



# Search Boxes

## Best Practice: How to Implement Search Boxes

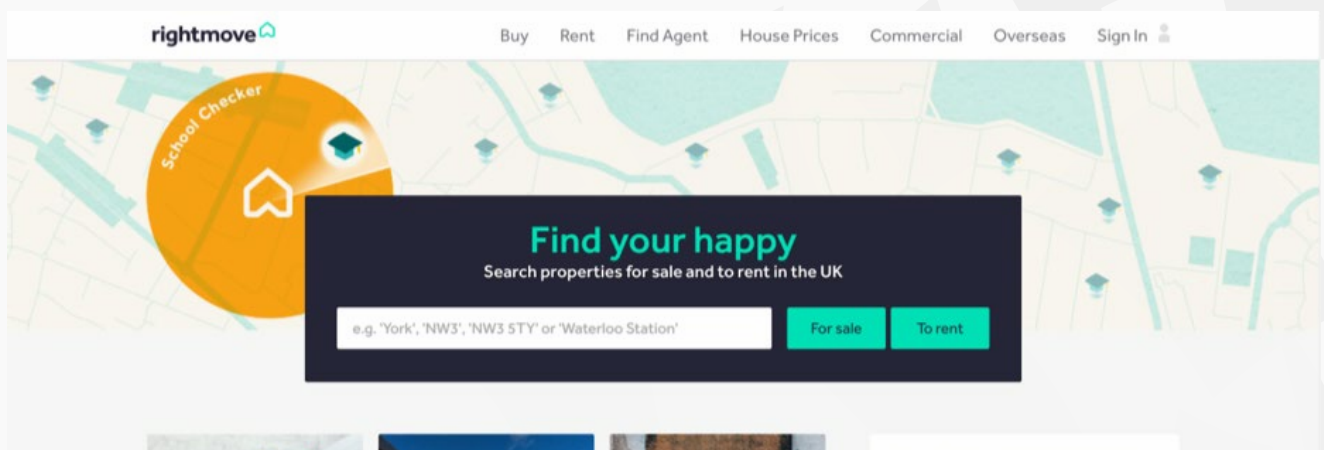
Many different designs call for some form of search box, and each one of these occasions will present different constraints, such as the appearance, location, size, and visibility afforded by the particular website, application, program, archive, or database. Therefore, these implementation guidelines are in no way exhaustive or applicable to every specific instance where search boxes are required. However, some qualities must remain the same across all of these different uses; so, we shall focus on the more general nature of search boxes and how to implement them to make the user experience as smooth, quick and efficient as possible, without focusing on any one application specifically.

- 1 To distinguish the search box clearly from the rest of the user interface, you must **outline the input field** and make sure the internal color of the box contrasts with the surrounding color. Generally, search boxes are white, so they appear prominent within the design, regardless of the other colors used in the surrounding regions.
- 2 Always try to place search boxes *above* the region where the results will be displayed. For this reason, you should **position search boxes at the highest point on a page**, or just beneath the global navigation area.

[Continued on next page]

[Continued from previous page]

- 3 | If the main aim of a design is to allow users to search for content the moment they arrive, you should **automatically place the cursor within the search box**. When users are frequent visitors to a site and they always have to click within the search box before they can start navigating through the contents, it can become frustrating. For example, on the website of Rightmove (shown below), users must first enter a location before they can view properties, but the search box is only active once they have clicked in the input field. It may seem like a small detail, but remember the last time your system was running slow. For some reason, you had to get something done or get answers *now* and you were slowed down because your computer was having a brain freeze or your internet service seemed to be having a stroke. You know the cursor appears automatically in your default search engine's search box, so you type away, expecting to see your words magically appear—and...*eventually*, they do.



- 4 | When you are using a search box that directs the user to a new page, **the search term should still appear above the results or contents** on this new page. This way, the users are provided with *confirmation* of their search term, so they do not have to remember what they had entered on the previous page, or wonder if they may have made a typo.

[Continued on next page]

[Continued from previous page]

- 5 | While search boxes are common within user interface design, you should **include a word or icon to show the user that the search field is *editable***. If the input field is blank, the user might assume it is simply an area of dead space within the design. Typically, the word 'search' appears in the search box and there is a small magnifying glass icon either in the right- or left-hand corner of the input field. When the user clicks in the search box, the word or phrase that is put there to trigger users to input text (often the word 'search' is used) should *instantly* disappear, so they do not have to delete the word manually before they can enter their search term.
- 6 | Where appropriate, **visualize previous search terms in a dropdown menu from the search box**, to help speed up the process when users make common searches. If you implement predictive search options, the dropdown menu should appear once the user has entered a letter or portion of a word. For example, if a user has previously searched for 'pandas' in a web browser, this search term should appear once the user has entered the letter 'p'. Other search suggestions should also appear within this dropdown menu, but they must be displayed after the user's own prior search terms.
- 7 | You must **provide the user with a clearly visible 'submit' button** or an icon, such as a magnifying glass, that performs the same function when clicked. However, the user should also be able to use the return key to submit the search term.
- 8 | When the search results are listed, **display them in order of relevance to the term**—from the most related to the least related—or according to the regularity with which the user selects a particular option.

# Do you want to learn more?

Learn how to use this template to your best advantage in our online course [UI Design Patterns for Successful Software](#). Sign up for it today and learn how you can create user interfaces that work just right if you haven't already started the course.

## UI Design Patterns for Successful Software

### ■□□ Beginner course

User interface (UI) design patterns can be a designer's best friend, allowing you to build excellent user experiences with structure and speed. When used in the wrong way, however, they can quickly lead to experiences that confuse your users... and no-one wants that! Our course [UI Design Patterns for Successful Software](#) will equip you with the knowledge required to master UI design patterns and secure them as one of the best attributes in your designer's toolkit. You'll be guided through best practices relating to content organization, navigation, data entry, and social integration—all with detailed templates that you can use in your daily work. You'll also analyze and critique popular websites to see how the best of the best utilize UI design patterns to achieve great UX design. If you found this template useful, then this course is a treasure trove of resources and guidance that will continue to enhance your knowledge of UI design.

[Learn more about this course >](#)



INTERACTION DESIGN  
FOUNDATION

INTERACTION-DESIGN.ORG



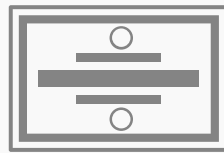
Creative Commons BY-SA license: You are free to edit and redistribute this template, even for commercial use, as long as you give credit to the Interaction Design Foundation. Also, if you remix, transform, or build upon this template, you must distribute it under the same CC BY-SA license.

# How to advance your career with our online courses



## Take online courses by industry experts.

Lessons are self-paced so you'll never be late for class or miss a deadline.



## Get a Course Certificate.

Your answers are graded by experts, not machines. Get an industry-recognized Course Certificate to prove your skills.



## Advance your career.

Use your new skills in your existing job or to get a new job in UX design. Get help from our community.

[See all our courses >](#)

## About the Interaction Design Foundation



INTERACTION DESIGN  
FOUNDATION

With over 66,000 alumni, the Interaction Design Foundation is the biggest design school globally. Industry leaders such as IBM and Adobe train their teams with our courses, and universities such as MIT and the University of Cambridge include our courses in their curricula. Our online courses are taught by industry experts and cover the entire spectrum of UX design from beginner to advanced. We give you industry-recognized course certificates to advance your career. Since 2002, we've put together the world's biggest and most authoritative library of open-source UX Design literature created by such noted authors as Don Norman and Clayton Christensen.



[INTERACTION-DESIGN.ORG](https://www.interaction-design.org)



Creative Commons BY-SA license: You are free to edit and redistribute this template, even for commercial use, as long as you give credit to the Interaction Design Foundation. Also, if you remix, transform, or build upon this template, you must distribute it under the same CC BY-SA license.