

## 4.5.2 Let Users Go Back (Pattern)

### 4.5.2.1 User Need

I need predictable back or undo features so that I know exactly where I was previously, before I made a mistake.

Related User Story: [Undo](#).

### 4.5.2.2 What to Do

Always let the user return to a previous point.

The standard back button is the best way to do this as it is familiar to the user. Many users will try the back button first.

The user should never lose their work if they press back.

### 4.5.2.3 How it Helps

Allowing users to return to a previous point helps prevent mistakes and makes it easy to correct mistakes when they happen.

Examples of mistakes include:

- touching a control by accident,
- opening a new link by accident, and
- closing a window the user intended to keep open.

If a person easily makes mistakes or makes them often, it is important that they can go back and make changes without having their work or previous choices deleted.

For example, a user is watching a video. They try to increase the volume but touch a different link instead. A new video now loads. The user can press the back button and return to the video they were watching before. They now know they can try and increase the volume and if they make a mistake, they can easily go back and try again.

In another example, the back button did not work as expected, but took them somewhere else (such as the home page). When they try to change the volume or add a comment they often lose the video they were watching and cannot find the way to get back to it. The user now feels they cannot use any of the web site's features in case they lose their main content again. They do not expand the screen, change the volume, or leave comments.

In forms, each time the user has to re-enter data presents a new chance for mistakes to occur. Entering and re-entering data can be stressful and tiring for some people with [cognitive and learning disabilities](#). This increases the likelihood of mistakes and may make it impossible to submit correct data and complete the intended task.

For those with anxiety, memory challenges, and difficulty following directions, the ability to go back and review information they have entered is very important. For example, for some people the task of following directions and reviewing their answers works best as two separate tasks. Being able to enter information with their focus being on following the directions, and later going back to review their answers, helps them be more effective.

#### 4.5.2.4 Getting Started

When the user has an opportunity to go back and review the data they entered, even if submitted by mistake. The back button always works as expected.

#### 4.5.2.5 More Details

Options for supporting users going back include:

- Going back steps in a user journey via a clearly labeled action.
- Using clickable breadcrumbs with clickable previous steps and no loss of data.
- Using back and undo features without unwanted data loss.
- Once it is mature you can also use personalization semantics to log the steps and return to a step in the process. See [[personalization-semantics-1.0](#)].
- Reopening a closed window or option.

#### 4.5.2.6 Examples

**Use:**

1. Designs that make it easy to go back. For example:
  - The user is watching a video. They touch a control accidentally. Pressing back can take them back to the video at the same position.
  - A user is completing an online form when applying for a job. The user accidentally hits the home icon and navigates away from the form. The back button takes them back to where they were without any loss of data.
  - The user is also able to go back through all the screens to be sure they did not misunderstand a section or skip an answer. The user can edit any data they mistyped.

**Avoid:**

1. Designs that make it hard to go back. For example:
  - The user is watching a video. They touch a control accidentally and go to a new video. Pressing back makes the new video smaller and does not take them back to the original video.
  - Completing an online form when applying for a job. The user goes back to a screen to check if they have forgotten to answer a question. When they use the back button all data previously entered has been cleared/deleted.

**Questions to answer:**

How many tests are needed for this pattern?

What tests are needed?

What kind of tests are they?

Can any of these tests be automated?