



Chapter 15

User Support and On-Line Information

Active Learning with Minimalist Manuals

- Minimalist instruction
 - Removing many of the obstacles that make learning difficult
- The Training Wheels Word Processor
 - Limits the learner to simple functions
- The Scenario Machine
 - Provides additional information

User Assistance and On-line Help

- Two tasks are involved when you use any tool to help you accomplish something
 - Primary task: what led you to use the tool
 - Secondary task: mastering enough of the tool to accomplish the primary task
- Design flaws can be present

On-line Information

- Help messages
- Context-sensitive help
- Generic help text
- Extended help screens
- On-line written documentation

Effectiveness of Help Systems

- Difficult to study
- Empirical study of IBM's CMS system
 - 15% of the help messages were never accessed
 - 10% of the messages accounted for 90% of the usage
 - (1984) Printed manuals work better than on-line help

Typical Users' Questions

- Goal exploration: What can I do with this program?
- Definition and description: What is this? What is it for?
- Task achievement: How do I do this?
- Diagnostic: How did that happen?
- State identification: Where am I?

Current Status of On-line Assistance

- Well-written, generally accessible on-line help works effectively to meet requests for operational and definitional information
- Not as effective for tactical information

Five Different Patterns

- Immediate correction
- Automatic causal analysis
- Conscious causal analysis
- Explorative causal analysis
- Conceptual mismatch

SuperBook

- A presentation system for on-line books, designed and built by researchers at AT&T
- Presents existing documentation in a multi-windowed display
- Users had significantly shorter search times and more correct responses than those using printed text

Hypertext and Hypermedia

- **Hypertext:** a collection of nonlinear, text-based nodes that are linked together
- **Hypermedia:** when different media are included as well as text in a branching structure

Designing Hypermedia for Training in HCI

- The development of the HalCion system
- The designer must:
 - Help users to build accurate mental models of the information structure
 - Provide appropriate tools to allow the users to navigate the conceptual space in the way they wish