

Better Form Fields

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Related Categories: Usability

When I first started surfing, I would try to click the text next to a radio button or checkbox in order to select it (after all, that works in most Windows programs). I suspect many web surfers still experience this annoyance.

This is a problem because it violates the expectations of some users and because the size of a clickable area determines the ease with which it can be clicked.

In fact, [Joel Spolsky](#) has a whole chapter called "People Can't Control the Mouse" in his book "[User Interface Design for Programmers](#)" in which he argues (in part), "you should design your program so that it doesn't take a tremendous amount of mouse-agility to use correctly" (think of the poor person with a ThinkPad or other hard-to-control-mouse).

The need for mouse-agility and the dissonance with many Windows programs (thus violating Mr. Spolsky's cardinal axiom of "A user interface is well design when it behaves exactly how the user thought it would"), makes this behavior a bit of a usability no-no.

Fortunately, a tag added in HTML 4 allows us to solve the problem. The <label> tag, when used correctly, will solve this problem and more.

Let's have a look:

```
<input type="checkbox" name="favfood" id="favfood-cheese" value="cheese">  
<label for="favfood-cheese">Cheese</label>
```

The above code will enable the user to click on the word "Cheese" to select the checkbox next to the word. How does it work? The "for" attribute of the label must match the "id" attribute of the form field. If it does, the browser knows that the label is associated with that field.

The same syntax will work for radio buttons as well. In fact, it will work for any input type (including textarea). When used with textarea or input boxes, clicking the label will place the cursor inside that field.

As an added bonus, this syntax will also tell screen readers which text to associate with which input field, thereby making your forms easier to fill out for blind users.

I highly encourage you to start using the label field in your forms. It will help make them accessible to blind users and easier for every one else.

Good luck!

Related Links:

[W3Schools: label](#)
[HTML Help: Label](#)