

Finding information on everyday forms

Jonas Vale / 2024

Notes by Sofia Marino / 2026-04-21

Fictional teaching text

Question

Which layout choices help readers find a deadline?

Study design

The fictional teaching text compares three versions of a community booking form. Each version contains the same event details and deadline.

Participants were asked to locate the closing date and explain what they would do next. The observer recorded errors and the time taken to answer.

Findings

Readers found the deadline more consistently when it appeared next to the booking instruction. A larger heading alone did not prevent errors when the date was separated from the action.

Participants sometimes confused an event date with a booking deadline. Explicit labels reduced that confusion in the reported trial.

Implications

Related dates should be labelled with their purpose. A form can use a short reminder near the action without repeating the entire paragraph.

Testing should use the intended print size. Enlarged screen previews do not reproduce the conditions of reading a paper notice.

Limitations

- The trial involved only eighteen participants.
- The text does not report whether participants had prior form-filling experience.

Discussion

- What task would reveal confusion between the two dates?
- When could repeating a deadline make a form harder to read?