Reporting Bugs: A Quick Guide

The Purpose of this Guide

This guide gives some suggestions on how to report bugs. Following this procedure when logging a bug makes it easier for technical staff to track down and fix a problem. The end result of this is a bug is fixed sooner and is less likely to re-emerge.

What's in a [Bug] Name?

When submitting a bug, it's a good idea to give it a short, descriptive title. It may seem like a chore, but it assists developers to quickly identify what a bug is when looking at a list of bug titles. It also helps in future when trying to recall what an old bug was about.

To create a good title, all you need to do is think to yourself for a second "now what exactly is the problem?" The first thing that pops into your mind will usually be a pretty descriptive title.

Examples of good bug titles	Examples of some 'not-so-great' titles
My login details aren't being saved	Error on page
The photo gallery page has a script error on it	The system is busted
GST totals on invoice report are not accurate	The system doesn't work when I use it

Key points to a good title;

1) Say what page (or section) the error occurs on.
2) Generally, say what *one* thing is broken.
3) Keep it short, well formed grammar isn't that necessary here.

Describing the Bug

The single most important thing for reporting a bug well is to give the steps required to reproduce the problem. It really is that simple, all you need to do is give a step-by-step account of what you were doing when the bug first appeared.

For example;

1) Login as a standard user
2) Go to 'My Account→Profile'
3) In the 'Surname' field, enter a name with an apostrophe (e.g. O'Brien)
4) Click the 'Save' button.

You'll see the page has a script error and doesn't save the new name.

Example of a 'not-so-great' bug report;

> There's something wrong with the profile page. It crashes, my computer reboots, and the cat goes and scratches the couch.

Keys points to a helpful bug submission;

1) Use asterisks as bullets if you can (it makes life easier for developers).
2) Give just enough detail to be able to recreate the bug (one line is unlikely to help, a novella adds little benefit either).
3) At the end of the steps, say what went wrong (e.g. "the page has an error", "data goes missing", etc).

Is It Serious? Assigning Priority to a Bug

When logging a bug, a 'priority rating' is assigned to it. The choices are;

1) Low → User Interface (UI) or usability problem (e.g. spelling mistake, misaligned controls, etc).
2) Normal → Catch all (most things fall into this category)
3) High → A script error.

The reason why a priority rating is assigned to a bug is so developers know which issues are most pressing and need to be attended to first.

Is it Really a Bug?

Occasionally it's hard to tell if something really is a bug, it may instead best be categorised as a 'feature addition'. As a general rule of thumb, you can think of a bug as; a) a script error on a page, b) data going missing or being corrupted, or c) the system *behaves in a manner in which it was not intended too*.

So You've Logged Your Bug - What Now?

The actual act of submitting a bug in a formalised way is very important – having a record made of it means it wont get 'lost'. The other boon is that someone has clearly taken responsibility for dealing with the problem. Once a bug has been submitted, you will generally see a bug assigned to a developer who will take care of it within a few days.

Appendix: Name That Control

Whilst using a computer-based system you may come across certain 'nerdy' computer terms such as 'multi-select list' or 'radio button'. No doubt you will already be familiar with some of these controls, others you may be able to figure out in due course. Just to be on the safe side though, here is a brief selection of common controls you may encounter during your Internet adventures.