# Paizo Checkout Feedback

The following is a brief usability analysis of the Paizo.com checkout procedure. It assumes that the user has begun by clicking "Add to Cart" on a product page, and then clicking "View Cart" to begin the checkout process.

## Screen 1 — Order Review



*Order Review screen*

This screen allows the user to adjust quantities, deal with gifting, and so on. The label **Proceed to Checkout** is clear. The button's position at the bottom right of the area makes sense for an audience of primarily English speakers, who read from top-to-bottom and left-to-right because that is how their language is written.

**Recommendations:** None. This one is fine.

# Screen 2 — Step 1.5?



*Step 1.5?*

Screen 2 introduces a new element: the step-tracking interface at the top. The question that floats instantly to mind is: *Which step am I on?* Am I on step 1, the shopping cart? But that does not make sense, because I just came from there. So I must be on Step 2. Except that's red, which is bad and scary, and anyway Step 2 is labeled "Payment Method." None of the rest of the page talks about payment yet, so I can't be on Step 2. But if I'm not on Step 1, and I'm not on Step 2, then where the hell am I? I guess I must be on Step 1.5? Because it's clearly too soon for Step 3, as indicated by the fact that it is greyed out and has big X on it.
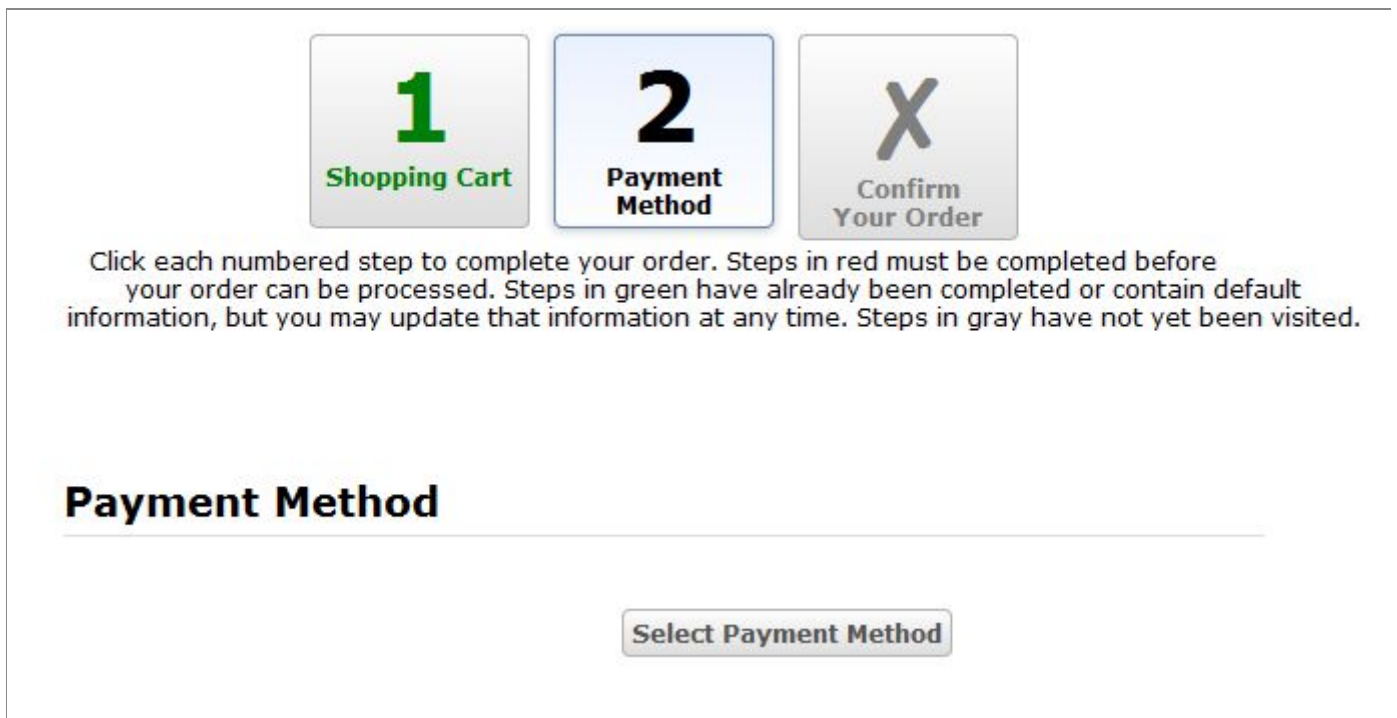
The color coding can be understood if you take the time to read the three lines of text beneath the step tracker. However, the vast majority of the time people **do not** carefully read the pages they are interacting with. They scan quickly, looking for familiar patterns and contextual cues. If your UI depends on the user reading a textual description of it in order to understand what it's for, then that UI has already failed in its primary purpose.

The other portion of the screen contains a duplicate of the user interface from the previous step, allowing me once again to adjust the quantities of the items I am purchasing. Why? I just did that.

The customer needs to click "Payment Method" to proceed. But it is not obvious that this is intended to be clicked. In particular, the color red is conventionally used to highlight errors, warnings, and irrevocable actions that should not be taken unless you know what you are doing. That is not the frame of mind you want your customers in.

**Recommendations:** From an end-user perspective, this screen serves no purpose. The step-tracker is confusing, and the **Items in Your Cart** section needlessly duplicates earlier functionality. The screen should be completely eliminated.

# Screen 3a — Initial Payment Method Screen



*Initial Payment Method Screen*

At first glance, I cannot do anything on this page. The visual hierarchy places far more emphasis on the step tracker, which is large and vibrantly colored, than on the **Select Payment Method** button, which is smaller and colored grey-on-grey in a white field.

When I finally DO find and click the **Select Payment Button** button, we get to …

# Screen 3b — Payment Method Selection
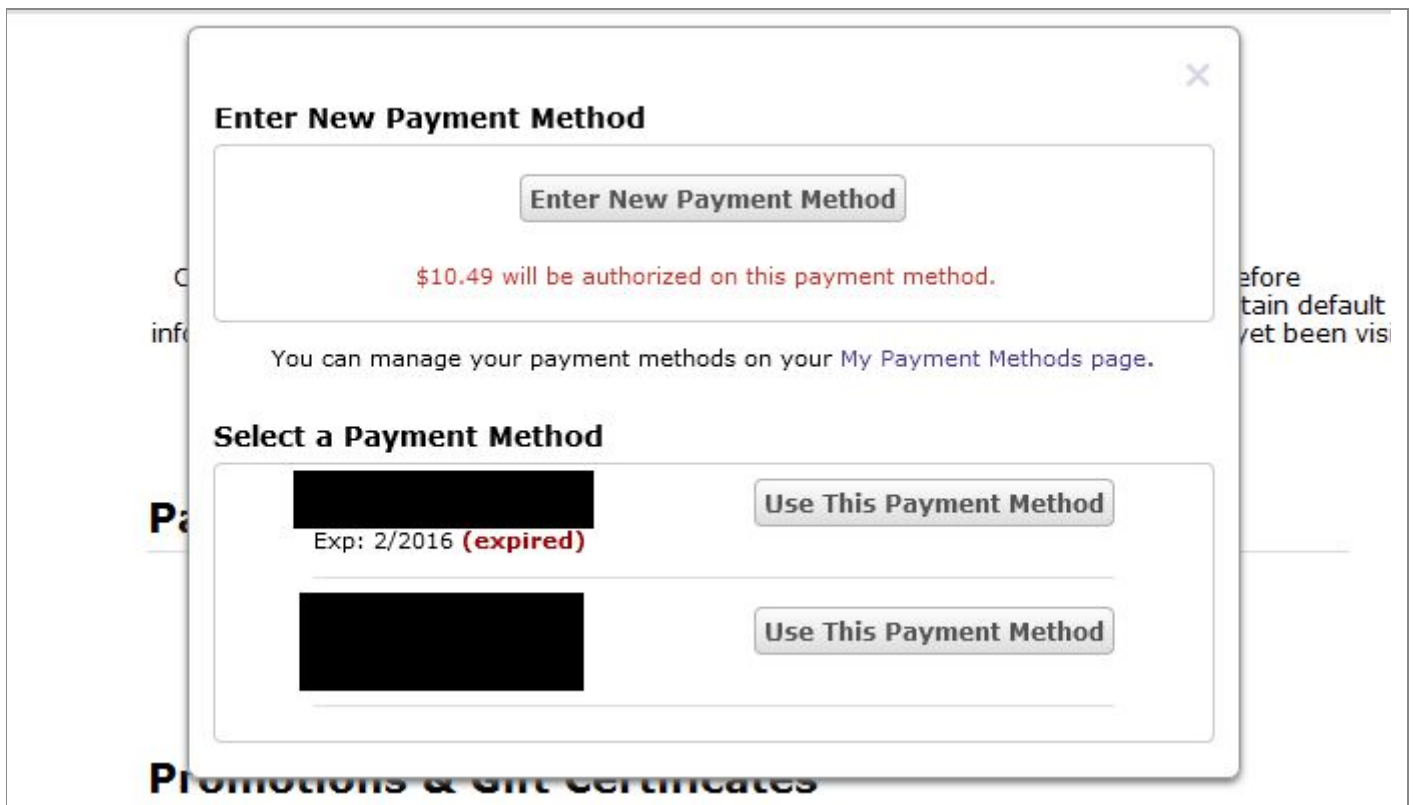


*Payment Method Selection*

... the actual list of payment methods, including the option to enter a new payment method.

Why did I need to click **Select Payment Method** in order to load the list of payment methods into a pop-up window? I have only one valid payment method on file. Why has it not selected that method by default?

After clicking **Use this Payment Method**, the list of payment methods goes away, and the site informs me **Your payment method has been changed.** Yes, thank you, I know that. I just did that. Why are you me making me click OK to acknowledge this obvious fact before I can proceed?

**Recommendations:**

- Integrate the list of payment methods directly into Screen 3a, instead of requiring an extra click to invoke it.
- Eliminate the modal dialog requiring you to acknowledge the fact that you've changed your payment method. It's fine to add text informing people of that, but requiring them to click a button over the matter is silly.
- Add some method of defaulting to a payment method. It could be a checkbox allowing the person to designate one payment method as their preferred default; it could default to the last-used payment method, though that is more likely to cause annoyance when people forget to change back from a one-off purchase. In the case of people having only one valid payment method on file, default to that method. You do not need to force people to choose their payment method on every checkout.

# Screen 3c — Payment Method Selection



*Payment Method Selected*

After selecting a payment method, I am back at 3a. My payment method has been chosen, but step 2 has not turned green. Step 3 is greyed out and has a big X on it. Generally, greyed-out with a big X means "disabled, do not click here yet". I must be missing something. But it looks like there's nothing left to do here, so finally I click **Confirm Your Order** even though its affordance is signalling that it shouldn't be clicked yet.

# Screen 4 — Final (?) Screen



*Final (?) Screen*

Once the customer gets to this point, the step tracker looks like it's all done. Everything is green, and the X became a checkmark. That means I'm done, and I can close the browser window because my purchase is complete. Right?

Except to actually place the order, you have to click **Place Your Order**. This is arguably the most important button on your site. It's your **now we make money** button. But compared to the large, vibrant green of the steps at the top, its small grey-on-grey look does not draw the eye.

**Recommendations:**

- **Place Your Order** button should be impossible to miss.

# Screen 5 — Order Page



*A bit of JavaScript.*

I do not know if this is universal, or a side-effect of the many plugins that I have enabled in my web browser, but every time I finish an order, it takes me to a screen showing a bit of JavaScript. The code itself is clear enough — it just redirects me to the actual order page. But there is zero reason for the end user ever to see a page like this one. Redirects should be invisible to the end user.

**Recommendation:** Handle redirects server-side using an HTTP header, if possible. If for some reason the redirect must happen client-side, ensure that the code is not displayed to the end user, and that they have some kind of friendly message explaining what's going on. Perhaps "Processing your order ..." or similar.

# General Recommendations

At the risk of speaking bluntly, the step tracker is a mess. Replace it with something that can clearly, at a glance, answer the following questions:

- How many steps are there in this process?
- Where am I in this process?
- What have I done already?
- What remains to be done?
- How do I go back to an earlier step if I have to?

There are a number of ways to convey this visually. A common one borrows from the "progress bar" user interface element and splits it into chunks for each step. For example, here's a composite showing such a thing from a library's form allowing patrons to request materials from other libraries:
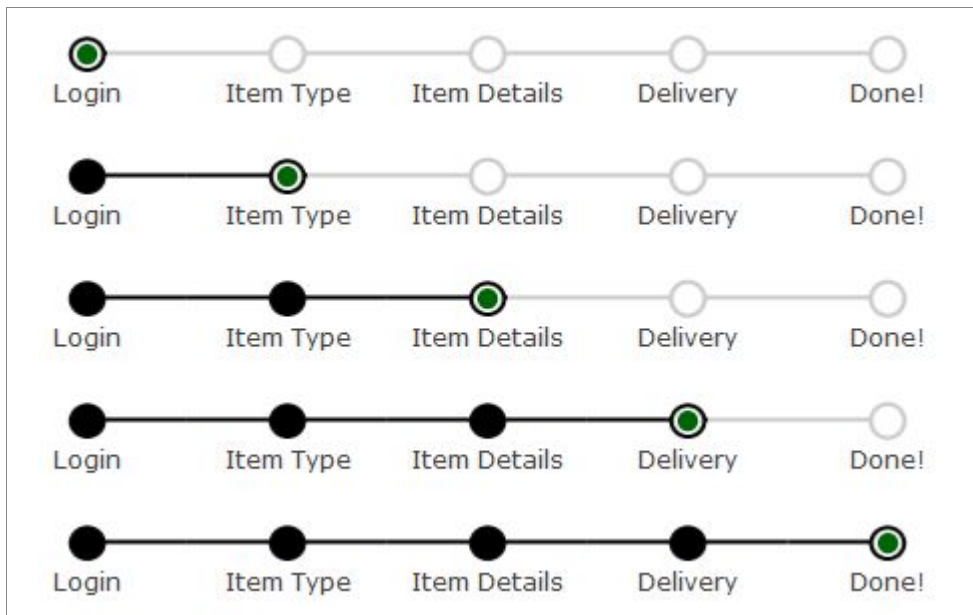
*Step tracker example.*

It can answer four of the five questions posed above at a glance:

- How many steps are there in this process? **Five.**
- Where am I in this process? **At the green dot.**
- What have I done already? **Completed steps are filled in with black.**
- What remains to be done? **Incomplete steps are empty and greyed out.**

The one real shortcoming of the design is that it doesn't offer a good way to jump back to an earlier step. That could be addressed by making the labels of each step clickable hyperlinks that would rewind the process. In this case, however, the designer opted for large "Previous" and "Next" buttons instead (not pictured).

# Final Comments

Paizo's checkout procedure is not the most convoluted I've encountered by any means. In one memorable incident, I came across a checkout form where it was impossible to complete the order at all, because a vital button was disabled. And clearly, plenty of people do figure out how to buy your stuff, so it's working adequately.

That said, there is much room for improvement. I hope the above discussion and recommendations will prove helpful in that regard.