ESC Guidelines Around Hand and Face Emoji

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Introduction

Per Unicode data, Hands and Faces are some of the most frequently used categories of emoji. These two categories can be easily recognised and incorporated into online communication. There are, however, some challenges to writing a strong proposal for these categories as there are seemingly infinite ways to contort your hand and face and meanings are not always easily tied to a single search term. Search terms is one way for emoji proposals to demonstrate empirical use when frequency data from apps is not available.

This document provides an overview of what makes for a compelling proposal for a hand or face emoji, and links to other resources that can help us continue to see strong and useful proposals in this category. This document also includes examples of successful proposals in these categories and what made them so compelling.

Background

Hands and faces have been included in emoji since the earliest encodings. We already use our hands and faces in face-to-face communication, and now use emoji in digital communication.

As of Emoji 14.0 there are 9 "face-hand" emoji and 43 "hand emoji":

"Smiley" and hand emoji have different relationships to modifiers. Smileys do not take skin tone or gender modifiers. Handshapes take skin tone but not gender modifiers. That means these two types of emoji have fewer modifications than full human emoji, which have both gender and skin tone modifiers.

Related documents

Unicode has released a number of guidance documents on encoding hand and face emoji. This document is intended to build on these, rather than supersede these earlier documents.

Comparison of Unicode Faces and JVL morphemes (L2/19-390)
Encoding concepts that are commonly found in communicative contexts aids in digitizing communication. This document includes an audit of common graphic elements in the Japanese Visual Language of manga. It provides evidence of common visual tropes and acknowledges where a sufficiently similar element is already encoded in emoji characters.

Smileys for consideration for Unicode 14.0 (L2/18-18258)
Compatibility with existing writing systems continues to be a priority.. This document shows the utility of comparing proposed Unicode emoji to characters on other platforms, including QQ and WeChat.

ESC Guidelines around Gestures and Emoji (L2/20-274)
This document provides an introduction to the different gestural functions of emoji handshapes, and the kinds of evidence required to support a handshape proposal.

Gesture Emoji for Consideration, Unicode 15.0 (L2/20-282)
This document explores emblem gestures that occur in large populations. Some of these have been submitted as proposals. This document acknowledges where a sufficiently similar element is already encoded in emoji characters.

Guidance

If you're interested in writing a proposal for a hand or a face we have some basic guidance to help you. Please also refer to the general guidelines for submitting an emoji proposal.

Specificity isn't always your friend
As with objects, creating a more nuanced gesture emoji isn't always the best way to go. Face emoji, rather than full body emoji, are easier to see at emoji sizes, and require fewer/no modifiers for skin colour and gender, and therefore are more accessible to more people.

Hands or faces with objects
To propose a hand or face emoji with an object (e.g. 💅✍️🤠🤧) you need to demonstrate that the combination is intrinsic and requires the combination of both the face/hand and the object. *Often, it is actually a stronger use-case to propose an object that can be used in combination with an existing hand or face.*

Empirical use
Emoji proposals require evidence through an associated search term that generates results from a number of platforms, including Google Search, Bing Search and Google Trends. Faces and hands usually have meanings that are not easily pinned down by words. You will still want

to present the strongest search term data you can, but you might also want to provide other evidence that this visual element has a specific communicative function and is not ephemeral.

To accomplish this, look to literature, movies, pop culture, comics, art, etc. Rather than inventing something new, provide evidence that the concept getting proposed for encoding is a long standing visual morpheme, trope, or emblem.

Closed Set
We recommend citing evidence of how your addition completes a set or doesn't expose Unicode to more proposals of similar type. See *Related Documents* for more information and how this has been accomplished in the past.

Examples of well-formed proposals

Below are a few proposals (two faces, two hands, two face/hand combinations) that demonstrate how a strong proposal can be made. All of these were included in Unicode 14.0. Note these proposals were submitted using the evaluation criteria in place for proposals for 14.0 and guidelines have been updated since.

Melting Face (L2/20-072)
This proposal includes images from popular culture, as well as a range of metaphoric uses.

Index Pointing at the Viewer (L2/20-212)
This proposal includes extensive documentation of the use of this handshape in popular iconography, and signed languages.

Hand with palm facing up and Hand with palm facing down (L2/20-213)
This proposal includes two different emoji to argue for completeness of this set. It demonstrates how each can interact with a wide variety of objects for flexible use.

Dotted-Line-Face (L2/20-223)
This proposal demonstrates the application of a distorted effect using images from literature.

Face With Open Eyes and Hand Over Mouth (L2/19-304)
This proposal clearly demonstrates a need for the addition of an emoji similar to an existing emoji (FACE WITH HAND OVER MOUTH) to disambiguate the sense change that happens when the eyes are smiling (existing emoji) and eyes open in surprise (this proposal). Also includes images from pop culture, media, and literature to support the value of the differentiation.

Saluting-Face (L2/19-396)
This proposal demonstrates variation in the performance of a salute in various contexts. The proposal provides a compromise (there are many ways to salute around the world) to convey the general meaning of this hand/face combined action. This document also provides a case for a face rather than body with additional gender and skin tone modifiers.