Information Architecture & Navigation

Guidelines for User Experience

MIS3506 Spring 2026

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What is a menu?

A navigational design element that provides users with a structured overview of the information and functionalities available within a website or application.

A temporary, interactive surface displaying a list of options that allows users to navigate a digital product or perform actions. It's a fundamental navigation pattern, crucial for organizing content and enhancing usability by providing a structured and accessible way for users to make choices and find information within an app or website
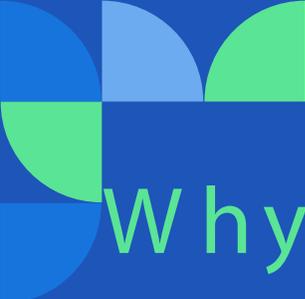
What is Menu Design?

The creation of structured, intuitive navigational elements (like top bars, sidebars, or dropdowns) that allow users to easily find information and functions within a digital product. Effective menu design prioritizes clarity, scannability, consistency, and mobile-friendliness to provide an efficient and satisfying user experience, helping users understand and navigate content

Where is the first place you look for a menu?

Why is Menu Design Important?

1

People rely on menus to discover and find content and features on your digital product

2

Menus help users understand the content structure and mapping between pages
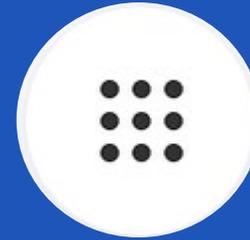
3

Menus help Conserve screen space by organizing numerous options until the user needs them

Common Menu Types

- Bento Menu: Grid- based navigation

- Kebab Menu: Three dots, popular on mobile interfaces

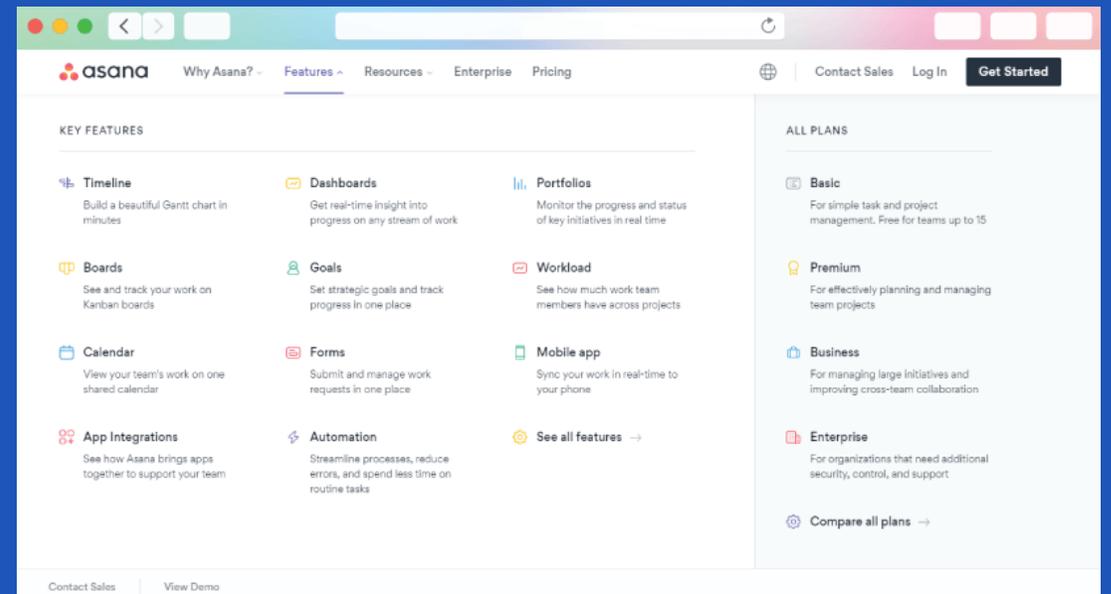- Burger Menu: Three horizontal lines, universal mobile standard

Common Menu Types

- **Multilevel Menu: Complex hierarchies for content-rich sites**

- **Mega Menu: Hover-activated custom blocks with previews**
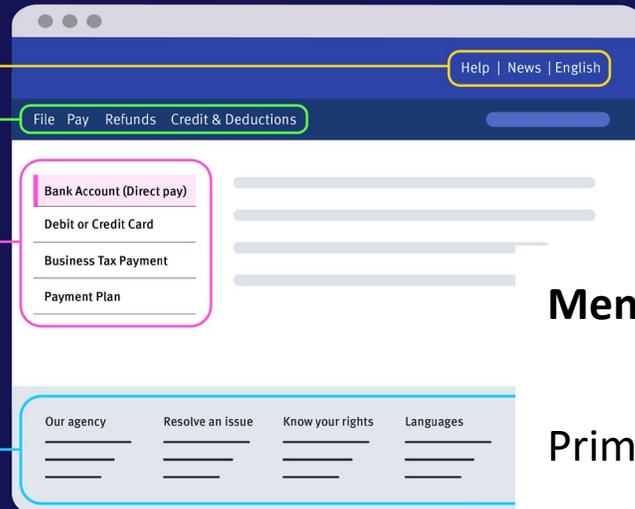
4 Types of
Website Navigation

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UTILITY NAVIGATION — Help | News | English

GLOBAL NAVIGATION — File   Pay   Refunds   Credit & Deductions

LOCAL NAVIGATION —
Bank Account (Direct pay)
Debit or Credit Card
Business Tax Payment
Payment Plan

FOOTER NAVIGATION —
Our agency | Resolve an issue | Know your rights | Languages

Menu Type	Expected Location
Primary navigation menu	Websites: Header Applications: Left side of the screen
Utility (or secondary) navigation	Above the primary navigation and search, towards the top of the screen
Local navigation	Along the left-hand side on desktop websites
Footer menu	Bottom of the screen

- User Experience: 83% ROI improvement with good UX design
- SEO Benefits: Better crawlability and site structure indexing
- Brand Credibility: Professional navigation builds user trust
- Conversions: Clear navigation guides users to complete actions
- Engagement: Increased session time and reduced bounce rates
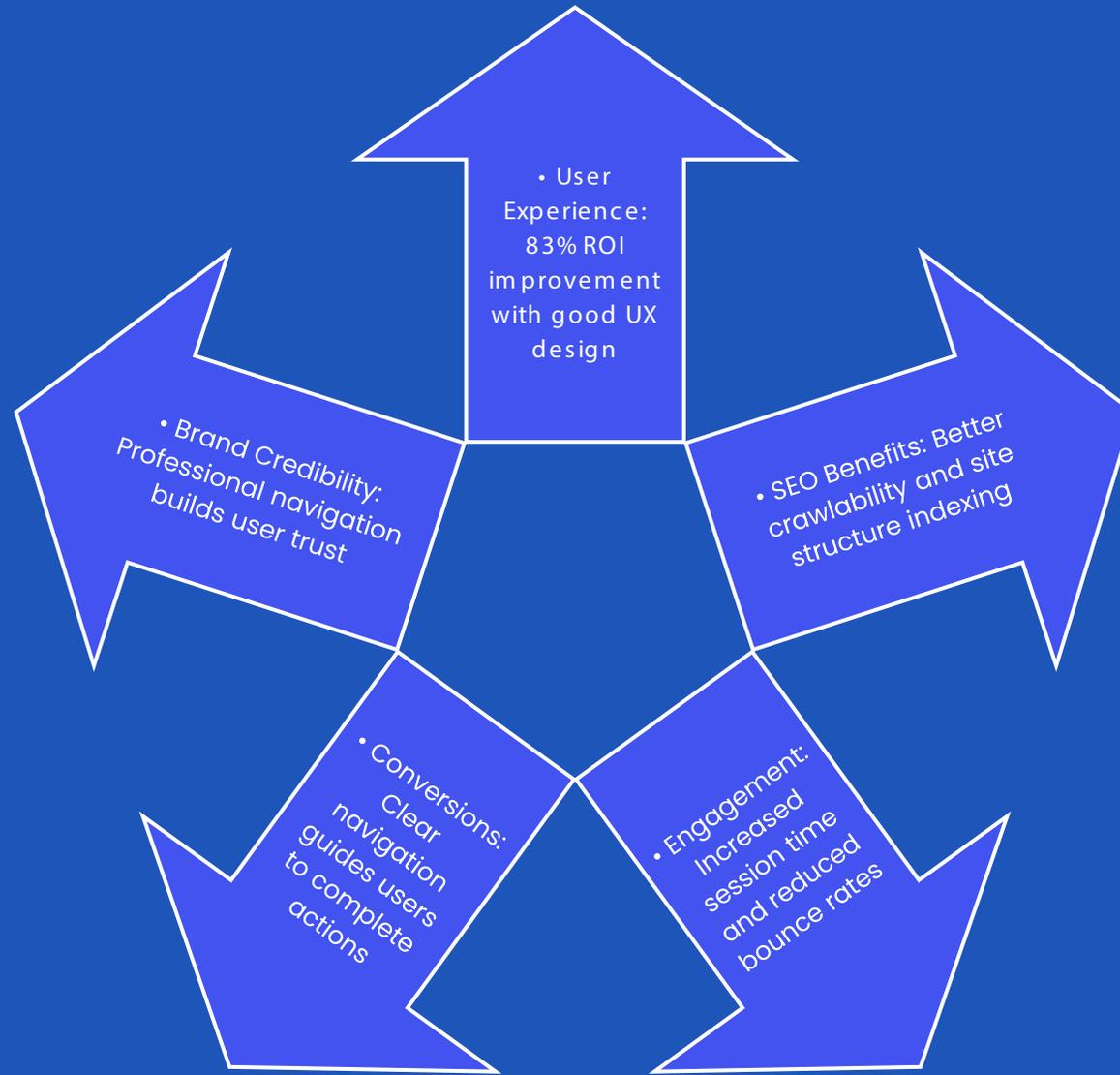
Business Impact of Good Menu Design

Guideline 1: Make Menus/Navigation Visible

- Ensure menus are immediately visible upon page load

- Avoid hidden or hard-to-find navigation elements (hidden menus make navigation tricky!)

- Use top navigation bars, multilevel menus, or mega menus

- Hidden menus increase touchpoints and user frustration

- Visibility prevents user drop-offs and abandonment

Guideline 2: Reduce Cognitive Load

- Structure information to minimize mental effort required

- Use subcategories and multilevel organization for complex sites

- Prioritize content hierarchy over arbitrary item limits

- The "7-item rule" is a misconception for digital menus

- Focus on logical grouping rather than strict number limits

Guideline 3: Use Familiar Icons and Labels

- Follow Jakob Nielsen's usability heuristics

- Use universally recognized icons and terminology

- Match system language with real-world conventions

- Avoid confusing or creative labeling that requires explanation

- Enable users to navigate without assistance or learning curve

Guideline 4: Optimize for Mobile

- 96.2% of users access web through mobile devices

- Implement responsive design for smaller screens

- Use burger menus or bento menus for mobile interfaces

- Follow native app guidelines for iOS and Android

- Ensure touch-friendly sizing and spacing

Guideline 5: Follow Platform Guidelines

Guidelines provide structure, accessibility, and development standards. Use as starting point, not strict rules.

- Android: Material Design guidelines for consistency

- iOS: Apple Human Interface Guidelines for native feel

- Web: WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)

Guideline 6: Design for Accessibility

- 16% of global population has some form of disability

- Use simple, clear language for menu labels

- Implement high-contrast colors and scalable fonts

- Include icons for faster recognition

- Add voice command features where possible

- Test with users who have disabilities

Guideline 7: Conduct User Testing

- Test menu designs with target audience in controlled environment

- Validate usability before full implementation

- Use remote testing platforms for broader reach

- Gather feedback on navigation flow and findability

- Iterate based on real user behavior and feedback

Guideline 8: Maintain Consistency

- Keep menu placement consistent across all pages

- Use single menu design pattern throughout site

- Maintain consistent labeling and terminology

- Follow brand guidelines for visual consistency

- Inconsistency leads to user confusion and distrust

Guideline 9: Prioritize Localization

- Adapt menu design for specific regional preferences

- Consider RTL (Right-to-Left) layouts for Middle Eastern markets

- Use local language and cultural conventions

- Research regional digital interface patterns

- Localization improves user comfort and adoption

Guideline 10: Conduct Regular Audits

- Regularly review menu performance and usability

- Check compliance with accessibility standards

- Monitor user behavior and navigation patterns

- Update based on changing user needs and technology

- Continuous improvement ensures long-term success

Key Takeaways

- Visible, well-structured menus are essential for user success

- Mobile optimization is critical with 96%+ mobile usage

- Accessibility and inclusion should be design priorities

- Regular testing and auditing ensure continued effectiveness

- Good menu design directly impacts business metrics and ROI

Tree Testing

- An evaluation of hierarchical category structure (menu) by having users find locations in the tree where specific resources or features can be found

Tree Testing Process

Step 1: Create the Tree

Step 2: Write Tasks

Task 1:
You want to renew your driver's license.
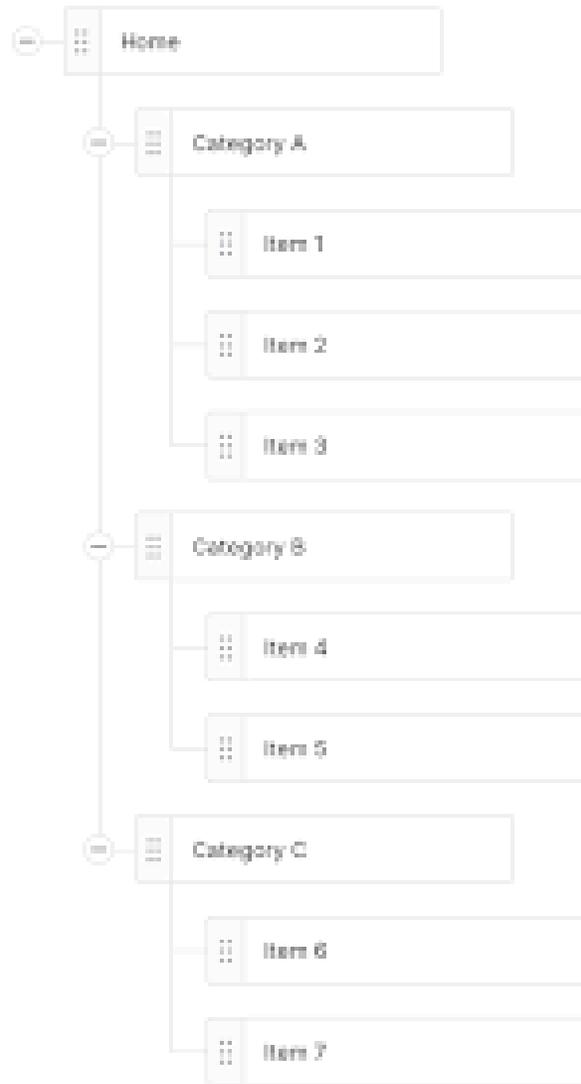*Where would you look for information about this?*

Step 3: Test with Users

I'd find it here.

Step 4: Review Data

Task 1
75% success
36 seconds

Task #	Time (sec.)	Success Rate
	36	75%
	60	80%
	49	70%
4	120	40%
5	45	60%

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Tree structure

- Home
  - Category A
    - Item 1
    - Item 2
    - Item 3
  - Category B
    - Item 4
    - Item 5
  - Category C
    - Item 6
    - Item 7

Tree (?)

▼ Expand all   ▶ Collapse all   ⬇ Export

▼ Home
  ▼ Citizen
    ▶ **Education**
    ▼ Health and Wellness
      └ General Health and Wellness
      └ Health Care
      └ Insurance Providers
  ▶ **Visitor**
  ▶ **Business**
  ▶ **Government**

Tree Testing

Provides a quick way to evaluate and test your menu labels and categories

Helps you to design a menu that will make sense to the user

Tied to business metrics

ICA – Paper Tree Testing & Metrics

Create a navigational menu/tree for the following:

You are a UX designer for a mid-size online apparel retailer. The CEO wants to redesign the website based on customer feedback. There are several major issues, one of which is that users find it hard to navigate with the current menu structure. Goals: improve product discovery, reduce support contacts about orders/returns, increase conversion from browse to cart, and reduce time-to-find for high-intent tasks (order tracking, returns).