Appendix A:

Standard actions for pushbuttons and menus

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This appendix contains a list of standard actions for pushbuttons and menus. If applied consistently, these actions can help the user complete interactions quickly and consistently. This document provides the descriptions for common pushbutton actions and menu options, but is not comprehensive.

Pushbuttons

Pushbuttons are a means for users to interact with dialog boxes. They are usually arranged from left to right across the bottom of a window with positive responses first, followed by negative responses, canceling responses, and help. When the help button is present in a dialog box, it should always be the rightmost button on a horizontal button arrangement or the bottommost button on a vertical arrangement. Additional pushbuttons are generally ordered based on order of use or frequency of use.

Pushbuttons that are relevant to only part of a window are often located immediately to the right of that portion of the window, separated from the rest of the window by a border or line.

Default buttons are usually indicated by a darker border (see Figure 1). Default buttons will be activated if the user presses Enter.
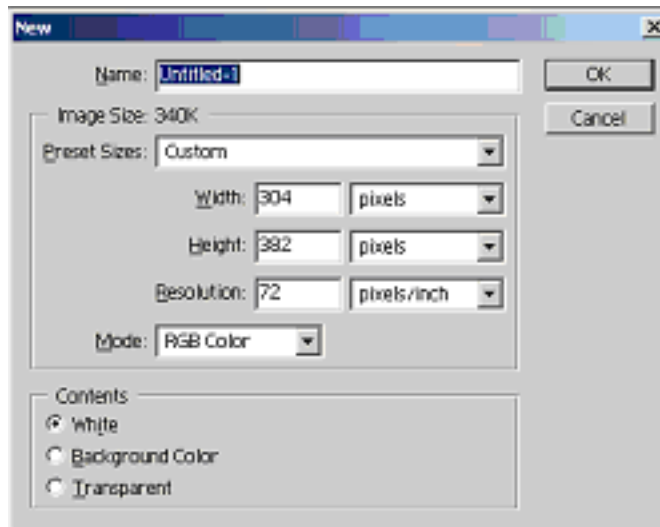

Figure 1. The default button is Ok, indicated by the darker border.

Pushbutton actions

Whenever possible, buttons should be named with a verb describing the action performed by the button. Names should be limited to a single word when possible, with no button labels having more than three words. Pairs of push button actions should be congruent (e.g. Yes/No), and consistent throughout the application. Dialog box buttons that require additional user input should be followed with three dots (…) to indicate that selecting this dialog box button will open an additional dialog box requiring user input. The following is a list of commonly used pushbutton labels and the meanings associated with them.

Apply – accepts all changes but leaves dialog open.

Back - Returns to the previous dialog box, ignoring any actions taken in the current dialog box. (Back is preferable to the terms previous or return). Back as a dialog button is reserved for cases where there are a series of consecutive dialog boxes such as setting up or installing new software.

Cancel- closes dialog box and ignores all changes that have been made, restoring settings to what they were before the dialog box was opened. Cancel is preferred to the terms exit or close for dialog boxes in which users specify options or settings. Exit should be reserved for exiting the entire program, and thus is not generally applicable to a dialog box. Cancel is more specific than close, conveying to the user that changes made in the dialog box will not be enacted. The cancel button should be activated if the user presses the escape button while the dialog box is open and active.

Close – Closes the dialog box without making additional changes to the system. Use of close is not very common anymore.

Defaults – Returns all of the parameters in a dialog box to the default settings prior to what they were before any user action without closing the dialog box.

Help – opens a secondary window that displays help information. This pushbutton allows the user to obtain additional information related to the dialog box.

Log off - Ends processing by a system; closes all windows on the work space and stops all processing; requests confirmation if unsaved changes have been made, and allows the user to save the changes.

Next – Goes to the next item in a series of dialog boxes. Next as a dialog button is reserved for cases where there are a series of consecutive dialog boxes such as setting up or installing new software.

No – No answers a specific question. For example "Are you sure you want to delete this file?" In general, No cancels the actions indicated by the question dialog box and closes the dialog box.

OK – executes all changes and closes dialog box.

Options – Opens a dialog box allowing additional user choices. The contents of the secondary dialog box will be application or window specific. This button is generally located to the left or above the main set of dialog box pushbuttons.

Pause – Temporarily interrupts operations in progress. Once the pause pushbutton is activated, the dialog box remains open but the label of the pushbutton should change to resume. This action is different than stop which will end an action in progress at the next possible non-destructive breaking point.

Properties – Provides the user with additional information, depending on the application this button may allow the user to changes certain properties related to an item referred to in the dialog box window.

Resume – Begins again an action previously halted or paused by either the user or the system. This option may occur in an alert dialog box informing the user that the system has halted an operation and may require an action of the user before the action can continue or it may occur in a dialog box which is informing the user of an action in progress which has been paused by the user.

Retry – Resends a failed command or action to the system. This button is usually found in alert dialog boxes that alert the user that the system was unable to complete an action.

Stop - ends an action in progress at the next possible non-destructive breaking point and closes the dialog box

Yes – Confirms the action indicated by the dialog box, carries out any associated action and closes the dialog box.

Menus

One of the primary means for interacting with windowing systems is through menus. Over the years, conventions of use have been developed for menus. With computer use becoming increasingly widespread, most users have developed expectations for the actions associated with these menu items.

Menu options

This section defines actions associated with menu options.

Archive – Creates a backup copy of a file to an alternate database or storage device.

Arrange – Makes all open windows (including minimized windows) visible without overlap.

Cascade – Presents all open windows overlapping with a slight diagonal offset so that all menu bars can be seen, but the active window (the window with input focus) is in front of all of the other windows.

Clear – Removes an object from a window without copying it to the clipboard, does not compress the remaining space.

Close – Closes the active window in applications with multiple windows. If closing the window will result in loss of data, a dialog box should appear requesting confirmation or allowing the user to cancel the action before the action is completed.

Close All – Closes all open windows. If this action will result in loss of data, a dialog box should appear requesting confirmation or allowing the user to cancel the action before the action is completed.

Copy – Makes a duplicate of the selected data and places it on the clipboard.

Cut - Removes selected data from the document and places it on the clipboard.

Edit – Opens a set of options that allow users to change the contents of a document.

Exit – Closes all application windows, ends processing by application, closes application.

File – Opens a set of options that are used to manage documents.

Find – Locates an item within the document that matches the word or character string entered by the user.

Help – When in the main menu bar, opens a set of options that provide the user with additional information related to the application. Also can be an option in the Help submenu that provides additional information relevant to the use of the application such as an electronic user manual.

New – Opens a new untitled file or window.

Open – Opens a dialog box allowing the user to choose an existing file.

Paste – Inserts the contents of the clipboard at the insertion point in the document.

Print – Opens a dialog box that allows the user to select printer and print options. Sends data to printer.

Refresh – Redraws the contents of a window.

Replace – Replaces a word or character string with a different word or character string entered by the user.

Save – Saves the currently active file to a selected storage device using the same file name. If the document has no file name, a pop-up window for the filename and location to be saved should appear before saving the document.

Save As – Causes a pop-up window to open, prompting the user to enter a name and designate a location for the file to be saved.

Spell check – Compares selected words in a file against a dictionary of recognized words and identifies entries not in the dictionary.

Undo – Reverses the effect of the last action.

View – Opens a list of menu options that allow the user to change the view of the data without changing the data itself.

Window – Opens a list of options that gives the user the ability to manipulate windows.

References

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