

TOP 10 USABILITY GUIDELINES

for J2ME™ Games for Series 40



Developers designing games for the Series 40 Platform should read and understand the following list of the most significant usability guidelines. In addition to these guidelines, and above all, developers should strive to know and satisfy their users. The list below was excerpted from the document entitled *Nokia Series 40 J2ME™ Game Usability Guidelines and Implementation Model*, available at forum.nokia.com. The symbol **S40** indicates that a guideline may be specific to Series 40 phones.

Pregame

1. Provide a clear menu structure

- **S40** Use only one main menu and make it accessible with the left soft key
- Main menu commands: Continue game, New game, Settings, High scores, Help and About. Exit/Back via right soft key; Select with left.
- **S40** Make the menu short. Minimize or eliminate scrolling.
- Make the menu a part of the game. Use different background color, font, etc. Conserve memory when implementing this. Implement only if it improves the game experience and usability.
- **S40** For the left soft key in the game menus, use Back, Quit, Exit, Cancel, or Clear as the label. Inside the game itself, use Menu or a symbol (such as a triangle) as the label. Display the label in FullCanvas mode.
- **S40** For the right soft key in the game menus, use Back, Quit, Exit, Cancel, or Clear as the label. If the right soft key has a function, display its label in FullCanvas mode, too. Implementing the right soft key inside the game itself is optional (but required within the menu structure).
- **S40** Use the left soft key for selecting, OK and opening menus; right for canceling and going back.
- See “3.1 Navigation” for a navigation diagram.

2. Make simplicity paramount

- Given otherwise equal solutions, the simplest is the best. Complex solutions create problems.
- Do not use too many different characters in the game – make sure each one is unique.
- Provide different game modes only if they are truly different and provide value.

3. Offer help where it is needed

- Make the help text brief. Concentrate on the controls in the help text.
- Make the help text scroll faster than one line at a time. Not applicable if FullCanvas is not used.
- Provide on-line help. Show very brief text on the screen to tell the user about new items, characters, and situations in the game. Provide a setting to disable the on-line help
- **S40** In the help screen, use a graphic representation of the controls, especially movement controls.

- Do not expect or force players to read the help text.

4. Be consistent on all levels

- Use the native language of the user as the game language.
- **S40** Be consistent with the phone user interface and terminology, game industry conventions, cultural conventions and within the game itself.
- The game must use consistent terminology.
- **S40** Use left soft key for OK, menu and select; right for cancel and back.

5. Conserve the user's time

- Make it possible to skip the game introduction.
- Don't force the user to re-enter data that has already been entered or redo things he has already done (either in the game or in the menu structure).
- Provide shortcuts and reasonable default values.

Game experience

6. Use natural controls

- Use 2, 4, 6, and 8 for horizontal and vertical movement. The arrow keys should be automatically enabled.
- Use 1, 3, 7, and 9 for diagonal motion, if appropriate for the game.
- Use 5 as the action button.
- Other than movement, use only one key for one command.
- Inside the game, the left soft key should pause the game and bring up the main menu. The right soft key is optional – it may be disabled completely. If enabled, it should be labeled Exit and quit the game (with confirmation).
- Design the game so that it does not encourage the user to press two keys simultaneously since they do not work (on a 7210).

7. Provide save and pause

- Provide a simple Save Game feature, just like Snake used to have.
- When restarting with a saved game available, the first command in the menu is Continue game.
- **S40** Have the game auto-save in case the user presses the red phone button. Use the `destroyApp()` -method.
- **S40** Provide a pause mode (left soft key, goes to the game menu). This can be done with the `hideNotify()` method.

- If the user quits the game from the pause mode, have the game auto-save.

8. Match game world to real world

- The game should function like the real world. If there are differences, they must be indicated clearly. For example, when jumping or throwing objects, the flight path should be predictable.
- There should be no invisible barriers that the player cannot pass or holes that he cannot reach.
- Do not kill the user game without letting the player do something about it.
- Match functionality and outlook. Things should look like and do what they are.
- Do not force players to learn new things if they can use previous knowledge. Implement a realistic physics model in relevant games (racing games, for example).

9. Go easy on the sounds

- **S40** Use sound for feedback. However, the game must also be playable without the sounds.
- Don't use annoying sounds: nothing too loud or high-pitched.
- Background music is optional, but strongly discouraged.
- Provide an easy way to turn the sound off, accessible from within the game.
- Sounds must be distinctive, not easily confused with one another.
- Make sounds consistent. Sad sounds for sad events, happy for happy.

Post game

10. Provide high score as reward

- Provide a high score list if the game uses a scoring system.
- **S40** Make it easy to enter a name. Tell the user which place he reached before asking for his name.
- Provide the previously entered name as the default.
- **S40** Do not use T9, if possible, as it doesn't work well for names. However, when using TextFields, the system enables T9 and it is not possible to disable it.
- Do not force the user to enter a name. Make it optional.
- Do not list more than 10 high scores. If the game has multiple modes, list no more than 10 high scores per mode.