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Explore auto layout properties

Who can use this feature

Users on any team or plan.

Users with **can edit** access to a file can add Auto layout to frames and objects.

Already familiar with auto layout properties? Learn how use auto layout →

Auto layout is a property you can add to frames and components. It lets you create designs that grow to fill or shrink to fit, and reflow as their contents change. This is great when you need to add new layers, accommodate longer text strings, or maintain alignment as your designs evolve.

There are lots of ways to use auto layout:

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Combine auto layout frames to build complete interfaces.

Auto layout is a powerful feature with many moving parts and uses. In this article we'll show you how how each of its properties work.

Explore the auto layout playground file in the Figma Community →

Frames with auto layout have different properties to regular frames. When you apply auto layout, you'll see some changes in the right sidebar.

You can't do the following to auto layout frames:

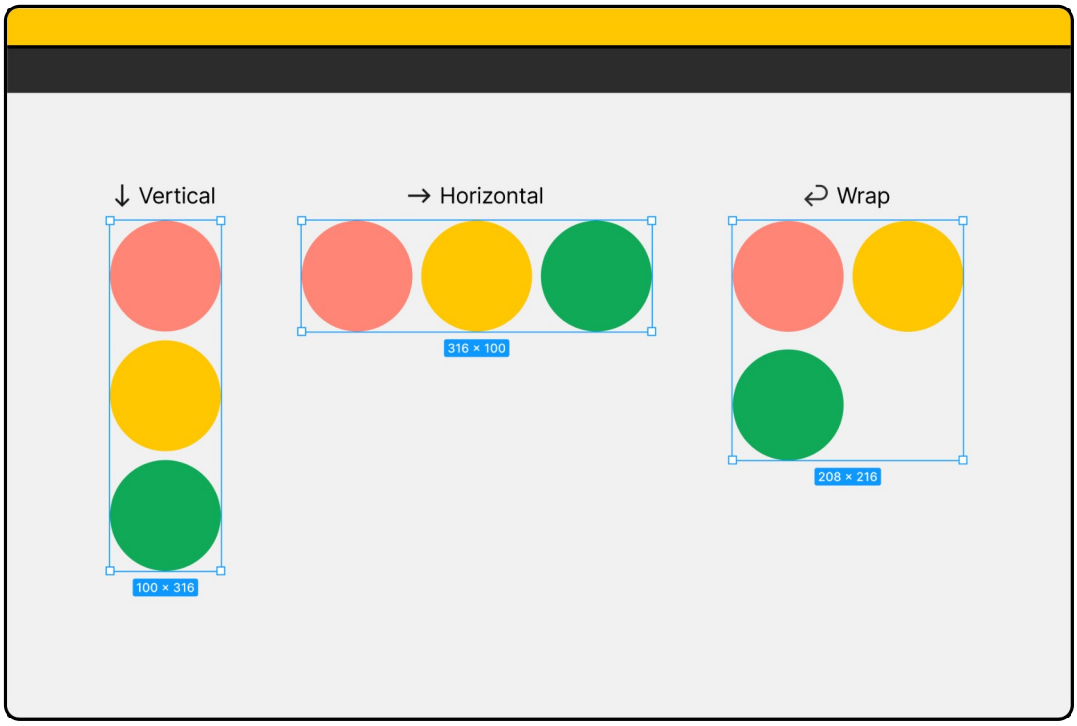
- 🚫 Add **Layout grids** to that frame
- 🚫 Apply **Constraints** to any objects within an auto layout frame, unless the object has absolute position enabled
- 🚫 Use **Smart selection** on any objects within the frame

Layout flow

Direction

objects within a list, or posts within a newsfeed or timeline.

- **Horizontal**: Add, remove, and reorder objects along the x-axis. For example: a row of buttons, or icons in a mobile navigation menu.
- **Wrap**: Arrange objects in multiple rows and columns in a frame. Objects will flow horizontally and wrap to the next line. For example: photo galleries or a set of tags.



Canvas stacking order

When multiple layers have negative spacing creating a stack, the last object (either the right-most or bottom-most object) in the stack will be on top by default.

You can change the visual order of the stack as seen on the canvas.

With the auto layout frame selected, click ☐ from the right sidebar to open advanced layout settings. Next to **canvas stacking**, select:

- **First on top:** the first layer in the stack will be on top
- **Last on top:** the last layer in the stack will be on top

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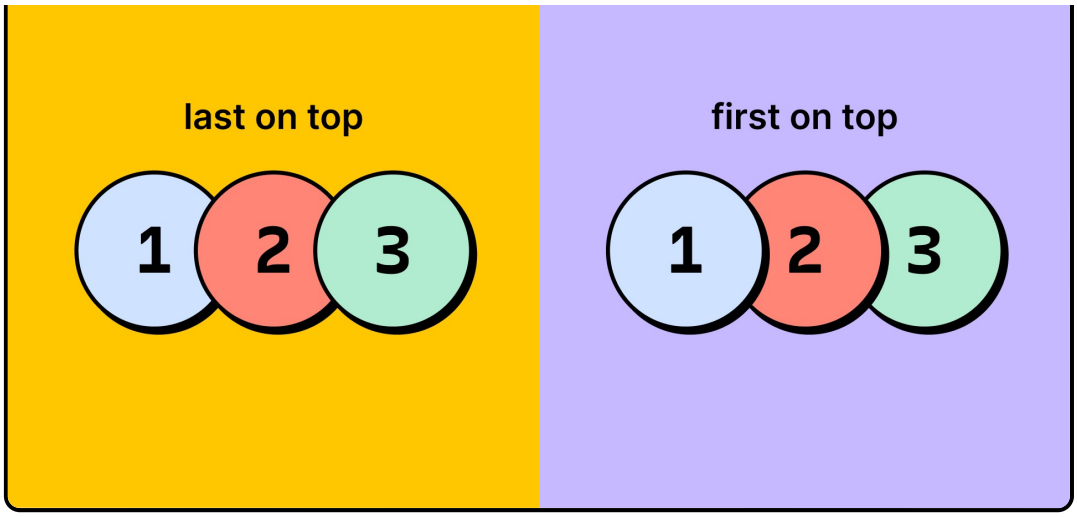


Note: Note that when the stacking order changes, the order of layers in the layers panel stays the same. Canvas stacking is solely a visual change that happens on the canvas.

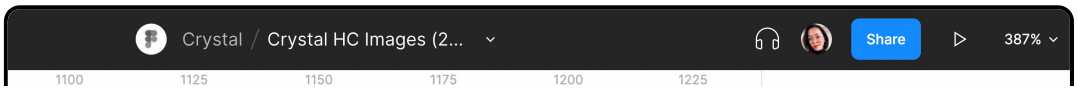
Absolute position

Absolute position excludes an object from an auto layout flow while keeping it in the auto layout frame. The object and its surrounding siblings ignore each other, even as they resize and move.

Much like **absolute position in CSS**, an object with absolute position enabled can be placed precisely where you want relative to its parent container.

Objects with absolute position are treated as objects in a regular frame. This means you can apply constraints to determine how they respond when its parent auto layout frame resizes. Other auto layout settings, such as resizing and advanced layout options, aren't available to these objects.

To enable absolute position, select a child of an auto layout frame, and click ☐ in the right sidebar.



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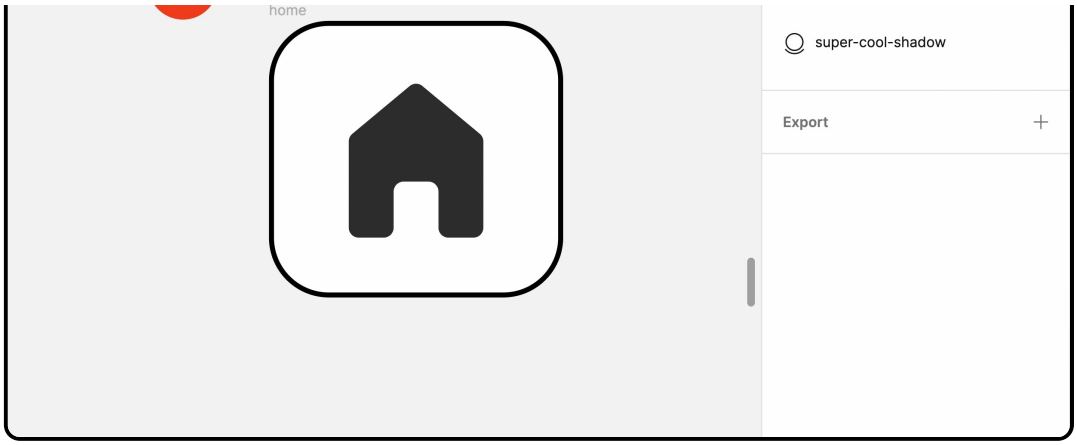


Spacing

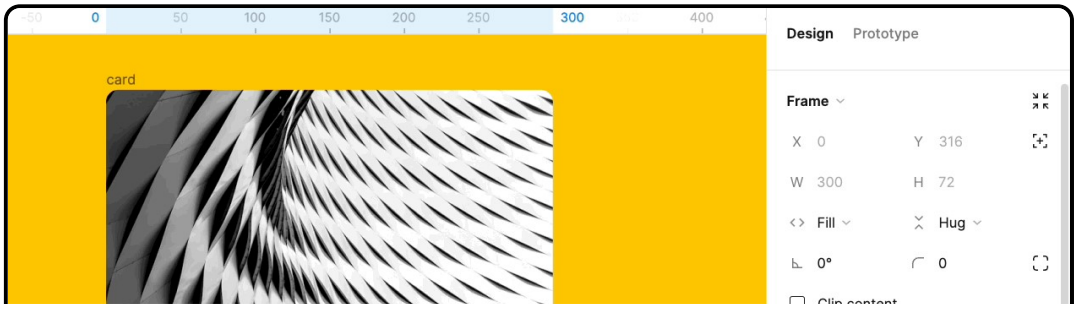
Gap between items

Use [ ] **gap between items** to set the distance, or distribution, between objects in an auto layout frame.

Gap between items has two different settings:

- **Auto**: Set the gap between objects to be the largest distance possible. Type `Auto` in the field or select it from the dropdown menu.
- **A specified gap:** Specify how far apart you want objects to be. Enter a value into the field, nudge the values using your arrow keys, or scrub the field using your cursor.

To quickly toggle between these two settings, click the alignment box and press [X].



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If the auto layout frame's direction is set to vertical or horizontal, you'll be able to set horizontal gap between items. If you have the frame's direction set to wrap, then you'll be able to set both horizontal and vertical gap between items.

Tip! Hold ⇧ Shift while dragging handles to increase and decrease using your big nudge values.

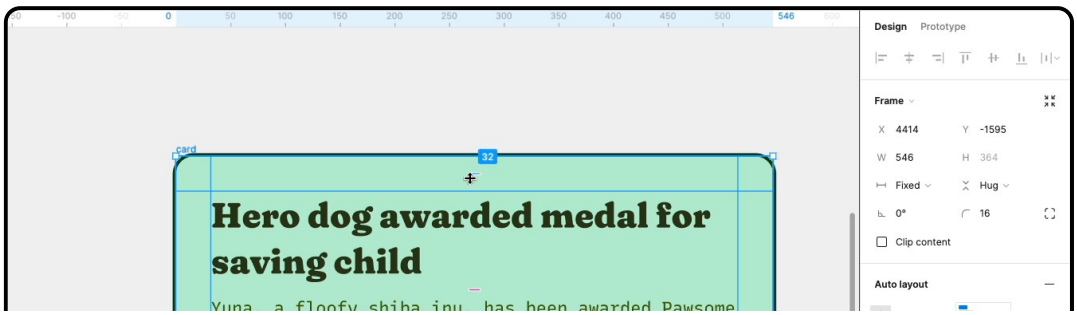
Padding

Padding controls the empty or white space between the boundary of an auto layout frame and the frame's child objects. You can set padding uniformly, vertically and horizontally, or have different values for top, right, bottom, and left padding.

Adjust the padding using canvas controls or spacing fields in the right sidebar.

To access canvas controls, select an auto layout frame and hover over it. Pink handles will appear, similar to those in smart selection.

- Click handles to open input fields and enter a numeric value
- Or, click and drag the handle to change the spacing



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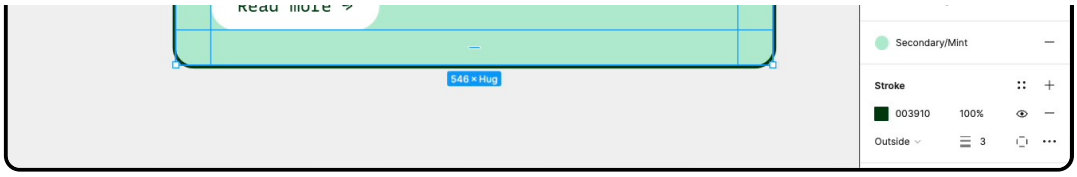
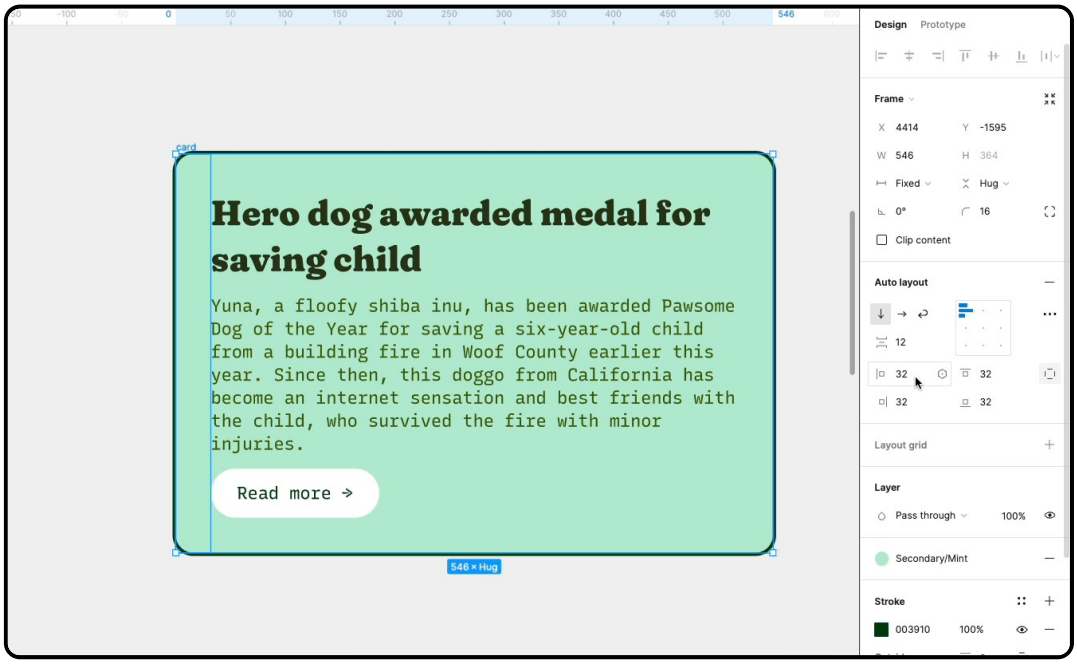


Tip: Check out our keyboard shortcut guide ↓ for shortcuts on setting padding on opposite sides, all sides, and more!

Padding controls in the right sidebar are separated into vertical (top and bottom) and horizontal (left and right) padding by default.

- To set individual padding, click ⬚ to use top, right, bottom, and left padding fields.
- To set uniform padding or to use CSS shorthand, hold ⌘ Command or Control and click into any padding field. You can also type CSS shorthand. For example, entering `1,2,3,4` sets the top, right, bottom, and left to 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively. Entering `1,2` sets the values to top/bottom: 1 and left/right: 2.



- Hold `⌘ Command` for Mac, or `Control` for Windows, and click into any padding box. A single padding field will appear. Enter a single value to set uniform padding on all sides. Or, use CSS shorthand to set individual values. For example, entering `1,2,3,4` sets the values to top: 1, right: 2, bottom: 3, and left: 4 respectively. Or entering `1,2` sets the values to top/bottom: 1 and left/right: 2.

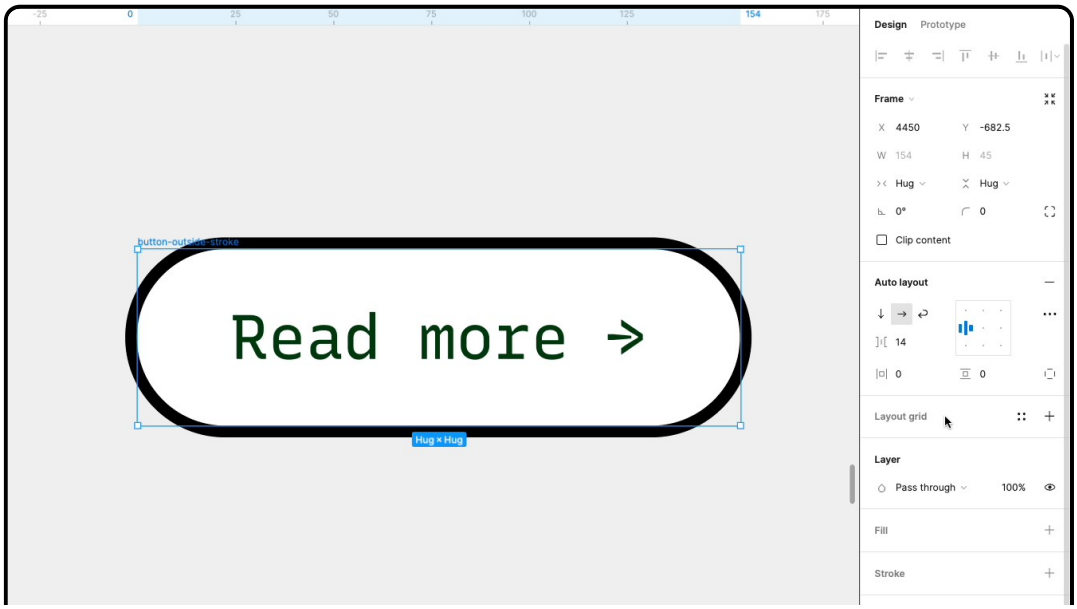
> **Tip!** Press the `tab` key to move between input fields.

Strokes in layout

By default, strokes aren't accounted for when calculating the size of objects, and thus don't affect their parent frame or surrounding siblings.

This may not be ideal during developer handoff, as it doesn't accurately represent how CSS renders borders.

Choose whether strokes will take up space in an auto layout frame by going to the advanced layout settings, and using the dropdown next to **stroke** to select **included in layout** or **excluded from layout.**



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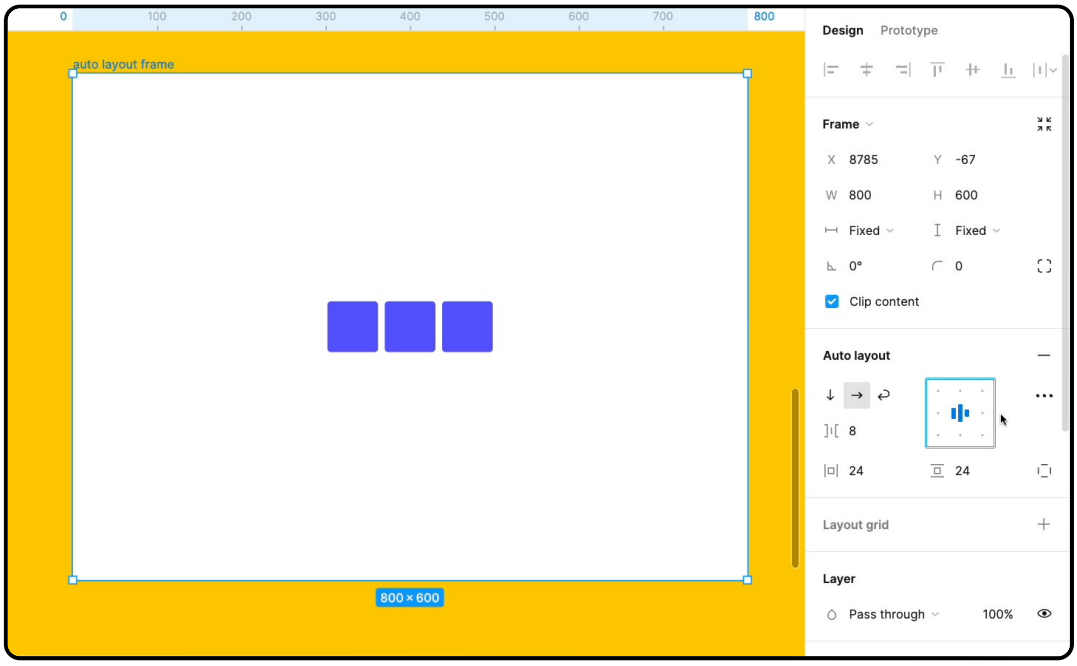
Set alignment on child objects

Choose how to align child objects within an auto layout frame. Both the direction of the auto layout frame and the distribution, or gap between items, will determine what alignment options you have available.

Unlike objects in a regular frame, you can't control the alignment of the objects individually. For that reason, you set the alignment of the child objects on the parent auto layout frame.

Use the alignment box in the right sidebar to select from nine layout options for the children in a frame.

- Select the box and use arrow keys to switch between the different alignment settings.
- Select the box and press W / A / S / D to set alignment to the edge of the frame.



If gap between items is set to **Auto**, you have three options for each direction:

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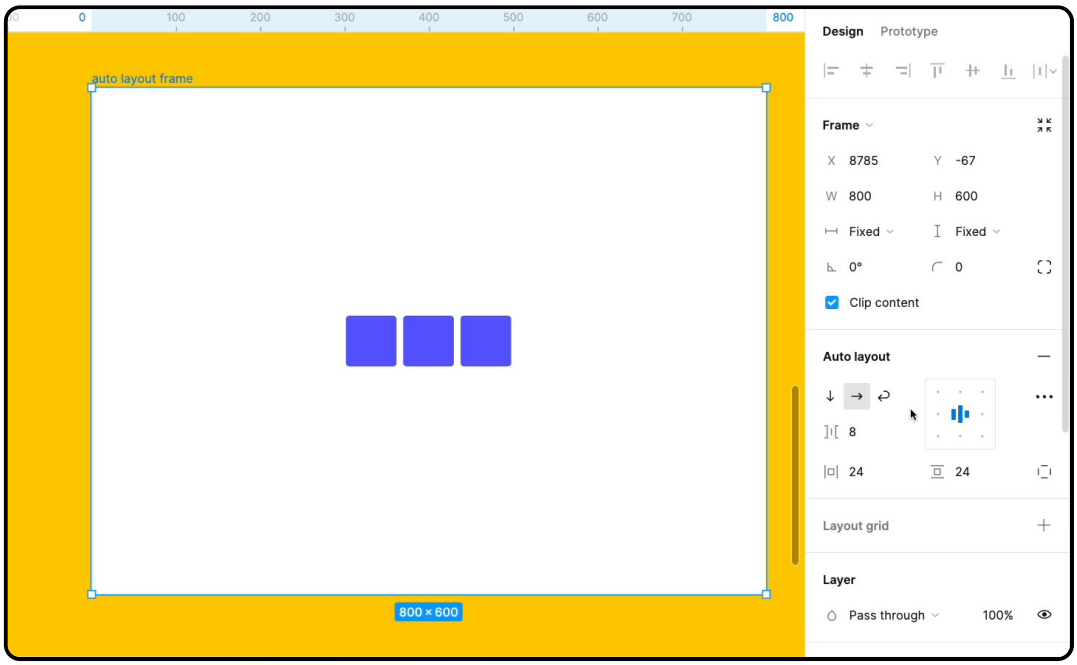

If gap between items is set to a specific number, you have the same nine options for each direction:

- Top left
- Top center
- Top right
- Left
- Center
- Right
- Bottom left
- Bottom center
- Bottom right

Note: When one or more resizing properties are set to hug contents, some selections won't result in visually different layouts on the canvas. This is because hug contents removes any extra space around the child objects.

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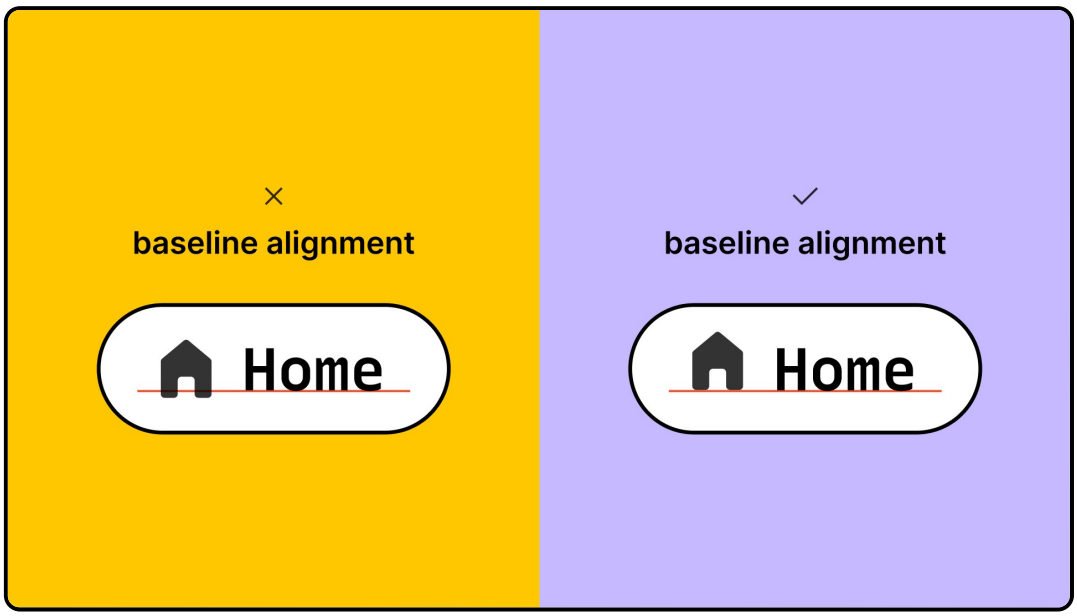
When layers of varying heights are vertically centered when placed in a horizontal auto layout. However, in cases with text layers of different sizes or text with an object like a button with an icon, you may need to align their baselines instead.



To align layers by their baselines, select the layers you want to align, and click ☐ from the right sidebar to open advanced layout settings. Next to text baseline alignment, click ☐ to enable baseline alignment.

Tip! Click the alignment box in the right sidebar, and press B to toggle text baseline alignment on and off.

Resizing

One of the most powerful functions of auto layout is its ability to control the dimensions of the objects in an Auto layout frame.

Set resizing behavior for parent auto layout frames to adapt to any changes made to their children objects. Resizing settings can be applied for objects on both the X and Y axes individually using the dropdown menus in the right sidebar.

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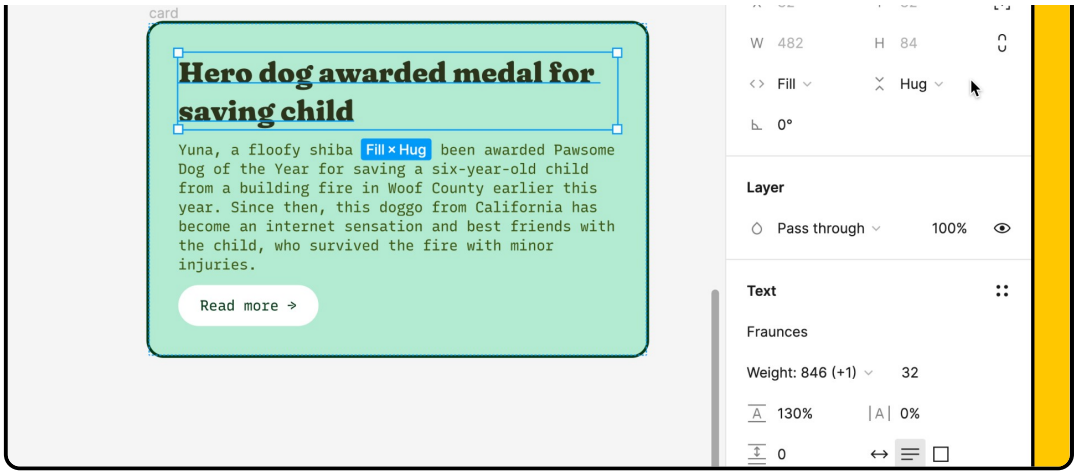


Note: Text layers also have their own resizing properties. Within an auto layout frame, this may produce some useful results.

If you want your auto layout frames to be completely fluid, we advise against using fixed size text boxes. Fixed size text layers won't resize to accommodate your text, which may cause overlap between layers in an auto layout frame.

Learn more about text resizing →

Fixed width or height

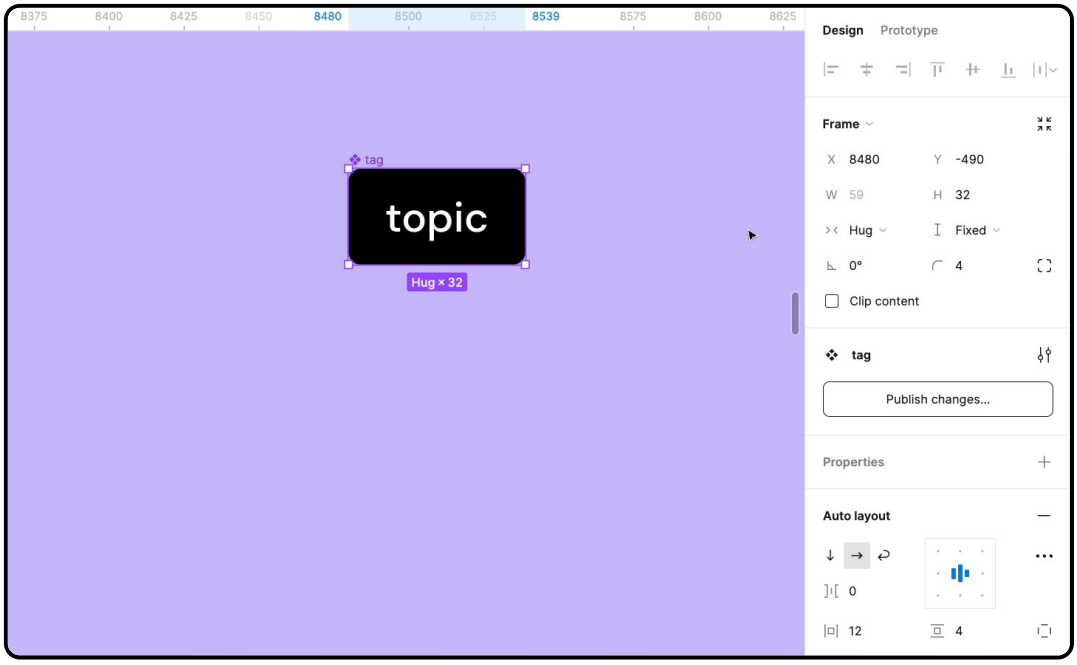
When an auto layout frame is set to **Fixed** width or height, the values of the frame's dimensions remain the same regardless of the content within them. The size of the frame doesn't respond to changes in the objects within them, like a string of text that changes in length.

Minimum and maximum dimensions

You can set minimum or maximum width and height to any auto layout frame and its children.

- Open the **Width** dropdown to find **Add min width** and **Add max width**
- Open the **Height** dropdown to find **Add min height** and **Add max**

open its dropdown to apply a number variable.



If an object has a min or max dimension added, its respective width or height icon will have two lines on either side indicating this. You can hover the icon to see a preview of the dimension limits on canvas.

To remove a min or max setting, open the **Width** or **Height** dropdown and choose **Remove min and max.**

> **Note:** Layers cannot have both a **max height** and a set number of **max lines.** Adding a max height will set max lines to Auto. Setting max lines to a number will remove the layer's max height setting. Learn more about max lines →

Hug content

Set an auto layout frame to **Hug content** to resize itself according to its child objects. The frame will keep the smallest possible dimensions to surround the objects within it, while respecting the padding value.

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Note: If any child objects within an auto layout frame are set to **Fill container**, the parent frame will no longer hug contents and become **Fixed** for the axis.

Fill container

Objects in an auto layout frame set to **Fill container** stretch to the width and/or height of their parent frame.

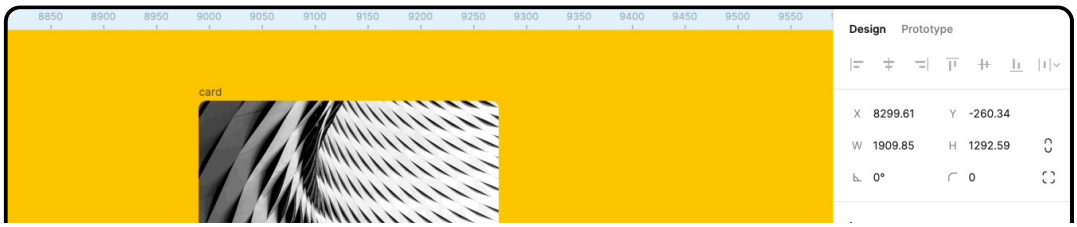
Tip! Hold ⌥ Option or Alt and double-click the vertical or horizontal edge of an auto layout object's bounding box to set it to **Fill container.**

A note on constraints

You can't apply constraints to child objects in an auto layout frame, unless the object has absolute position enabled. Instead, you can use the resizing property to define how objects respond as the frame, or the objects in the frame, resize.

You can still apply constraints to the auto layout frame itself if it's nested within a regular frame. The **Constraints** section and resizing options will appear, allowing you to set both the constraints for the Auto layout frame and the resizing behavior for any objects within it.

For example: If you created a set of tags using auto layout, you may want it to adjust to different screen sizes. You can use constraints to make sure the navigation bar responds correctly when its parent frame is resized, and resizing to control how the objects within the navigation bar respond to those changes.



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Learn more about constraints →

Keyboard shortcut guide

Basic shortcuts

Action	Mac	Windows
Add auto layout	⇧ Shift A	⇧ Shift A
Remove auto layout	⌥ Option ⇧ Shift A	Alt ⇧ Shift A
Edit padding on all sides (from right sidebar)	⌘ Command + Click padding input field	Ctrl + Click padding input field

From the alignment box

Click the alignment box in the right sidebar and press the following keys to:

Action	Mac and Windows

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Set alignment to edge	W / A / S / D
Toggle baseline alignment	B
Toggle gap between	X

From the canvas

Use these keyboard shortcuts while dragging on-canvas handles to:

Action	Mac	Windows
Set padding on opposite sides	⌥ Option	Alt
Set padding on all sides	⌥ Option ⇧ Shift	Alt ⇧ Shift
Set padding or spacing with big nudge	⇧ Shift	⇧ Shift

Use these keyboard shortcuts and click specific areas in an auto layout frame to:

Action	Mac	Windows

sides		
Input padding value on all sides	⌥ Option ⇧ Shift + Click padding area	Alt ⇧ Shift + Click padding area
Set hug contents	Double-click vertical or horizontal edge	Double-click vertical or horizontal edge
Set fill container	⌥ Option + Double-click vertical or horizontal edge	Alt + Double-click vertical or horizontal edge

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