

This chapter describes the dialog boxes that your application can use and shows how each has changed under platinum appearance. The chapter gives brief recommendations on choosing and implementing each kind of dialog box; more details are available in *Macintosh Human Interface Guidelines*. Finally, the chapter provides guidelines on how to lay out dialog boxes and alert boxes for maximum clarity and consistency.

## About Dialog Boxes

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Dialog boxes are a type of specialized window. They provide a standard framework in which to present a set of choices to and elicit responses from the user. A dialog box may contain text, controls, and icons.

Alert boxes appear when the system software or an application needs to communicate important information to the user, such as messages about error conditions and warnings about potentially hazardous situations or actions. An alert box is a type of dialog box and thus follows many of the same guidelines.

Each dialog box contains some text to indicate which command or condition caused it to be displayed and what its function is. In some cases, this text is a title for the dialog box.

There are five types of dialog boxes available for use in your application:

- n Movable modal dialog boxes provide a means to request user input and make changes to a document while allowing the user to switch to another application. This is the preferred type of modal dialog box.
- n Modal dialog boxes force the user to provide necessary information before carrying out the current operation. They cannot be moved or hidden.
- n Movable modal alert boxes communicate warnings and error conditions while allowing the user to move the alert dialog around on the screen. This is the preferred type of alert box.
- n Modal alert boxes communicate warnings and error conditions. A modal alert box prevents any other activity until the user responds to the alert.
- n Modeless dialog boxes accept user input and allow multiple changes to a document. Once open, they are available until the user closes them.

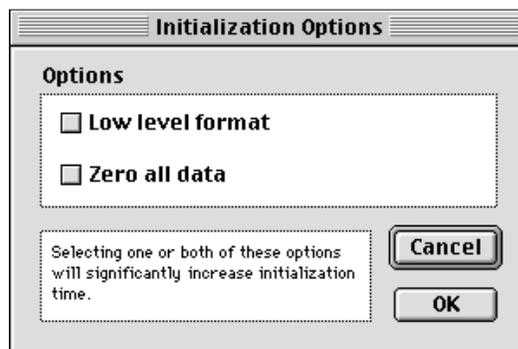
## Movable Modal Dialog Boxes

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A **movable modal dialog box** is a modal dialog box with a title bar which allows the user to move the dialog box. This enhancement makes the movable modal dialog box preferable to the modal dialog box in most situations.

A movable modal dialog box does not have a close box or a zoom box. This design gives the user visual feedback that the dialog box can be moved, but is modal and must be responded to before completing any other action in the active application. Figure 3-1 shows a typical movable modal dialog box.

**Figure 3-1** A typical movable modal dialog box



For more information on the behavior of movable modal dialog boxes, see “Movable Modal Dialog Box Behaviors” in *Macintosh Human Interface Guidelines*.

## Modal Dialog Boxes

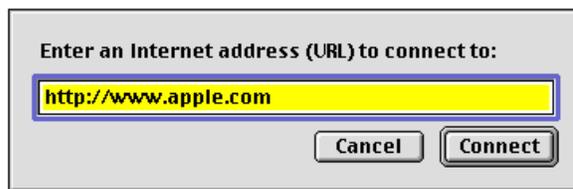
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A **modal dialog box** puts the user in the state (or “mode”) of being able to work only inside the dialog box. It temporarily suspends all other user actions

in an application and forces the user to make decisions and respond to the dialog. The user cannot move or resize a modal dialog box, and the user can dismiss it only by clicking its buttons. If the user clicks any other window or on the desktop, the system beeps, but nothing else happens.

Modal dialog boxes resemble a document window without a title bar, but display their content on a placard-like background. Figure 3-2 shows a modal dialog box.

Figure 3-2 Modal dialog box



You should restrict your use of modal dialog boxes to occasions when your application needs the user to make a decision before operations can continue. This should be a task-specific, limited interaction that can be quickly resolved. Unless you need the extra restrictions of a non-movable modal dialog box, you should use a movable modal dialog box (page 56) whenever possible.

For more information on implementing modal dialog boxes, see “Modal Dialog Box Behaviors” in *Macintosh Human Interface Guidelines*.

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## Alert Boxes

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Alert boxes are a special kind of modal dialog boxes. **Alert boxes** display messages to users to inform them of situations that may be particularly notable or dangerous. Each type of alert has a corresponding icon that signifies the degree of severity of the alert message.

An alert box contains only an icon, text, and buttons. There are no other controls in alert boxes. The only way to close an alert box is to click a button.

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This is deliberate, as alert boxes are only used to signify conditions which demand an explicit response from the user.

An alert box may contain up to four buttons:

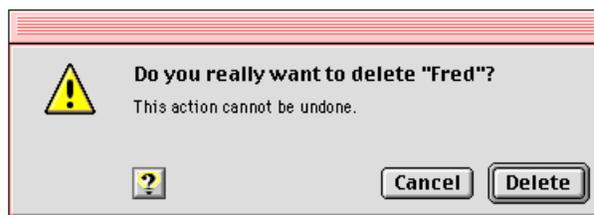
- n OK
- n Cancel
- n Help
- n An optional button (Revert, for example.)

If you use the standard alert boxes provided by the Mac OS Toolbox, the size of the alert box is automatically set for you based on the amount of text it contains. The icon, text, and buttons of a standard alert box are automatically positioned.

Alert boxes feature two distinct styles of text display. The box's label appears in the boldfaced version of the large system font, while the narrative below it appears in the plain text version of the small system font. This distinction is handled automatically for you when you specify an alert box through the Mac OS Toolbox. You should use the label to provide a short, simple summary of the error or condition which summoned the alert. The narrative section allows you to provide a longer, more detailed description of the situation and its consequences.

A movable alert box has red highlights on its title bar which distinguish it from a movable modal dialog box. As with dialog boxes, you should use a movable alert box whenever possible. Figure 3-3 shows a movable alert box.

**Figure 3-3** A movable alert box



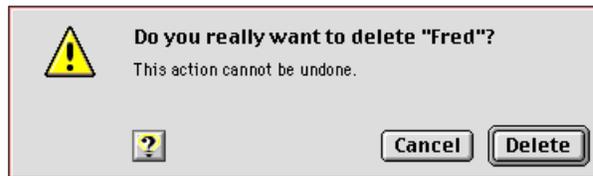
A non-movable alert box has a red border around the plaque which forms the content region. This reflects the significance of the content and helps to

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distinguish the alert box from a standard modal dialog box. Figure 3-4 shows a modal alert box.

**Figure 3-4** A modal alert box



See "Language" in *Macintosh Human Interface Guidelines* for more information on writing appropriate alert box messages.

### Note Alert Boxes

The note alert box is the first level of alert box. It uses the talking face icon. The note alert box provides useful information which does not imply any threat of data loss. Note alert boxes generally have only one button, the OK button. In this case, the user can respond to the information only by acknowledging it. Figure 3-5 shows an example of a note alert box.

**Figure 3-5** A note alert box



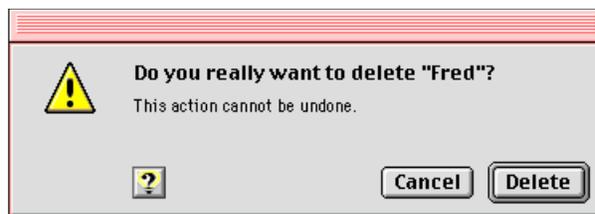
## Caution Alert Boxes

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The caution alert box, the second level of alert box, is more severe than the note alert box. The caution alert box icon is the triangle with an exclamation point. Caution alert boxes provide a safety net by warning the user in advance of a potentially dangerous action.

Caution alert boxes always contain two buttons, an OK button (which can use more specific 'go ahead' labels such as Continue or Delete) and a Cancel button. This choice allows the user to continue the potentially dangerous action or to cancel it. The OK or Continue button should be the default button, unless the user has to perform some other task in order to prevent the loss of data. Figure 3-6 shows an example of a caution alert box.

**Figure 3-6** A caution alert box



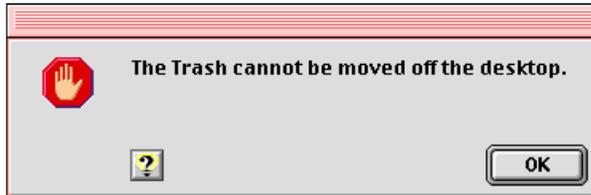
## Stop Alert Boxes

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The stop alert box is the third, and most severe, level of alert box. The stop alert box icon is the octagon with an open hand, which resembles a stop sign in most locales. (If this icon is offensive in a region or country where you want to market your application, make sure it is replaced by a more acceptable icon through the Mac OS localization process.)

Stop alert boxes notify the user that an action cannot be completed. Stop alert boxes typically have only one button, the OK button. As with the note alert box, the user can only acknowledge the warning and dismiss the alert box. Figure 3-7 shows an example of a stop alert box.

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**Figure 3-7** A stop alert box

Use a stop alert box when the user tries to complete an action that is impossible in the current context.

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## Modeless Dialog Boxes

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A **modeless dialog box** looks like a document window without a size box, zoom box, or scroll bars. The user can move a modeless dialog box, make it inactive and active again, collapse or close it like any document window. A modeless dialog box has a close box on the far left of the title in the title bar region and a collapse box on the far right. (For more on the use of collapse boxes, see “Collapsing a Window”, page 101.)

The title of a modeless dialog box is generally the same as the name of the menu item that activates the dialog box. In some cases, however, it may be useful to expand the title to provide more information, as shown in Figure 3-9. If the menu item includes an ellipsis character, *don't* include it in the title of the dialog box.

Modeless dialog boxes provide the most flexibility for users, allowing them to do any task at any time or in any order. Modeless dialog boxes may be used to allow users to change their documents, perform actions with data, or get information about files.

Modeless dialog boxes allow users to repeat an action as many times as necessary while the dialog box remains open—that is, the dialog box doesn't demand closing and reopening to repeat an action. This feature is useful for tasks such as finding and replacing text in a word processor or numbers in a spreadsheet. Figure 3-8 shows a modeless dialog box.

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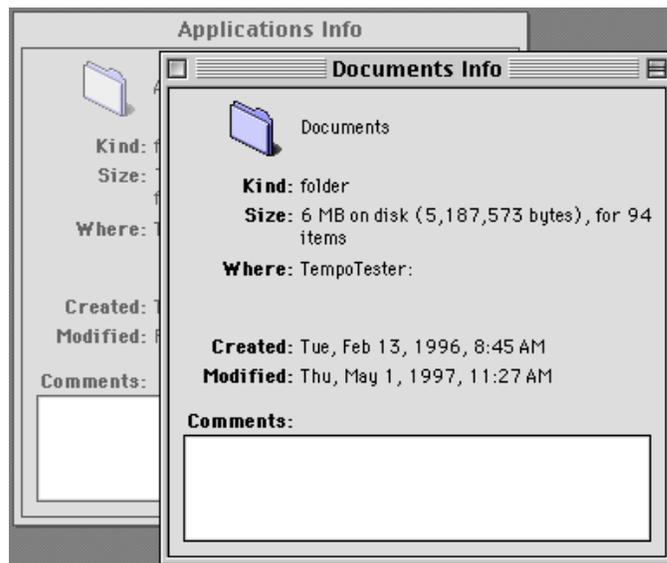
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**Figure 3-8** A modeless dialog box



If the user activates a window behind an open modeless dialog box, the selected window appears in front of the dialog box. Users can relocate modeless dialog boxes to make other windows more visible. Unlike modal dialogs, modeless dialog boxes may also be left open when not in use, so they are easily available when needed. This option might be useful if a user wants to compare information about several documents, which is possible with Get Info windows in the Finder. Figure 3-9 shows two such windows on a desktop.

**Figure 3-9** Two open modeless dialog boxes



When an application displays a modeless dialog box, it should preset any controls to appropriate default values. Supply text in edit text fields whenever possible; typically this will be the text last used in the dialog box, if applicable, or the current text selection in a document. At a minimum, you should display an insertion point in the one of the text entry fields (usually the first field) when the dialog box is opened.

For more information on using modal dialog boxes, see “Modal Dialog Box Behaviors” in *Macintosh Human Interface Guidelines*.

## Keyboard Navigation and Focus

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In a dialog box, the user can navigate through the interface elements that accept keyboard input, such as edit text fields and list boxes, in several ways. The user can click the desired element or press the Tab key to cycle through the available elements. This is called **keyboard navigation**. The user can move backward through the available elements by pressing the combination Shift-Tab.

When a dialog box contains more than one element that can accept input from the keyboard, it's necessary to indicate to users which element has **keyboard focus**. This is done by drawing a **focus ring** around the control. (Under platinum appearance, the default ring is lavender, but the user can choose a different color in the Appearance Settings control panel.) Figure 3-10 shows a edit text field with a focus ring.

**Figure 3-10** Edit text field with focus ring



A control with keyboard focus receives all keystrokes. Therefore, there should be only one active area and only one focus ring at any time. If a dialog box has only one control which can accept keyboard input, it's not necessary to provide a focus ring.

## Layout Guidelines

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This section provides guidelines to help you lay out dialog box designs. Although it does not specify rules for every situation, it serves as a starting point.

It is written for human interface designers and engineers, and assumes that you create mockups of your dialog boxes in a graphics program before creating the resource files for them. Therefore, the section gives you both the visual dimensions of dialog box elements and their corresponding resource rectangle sizes. In the illustrations, resource layout numbers are shown in red in the plain font. Visual dimensions (in pixels) are shown in blue in the italicized font.

### IMPORTANT

Although this section gives you enough information to replace the standard Mac OS controls with your own, Apple Computer strongly suggests that you use the Mac OS Toolbox controls rather than creating your own similar ones. The Mac OS Toolbox provides all of the controls whose layout measurements are described in this section.

## General Layout Information

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This section provides general rules for dialog box layout, including how to make measurements and display text.

### Measuring Dialog Boxes and Controls

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A dialog box consists of a content region and a structure region. The **content region** contains the elements of the dialog box that communicate information and allow the user to enter information. The content region of a dialog box determines its usable size. The **structure region** is the frame-like area surrounding the content region outside its border line. Depending on the type of dialog box, the structure region can contain a title and one or more controls.

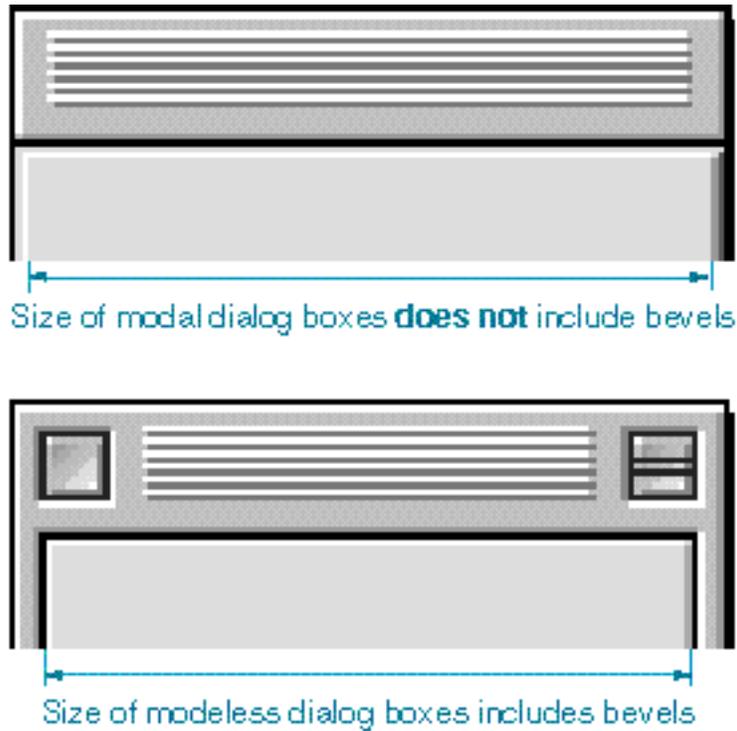
In designing modal or movable modal dialog boxes, do not include any bevels in the measurement. However, when you measure distances in modeless dialog boxes, count as part of the content region the bevel inside the black line.

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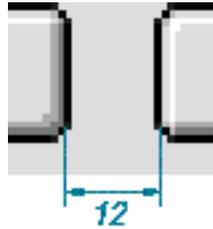
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Figure 3-11 shows the content region sizes of a modal and a modeless dialog box.

**Figure 3-11** Size of dialog box content regions



In measuring the space between items, exclude the outside border lines of the control in the measurement. When you measure an item itself, include the border of the item in the measurement. Figure 3-12 illustrates how to measure the distance between items.

**Figure 3-12** Measuring distance between dialog box items

Distance between controls **does not** include outside lines of controls

### Font Guidelines

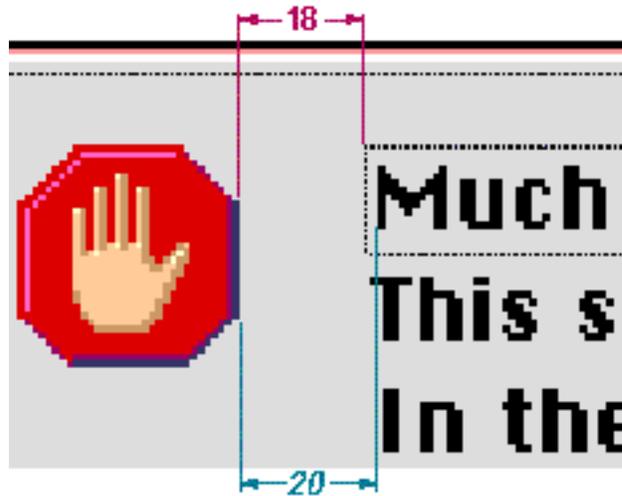
When you position or align text in dialog boxes and alert boxes, you should take into account the characteristics of the font used. We strongly recommend the Chicago font as the metric basis for making text alignment decisions. Use of any other font as a metric basis may result in incorrect text spacing when displayed in a different font.

12-point Chicago gives an overall height of 16 pixels, so the height of the resource rectangle surrounding text in Chicago should be 16 pixels.

### Choosing a Font's Letter on which to Base Text Alignment

In aligning static text with other elements of dialog boxes or alert boxes, you should carefully choose the letter on which to base the alignment. The glyphs of a font include pixel space before the letter or number. A font includes letters and numbers having the same amount of preceding space measured in pixels, but it can also include letters having more or less than the standard preceding pixel space.

For 12-point Chicago, the standard letter includes 2 preceding pixels. In other words, there are two pixels of space before the letter that are part of the glyph. If you assume that the first word of a text string starts with a capital "M", which is a standard letter, you will align text correctly for all strings, not just the one you are currently placing. Figure 3-13 shows the correct alignment based on the capital "M" and the amount of space between the icon and the text.

**Figure 3-13** Alignment of text based on a 12-point Chicago standard letter

The 12-point Chicago font includes some letters that could cause misalignment if you use them as your guide. In 12-point Chicago, the letters “J”, “T” and “j” outdent 1 pixel to the left beyond the font’s standard letters for left-aligned text. The letter “I” and the number “1” have an additional pixel to the left for left-aligned text resulting in a total of 3 preceding pixels for these letters.

In general, you should use the large system font for all controls. You should use the small system font only when space is limited or you present large amounts of textual information.

Use the emphasized version of the small system font for headings. The headings can either be static text labels, controls, or group box titles. Using the emphasized version sparingly increases its impact.

When a dialog box is localized for worldwide versions of system software, the text in the dialog box may become longer or shorter. The alignment of the items in the dialog box may vary with localization. For example, Arabic and Hebrew are written right to left, so the items in an Arabic or Hebrew dialog box should be aligned on the right. Be sure to create dialog items of the same size, so that they align properly when a user has a script that reads from right to left.

## Dialog Box Control Layout

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This section describes the layout and spacing of items in dialog boxes. In particular, this section discusses push buttons, bevel buttons, group boxes, radio buttons, checkboxes, pop-up menus, edit text fields, disclosure triangles, text labels, and list boxes.

The Western reader's eye tends to move from the upper-left corner of the dialog box to the lower right. Put the initial impression that you want to convey in the upper-left area (like the alert icon), and place the buttons that a user clicks in the lower right. Following this guideline makes it easier for users to identify what's important in a dialog box.

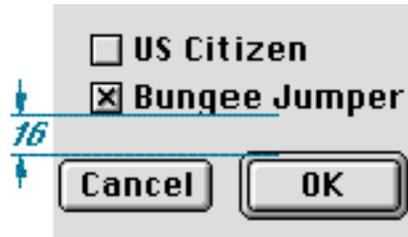
## Spacing

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When you layout a dialog box, allow a *minimum* of 4 pixels between clickable items. If possible, include 6 pixels between items to provide sufficient space for focus rings. It's also better to place clickable items closer to nonclickable items such as group boxes, dividing lines, and the edges of modal dialogs rather than to place them closer to one another.

For all windows and dialog boxes except toolbars and palettes, allow a minimum of 4 pixels between any item and the edge of a window or dialog box. Use a consistent amount of pixel space between the border of the dialog box and its elements. This creates a balanced appearance in the dialog box.

Allow 16 pixels between groups of controls. For example, two groups of radio buttons—not two individual buttons—should be 16 pixels apart. You should measure this space from the baseline of the static text or the bottom edge of the nearest control and the top of the push button below it. Figure 3-14 shows this space measured from the bottom edge of the control to the top of the action button below it.

**Figure 3-14** Spacing between action buttons and controls

If you measure from the baseline of static text rendered in 10-point Geneva, allow for 14 pixels visually. For 12-point Chicago, allow for 16 pixels visually.

### Push Buttons

In dialog boxes, you should place push buttons in locations that are functional and consistent—consistent both within your particular application and across other applications that you develop. Note that standard alert boxes will place any buttons automatically.

The default button is not necessarily the button in the lower-right corner; it should be the one for the action that the user is most likely to want to perform. If the default button were always in the lower-right corner, the buttons would change location depending on which one was the default choice. See “Default Buttons”, page 22, for more information on assigning the default button.

#### Note

The resource rectangle of a push button is the same size as its visual dimensions.

The standard height of a push button is 20 pixels. Don’t count the default ring when measuring the size or alignment of push buttons. The default ring (which is outset 3 pixels from the button) is an attribute and does not affect the base resource size.

To determine the width of a push button that is not a standard one such as the OK button or the Cancel button, add a minimum of 8 pixels between the ends of the text string and the outside line of the button on each side, not including

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the black border; the resource provides the black border by default. Figure 3-15 shows a button called Desktop with the correct spacing at each end of the text.

**Figure 3-15** Spacing of text in a push button



The standard size for the OK and Cancel buttons is 20 pixels by 58 pixels. Figure 3-16 shows the OK button.

**Figure 3-16** OK button showing standard push button size



In general, it's best to make a set of push buttons all the same size, as determined by the width of the longest button name. When you stack push buttons vertically, center the text, as shown in Figure 3-17.

When you stack push buttons vertically, leave 10 pixels between each button. Figure 3-17 shows this spacing. Recall that you don't count the default ring of the OK button, which is an attribute that does not affect the resource size.

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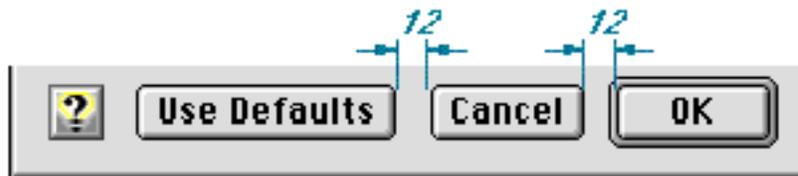
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**Figure 3-17** Distance between vertically stacked buttons



When you place push buttons horizontally, leave 12 pixels between the buttons. Figure 3-18 shows this spacing.

**Figure 3-18** Distance between horizontally placed buttons



Leave 12 pixels between the edge of a push button and any applicable edge of a dialog box.

### Bevel Buttons

You can use pictures, icons, text, or a combination of these on bevel buttons. For more information on the use of bevel buttons, see “Checkboxes”, page 27.

When placing bevel buttons in windows or dialog boxes, leave a minimum of 12 pixels of space horizontally between the buttons. Leave 6 pixels of space from the bottom of the button to the top of the button title.

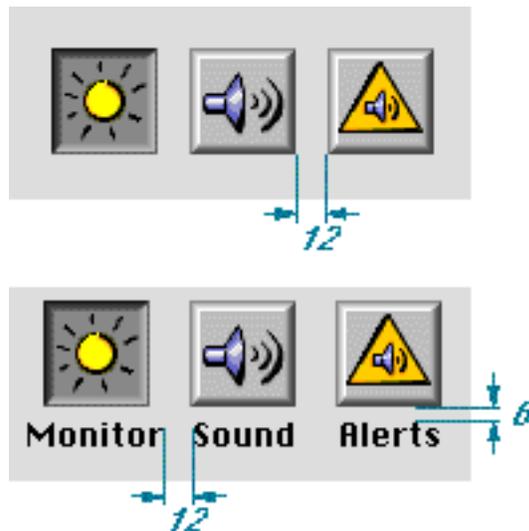
A button title can exceed the width of its button. When it does, there should be at least 12 pixels of space between that title and adjacent titles. Be sure to space

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equally all buttons in the same horizontal group. Figure 3-19 shows the correct spacing between bevel buttons.

**Figure 3-19** Spacing of bevel buttons



### Group Boxes

All group box border lines are 2 pixels wide. A group box can have a title, but one is not required. When you use a title of any kind with a group box, align the base of the text with the inside white border line of the group box. There should be at least 3 pixels on each side of the title text.

Under platinum appearance, group boxes have a 2-pixel border line— a 1-pixel white line next to a 1-pixel dark gray line. In laying out the group box, your measurements should be from the inside of these lines.

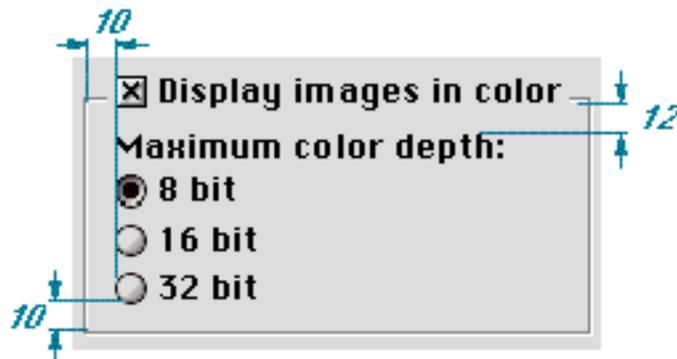
Leave 10 pixels of space between the sides of a group box or the bottom of a group box and any items you place inside those borders. Leave 12 pixels of space from the inside top of the group box to the top of the first item within the group box.

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Figure 3-20 shows visual layout measurements for radio button controls in a group box. Notice that the controls align with the checkbox title of the group box.

**Figure 3-20** Visual layout measurements of controls in a group box



In positioning a secondary group box inside of a primary group box, you should treat the secondary group box as a dialog item with regard to spacing. So for nested group boxes, you measure the space between the outside edge of the secondary group box and the inside border line of the primary group box. Figure 3-21 shows a nested group box that leaves 10 pixels of space between the inside border line of the bottom edge of the primary group box and the outside bottom edge of the nested, secondary group box.

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**Figure 3-21** Spacing for nested secondary group box

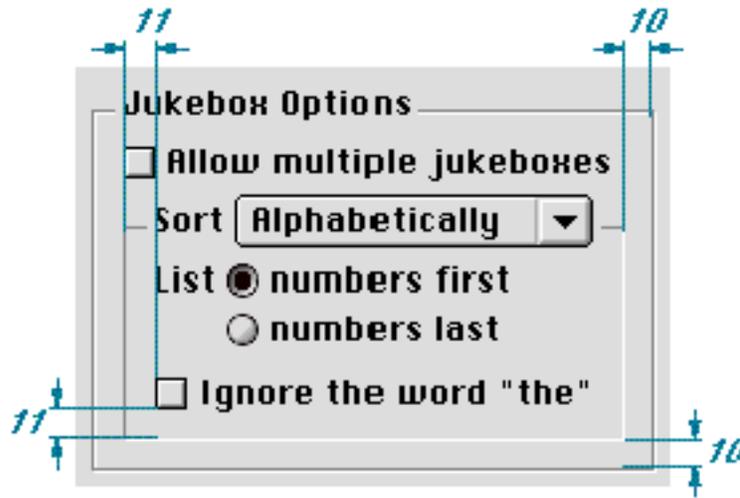
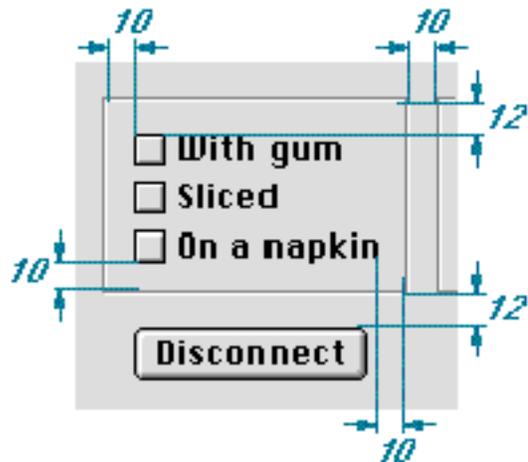


Figure 3-22 summarizes the dimensions for laying out group boxes. The list following the figure describes application of these dimensions.

**Figure 3-22** Visual dimensions of a group box

Here is how to use these measurements:

- n Side margins inside, allow 10 pixels.
- n Top margin inside, allow 12 pixels.
- n Bottom margin inside, allow 10 pixels.
- n Horizontal distance between a group box and other groups of controls or group boxes, allow 10 pixels.
- n Vertical distance between a group box and other control groups or group boxes, allow 12 pixels.

### Checkboxes and Radio Buttons

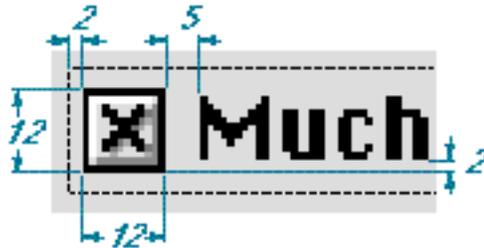
The size and layout of checkboxes and radio buttons are identical. The square or circle itself is 12 pixels high and 12 pixels wide. For both radio button and checkbox controls, the Mac OS Toolbox automatically provides for the correct positioning of each control in relation to its text label. Built into the control are 5 pixels of space between the visible square or circle and the text of the control, assuming a capital M. The bottom of the square is 2 pixels below the baseline of the 12-point Chicago. These dimensions are fixed attributes of the control; you

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do not have to define them nor can you change them. Figure 3-23 illustrates these dimensions.

**Figure 3-23** Fixed dimensions of a checkbox



The standard height of an entire checkbox or radio button control (the clickable region) is 18 pixels. Figure 3-24 shows the height of checkboxes.

**Figure 3-24** Checkbox height



The minimum visible vertical spacing between checkboxes or radio buttons should be 6 pixels. This spacing occurs when you about 18-pixel high controls, as shown in Figure 3-24.

When you place radio buttons or checkboxes horizontally, leave a minimum of 12 pixels space between them. If possible, leave more than 12 pixels of space between these controls. Leave 5 pixels of space between any preceding text and

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the first button. Figure 3-25 shows the minimum horizontal spacing between radio buttons.

**Figure 3-25** Horizontal spacing of radio buttons



When you use an icon or a picture instead of or with text as a title for a checkbox or a radio button, the amount of space you allow depends on the position of the icon or picture in relation to the button or checkbox:

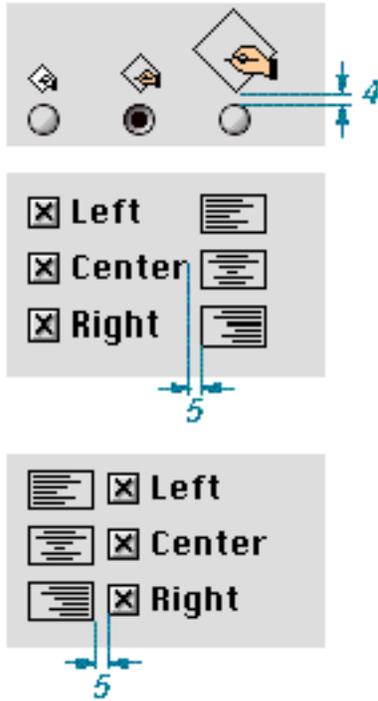
- n Allow 4 pixels of space between the title and the control when the icon or picture is above the radio button or checkbox.
- n Allow 5 pixels of space between the title and the control when the icon or picture is to the right or left of the radio button or checkbox.

Figure 3-26 shows the correct placement of title icons with radio buttons or checkboxes.

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**Figure 3-26** Spacing of icons used with radio buttons or checkboxes



### Pop-up Menu Buttons

The standard height of a pop-up menu button is 20 pixels. If you use the small system font, the height is 18 pixels.

When placing pop-up menu buttons in a vertical orientation, leave a minimum distance of 6 pixels between the controls, as shown in Figure 3-27.

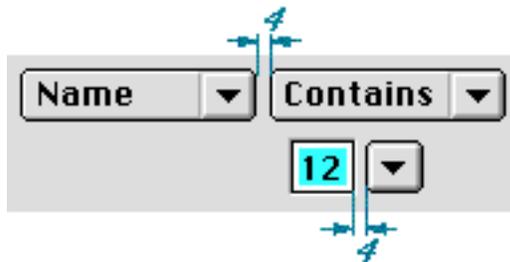
**Figure 3-27** Vertical spacing of pop-up menus

Place paired controls close together. For editable pop-up menus, leave 4 pixels of space between a text entry field and its pop-up menu or between pop-up menus that are interrelated—that is, two or more pop-up menus whose text the user is meant to read sequentially. This space between the two controls is not automatically provided for by the Mac OS Toolbox; it is your responsibility to allow for it in your layout design.

**Note**

Although you can use two or more interrelated pop-up menus, you should avoid doing so because of international sentence structure differences.

Figure 3-28 shows the horizontal spacing between two interrelated pop-up menus and between a text entry field and its downward-pointing triangle.

**Figure 3-28** Horizontal spacing of paired pop-up menus and other controls

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#### Edit Text Fields

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When you measure an edit text field, don't include the bevel outside the black border.

The standard height of an edit text field is 22 pixels. If you are aligning the field with a 20-pixel high item, such as a pop-up, you can use a height of 20 pixels, reducing the white space from 2 pixels to 1.

When you stack edit text fields, leave a minimum distance of 6 pixels between the controls. Figure 3-29 shows the spacing and height of edit text fields.

**Figure 3-29** Spacing and height of text entry fields



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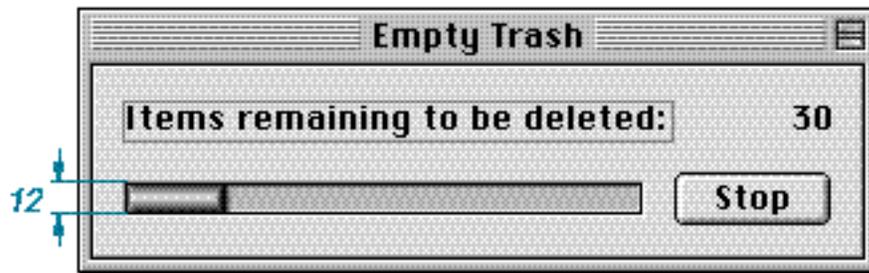
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#### Progress Indicators

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Progress indicators have a static height of 12 pixels and a variable width. When you measure progress indicators, don't include the bevel outside the black line. Figure 3-30 shows measurement for a determinate progress indicator.

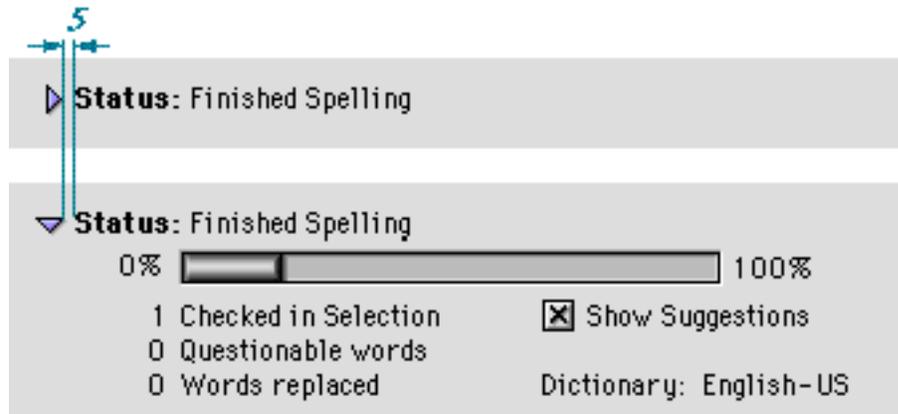
**Figure 3-30** Progress indicator



#### Disclosure Triangles

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Leave 5 pixels of space between the triangle in its right-pointing, or collapsed, state—ignoring the gray shadow—and its text string, as shown in Figure 3-31.

**Figure 3-31** Spacing of disclosure triangles

### Static Text Fields

Leave 5 pixels of space between a static text field and the item it defines. Don't use a colon when the item completes a sentence.

There are three approaches you can take to aligning static text fields when you stack multiple dialog box items to which the fields pertain:

- n You can left align the text labels. This is the standard approach.
- n You can right align them when you use colons at the end of the label. Figure 3-32 shows this approach.

**Figure 3-32** Right-alignment of dialog box item labels

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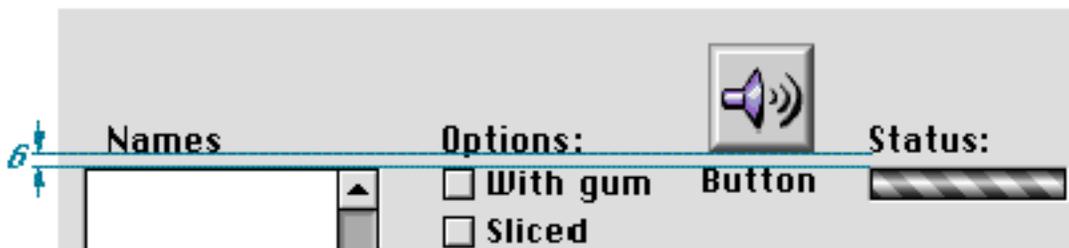
- n A third approach—left aligning both the text labels and their items—is useful for the rare case in which the text labels are nearly the same length.

#### Note

If you are designing your application and its interface for the international market, you should not take this approach because it does not lend itself to localization.

Leave 6 pixels of space between the baseline of text labels and dialog box items that appear below them, as shown in Figure 3-33. This measurement allows space for a keyboard focus ring.

**Figure 3-33** Vertical spacing between text label and dialog box item



### List Boxes

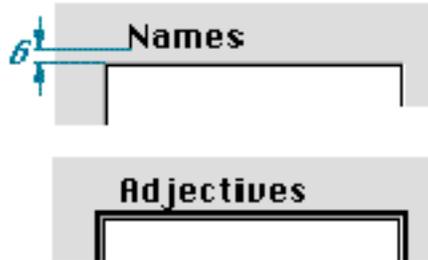
When you measure a list box for layout, don't include the bevel outside the black line.

For a list box title, leave 6 pixels of space between the baseline of the text and the black line of a list box. The horizontal spacing varies depending on the list contents. This spacing allows room for the keyboard focus ring. Figure 3-34 shows the spacing for a text title of a list box.

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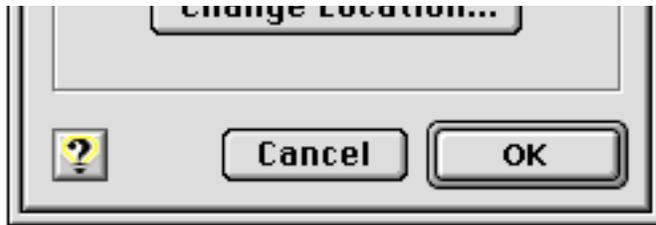
**Figure 3-34** Placement of text title for a list box



### Help Buttons

The Help button is a 21-pixel high, 20-pixel wide bevel button with the standard help icon. The preferred location is the lower left corner of the dialog box, aligned with the bottom of the push buttons, as shown in Figure 3-35.

**Figure 3-35** Help button in lower left corner

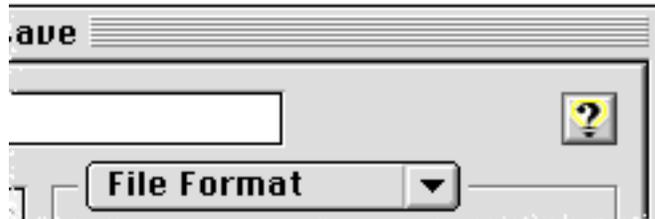


If there are no push buttons or there isn't enough room in the lower left corner, the alternative location is the upper right corner, as seen in Figure 3-36.

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**Figure 3-36** Help button in upper right corner



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