Error Prevention

Definition Good error messages are important, but the best designs carefully prevent problems from occurring in the first place. Either eliminate error-prone conditions, or check for them and present users with a confirmation option before they commit to the action.

There are two types of errors: slips and mistakes.

Slips are unconscious errors caused by inattention.

Mistakes are conscious errors based on a mismatch between the user’s mental model and the design.

Tip: Prioritize your effort: Prevent high-cost errors first, then little frustrations.

Tip: Avoid slips by providing helpful constraints and good defaults.

Tip: Prevent mistakes by removing memory burdens, supporting undo, and warning your users.

Guard rails
Guard rails on curvy mountain roads prevent drivers from falling off of cliffs.

Airline confirmation
The confirmation page before checking out on airline websites gives users another chance to review the flight details.

Date selection on calendar
Offer good defaults and set boundaries when people book services by dates. Grey out unavailable options.