Helping Users Get Started with Visual Interfaces:
Multi-Layered Interfaces, Integrated Initial Guidance and
Video Demonstrations

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We are investigating new ways to help users learn to use public access interactive tools, in particular for
the visual exploration of government statistics. Our work led to a series of interfaces using multi-layered
design, a new help method called Integrated Initial Guidance, and video demonstrations. Multi-layer
designs structure an interface so that a simpler interface is available for users to get started and more
complex features are accessed as users move through the more advanced layers. Integrated Initial
Guidance provides help within the working interface, right at the start of the application. Using the
metaphor of “sticky notes” overlaid on top of the functional interface locates the main widgets,
demonstrates their manipulation, and explains the resulting actions using preset activations of the
interface.

Figure 1: Three different levels of the multi-layered approach, (a) the first level shows only
the map and the data table (b) second level shows slider bar along with map and table (c) the
third level adds scatter plot. A yellow introduction panel lists the features of the level and
indicates the location of the level buttons.

Figure 2: Two examples of Immediate Integrated Guidance sticky notes. The left example (a) corresponds
to a serial grouping of sticky notes. It shows the series of steps to accomplish a task. The right example (b)
depicts the sticky notes representing separate or “parallel” features in a level of the interface.

See also: Kang, H, Plaisant, C., Shneiderman B., New Approaches to Help Users Get Started
with Visual Interfaces: Multi-Layered Interfaces and Integrated Initial Guidance, paper in
Proceedings of DG’03 conference, Boston, 2003