Simple for beginners and rich for aficionados: How Starbucks’ drink framework and ordering language engage customers at all levels

December 1, 2007; v16
Option Shift Control
Dubberly Design Office
Simple for beginners and rich for aficionados: How Starbucks’ drink framework and ordering language engage customers at all levels
One of Moses’ Lost Commandments

“Honor small, medium and large. Tall, grande and venti are for jackasses.”

Paul Rudd
Simple for beginners and rich for aficionados: How Starbucks’ drink framework and ordering language engage customers at all levels
Customizable gift cards
Customizable gift cards

Drink framework and ordering language

Designer Controls

User Controls
Simple for beginners and rich for aficionados: How Starbucks’ drink framework and ordering language engage customers at all levels

Designer Controls

- Customizable gift cards
- Drink framework and ordering language

User Controls

- Grow, roast, grind, percolate coffee
- Steam milk, build, and clean up
Pine & Gilmore wrote *The Experience Economy* offering Starbucks as a prime example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>Goods</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beans</td>
<td>Roasted and ground</td>
<td>Brewed and served</td>
<td>Treating yourself to something special</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1¢–2¢ Per Cup</strong></td>
<td><strong>5¢–25¢ Per Cup</strong></td>
<td><strong>75¢–$1.50 Per Cup</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2–$5.00 Per Cup</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An important component of the Starbucks experience is its drink framework and ordering language.
“I’ll have my usual—
Iced Half-caf Double Tall
Non-fat No-whip Mocha”
“I’ll have my usual—
Iced Half-caf Double Tall
Non-fat No-whip Mocha”

“Wait, I’ll try a Triple Grande Two-pump Upside-down Caramel Macchiato”
Barista-speak—
the language of Starbucks orders—
may sound alien to outsiders

But it is richly meaningful to
baristas and regular patrons
Do customers really order this way?

An informal study at a Starbucks store in San Francisco revealed that over 60% of customers customize their drinks by changing at least one variable.
Over 60% of customers change at least one variable
**Starbucks groups drinks in 4 main categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Espresso</th>
<th>Drip coffee</th>
<th>Frappuccino</th>
<th>Tea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

![Menu image](image_url)
The espresso category is comprised of 4 drink families:

**Category**
- Espresso
- Drip coffee
- Frappuccino
- Tea

**Family**
- Espresso
- Latte
- Cappuccino
- Americano
These families are made by combining espresso, water, foam, and milk

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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>No water</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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### A shot of espresso can be ordered alone

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A Latte is Espresso with a lot of steamed milk and a little foam.
A Cappuccino is an Espresso with more foam and less milk

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An Americano is Espresso poured into hot water
Each family is a framework for further customization

- **Category**
  - Espresso
  - Drip coffee
  - Frappuccino
  - Tea

- **Family**
  - Espresso
  - Latte
  - Cappuccino
  - Americano

- **Base**
  - Espresso

- **Water**
  - No water
  - Water

- **Milk**
  - No milk
  - Little milk
  - Lots of milk

- **Foam**
  - No foam
  - Little foam
  - Lots of foam
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

Latte

Vanilla Latte
Cinnamon Dolce Latte
Pumpkin Spice Latte
Mocha
White Chocolate Mocha
Iced Latte
Iced Mocha
Chai Tea Latte
Caramel Macchiato
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

**Latte**

Vanilla Latte

Cinnamon Dolce Latte

Pumpkin Spice Latte

Mocha

White Chocolate Mocha

Iced Latte

Iced Mocha

Chai Tea Latte

Caramel Macchiato
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

**Latte**

- Vanilla Latte
- Cinnamon Dolce Latte
- Pumpkin Spice Latte
- Mocha
- White Chocolate Mocha
- Iced Latte
- Iced Mocha
- Chai Tea Latte
- Caramel Macchiato

![Graphic of coffee cup with steamed milk and espresso](image-url)
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Caramel Macchiato
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- Cinnamon Dolce Latte
- Pumpkin Spice Latte
- Mocha
- White Chocolate Mocha
- Iced Latte
- Iced Mocha
- Chai Tea Latte
- Caramel Macchiato
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

Latte
Vanilla Latte
**Cinnamon Dolce Latte**
Pumpkin Spice Latte
Mocha
White Chocolate Mocha
Iced Latte
Iced Mocha
Chai Tea Latte
Caramel Macchiato

Cinnamon Dolce Syrup
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

Latte
Vanilla Latte
Cinnamon Dolce Latte
Pumpkin Spice Latte
Mocha
White Chocolate Mocha
Iced Latte
Iced Mocha
Chai Tea Latte
Caramel Macchiato

Pumpkin Spice Syrup
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

Latte
Vanilla Latte
Cinnamon Dolce Latte
Pumpkin Spice Latte

Mocha
White Chocolate Mocha
Iced Latte
Iced Mocha
Chai Tea Latte
Caramel Macchiato
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

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Pumpkin Spice Latte
Mocha
**White Chocolate Mocha**
Iced Latte
Iced Mocha
Chai Tea Latte
Caramel Macchiato
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

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Vanilla Latte
Cinnamon Dolce Latte
Pumpkin Spice Latte
Mocha
White Chocolate Mocha

Iced Latte
Iced Mocha
Chai Tea Latte
Caramel Macchiato
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

- Latte
- Vanilla Latte
- Cinnamon Dolce Latte
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- Mocha
- White Chocolate Mocha
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- Chai Tea Latte
- Caramel Macchiato
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

Latte
Vanilla Latte
Cinnamon Dolce Latte
Pumpkin Spice Latte
Mocha
White Chocolate Mocha
Iced Latte
Iced Mocha

Chai Tea Latte
Caramel Macchiato
The menu offers more than 10 variations on the Latte

Latte
Vanilla Latte
Cinnamon Dolce Latte
Pumpkin Spice Latte
Mocha
White Chocolate Mocha
Iced Latte
Iced Mocha
Chai Tea Latte
Caramel Macchiato
The main difference is the flavor of the syrup.
Iced drinks come in a plastic cup and contain more espresso at larger sizes.
The Caramel Macchiato is more complicated.

In Italy Macchiato means espresso “marked” with foam.

At Starbucks it means the reverse—foam “marked” with Espresso.

The Espresso is poured last—through the foam.
Caramel Macchiato
Caramel Macchiato
Caramel Macchiato
Caramel Macchiato
Caramel Macchiato
Caramel Macchiato
But we’re getting ahead of ourselves
Ordering a drink off the menu requires just two choices: a drinks name (i.e. “Mocha”) and size (i.e. “tall”) 

(If you forget the size, the barista will prompt you)
Short is available to order, but does not appear on the menu.

In Italian, venti means 20.

Venti is a trademark.
Unspecified options are implied

For example,
The espresso will be caffeinated unless you request otherwise
A “Tall Mocha” really means:

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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Warm</td>
<td>Iced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Short</td>
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<td>Grande</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk type</td>
<td>Non-fat</td>
<td>Two percent</td>
<td>Whole</td>
<td>Breve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrup type</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Chocolate</td>
<td>Peppermint</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whipped cream</td>
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A tall comes with one shot of Espresso

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As of this year, 2% milk is standard

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# Chocolate syrup makes a Mocha a Mocha

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And like most sweet drinks, a Mocha comes with whipped cream.

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You can order more complex drinks by choosing options within the framework

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Another type of milk

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<td>Whipped cream</td>
<td>w/ Whip</td>
<td>w/o Whip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simple for beginners and rich for aficionados: How Starbucks’ drink framework and ordering language engage customers at all levels
# More Espresso for stronger flavor

**Category**
- Espresso
- Latte
- Cappuccino
- Americano

**Drink name**
- Double Tall Non-fat Mocha

**Drink type**
- Warm
- Iced

**Kind of espresso**
- Regular
- Decaf
- Half-caf

**Amount of espresso**
- Single
- Double
- Triple
- Quad
- N shots

**Drink size**
- Short
- Tall
- Grande
- Venti

**Milk type**
- Non-fat
- Two percent
- Whole
- Breve
- Soy

**Syrup type**
- None
- Chocolate
- Peppermint
- Caramel
- Etc.

**Whipped cream**
- w/ Whip
- w/o Whip
(Another) flavored syrup for greater variety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Espresso</th>
<th>Latte</th>
<th>Cappuccino</th>
<th>Americano</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drink name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Double Tall Non-fat Peppermint Mocha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink type</td>
<td>Warm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Iced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of espresso</td>
<td>Regular</td>
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<td>Half-caf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of espresso</td>
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<td>Triple</td>
<td>Quad</td>
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<td>Short</td>
<td>Tall</td>
<td>Grande</td>
<td>Venti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk type</td>
<td>Non-fat</td>
<td>Two percent</td>
<td>Whole</td>
<td>Breve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrup type</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Chocolate</td>
<td>Peppermint</td>
<td>Caramel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whipped cream</td>
<td>w/ Whip</td>
<td>w/o Whip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Drink Name: Double Tall Non-fat Peppermint Mocha w/o Whip

**Category**: Espresso, Latte, Cappuccino, Americano

**Drink Type**: Warm, Iced

**Kind of Espresso**: Regular, Decaf, Half-caf

**Amount of Espresso**: Single, Double, Triple, Quad, N shots

**Drink Size**: Short, Tall, Grande, Venti

**Milk Type**: Non-fat, Two percent, Whole, Breve, Soy

**Syrup Type**: None, Chocolate, Peppermint, Caramel, Etc.

**Whipped Cream**: w/ Whip, w/o Whip
Add ice on a hot day

Category
- Espresso
- Latte
- Cappuccino
- Americano

Drink name
- Iced Double Tall Non-fat Peppermint Mocha w/o Whip

Drink type
- Warm
- Iced

Kind of espresso
- Regular
- Decaf
- Half-caf

Amount of espresso
- Single
- Double
- Triple
- Quad
- N shots

Drink size
- Short
- Tall
- Grande
- Venti

Milk type
- Non-fat
- Two percent
- Whole
- Breve
- Soy

Syrup type
- None
- Chocolate
- Peppermint
- Caramel
- Etc.

Whipped cream
- w/ Whip
- w/o Whip

Simple for beginners and rich for aficionados: How Starbucks’ drink framework and ordering language engage customers at all levels
### Cut back on the caffeine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Espresso</th>
<th>Latte</th>
<th>Cappuccino</th>
<th>Americano</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drink name</td>
<td>Iced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink type</td>
<td>Warm</td>
<td>Iced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of espresso</td>
<td>Regular</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Syrup type</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Chocolate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whipped cream</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simple for beginners and rich for aficionados: How Starbucks’ drink framework and ordering language engage customers at all levels
Very savvy users may request more obscure variations
Cup type

Order your Mocha for-here

Sip from a ceramic cup or bring your own mug
Tempurature

Ask for an extra hot Mocha, or have it cooler, or— if you are very fussy— have it at 167°F

Drinks are served at 160°F by default. Baristas hesitate to heat a drink above 180°F. Any warmer and the milk could scald
Build order

Have your Mocha upside down like a Caramel Macchiato
Build order

Some people order a Macchiato upside down, which might seem like a Vanilla Caramel Latte. But the Macchiato uses special caramel butter rather than normal caramel syrup.

A connoisseur will tell you that build-order affects flavor.
Long or short pull

Have a short pull or “ristretto” Mocha

A short pull results in a sweeter, smoother shot.
A long pull results in more bitter flavor.

(Newer espresso machines pull espresso automatically. As Starbucks replaces old equipment short and long pulls will no longer be available.)
Espresso alternatives

Not all drinks in the Latte framework contain espresso

Chai Lattes and Green Tea Lattes are tea in steamed milk

A hot chocolate is steamed milk and chocolate syrup—no espresso or tea
Amount of foam

Have your Mocha dry

“dry” means more foam, less milk
“wet” means less foam, more milk
Amount of syrup

Order a 4 pump Mocha when you need it a little sweeter

Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of syrup by default</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grande</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other syrups

Have a peppermint Mocha
or choose from about 15 other syrups

Regularly available
Chocolate
White Chocolate
Caramel
Vanilla (regular or sugar-free)
Hazelnut (regular or sugar-free)
Cinnamon Dolce (regular or sugar-free)
Orange (formerly called Valencia)
Raspberry
Peppermint
Almond
Simple (unflavored sugar)

Seasonally available*
Blackberry (Spring)
Melon (Spring)
Coconut (Summer)
Pumpkin Spice (Fall)
Maple (Fall)
Gingerbread (Winter)

*Seasonal syrups change year to year. Some syrups return, others may not. If a seasonal syrup is very popular it may become permanent. (Peppermint syrup was once only available in winter)
How many Latte variations are possible?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cup type</th>
<th>To-go</th>
<th>For-here</th>
<th>Personal cup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drink type</td>
<td>Warm</td>
<td>Iced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of espresso</td>
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<td>Tall</td>
<td>Grande</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk type</td>
<td>Non-fat</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrup combinations</td>
<td>(Choose from about 15 flavors)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whipped cream</td>
<td>w/ Whip</td>
<td>No whip</td>
<td>Light whip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>Extra hot</td>
<td>Cooler</td>
<td>Specific degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build order</td>
<td>Upside down</td>
<td>Right-side up</td>
<td>Macchiato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long/Short pull</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of foam</td>
<td>Dry</td>
<td>Wet</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of syrup</td>
<td>1 pump</td>
<td>2 pumps</td>
<td>3 pumps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### How many Latte variations are possible?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cup type</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink type</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of espresso</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of espresso</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink size</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk type</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrup combinations</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whipped cream</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build order</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long/Short pull</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of foam</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of syrup</td>
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With only 1 syrup the Starbucks Latte framework offers almost 200 million variations
Add a second syrup
and there are over 1.3 billion

Enough for each Chinese citizen
to have his or her own personal drink
How do people learn to cope with so many options?
Starbucks has training dice for new baristas
Starbucks also helps customers learn
Imagine:
A new customer enters
She hears another customer order as she stands in line

“Grande Non-fat Latte”
She hears a barista repeat the order

“Grande Non-fat Latte”
She hears another barista call out the order when it is ready

“Grande Non-fat Latte”
She orders from the menu

“Small Mocha”
The barista clarifies the order

“Whipped cream?”
“No, thank you.”
The barista repeats her order in Barista-speak

“Tall No-whip Mocha”
And when it is ready the other barista calls out:

“Tall No-whip Mocha”
Each order is repeated 3 times
Repetition supports the learning process

Learning from your order
Learning from others orders

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Over time the new customer learns new options from the baristas other customers her friends
The customer may learn barista-speak and the underlying framework for designing drinks.
But not all at once
Customers learn at the pace they set

after Mihalyi Casikszentmihalyi

Simple for beginners and rich for aficionados: How Starbucks’ drink framework and ordering language engage customers at all levels

Flow by Mihalyi Casikszentmihalyi

challenge

ability

anxiety
challenge exceeds ability

now you’re talking

boredom

ability exceeds challenge

flow

beginner

this is easy!

uh oh

getting the hang of it

come on, hit me again
The process of learning barista-speak is a carefully designed journey

based on a framework by Shelley Evenson and John Rheinfrank

Starbucks attracts customers with refreshments and a comfortable place to relax, socialize or study.

A new customer can order from the menu. Baristas echo back orders in barista-speak, helping customers learn the language.

An experienced customer may suggest new variations to friends and teach the language to beginners.

Upon recognizing the language a customer may begin to seek out new options and experiment with new variations.

Customers may begin to customize drink orders after learning new options through promotions, by hearing other customers order, and by sharing drink preferences with friends.

Simple for beginners and rich for aficionados: How Starbucks’ drink framework and ordering language engage customers at all levels
Learning the language gives the customer more control—the power to order a drink precisely to preference
It also creates a sense of belonging—of having insider knowledge and status
Empowerment and belonging make customers feel they are a part of Starbucks
Closing notes

“Imagine your users are very intelligent, but very busy”
–Alan Cooper

Creation, participation and control make people feel good

But they also require more work
Closing notes

“Design for the user, not yourself”
—Alan Cooper

Respect that users may not want control all the time—or at all
Closing notes

“Do I do X or Y?... Do both”
—John Maeda

Make systems easy and powerful
Closing notes

Design the learning experience
after Shelley Evanson
John Rheinfrank

Engage users by matching challenge
to skill, and by helping them grow
after Mihalyi Casikszentmihalyi
Thank you.