifiers are not used.	Feedback	1-3
Corresponds to podcast subject area to increase engagement—professional music for a professional podcast, fun music for a kids podcast, futuristic music for a podcast about future technology—as appropriate for the podcast.	S&E	0-3
Sets the mood/tone of the podcast.	S&E, D&D	0-2
Is generally likeable and interesting. Does not turn users off of the podcast.	S&E	1-3
Is of an effective length—not too long (especially) nor too short.	EEE, D&D	1-3
Considers users’ context and needs in the selection of music, length of music played, and style of music.	Users & Use	1-2
Is the same across all episodes.	Consistency	2-3

Visuals Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Used as necessary to provide additional location information.	Feedback	0-2
Adds interest and supports the podcast episode.	S&W	0-2
Supports tasks users can access/view visuals, such as workout positions during a workout.	EEE	1-3
Illustrates complex concepts with visuals to support user needs and levels.	Users & Use	1-3
Provides visuals only in contexts and types of use where the visuals can be accessed—a podcast for commuters should not require the driver to look at visuals, for instance.	Users & Use, EEE	1-3
Supports content and aids in delivery.	D&D, Doc	1-3
Used consistently within episode and across episodes.	Consistency	1-2

Intro Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Includes episode overview/outlines—more details required for longer episodes.	Feedback	3-4
Provides users information on segments they may find more or less useful and may want to skip, including areas too advanced or easy. Ideally give at least a time episode, so used can navigate these sections.	Feedback, Users & Use	1-3
Orientates the user to her location within the series—for example part two of three. Provides information on the rest of the series. <i>[only necessary for series]</i>	Feedback	2-4
Displays podcasters interest or passion in the topic to engage listener.	S&E	1-3
Provides enough of a podcast overview to hook the listeners and make them want to stay without going too long.	S&E	1-3
Starts in a timely manner (normally within 30 seconds of the start of the podcast).	EEE	1-3
Provides key information in a short amount of time.	EEE	1-3
Covers topics and episodes title (at least) within 45 seconds of the start of the podcast.	EEE	
Points out ways to access alternative content to allow for users to tailor of content.	Users & Use	1-2
Considers context and method of use—providing information in ways that best work with the medium.	Users & Use	1-3
Provides key content in appropriate tone.	D&D	1-3
Precludes superfluous material.	D&D	1-3
Matches the introduction of the other episodes.	Consistency	2-3
Corresponds to the introduction format of other podcasts in the genre.	Consistency	2-3
Points to any additional documentation or support materials.	Doc	1-3

Musical & Other Transitions Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Provides consistent transitions—if music is used it is used consistently and predictably. The longer the podcast the more severe the lack of transitions is—also the more segments the more severe the lack of transitions.	Feedback	1-3
Indicates location in the podcast—including where was and where going (For example “That wraps up the topic for today. Now we move to listener feedback”). For longer podcasts these verbal transitions are more necessary.	Feedback	1-3
Adds interest and possibly fun or entertainment between segments.	S&E	0-2
Keeps users hooked by not straying from the topic too far and corresponding to the topic.	S&E	0-3
Provides mental breaks between segments or in longer segments to keep and holder overall listener’s interest and reduce mental load, without wasting time.	S&E, EEE	1-3
Are short and informative: Keeps time in mind and does not waste user’s time.	EEE	1-3
Provides information on the next segment, so users can skip if the segment is not appropriate for their levels or needs.	Users & Use	1-3
Considers users’ context and needs in the selection of music, length of music played, and style of music.	Users & Use	1-2
Considers users’ context and needs in the types of transitions used, frequency of transitions, and even the inclusion of transitions.	Users & Use	1-2
Adds aesthetics and sets tone.	D&D	1-3
Does not get superfluous.	D&D	1-3
Used consistently within the episode.	Consistency	1-2
Used consistently across all episodes	Consistency	1-2

Bed Music Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Used consistently to aid listeners with their location in the podcast—for example only used in the intro and outro, or used with a fade out at the beginning of each section.	Feedback	0-2
Adds and keeps interest during the start or end of segments.	S&E	0-2
Provides or supports the tone of the podcast—such as scary music during a horror story.	S&E, D&D	0-2
Does not overpower the content being presented at the same time—user should be able to easily hear the podcaster/content over the bed music.	EEE	3-4
Does not distract from content.	EEE	3-4
Considers users with hearing problems that may not be able to differentiate between background noise and key content.	Users & Use	3-4
Considers users' context and needs in the choice to use music, selection of music, length of music played, and style of music.	Users & Use	1-2
Adds aesthetics and sets tone.	D&D	1-3
Used consistently within the episode.	Consistency	1-2
Used consistently across all episodes.	Consistency	1-2

Main Body Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Follows a consistent pattern from episode to episode.	Feedback	1-3
Provides location information every few minutes through transitions, overviews, summaries, and placement indicators like “next” and “second.”	Feedback	2-4
Employs an interesting and engaging voice and tone—but “radio voice” not needed. Podcaster(s) should make sure they seem interested and even passionate about the material and that will add to the listener’s engagement and satisfaction.	S&E	1-3
Provides the listeners with the materials they need or want.	S&E	1-4
Keeps on topic and to the point (as necessary, some podcasts may be engaging by going off topic), avoiding distractions and superfluous material.	S&E, D&D	0-2
Delivers key and expected information/content.	EEE, S&E	1-4
Supplies content effectively—without unnecessary tangents, ramblings, excessive details, and so on. Listener’s time is kept in mind.	EEE, S&E	1-4
Presented at the level of the majority of the audience.	Users & Use	2-4
Accommodates other key user groups/levels by offering additional content—such as definitions for beginners and short theoretical sections for experts.	Users & Use	1-3
Delivers content appropriate to the user’s context and methods of use—for example, highly complex information may not be best in a podcast meant to be listened to while driving.	Users & Use	1-4
Matches the body of the other episodes.	Consistency	2-3
Corresponds to the body format of other podcasts in the genre.	Consistency	2-3
Points to links and further information on any sources, documentation, or additional materials.	Doc	1-3

Outro Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Includes episode summary and wrap-up—more details required for longer episodes.	Feedback	4
Leads into the next episode to indicate place in the series or episodes.	Feedback	2-3
Orientates the user to her location within the series—for example part two of three. Provides information on the rest of the series. <i>[only necessary for series]</i>	Feedback	0-2
Reminds user of the satisfying content by summarizing and highlighting key points.	S&E	0-2
Hooks user on next the next episode.	S&E	0-2
Engages with same passionate/interested tone.	S&E	1-3
Wraps up episode effectively and efficiently.	EEE	1-3
Points out ways to access alternative content to allow for future user tailoring of content.	Users & Use, D&D, Doc	1-3
Fits context and use.	Users & Use, D&D	1-2
Matches the outro of the other episodes.	Consistency	2-3
Corresponds to the outro format of other podcasts in the genre.	Consistency	2-3
Provides basic reference information.	Doc	1-2
Points to links, show notes, transcripts, and further information on any sources, documentation, or additional materials.	Doc	1-3

Additional Texts Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Provides information needed on related podcast, such as episode number and section it is related to.	Feedback	2-4
Follows location/place practices (in text feedback) as normal for type of text.	Feedback	2-4
Provides users methods to further explore the topic and content.	S&E	0-4
Follows the rules for efficiency and effectiveness for the type of text.	EEE	1-3
Are easy to access.	EEE	1-3
Matches appropriate user levels and needs.	Users & Use	1-3
Provides information needed to support different user levels.	Users & Use	1-3
Accommodates the different access methods of users (text transcripts for the hearing impaired, for example).	Users & Use	3-4
Delivers materials in forms that best match use, content, purpose and context.	Users & Use, D&D	1-2
Used consistently within episode and across episodes.	Consistency	1-2
Designed to support the core content.	D&D, Doc	1-2
Easily accessible from information provided in the podcast.	Doc	1-3
Are available for users to access, search, and utilize: at least show notes or a transcript outside the podcast file—on an associated blog for instance.	Doc	2-3

Podcast as a Whole Guidelines

Usability Concerns	Heuristic	Severity
Utilizes various techniques throughout in a consistent manner to provide feedback on user's location within the text for navigation and location.	Feedback	2-4
Weaves content, podcaster tone/engagement, music, and other pieces of the podcast together into a satisfying and engaging text.	S&E	2-4
Provides an edited clean podcast without distracting sound issues, noises, or repetitions.	EEE, D&D	1-4
Fits within any time constraints (such as an expected episode length, or commute time for podcast designed for commutes or a workout time for podcasts designed for workouts).	EEE	3-4
Provides link and methods to easily access additional material.	EEE	1-2
Offers a variety of ways to access key content—through the podcast, through transcriptions and show notes in the album text and corresponding site, links to references, and so on.	Users & Use	3-4
Provides additional content for users of different levels—such as definitions (perhaps in the transcript) for beginner users, and links to advanced applications for expert users.	Users & Use	1-2
Considers context and use, presenting only appropriate materials for the context and methods of use.	Users & Use	1-4
Delivered in correct format—heavily visual material for instance, should not be a podcast.	D&D	3-4
Is of an effective length—not too long (especially) nor too short.	D&D	1-3
Sound levels are appropriate across the podcast and with other MP3 files.	D&D	2-4
Considers the sound as a medium and present material in best ways for this medium.	D&D	1-3
Balances aesthetics and minimalism.	D&D	1-3
Parallels in format, content type, arrangement, and delivery other episodes and within the genre.	Consistency	2-4
Applies consistent sound levels and sound editing.	Consistency	1-3
Provides reference information for listeners to locate and access the music, citations, references, and other outside material used in the podcast.	Doc	1-2
Provides at least enough support materials for those with hearing issues to access the text and for those who need an alternative form of access. Ideally provides a form of the text that can be quickly skimmed and searched (via search engines and keyword site and browser searches).	Doc	1-2