Input Hints

Best Practice: How to Implement Input Hints

Input hints help users establish what information should be entered into an input field. They are concise descriptions given inside—or just beside—the data entry fields that guide users to enter the right information. Take to following steps to implement this design pattern:

1 | **Establish your input fields.**

2 | **Provide short hints** that are instantly understandable and directly linked to the task. For example, if the user is requested to enter his/her name, the hint might be an example name (such as *"e.g., John Smith"*). If the input field is for the user's date of birth, the hint may state *"e.g., 12/31/1976"* (note the date format is geared for American users here). Ambiguity can be confusing, so these input hints must be in line with what the user would *expect*; this is not an area to show creative flair. Simply provide the user with the information necessary to satisfy *all* elements of the task as quickly as possible.

3 | Now **decide on the superficial aspects of the input hints**. Traditionally, the hint font is in a lighter color to the user input font. This allows users to distinguish immediately between the input fields that have been completed and those that are still outstanding. You may want to use a different font entirely or show the input hints in italics. Just make sure the users can perceive the difference between their own input and the hints themselves.

4 | Once the user clicks in an input field, **make sure the input hint disappears**, so the user does not end up typing in the box with the hint still present.