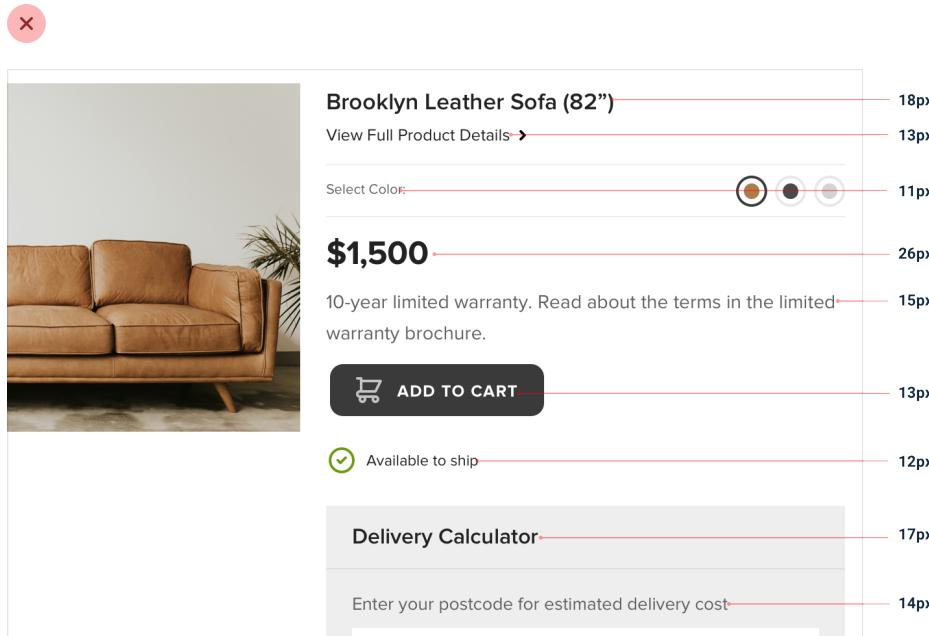


Designing Text

Establish a type scale

Most interfaces use way too many font sizes. Unless a team has a rigid design system in place, it's not uncommon to find that every pixel value from 10px to 24px has been used in the UI *somewhere*.



Choosing font sizes without a system is a bad idea for two reasons:

1. It leads to annoying inconsistencies in your designs.
2. It slows down your workflow.

So how do you define a type system?

Choosing a scale

Just like with spacing and sizing, a linear scale won't work. Smaller jumps between font sizes are useful at the bottom of the scale, but you don't want to waste time deciding between 46px and 48px for a large headline.

Modular scales

One approach is to calculate your type scale using a *ratio*, like 4:5 (a "major third"), 2:3 (a "perfect fifth"), or perhaps the "golden ratio", 1:1.618. This is often called a "modular scale".

You start with a sensible base value (*16px is common since it's the default font size for most browsers*), apply your ratio to get the next value, then apply your ratio to *that* value to get the next value, and so on and so forth:

?

0.618em (9.88875px)

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

1em (16px)

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

1.618em (25.888px)

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

2.618em (41.8868px)

The quick brown fox jumps over th

4.236em (67.7728px)

The quick brown fox j

6.854em (109.656px)

The quick br

The mathematical purity of this approach is alluring, but in practice, it's not perfect for a couple of reasons.

1. You end up with fractional values.

Using a 16px base and 4:5 ratio, your scale will end up with lots of sizes that don't land right on the pixel, like 31.25px, 39.063px, 48.828px, etc. Browsers all handle subpixel rounding a little bit differently, so it's best to avoid fractional sizes if you can avoid it.

If you do want to use this approach, make sure you round the values yourself when defining the scale to avoid off-by-one pixel issues across browsers.

2. You usually need more sizes.

This approach can work well if you're defining a type scale for long form content like an article, but for interface design, the jumps you get using a modular scale are often a bit too limiting.

With a (*rounded*) 3:4 type scale, you get sizes like 12px, 16px, 21px, and 28px. While this might not seem too limiting on the surface, in practice you're going to wish you had a size between 12px and 16px, and another between 16px and 21px.

You could use a tighter ratio like 8:9, but at this point you're just trying to pick a scale that happens to match the sizes you already know you want.

Hand-crafted scales

For interface design, a more practical approach is to simply pick values by hand. You don't have to worry about subpixel rounding errors this way, and you have total control over which sizes exist instead of outsourcing that job to some mathematical formula.

Here's an example of a scale that works well for most projects and aligns nicely with the spacing and sizing scale recommended in "Establishing a spacing and sizing system":



12px The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

14px The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

16px The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

18px The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

20px The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

24px The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

30px The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

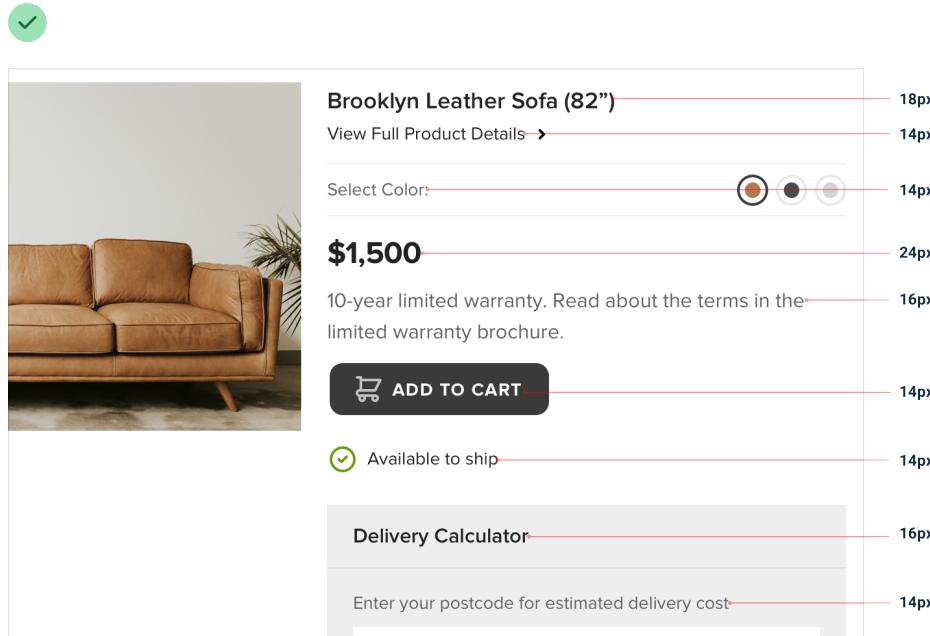
36px The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

48px The quick brown fox jumps over th

60px The quick brown fox jumps

72px The quick brown fox ju

It's constrained just enough to speed up your decision making, but isn't so limited as to make you feel like you're missing a useful size.



Avoid em units

When you're building a type scale, don't use *em* units to define your sizes.

Because *em* units are relative to the current font size, the computed font size of nested elements is often not actually a value in your scale.

For example, say you've defined an *em*-based type scale like this:

.75em The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

.875em The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

1em The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

1.25em The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

1.5em The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

If you give an element a font size of 1.25em (*20px by default*), inside of that element 1em is now equal to 20px. That means that if you give one of the *nested* elements a font size of .875em, the actual computed font size is 17.5px, not a value from your type scale!

Stick to *px* or *rem* units — it's the only way to guarantee you're actually sticking to the system.

Use good fonts

With thousands of different typefaces out there to choose from, separating the good from the bad can be an intimidating task.

Aa	Freight Sans Extra Bold	Aa	Harmonia Sans Regular	Aa	Work Sans Semibold	Aa	Proxima Nova Bold	Aa	I R
Aa	Aktiv Grotesk Regular	Aa	Avenir Next Demi Bold	Aa	Roboto Regular	Aa	Museo Sans 300	Aa	N R
Aa	Akagi Pro Regular	Aa	Din Pro Regular	Aa	Meta Serif Book	Aa	Encode Sans Black	Aa	Ir R
Aa	Futura Bold	Aa	Franklin Gothic Book	Aa	Freight Text Regular	Aa	Jubilat Light Italic	Aa	E R

Developing an eye for all of the details that make a good typeface can take years. You probably don't have years, so here are a few tricks you can use to start picking out high quality typefaces right away.

Play it safe

For UI design, your safest bet is a fairly neutral sans-serif — think something like Helvetica.

If you really don't trust your own taste, one great option is to rely on the system font stack:

```
-apple-system, Segoe UI, Roboto, Noto Sans, Ubuntu, Cantarell, Helvetica Neue;
```

It might not be the most ambitious choice, but at least your users will already be used to seeing it.

Ignore typefaces with less than five weights

This isn't always true, but as a general rule, typefaces that come in a lot of different weights tend to be crafted with more care and attention to detail than typefaces with fewer weights.

Many font directories (*like Google Fonts*) will let you filter by "number of styles", which is a combination of the available weights as well as the italic variations of those weights.

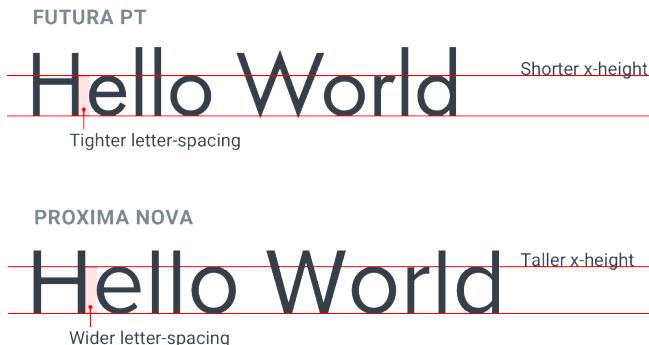
A great way to limit the number of options you have to choose from is to crank that up to 10+ (to account for italics):

The screenshot shows a user interface for a font directory. At the top, there are navigation links: Directory, Featured, Articles, and About. To the right is a search bar with a magnifying glass icon and the placeholder text "Search". Below the navigation, there's a preview area with sample text: "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog". To the left of this text is a dropdown menu set to "Sans Serif". To the right are buttons for "Classification" (set to "Sans Serif"), "Languages" (set to "All Languages"), and "Number of styles". A slider for "Number of styles" is set to "10+", with a checked checkbox to its left. Further down, there are sections for "Thickness", "Slant", and "Width", each with a slider and a checkbox. On the left side of the main content area, there's a sidebar with a list of words: "brown", "over the", and "lazy". Below this is a section for the font "Acumin Pro" with "90 Styles". At the bottom of the sidebar are "Activate" buttons with toggle switches. The main content area also has "Activate" buttons with toggle switches.

On Google Fonts specifically, that cuts out 85% of the available options, leaving you with less than 50 sans-serifs to choose from.

Optimize for legibility

When someone designs a font family, they are usually designing it for a specific purpose. Fonts meant for headlines usually have tighter letter-spacing and shorter lowercase letters (*a shorter x-height*), while fonts meant for smaller sizes have wider letter-spacing and taller lowercase letters.



Keep this in mind and avoid using condensed typefaces with short x-heights for your main UI text.

Trust the wisdom of the crowd

If a font is popular, it's probably a good font. Most font directories will let you sort by popularity, so this can be a great way to limit your choices.

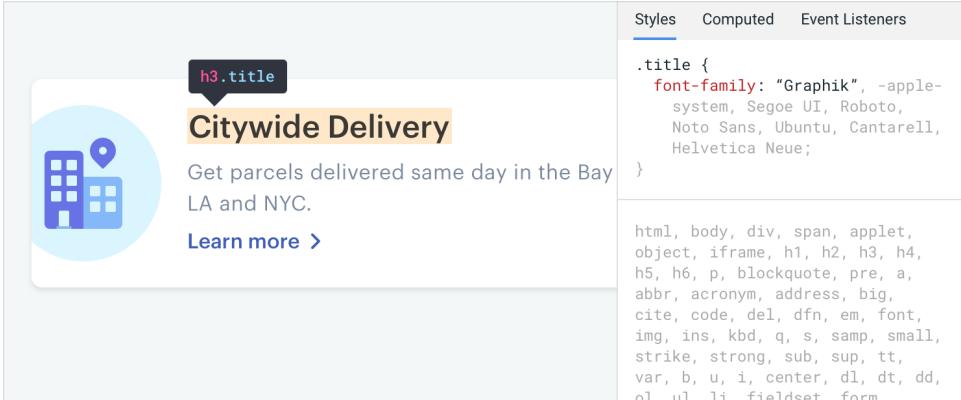
This is especially useful when you're trying to pick out something other than a neutral UI typeface. Picking a nice serif with some personality for example can be tough.

Sort by	Sample text
Popularity	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy c
EB Garamond 10 Styles	 
The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog	
Alegreya 10 Styles	 
The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog	
Cormorant Garamond 10 Styles	 
The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog	

Leveraging the collective decision-making power of thousands of other people can make it a lot easier.

Steal from people who care

Inspect some of your favorite sites and see what typefaces they are using.



h3.title

Citywide Delivery

Get parcels delivered same day in the Bay LA and NYC.

Learn more >

Styles	Computed	Event Listeners
.title { font-family: "Graphik", -apple-system, Segoe UI, Roboto, Noto Sans, Ubuntu, Cantarell, Helvetica Neue; }		
html, body, div, span, applet, object, iframe, h1, h2, h3, h4, h5, h6, p, blockquote, pre, a, abbr, acronym, address, big, cite, code, del, dfn, em, font, img, ins, kbd, q, s, samp, small, strike, strong, sub, sup, tt, var, b, u, i, center, dl, dt, dd, ol, ul, li, fieldset, form		

There are a lot of great design teams out there full of people with *really* strong opinions about typography, and they'll often choose great fonts that you might have never found using some of the safer approaches outlined above.

Developing your intuition

Once you start paying closer attention to the typography on well-designed sites, it's not long before you feel pretty comfortable labeling a typeface as awesome or terrible.

You're gonna be a type snob soon enough, but the advice outlined above will help get you by in the meantime.

Keep your line length in check

When styling paragraphs, it's easy to make the mistake of fitting the text to your layout instead of trying to create the best reading experience.

Usually this means lines that are too long, making text harder to read.



— ~120 characters per line —

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the

For the best reading experience, make your paragraphs wide enough to fit between 45 and 75 characters per line. The easiest way to do this on the web is using *em* units, which are relative to the current font size. A width of 20-35em will get you in the right ballpark.

45 - 55 characters per line

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.

We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless
shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since
dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company,
dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with
it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating,
that further out-door exercise was now out of the
question.

55 - 65 characters per line

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question.

65 - 75 characters per line

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question.

Going a bit wider than 75 characters per line can sometimes work too, but be aware that you're entering risky territory — stick to the 45-75 range if you want to play it safe.

Dealing with wider content

If you're mixing paragraph text with images or other large components, you should still limit the paragraph width even if the overall content area needs to be wider to accommodate the other elements.



The one-size-fits-all platform

Need a simple website or an online store? Build a beautiful website without touching code. We'll provide you with all of the tools and insights to grow your online business.



Beautiful templates

Who said you need to hire a professional



Sell online

Whether you're getting started or already



Grow your Audience

Start a social media campaign or set up a

max-width: none;

✓

The one-size-fits-all platform

Need a simple website or an online store? Build a beautiful website without touching code. We'll provide you with all of the tools and insights to grow your online business.

 Beautiful templates Who said you need to hire a professional	 Sell online Whether you're getting started or already	 Grow your Audience Start a social media campaign or set up a
---	--	---

max-width: 34em;

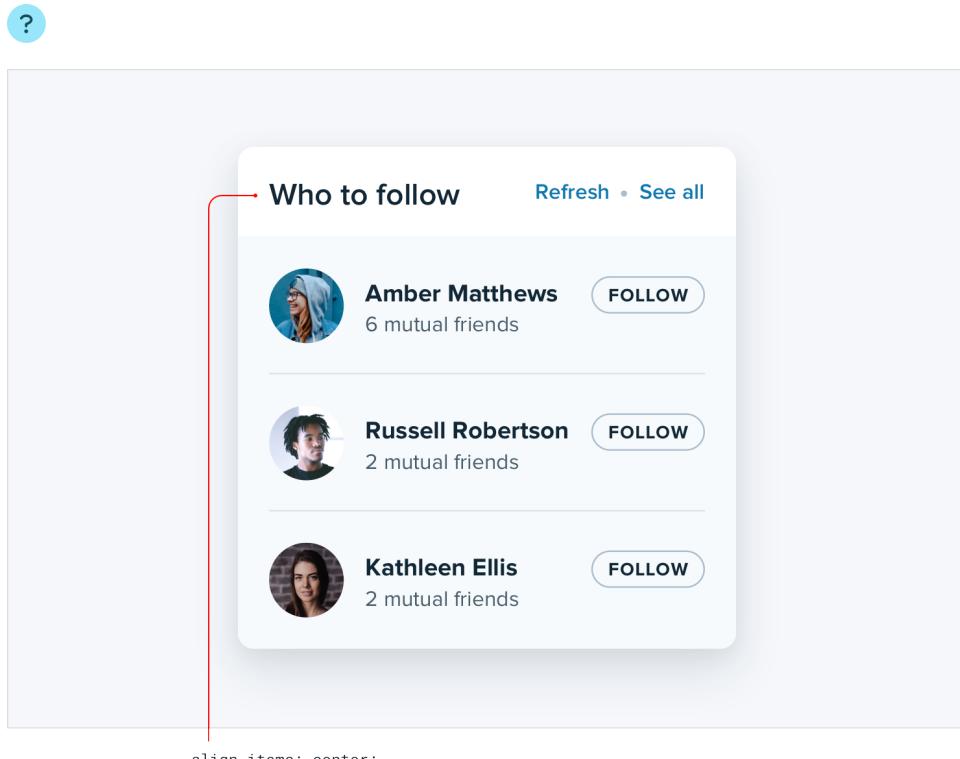
It might seem counterintuitive at first to use different widths in the same content area, but the result almost always looks more polished.

Baseline, not center

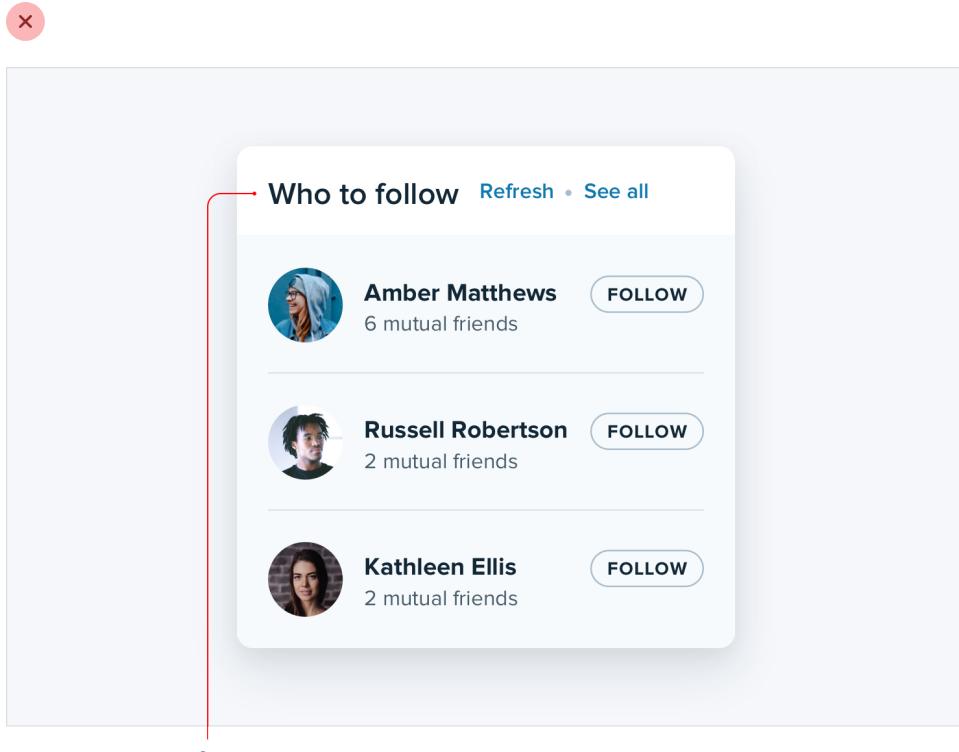
There are a lot of situations where it makes sense to use multiple font sizes to create hierarchy on a single line.

For example, maybe you're designing a card that has a large title in the top left and a smaller list of actions in the top right.

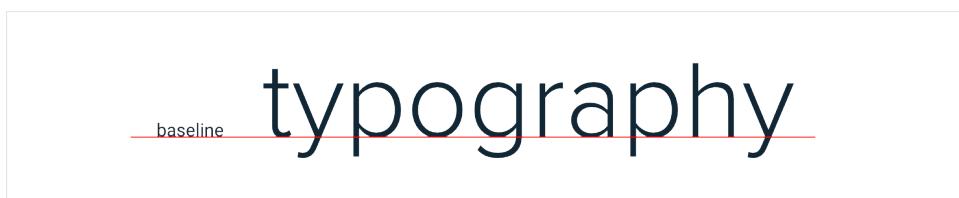
When you're mixing font sizes like this, your instinct might be to vertically center the text for balance:



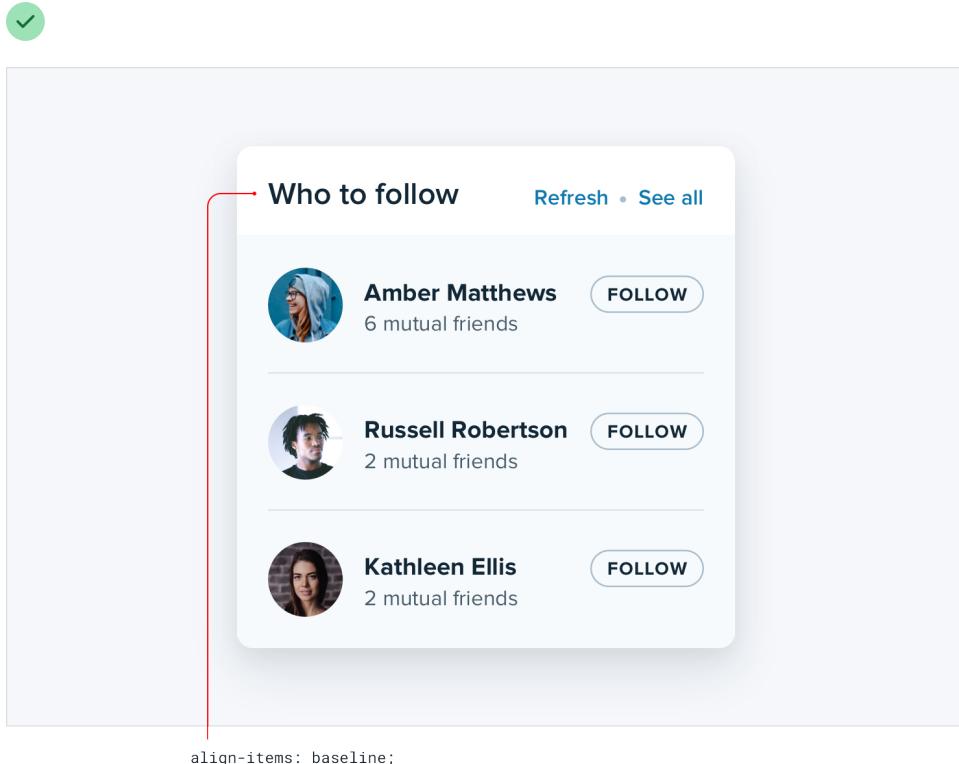
When there's a decent amount of space between the different font sizes it often won't look bad enough to catch your attention, but when the text is close together the awkward alignment becomes more obvious:



A better approach is to align mixed font sizes by their *baseline*, which is the imaginary line that letters rest on:



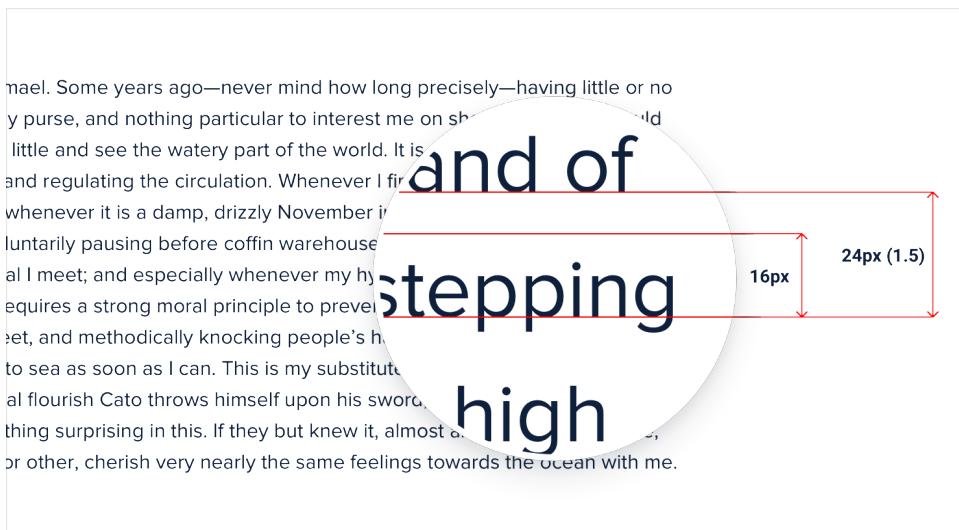
When you align mixed font sizes by their baseline, you're taking advantage of an alignment reference that your eyes already perceive.



The result is a simpler, cleaner look than what you get when you center two pieces of text and offset their baselines.

Line-height is proportional

You might have heard the advice that a line-height of about 1.5 is a good starting point from a readability perspective.



While that's not necessarily untrue, choosing the right line-height for your text is a bit more complicated than just using the same value across the board in all situations.

Accounting for line length

The reason we add space between lines of text is to make it easy for the reader to find the next line when the text wraps. Have you ever accidentally read the same line of text twice, or accidentally skipped a line? The line-height was probably too short.

When lines of text are spaced too tightly, it's easy to finish reading a line of text at the right edge of a page then jump your eyes all the way back to the left edge only to be unsure which line is next.



Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping

This problem is magnified when lines of text are long. The further your eyes have to jump horizontally to read the next line, the easier it is to lose your place.

That means that your line-height and paragraph width should be proportional — narrow content can use a shorter line-height like 1.5, but wide content might need a line-height as tall as 2.



There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter

1.5

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question

2

Accounting for font size

Line length isn't the only factor in choosing the right line-height — font size has a big impact as well.

When text is small, extra line spacing is important because it makes it a lot easier for your eyes to find the next line when the text wraps.



Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I 1.25 ↓

thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the chin. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in



Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I 1.75 ↑

thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to

But as text gets larger, your eyes don't need as much help. This means that for large headline text you might not need any extra line spacing, and a line-height of 1 is perfectly fine.



Team communication optimized for deep work.

1.5

Meet Sarah, the founder of CoffeeKit and waffle lover. CoffeeKit



Team communication optimized for deep work.

1

Meet Sarah, the founder of CoffeeKit and waffle lover. CoffeeKit

helps boutique coffee shops manage their business operations

Line-height and font size are *inversely* proportional — use a taller line-height for small text and a shorter line-height for large text.

Not every link needs a color

When you're including a link in a block of otherwise non-link text, it's important to make sure that the link stands out and looks clickable.

Nothing quite compares to greenfield software development. The canvas is blank and you finally have the opportunity to do it "[The Right Way](#)" from the ground up. If you've been building web apps for a while, you've undoubtedly found yourself working with technologies that you'd never use again, given the luxury of a blank canvas. And if you follow the open source world, there's probably a brand-spanking-new [boutique framework](#) you've been itching to take for a spin.

With all the excitement of a blank canvas comes an equal amount of anxiety. You know you are one ill-advised choice away from being stuck with the "imperfect" tech stack. You have a hunch about what you want to use, but being the dutiful

But when you're designing an interface where almost everything is a link, using a treatment designed to make links "pop" in paragraph text can be really overbearing.



[Violinist stunsarians with an electrifying...](#)

Wie Price
1.1M views • 8 months ago



[Artisan glass blowing artist makes incredible creations](#)

Museum of Glass
756K views • 2 years ago



[How to make a perfect loaf of bread from scratch](#)

Bread Masters
3M views • 4 months ago



[Man makes not missin...](#)

Free Throw
104K views

Instead, emphasize most links in a more subtle way, like by just using a heavier font weight or darker color.

✓

 5:45 Red violinist stuns fans with an electrifying... anie Price ws • 8 months ago	 3:30 Artisan glass blowing artist makes incredible creations Museum of Glass 756K views • 2 years ago	 8:21 How to make a perfect loaf of bread from scratch Bread Masters 3M views • 4 months ago	 Man make not missin Free Throw 104K views
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Some links might not even need to be emphasized by default at all. If you've got links in your interface that are really ancillary and not part of the main path a user takes through the application, consider adding an underline or changing the color *only on hover*.

✓

 5:45 Red violinist stuns fans with an electrifying... anie Price ws • 8 months ago	 3:30 Artisan glass blowing artist makes incredible creations Museum of Glass 756K views • 2 years ago	 8:21 How to make a perfect loaf of bread from scratch Bread Masters 3M views • 4 months ago	 Man make not missin Free Throw 104K views
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They'll still be discoverable to any users who think to try, but won't compete for attention with more important actions on the page.