

Attention Panels

An attention panel demands attention from users by denying them the ability to work in any other window of the active application. Until it's explicitly dismissed, the panel limits what the user can do within the application to just rearranging windows. Nothing else—title bar buttons, text entry, miniwindows, or controls in other panels—will work. The only menu commands that work are those that can affect the panel itself—for example, Cut, Copy, and Paste, if the panel includes a text field.

Attention panels are appropriate only in a limited number of situations. Because they create a mode that severely limits the user's freedom of action, their use should be restricted as much as possible. A panel can be made an attention panel when:

- It gives the user information about the current context. Such panels usually warn of an error, of a potentially dangerous or unexpected result of the user's current course of action, or of a condition that makes it impossible to carry out a requested action. But they may also simply supply information the user will need to proceed intelligently with the application.
- It interrupts an action to give the user an opportunity to take corrective steps—as, for example, the panel that interrupts the Quit command to let users save altered files before the application terminates.
- It clarifies or completes a user action—as, for example, the panel that completes the Save As and Save To commands.

Attention Panel Appearance

Because an attention panel sets an exclusive mode for itself, in effect disabling the rest of the application, it must be unmistakable and immediately apparent to the user. Some of the features that distinguish attention panels from other windows include:

- An empty title bar. The panel is labeled by text within its content area and is dismissed, not by a close button, but by buttons within the content area.
- Larger than usual type.
- An icon to identify its application.
- A Cancel button that lets the user cancel the action that brought the panel up.
- The Return symbol on a button with the panel's default action.

Naming Attention Panels

Attention panels that come up as the result of a command or a command-like user action should be named after the action that brought them to the screen. For example, the panel that appears as the result of a Save, Save As, Save To, or Save All command should be named "Save." The panel that comes up when the user wants to close an edited but unsaved document should be named "Close," whether it's invoked from the close button or through the Close or Close Window commands.

Dismissing an Attention Panel

The buttons that dismiss an attention panel should be located along the right and lower edges of the panel,

with the default button-the one operated by Return-in the lower right corner. The Return key is used as a shortcut for the action the user is most likely to take, provided that action is also not destructive. Actions the user might regret-such as deleting a file or removing recent editing changes-shouldn't be made easier with the Return shortcut. See help for "returnSign Button" for guidance about choosing the default button for an attention panel.

Each button must be clearly labeled with the action it performs. Generic labels (like "Yes," "No," and "OK") are not permitted, since they require the user to look elsewhere, perhaps to other text, to understand what the button actually does. However, a button labeled "OK" can be used to dismiss an attention panel that issues a warning.

If an attention panel completes or interrupts a user action, one of its buttons must be labeled "Cancel". The Cancel button in an attention panel cancels only the action that brought up the panel. Thus, if a user action in one attention panel brings up another attention panel, the user would have to click Cancel twice (once in each panel) to get out of both.