Figma

Design for Developers

Wireframes and Prototypes

Wireframes and Prototypes

Before you invest a lot of time in a final design, it is good to explore your options first. This calls for a lower fidelity, lower investment approach that can be worked more quickly and allows for more experimentation.

That means wireframes and prototypes!

Wireframes are typically very, very simple sketches or outlines for what something *may* look like. These are often sketches or digital illustrations that take seconds-to-minutes to get a general idea or feel across.

A step up from wireframes are **prototypes**. These are usually a little more detailed, and sometimes are interactive—either a basic presentation or a skeleton of the website/application that lets you simply click through the screens.

It is important to consider the user experience on all popular devices. Content and functionality afforded to the desktop design, should also be present and equally available on tablet and phone-sized designs.

Wireframes

During the earliest stages of your project, you'll want to "scope out the competition." Have a look at similar websites and/or applications, see what they do right and what they do wrong.

If they do something right, make a note and see if you can find a way to accommodate the same good outcome. Whatever they've done poorly, see if you can think of ways to improve upon their design or at least minimize any undesirable user experience.

Some create an inspiration collage, a mood board, gather screenshots, and take notes of what they like from other projects to get a feel for the approach they may want to take for their design and layout.

Once you have some ideas, it is time to begin penciling in some very quick, brief, messy wireframes. Get some ideas on paper. If you have a team, run some of your ideas by them to see if they see any problems with the approach, or if they think it looks good so far.

Prototypes

After you've got some wireframes you like, it is time to kick it up a notch. Take a little more time laying out your idea, put some thought into how the user might experience the page. What is the main goal of the website or application? Make sure that goal gets ample visual attention to draw a user's interest.

During this refinement of your wireframes, try to engage in **rapid prototyping**. Try out a few different layouts of increasing fidelity and detail, slowly honing in on the best parts of your approach.

Once you're rather confident with your plan, it is time to put together something you'd be comfortable sharing with your manager or client. This is where a tool like Figma comes in handy, as it is capable of perfectly straight lines, detailed graphics, complex layouts, and exporting to a variety of popular file formats that your contacts will be able to open and view.

Figma allows for multiple sizes (breakpoints) for each of your pages as well, to easily communicate what your website/application might look like on a desktop, tablet, or even a mobile device.
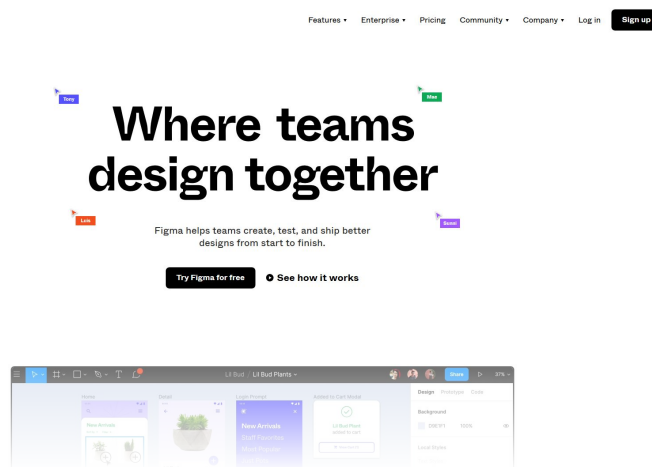
Figma

What is Figma?

[Figma](#) is a computer program and online web tool that is used primarily for prototyping designs for software user interfaces and web applications.

Through its web portal it even offers real-time collaboration—that is to say multiple users can view and edit the document together from different devices. This is especially useful in both team environments or cases wherein you're hoping to collaborate with a client.

If you feel comfortable quickly with Figma, look into its [interactive clickable prototype features](#)!

Download Figma

Visit the Figma website and locate the correct download for your device:
https://www.figma.com/downloads/

Once it is downloaded, run the installer. Follow the presented installation instructions.
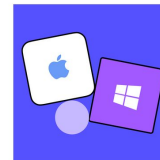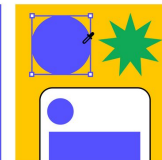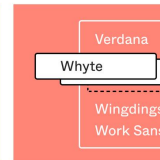
Getting Started

1. [Create an account](#).
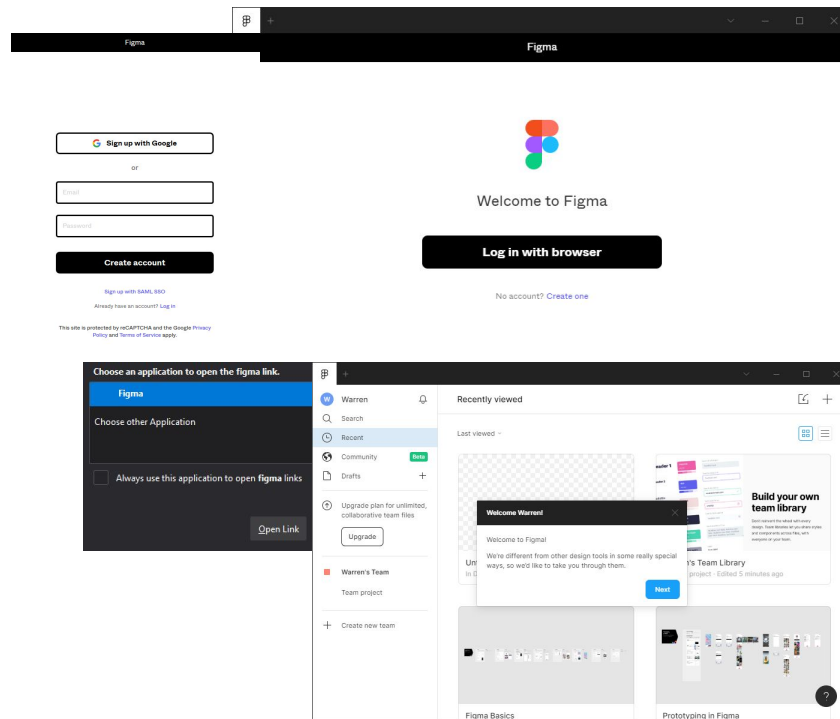2. Sign in, on the application.
3. The first time, the application will give you a brief tour to help introduce you to the software.

User Interface

Tools:
1. Move Tools
2. Frame
3. Shape Tools
4. Pen
5. Text
6. Hand Tool

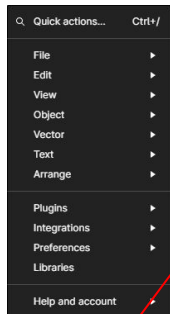Window Settings and Options

Share

Comments

Present

Zoom

Project Tabs

Project Name / Title

Home Screen

Main Menu

Untitled

Quick actions...   Ctrl+/
File   ▶
Edit   ▶
View   ▶
Object   ▶
Vector   ▶
Text   ▶
Arrange   ▶

Plugins   ▶
Integrations   ▶
Preferences   ▶
Libraries

Help and account   ▶

Layers   Assets   Page 1 ⌄

Untitled ⌄   W   Share

Design   Prototype   Inspect

Background

E5E5E5   100%   👁

Export   +

?

100%

100%
Zoom in
Zoom out   -
Zoom to fit   Shift+1
Zoom to 50%
Zoom to 100%   Shift+0
Zoom to 200%

Pixel preview   ▶
Pixel grid   Ctrl+'
Snap to pixel grid   Ctrl+Shift+'
Layout grids   Ctrl+Shift+4
Rulers   Shift+R
Outlines   Ctrl+Shift+3
Multiplayer cursors   Ctrl+Alt+\

Layers and Assets Lists

Change Page of App

Workspace

Help and Resources

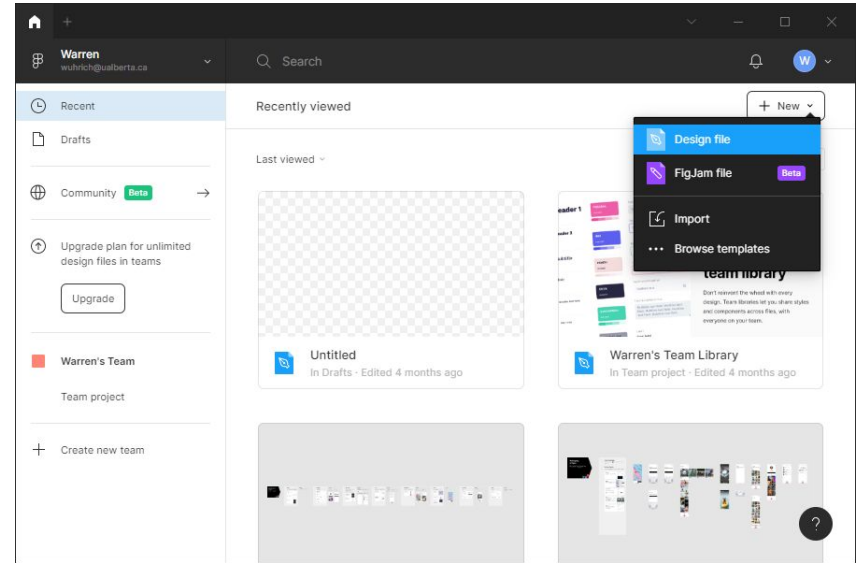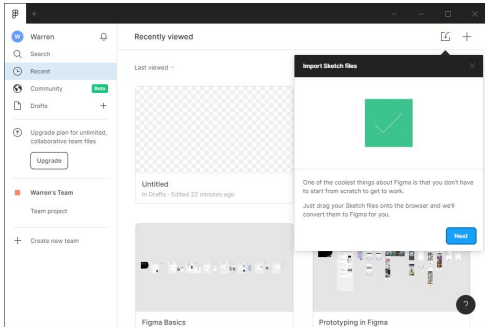Design, Prototype, and Inspection Options

Create a new Design File

Once you've had your tour, let's try out the program.

Click the "New" button, and select "Design file."

Make a note that you can also import projects and files using the "Import" option, instead of "Design file."

Constraints (Breakpoints)

Constraints can be used to adjust your layouts on a per screen-size basis. Note that when you click this (or most any) of the tools available at the top of your work area, the options on the right side of the window will update to reflect it.

The constraints tool offer you a wide array of common screen sizes to pick from, to allow you to confirm your design will be suitable to everything from a desktop display to a smartphone screen.

Figma has a tutorial on this feature, that explains the details of constraints quite well.
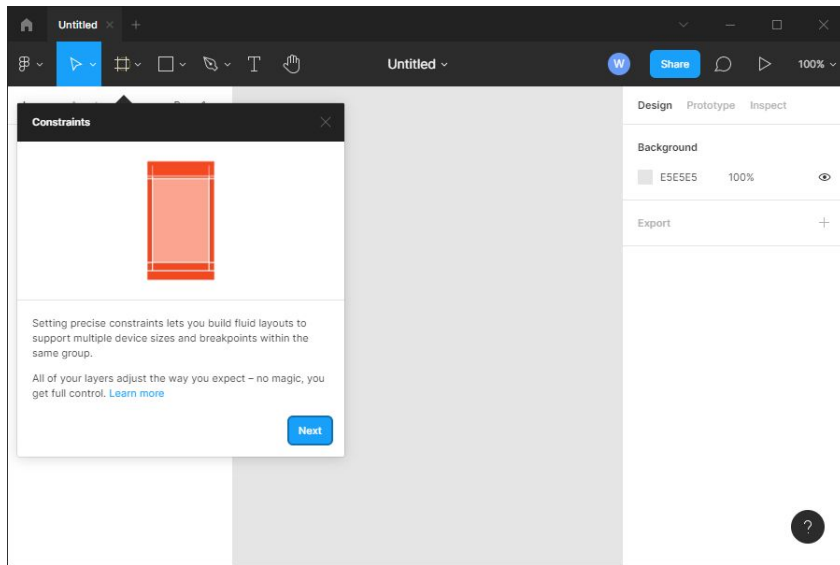
Vector Networks (Pen Tool)

If you've ever used vector graphic tools like Adobe Illustrator or Inkscape, you've likely had to use a pen tool before.

The pen tool can be used to make graphics. Clicking will connect points. Click and hold to create a curve in your line. Notice that once you've created a curved line, a pair of circles and lines appear—these are called "handles" and are used to edit the intensity of the curve.
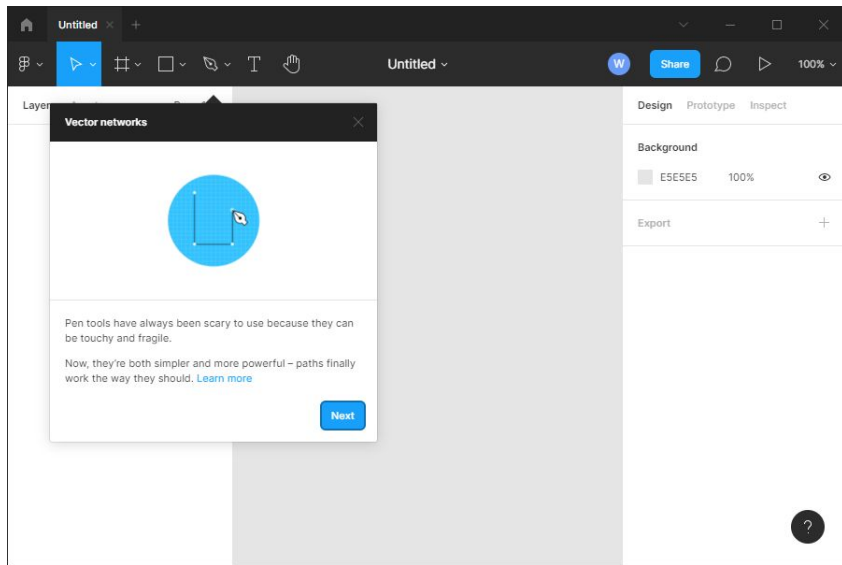
Comments

You can use the comments feature to leave notes, either for yourself or team members.

Once the tool is selected, simply click anywhere in your design and type in your comment. The comment will point to where you had clicked when revisited.
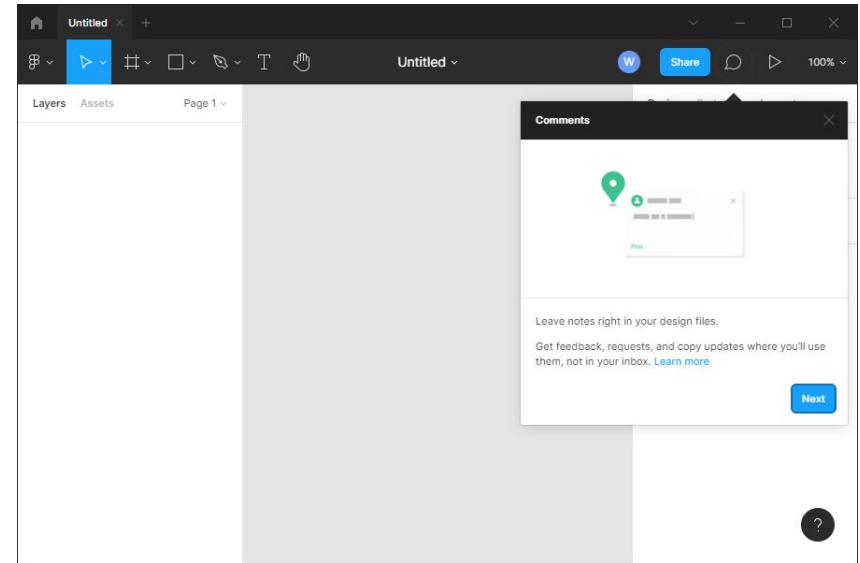
Sharing and Permissions

When sharing your design file, note that you have control over which user accounts will be able to view or edit your project.

Often with clients or supervisors, "view" is sufficient. The team members building the design with you often require "edit."

Ensure you only let people you trust edit your project, lest they make unwanted changes.

You are also able to allow *anyone* with the link view it. This is good for sharing with larger teams, or if the general public should be allowed to see what you've been working on.
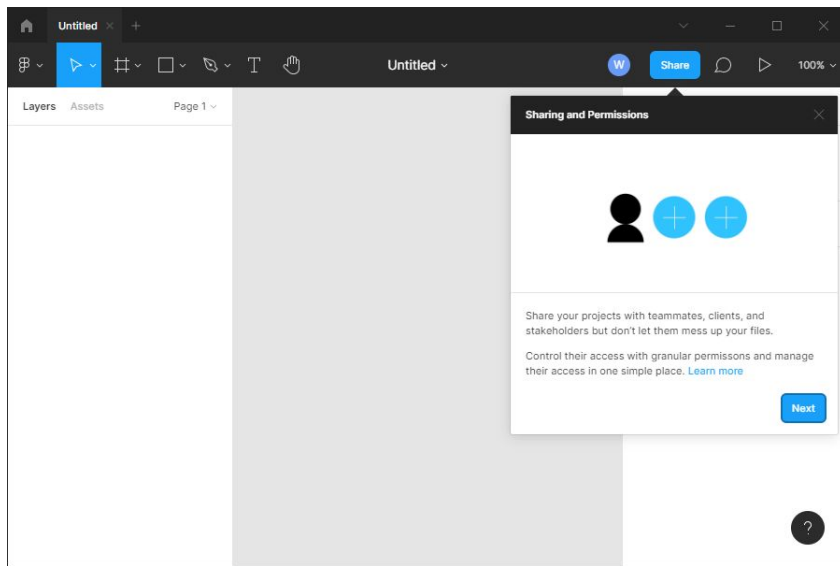
Collaborating with a Team

So long as you have a live internet connection, Figma is a *live* collaboration tool. This means that as you make changes, everyone with access with the tool or website open will see the changes as you make them (and vice versa.)

This makes it exceptionally effective in team environments, whether you're in the same office or across the world from each other.
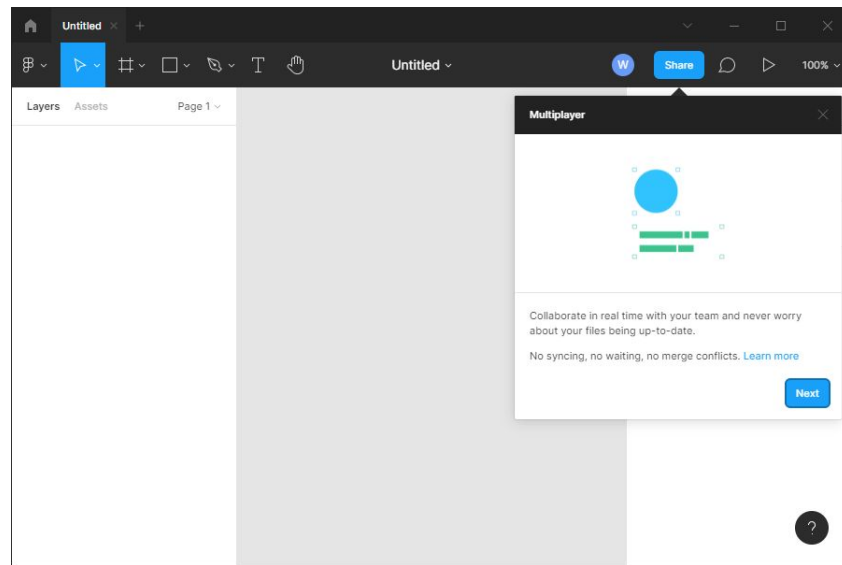
Asset Sharing and Components

As you create shapes and graphics, you're able to save them as reusable "components" for your pages. Anything you think will be re-used, or copied and pasted in a web site.

Once you've drawn something in the workspace, right-click the layer and select "Create component."

These can be shared with the team to increase the efficiency of your workflow.

Figma has tutorials for this feature as well as others. Be sure to dive deep into the features you are interested in! Component design will be a BIG part of learning React later on.
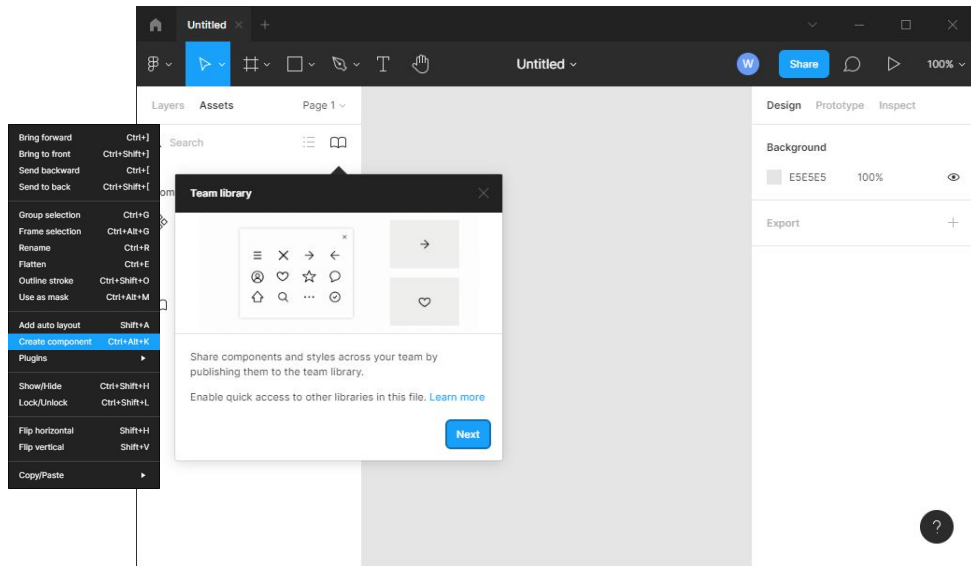
Export your Design

Once your design is ready to send to someone, if you need a more accessible file, you can export your work using the "Export" dialogue on the right side.

If you want a high-quality rendition of your project that can be opened on any mainstream device, PDF is the recommended file format.

PDFs are regarded as the "universal" document format, as PDF readers are available on almost every platform.
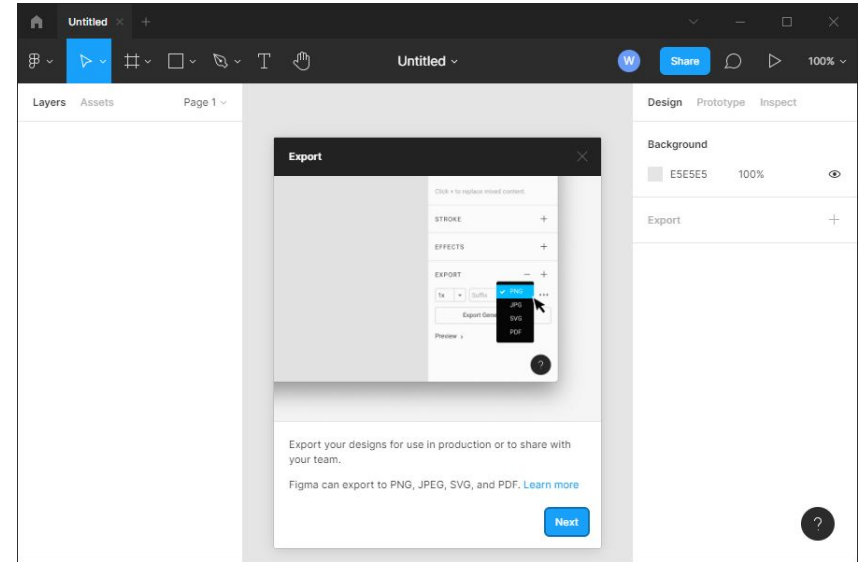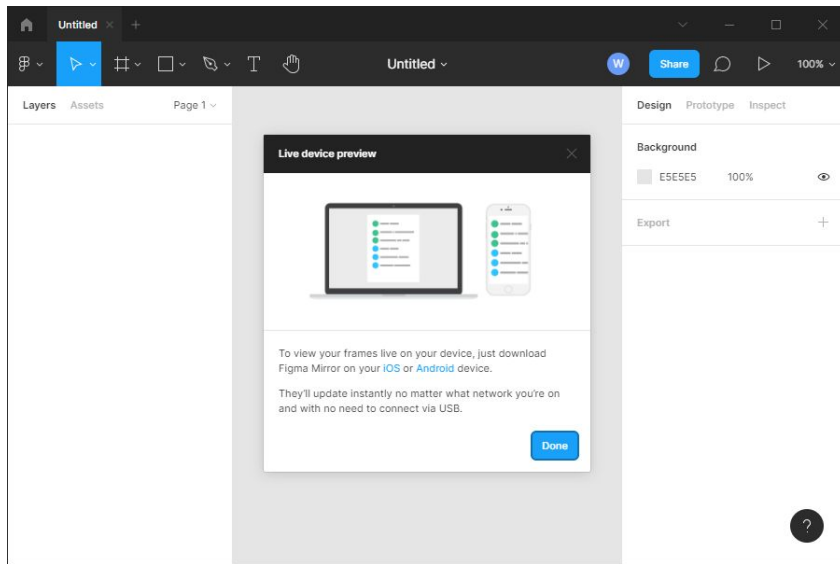
Try out your Design on your Phone or Tablet

To preview your design on your mobile device, use the Figma Mirror app found here:

- [Figma Mirror on iOS](#)
- [Figma Mirror on Android](#)

If you'd like to see, or work on, your designs on your mobile device(s), try the [beta] mobile applications instead:

- [Figma on iOS](#)
- [Figma on Android](#)

Practice Makes Perfect

The best way to learn with new tools—especially in the fields of interface design, user experience, and prototyping—is to practice, practice, practice!

Start by reading the documentation and learning about the features available in Figma:

- [Get Started](#) (Installation and Setup)
- [Get Started with Figma Design](#)
  (How to use the Tool and Figma Features)

Prototyping

Recall when we had looked at rapid prototyping. It's usually best to do some research, to see what other similar projects do right and wrong for inspirations. After you have done your research, and have taken some reference screenshots / notes, sketch some layouts.

Once you land on one that you're happiest with, bring your sketch over to the computer and see if you are able to use Figma to flesh it out in a more presentable way.
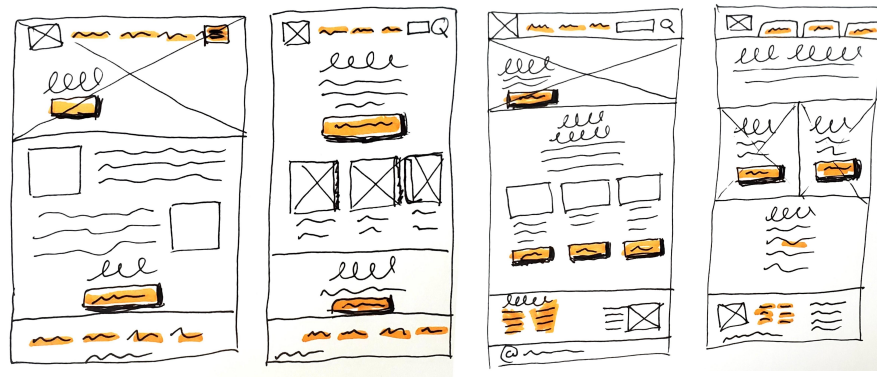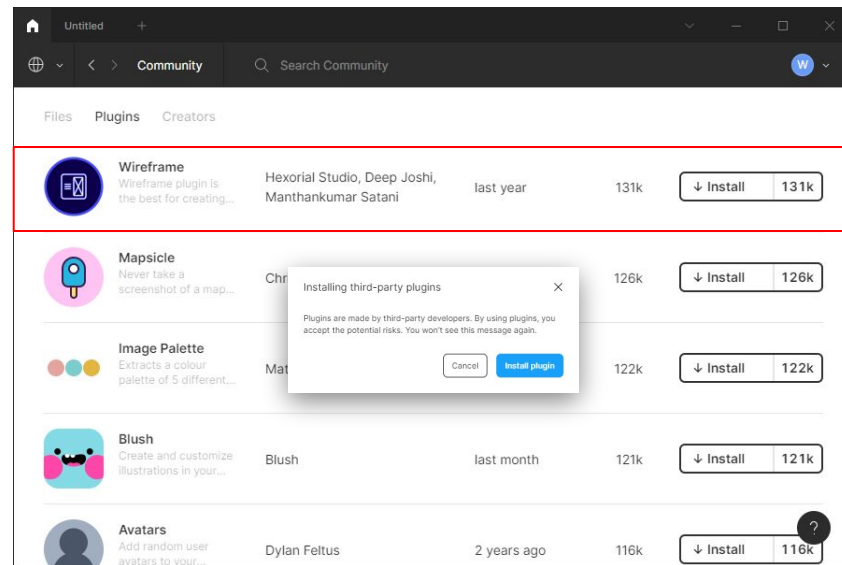
Plugins

For pre-existing icon, component, and styles, as well as new features (like populating your designs with placeholder images and text) there are plugins available for your Figma program.

Click the "Main Menu" and navigate to "Browse plugins in Community." Read through the options carefully, and consider what might give you a leg up on your design!
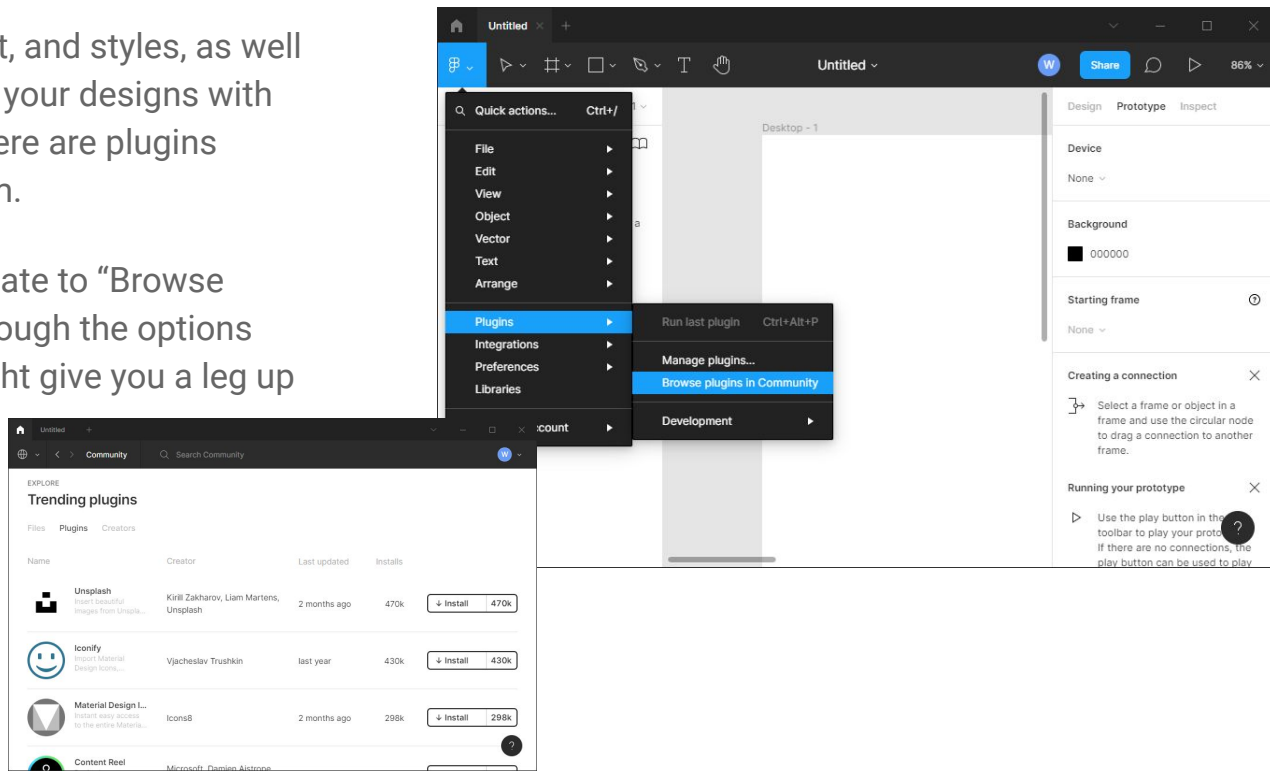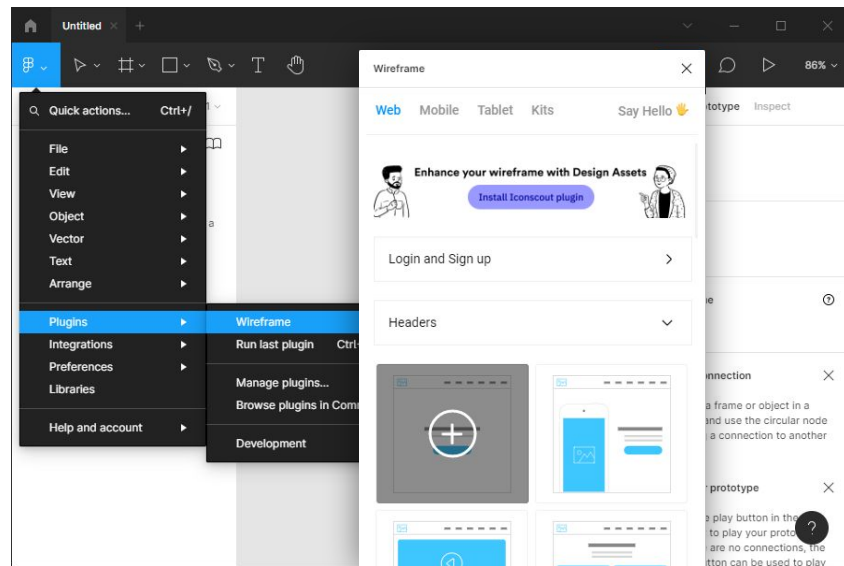
Let's try a Plugin

Let's try out the [Wireframe](#) plugin, and see if that helps us save some time!

Open Wireframe

In the "Main Menu" navigate to "Plugins," and then to the new "Wireframe" option.

This will open a modal for selecting pre-made wireframe pieces. Explore each of the tabs and options available, they're here to save you time and effort when wireframing!

Look at that!

That was easy! You can also build designs completely of your own design out of shapes and the pen tool, which may take some more time.

Try adding more pieces of the webpage using the same plugin—can you achieve a layout similar to our sketches?

The huge advantage to *rapid* prototyping and wireframing is you can prepare multiple options for consideration. With plugins like Wireframe you can *very* quickly try new layouts too, without much effort or time.
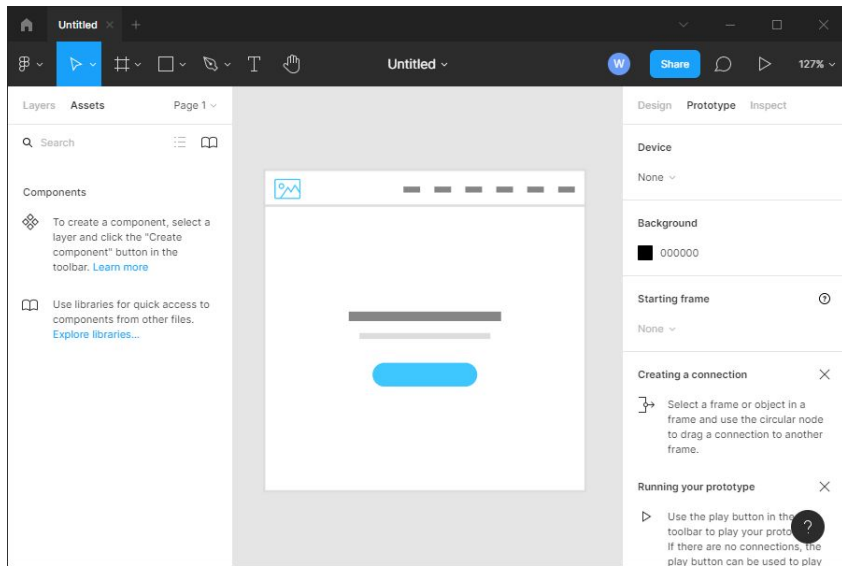
Recommended Readings

Here are some of the official resources available for getting started with Figma:

- <u>Get Started</u> (Installation and Setup)
- <u>Get Started with Figma Design</u>
  (How to use the Tool and Figma Features)