



Usability News is a free web newsletter that is produced by the Software Usability Research Laboratory (SURL) at Wichita State University. The SURL team specializes in software/website user interface design, usability testing, and research in human-computer interaction.

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What's The Best Way to Wrap Links?

By Kelly Spain

Magic Carpet
Trip Planner

Consider the above text on a web site. Is it showing a link for Magic Carpet and Trip Planner or a link for the Magic Carpet Trip Planner? It is hard to tell by looking at it and may cause you some confusion. We conducted a study comparing three different presentations of wrapped links: bullets at each link (Fig. 1), spaces between links (Fig. 2), and no spaces (Fig. 3).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magic Carpet Trip Planner • International Traveler Medicine Clinic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magic Carpet Trip Planner • International Traveler Medicine Clinic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magic Carpet Trip Planner • International Traveler Medicine Clinic
Figure 1 Bullets	Figure 2. Spaces Between Links	Figure 3. No Spaces

The information was chosen so that the multiple lines of one link could possibly be read as two separate links. For example, "World Wide Ski Resort Directory" was split between "ski" and "resort". It is possible that a person would view this as two separate links: "World Wide Ski" and "Resort Directory". Eight separate links were used in this study (17 lines of text). The participants were asked to search the links to find specific information and to clearly state the name of the link they had chosen. The presentation order of the different conditions was counterbalanced. Accuracy and user preference data were collected. Both the bullets and no-space lists were visible without scrolling. The spaces list needed to be scrolled to view all of the information.

Accuracy rates for the three conditions were 100% for bullets, 89% for spaces, and 67% for no spaces. All participants preferred either the bullets or spaces; no one preferred the no space condition. Participants commented that the no spaces condition was too difficult to read and too difficult to distinguish the different links. This data supports the hypothesis that bullets and spaces result in more accurate information retrieval than no spaces. One drawback to the space condition is that it requires more screen real estate. Considering the minimal difference in screen real estate between the bullet and no-space condition, designers should consider using bullets to identify individual links.