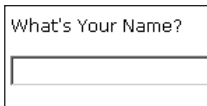


The Many Forms of Forms

Forms are made of a combination of a few interactive GUI objects. The form's power and utility comes from choosing the appropriate objects to invite your users to interact with the site. Each object has its own unique purpose, as well as advantages and disadvantages. Let's take a look:

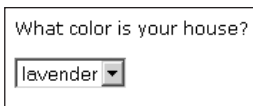
A rectangular box containing the text "What's Your Name?" above a single-line text input field.

Text input can be short or long. It's seen on the left as a place to leave your name. It's easy to use and extremely inviting.

A rectangular box containing two sections. The top section is titled "What colors do you like?" and has three checkboxes labeled "red", "blue", and "yellow". The bottom section is titled "What's your favorite color?" and has three radio buttons labeled "red", "blue", and "ochre".

Check boxes are most often used to allow you to select multiple items from a list. In the example, they let you choose which colors you like. Radio buttons allow you to choose one of several items on a list. In the example, radio buttons ask you to choose one favorite color.

The advantage of both the check box and the radio button is that all the items can be seen at once, so you have a good idea what the range of choices are. These are also extremely intuitive—even web novices quickly figure out how to use them.

A rectangular box containing the text "What color is your house?" above a drop-down list menu showing "lavender" with a downward arrow.

The drop-down list is an alternate way to request a choice from a list. Drop-down lists are the most misused of all the form objects. They are made to allow

you to choose one item from a short list of similar items, not just to save page space.

Drop-down lists are extremely popular because they are capable of packing a lot of information into a small space, so they are often used for navigation. However, they have several drawbacks.

- A long drop-down list is hard to navigate with a mouse. It can be easy to scroll past what you wanted or even scroll off the list and have the list collapse. This can be intensely frustrating for a user.