Analysing user experiences

perplexity

Designing Trust: Citations and Follow-Ups in Perplexity

Learn in Public Challenge (3/5)

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PRODUCT OVERVIEW

WHAT IS PERPLEXITY?

- Founded: **2022**, San Francisco
- AI-powered answer engine (not just a chatbot)
- Combines LLM generated responses + real-time web sources
- Core positioning: “Fast, accurate, cited answers”

COMPETITORS:

Copilot

ChatGPT

Claude

Gemini

AI search market is growing at a CAGR of

30%+

Perplexity valuation (2024–25 estimates):

$1B+

Monthly active users:

22M+

PERPLEXITY’S CITATIONS & FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS UI

What is this feature?

Perplexity’s Citations & Follow-up Questions UI is the part of the product that:

- Shows source links (citations) directly below AI-generated answers
- Provides clickable follow-up questions to help users explore the topic further
- Connects answer → proof → next action in a single flow

It transforms Perplexity from a chatbot into a trust-first answer engine.

Why This Feature Matters?

- Builds Trust: Citations make AI responses verifiable
- Reduces Hallucination Anxiety: Users can check original sources instantly
- Improves Learnability: Follow-ups guide users on what to ask next
- Aligns with User Mental Models: Feels like Google + Wikipedia + research assistant
- Drives Retention: Follow-ups encourage longer sessions and repeat usage
- Differentiates Perplexity: Clear UX advantage over ChatGPT & Google AI

BUSINESS MODEL:

Free

Personal:

- **Pro:** $20/month
- **Max:** $200/month

Education:

Students & educators can redeem Pro for free after verification.

Business:

- **Enterprise Pro:** $40/user/month
- **Enterprise Max:** $325/user/month

USERS:



Students & Academic Learners



Working professionals



Curious General Users

USER JOURNEY & UX ANALYSIS

1 Landing Page & Query Input



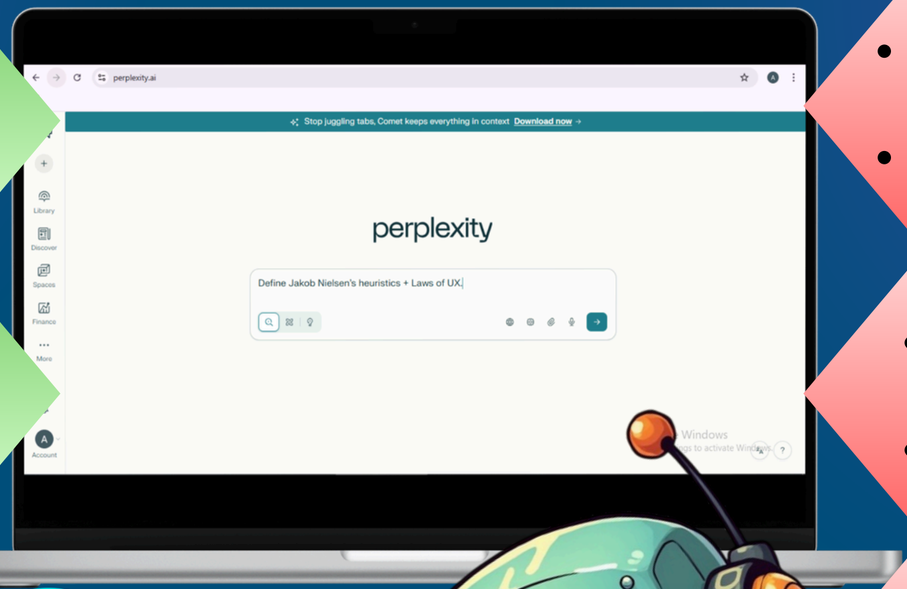
User Thoughts:
"Is this going to give me a reliable answer, or just another AI response?"

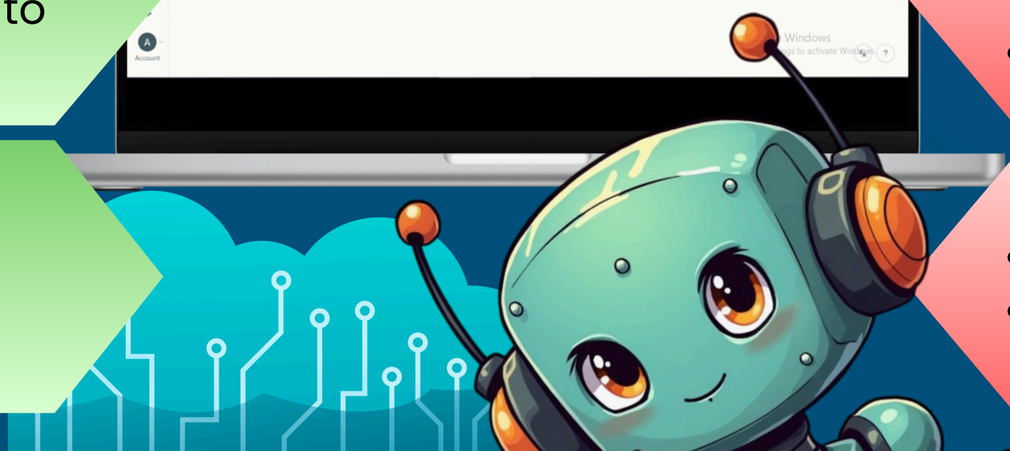
✅ UX Laws Applied

Jakob's Law
- Familiar search-bar layout similar to Google/ChatGPT.
- No learning curve for first-time users.

Hick's Law
- Single primary action: "Ask anything".
- Fewer choices → faster decision to engage.

Aesthetic–Usability Effect
- Clean, minimal UI with ample white space.
- Simple design increases perceived reliability.





⚠️ UX Laws Violated / Weak

Visibility of System Status (Nielsen)
- No indication of how answers are generated.
- Users don't know citations will be shown later.

Von Restorff Effect
- No standout element highlighting "answers with sources".
- Differentiation from other AI tools is not immediately visible.

Help & Documentation (Nielsen)
- No sample queries or onboarding hints
- First-time users may hesitate on what to ask.

USER JOURNEY & UX ANALYSIS

2 Perplexity AI Answer Generation



User Thoughts:

"Just give me a clear answer without making me think too much."

✅ UX Laws Applied

Visibility of System Status (Nielsen)

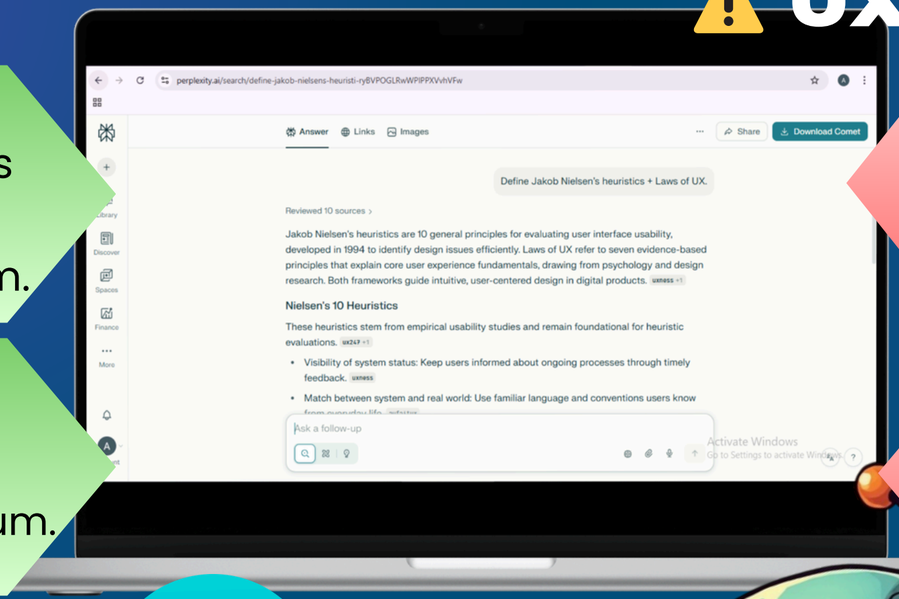
- "Reviewed X sources" indicator shows background work.
- Signals that the answer is not random.

Doherty Threshold

- Answer appears quickly after query submission.
- Maintains user attention and momentum.

Law of Prägnanz (Gestalt)

- Information is grouped into a clear paragraph structure.
- Users grasp the core idea at a glance.



⚠️ UX Laws Violated / Weak

Error Prevention (Nielsen)

- Confident language even when information may vary by source.
- No cues indicating uncertainty or assumptions.

Transparency Principle (Laws of UX)

- Explains what the answer is
- Does not explain how confident the system is?





USER JOURNEY & UX ANALYSIS

3

Citations Display



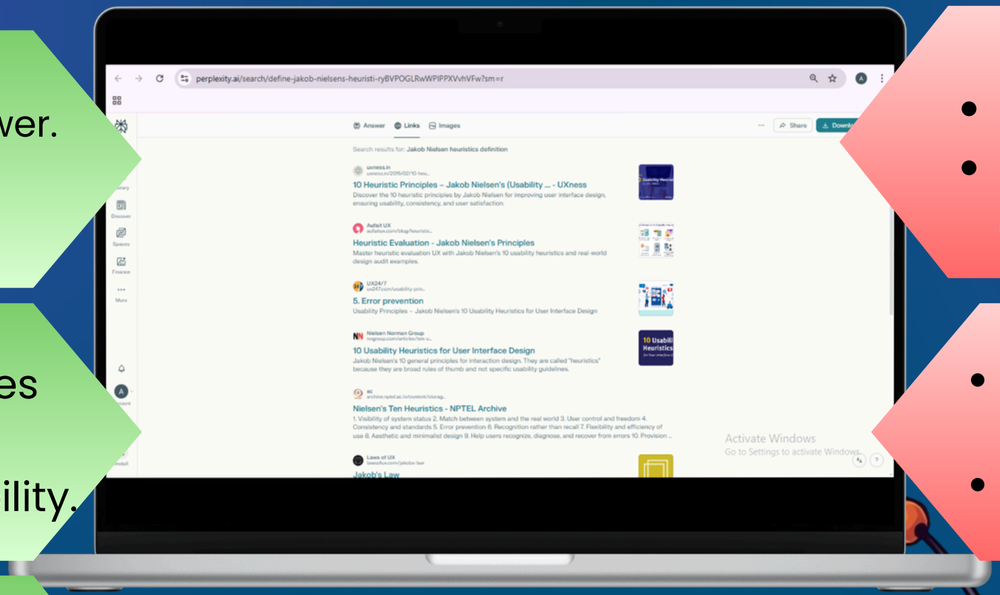
User Thoughts:
"Okay, but where is this information actually coming from?"

✅ UX Laws Applied

Recognition Over Recall (Nielsen)
- Sources are clearly listed below the answer.
- Users don't need to search externally for validation.

Jakob's Law
- Link-based citation format resembles Google / Wikipedia.
- Familiar pattern for checking credibility.

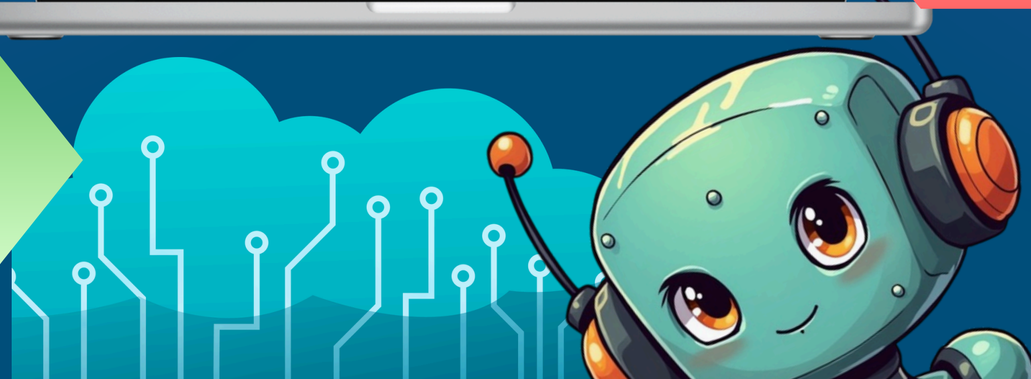
Feedback Principle (Laws of UX)
- "Reviewed X sources" reinforces system effort.
- Confirms that the answer is evidence-backed.



⚠️ UX Laws Violated / Weak

Von Restorff Effect
- All links look visually similar.
- High-authority sources don't stand out.

Uniform Connectedness
- Academic, blog, and generic sources appear equal.
- Users must judge credibility on their own.





USER JOURNEY & UX ANALYSIS

4 Follow-up Questions



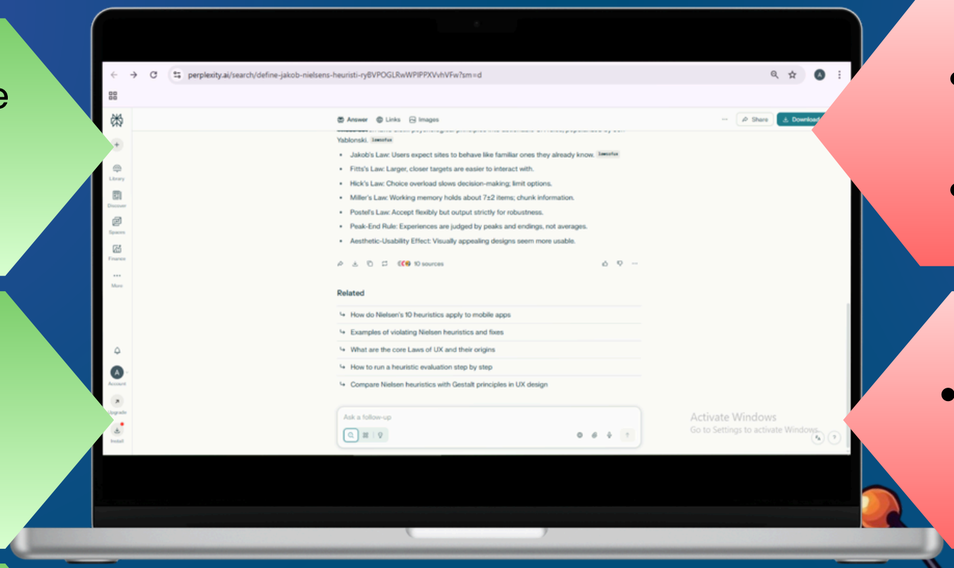
User Thoughts:
"What should I explore next?"

✅ UX Laws Applied

Hick's Law
- Limited follow-up questions reduce choice overload
- Users can decide quickly without overthinking.

Miller's Law
- 3–5 follow-ups fit within working memory limits.
- Easy to scan and mentally process.

Recognition Over Recall (Nielsen)
- Suggested questions remove the need to frame the next query.
- Keeps users in exploration flow.



⚠️ UX Laws Violated / Weak

User Control & Freedom (Nielsen)
- Follow-ups are fully system generated.
- Users cannot modify intent or direction.

Autonomy Principle (Laws of UX)
- No option to guide the type of follow-ups (compare, oppose, simplify)



KEY UX TAKEAWAYS

Citations successfully establish trust but only at a surface level

- Showing sources applies Recognition over Recall and the Feedback Principle.
- Users feel reassured that answers are grounded in evidence.
- However, all sources look equal, forcing users to manually judge credibility.

👉 **Takeaway:** Trust is visible, but not yet well-calibrated.

Explainability is the biggest UX gap

- Perplexity shows what it used, but not why.
- This partially violates Transparency and Error Prevention heuristics.
- Users must still rely on their own judgment.

👉 **Takeaway:** AI trust needs explanation, not just evidence.

Familiarity is Perplexity's biggest strength

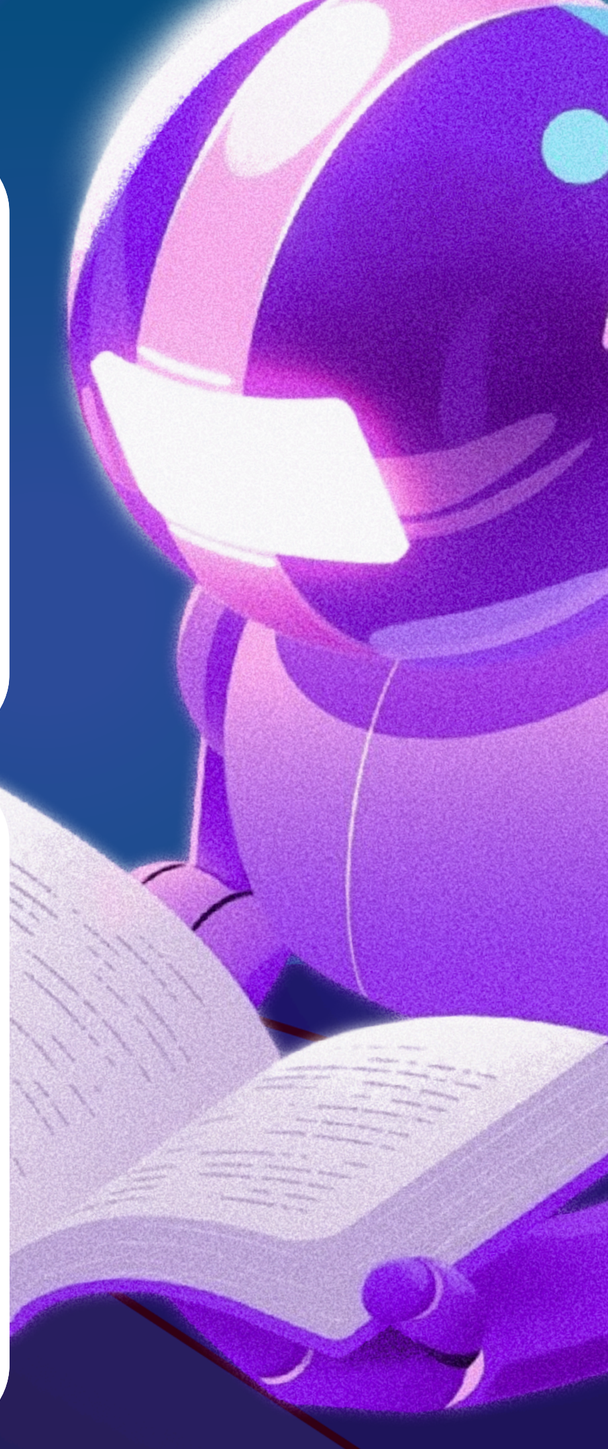
- Perplexity heavily leverages Jakob's Law by borrowing patterns from Google, Wikipedia, and research tools
- This reduces onboarding friction and helps users trust the product faster.

👉 **Takeaway**: In AI products, reducing novelty often beats introducing innovation.

Follow-ups reduce cognitive effort and drive engagement

- Follow-up questions apply Hick's Law and Miller's Law.
- Users are guided smoothly without decision fatigue.
- This increases session depth and repeat usage.

👉 **Takeaway:** Follow-ups act as both a UX feature and a growth lever.



UX IMPROVEMENT SUGGESTIONS

Make Source Quality Instantly Scannable in the Citations Section Current UX

- All sources are displayed as uniform links.
- Users must open each link to judge credibility.

Improvement

- Add lightweight visual indicators next to each source:
  - Source type (Academic / News / Blog)
  - Publication date
- Keep it non-intrusive and inline with existing citation layout

UX Laws Addressed:

- Von Restorff Effect
- Recognition over Recall
- Error Prevention

Why this fits Perplexity?

- Builds directly on its core promise of “answers with sources”.
- Improves trust without changing user flow.

Make Follow-up Questions Intent-Aware Instead of Generic Current UX

- Follow-up questions are helpful but broad
- Same style of suggestions appears regardless of user intent (learn, compare, decide)

Improvement:

- Add a lightweight intent label above the follow-ups such as:
  - Understand basics
  - Compare viewpoints
  - Go deeper
- Re-rank existing follow-ups based on the user’s original query
- Do not add new controls or choices

UX Laws Addressed:

- Hick’s Law
- User Control & Freedom
- Recognition over Recall

Why this fits Perplexity?

- Makes follow-ups feel more relevant and purposeful
- Encourages deeper exploration without increasing cognitive load
- Preserves Perplexity’s clean, minimal UI

Contextual Highlighting of Answer Sentences When a Source Is Clicked Current UX

- Users click a source link to verify information
- The source opens, but the user must manually find:
  - Which part of the answer it supports
- There is no visual connection back to the answer text

Improvement:

- When a user clicks a source:
  - The app subtly highlights the sentence(s) in the answer that are supported by that source
- Highlight disappears when another source is clicked or on scroll
- No new UI elements, only contextual highlighting

UX Laws Addressed:

- Recognition over Recall
- Law of Prägnanz
- Visibility of System Status

Why this fits Perplexity?

- Directly strengthens Perplexity’s core promise: answers backed by evidence.
- Reduces verification effort without changing navigation flow.
- Builds trust through clarity, not additional features

Thank You