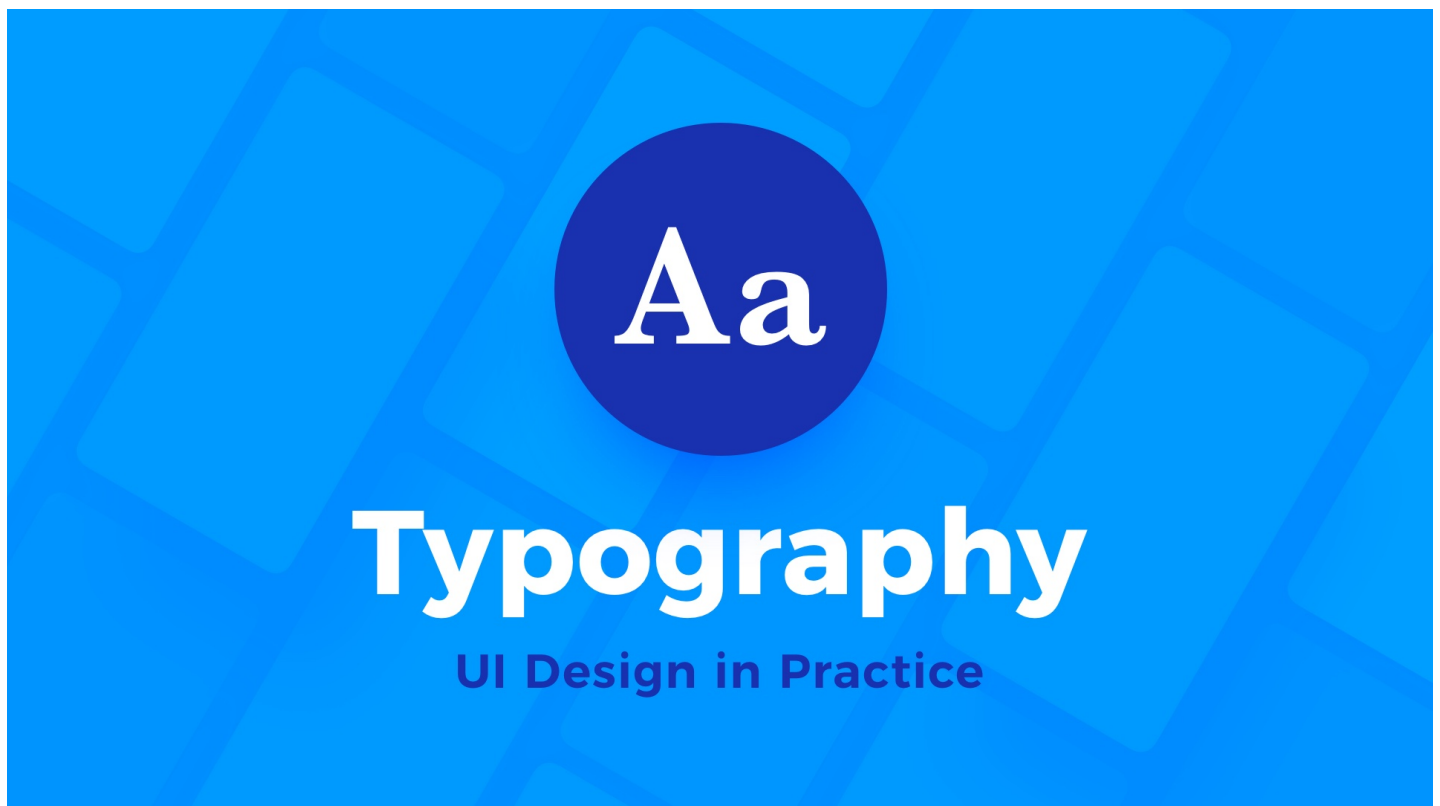


UI Design in Practice – Typography

FEBRUARY 3, 2020 • BY THALION



Practical Tips & Tricks.

Your app may not have icons, photos, or multiple color palettes. One thing digital solutions cannot exist without is text content. It is a text that makes the solution understandable. Some say that 90% of design is typography.

Usage of the right typography may significantly improve the User Experience of the solution. Thanks to the right setup, users will be able to consume content easier and engage more.

Ok, enough of introduction. Grab the mug of your favorite coffee, and let's check how to improve typography in your UI Designs.

Theory

Before tons of practical samples, let's begin with a little theory. I promise to keep it concise!

What is Typography?

Typography is the technique and art of arranging type to make written language readable, legible and appealing when displayed or printed.

Font vs. Typeface

We all use font and typeface terms as synonyms. However, their meaning is different.

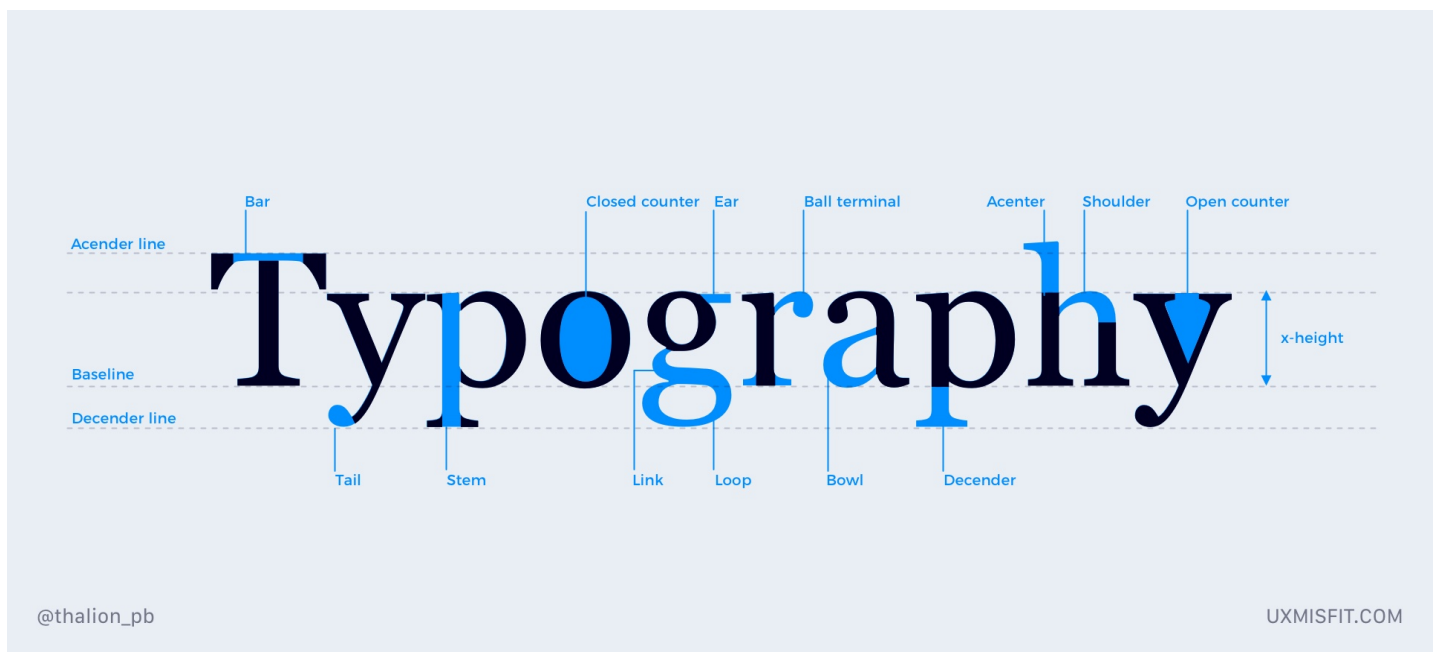
The font is a visual representation of text character introduced in one specific typeface, size, and weight. For example, "Helvetica Regular" is a font.

The typeface is a style of type design. It contains a complete scope of characters. This means all sizes and weights. For example “Helvetica” (includes “Helvetica Regular,” “Helvetica Light,” “Helvetica Bold”)

This means that typeface is a collection that gathers many fonts.

Naming in Typography

Typography has got a rich naming convention. It is good to learn about samples. This is why the image presented below demonstrates all of the necessary names needed to understand the discipline:



Now let's describe the essential terms briefly:

x-height – the height of a typical lowercase letter “x.” They are a vast majority of characters we read — larger proportions between uppercase and lowercase results in better legibility.

Baseline – the invisible line that defines the bottom of the character body.

Meanline – similar to baseline, but this defines the invisible line that marks the top of the character body.

Counter – the area of a character enclosed (entirely or partially) by the form of the character.

Serif – the small line attached to the end of a larger stroke in character.

Weight – the measurement of how thick type character is.

Kerning – the spacing between two neighboring letters.

Tracking – the spacing between two individual blocks of texts. Tracking is also known as letter spacing.

Leading – also known as Line-Spacing, the distance between two baselines.

Line-Length – total number of characters (or words) in a line.

Typography Tips for Better UI Design

Let's move to the practical part. I have organized tips into several categories. First will help you enhance readability, second content scanning, and the final one is dedicated to a mobile-specific design.

Tips for Better Readability and Legibility

Pick one, max two Typefaces.

Most of UI Design for Web and Mobile use only one typeface. Thanks to this, users will be able to read the content more comfortable without distracting themselves while recognizing different characters look in various typefaces. You may consider adding alternative typeface for headings and titles. Thanks to this, you will gain an interesting visual hierarchy. Remember about good font pairing. You may find good sources for font pairings at the end of the article.

Pick One, Max Two Typefaces.

✓ Two typefaces



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

Cancel

Turn on

✗ Four typefaces



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

Cancel

Turn on

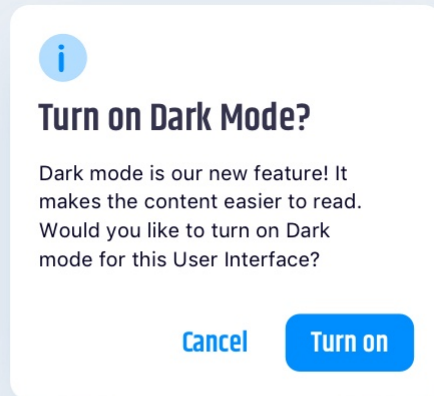
@thalion_pb

Use two, max three weights.

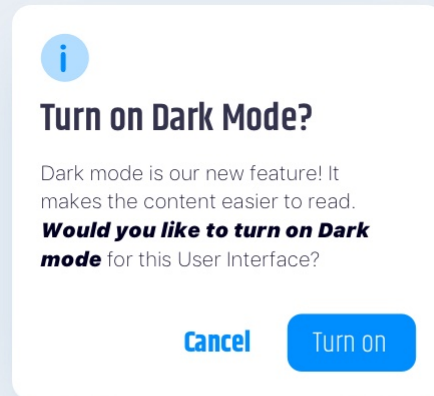
Lots of fonts contain 8 or even more weights from “Ultrathin” to “Heavy Black.” However, applying them to your design will make it chaotic. Pick two or three of them and use them with purpose. Example: Bold for Titles, Regular for Body, Medium for Buttons – that’s enough.

Use Two, Max Three Weights.

✓ Two weights



✗ Five weights



@thalion_pb

Avoid Black and Ultralight weights.

While these weights may look stylish, they are hard to read. Avoid using them if you want to make your content readable.

Avoid Black & Ultralight Weights.

✓ Regular & Semibold

✗ Ultralight, Black



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

Cancel

Turn on



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

Cancel

Turn on

@thalion_pb

Hard to read? Experiment with tracking

If the content becomes hard to read before you will decide to change the font, try to increase or decrease tracking.

If you use Upper case letters in your UI components, try to increase tracking a bit – they will gain better readability.

Experiment with Tracking

✓ A bit more space

✗ Less space



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

@thalion_pb

Increase Line Spacing for a larger amount of content

Blocks of text having a line-height set to 140%-180% of font size have got excellent readability. Some say that perfect line-height should have 160%. Thanks to this human eye recognize individual lines of text much easier.

Increase Line Spacing

for bigger amount of content

✓ 140%



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

✗ 100%



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

@thalion_pb

Limit the line length to 70-80 characters.

If you use longer text lines, they will confuse the eye. Shorter lines will make content hard to read – the user will have to jump through lines quickly.

Limit the line lenght

to 70-80 characters.

✓ Good



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read in the low light environment. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

✗ To narrow



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

@thalion_pb

Keep track of line spacing when changing fonts

Different fonts and typefaces may be harder to read within the same line spacing. Remember to check how everything looks together after updating one.

Keep track of line spacing

when changing fonts

✓ 140%



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

✗ 140%



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

@thalion_pb

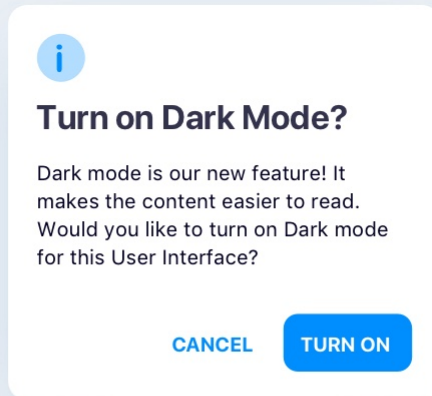
Align big blocks of text to the Left

Left alignment of text is the most comfortable one to read (with the exception of languages that are read from right to left).

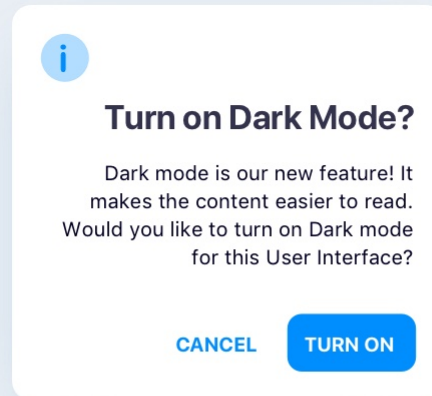
You may use center alignment to differentiate some portions of content, like quotes or shorter content blocks. You should always avoid using the right alignment in bigger parts of the content.

Align big blocks of text to the Left

✓ Left alignment



✗ Right alignment



@thalion_pb

Do Not Justify

Justified block of text may look more attractive as a whole thing, but if you would like to read it, the different spacing between the words will show the bad side of this type of alignment.

Do Not Justify

✓ Left alignment



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

✗ Justified text



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

@thalion_pb

Use 16pt for Body Text

This size of the font is comfortable to read for the majority of people. Sure, you may consider 17 or 18 points, but decreasing the size of the Body to be lower than 16 points will make the text less comfortable to read.

Addition tip: Compare your custom typeface x-height to the system fonts. Its visual size should be similar to the system font's x-height to be readable for most of the users.

Use 16pt for Body Text

✓ 16pt



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

✗ 13pt



Turn on Dark Mode?

Dark mode is our new feature! It makes the content easier to read. Would you like to turn on Dark mode for this User Interface?

CANCEL

TURN ON

@thalion_pb

Want to Design Better?

You can create delightful apps and websites and save more than 80% time on their design preparation. Prime is the UI Framework for Sketch that let you focus more on creative work and free you from tedious tasks. If time is a precious asset for you, this tool will speed-up lots of parts of your work.

Extend Sketch app possibilities. The set of libraries included in Prime save dozens of hours and help you to maintain consistency with better quality. You may create full website design within minutes with Prime, and all of your 396 buttons and 64 types of text fields will look perfectly.

Try PRIME for Sketch (http://primedesignsystem.com/?ref=in_story)

Where is the key to success? See the library in action!

Prime Design System Kit – Quick Start Guide

(https://uxmisfit.com/2019/10/09/prime-2-0-quick-start-guide/?ref=in_story).

Tips for Better Content Scanning

Establish Consistent Typography Hierarchy

Build the Design System or at least a Style Guide with a Typography Hierarchy and stick to it.

Users will get familiar with Title, Subtitle, Body, or Caption appearance and will be able to scan text better if you apply hierarchy consequently.

Establish consistent Typography Hierarchy

and stick to it!

Display
Header

Body

Footnote

Caption

Display
Header

Body

Footnote

Caption

Disp
Hea

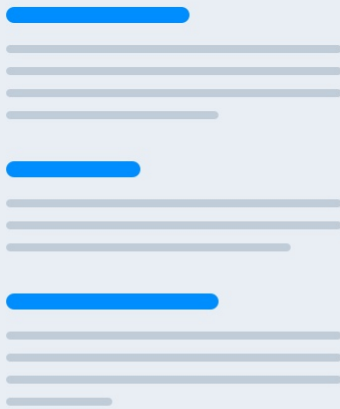
@thalion_pb

Remember About The Rhythm

Keep the paragraphs of content in similar sizes. Users like the predictable layout of text. Avoid making one big paragraph and four small. Separate bigger ones to make content cleaner.

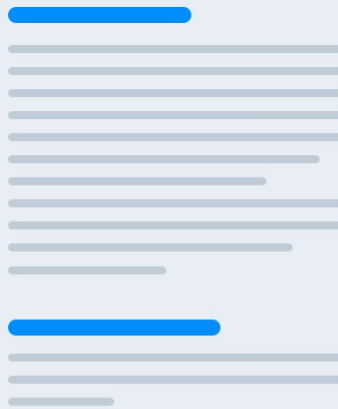
Remember About The Rhythm

✓ rhythm



@thalion_pb

✗ No rhythm



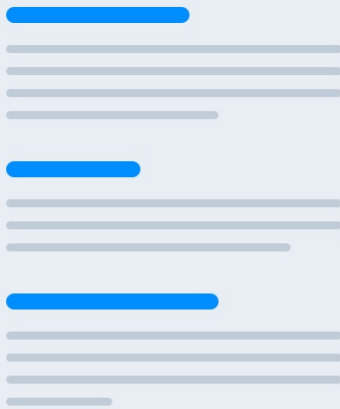
Use Visual Spacing

The best method to enhance content clarity is to give larger white space to the specific blocks and sections.

If you would like to use something else, use line separators or pack the pieces of content to the cards. But remember, it is much easier to scan the content with the right white space applied than the list of cards.

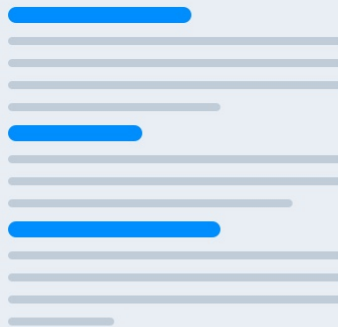
Use Visual Spacing

✓ With spacing



@thalion_pb

✗ No spacing

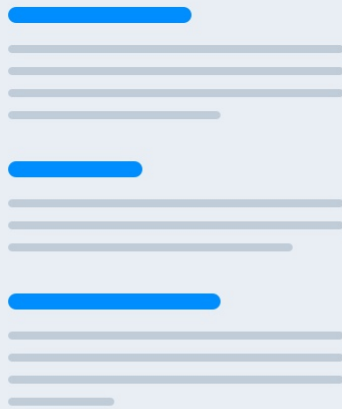


Apply Good Contrast

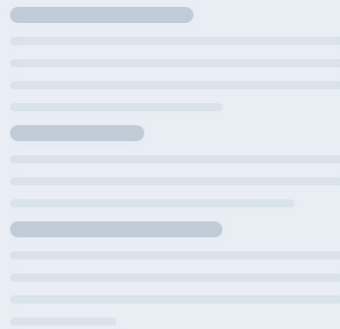
Subtle colors are always tempting and look stylish. However, you have to remember about good readability and clarity. Applying the right contrast will make the content more friendly to everyone. Here are official guidelines (<https://www.w3.org/TR/UNDERSTANDING-WCAG20/visual-audio-contrast-contrast.html>)

Apply Good Contrast

✓ With contrast



✗ No contrast



@thalion_pb

You may check the contrast of background and foreground with these tools:

- Accessible colors (<https://accessible-colors.com>)
- Contrast checker (<https://contrastchecker.com>)
- WCAG Contrast Color Checker – Chrome plugin
(<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/wcag-color-contrast-check/plnahcmalebfffmaghcpcmpaciebdhgdf>)
- Stark for Sketch, XD and Figma (<https://www.getstark.co>)

Tips for Better Mobile Typography

Using system fonts is safe

If you build the native solution and you use system fonts (iOS, macOS – San Francisco, Android – Roboto, Windows – Segoe UI), you may be sure that the app will look good in all cases.

If you would like to use a custom font, remember to check if it supports different characters used in languages that app may use — text how it renders on particular devices, etc.

Do not use less than 12px font size

Good readability on mobile is crucial. We use our devices in different environments and in various cases. Typography scaling having 16px for Body is comfortable, but sometimes it is good to use something smaller. Do not use less than 12px as font size, because it may make UI unreadable.

Exception: Sometimes, tab bars (bottom navigation) uses less than 12px text as the label. When users learn to recognize specific icons, they do not have to read labels anymore.

Learn the typography scale of the specific platform

Knowing the behavior and rules of typography on a platform will help you make the app more readable and enjoyable for all users.

Here are guidelines for major platforms:

- iOS (<https://developer.apple.com/design/human-interface-guidelines/ios/visual-design/typography/>)
- Android (<https://material.io/design/typography/the-type-system.html#applying-the-type-scale>)
- macOS (<https://developer.apple.com/design/human-interface-guidelines/macos/visual-design/typography/>)
- Apple Watch (<https://developer.apple.com/design/human-interface-guidelines/watchos/visual-design/typography/>)

Tools & Resources

There are several tools and resources that help us to get most of typography much more efficiently. I would like to recommend you following ones:

- Type scale (<https://type-scale.com>)
- Google Fonts (<https://fonts.google.com>)
- Font Pairing (<https://fontpair.co>)
- What Font
(<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/whatfont/jabopobgcpjmedljpbcaa hl=pl>)
- Accessible colors (<https://accessible-colors.com>)
- Contrast checker (<https://contrastchecker.com>)

- WCAG Contrast Color Checker – Chrome plugin
(<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/wcag-color-contrast-check/plnahcmalebfffmaghcpcmpaciebdhgdf>)
- Stark for Sketch, XD and Figma (<https://www.getstark.co>)
- Archetype (Archetypeapp.com)

Summing up

Typography is an essential part of UI Design. It is also one of the most challenging ones. These tips will help you enhance your designs with simple tactics that may be applied everywhere.