Creating a Design: Wireframing

slide 1: Introduction

Hi guys! Welcome to [Fundamentals of User Experience Design ], a Tuts+ premium course. I’m [Sarah Kahn] and today we’re going to talk about Wireframes..

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Here’s what we’re going to cover:

* + Why wireframe?
  + Traditional wireframes
  + Sketching
  + Tools
  + Incorporating feedback and iterations
  + Assignment

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[skeleton]

So why do we make wireframes, anyway?

Well, building websites and applications is a highly visual process. It’s hard to talk about abstract things without a good way to visually understand what you’re talking about.

Detailed, visual mockups fill this role as well, but before you jump straight to the visual design, it’s important to establish the bones of your design.

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[colorwheel]

The wireframe allows you to work with layouts, requirements, and ratios without delving into the messy quagmire of emotion that is color, design, and branding. From a usability perspective, you might know that you need to place the navigation on the left of the page. It’s easier to make a reasonable case for this if you haven’t complicated the equation with shiny blue buttons. Once color is introduced, unfortunately, that seems to be the only thing that people can focus on. This makes it more challenging to stick to your design requirements. The wireframe brings clarity to the process, and allows us to focus on the actual elements of the page.

slide 5

[traditional wireframes]

the traditional wireframe is quite detailed, and rendered by a digital drafting tool. It’s generally fairly polished and contains all the elements possible.

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[example wireframe]

this is an example of a traditional wireframe. The navigation is completely fleshed out, the content blocks include all the pieces, it includes where images will be placed, where media such as video will be placed, search box, logo, detailed footer with social media icons. It’s basically how the site is going to look, minus the color, graphic components, and filling in the actual data.

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[web-based tools]

What could you use to create a wireframe like this one?

here are just a few web-based tools. I’ve used every one of these and they all have their good points.

Mockingbird and Balsamiq are both very popular and well-known. They both have a small free version, but for more than somewhere in the neighborhood of 5-10 wireframes they start charging. Cacoo is newer and will allow up to 25 free wireframes. Gliffy is more of a multi-purpose diagramming tool, where they don’t have as many shapes that are pre-defined website elements.

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[desktop tools]

Many of the desktop tools are larger, more expensive, and more powerful than their web-based counterparts.

They allow more flexibility, more detail, but don’t necessarily allow you to toss things together quite as quickly. My personal emphasis is more on light and quick, so my preference has typically been the web-based tools. But there is a situation for every tool.

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[Paper wireframes]

As i’ve mentioned before, I’m a big fan of the paper wireframe. It’s quick, and light, and you can change your mind without much repercussion. You haven’t invested as much time or effort in the creation of the actual wireframe, so you may find you’re less adverse to making changes, writing over it, or tossing it straight into the recycling bin.

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[blank state]

here’s a quick example, this is a super non-detailed, quick version of a wireframe. this one involved a black marker and some scrap paper.

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[populated state]

this one did the same. now, with a paper wireframe, you can also get more detailed and precise.

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[browser sketch pad]

i have this stencil kit, and i love it very much for making detailed paper prototypes. there’s a point where you want to invest a little bit more time on the wireframe, for example, if you’re ready to show it to a user.

making wireframes is like carving a statue- you begin with the rough, and you get a lot more detailed and specific as you go along.

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[iterating]

an iteration refers to the process of taking a wireframe, showing it to someone, discussing it, and then agreeing on changes. then you make the next version. there might be a few elements that you’ll move to different places, or features that you’ll add. you might get more detailed.

you then take that version, and show it to some more people, and get more feedback. rinse and repeat. i don’t generally like to go through more than 3 or 4 iterations on a wireframe, but depending on your clients and or process, you may need to iterate a few more times than that.

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[don’t get attached]

One of the main points of the wireframe is to keep your stakeholders or clients from becoming distracted by the colors and design, but its also to keep you as the designer from becoming too invested in any one design. It’s a place to visualize, and try on many different looks, layouts, and ideas with a minimum of investment. So try to keep that in mind when you’re creating your wireframe, and avoid getting too attached.

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[assignment]

* + Go back to the example we worked with last time
  + Create a wireframe of the ‘Superuser listview page’.
  + Use either a digital tool to create a detailed digital wireframe, or try your hand at a sketch!

Next time on [Fundamentals of User Experience Design ], will be [Lesson 13: Creating a Design: Visual Design ]. This is [Sarah Kahn], and from all of us here at Tuts+, thanks for listening!