



Center Stage

Best Practice: How to Implement Center Stage

By putting the most important information or frequently used panel center stage, you draw the users' attention towards it and allow them to maintain focus on it when carrying out their tasks.

Center stage is a common user interface design pattern, which you can successfully implement by taking the following steps:

- 1** First, you must **determine which panel, toolset, or window is the most important part of the user interface**. This will usually be obvious from the outset, as it is usually the user's central operating panel, such as the panel containing the user's text document, spreadsheet, or 'canvas'.
- 2** **Make this panel the largest** in the user interface, and ensure all others are smaller. Some user interface design experts recommend the center stage panel should be at least twice as large as the next largest user interface element, such as a tool bar.
- 3** Use color to **distinguish the contents of the panel from the panel itself**. Typically, the central area of the largest panel is white and the surrounding regions are grey.
- 4** **Use headlines** to help distinguish the panels from one another and to assist the user in identifying specific toolsets, groups of actions, and any other ancillary panel.

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- 5 | Arrange the different elements according to the users' expectations. Placing the primary panel center stage is important, but **arranging the other panels to help the users carry out their desired actions** as quickly and accurately as possible is also a vital consideration. Therefore, although the other panels and toolsets perform a supporting role, they should not be hidden from view; nor should they occlude the user's view of the main panel.

