Tabs

## Best Practice: How to Implement Tabs

Tabs take their inspiration from file folders and indexed address books, which enable the users to jump quickly to their target section by holding a particular label and opening the book on that page. Tabs act as the highest-order sections or categories; they are purposefully broad so the user can gradually channel into the user interface to access more specific content without having to scan all of the available contents a site has to offer at once.

There are two distinct types of tabs you can use.

- **Navigation tabs** are almost exclusively placed along the top-level navigation bar of websites, offering small, clickable labels that open content in a new webpage. We can see navigation tabs in the example of the Google Chrome interface below.
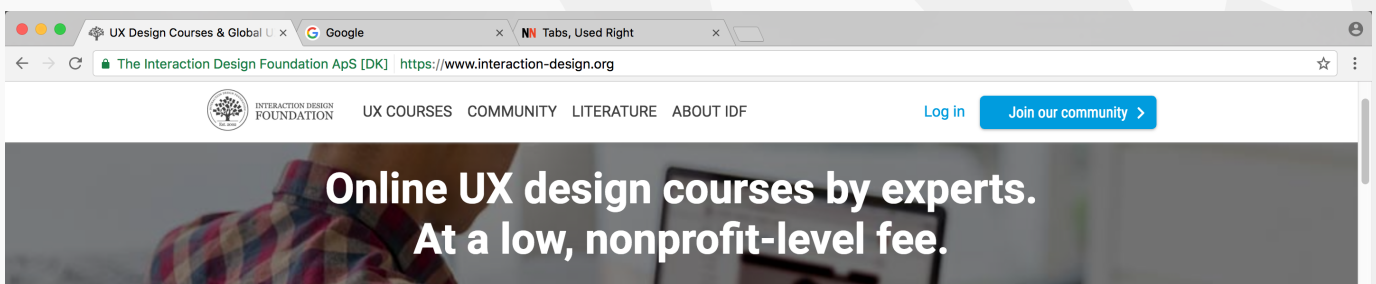
- **Module tabs** present information on the same page, usually within a fixed panel, allowing the user to operate without having to navigate to other separate sections of the user interface.

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When implementing tabs, take into account the following steps:

1 | First of all, you must **establish how the site contents will be divided**, which involves clubbing related information, images, and other items together under the same umbrella term. As a general rule, you should only use tabs when you are dealing with at least three and no more than nine or ten distinct sections. After you have established which groups all the available contents fit into, you must assign a *logical* and *unambiguous tab label* to each category and sort them in a logical order.

2 | You must then **arrange all of these labels horizontally**, bordering one another so as to reduce the amount of space the user must traverse when skipping from tab to tab, and to ensure there is enough room to fit all of the necessary information onto each tab. The usual convention for navigation tabs is to make sure the tab bar spans the top width of the screen, as this helps establish the first level in the visual framework – with the navigation tabs serving as the top tier and providing the broadest channels to explore.

3 | In order to help users identify where they are within the website, you should **distinguish the currently selected tab from the rest**. You can achieve this by using a different color for the selected tab, but any visual indicator will work. Providing context is an important element of user interface design as, otherwise, the users might not remember where they are, where they have already been, or where they can go (in general or from their current position).

Next, **place some form of boundary around the tab and its corresponding contents**, to increase the sense of connectedness between the means of selection and resulting information, options, etc. To enhance this effect, ensure the color of the selected tab is the same as the background color of the corresponding content panel or menu.

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When implementing tabs, take into account the following steps:

4 | Finally, **ensure the same design is maintained across all the different pages**, to allow free and easy movement around the contents of the site and to prevent errors. Users are more likely to make selection mistakes if the tabs are constantly changing place. Furthermore, inconsistent design forces users to engage with the visual display consciously rather than rely on experience to help guide their interactions.

Consistent design helps to reduce the amount of cognitive effort required in order to decode the visual representations in a user interface. As cognitive resources, such as short-term memory and attention, are limited, consistent design enables users to apply knowledge from one page to all others without even realizing it, thereby conserving these precious resources for their core aims and objectives. Users do not want to spend time working out how they can achieve their goals according to the constraints of the system; the user interface design must take this pressure off them, freeing their attention up so they can move and interact (largely) unconsciously to complete their system-based tasks.

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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.

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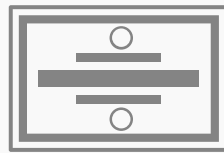
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