

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



| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
|  5:45 |  3:30 |  8:21 |  |
| ed violinist stuns rians with an electrifying... | Artisan glass blowing artist makes incredible creations | How to make a perfect loaf of bread from scratch | Man make not missin |
| anie Price ws • 8 months ago | Museum of Glass 756K views • 2 years ago | Bread Masters 3M views • 4 months ago | Free Throw 104K views |

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 |  3:30 |  8:21 |  |
| ed violinist stuns rians with an electrifying... | Artisan glass blowing artist makes incredible creations | How to make a perfect loaf of bread from scratch | Man make not missin |
| anie Price ws • 8 months ago | Museum of Glass 756K views • 2 years ago | Bread Masters 3M views • 4 months ago | Free Throw 104K views |

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.

Align with readability in mind

In general, text should be aligned to match the direction of the language it's written in. For English (and most other languages), that means that the vast majority of text should be left-aligned.

A screenshot of a social media post by Amanda Wagner, a Human Resources Specialist. The post is left-aligned and includes a profile picture, name, title, a descriptive message, and engagement metrics.

Amanda Wagner
Human Resources Specialist
Join us on November 27th for our 1st Dribbble meetup in Waterloo! Calling all designers, UI/UXers, illustrators and other creatives from the KW and surrounding area together to talk shop, mingle, and walk away with some great swag!

23 17 Share

`text-align: left;`

Other alignment options do have their place though, you just need to use them effectively.

Don't center long form text

Center-alignment can look great for headlines or short, independent blocks of text.

Beautiful templates
Our templates are all you need to stand out from the rest of the competition.

Sell online
We provide you with everything you need to run a successful business online.

Grow your Audience
Our marketing tools enable you to engage directly with your audience.

But if something is longer than two or three lines, it will almost always look better left-aligned.



The one-size-fits-all solution
Build a beautiful website without touching code. We'll provide you with all of the tools and insights to grow your online business. Our templates are all you need to stand out from the rest of the competition.



The one-size-fits-all solution
Build a beautiful website without touching code. We'll provide you with all of the tools and insights to grow your online business. Our templates are all you need to stand out from the rest of the competition.

If you've got a few blocks of text you want to center but one of them is a bit too long, the easiest fix is to rewrite the content and make it shorter:



Beautiful templates
Our templates are all you need to stand out from the rest of the competition.



Sell online
Whether you're getting started or already well established, we provide you with everything you need to run a successful business online.



Grow your A
Our marketing tools engage directly with



Beautiful templates
Our templates are all you need to stand out from the rest of the competition.



Sell online
We provide you with everything you need to run a successful business online.



Grow your A
Our marketing tools engage directly with

Not only will it fix the alignment issue, it will make your design feel more consistent, too.

Right-align numbers

If you're designing a table that includes numbers, right-align them.

| SYMBOL | PRICE | CHG | MKT CAP |
|--------|------------|--------|---------|
| APPL | \$174.72 | -1.97 | 1.007T |
| GOOGL | \$1,068.73 | +17.91 | 874.4B |
| AMZN | \$1,699.19 | +30.79 | 830.9B |
| MSFT | \$1,699.19 | +0.67 | 838.2B |

| SYMBOL | PRICE | CHG | MKT CAP |
|--------|------------|--------|---------|
| APPL | \$174.72 | -1.97 | 1.007T |
| GOOGL | \$1,068.73 | +17.91 | 874.4B |
| AMZN | \$1,699.19 | +30.79 | 830.9B |
| MSFT | \$1,699.19 | +0.67 | 838.2B |

When the decimal in a list of numbers is always in the same place, they're a lot easier to compare at a glance.

Hyphenate justified text

Justified text looks great in print and can work well on the web when you're going for a more formal look, but without special care, it can create a lot of awkward gaps between words:

I recently set out to implement user registration for a project I'm working on in Elixir/Phoenix. It wasn't long before I encountered a challenge that I have stumbled upon with every other ORM library: accepting a collection of form inputs and saving it across multiple (related) records in the database.

Awkward gaps between words
hyphens: none;

To avoid this, whenever you justify text, you should also enable hyphenation:



I recently set out to implement user registration for a project I'm working on in Elixir/Phoenix. It wasn't long before I encountered a challenge that I have stumbled upon with every other ORM library: accepting a collection of form inputs and saving it across multiple (related) records in the database.

Gaps between words reduced

hyphens: auto;

Justified text works best in situations where you're trying to mimic a print look, perhaps for an online magazine or newspaper. Even then, left aligned text works great too, so it's really just a matter of preference.

Use letter-spacing effectively

When styling text, a lot of effort is put into getting the weight, color, and line-height just right, but it's easy to forget that letter-spacing can be tweaked, too.

Tight letter-spacing

letter-spacing: -0.05em;

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.

Normal letter-spacing

letter-spacing: 0;

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.

Wide letter-spacing

letter-spacing: 0.05em;

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.

As a general rule, you should trust the typeface designer and leave letter-spacing alone. That said, there are a couple of common situations where adjusting it can improve your designs.

Tightening headlines

When someone designs a font family, they design it with a purpose in mind.

A family like Open Sans is designed to be highly legible even at small sizes, so the built-in letter-spacing is a lot wider than a family like Oswald which is designed for headlines.

Open Sans

Team Communication Made Easy

Oswald

Team Communication Made Easy

If you want to use a family with wider letter-spacing for headlines or titles, it can often make sense to decrease the letter-spacing to mimic the condensed look of a purpose-built headline family:

Open Sans

Team Communication Made Easy

Open Sans

Team Communication Made Easy — letter-spacing: -0.05em;

Avoid trying to make this work the other way around though — headline fonts rarely work well at small sizes even if you increase the letter spacing.

Improving all-caps legibility

The letter-spacing in most font families is optimized for normal “sentence case” text — a capital letter followed by mostly lowercase letters.

Lowercase letters have a lot of variety visually. Letters like *n*, *v*, and *e* fit entirely within a typeface’s x-height, other letters like *y*, *g*, and *p* have descenders that poke out below the baseline, and letters like *b*, *f*, and *t* have ascenders that extend above.



All-caps text on the other hand isn’t so diverse. Since every letter is the same height, using the default letter-spacing often leads to text that is harder to read because there are fewer distinguishing characteristics between letters.

For that reason, it often makes sense to increase the letter-spacing of all-caps text to improve readability:

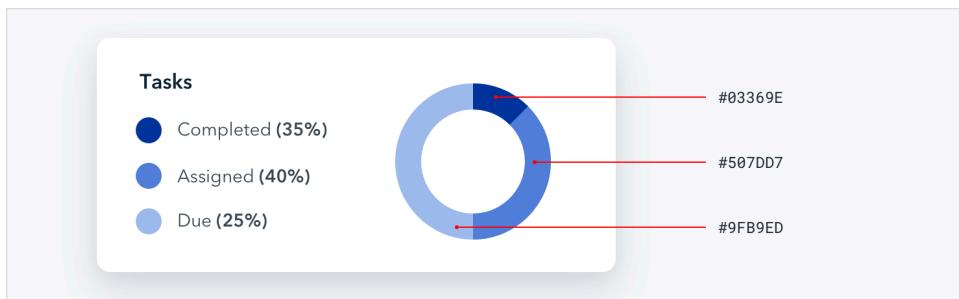


Working with Color

Ditch hex for HSL

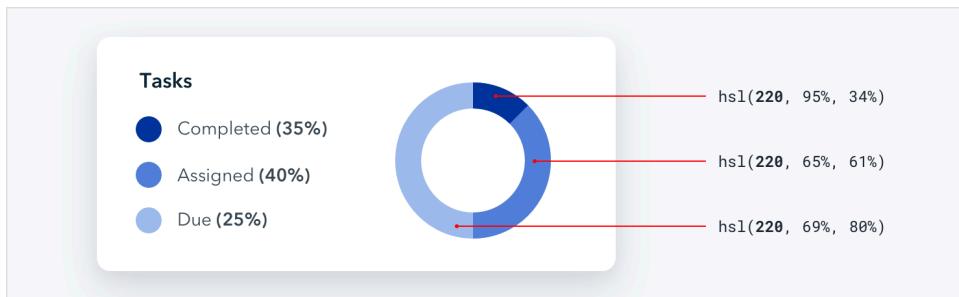
Hex and RGB are the most common formats for representing color on the web, but they're not the most useful.

Using hex or RGB, colors that have a lot in common visually look nothing alike in code.

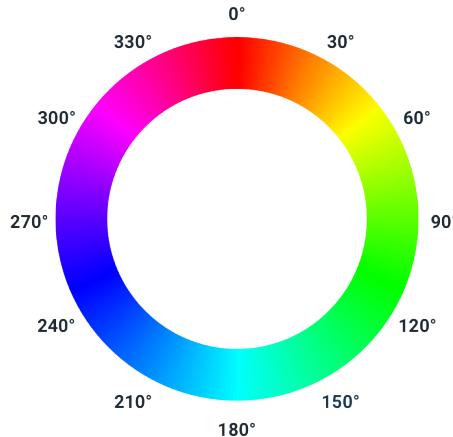


HSL fixes this by representing colors using attributes the human-eye intuitively perceives: *hue*, *saturation*, and *lightness*.

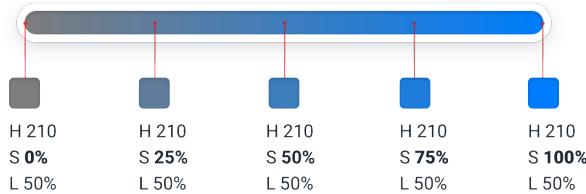
Hue is a color's position on the color wheel — it's the attribute of a color that lets us identify two colors as "blue" even if they aren't identical.



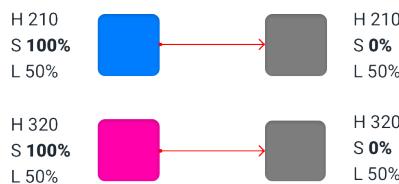
Hue is measured in degrees, where 0° is red, 120° is green, and 240° is blue.



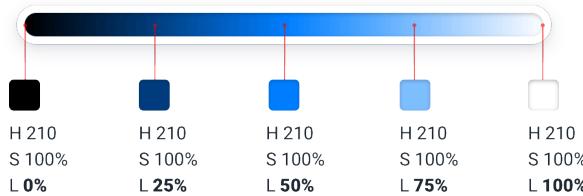
Saturation is how colorful or vivid a color looks. 0% saturation is grey (no color), and 100% saturation is vibrant and intense.



Without saturation, hue is irrelevant — rotating the hue when saturation is 0% doesn't actually change the color at all.



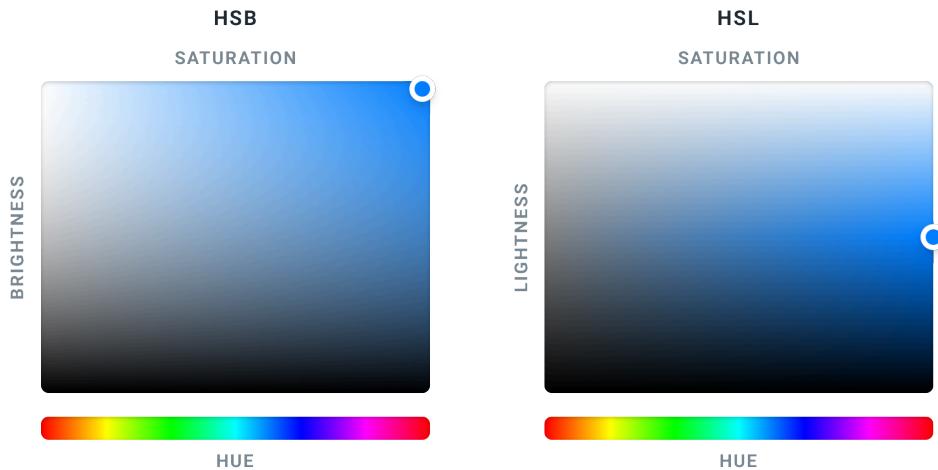
Lightness is just what it sounds like — it measures how close a color is to black or to white. 0% lightness is pure black, 100% lightness is pure white, and 50% lightness is a pure color at the given hue.



HSL vs. HSB

Don't confuse HSL for HSB — *lightness* in HSL is not the same than *brightness* in HSB.

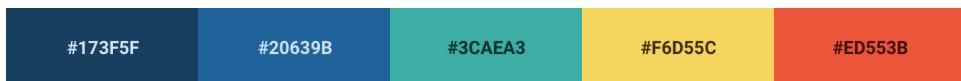
In HSB, 0% brightness is always black, but 100% brightness is only white when the saturation is 0%. When saturation is 100%, 100% brightness in HSB is the same as 100% saturation and 50% lightness in HSL.



HSB is more common than HSL in design software, but browsers only understand HSL, so if you're designing for the web, HSL should be your weapon of choice.

You need more colors than you think

Ever used one of those color palette generators where you pick a starting color, tweak some options, and are then bestowed the five perfect colors you should use to build your website?

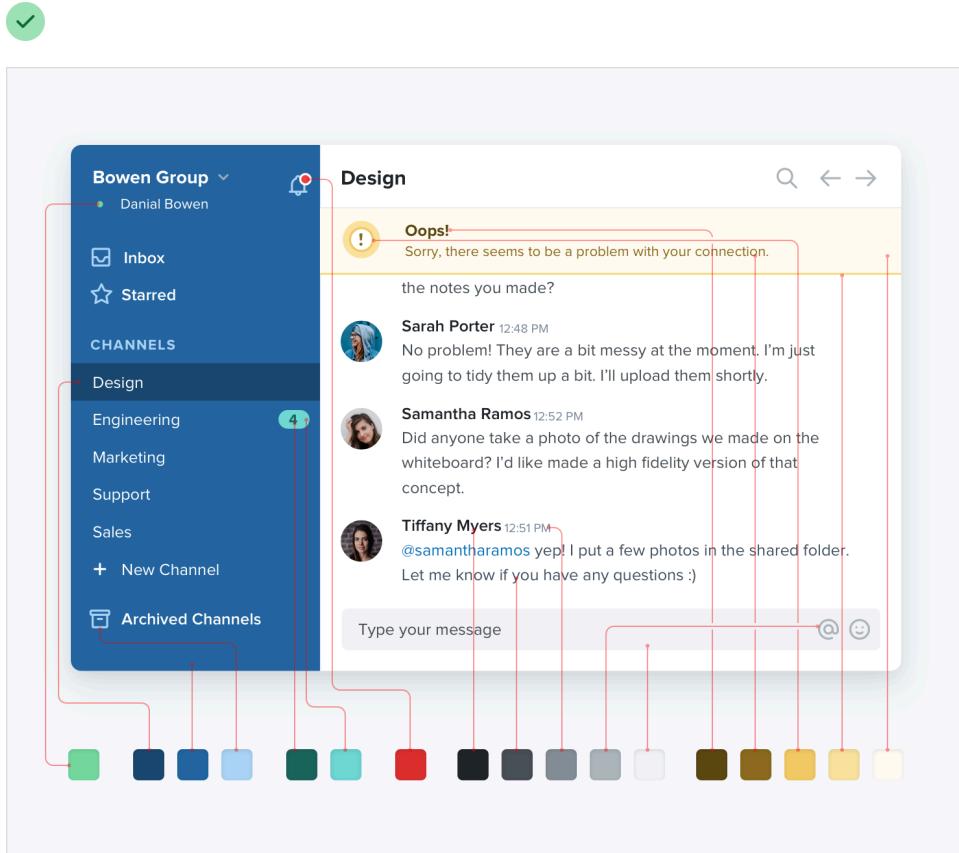


This calculated approach to picking the perfect color scheme is extremely seductive, but it's not very useful unless you want your site to look like this:

The screenshot shows a messaging application interface. On the left, a dark blue sidebar displays the 'Bowen Group' header with a dropdown arrow, a 'Danial Bowen' contact, and a bell icon. Below this are sections for 'Inbox' (with a checkmark icon) and 'Starred' (with a star icon). A 'CHANNELS' section lists 'Design' (which is selected and highlighted in dark blue), 'Engineering', 'Marketing', 'Support', 'Sales', and a '+ New Channel' button. At the bottom of the sidebar is an 'Archived Channels' section with a folder icon. The main area is titled 'Design' and features a search bar and navigation icons. A red banner at the top right says 'Oops!' with an exclamation mark icon, stating 'Sorry, there seems to be a problem with your connection.' Below this, a message from 'Sarah Porter' at 12:48 PM says: 'the notes you made?' followed by 'No problem! They are a bit messy at the moment. I'm just going to tidy them up a bit. I'll upload them shortly.' A message from 'Samantha Ramos' at 12:52 PM says: 'Did anyone take a photo of the drawings we made on the whiteboard? I'd like made a high fidelity version of that concept.' A message from 'Tiffany Myers' at 12:51 PM says: '@samantharamos yep! I put a few photos in the shared folder. Let me know if you have any questions :)' At the bottom of the main area is a message input field with placeholder text 'Type your message' and a blue send button with an '@' and smiley face icon.

What you actually need

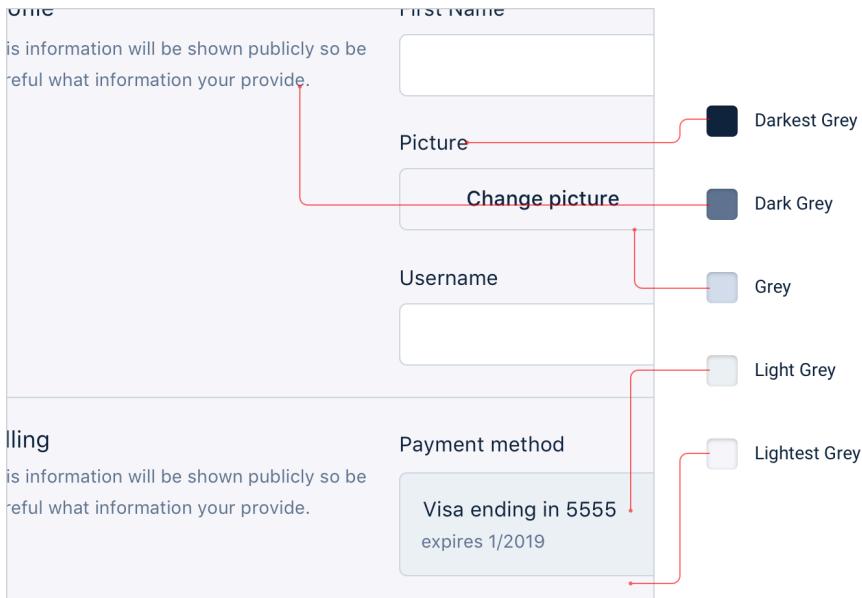
You can't build anything with five hex codes. To build something real, you need a much more comprehensive set of colors to choose from.



You can break a good color palette down into three categories.

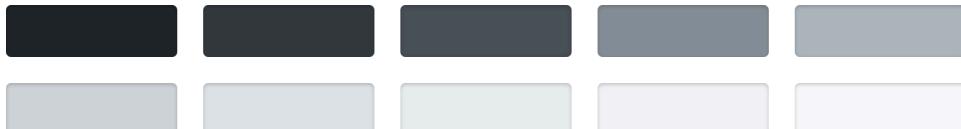
Greys

Text, backgrounds, panels, form controls — almost everything in an interface is grey.



You'll need more greys than you think, too — three or four shades might sound like plenty but it won't be long before you wish you had something a little darker than shade #2 but a little lighter than shade #3.

In practice, you want 8-10 shades to choose from (more on this in "*Define your shades up front*"). Not so many that you waste time deciding between shade #77 and shade #78, but enough to make sure you don't have to compromise too much.

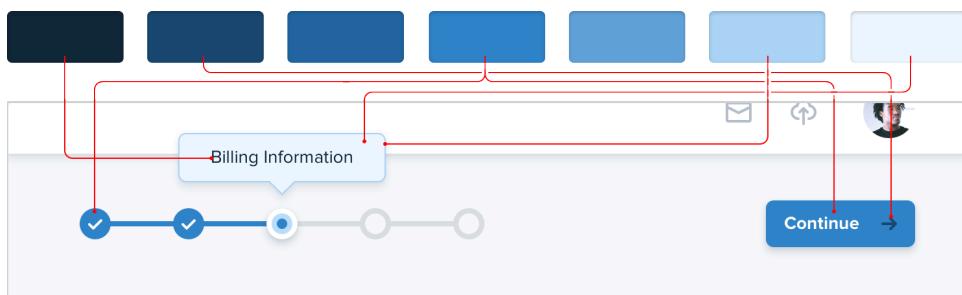


True black tends to look pretty unnatural, so start with a really dark grey and work your way up to white in steady increments.

Primary color(s)

Most sites need one, *maybe* two colors that are used for primary actions, active navigation elements, etc. These are the colors that determine the overall look of a site — the ones that make you think of Facebook as “blue”.

Just like with greys, you need a variety (5-10) of lighter and darker shades to choose from.

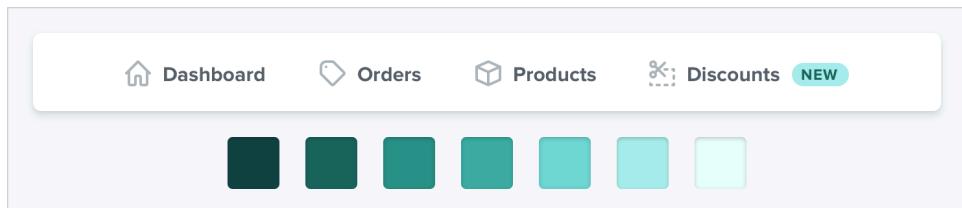


Ultra-light shades can be useful as a tinted background for things like alerts, while darker shades work great for text.

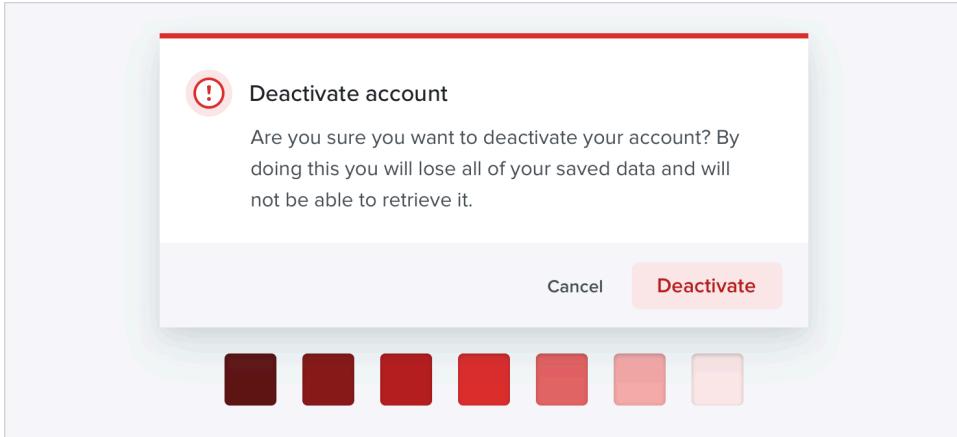
Accent colors

On top of primary colors, every site needs a few accent colors for communicating different things to the user.

For example, you might want to use an eye-grabbing color like yellow, pink, or teal to highlight a new feature:



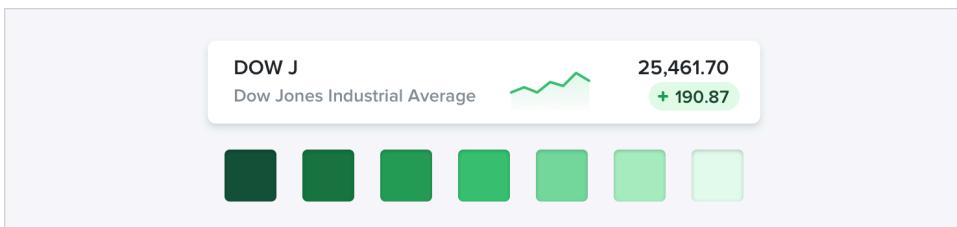
You might also need colors to emphasize different semantic states, like red for confirming a destructive action:



...yellow for a warning message:



...or green to highlight a positive trend:



You'll want multiple shades for these colors too, even though they should be used pretty sparingly throughout the UI.

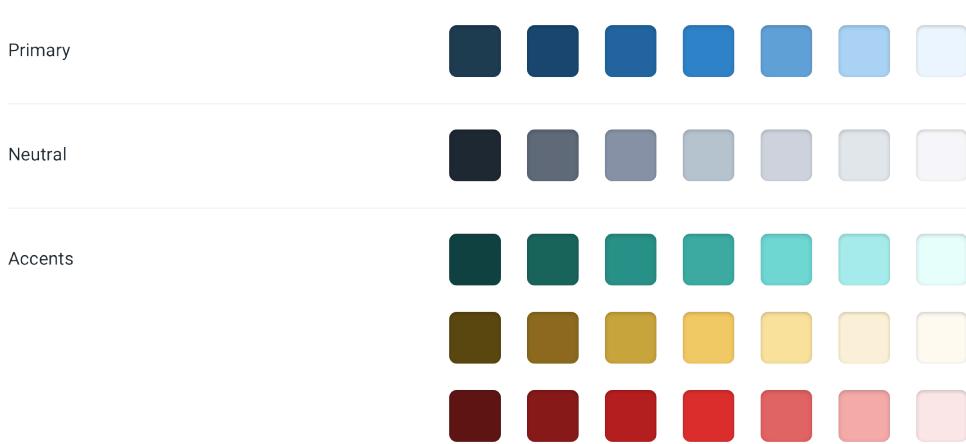
If you're building something where you need to use color to distinguish or categorize similar elements (like lines on graphs, events in a calendar, or tags on a project), you might need even more accent colors.

All in, it's not uncommon to need as many as *ten* different colors with 5-10 shades each for a complex UI.

Define your shades up front

When you need to create a lighter or darker variation of a color in your palette, don't get clever using CSS preprocessor functions like "lighten" or "darken" to create shades on the fly. That's how you end up with 35 *slightly* different blues that all look the same.

Instead, define a fixed set of shades up front that you can choose from as you work.



So how do you put together a palette like this anyways?

Choose the base color first

Start by picking a *base* color for the scale you want to create — the color in the middle that your lighter and darker shades are based on.

There's no real scientific way to do this, but for primary and accent colors, a good rule of thumb is to pick a shade that would work well as a button background.



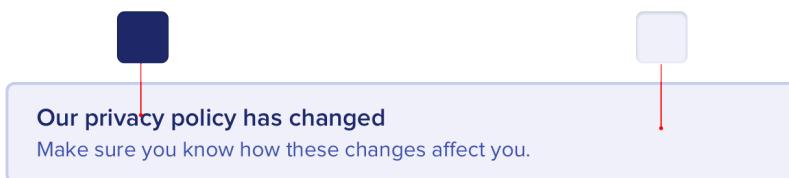
It's important to note that there are no real rules here like "start at 50% lightness" or anything — every color behaves a bit differently, so you'll have to rely on your eyes for this one.

Finding the edges

Next, pick your darkest shade and your lightest shade. There's no real science to this either, but it helps to think about where they will be used and choose them using that context.

The darkest shade of a color is usually reserved for text, while the lightest shade might be used to tint the background of an element.

A simple alert component is a good example that combines both of these use cases, so it can be a great place to pick these colors.



Start with a color that matches the hue of your base color, and adjust the saturation and lightness until you're satisfied.

Filling in the gaps

Once you've got your base, darkest, and lightest shades, you just need to fill in the gaps in between them.

For most projects, you'll need at least 5 shades per color, and probably closer to 10 if you don't want to feel too constrained.

Nine is a great number because it's easy to divide and makes filling in the gaps a little more straightforward. Let's call our darkest shade 900, our base shade 500, and our lightest shade 100.



Start by picking shades 700 and 300, the ones right in the middle of the gaps. You want these shades to feel like the perfect compromise between the shades on either side.



This creates four more holes in the scale (800, 600, 400, and 200), which you can fill using the same approach.



You should end up with a pretty balanced set of colors that provide just enough options to accommodate your design ideas without feeling limiting.

What about greys?

With greys the base color isn't as important, but otherwise the process is the same. Start at the edges and fill in the gaps until you have what you need.



Pick your darkest grey by choosing a color for the darkest text in your project, and your lightest grey by choosing something that works well for a subtle off-white background.

It's not a science

As tempting as it is, you can't rely purely on math to craft the perfect color palette.

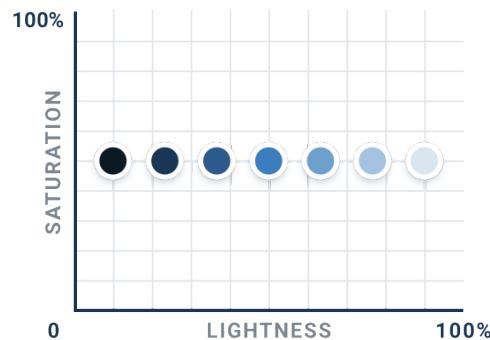
A systematic approach like the one described above is great to get you started, but don't be afraid to make little tweaks if you need to.

Once you actually start using your colors in your designs, it's almost inevitable that you'll want to tweak the saturation on a shade, or make a couple of shades lighter or darker. Trust your eyes, not the numbers.

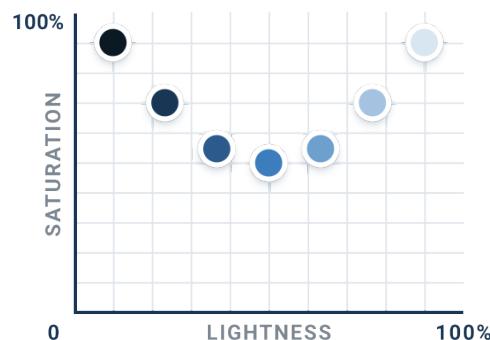
Just try to avoid adding *new* shades too often if you can avoid it. If you're not diligent about limiting your palette, you might as well have no color system at all.

Don't let lightness kill your saturation

In the HSL color space, as a color gets closer to 0% or 100% lightness, the impact of saturation is weakened — the same saturation value at 50% lightness looks more colorful than it does at 90% lightness.



That means that if you don't want the lighter and darker shades of a given color to look washed out, you need to increase the saturation as the lightness gets further away from 50%.



It's subtle but little details like this add up, especially when a color is being applied to a large section of a UI.

But what if your base color is already heavily saturated? How do you increase the saturation if it's already at 100%?

Use perceived brightness to your advantage

Which of these two colors do you think is lighter?



The yellow, right? Well it turns out both colors actually have the exact same "lightness" in terms of HSL:

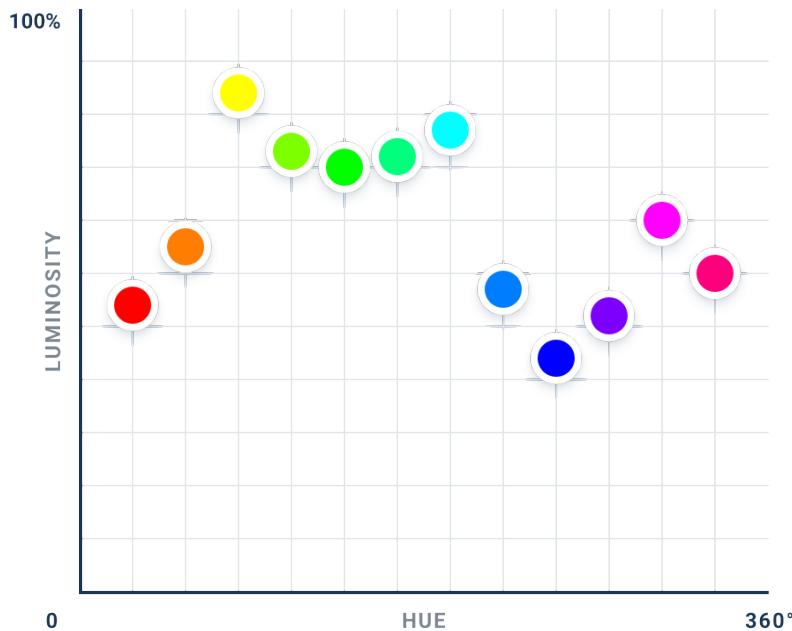


So why do we see the yellow as lighter? Well it turns out that every hue has an inherent perceived brightness due to how the human eye perceives color.

You can calculate the perceived brightness of a color by plugging its RGB components into this formula:

$$\sqrt{0.299 r^2 + 0.587 g^2 + 0.114 b^2}$$

Taking samples of different hues with 100% saturation and 50% lightness, we can get a good sense of the perceived brightness of different colors around the color wheel:



As expected, yellow has a higher perceived brightness than blue. But what's interesting here is that perceived brightness doesn't simply change linearly from the darkest hue to the lightest hue — instead, there are three separate local minimums (red, green, and blue) and three local maximums (yellow, cyan, and magenta).

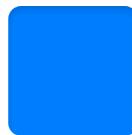
Changing brightness by rotating hue

On the surface, this is certainly an interesting thing to understand about color. But things get really interesting when you realize how you can use this knowledge in your designs.

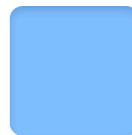
Normally when you want to change how light a color looks, you adjust the *lightness* component:



H 210
S 100%
L 25%



H 210
S 100%
L 50%



H 210
S 100%
L 75%

While this does work to lighten or darken a color, you often lose some of the color's *intensity* — the color also looks closer to white or to black, not just lighter or darker.

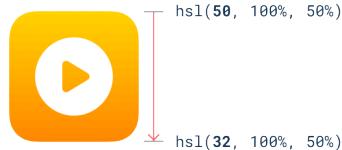


Since different hues have a different perceived brightness, another way you can change the brightness of a color is by *rotating its hue*.

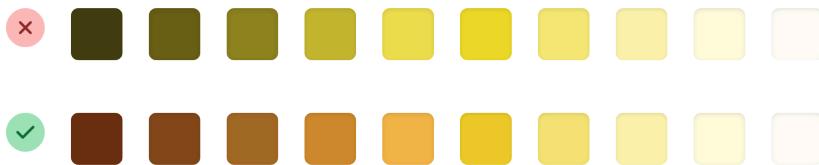
To make a color lighter, rotate the hue towards the nearest bright hue — 60°, 180°, or 300°.



To make a color darker, rotate the hue towards the nearest dark hue — 0°, 120°, or 240°.



This can be really useful when trying to create a palette for a light color like yellow. By gradually rotating the hue towards more of an orange as you decrease the lightness, the darker shades will feel warm and rich instead of dull and brown:



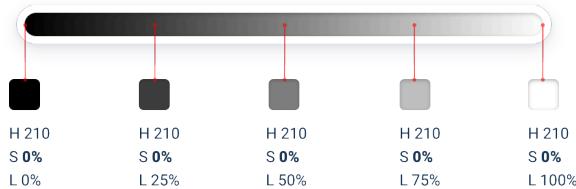
You can of course combine these approaches too, getting some of the brightness by adjusting the hue and some from adjusting the lightness.



While this is a great way to change a color's brightness without affecting its intensity, it works best in small doses. Don't rotate the hue more than 20-30° or it will look like a totally different color instead of just lighter or darker.

Greys don't have to be grey

By definition, true grey has a saturation of 0% — it doesn't have any actual color in it at all.



But in practice, a lot of the colors that we *think* of as grey are actually saturated quite heavily:

Recently Updated

| CLIENT | ISSUED DATE | |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Carl Phillips | Pending | US\$249.00 Due in 5 days |
| Tyler Burns | Due yesterday | US\$479.00 |

All Invoices

| CLIENT | ISSUED DATE | |
|---------------|-------------|--|
| Maria Schmidt | | |

Red arrows point from the grayscale colors in the interface to their HSL values:

- Dark blue square: hsl(212, 56%, 16%)
- Medium blue square: hsl(212, 18%, 35%)
- Light gray square: hsl(210, 32%, 93%)
- Very light gray square: hsl(210, 38%, 97%)

This saturation is what makes some greys feel cool and other greys feel warm.

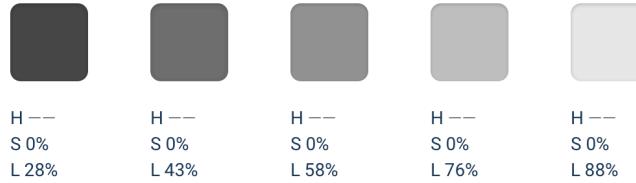
Color temperature

If you've ever purchased light bulbs before, you've had to make the decision between "warm white" bulbs that give off a yellow-ish light, and "cool white" bulbs that give off a blue-ish light.

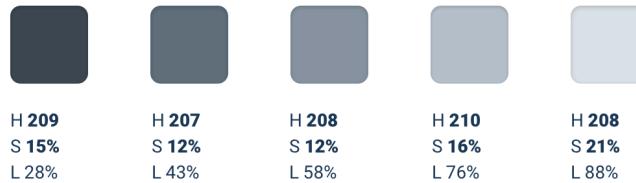
Saturating greys in a user interface works in a similar same way.

If you want your greys to feel cool, saturate them with a bit of blue:

NEUTRAL GREYS

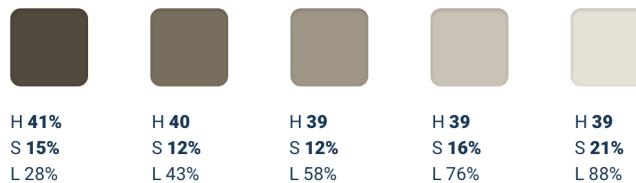


COOL GREYS



To give your greys a warmer feel, saturate them with a bit of yellow or orange:

WARM GREYS



To maintain a consistent temperature, don't forget to increase the saturation for the lighter and darker shades. If you don't, those shades will look a bit washed out compared to the greys that are closer to 50% lightness.

How much you want to saturate your greys is completely up to you — add just a little if you only want to tip the temperature slightly, or crank it up if you want the interface to lean strongly in one direction or the other.

Accessible doesn't have to mean ugly

To make sure your designs are accessible, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) recommend that normal text (*under ~18px*) has a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1, and that larger text has a contrast ratio of at least 3:1.

Normal Text

| EXAMPLE | COLOR | CONTRAST | GRADE |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| The five boxing wizards jump quickly. | hsl(0, 0%, 54%) | 3.45:1 | Fail |
| The five boxing wizards jump quickly. | hsl(0, 0%, 42%) | 5.41:1 | AA |
| The five boxing wizards jump quickly. | hsl(0, 0%, 33%) | 7.57:1 | AAA |

Large Text

| EXAMPLE | COLOR | CONTRAST | GRADE |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| The five boxing wizards jump... | hsl(0, 0%, 59%) | 2.96:1 | Fail |
| The five boxing wizards jump... | hsl(0, 0%, 54%) | 3.45:1 | AA |
| The five boxing wizards jump... | hsl(0, 0%, 42%) | 5.41:1 | AAA |

For typical *dark-text-on-a-light-background* situations, meeting this recommendation is pretty easy, but it gets a lot trickier when you start working with color.

Flipping the contrast

When using white text on a colored background, you'd be surprised how dark the color often needs to be to meet that 4.5:1 contrast ratio.



| NAME | STATUS | POLICY | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Molly Sanders VP of Sales | Approved | \$20,000 All-inclus | 2.25 (Fail) |
| Michael Roberts Advisory Board | Awaiting Approval | \$5,000 Basic Pol | 1.56 (Fail) |
| Devin Childs Marketing Manager | Declined | \$5,000 Basic Pol | 3.14 (Fail) |

This can create hierarchy issues when those elements aren't supposed to be the focus of the page — dark colored backgrounds will really grab the user's attention.



| NAME | STATUS | POLICY | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| Molly Sanders VP of Sales | Approved | \$20,000 All-inclus | 5.97 (AA) |
| Michael Roberts Advisory Board | Awaiting Approval | \$5,000 Basic Pol | 5.07 (AA) |
| Devin Childs Marketing Manager | Declined | \$5,000 Basic Pol | 5.34 (AA) |

You can solve this problem by *flipping the contrast*. Instead of using light text on a dark colored background, use dark colored text on a light colored background:

| | NAME | STATUS | POLICY | |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| | Molly Sanders VP of Sales | Approved | \$20,000 All-inclus | 9.01 (AAA) |
| | Michael Roberts Advisory Board | Awaiting Approval | \$5,000 Basic Pol | 9.78 (AAA) |
| | Devin Childs Marketing Manager | Declined | \$5,000 Basic Pol | 12.32 (AAA) |

The color is still there to help support the text, but it's way less in-your-face and doesn't interfere as much with other actions on the page.

Rotating the hue

Even harder than white text on a colored background is *colored text on a colored background*. You'll run into this situation if you're ever trying to pick a color for some secondary text inside a dark-colored panel.

If you start by taking the background color and simply adjusting the lightness and saturation, you'll find that it's hard to meet the recommended contrast ratio without getting very close to pure white.



Here every step of the way

Think of us as your very own help desk, with free, around-the-clock support. Contact us anytime – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

REACH OUT NOW

Background
hsl(240, 34%, 34%)

Text
hsl(240, 44%, 89%)

8.37:1 **AAA**

You don't want the primary text and the secondary text to look the same, so what else can you do?

Well since some colors are brighter than others, one way to increase the contrast without getting closer to white is to *rotate the hue* towards a brighter color, like cyan, magenta, or yellow.



Here every step of the way

Think of us as your very own help desk, with free, around-the-clock support. Contact us anytime – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

REACH OUT NOW

Background
hsl(240, 34%, 34%)

Text
hsl(188, 100%, 85%)

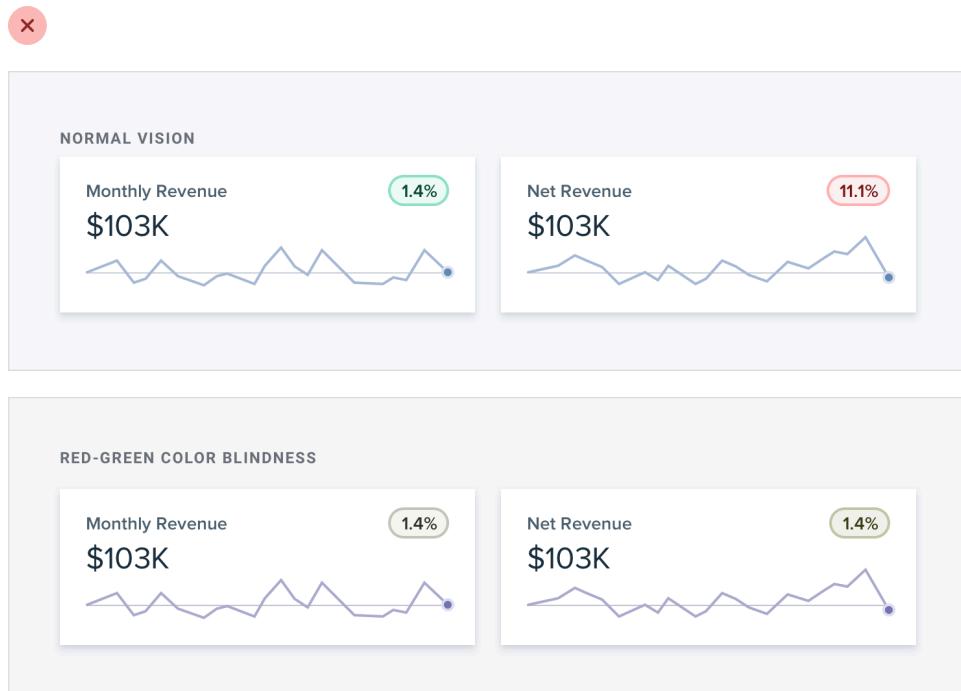
8.71:1 **AAA**

This can make it a lot easier to make the text accessible while still keeping it colorful.

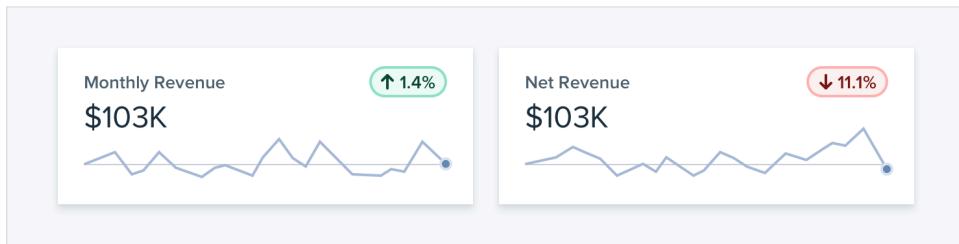
Don't rely on color alone

Color can be a fantastic way to enhance information and make it easier to understand, but be careful not to *rely* on it, or users with color blindness will have a hard time interpreting your UI.

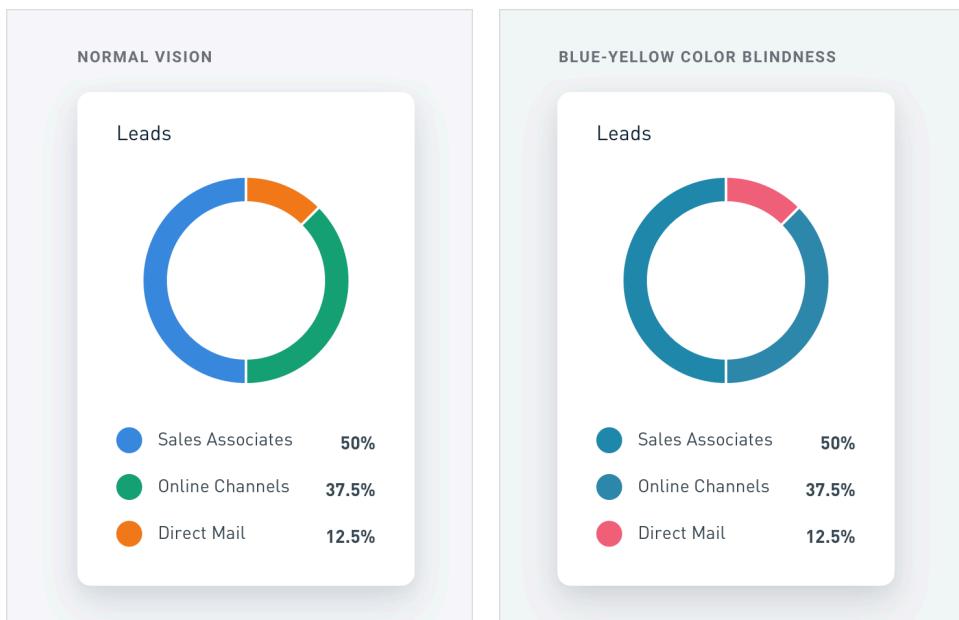
Take these metric cards for example. With this design, someone who is red-green colorblind can't easily tell if a metric has gotten better or worse:



An easy fix for this is to also communicate that information in some other way, like by adding icons to indicate if the change is positive or negative.

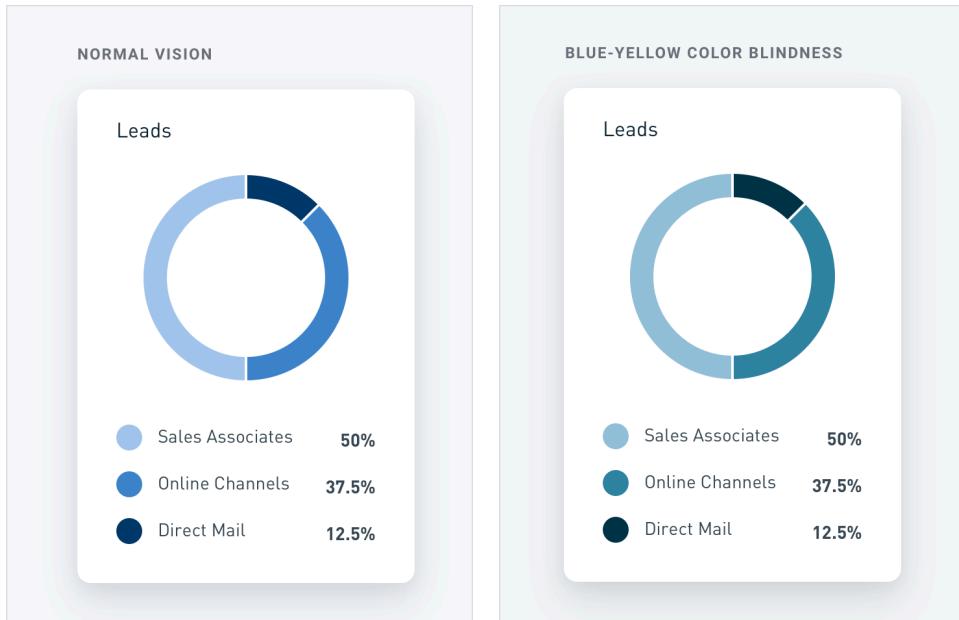


What about something like a graph, where each trend line has a different color?



In situations like this, try relying on *contrast* instead of using completely different colors. It's much easier for someone who's colorblind to tell the

difference between light and dark than it is for them to tell the difference between two distinct colors.



Always use color to support something that your design is already saying; never use it as the only means of communication.

Creating Depth

Emulate a light source

Have you ever noticed how some elements in an interface feel like they're raised off of the page, while others feel like they are inset into the background?

The image shows a user interface for a real estate search. On the left, there's a dark-themed sidebar with dropdown menus for 'Transaction Type' (set to 'For Sale') and 'Property Type' (set to 'Residential'). Below these are a price range slider and a list of features: 'Balcony', 'Central Air', and 'Pool'. A red bracket on the left side of the image groups the 'Property Type' dropdown, the price range slider, and the feature list, indicating they appear 'inset' from the main content area. On the right, there's a listing card for a 'DETACHED HOUSE • 5Y OLD' located at '528 Douglas Street' with a price of '\$680,000'. This card has a white background and a thin shadow, making it look 'raised' above the main interface. A red bracket on the right side of the image groups the listing card and the second image of a house, indicating they appear 'raised'.

Appears inset

Appears raised

Creating this effect might look complicated at first, but it actually only requires you to understand one fundamental rule.

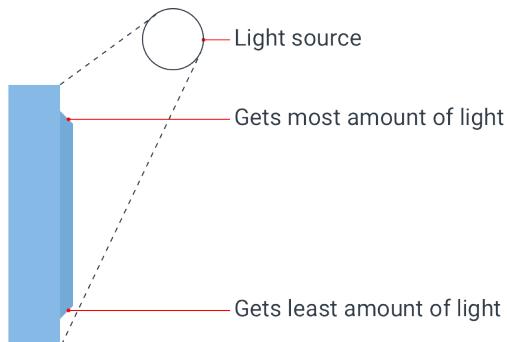
Light comes from above

Take a look at the panelling on this door:



Even though you're just looking at a flat image, it's still pretty obvious that the panels on the door are raised. Why is that?

Notice how the top edge of the panel is lighter? That's because it's angled towards the sky and receives more light. Similarly, the bottom edge is darker because it's angled away from the sky, receiving *less* light.

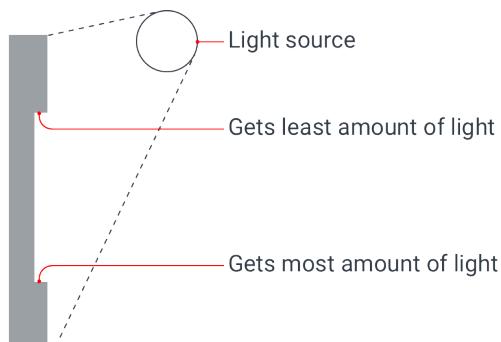


The only way those edges could possibly be oriented that way is if the panel itself is raised, so that's how our brains perceive it.

Now take a look at the panelling on this cabinet:



In this case it's clear that the panels are *inset* because there's a shadow at the top indicating that the lip above is blocking the light, and the bottom edge is lighter, indicating that it's angled upward.



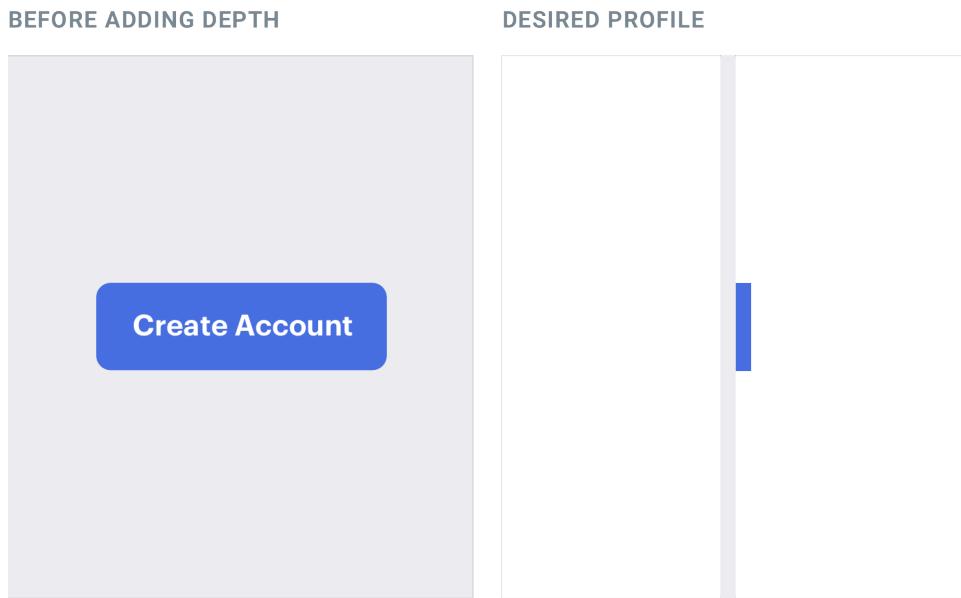
To create this same sense of depth in your designs, all you need to do is mimic the way light affects things in the real world.

Simulating light in a user interface

If you want an element to appear raised or inset, first figure out what *profile* you want that element to have, then mimic how a light source would interact with that shape.

Raised elements

For example, say you had a button and you wanted it to feel raised off of the page, with perfectly flat edges on the top and bottom:

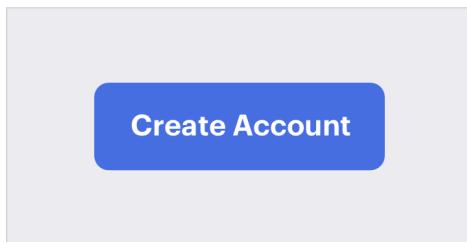


Because the top and bottom edges are both flat, it would be impossible to see both of them at the same time. People generally look slightly downward towards their screens, so for the most natural look, reveal a little bit of the top edge and hide the bottom edge.

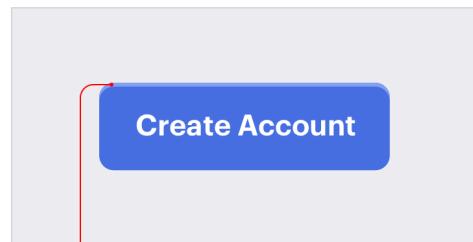
Since the top edge is facing upward, make it slightly lighter than the face of

the button, usually using a top border or an inset box shadow with a slight vertical offset:

BEFORE



AFTER



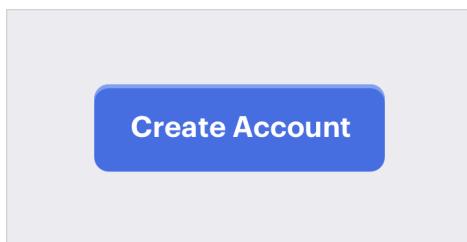
```
box-shadow: inset 0 1px 0 hsl(224, 84%, 74%);
```

Choose the lighter color by hand instead of using a semi-transparent white for best results — simply overlaying white can suck the saturation out of the underlying color.

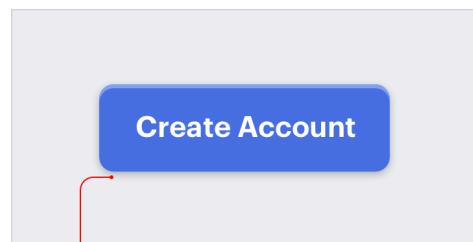
Next, you need to account for the fact that a raised element will block some of the light from reaching the area below the element.

Do this by adding a small dark box shadow with a slight vertical offset (you *only want the shadow to appear below the element*):

BEFORE



AFTER



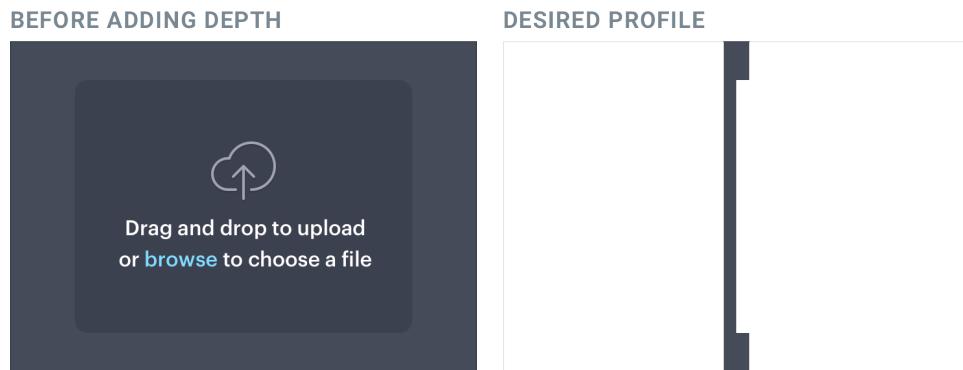
```
box-shadow: 0 1px 3px hsla(0, 0%, 0%, .2);
```

Don't get carried away with the blur radius, a couple of pixels is plenty. These

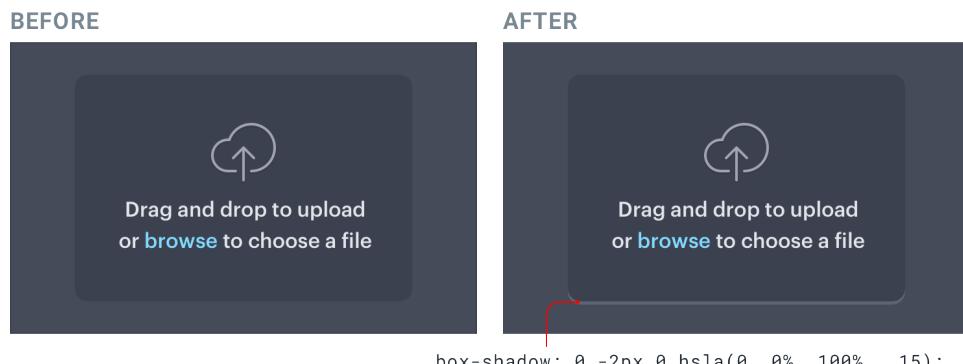
sorts of shadows should have pretty sharp edges — take a look at the shadow cast by the bottom of a wall outlet or window frame for a real-world example.

Inset elements

Say you're designing a "well" component that should feel like it's recessed into the page.

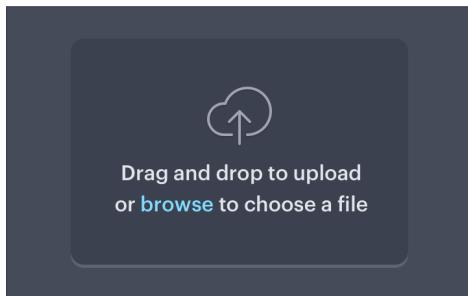


Looking slightly downward, only the bottom lip would be visible. Since it's facing towards the sky, give that edge a slightly lighter color using a bottom border or inset shadow with a negative vertical offset:

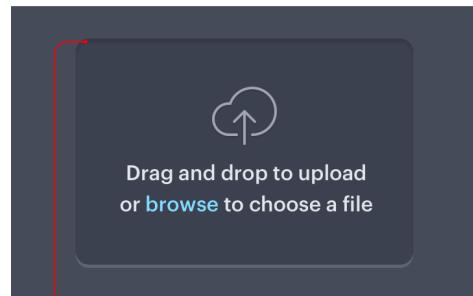


The area above the well should block some of the light from reaching the very top of the well, so add a small dark inset box shadow with a slight positive vertical offset to make sure it doesn't poke through at the bottom:

BEFORE



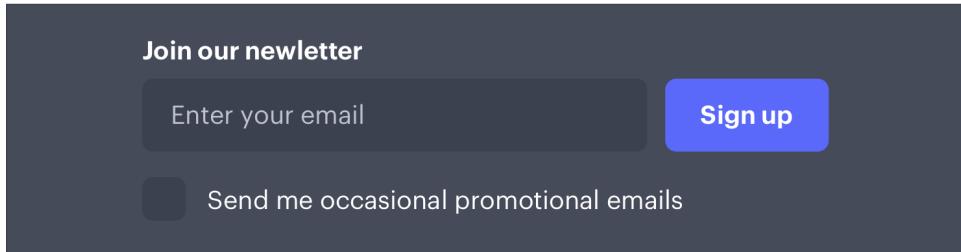
AFTER



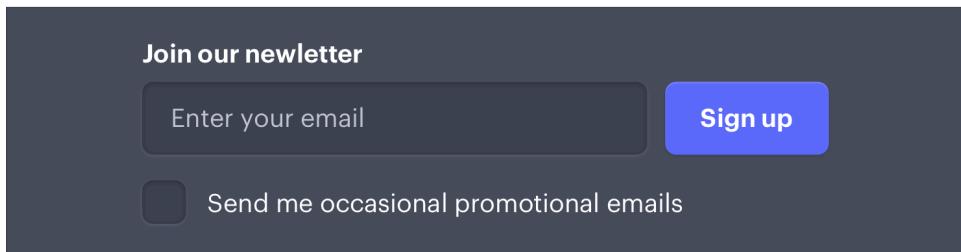
```
box-shadow: inset 0 2px 2px hsla(0, 0%, 0%, 0.1);
```

This same treatment works for any element that may need to appear inset, for example text inputs and checkboxes:

BEFORE



AFTER



Don't get carried away

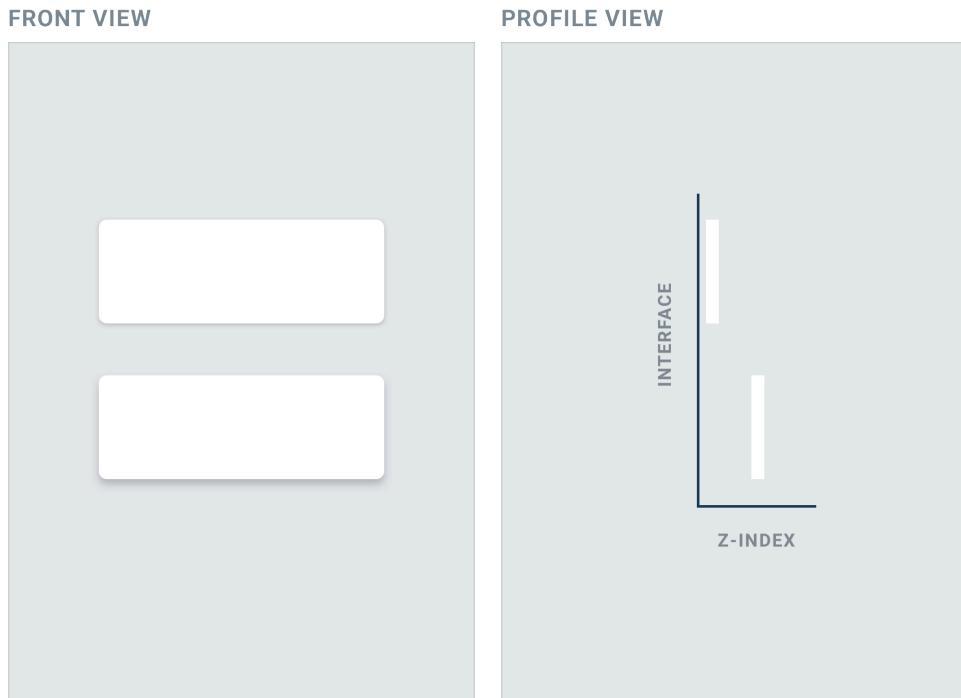
Once you understand how to simulate light in an interface, it can be tempting to tinker away for hours, tweaking and tweaking to see how closely you can mimic the real world.

While this can be a fun exercise, in practice it can lead to interfaces that are busy and unclear. Borrowing some visual cues from the real world is a great way to add a bit of depth, but there's no need to try and make things look photo-realistic.

Use shadows to convey elevation

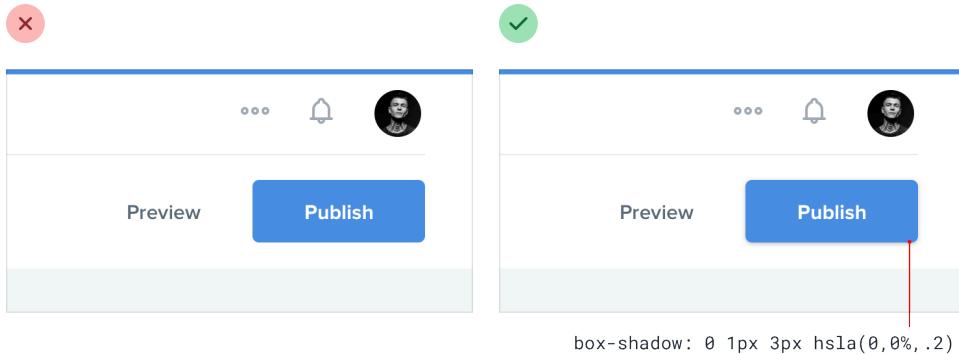
Shadows can be more than just a flashy effect — used thoughtfully, they let you position elements on a virtual z-axis to create a meaningful sense of depth.

Small shadows with a tight blur radius make an element feel only slightly raised off of the background, while larger shadows with a higher blur radius make an element feel much closer to the user:

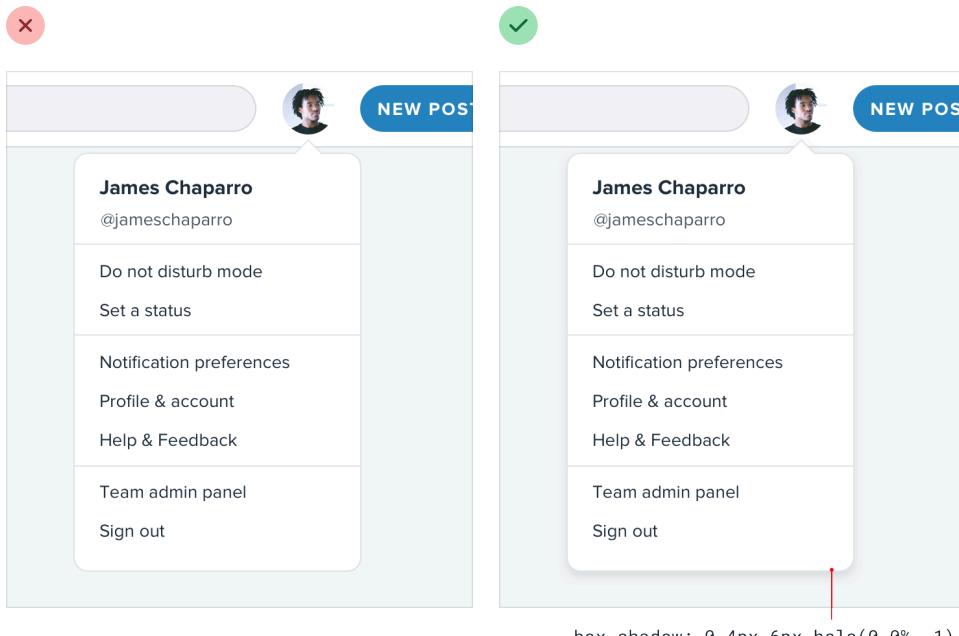


The closer something feels to the user, the more it will attract their focus.

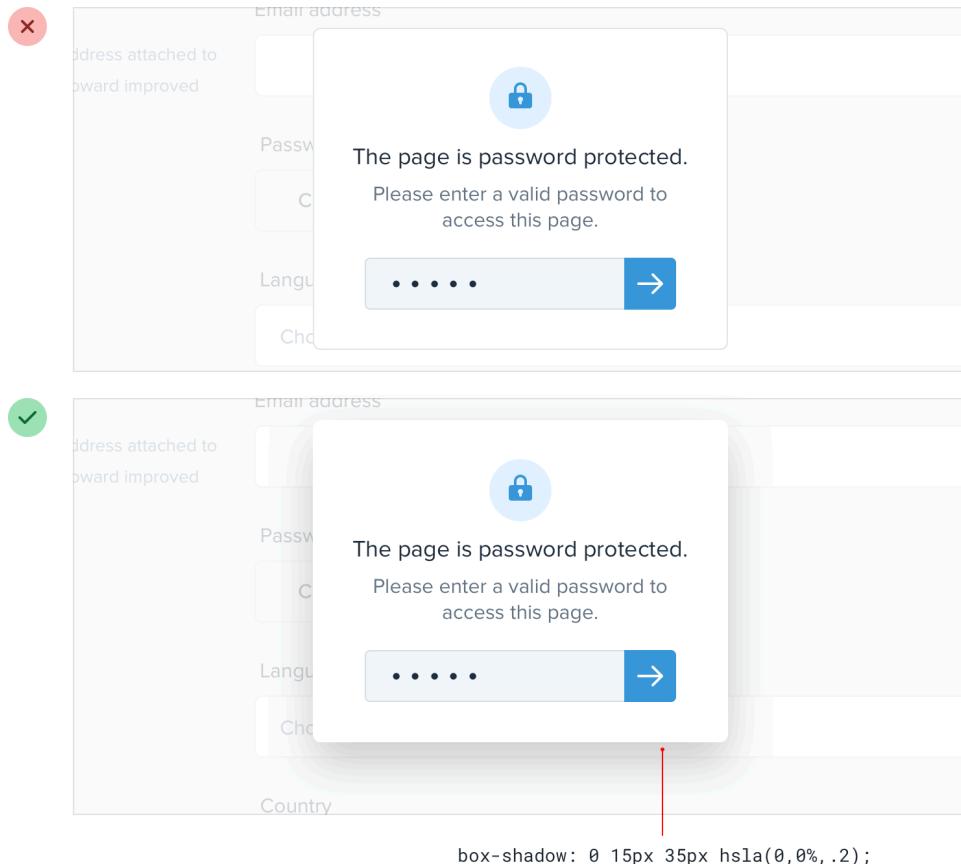
You might use a smaller shadow for something like a button, where you want the user to notice it but don't want it to dominate the page:



Medium shadows are useful for things like dropdowns; elements that need to sit a bit further above the rest of the UI:



Large shadows are great for modal dialogs, where you really want to capture the user's attention:

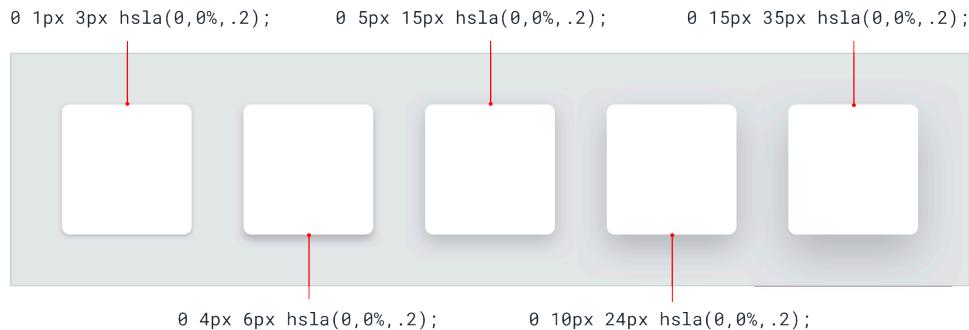


Establishing an elevation system

Just like with color, typography, spacing, and sizing, defining a fixed set of shadows will speed up your workflow and help maintain consistency in your designs.

You don't need a ton of different shadows — five options is usually plenty.

Start by defining your smallest shadow and your largest shadow, then fill in the middle with shadows that increase in size pretty linearly:



Combining shadows with interaction

Shadows aren't only useful for positioning elements on the z-axis statically; they're a great way to provide visual cues to the user as they interact with elements, too.

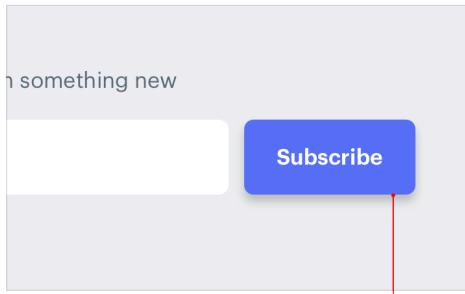
For example, say you had a list of items where the user could click and drag each item to sort them. Adding a shadow to an item when a user clicks it makes it feel like it pops forward above the other items in the list, and makes it clear to the user that they can drag it:

A screenshot of a mobile application interface showing a list of songs. At the top is a search bar labeled "Filter". Below it is a table with three columns: "TITLE", "ARTIST", and "ADDED". The table has five rows of data. The second row, which contains the song "Kerala" by Bonobo added "2 min ago", has a shadow underneath it, indicating it is selected or being interacted with. The third row, which contains the song "Blush" by Leon Vynehall added "4 days ago", also has a shadow underneath it. The other two rows do not have shadows.

| TITLE | ARTIST | ADDED |
|---------------|---------------|------------|
| + Kerala | Bonobo | 2 min ago |
| : + Blush | Leon Vynehall | 4 days ago |
| + Bad Kingdom | Moderat | 6 days ago |
| + Fewer Locks | Affelaye | 6 days ago |

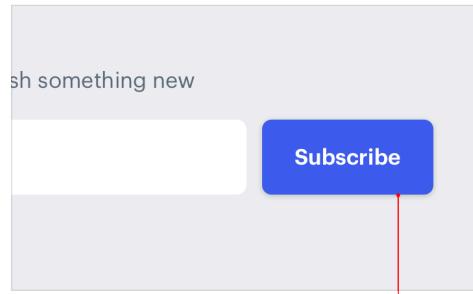
Similarly, you can make a button feel like it's being pressed into the page when a user clicks it by switching to a smaller shadow, or perhaps removing the shadow altogether:

NORMAL



`box-shadow: 0 4px 6px hsla(0,0%,.2);`

ON CLICK

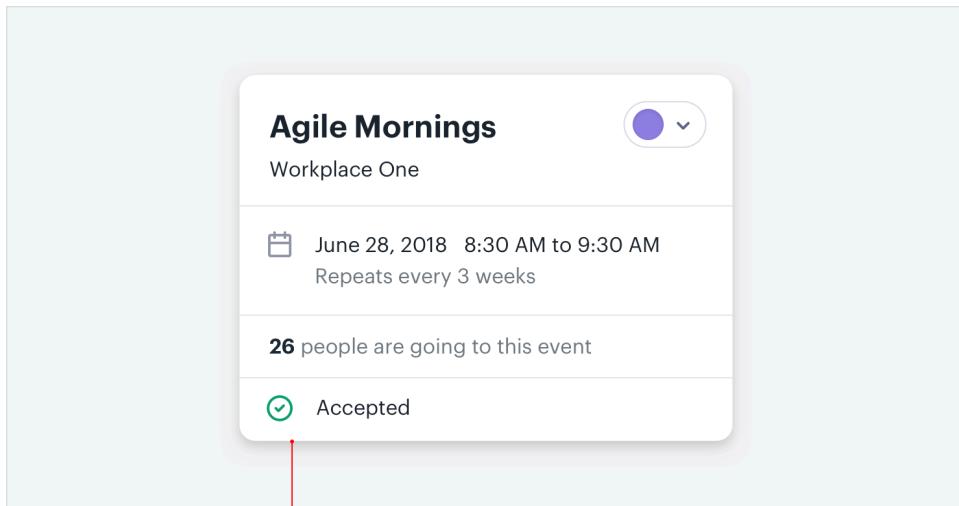


`box-shadow: 0 1px 3px hsla(0,0%,.2);`

Using shadows in a meaningful way like this is a great way to hack the process of choosing what sort of shadow an element should have. Don't think about the shadow itself, think about where you want the element to sit on the z-axis and assign it a shadow accordingly.

Shadows can have two parts

Ever inspected a really nice shadow on a site and noticed they were actually using two shadows?

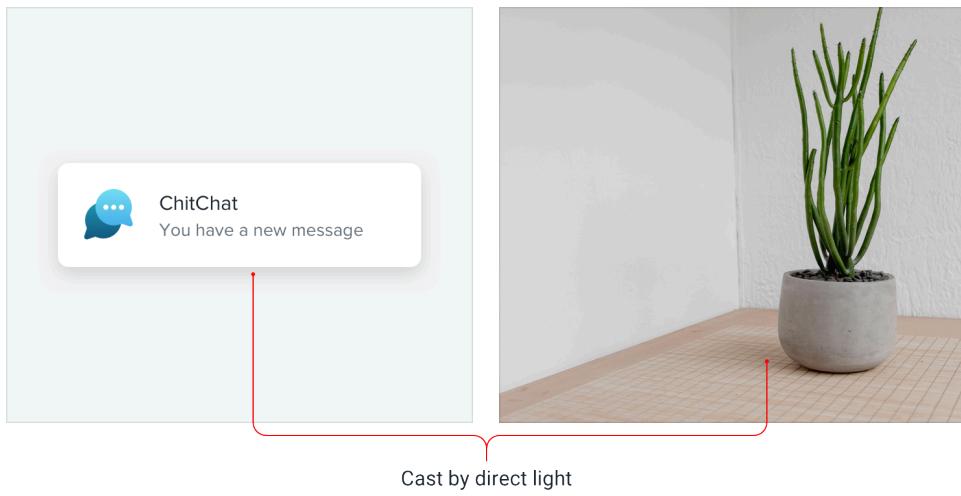


```
box-shadow: 0 4px 6px hsla(0,0%,.7), 0 5px 15px hsla(0,0%,.1);
```

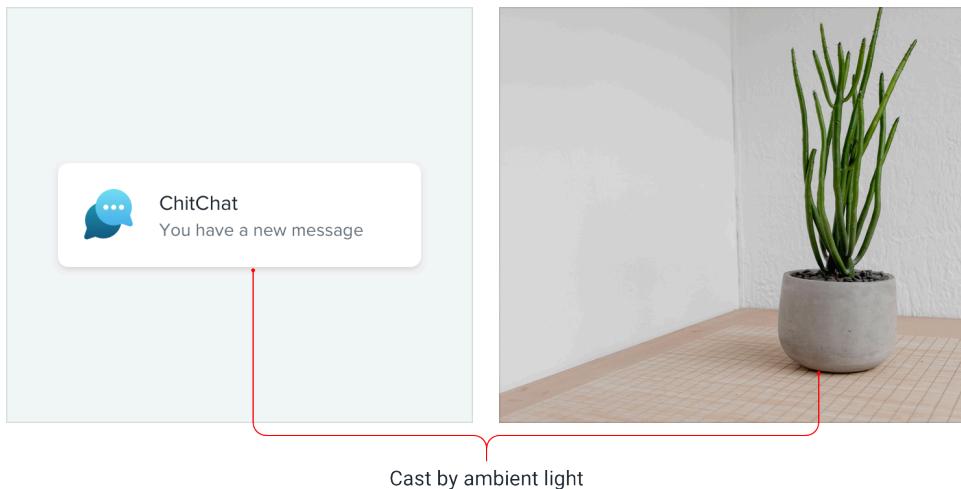
There's a method to this madness, and it's actually pretty simple and makes a lot of sense.

When you see someone combining two shadows, they're not just experimenting randomly until things look nice, they're using each shadow to do a specific job.

The first shadow is larger and softer, with a considerable vertical offset and large blur radius. It simulates the shadow cast behind an object by a direct light source.

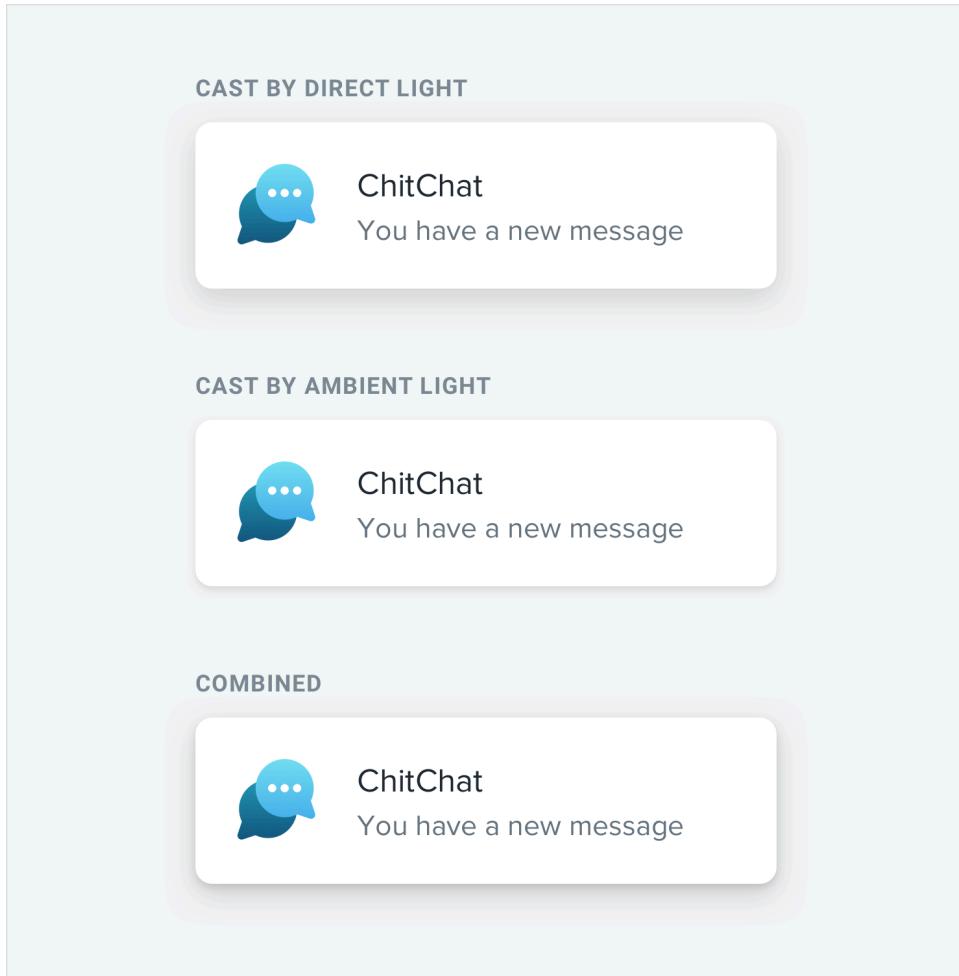


The second shadow is tighter and darker, with less of a vertical offset and a smaller blur radius. It simulates the shadowed area *underneath* an object where even ambient light has a hard time reaching.



Using two shadows like this gives you a lot more control than you'd get with a single shadow — you can keep the larger shadow nice and subtle while still

making the shadow closer the element's edges nice and defined.

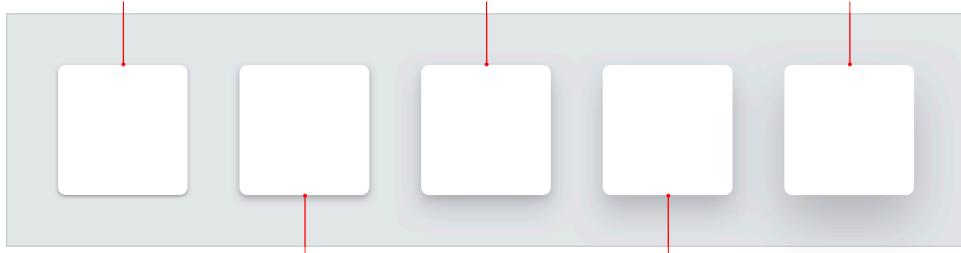


Accounting for elevation

As an object gets further away from a surface, the small, dark shadow created by a lack of ambient light slowly disappears (*go ahead, try it out with something on your desk*).

So if you're going to use this two-shadow technique in your own projects, make sure you make that shadow more subtle for shadows that represent a higher elevation.

```
0 1px 3px hsla(0,0%, .12);      0 10px 20px hsla(0,0%, .15);  
0 1px 2px hsla(0,0%, .24);      0 3px 6px hsla(0,0%, .10);      0 20px 40px hsla(0,0%, .2);
```



```
0 3px 6px hsla(0,0%, .15);      0 15px 25px hsla(0,0%, .15);  
0 2px 4px hsla(0,0%, .12);      0 5px 10px hsla(0,0%, .5);
```

It should be quite distinct for your lowest elevation, and almost (or completely) invisible at your highest elevation.

Even flat designs can have depth

When most people talk about “flat design”, they mean designing without shadows, gradients, or any other effects that try to mimic how light interacts with things in the real-world.

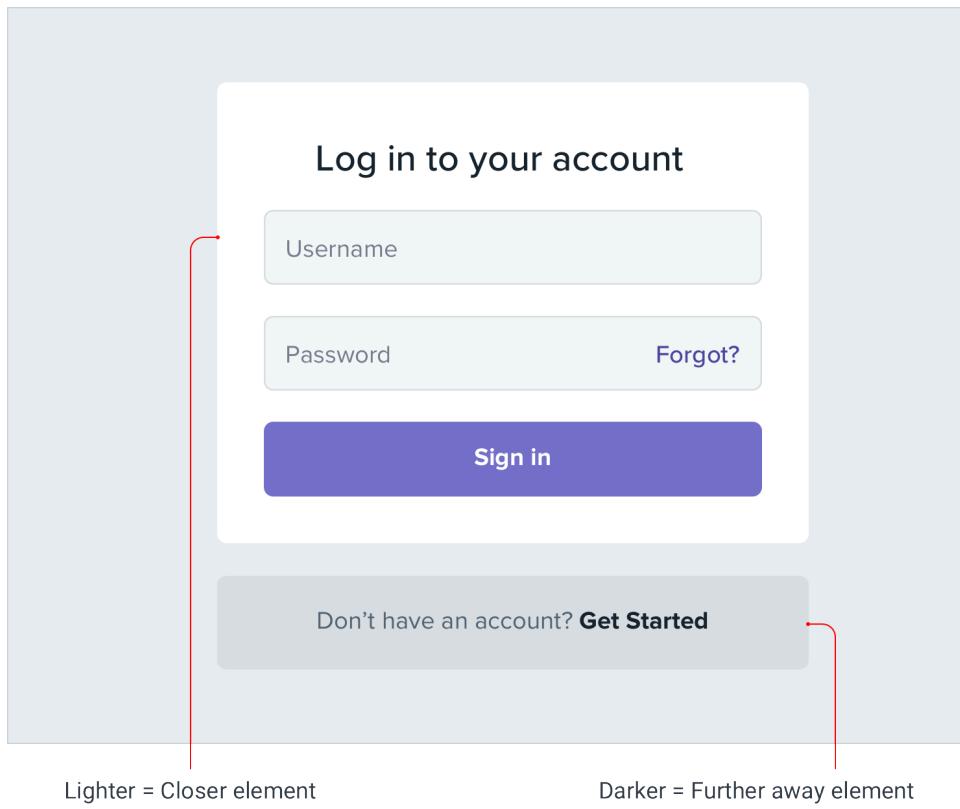
The image shows a mobile-style social media application interface. At the top right is a search bar with a magnifying glass icon and the word "Search". Next to it is a profile picture of a woman and a blue button labeled "New Post". Below the search bar is a post from a user whose name is partially visible. The post content is cut off at the bottom. Underneath the post are two interaction buttons: a comment icon followed by the number "17" and a share icon followed by the word "Share". To the right of the post is a sidebar titled "Who to follow" with a "View all" link. It lists three users with their profile pictures, names, and handles: Spencer Mendez (@spencermendez), Clark Castillo (@ccastillo), and Carol Barnett (@carol_barnett). Each user entry has a small circular "Follow" button with a plus sign next to it. Below the sidebar is another section titled "Trending News" with a "View all" link. It lists four trending topics: "#FirstSnow" (13.7K posts), "Thanksgiving Weekend" (17.8K posts), "#OscarBuzz" (10.3K posts), and "Black Friday" (10.2K posts).

But the most effective flat designs still convey depth, they just do it in a different way.

Creating depth with color

In general (*especially with shades of the same color*), lighter objects feel closer to us and darker objects feel further away.

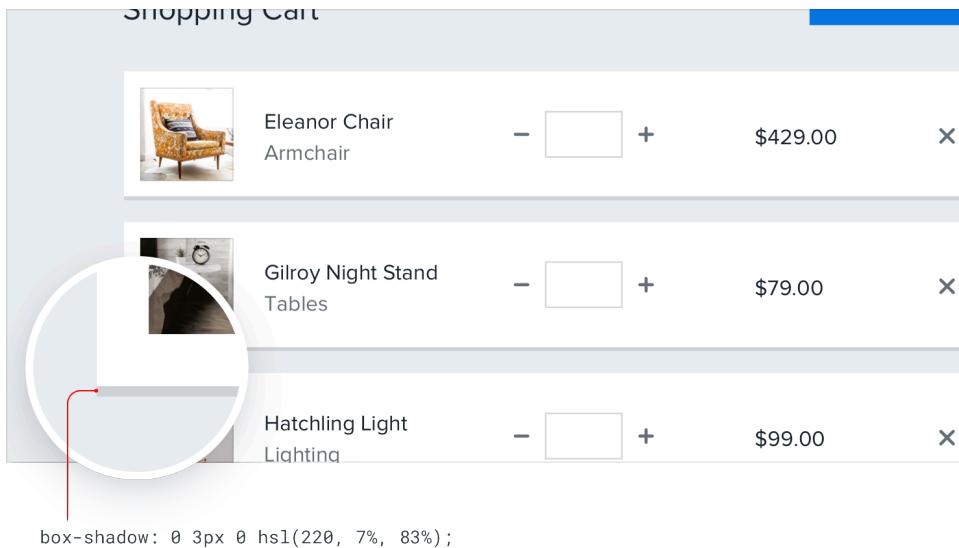
Make an element lighter than the background color to make it feel like it's raised off of the page, or darker than the background color if you want it to feel inset like a well:



This is just as applicable to non-flat designs, too — color is just another tool in your toolkit for conveying distance.

Using solid shadows

Another way to communicate depth in a flat design is to use short, vertically offset shadows with no blur radius at all.

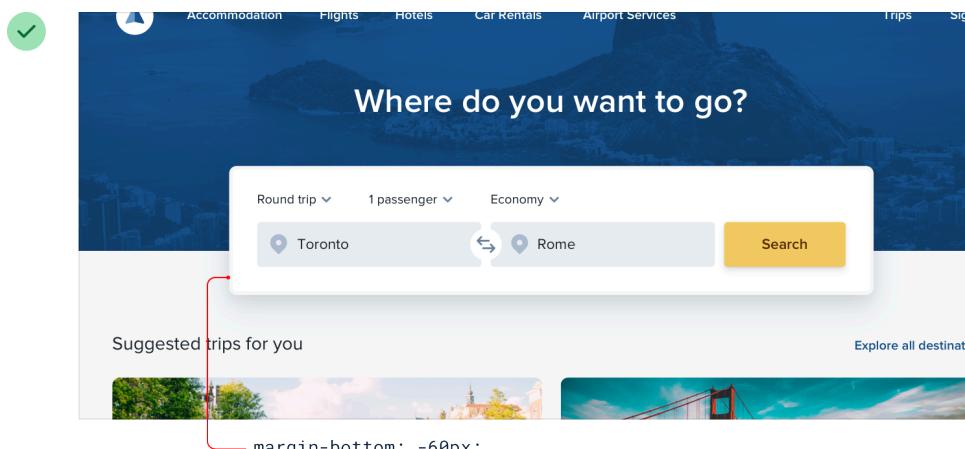
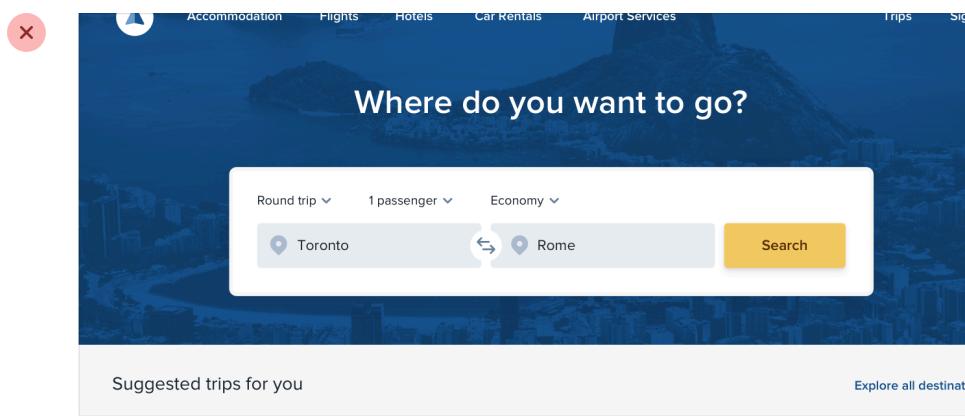


It's a great way to make a card or button stand off the page a little bit without sacrificing that flat aesthetic.

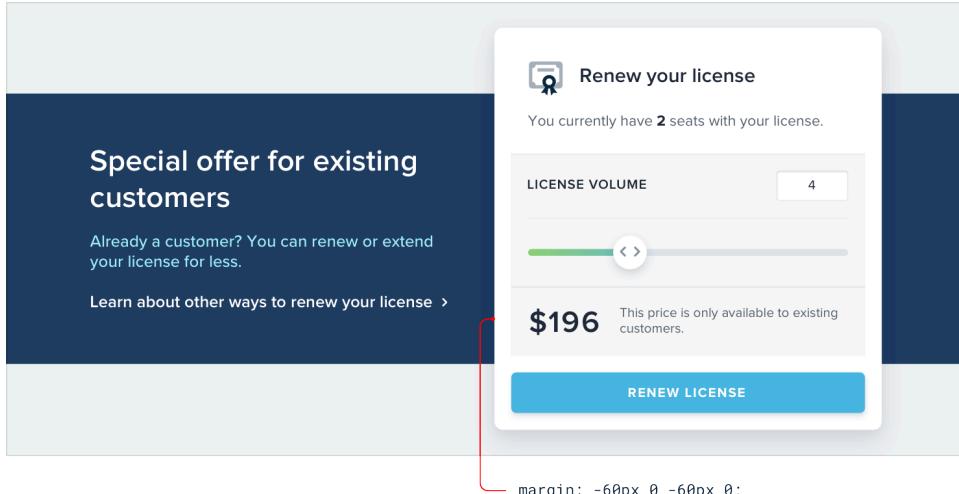
Overlap elements to create layers

One of the most effective ways to create depth is to overlap different elements to make it feel like a design has multiple *layers*.

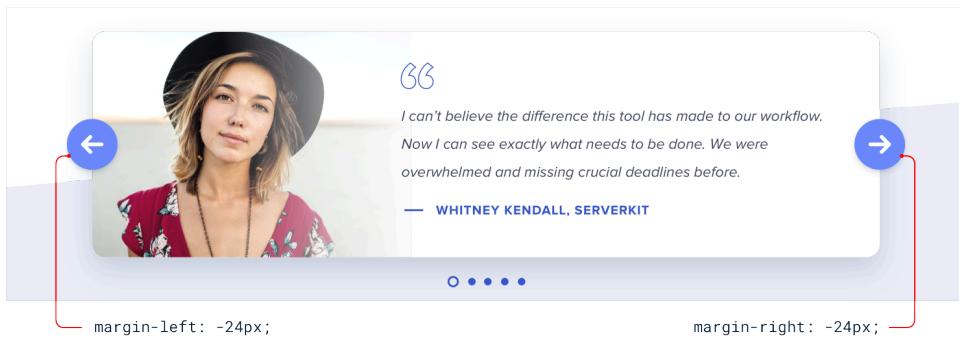
For example, instead of containing a card entirely within another element, offset it so it crosses the transition between two different backgrounds:



You could also make an element taller than its parent, so it overlaps on both sides:



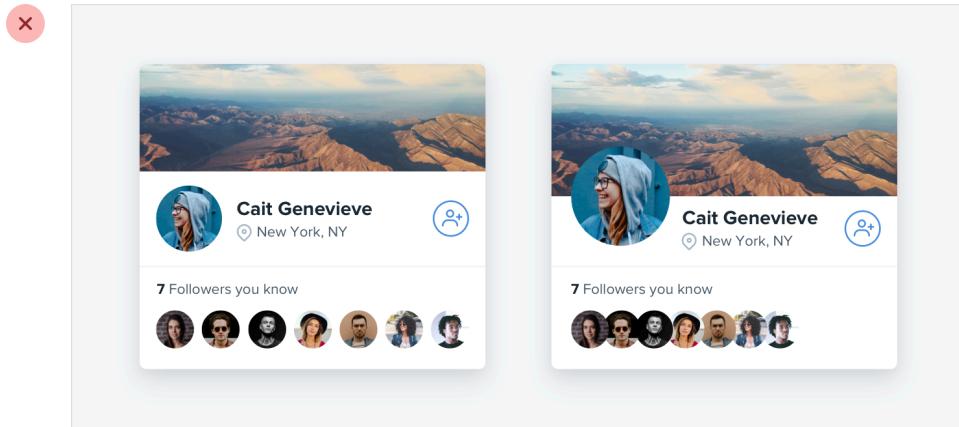
Overlapping elements can add depth to smaller components too, for example the controls on this carousel:



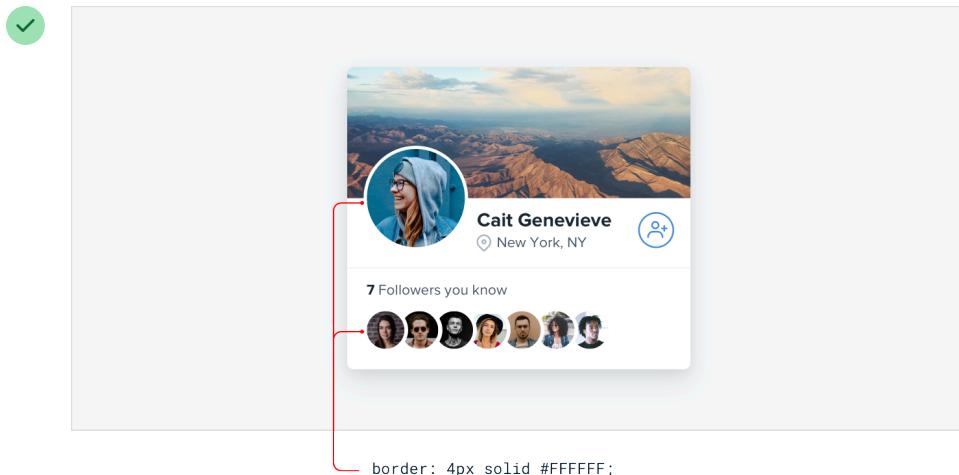
Overlapping images

This technique can work great with images as well, but without special

consideration it's easy for overlapping images to clash.



A simple trick for avoiding this is to give the images an “invisible border” — one that matches the background color — so there’s always a bit of a gap between images:



```
border: 4px solid #FFFFFF;
```

You'll still create the appearance of layers but with none of the ugly clashing.

Working with Images

Use good photos

Bad photos will ruin a design, even if everything else about it looks great.



×

ENTIRE APARTMENT
Modern Studio in Central San Francisco
\$120 USD per night
 23



✓

ENTIRE APARTMENT
Modern Studio in Central San Francisco
\$120 USD per night
 23

If your design needs photography and you're not a talented photographer, you've got two options:

- 1. Hire a professional photographer.**

If you need very specific photos for your project, entrust a professional. Taking great photos isn't just about using an expensive camera, it's about lighting, composition, color — skills that take years to develop.

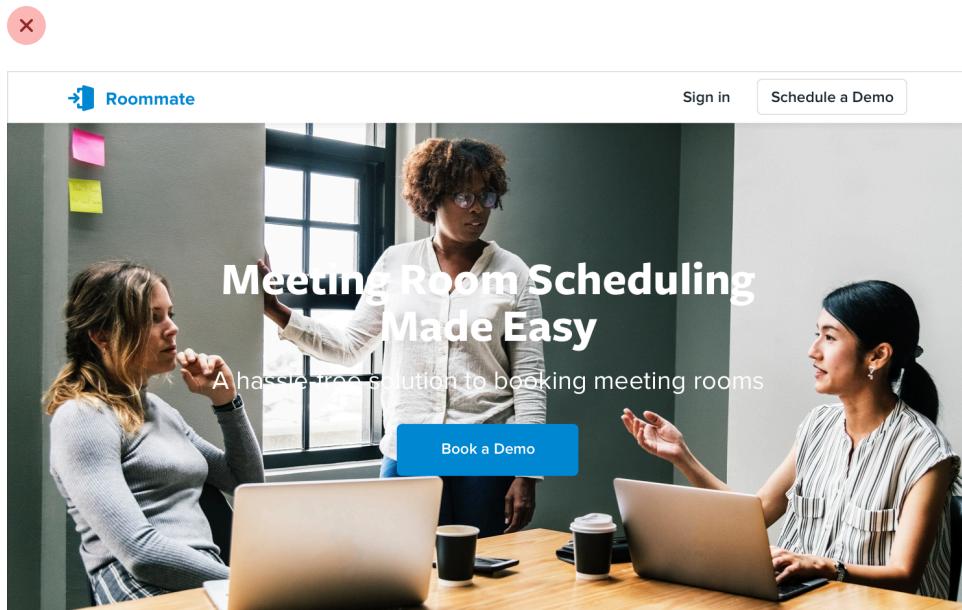
2. Use high quality stock photography.

If your needs are more generic, there are tons of great resources out there where you can purchase great stock photos. There are even sites like Unsplash that offer beautiful photography for free.

Whatever you do, don't design using placeholder images and expect to be able to take some photos with your smartphone and swap them in later. It never works.

Text needs consistent contrast

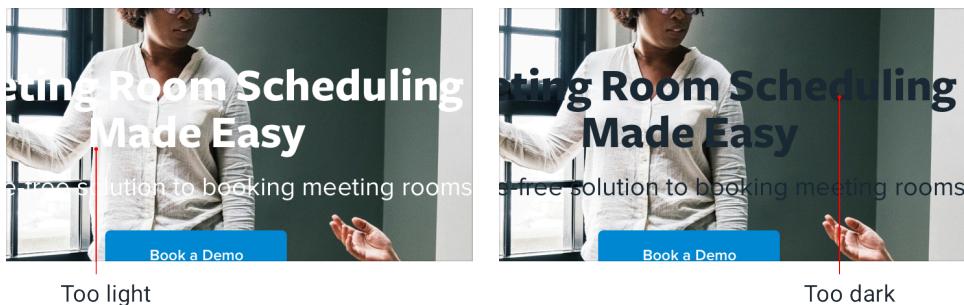
Ever tried to slap a headline on a big hero image, only to find that no matter what color you tried for the text, it was still hard to read?



That's because the problem isn't the text, it's the image.

The problem with background images

Photos can be very dynamic, with a lot of really light areas, and a lot of really dark areas. White text might look great in the dark areas, but it gets lost in the light areas. Dark text looks great in the light areas, but gets lost in the dark areas.



To solve this problem, you need to *reduce* the dynamics in the image to make the contrast between the text and the background more consistent.

Add an overlay

One way to increase the overall text contrast is to add a semi-transparent overlay to the background image.

The image shows a landing page with a semi-transparent black overlay. The overlay has a transparency value of hsla(0, 0%, 0%, .55). It covers the entire background image of three women in an office. Overlaid on the image is the text "Meeting Room Scheduling Made Easy" and "A hassle-free solution to booking meeting rooms". A blue button at the bottom is labeled "Book a Demo". A green circular icon with a checkmark is located in the top-left corner of the page.

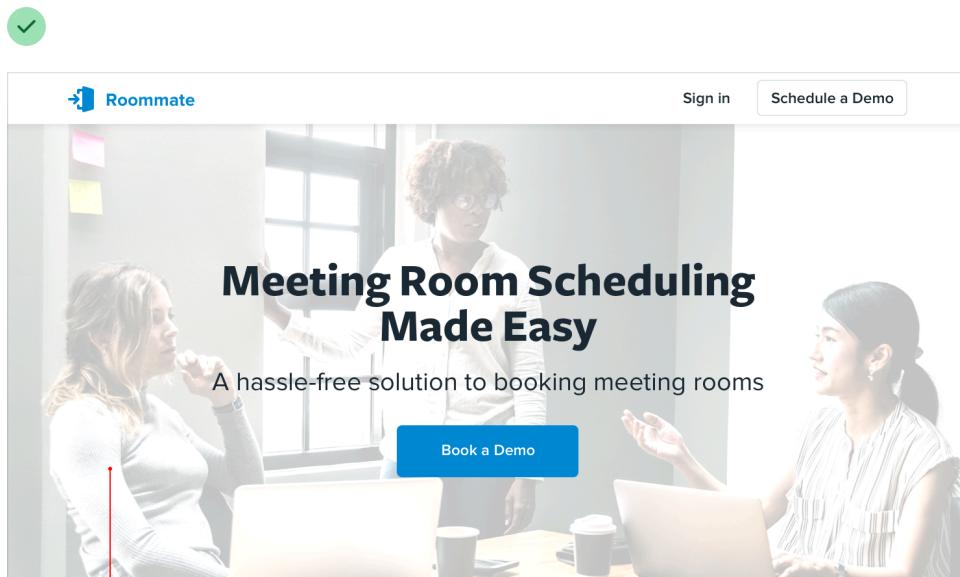
background-color: hsla(0, 0%, 0%, .55);

A black overlay will tone down the light areas and help light text stand out, while a white overlay will brighten up the dark areas and help dark text stand out.

Lower the image contrast

One of the compromises you make when using an overlay is that you're lightening or darkening the *whole* image, not just the problem areas.

If you want more control, another solution is to lower the contrast of the image itself:



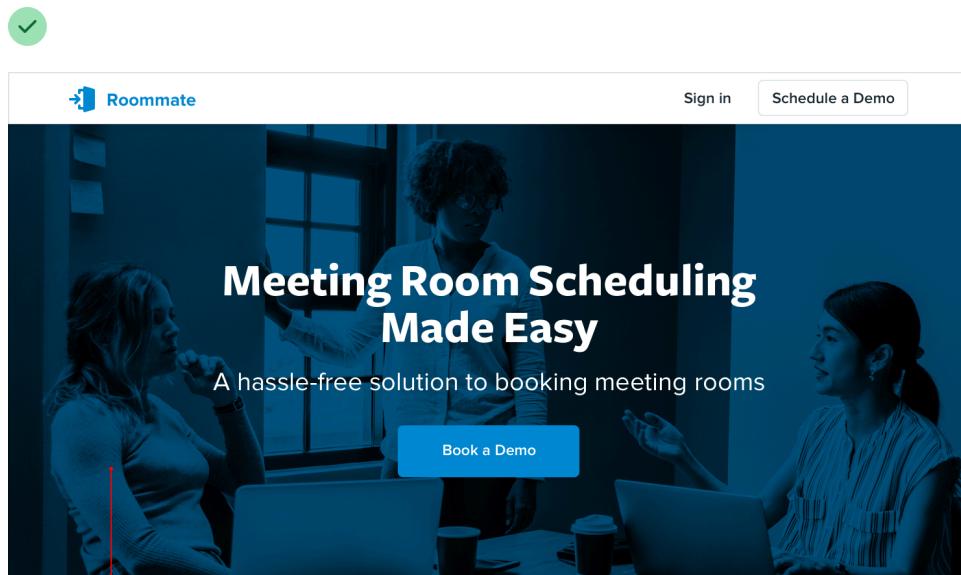
Lowering the contrast will change how light or dark the image feels overall, so make sure to adjust the brightness to compensate.

Colorize the image

Another way to help text stand out against an image is to colorize the image with a single color.

Some photo editing software includes this as a first-class feature, but if yours doesn't, you can create this effect in three steps:

1. **Lower the image contrast**, to balance things out a bit.
2. **Desaturate the image**, to remove any existing color.
3. **Add a solid fill**, using the “multiply” blend mode.



Color: #035581

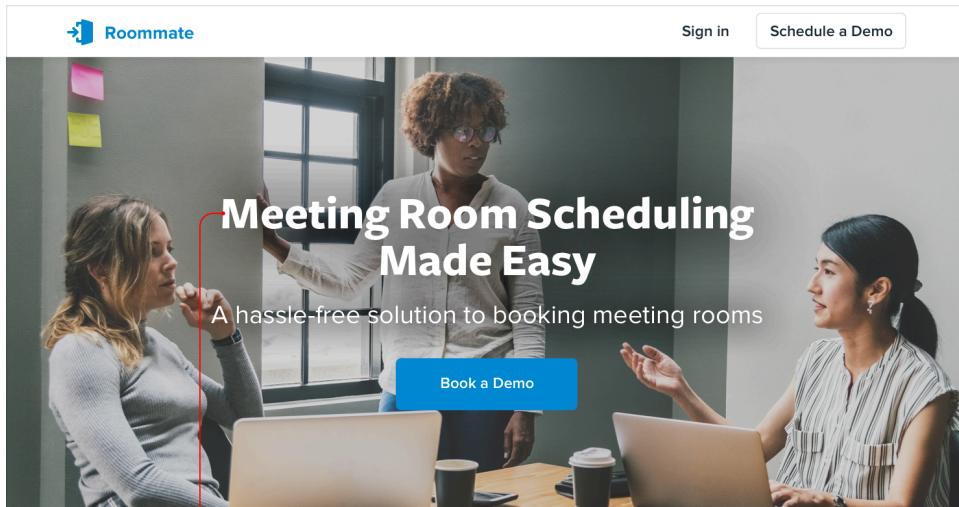
Blending mode: Multiply

This can also be a great way to make a background image pair more nicely with your existing brand colors.

Add a text shadow

If you want to preserve a bit more of the dynamics in a background image, a text shadow can be a great way to increase contrast only where you need it most.

You want it to look more like a subtle glow than an actual shadow, so use a large blur radius and don't add any kind of offset.



```
text-shadow: 0 0 50px hsla(0, 0%, 0%, .4);
```

It's still a good idea to reduce the overall image contrast, but combining that with a text shadow means you can reduce it a little less.

Everything has an intended size

Everyone knows that scaling bitmap images to larger than their original size is a bad idea — they immediately feel “fuzzy” and lose their definition.



But that's not the only way you can go wrong with scaling, even when you think you're playing it safe.

Don't scale up icons

If you're designing something that could use some large icons (*like maybe the “features” section of a landing page*), you might instinctively grab your favorite SVG icon set and bump up the size until they fit your needs.

They're vector images after all, so the quality isn't going to suffer if you increase the size, right?

A screenshot of a website featuring three service offerings. Each offering includes an icon, a title, and a brief description. The first offering is "Automatic rebalancing" with the subtitle "Adjust as the market changes". The second offering is "Dividend reinvesting" with the subtitle "Earn more as you grow". The third offering is "Advice from Advisors" with the subtitle "Advisors are available".

| | | |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Automatic rebalancing Adjust as the market changes | Dividend reinvesting Earn more as you grow | Advice from Advisors are available |
|---|---|------------------------------------|

While it's true that vector images won't degrade in quality when you increase their size, icons that were drawn at 16–24px are never going to look very professional when you blow them up to 3x or 4x their intended size. They lack detail, and always feel disproportionately "chunky".



Intended size (24px)



Scaled up (48px)



Drawn for large sizes (48px)

If small icons are all you've got, try enclosing them inside another shape and giving the shape a background color:



Scaled up (48px)



Larger but not scaled (48px)

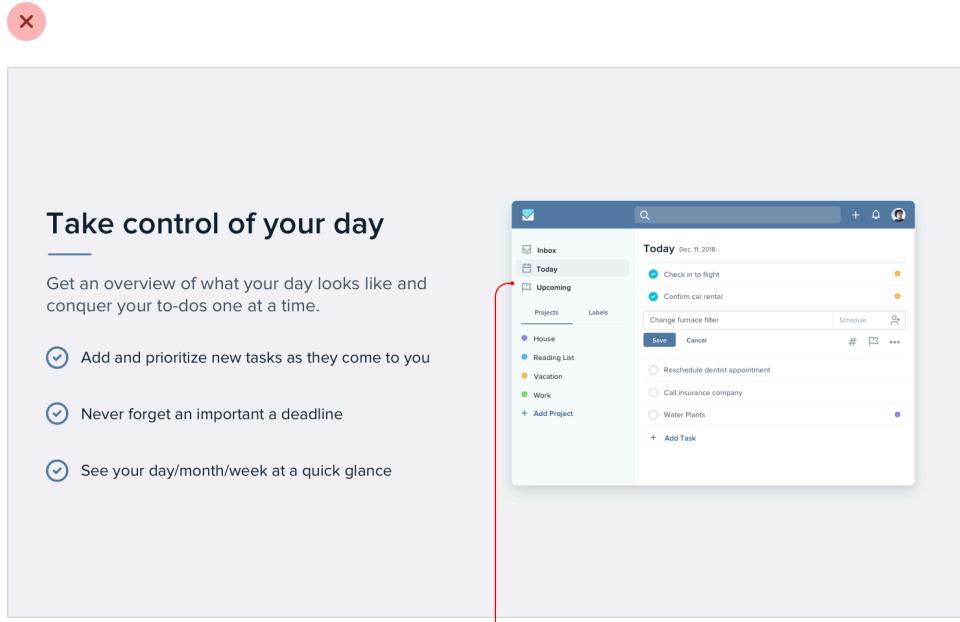
This lets you keep the actual icon closer to its intended size, while still filling the larger space.

A screenshot of a mobile application interface. At the top, there is a dark blue header bar with a green circular icon containing a white checkmark. Below the header, there are three horizontal cards, each featuring a small circular icon with a white outline and some descriptive text. The first card, on the left, has a green icon and the text "Automatic rebalancing" followed by "Adjust as the market changes". The second card, in the middle, has a purple icon and the text "Dividend reinvesting" followed by "Earn more as you grow". The third card, on the right, has an orange icon and the text "Advice from" followed by "Advisors ar".

Don't scale down screenshots

Say you want to include a screenshot of your app on that same features page.

If you take a full-size screenshot and shrink it by 70% to make it fit, you'll end up with an image that's trying to cram way too much detail into far too little space.

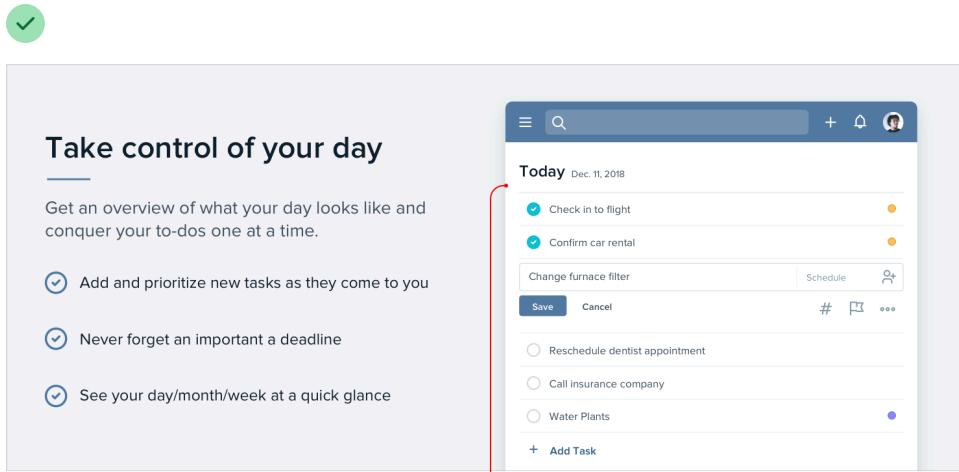


Details are distorted and hard to read

The 16px font in your app becomes a 4px font in your screenshot, and visitors will be squinting with their eyeballs two inches from the screen, struggling to make out what all that text says.

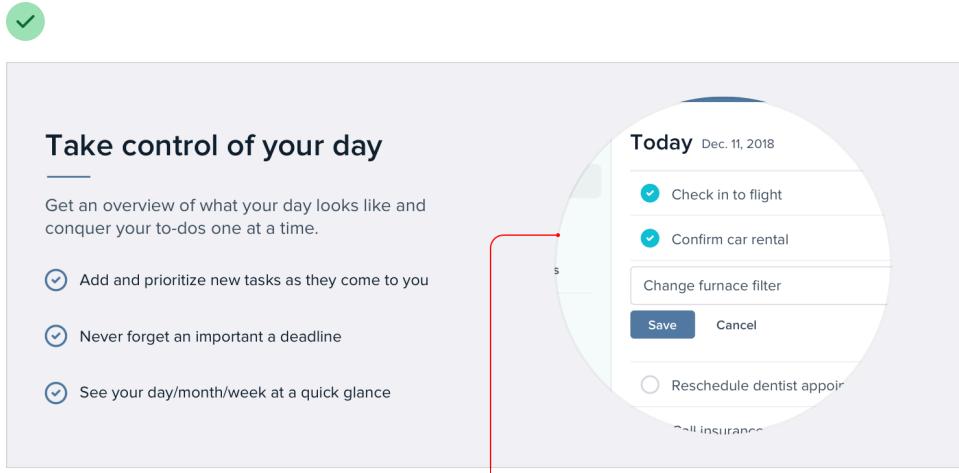
If you want to include a detailed screenshot in your design, take the screenshot at a smaller screen size (*like maybe your tablet layout*) and save a

lot of space for it so you don't have to shrink it as much:



Screenshot of smaller device layout

Or consider taking just a partial screenshot, so you can display it in less space without needing to scale it down:



Screenshot of specific area

If you really need to fit a whole-app screenshot in a tight space, try drawing a simplified version of the UI with details removed and small text replaced with simple lines:

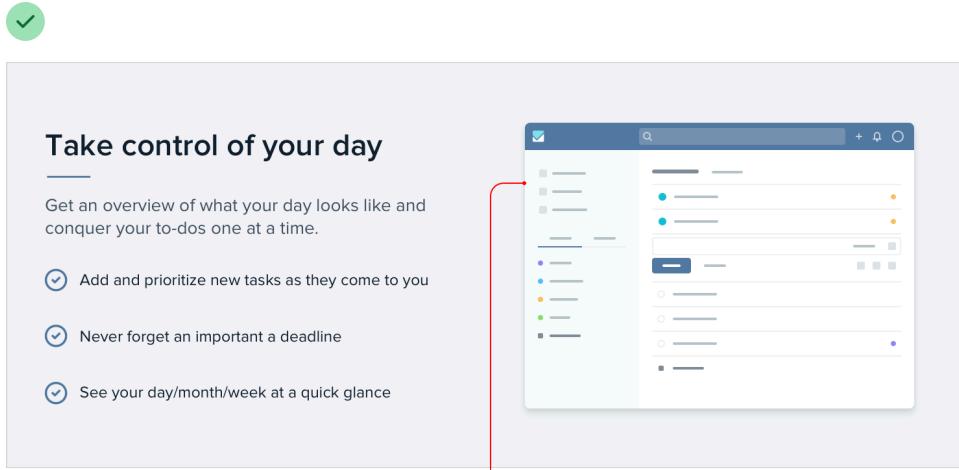


Illustration of simplified UI

It'll still communicate the big-picture design without tempting visitors to try and make out all of the details.

Don't scale down icons, either

Just as icons drawn to be used at 16px look chunky when you scale them up, icons intended to be used at larger sizes look choppy and fuzzy when you scale them down.

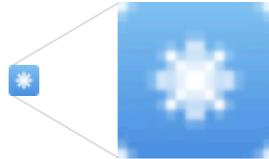
The most extreme example of this are favicons, those little icons you see next to the page title in a browser tab.

If you try to shrink a logo drawn at 128px down to favicon size, it all turns to

mush as the browser tries its best to render all of that detail in a tiny 16px square:



Original Icon



Icon Shrunk

A better approach is to redraw a super simplified version of the logo at the target size, so you control the compromises instead of leaving it up to the browser:



Original Icon



Simplified icon



Simplified icon shrunk

Beware user-uploaded content

When you're depending on user-uploaded images, you don't have the luxury of fine-tuning contrast, carefully adjusting colors, or cropping the perfect frame.

While you'll always be at your users' mercy to some extent, there are a few things you can do to make sure their content doesn't completely undermine your design.

Control the shape and size

Displaying user-uploaded images at their intrinsic aspect ratio can really throw off a layout, especially if there are a lot of images on the screen at once.



pleasing backyard barbecue...

By Hank Douglas

All-American Cheese Burger

★★★★★

The All-American Cheeseburger has certain...

By Kevin Francis



Helen's Healthy Beef Burger

★★★★★

This burger is not only good for you, but it's actually quite...

By Helen Pearson

Ultimate Double-Decker Burger

Southern Fried Chicken Sandwich

★★★★★

Try our quick and easy buttermilk chicken...

By Nicholas Denver



Homemade Cheese Fatburger

★★★★★

Is there such thing as too much beef? If you think the answer...

By Stefan Hagon

Vegan Mushroom Bean Burger

★★★★★

Mushrooms are surprisingly similar in taste and texture...

By Lily Hart



Green Tomato Messy Burger

★★★★★

Green Tomatoes on a burger? What is this nonsense...

Instead of letting users wreak havoc on your page structure, center their images inside fixed containers, cropping out anything that doesn't fit.

✓

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| Hank's Juiciest Beef Burger ★★★★★ Here's your recipe for a crowd-pleasing backyard barbecue... By Hank Douglas | All-American Cheese Burger ★★★★★ The All-American Cheeseburger has certain... By Kevin Francis | Southern Fried Chicken Sandwich ★★★★★ Try our quick and easy buttermilk chicken... By Nicholas Denver | Vegan Mushroom Bean Burger ★★★★★ Mushrooms are surprisingly similar in taste and texture... By Lily Hart |
| Helen's Healthy Beef Burger ★★★★★ | Ultimate Double-Decker Burger ★★★★★ | Homemade Cheese Burger ★★★★★ | Green Tomato Messy Burger ★★★★★ |

This is really easy to do with CSS these days by making the image a background image, and setting the `background-size` property to `cover`.

Hank's Juiciest Beef Burger
★★★★★
Here's your recipe for a crowd-pleasing backyard barbecue...
By Hank Douglas

background-size: cover;

Prevent background bleed

When a user provides an image with a background color that's similar to the background in your UI, the image and the background can bleed together, causing the image to lose its shape.

×

| | |
|--|--|
|  Kyle Rivera 6:42 PM Sure! 8:30pm works great |  Laura Matthews But fleece is what I am after A pull over is nice. I don't know if they have any nice v I didn't really look but I can |
|  Rose Peterson ✓ Sun That's really funny! Did you see the photo of Matt? |  Michael Henry They only have large sizes available I'm pretty sure you're a medium? Amirite? Did you like that one vest I showed you? <small>Laura Matthews</small> |
|  Will Pearson Wed What was the name of that song you played the other night? | |

Poor Contrast

Instead of trying to solve this with a border, try using a subtle inner box shadow:

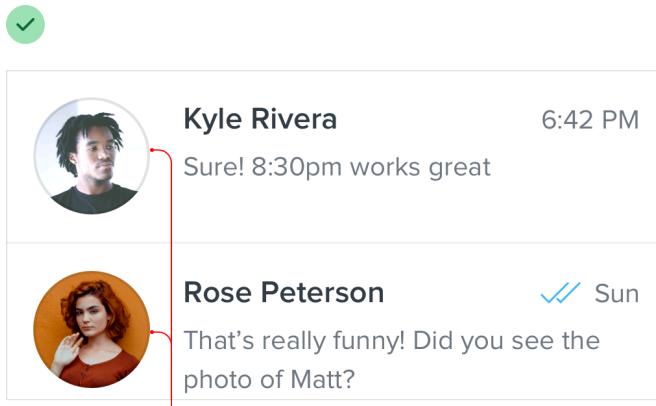
✗

| | |
|--|--|
|  Kyle Rivera Sure! 8:30pm works great |  Kyle Rivera Sure! 8:30pm works great |
|  Rose Peterson That's really funny! Did y photo of Matt? |  Rose Peterson That's really funny! Did y photo of Matt? |

border: 2px solid hsl(212, 12%, 72%); border: 2px solid hsl(212, 12%, 72%);

Borders will often clash with the colors in the image, while most people will barely even realize the shadow is there.

If you don't like the slight "Inset" look you get from using a box shadow, a semi-transparent inner border works great, too.



```
box-shadow: inset 0 0 0 1px hsla(0,0%,0%, .1);
```


Finishing Touches

Supercharge the defaults

You don't always have to add new elements to a design to add flare — there are a lot of ways to liven up a page by "supercharging" what's already there.

For example, if your design includes a bulleted list, try replacing the bullets with icons:



Everything you need in one place

- Create your own online presence
- Manage all of your products and inventory
- Effortlessly complete order fulfillment



Everything you need in one place

- ✓ Create your own online presence
- ✓ Manage all of your products and inventory
- ✓ Effortlessly complete order fulfillment

Checkmarks and arrows are great generic choices for a lot of situations, but you can also use something more specific to your content, like a padlock icon for a list of security-related features:



Protecting your customers and income

- Machine learning monitors suspicious transactions
- No fee when your customer disputes a payment



Protecting your customers and income

- 🔒 Machine learning monitors suspicious transactions
- 🔒 No fee when your customer disputes a payment

Similarly, if you're working on a testimonial try "promoting" the quotes into visual elements by increasing the size and changing the color:



"This app does for me in seconds what used to be a full day of work. Now I can spend more time meeting with my customers and focus on my sales."

— Daniel Bowen, Founder of Bowen Group



“ *This app does for me in seconds what used to be a full day of work. Now I can spend more time meeting with my customers and focus on my sales.* **”**

— Daniel Bowen, Founder of Bowen Group

Links are another great candidate for special styling. You can do something as simple as changing the color and font weight, or something as fancy as a thick and colorful custom underline that partially overlaps the text:



Schedule a consultation

Visit our [locations page](#) to find the nearest distributor and schedule a consultation today!



Schedule a consultation

Visit our [locations page](#) to find the nearest distributor and schedule a consultation today!



Schedule a consultation

Visit our [locations page](#) to find the nearest distributor and schedule a consultation today!

If you're working on a form, using custom checkboxes and radio buttons is an easy way to add some color to the design:

The image shows two side-by-side form snippets. The left snippet is marked with a red 'X' in a circle at the top left, indicating it's incorrect or undesirable. The right snippet is marked with a green checkmark in a circle at the top left, indicating it's correct or desirable.

Left Snippet (Incorrect):

- Do you own a business?
- What type of business to you run?**
- Service Business**
The products you provide are intangible (*no physical form*).
- Merchandising Business**
You buy products at wholesale price and sell them at retail price.
- Manufacturing Business**

Right Snippet (Correct):

- Do you own a business?
- What type of business to you run?**
- Service Business**
The products you provide are intangible (*no physical form*).
- Merchandising Business**
You buy products at wholesale price and sell them at retail price.
- Manufacturing Business**

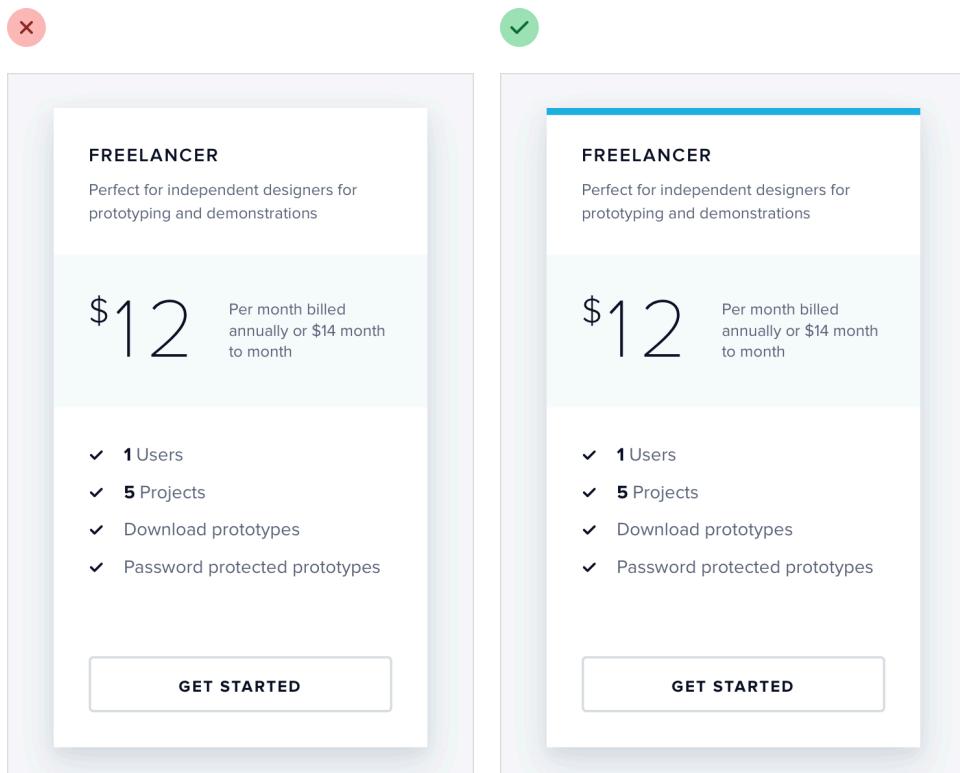
Just using one of your brand colors for the selected states instead of the browser defaults is often enough to take something from feeling boring to feeling polished and well-designed.

Add color with accent borders

If you're not a graphic designer, how do you add that dash of visual flair to your UI that other designs get from beautiful photography or colorful illustrations?

One simple trick that can make a big difference is to add colorful accent borders to parts of your interface that would otherwise feel a bit bland.

For example, across the top of a card:



...or to highlight active navigation items:



The screenshot shows a horizontal navigation bar with four items: "Dashboard", "Orders", "Products", and "Discounts". The "Products" item is highlighted with a blue underline, indicating it is the active or selected item. To the left of the bar, there is a red circular icon with a white "X" inside.



This screenshot is identical to the one above, showing the same navigation bar with the "Products" item highlighted by a blue underline. A green circular icon with a white checkmark is positioned to the left of the bar.

...or along the side of an alert message:



The screenshot shows an alert message box with a red border. In the top-left corner, there is a red circular icon with a white "X" inside. The message text reads: "Pro user feature: This is a feature available to Pro users at an additional cost. Check out our [pricing information](#) to learn more and activate a free trial."



This screenshot is identical to the one above, showing the same alert message box with a green border instead of a red one. The green circular icon with a white checkmark is in the top-left corner, and the message text is the same: "Pro user feature: This is a feature available to Pro users at an additional cost. Check out our [pricing information](#) to learn more and activate a free trial."

...or as a short accent underneath a headline:



Here to help every step of the way

Think of us as your very own help desk, with free, around-the-clock support. Contact us anytime, we're here to help 24 hours, 7 days a week.



Here to help every step of the way

Think of us as your very own help desk, with free, around-the-clock support. Contact us anytime, we're here to help 24 hours, 7 days a week.

...or even across the top of your entire layout:



FutureWeb is a conference that explores some of the new ideas tools, and technologies are happening in web design. This 2 day event features amazing workshops and sessions led by the best in the business covering topics including HTML/CSS, Javascript, UI/UX Design, and much, much



FutureWeb is a conference that explores some of the new ideas tools, and technologies are happening in web design. This 2 day event features amazing workshops and sessions led by the best in the business covering topics including HTML/CSS, Javascript, UI/UX Design, and much, much

It doesn't take any graphic design talent to add a colored rectangle to your UI, and it can go a long way towards making something feel more "designed."

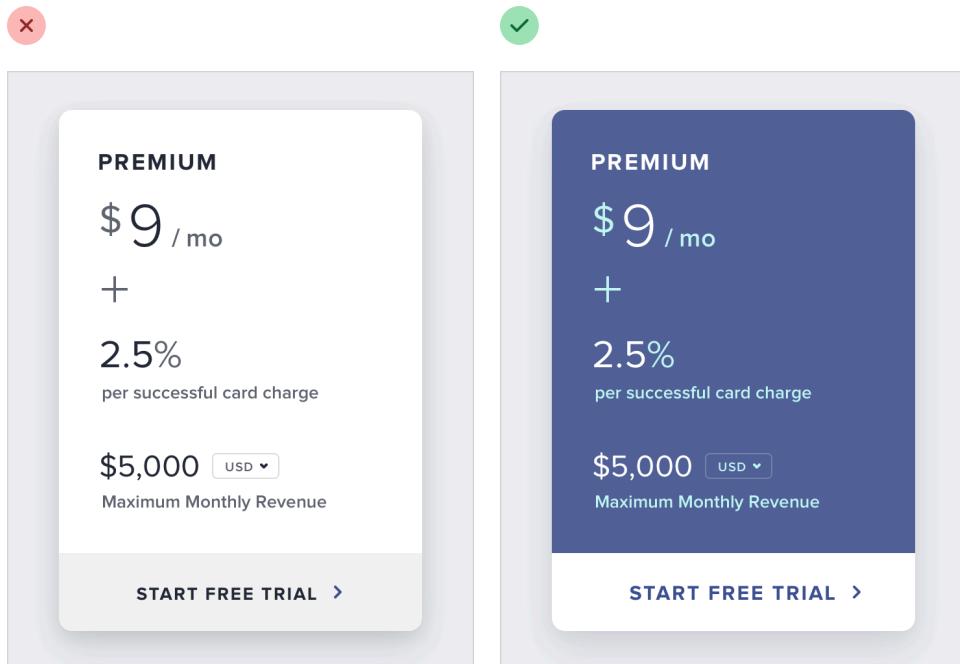
Decorate your backgrounds

Even if you do a great job with hierarchy, spacing, and typography, sometimes a design will still feel a little bit plain.

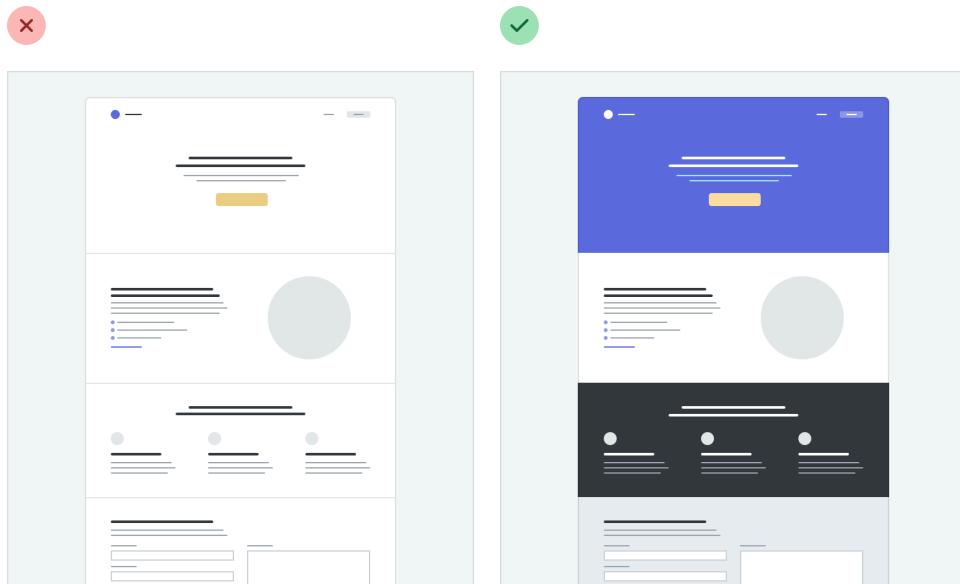
A great way to break up some of the monotony without drastically altering the design is to add some excitement to a few of your backgrounds.

Change the background color

One way to add some excitement to a background is to simply change the color.



This works great for emphasizing an individual panel, as well as for adding some distinction between entire page sections.



For a more energetic look, you could even use a slight gradient:

Details we're sweating

Full-time control for two
Seamless mouse and keyboard control for both parties.

Snappy intera...
An obsession w...
(extra not easy,

Command-line friendly

Pluginability

For best results, use two hues that are no more than about 30° apart.

Use a repeating pattern

Another approach is to add a subtle repeatable pattern, like this one from Hero Patterns:



Hi, I'm Paul! I'm a web designer from Halifax, Nova Scotia. I've been designing websites for over 10 years working with small startups and large corporations.

You don't have to necessarily repeat it across the entire background, either — a pattern designed to repeat along a single edge can look great, too.

| | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Locations | Careers | Referral Program | Newsletter |
| Plans & Pricing | Press | CoSpace Magazine | Sign up for our newsletter. |
| Mission | Blog | Terms of Service | |
| Enterprise | FAQ | | Enter your email |
| Events | Broker Partnership | | |

A dark gray footer with a light gray dotted pattern at the bottom. A white input field with rounded corners is positioned on the right side of the footer, containing the placeholder text "Enter your email".

Keep the contrast between the background and the pattern pretty low to ensure readability.

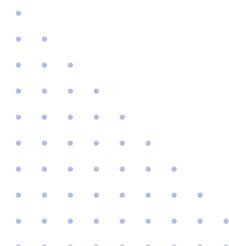
Add a simple shape or illustration

Instead of decorating an entire background, you can also try including an individual graphic or two in specific positions.

Simple geometric shapes work well for this:

Choosing the Perfect Tech Stack

ng 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’ll never use again, given the luxury of a blank canvas. And if you’re exploring the open source world, there’s probably a brand-spanking-new framework you’ve been itching to take for a spin.



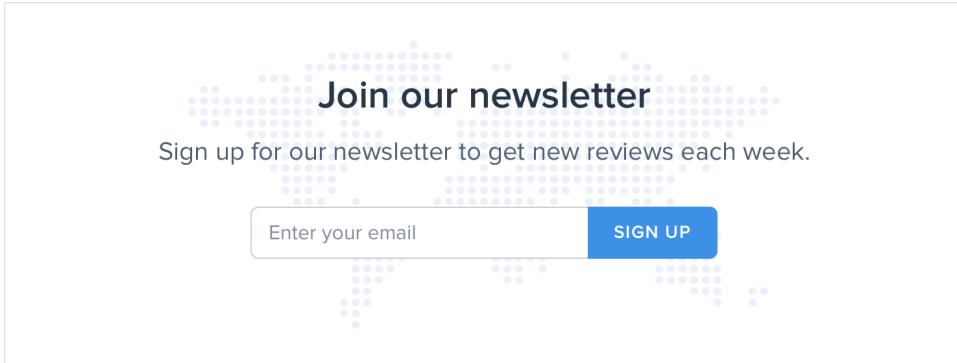
...as do small chunks of a repeatable pattern:

The screenshot shows a landing page with a wavy grey background on the left. The main title is "Simple Pricing". Below it, a subtext reads: "Our plans are designed to save you thousands of dollars compared to a traditional mutual fund." The central content area has three columns with rounded corners:

- ACCOUNT BALANCE**: \$65,000
- 25 YEAR SAVINGS**: \$25,000
- OUR FEE**: 0.4%

A horizontal slider with a circular arrow icon is positioned between the first two columns. Below the slider, the "Starter Plan" is on the left and the "Advanced Plan" is on the right. The overall design is clean and modern.

You can even do something more complex, like a simplified world map:

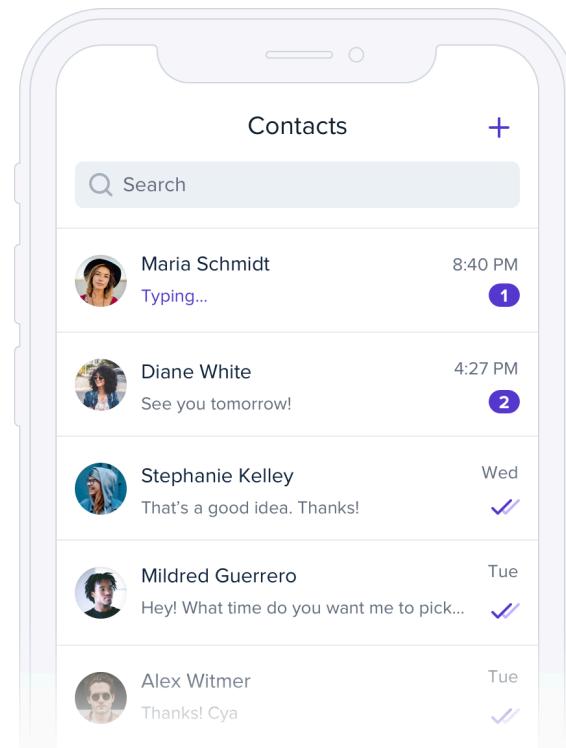


Just like with a full background pattern, it's best to keep the contrast low so nothing interferes with the content.

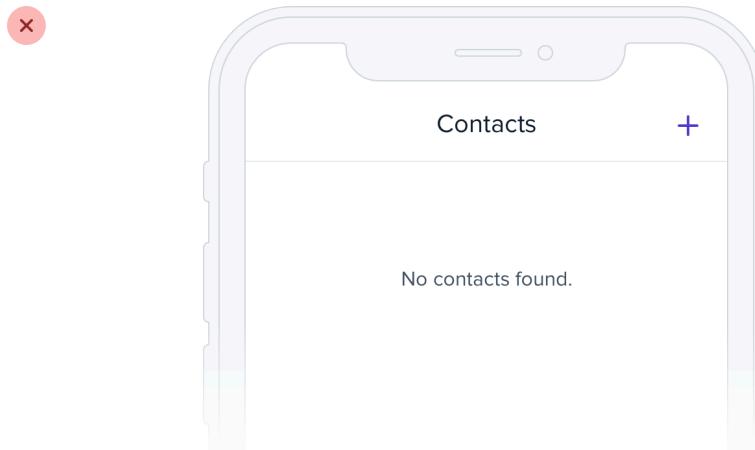
Don't overlook empty states

Imagine you're designing a new feature for an app you're working on.

You've spent a ton of time crafting the perfect realistic sample data, picking out usernames and avatars, and putting together a beautiful and electrifying screen.

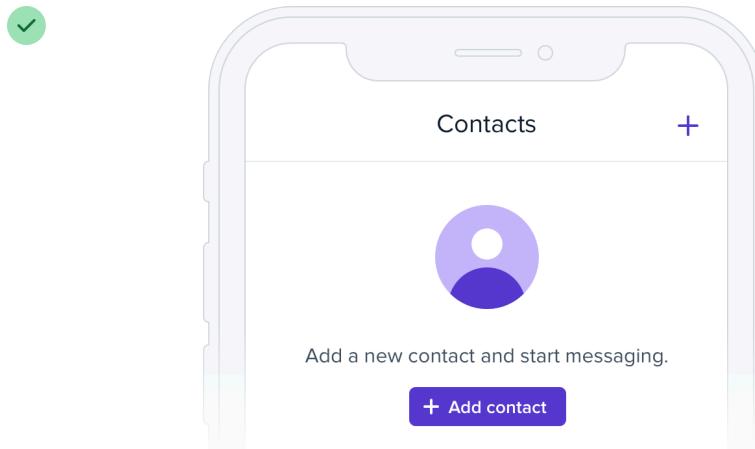


You code it all up and deploy it to production. But when an excited user clicks the new item in the nav, they see this:

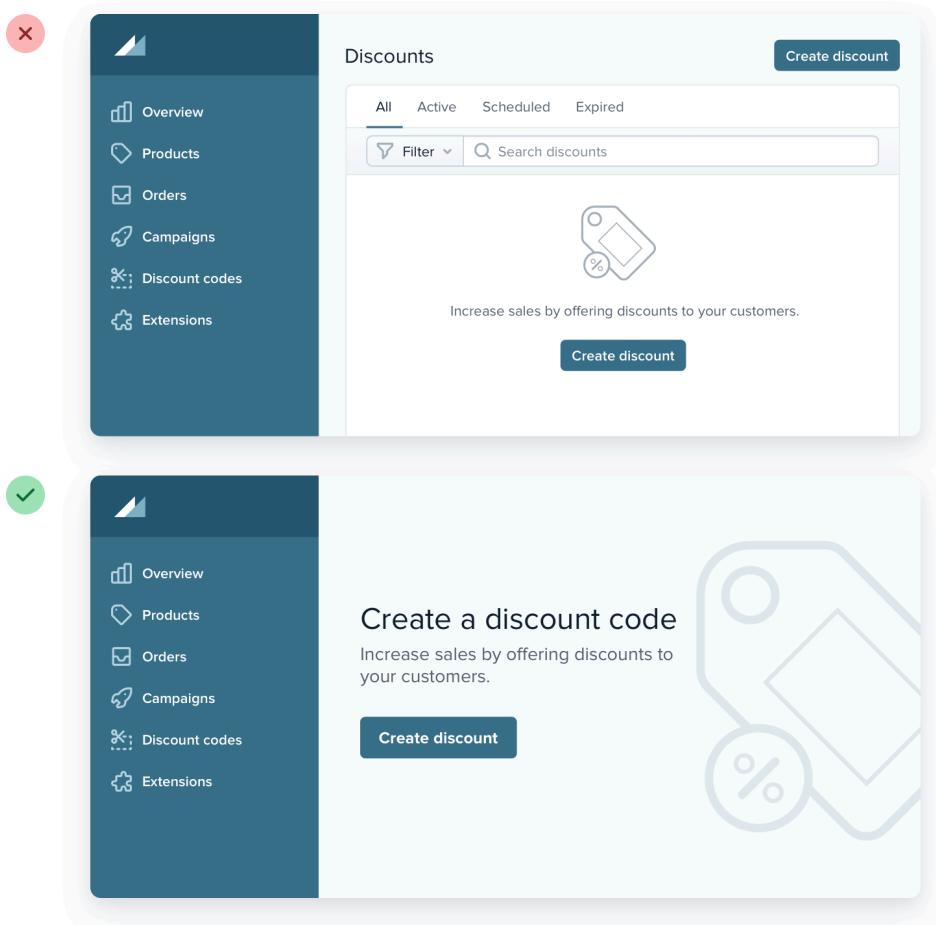


If you're designing something that depends on user-generated content, the empty state should be a priority, not an afterthought.

Try incorporating an image or illustration to grab the user's attention, and emphasizing the call-to-action to encourage them to take the next step:



If you're working on something that has a bunch of supporting UI like tabs or filters, consider hiding that stuff entirely. There's no point in presenting a bunch of actions that don't do anything until the user has created some content.



Empty states are a user's first interaction with a new product or feature. Use them as an opportunity to be interesting and exciting — don't settle for plain and boring.

Use fewer borders

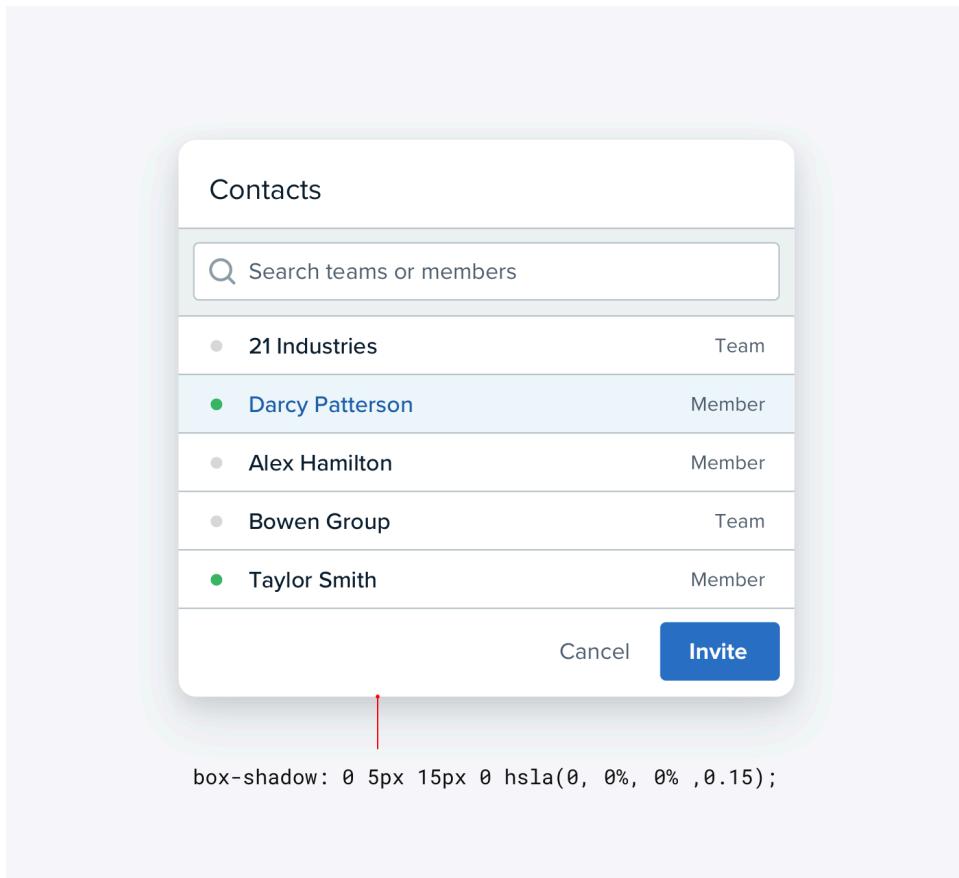
When you need to create separation between two elements, try to resist immediately reaching for a border.

The image shows a mobile application's contact list screen. The title 'Contacts' is at the top. Below it is a search bar with the placeholder 'Search teams or members'. The main content area contains a list of contacts, each with a small circular icon to its left indicating their status: grey for teams and green for members. The list includes: '21 Industries' (Team), 'Darcy Patterson' (Member, highlighted), 'Alex Hamilton' (Member), 'Bowen Group' (Team), and 'Taylor Smith' (Member). At the bottom of the list are two buttons: 'Cancel' and a blue 'Invite' button.

While borders are a great way to distinguish two elements from one another, they aren't the only way, and using too many of them can make your design feel busy and cluttered.

Use a box shadow

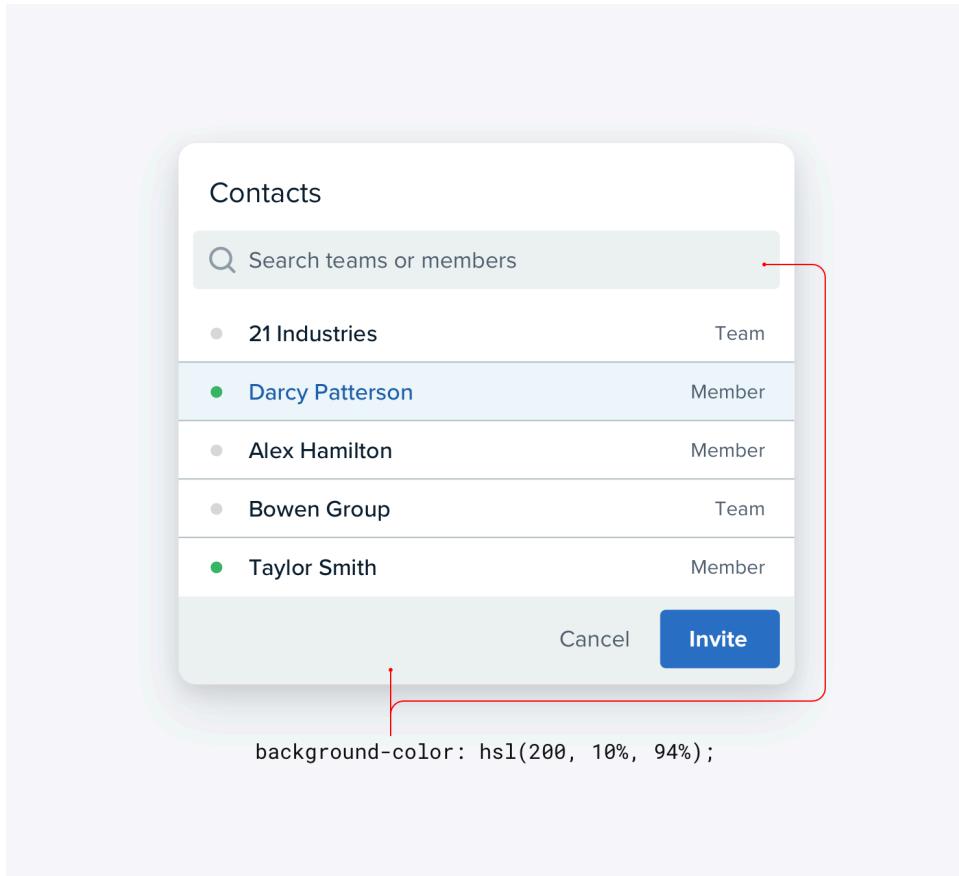
Box shadows do a great job of outlining an element like a border would, but can be more subtle and accomplish the same goal without being as distracting.



This approach works best when the element you are applying the box shadow to is not the same color as the background.

Use two different background colors

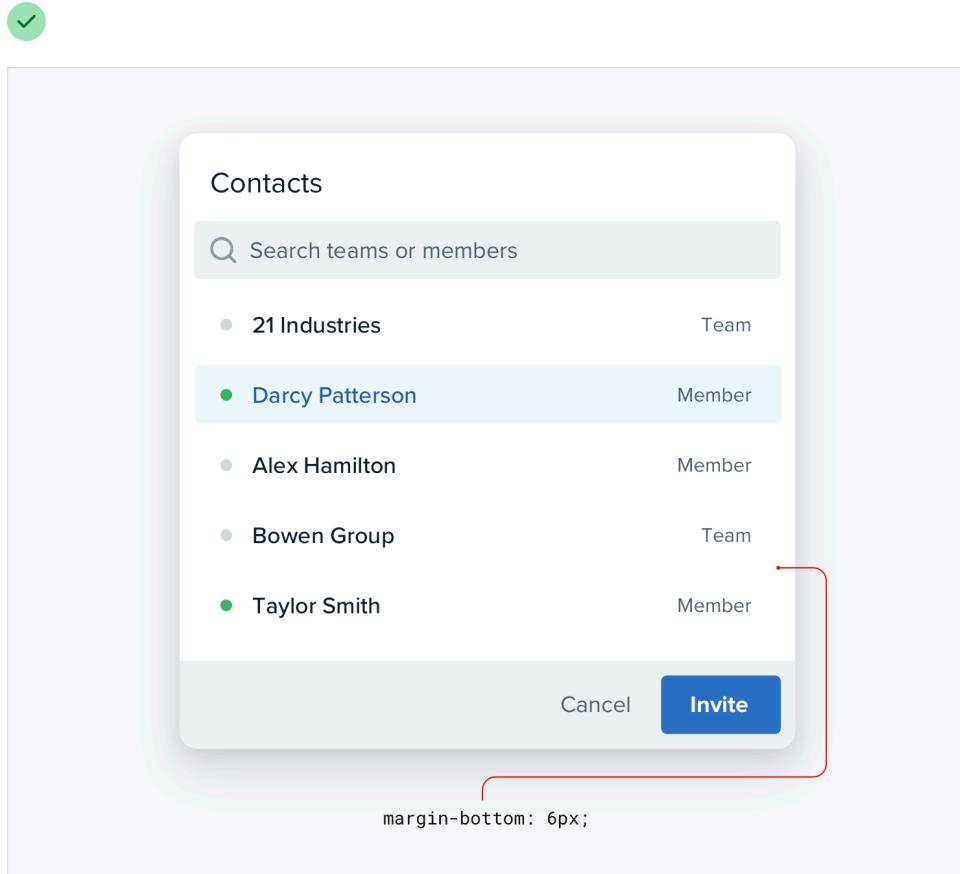
Giving adjacent elements slightly different background colors is usually all you need to create distinction between them.



If you're already using different background colors in addition to a border, try removing the border; you might not need it.

Add extra spacing

What better way to create separation between elements than to simply increase the separation?

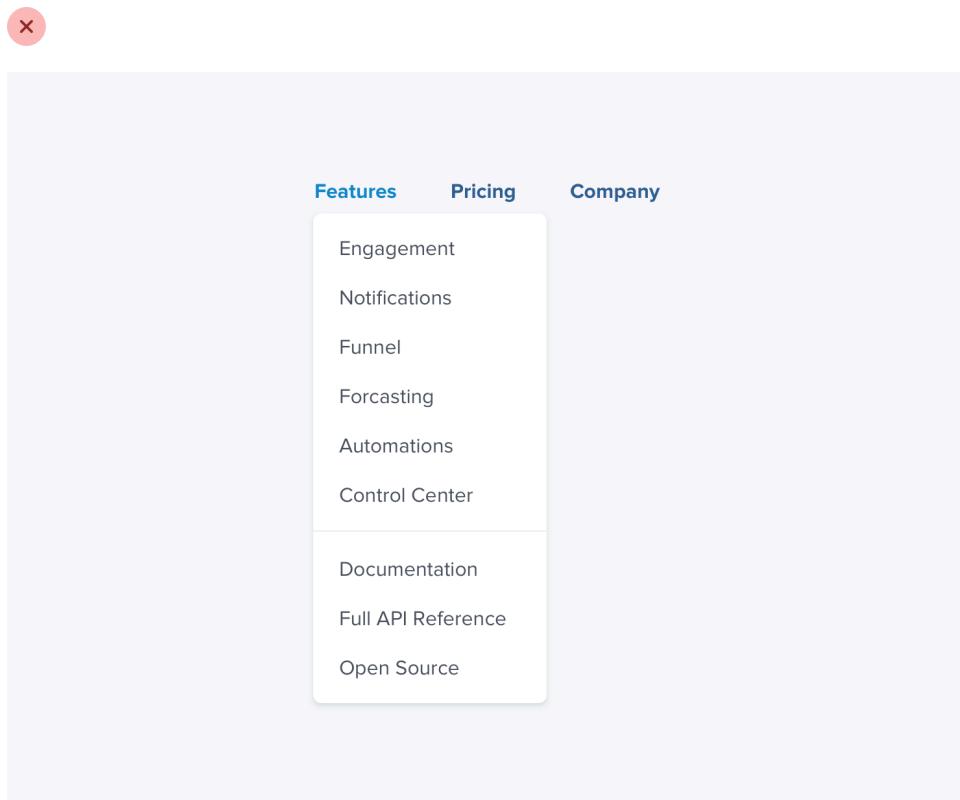


Spacing things further apart is a great way to create distinction between groups of elements without introducing any new UI at all.

Think outside the box

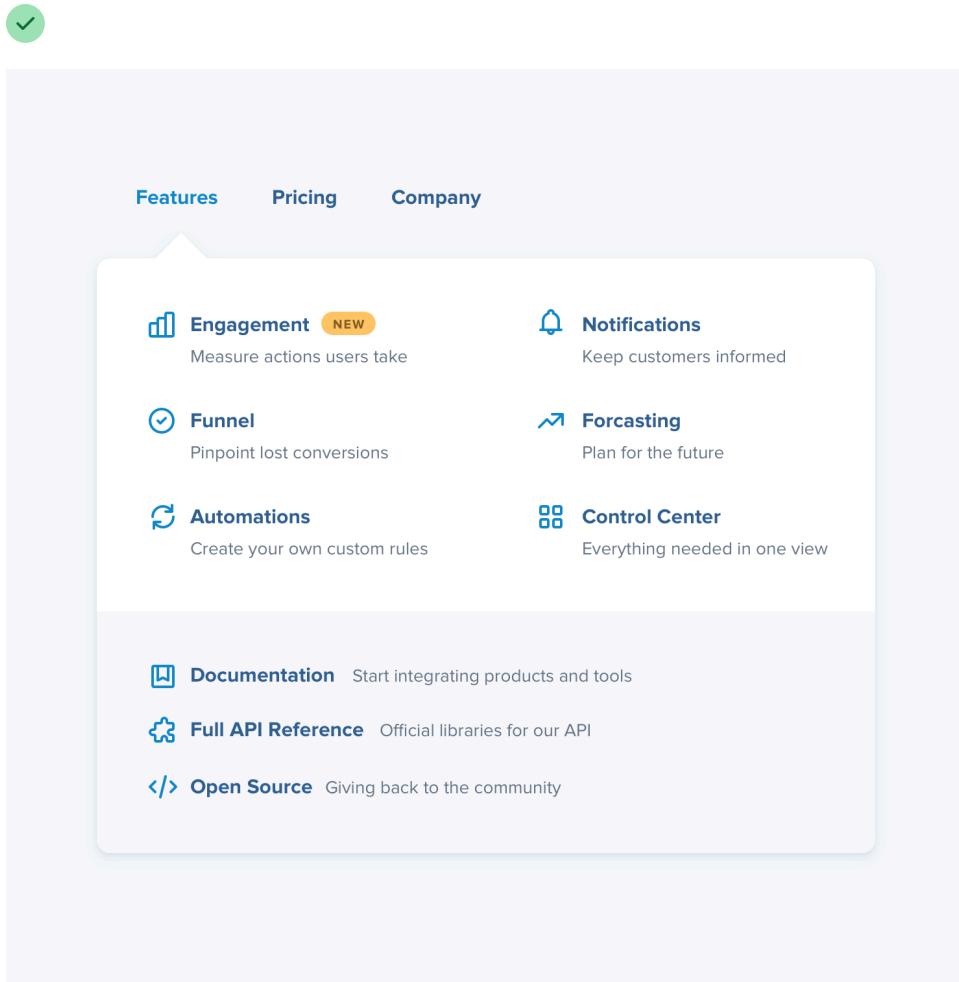
Most people have a lot of preconceived notions about how certain components are supposed to look. But just because we've been conditioned to believe that there's only one way to design a particular component, doesn't mean it's true.

For example, picture a dropdown menu. You're probably picturing a white box with a bit of a drop shadow and a list of links stacked inside of it:



But who says a dropdown needs to be a boring list of links? It's just a floating box on the screen, you can do anything you want with it.

Break it into sections, use multiple columns, add supporting text or colorful icons — do something fun with it!



And don't just stop at dropdowns; what about something like a table?

When you imagine a table, you probably think of columns that each contain one specific piece of data:



| NAME | ROLE | POLICY | POLICY TYPE | LOCATION | STATUS | ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------|----------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------|
| Molly Sanders | VP of Sales | \$20,000 | All-inclusive Policy | Denver, CO | Approved | ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ |
| Michael Roberts | Advisory Board | \$5,000 | Basic Policy | New York, NY | Approved | ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ |
| Devin Childs | Marketing Manager | \$5,000 | Basic Policy | Chicago, IL | Awaiting Approval | ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ |

Tables don't have to work this way, though — if a column doesn't need to be sortable, there's no reason you can't combine it with a related column and introduce some interesting hierarchy:



| NAME | POLICY | LOCATION | STATUS | ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------|
| Molly Sanders VP of Sales | \$20,000 All-inclusive Policy | Denver, CO | Approved | ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ |
| Michael Roberts Advisory Board | \$5,000 Basic Policy | New York, NY | Approved | ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ |
| Devin Childs Marketing Manager | \$5,000 Basic Policy | Chicago, IL | Awaiting Approval | ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ |

Table content doesn't have to be plain text, either. Add images if it makes sense, or introduce some color to enrich the existing data:



| NAME | POLICY | LOCATION | STATUS | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------|
| Molly Sanders VP of Sales | \$20,000 All-inclusive Policy | Denver, CO | Approved | • • • |
| Michael Roberts Advisory Board | \$5,000 Basic Policy | New York, NY | Approved | • • • |
| Devin Childs Marketing Manager | \$5,000 Basic Policy | Chicago, IL | Awaiting Approval | • • • |

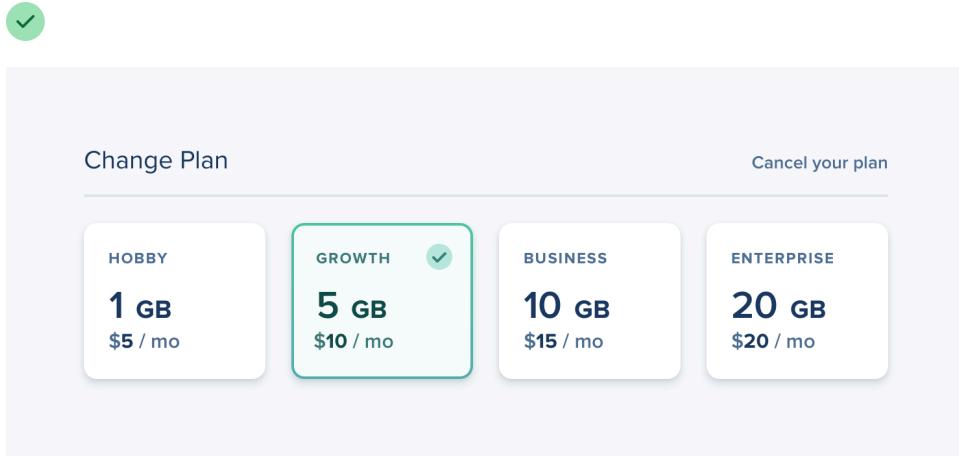
How about radio buttons? There's nothing more boring than a stack of labels with little circles next to them.



Change Plan Cancel your plan

- Hobby - 1 GB (\$5/mo)
- Growth - 5 GB (\$10/mo)
- Business - 10 GB (\$15/mo)
- Enterprise - 20 GB (\$20/mo)

If a set of radio buttons are an important part of the UI you're designing, try something like selectable cards instead:



Don't let your existing beliefs hold back your designs — constraints are powerful but sometimes a bit of freedom is just what you need to take an interface to the next level.

Leveling Up

Leveling up

Hopefully after reading this book you feel much more confident in your ability to make something look awesome, without relying on a designer. But even though we've tried our best to cram in every good idea we could possibly think of, there will always be more out there to learn.

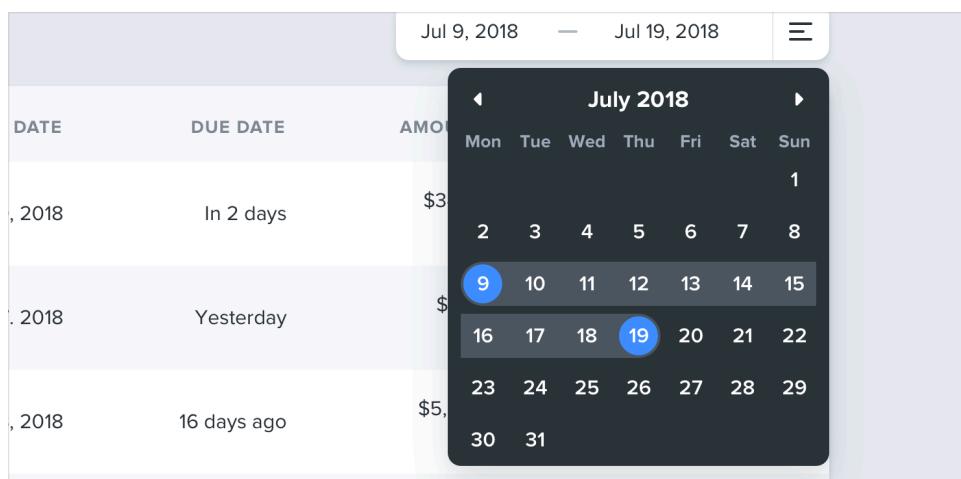
Here are two of the best ways you can continue to hone your skills, and add new tools to your toolbelt.

Look for decisions you wouldn't have made

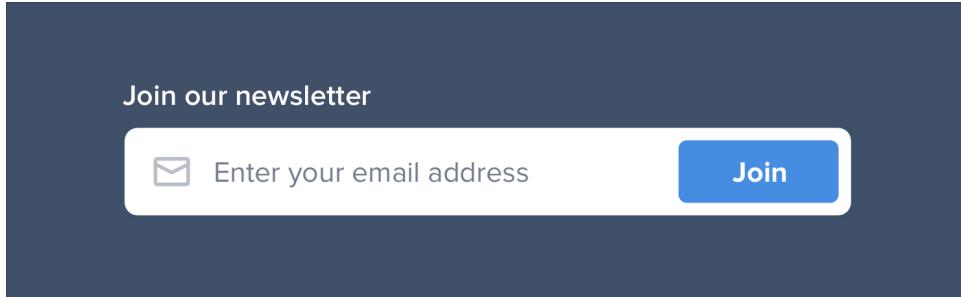
Whenever you stumble across a design you really like, ask yourself:

"Did the designer do anything here that I never would have thought to do?"

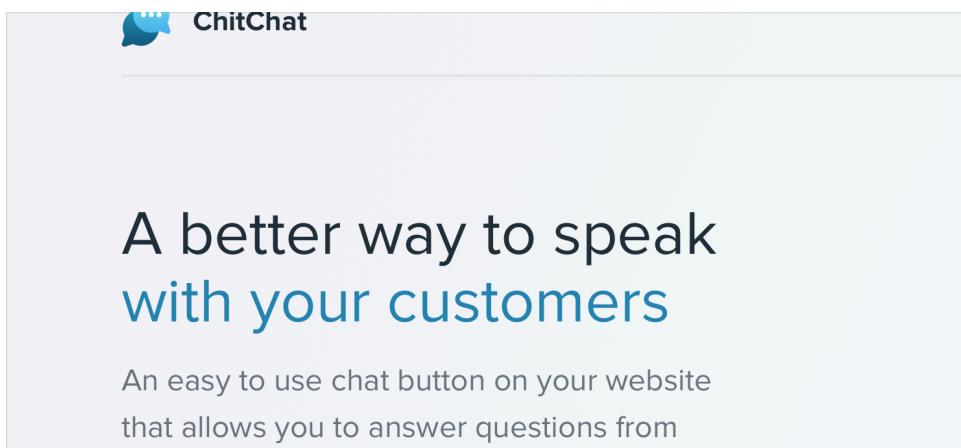
Maybe it's the way they inverted the background color on a datepicker:



...or the way they positioned a button within a text input instead of on the outside:



...or something as simple as using two different font colors for a headline:



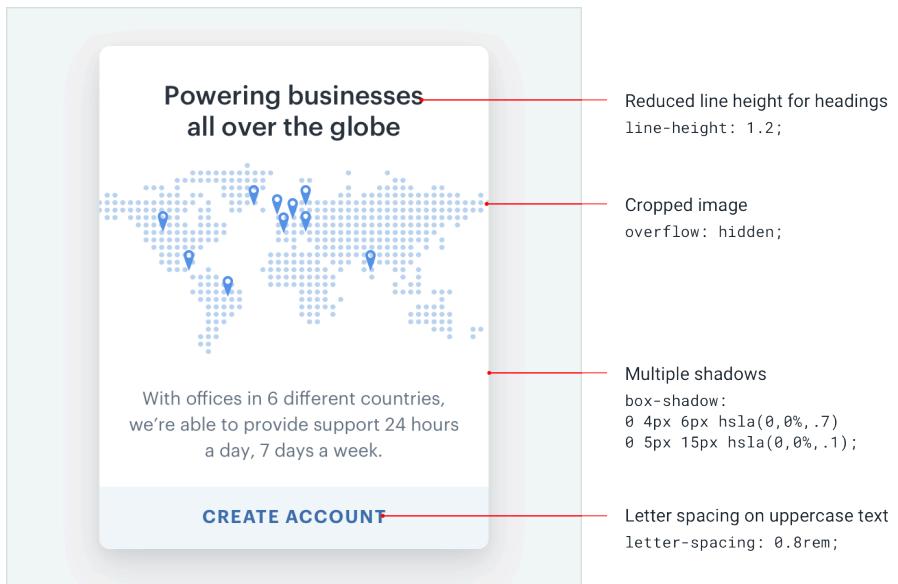
Paying attention to these sorts of unintuitive decisions is a great way to discover new ideas that you can apply to your own designs.

Rebuild your favorite interfaces

The absolute best way to notice the little details that make a design look

really polished is to recreate that design from scratch, *without peeking at the developer tools*.

When you're trying to figure out why your version looks different than the original, you'll discover tricks like "reduce your line height for headings", "add letter-spacing to uppercase text", or "combine multiple shadows" all on your own.



By continually studying the work that inspires you with a careful eye, you'll be picking up design tricks for years to come.

— Adam Wathan & Steve Schoger