
**Ergonomics of human-system
interaction —**

Part 126:
**Guidance on the presentation of
auditory information**



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Contents

| | Page |
|---|------------|
| Foreword | vi |
| Introduction | vii |
| 1 Scope | 1 |
| 2 Normative references | 1 |
| 3 Terms and definitions | 1 |
| 4 Application | 3 |
| 4.1 Accessibility..... | 3 |
| 4.2 Applying the recommendations in this document..... | 4 |
| 5 Appropriate usage | 4 |
| 5.1 Visual system unavailability..... | 4 |
| 5.2 Inadequate or excessive light..... | 4 |
| 5.3 Inability to maintain visual attention..... | 4 |
| 5.4 Message brevity and simplicity..... | 4 |
| 5.5 Event-based messages..... | 5 |
| 5.6 Messages requiring immediate action..... | 5 |
| 5.7 Messages requiring verbal response..... | 5 |
| 5.8 Permanence of message relevance..... | 5 |
| 5.9 Attention capture..... | 5 |
| 5.10 Muting sound..... | 5 |
| 6 Auditory presentation | 5 |
| 6.1 General..... | 5 |
| 6.1.1 Auditory channel overload..... | 5 |
| 6.1.2 Information conciseness..... | 5 |
| 6.1.3 Avoid extreme dimensions..... | 5 |
| 6.1.4 Monaural option..... | 6 |
| 6.1.5 Ease of learning..... | 6 |
| 6.1.6 Signal invariance..... | 6 |
| 6.1.7 Signal similarity..... | 6 |
| 6.1.8 Two-stage signal usage..... | 6 |
| 6.1.9 Logical sequencing..... | 6 |
| 6.1.10 Supporting short term memory..... | 6 |
| 6.1.11 Cross-cultural sounds..... | 7 |
| 6.1.12 Representative sounds..... | 7 |
| 6.1.13 Representative sound usage..... | 7 |
| 6.2 Detectability in noisy environments..... | 7 |
| 6.2.1 Signal distinctiveness..... | 7 |
| 6.2.2 Change signal frequency..... | 7 |
| 6.2.3 Signal duration in noisy environments..... | 7 |
| 7 Auditory dimensions | 7 |
| 7.1 Frequency..... | 7 |
| 7.1.1 Absolute pitch identification..... | 7 |
| 7.1.2 Temporal proximity for pitch comparison..... | 7 |
| 7.1.3 Similarity for pitch comparison..... | 7 |
| 7.1.4 Minimum difference for pitch comparison..... | 8 |
| 7.1.5 Frequency range for pitch identification..... | 8 |
| 7.1.6 Frequency range for most accurate pitch discrimination..... | 8 |
| 7.1.7 Harmonicity for pitch identification..... | 8 |
| 7.1.8 Harmonic tones for pitch discrimination tasks..... | 8 |
| 7.1.9 Long-distance sound..... | 8 |
| 7.1.10 Obstructed sound..... | 8 |
| 7.2 Intensity..... | 8 |
| 7.2.1 Avoid distortion..... | 8 |

| | | |
|----------|---|-----------|
| 7.2.2 | Separate signal control | 8 |
| 7.2.3 | Loudness cues about the environment | 9 |
| 7.2.4 | Minimal signal intensity | 9 |
| 7.2.5 | Signal intensity for rapid response | 9 |
| 7.2.6 | Relative maximal signal intensity | 9 |
| 7.2.7 | Absolute maximal signal loudness | 9 |
| 7.3 | Timbre | 9 |
| 7.3.1 | Timbre discrimination | 9 |
| 7.3.2 | Musical instrument timbres | 9 |
| 7.4 | Localization | 9 |
| 7.4.1 | Guidance related to lateral sound localization | 9 |
| 7.4.2 | Minimum angle for position discrimination | 10 |
| 7.4.3 | Frequency selection for sound localization | 10 |
| 7.4.4 | Minimum distance for front/back position identification | 10 |
| 7.4.5 | Guidance related to distance judgment | 10 |
| 7.4.6 | Doppler effect | 10 |
| 7.4.7 | Guidance related to elevation angle judgment | 10 |
| 7.5 | Duration | 11 |
| 7.5.1 | Minimum signal duration | 11 |
| 7.5.2 | Adjustable signal duration | 11 |
| 7.6 | Rhythm and accent usage | 11 |
| 7.7 | Timing | 11 |
| 7.7.1 | Event-based sounds | 11 |
| 7.7.2 | Sounds to guide rhythmic movements | 11 |
| 7.7.3 | Concurrent auditory streams | 11 |
| 8 | Speech | 11 |
| 8.1 | Appropriate usage | 11 |
| 8.1.1 | Complex messages | 11 |
| 8.1.2 | Source identification | 11 |
| 8.1.3 | Untrained users | 12 |
| 8.1.4 | Stressful context of use | 12 |
| 8.1.5 | Rapid information exchange | 12 |
| 8.2 | General speech presentation | 12 |
| 8.2.1 | Eliminate non-relevant speech | 12 |
| 8.2.2 | Audio volume consistency | 12 |
| 8.2.3 | Monophonic speech presentation | 12 |
| 8.2.4 | Present messages serially | 12 |
| 8.2.5 | Information brevity | 12 |
| 8.2.6 | Message replay | 12 |
| 8.2.7 | Option phrase sequencing | 12 |
| 8.2.8 | Grouping information | 13 |
| 8.3 | Language | 13 |
| 8.3.1 | Language and dialect control | 13 |
| 8.3.2 | Avoid dialect-specific expressions | 13 |
| 8.3.3 | Vocabulary used in prompts | 13 |
| 8.3.4 | Consistency of terminology use | 13 |
| 8.3.5 | Unambiguous prompts | 13 |
| 8.3.6 | Simple linguistic forms | 13 |
| 8.3.7 | Minimum syllable count | 13 |
| 8.3.8 | Sentence usage | 13 |
| 8.4 | Voice | 13 |
| 8.4.1 | Use of synthetic speech | 13 |
| 8.4.2 | Source voice identification | 14 |
| 8.4.3 | Dialects and accents | 14 |
| 8.4.4 | Speech output rate | 14 |
| 8.4.5 | Intonation and prosody | 14 |
| 9 | Earcons | 14 |

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 9.1 | Meaningful earcons..... | 14 |
| 9.2 | Sound organization..... | 14 |
| 9.3 | Earcon usage..... | 14 |
| 9.4 | Earcon construction..... | 14 |
| 9.5 | Earcon duration..... | 15 |
| 9.6 | Consistency across earcons..... | 15 |
| 9.7 | Reversing earcons..... | 15 |
| 10 | Coding..... | 15 |
| 10.1 | General..... | 15 |
| 10.1.1 | Meaningfulness of codes..... | 15 |
| 10.1.2 | Access to meaning of code..... | 15 |
| 10.1.3 | Rules of code construction..... | 15 |
| 10.1.4 | Distinctiveness of codes..... | 15 |
| 10.1.5 | Consistent coding..... | 15 |
| 10.1.6 | Coding relative values..... | 15 |
| 10.1.7 | Ordered coding..... | 16 |
| 10.1.8 | Change of state..... | 16 |
| 10.1.9 | Combination codes..... | 16 |
| 10.1.10 | User training in codes..... | 16 |
| 10.1.11 | Counting simultaneous tones..... | 16 |
| 10.2 | Dimension-specific coding..... | 16 |
| 10.2.1 | Number of frequencies for pitch coding..... | 16 |
| 10.2.2 | Frequency selection for pitch coding..... | 16 |
| 10.2.3 | Need for redundant coding when coding based on frequency..... | 16 |
| 10.2.4 | Coding based on timbre..... | 17 |
| 10.2.5 | Coding based on intensity..... | 17 |
| 10.2.6 | Number of levels for loudness coding..... | 17 |
| 10.2.7 | Intensity spacing for loudness coding..... | 17 |
| 10.2.8 | Number of levels for pitch and loudness coding..... | 17 |
| 10.2.9 | Coding by position and distance..... | 17 |
| 10.2.10 | Coding position and distance with rhythm..... | 17 |
| 10.2.11 | Number of levels for duration coding..... | 17 |
| | Bibliography..... | 18 |

Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 159, *Ergonomics*, Subcommittee SC 4, *Ergonomics of human-system interaction*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

Interactive systems have used auditory information as primary sources and, more commonly, to enhance interactions in primarily visual systems since about the time the digital computer was invented. Even before that, one can consider telephone conversations to be a type of interactive system where information is presented aurally. The way participants in a telephone conversation present information to one another is largely based on learned and subconscious conventions. In the digital realm, sound has been used in increasingly symbolic ways, straying out of necessity from the realistic representations of objects and actions in the physical world.

Unlike visual displays, the information conveyed through sound is typically sparse, and it seems more difficult to intuitively understand what makes a sound scheme usable, whether in its design or its presentation. Since the main communication medium of modern interactive software is the visual display, it is not surprising that a need was first identified for guidelines relating to presentation of visual information. However, designers developing for both visual and auditory information would benefit from guidelines rooted in scientific discovery, that lead to clear and usable communication of information, while not inhibiting the creative process.

This document focuses on guidelines for presentation of information in the auditory modality.

The success of this document will depend on its positive impact on usability of future systems presenting auditory information using these guidelines. However, this document is not necessarily designed to be used by the direct beneficiaries of this desired usability increase. Instead, it serves the following types of users:

- a) the user interface designer, who will apply these guidelines during the development process;
- b) the buyer, who will reference this document during the product procurement process, and whose end users will gain from the potential benefits provided by the guidelines;
- c) those responsible for ensuring products meet the recommendations in this document;
- d) designers of auditory interface development tools to be used by auditory interface designers;
- e) writers of software industry standard guides to be used by auditory interface designers.

Ergonomics of human-system interaction —

Part 126:

Guidance on the presentation of auditory information

1 Scope

This document provides guidance for the auditory presentation of information controlled by software, irrespective of the device. It includes specific properties such as the syntactic or semantic aspects of information, e.g. coding techniques, and gives provisions for the organization of information taking account of human perception and memory capabilities.

This document does not address the hardware issues of the transmission and the production of auditory information.

NOTE 1 Volume is dependent on hardware and thus cannot always be absolutely controlled by software. Environmental conditions can also affect the ability for sounds to be perceived, which can be beyond the ability of the software to take into account.

This document does not apply to auditory alarms, warnings or other safety-related uses of auditory information.

NOTE 2 Safety-related uses of auditory presentation of information are covered in various domain specific standards, such as ISO 7731:2003 which deals with auditory danger signals for public and work areas, and IEC 60601-1-8:2006 which provides very specific requirements for auditory alarms for medical devices.

While this document applies to the presentation of all non-safety-related information, it does not include application domain specific guidance (e.g., audio instructions for consumer products).

This document can be utilized throughout the design process (e.g. as specification and guidance for designers during design or as a basis for heuristic evaluation). Its provisions for the presentation of information depend on the auditory design approach, the task, the user, the environment and the single or multiple technologies that can be used for presenting the information. Consequently, this document cannot be applied without knowledge of the context of use. It is not intended to be used as a prescriptive set of rules to be applied in its entirety but rather assumes that the designer has proper information available concerning task and user requirements and understands the use of available technology.

This document does not address visual or tactile/haptic presentation of information or modality shifting for the presentation of auditory information in other modalities.

NOTE 3 ISO 9241-112 provides high-level ergonomic guidance that applies to all modalities.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 9241-171, *Ergonomics of human-system interaction — Part 171: Guidance on software accessibility*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.