

# Usability Breakdown



Eudora Pro Email 4.2 by QUALCOMM - an email software

CS147 Assignment 1: Usability Breakdown  
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**Problem:** I was trying to customize the toolbar of Eudora. I wanted to add the “undo” and “redo” buttons onto my toolbar. I thought this is going to be a rather simple task as I'd done it in other software BUT it turned out to be not as simple as I thought.



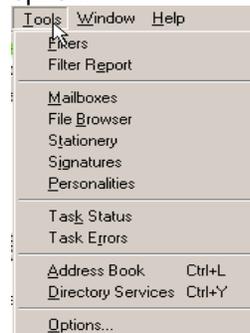
What I did: I tried looking for the customize option (or clues for “more options”) from:

## 1. The default toolbar

Naturally, toolbar is the first place to look for when started. But apparently there's no button that indicates more options are available (as shown in the toolbar above).

## 2. Tools menu

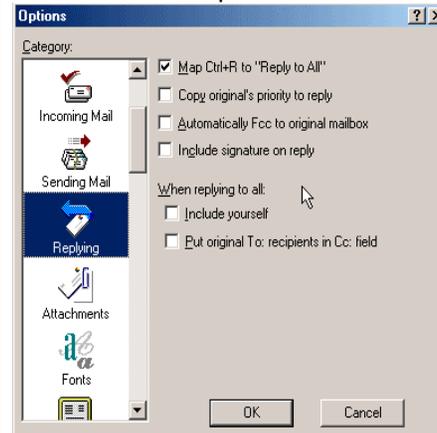
Next, I went to Tools menu since this is where most of the common software like Microsoft Word and PowerPoint place their customize option.



I can't find “customize”, but I see “options”....

## 3. Options (under Tools menu)

I searched the “Options”.



But still, there's no sign of “customize” nor clues for me to add in “undo” and “redo”.

## 4. All the menus on the menu bar

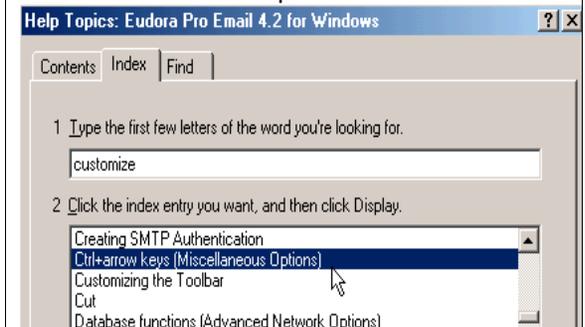
I was frustrated and I opened up all menus one by one from “File” to “Window”.

But again, no sign of “customize” nor ways to add in more functions on the toolbar.

I was puzzled at this point and wondering if customization is available in Eudora?

## 5. Help

I decided to give up on the interface and searched from the help menu.



Finally, I found out that the way to customize and add in more functions is to **right click the mouse at the toolbar** and choose customize from the pop-up menu. And this is THE Only Way the users can add in more functions to their toolbar.

After going through all these searching, I finally managed to add the “undo” and “redo” buttons onto my toolbar.



**Discussion:** I wonder why it took me so much trouble to figure out how to do a familiar task like customizing toolbar? I could have tried right clicked at the toolbar since “right click” seems like a convention in most of the windows software nowadays. **But why didn't I think of that at the first place?** And is this “right-click” convention **obvious to the users** of Eudora? In summary, I think the main issues of the problem are:

- **Visibility issue:** The interface of Eudora 4.2 provides no cue to its users that they can customize and add in more functions to their toolbar. First of all, there's neither button nor cue on the default toolbar that indicating “more functions” is available. Even when users go one level down to search from the menus, still, there's no item that indicating customization is available. I would imagine that most users would have given up at this point (if they've ever gone this far) and conclude that Eudora doesn't allow customization. It'll be a great loss to both the designers and the users as so many good functions were left hidden and unnoticed, simply because the designer has overlooked the importance of visibility cue at the interface design.
- **Mismatch of Conceptual Model:** In this case, the designers presumed that those users who want to customize toolbar (consider as more advanced users perhaps) will know the “right-click” convention based on the fact that this is the only way you can get access to it at Eudora. And these group of users will “naturally” know that customization is available at Eudora. Hence it is not necessary to display the option **explicitly**. With these assumptions, I think Eudora is not serving its “less advanced” users well as they are hidden from the many functions of the software that they've installed. Secondly, even if “right-clicked” is a “natural” convention, which I am not so sure it is yet, it will be too risky to rely on this only interface to get access to the designs. In short, this usability breakdown indicates that there's a mismatch between the “designer's conceptual model” and the “user's model” based on the system image constructed, and that Eudora has lacked a multidimensional understanding of its users.

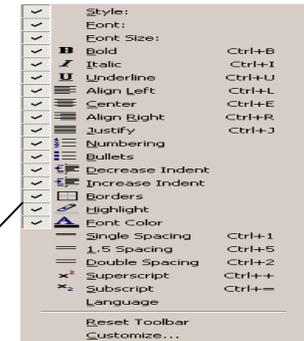
**Suggestion:** I think this problem can easily be resolved by simply adding in more visual cues at the interface design. I also suggest that the redesign will follow the interface design of Microsoft Word 2000:

1. Add in a button at the default toolbar to indicate that there are more options (with Alt-text “More”).



2. When the button is clicked, pop-up menu that includes some commonly used functions e.g. redo, undo, etc. as well as the “customize” option will show up. Users can add or remove the items on the menu by simply checking or unchecking the items.
3. Add “customize” option onto the Tools menu.

Pop-up menu



**Rationale for the redesign:**

**Visibility Principle:** The “more” button and the “customize” option under Tools menu act as good visual indicators to users that more functions are available in Eudora and that they can customize the appearance to suit their needs.

**Affordances:** The button “affords” clicking and interacting. Making “more options” as a button is inviting users to click on it and explore.

**Feedback:** The alt-text and pop-up menu will be a feedback to actions like pointing and clicking (selecting). The checked/unchecked will tell what users have selected and at the same time, make known to its users the other functions that are available at Eudora.

**Conceptual Model:** Adopting the similar interface design of popular software like Microsoft Word enables users to map their existing mental models on certain familiar interface to Eudora. This mental model allows users to **transfer** the knowledge, e.g. *getting more options by clicking on “more” button, and pull down Tools menu to customize*, to the new interface. Thus making the design model appears to be natural and match with the user's model.