



# Two-Panel Selectors

## Best Practice: How to Implement Two-Panel Selectors

Two-panel selectors are commonplace in web and application design as they enable users to view the contents of individual files, emails, and other content-carrying items in *one* panel and quickly switch between them in *another*. To implement them successfully, take the following steps:

- 1 | Users in Western countries tend to look from left to right and top to bottom (per the viewing direction followed during reading). Therefore, you should **place the list—being the user's first port of call—either above or to the left of the panel** in which the selected item contents are displayed. This provides a logical visual framework from which the user can switch from the broad list to specific contents in the anticipated fashion.
- 2 | To make the interactive and viewing experience as cohesive as possible, **place the contents of an item *immediately* in the second panel**, following interaction with the corresponding item in the first panel list. Even brief delays can negatively affect user experience, so you should make every effort to ensure the content appears as quickly as possible. If a list of options is very long, allow users to scroll using the directional keys on their keyboard; this will promote keyboard-only usability.

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- 3 | The selected option in the first panel must also be distinguished from the rest so as to provide users with a means of instantly determining which item contents they are currently viewing. You can achieve this by **using a different color background for the selected option or using a clear, unmissable marker**, such as a black dot or some other eye-catching shape. Humans are amazingly adept at spotting differences; as long as the selected item is distinct from the unselected ones in some way and the chosen method does not occlude or sacrifice the clarity of the list item, it will likely achieve the desired effect.

