

## Lists

### Lists are commonly found on websites. These

may be lists of, for example, people, drugs, theaters, or restaurants.

Each list should be clearly introduced and have a descriptive title. A list should be formatted so that it can be easily scanned. The order of items in the list should be done to maximize user performance, which usually means that the most important items are placed toward the top of the list. If a numbered list is used, start the numbering at "one," not "zero." Generally only the first letter of the first word is capitalized, unless a word that is usually capitalized is shown in the list.

**Guideline:** Arrange lists and tasks in an order that best facilitates efficient and successful user performance.

**Relative Importance:**  
  
**Strength of Evidence:**

**Comments:** Designers should determine if there is an order for items that will facilitate use of the website. If there is, ensure that the site is formatted to support that order, and that all pages follow the same order. For example, ensure that lists of items, sets of links, and a series of tabs are in a meaningful order.

Where no obvious order applies, organize lists alphabetically or numerically. Keep in mind that it is the user's logic that should prevail rather than the designer's logic.

**Sources:** Bransford and Johnson, 1972; Detweiler and Omanson, 1996; Engel and Granda, 1975; Evans, 1998; Flower, Hayes and Swarts, 1983; Halgren and Cooke, 1993; Morkes and Nielsen, 1998; Nygren and Allard, 1996; Ozok and Salvendy, 2000; Redish, Felker and Rose, 1981; Smith and Mosier, 1986; Spyridakis, 2000.

**Example:** Ordering list by region and then alphabetically by country allows users to rapidly find desired information.

Region/Country
<b>North America</b>
Canada
Mexico
United States
Other
<b>Total</b>
<b>Central &amp; South America</b>
Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
Costa Rica
Cuba
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
Guatemala
Honduras

Ordering list by region and then alphabetically by country allows users to rapidly find desired information.



If most of your users will be looking for the same item, then place it at the top of your list.

This list should be ordered to read down columns, not across rows.

<a href="#">Alabama</a>	<a href="#">Alaska</a>	<a href="#">Arizona</a>	<a href="#">Arkansas</a>
<a href="#">California</a>	<a href="#">Colorado</a>	<a href="#">Connecticut</a>	<a href="#">Delaware</a>
<a href="#">District of Columbia</a>	<a href="#">Florida</a>	<a href="#">Georgia</a>	<a href="#">Hawaii</a>
<a href="#">Idaho</a>	<a href="#">Illinois</a>	<a href="#">Iowa</a>	<a href="#">Iowa</a>
<a href="#">Kansas</a>	<a href="#">Kentucky</a>	<a href="#">Louisiana</a>	<a href="#">Maine</a>
<a href="#">Maryland</a>	<a href="#">Massachusetts</a>	<a href="#">Michigan</a>	<a href="#">Minnesota</a>
<a href="#">Mississippi</a>	<a href="#">Missouri</a>	<a href="#">Montana</a>	<a href="#">Nebraska</a>
<a href="#">Nevada</a>	<a href="#">New Hampshire</a>	<a href="#">New Jersey</a>	<a href="#">New Mexico</a>
<a href="#">New York</a>	<a href="#">North Carolina</a>	<a href="#">North Dakota</a>	<a href="#">Ohio</a>

## 12:2 Display Related Items in Lists

**Guideline:** Display a series of related items in a vertical list rather than as continuous text.

**Comments:** A well-organized list format tends to facilitate rapid and accurate scanning. One study indicated that users scan vertical lists more rapidly than horizontal lists. Scanning a horizontal list takes users twenty percent longer than scanning a vertical list.

**Sources:** Mayhew, 1992; Nygren and Allard, 1996; Smith and Mosier, 1986; Tullis, 1984; Wright, 1977.

### Example:

The Office of Data makes available for download

- [Annual Production Statistics](#)
- [Monthly Production Statistics](#)
- [Weekly Production Statistics](#) and
- [Quarterly Consumption Projections.](#)

Bulleted lists are easier to scan and understand.

The Office of Data makes available for download [Annual Production Statistics](#), [Monthly Production Statistics](#), [Weekly Production Statistics](#), and [Quarterly Consumption Projections](#).

Horizontal lists are more difficult to scan and understand.

Relative Importance:

12340

Strength of Evidence:

12340

## 12:3 Introduce Each List

**Guideline:** Provide an introductory heading (i.e., word or phrase) at the top of each list.

**Comments:** Providing a descriptive heading allows users to readily understand the reason for having a list of items, and how the items relate to each other. The heading helps to inform users how items are categorized, or any prevailing principle or theme. Users are able to use lists better when they include headings.

**Sources:** Bransford and Johnson, 1972; Bransford and Johnson, 1973; Detweiler and Omanson, 1996; Engel and Granda, 1975; Levine, 1996; Redish, 1993; Smith and Goodman, 1984; Smith and Mosier, 1986.

### Example:



Relative Importance:

12340

Strength of Evidence:

12340



See page xxi  
for detailed descriptions  
of the rating scales

12340

## 12:4 Format Lists to Ease Scanning

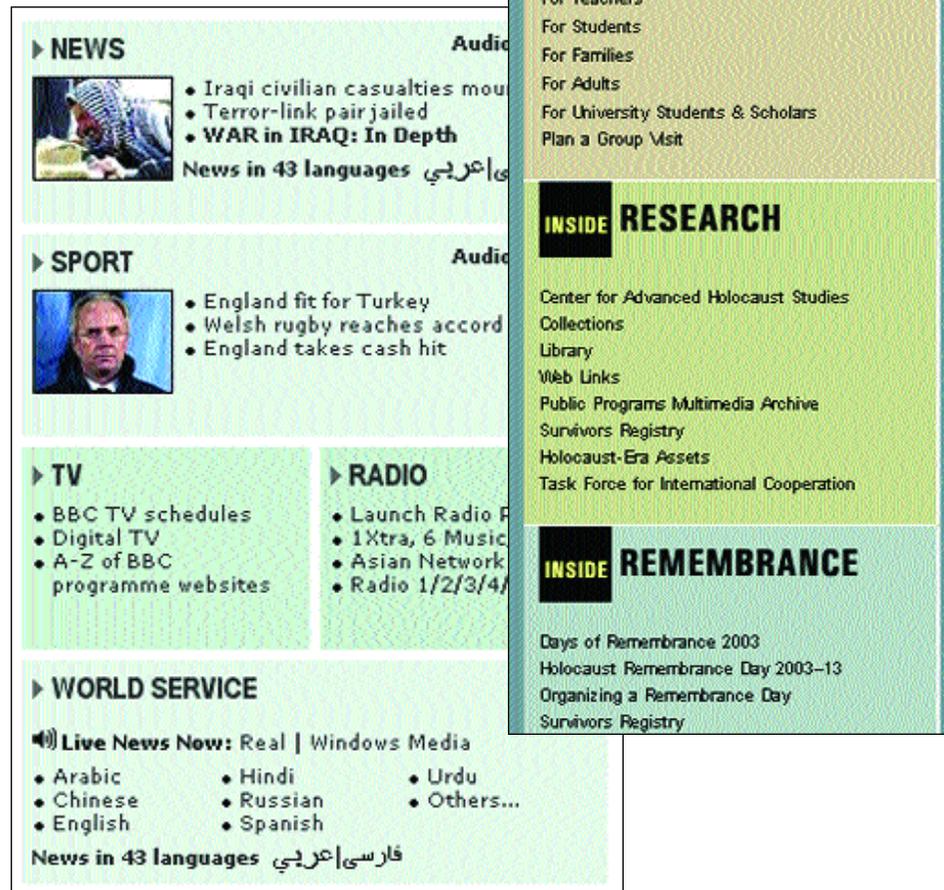
**Guideline:** Make lists easy to scan and understand.

**Comments:** The use of meaningful labels, effective background colors, borders, and white spaces allow users to identify a set of items as a discrete list.

**Sources:** Chaparro and Bernard, 2001; Detweiler and Omanson, 1996; Levine, 1996; Nielsen and Tahir, 2002; Nygren and Allard, 1996; Spyridakis, 2000; Treisman, 1982.

**Example:**

These websites use background colors and thin white lines between information groups to make these lists easy to scan.



Relative Importance:



Strength of Evidence:



## 12:5 Start Numbered Items at One

**Guideline:** When items are numbered, start the numbering sequence at "one" rather than "zero."

**Comments:** Do not start the numbering with a "zero." When counting, people start with "one," not "zero."

**Sources:** Engel and Granda, 1975; Smith and Mosier, 1986.

Relative Importance:



Strength of Evidence:



## 12:6 Place Important Items at Top of the List

**Guideline:** Place a list's most important items at the top.

**Comments:** Experienced users usually look first at the top item in a menu or list, and almost always look at one of the top three items before looking at those farther down the list. Research indicates that users tend to stop scanning a list as soon as they see something relevant, thus illustrating the reason to place important items at the beginning of lists.

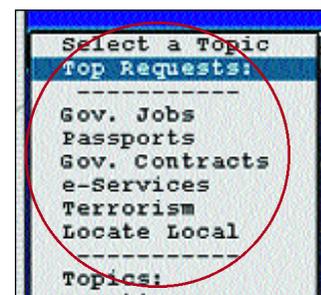
**Sources:** Byrne, Anderson, et al., 1999; Carroll, 1990; Evans, 1998; Faraday, 2001; Isakson and Spyridakis, 1999; Lewenstein, et al., 2000; Nielsen, 1996a; Nielsen, 1999b; Nielsen, 1999c; Spyridakis, 2000.

**Example:** On firstgov.gov, the "Topics" drop-down list presents the "Top Requests" in the first positions of the list, and then continues alphabetically by topic. This tactic can save users time when searching for popular items or topics.

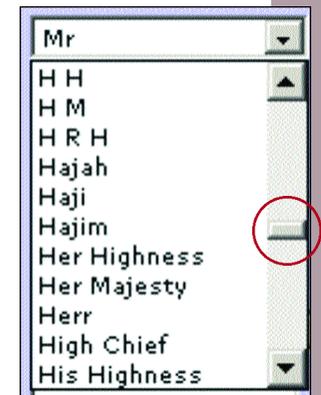
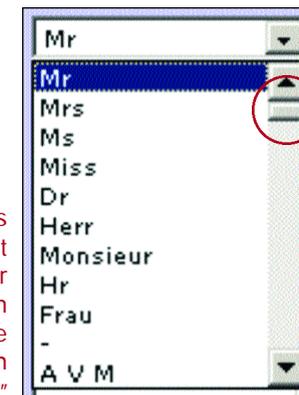
Relative Importance:



Strength of Evidence:



This extensive list of titles contains the most commonly used titles at the top of the list and also in their alphabetically-correct position further down the list. This avoids the need for users to scroll through titles such as "His Highness."



## 12:7 Capitalize First Letter of First Word in Lists

**Guideline:** Capitalize the first letter of only the first word of a list item, a list box item, check box labels, and radio button labels.

**Comments:** Only the first letter of the first word should be capitalized unless the item contains another word that normally would be capitalized.

**Sources:** Bailey, 1996; Fowler, 1998; Marcus, Smilonich and Thompson, 1995; Microsoft, 1992.

**Example:**

**Services**

- Email services
- Headline service
- Text alerts and PDA

**Events & offers**

- Write topical haiku win Penguin Classics

**Information**

- Contact us
- Newsroom
- Style guide
- Advertising guide
- Privacy policy
- Terms and conditions
- The Guardian
- Guardian readers' editor
- The Observer
- Observer readers' editor

**Relative Importance:**



**Strength of Evidence:**



**National Institute of Standards and Techn**  
...working with industry to deve

**About NIST**

- General information
- Budget, planning, and economic analys
- NIST conferences
- NIST visitor info/directions
- NIST contacts/staff directory
- A-Z subject index

**Programs**

**NIST Laboratories:** provide measurement standards for U.S. industry.

**Visit the Laboratories' web sites:**

- Building and fire research

**Baldrige National Quality Program:** prom recognizes organizational performance ex

See page xxi for detailed descriptions of the rating scales



## 12:8 Use Appropriate List Style

**Relative Importance:**



**Strength of Evidence:**



**Guideline:** Use bullet lists to present items of equal status or value, and numbered lists if a particular order to the items is warranted.

**Comments:** Bullet lists work best when the items do not contain an inherent sequence, order, or rank. Numbered lists assign each item in the list an ascending number, making the numerical order readily apparent. Numbered lists are especially important when giving instructions.

**Sources:** Coney and Steehouder, 2000; Detweiler and Omanson, 1996; Lorch and Chen, 1986; Narveson, 2001; Spyridakis, 2000.

**Example:**

Use bullets if your list items are of equal value, or if they have no discernable order.

**Top 10 Gaining Queries**  
February 2003

1. [nasa](#)
2. [valentines day](#)
3. [valentinstag](#)
4. [carnaval](#)
5. [michael jackson](#)
6. [american idol](#)
7. [great white](#)
8. [americas cup](#)
9. [world cup cricket](#)
10. [lana clarkson](#)

**Agencies**

- A-Z Index
- Federal Branches
- State, Local & Tribal
- International

**Contact Government**

- e-Mail
- Phone
- In-Person
- More

**Reference**

- News Releases
- Federal Forms
- Laws & Regulations
- Questions About Government?
- More

Using numbered lists is appropriate when items are in a proscribed order, such as this list of "Top 10" queries.