

Human Interface Notes

Note #12: Specifying Folders with Standard File

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Discussion of modifications to the standard file dialog box for specifying folders.

Introduction

The standard file dialog box is the usual interface for specifying a location in the Macintosh hierarchical file system. It is commonly used for finding and saving documents. Some applications, however, want the user to specify the location of a folder for storing a group of related documents. For example, an electronic mail application could ask where to save mail that is automatically retrieved. But the standard file dialog box is designed for choosing documents, not folders. When a folder is selected in the standard file dialog list, the Open button opens the folder, revealing the items inside. There is no obvious mechanism for choosing the selected folder instead of opening it.

Modified Standard File Dialog

To allow the user to choose a folder, add an additional “Choose” button to the standard file dialog box. This button gives the user an obvious way to choose the selected folder while preserving the existing mechanism for opening folders. The addition of a prompt (Choose a Folder:) informing the user what type of selection is required, helps to clarify the purpose of the dialog.

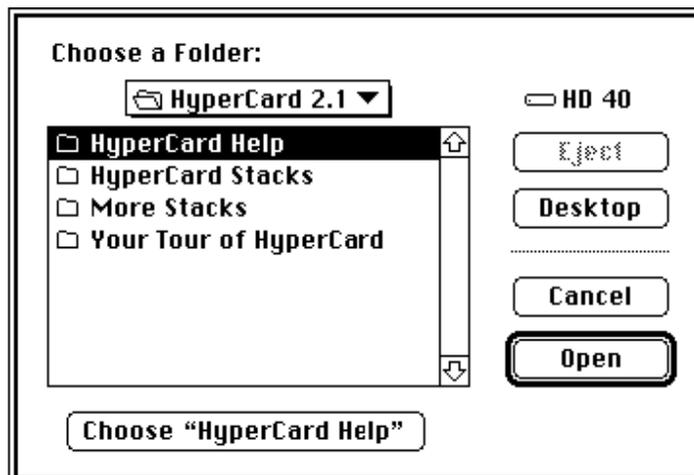


Figure 1–Modified standard file dialog box

If there is no selected item, pressing the Choose button should open the folder displayed in the pop-up, and the Open button should be disabled. Long folder names should be abbreviated using an ellipsis. (See Inside Macintosh VI, chapter 14, pages 47 and 59-60.)

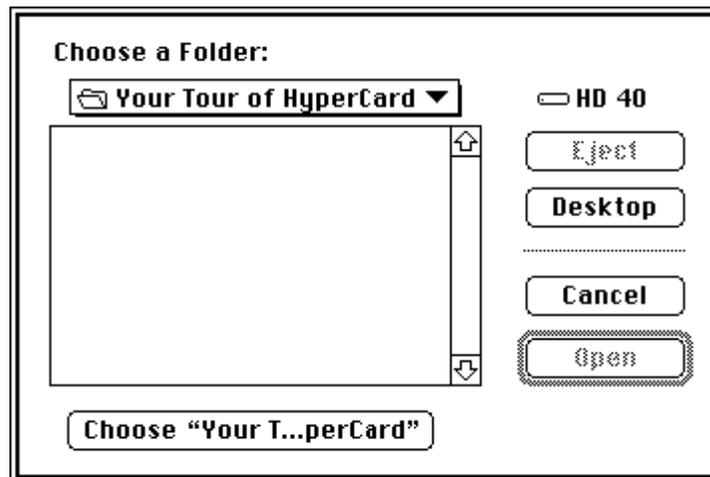


Figure 2—Long folder names and no selected item

The same design can be used to choose other types of containers. Containers are items which can be opened to reveal other items inside, such as folders and hard disks. For instance, a disk repair application could ask the user to specify which hard disk to check. When the user clicks on the Desktop button, the Choose button should read “Choose Desktop” and should be disabled. All items that are not containers, such as applications and documents, should be filtered from the list.

The Return and Enter keys should always select the default button. Command-C should be used as a keyboard shortcut for the Choose button in addition to Command-D for selecting the Desktop button, Command-O for selecting the Open button, and Command-Period for selecting the Cancel button.