

The Wild World of Web Design

People often ask me what makes a good web design?

The answer? Hard work!

I often feel that being a web designer is less about creation and more about curation. Your job is to pull inspiration and material from everything and everywhere and bring it together in a cohesive, organized way in order to convey a message.

You have to be passionate about design in order to do this work. You have to love color and shapes. You have to like being unbelievably meticulous. And, you have to delight in seeing all of the disparate elements of a design come together. There is nothing as pleasurable as being in the design zone, and nothing as frustrating as when things aren't working!

Good design is about knowing when to stick to the rules and knowing when to break them. It's about taking deep pleasure in the magic of making the whole greater than the sum of its parts—and, most importantly, it's about having the eye to know when you're not quite there yet.



KATE McGEE
Co-founder & Creative Director
of Skillcrush
[@kate_t_mcgee](#)

What I've Learned

I've been designing websites for the past seven years and the pace of change has been astounding. When I started dabbling in web design, only a small handful of companies even considered having a website. Today, having a website is not a luxury, it is a necessity for most every type of business or personal endeavor.

Before founding Skillcrush, I worked with companies such as MTV, The New York Times, and Audible to create online experiences that were a pleasure to use. When I worked with established companies I was charged with adapting their existing brand. Sometimes, I got to work with smaller companies and build a brand from the ground up.

What I Want You To Learn

My goal in creating this PDF is to provide you with the building blocks that you need to start designing for the web. I am going to walk you through the design process that I follow, from inspiration to delivery. This is a process that I have carefully honed over the past seven years and I believe that it is flexible enough to be applicable for a range of project sizes and situations.

Some of my process is theoretical and imaginative. It is meant to inspire me and stoke my creative fire. I encourage you to take what fits and disregard the rest.

Other parts of my process are rooted in road-tested best practices; and, although there is always room for improvement (and I would love to hear your suggestions), I encourage you to consider following them exactly. I think you will be pleased with the results, and I guarantee your clients and techie collaborators will appreciate your diligence!

So, let's get started. Up next is a quick breakdown of my Six Steps to Successful Web Design. I'll tackle each of these steps in-depth on the following pages.

I've also included loads of links along the way that you can follow if you want to take a deeper dive on any of the steps. There are lots of great design resources out there, so if you find that I've left your favorite one off the list, let me know!

xoxo, Kate & The Skillcrush Team

Six Steps to Successful Web Design

step 1

INFORMATION GATHERING

Who is this site for? What is its purpose? Are you working with an established brand or creating something from scratch? The goal of this step is to ask lots of questions before putting pen to paper or pixel to web.

step 2

FINDING IDEAS & INSPIRATION

Go out and get inspired! This is less of a step and more of a way to live your life. Inspiration is everywhere—go forth and find it!

step 3

WORKING WITH CONTENT

Words matter! What is the tone of the website copy? Is it a content heavy site? Or, is it primarily visual? Understand what needs to be communicated. Why? How? This is a critical step to take before you begin to visualize your design.

step 4

SKETCHING & WIREFRAMING

Bring your ideas and inspirations together and start to plot out the bones of the website. What pages do you need to create? Why? How will a user progress through the site? By sketching and wireframing, you begin to get a better sense of the scope of the project and can communicate with your client or your team to make sure that the goals of the site are being achieved.

step 5

DESIGNING

Now we get into the good stuff. Typography, grid systems, color theory, visual hierarchy, oh my!

step 6

TRANSITIONING INTO SITE DEVELOPMENT

We are web artists and the language of the web is code. This is one of the most important steps in the creative process. By following a few strict guidelines, you can make sure that your beautiful design is not lost in translation!

step 1 Information Gathering

The first step in any project is to determine what the project is all about. If it sounds like I'm stating the obvious, I am. But, it's shockingly easy to breeze through this step and end up with a team of people who have as many ideas about the goals of a project as there are team members.

As you gain more experience, you are going to want to skip this step, jump right into Photoshop, and get working. But take it from me, someone who has been burned time and again, the upfront investment of time will always pay off.

So get your magnifying glass and finger dusting kits out, and get to investigating.

QUESTIONS YOU HAVE TO ASK:

- ☒ Is this a new project that will live on its own or are you adding onto an existing site?
- ☒ What type of site are you creating? Content-based? Ecommerce? Social network? Marketing?
- ☒ What brand assets already exist? Logo? Font files? Colors? Styleguide?
- ☒ Who is the audience? How old are they? What are their jobs? What do you know about them? What other sites are they visiting?
- ☒ What is the overall tone of the website? Is it serious? Fun?
- ☒ What is the number one action users should take on the site? What is the second most important action? Third?
- ☒ What features do you need on the site? Will there be ads?

step 2 Idea & Inspiration Gathering

Once you have a clear idea of the type of website you are creating—its purpose, tone, and audience—it's time to start the process of gathering ideas and looking for inspiration.

Your job at this stage is to explore without judgement. No design decisions are to be made during this step. Instead, you just want to fill your conscious mind with as much visual information as you can get your hands (eyes?) on. You need to trust that your subconscious brain is digesting and sorting it all.

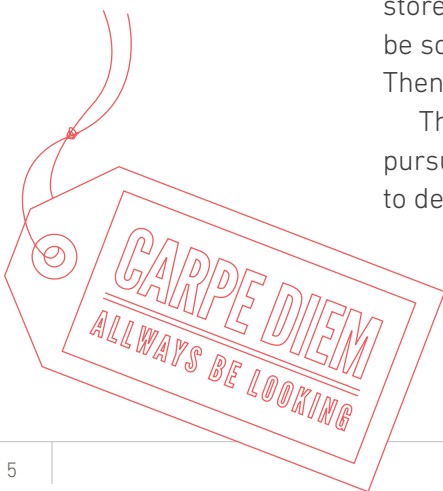
Sometimes I get inspired immediately. Other times it takes a day or two for an idea to marinate before I really get into the groove and can visualize the overall design that I want to create.

People find inspiration in many different places. The key is to not only seek inspiration; but, also, to catalogue those things that inspire you so that you can easily reference them in the future. Organization is key. I have Evernote folders filled with screen captures of things found browsing the Internet. In my office I have a basket filled with paper ephemera that I revisit often. And every time I look through my collection, I find something new that I had never noticed before.

The best place to find inspiration is in the world around you. Sometimes it's the texture of a piece of wood, a bright green wing of a butterfly in a museum display, or the packaging of some coconut water, that can spark an idea.

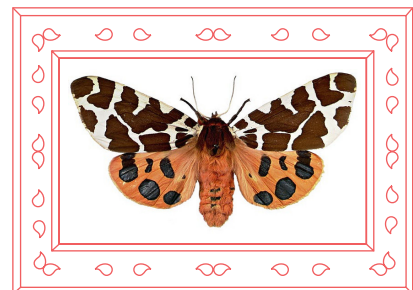
The truth is that this is a step in the design process, but it's really a way of life. As you go through your day, try to be open to all of the wonderful visual elements in your environment. The font on the cup holding the coffee from your local coffee shop; the color scheme used in the window display at your favorite clothing store; the pattern on the vase on your dinner table—these can all be sources of inspiration. Take out your phone and snap a picture. Then catalogue it to reference later.

The search for visual inspiration is a constant and tireless pursuit. And it's one of the most important skills for any designer to develop. So, go forth with an open mind and eyes!



Where I look for inspiration:

- ✓ The Egyptian section of the Metropolitan Museum
- ✓ Subway ads for The Brooklyn Academy of Music
- ✓ So many excellent books at The Strand Bookstore
- ✓ My favorite paper store, Xpedex in Orem, UT
- ✓ The wing of a butterfly at the Natural History Museum
- ✓ Hand illustrated gift cards at Pink Olive in the East Village
- ✓ Depression era public health posters. Clean those teeth!
- ✓ The wood textures and Edison light bulbs at a local donut shop
- ✓ The chalk signs at Ciao For Now on East 12th Street
- ✓ The menu in a Japanese restaurant in Tokyo



step 3

Design & Content

You may not consider yourself a wordsmith, but design and copy are inextricably linked. Content affects everything when it comes to design: tone, structure, hierarchy, information architecture, user flow. So get comfortable with your alphabetic friends and whomever is authoring them all.

As a designer, one of your most important tasks is to create a hierarchy of information. But if your experience is anything like mine, chances are that you will get a Word document full of copy with little to no instruction for which content is more or less important.

Your job is to inform yourself about the goals of the site, ask the copywriter the right questions, and lastly, get comfortable making content decisions within design.

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU DESIGN:

- ☒ How many words are we going to see on this site?
- ☒ What is the tone of the copy? Serious? Cheeky? Deadpan?
- ☒ Are sentences short and declarative? Or long and loopy?
- ☒ Will there be headlines? Subtitles?
- ☒ What information is most important?

step 4 Sketching & Wireframes

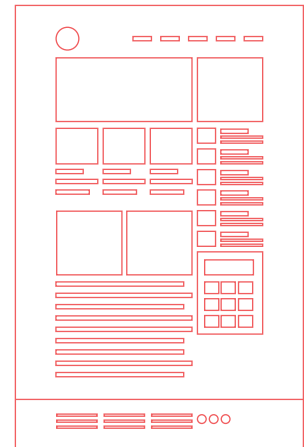
Once you have a good sense of the content and information hierarchy of the site, you're ready to start wireframing. In wireframing you represent the structure and layout of the website as simply as possible, using only boxes and text.

People are often confused by the term wireframe. How do you make a wireframe? When a client asks for a wireframe, what do they expect to see? Does it need to be interactive? Can I simply use a pen and paper? What is the key information that needs to be included?

Wireframes are sketches, drawn by hand or using a computer program, that show the features, content, and functionality of a website or software application. Wireframes are the blueprints of the tech world, they give you a rough sense of what a website will look like, illustrate what features you are going to build, and define how all of the different parts of a website are meant to work together. All without actually having to create final designs!

WIREFRAMES SERVE A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS IN THE DESIGN PROCESS:

1. Wireframes make the conceptual real.
By putting your ideas down on paper, you can turn concepts into actual designs and make sure that you and your team are on the same page before putting in the time to craft your designs.
2. They provide opportunities to user test—early and often!
Wireframes, especially if they are clickable, are an excellent way to test the usability of your product and gauge user interest before you invest your time and money in developing the final product.
3. And finally, wireframes give you a design checklist.
Wireframes can function as a checklist that you can reference as you move into visual design. I find myself referring back to my wireframes time and again to make sure that I'm not forgetting anything as I begin my design work.



Great Wireframing Tools

Analog



BLANK SKETCH BOOKS

Try Muji notebooks

<http://www.muji.us/store/stationery.html>



GRID NOTEBOOKS

I like Behance Action Books

<http://www.creativesoutfitter.com/product/17/action-book>

Digital



MOCKINGBIRD

Mockingbird is a web-based application that allows you to create your wireframe and share it with collaborators.

gomockingbird.com



OMNIGRAFFLE

Omnigraffle is one of the most popular wireframing tools. The desktop application, only for Macs, allows you to create reusable styles for your site, generate page outlines, and take advantage of the extensive library of Omnigraffle stencils.

omnigroup.com



AXURE

Axure allows you to create clickable and dynamic wireframes that you can share online. Because they are dynamic, these wireframes are great for walking clients or team members through the process that users will take when engaging with your site.

www.axure.com

step 5 Design

quick tip



BRANDIE HEINEL
Making Stuff Nice & Fun
@icyfrance

You're not done with a design when you've added the finishing touches, you're done when you've taken everything useless out. Good design is invisible.

Now for the good stuff!

When I first started working in web design, the web was like the Wild West, where wayward designers went to homestead. All of the things that had been taken for granted in print design for centuries, were thrown out the window. There was little to no standardization—no standard layouts, no columns, no footers / headers / sidebars, not even standard page sizes! I remember early client conversations where we literally asked the client what size website they wanted.

Today, the visual landscape of the web is quite different. Now, there are established guidelines for layouts and structure and typesetting and sizes (thank goodness!). But the reality is that no matter what design rules we try to impose on the web, designing for the web is not the precision art that print design is.

The web is a fluid, changing organism. You have to create designs that will work across browsers, devices, monitors, and connection speeds. As designers, we need to understand and be okay with fact that there are certain things that will always be out of our control!

Over the following pages, I will give you an overview of guidelines and best practices for visual web design. As you read, please keep in mind that design is not only about rules and processes; but, is also about knowing when and how to break the rules and find the magic that brings your ideas together, creates a new brand, and gives a website its unique voice.

Unique Challenges Of Designing For The Web

I encourage all budding web designers to embrace that the web is:

- Fluid
- Constantly changing
- Imperfect (see above)
- Begging to be simplified
- Not just the browser
- Content
- Fundamentally typography
- Made for an audience
- Testable (see above)
- Built via collaboration & sharing

Doing so can only make you a stronger designer.



RYAN SHAFER
Lead Digital Design
& Experience Thinker
at MTV & VH1
[@ryanshafer](#)

The beauty of the internet is that it's a fluid medium. While getting the structure correct right from the start is important, you can continue to update/improve content. It's not like printed material that has to be thrown out if you want to change one word. Sites can also be rolled out in releases. So don't let your web project get delayed or bogged down if every tiny detail isn't done. The important thing is to get the site up. Then evolve it on an ongoing basis.



ELIZABETH AMOROSE
Partner at Thinkso
[@thinksolizzy](#)

Where to Design

There are many different design programs out there. From Illustrator to Photoshop to InDesign, each has a specific set of core functionalities that make it easier for you to achieve your design goals. Deciding which product to use can be a daunting process because so many designers have so many opinions about which is best and why.

At the risk of alienating designers all over the world, I am going to take a stand and say that you should be designing all of your websites in Adobe Photoshop. Through my experience of working for many different companies with many different people, I have found that Photoshop is simply the industry standard. Why? Because Photoshop is perfect for the web—it is easy to use; most developers, who ultimately will be coding your site, are comfortable working with it; and, it's pixel-based (just like the web!).

Although Photoshop can be expensive to purchase up-front, it is worth the cost. And, if you don't want to make this initial investment, you can choose the monthly, cloud-based plan. Adobe also offers students great discounts. Once you've downloaded Photoshop, check out the following tips and tricks that you can use to make sure that you're working efficiently and effectively in the environment.

Tips & Tricks for your Photoshop Documents:

- ✓ Version your files—I recommend saving a new version at least once a day.

- ✓ Pick a good file naming convention, here is what I use:

Skillcrush-LaunchPage-03242012.psd

COMPANY	PROJECT	DATE

NOTE: You will notice that I use dates instead of version numbers (like v1). That's because I find it easier to remember what day I worked on something than what version it was.

- ✓ Clearly name your layers and organize them into groups, and website pages.

- ✓ Create global elements only once, for example, I only ever make one version of the site header or footer. I do this so that there's no room for confusion about what version of the navigation is being used.

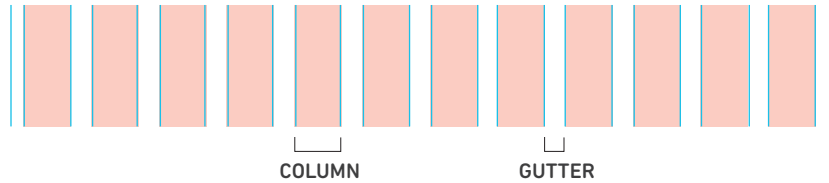
- ✓ If an element is repeated, such as an icon or button, use a smart object. That way if you need to change it, you only make the change once!

- ✓ Organize your layers from top to bottom, meaning elements at the top of your website should also be at the top of your layers list.

- ✓ Beware! Photoshop renders text slimmer & smaller than the web.

NOTE: Alright, I know I was all "Adobe Photoshop of bust!" up above, but in reality, some people I respect have started using Adobe Fireworks. I haven't had a lot of experience with it, but I do think it's worth checking out.

Grid Systems



Once you’ve created your Photoshop file, the first thing you need to do is pick a grid system.

Grid systems have existed for centuries. If you have ever picked up a multi-columned book or newspaper, then you have seen a grid system in action. Grids come in all sorts of variations. Some are based on multiples of three, others are based on even numbers. What all grid systems have in common is that they provide a set of guidelines (literally) to help you organize your and align your content.

A web page might be made up of 12 or 16 equally-sized, invisible columns each with a space in between called a “gutter.” These invisible columns are grouped together in order to create the actual columns you see on a web page.

Designers tend to have very specific preferences when it comes to grid systems. I recommend that you work with grid systems based on multiples of three (grid systems with 9, 12, or 15 columns). In general, I find that these grids are the most pleasing to the eye and easy to work with.

Once you get comfortable working within your grid, you can start to have fun playing with it. What’s the point of a rule, if not to break it? Sometimes you need to break the grid, or intentionally not fill it up. There are no rules for breaking the rules, except that you need to know what you are doing!

ALIGN! ALIGN! ALIGN!

There is no point in using a grid system, if you don’t actually use it.

MY GO-TO GRID SYSTEM:

960 Grid System - This grid system is based on a width of 960 pixels, which is a relatively standard screen size on the web. There are two variants. I recommend using the 12 column one. <http://960.gs/>

NOTE: The thing to keep in mind when selecting a grid is whether there will be content on the site whose size you can’t control. For example, display ads come in standard sizes, the most common being the 300x250 pixels widebox ad — so make sure you have 300 pixels ready for it.

When Disaster Strikes!

10 Surefire Ways to Combat Design Block

- 10.* Just get the content onto the page (into the PSD) and don't worry about how it looks, yet.
- 9.* Snuggle a puppy.
- 8.* Pull out your box of design inspiration.
- 7.* Go to a museum.
- 6.* Put on some good music, I recommend New Order.
- 5.* Call up a friend and get away from your computer.
- 4.* Take a nap. (But no hiding in bed until your co-founder drags you out! I would NEVER do that!)
- 3.* Let's be honest, desperate times call for Red Bull.
- 2.* Clean your office, sometimes getting your environment prepped does the trick.
- 1.* Relax. Don't try to solve the designer block, it will pass all on its own.

quick tip



COLIN NEDERKOORN
CEO & Founder Customer.io
@alphacoln

The simpler your design, the less you have to change to draw attention to important stuff. Every time you add something to the UI to draw attention — like a red button or a large text — you have to compete against that to draw attention to the next important thing. Starting simple allows you to use something as basic as making the text bold to make that one part stand out.

Visual Hierarchy

Once you have your grid system in place, it's time to get to work creating a visual hierarchy of information. As a designer, your job is to convey a message visually. You have to identify what is the primary, secondary, and tertiary information or calls to action and then use text, scale, and color to differentiate between the levels of content.

You may make your primary call to action the page headline and emphasize it with a large font set in a bright color at the top of your page. A legal disclaimer, on the other hand, may be set in size 8 pt. font, colored light grey, and placed all the way at the very bottom of the footer.

Every design decision you make and every design element you add will affect the overall hierarchy of your design. What color do you use for your background? Is it dull or saturated? Do you use icons to call attention to certain actions? Should you use a button or a text link? Should you use a big, splashy image to further highlight the main call to action?

Herein lies the real work of a designer: every decision you make with regard to color, iconography, imagery, and text must serve the visual hierarchy that you are looking to communicate.

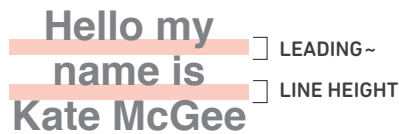
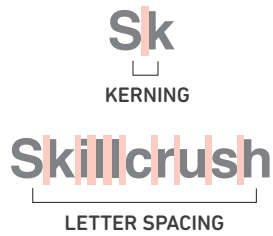
Typography

Key Typographic Terms (and their web based equivalents)

KERNING & LETTER SPACING

In print design, kerning is the space between individual letters. When you are typesetting a book, business card, or other print project, it's common for a designer to go in and tweak the spacing between individual letters.

Unfortunately, web designers don't have nearly that level of control. In web design, kerning's rough equivalent is letter spacing, and you can set the space between letters, but it will apply to the entire bit of text, and not individual letters.



LEADING & LINE HEIGHT

The word leading literally comes from pieces of lead. Typesetters, working on big printing presses, used to use pieces of lead to increase space between lines of text.

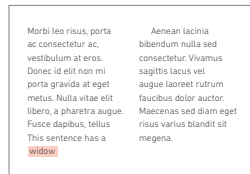
On the web, leading is called line height. As a general rule of thumb, I recommend that your line height be 20% larger than your text size.

WIDOWS & ORPHANS

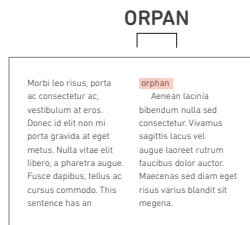
There is some controversy over the definition of widows and orphans, but I am going to go with the definition provided by Robin Williams in her canonical book on typesetting on the computer, **The Mac is Not a Typewriter**.

Orphans are orphaned sentences or words that end up in a column or on a page by themselves, separated from their parent paragraphs. Orphans are rare on the web because pagination and columns are not common.

Widows are the dangly little words at the end of a paragraph. The web is filled with widows! And there is little to nothing a web designer can do about it. You won't ever be able to control the browser and monitor people use, so spend your emotional energy on other pursuits.



WIDOW



ORPHAN

**LEFT-ALIGNED****CENTERED****RIGHT-ALIGNED****JUSTIFIED**

TEXT ALIGNMENT

Good news! What's true of text alignment in print, is true on the web. On the web, you have four options: left, right, center, and justify.

Left alignment, in Western cultures, is the easiest to read. Justified text is being used more and more and can be a great trick to have in your back pocket. But watch out for those rivers (the gaps between text that can occur in justified text).

FONT-SIZE

In print, font-size is measured in points (pts for short). On the web, font-size is measured in pixels, which are roughly equivalent to points, or ems.

When it comes to picking font-size legibility is king. One of the most common mistakes that web designers make is setting their text in a font-size much too small to read. I recommend that you don't make any text smaller than 15 pixels unless you want to seriously de-emphasize it.



SOME CUPCAKE IPSUM FOR YOUR PLEASURE...

Cupcake ipsum dolor
sit amet wypas bear
claw jujubes. Liquorice
cotton candy jelly beans
fruitcake. Chocolate
bar icing fruitcake
cheesecake ice cream
halvah cheesecake. Sweet
dragée halvah dragée
croissant. Caramels
dessert ice cream ice
cream I love gummi bears
cake sesame snaps I love.
Cookie applicake chupa
chups pastry cupcake tart.
Pie fruitcake I love donut
cheesecake I love sugar
plum I love. Bear claw
macaroon liquorice.

Lorem Ipsum

When creating wireframes, print or web designs, designers often use Lorem Ipsum, a specific type of modified Latin text as a placeholder for where text will go.

Lorem Ipsum has been used by designers and printers since the 1500s. Although the text resembles Latin and is based on a work of Cicero, it is intentionally modified and remixed to be nonsensical. The idea here is that by using a nonsense text, none of the focus will go to the meaning of the content, and instead, all attention is focused on the visual design.

Many web designers borrow their Lorem Ipsum text from Ipsum, a website dedicated to the history of Lorem Ipsum text. If you have a Mac, I recommend that you download Little Ipsum. This speedy app lets you pick up a few words, sentences, or paragraphs of Lorem Ipsum text, using their handy drop-down menu in your Apple top menu toolbar.

In recent years, clever designers have created a whole host of Lorem Ipsum variations. I am partial to Hipster Ipsum, so much mcsweeney's polaroid cray authentic locavore brunch fanny pack 8-bit swag!



FANNY KREBS @fannivuniconnu

I like cupcakeipsum.com but it makes me hungry :-)



AMANDA DEAN @MsAmandaDean

My favourite is Melbourne Ipsum melbourneipsum.com.au all about my wonderful city!



MATTHEW LAMB @SFDcMatt

Samuel L. Ipsum -> slipsum.com

But be careful! Make sure that whatever flavor of Lorem Ipsum you prefer is truly nonsensical. There is nothing that will deflate your sails faster than a client hung up on why your design for their news website is filled with descriptions of cupcakes.

quick tip



COLIN NEDERKOORN
CEO & Founder Customer.io
@alphacoln

Proxima Nova has replaced Helvetica Neue as my sans-serif typeface of choice. They probably won't make a movie about it, but if you want a sophisticated sans-serif typeface that the lay(wo)man won't recognize, give Proxima Nova a shot.

Types of Typefaces

There are a handful of major categories of typefaces. Each one has its own set of strengths and weakness. Some are better for headlines, others are fun for sidenotes, and others are best suited for hundreds of pages of text.

The two things to keep in mind when selecting a typeface is: personality and legibility. Is the text in question meant to grab someone's attention? Then maybe a display font suits. Are you typesetting 2,000 words of a newspaper article? Go with a serif font. Creating a simple logo for a refined, fanciful brand? Consider a script font!

Serif

Serif typefaces are defined by their "feet," which are yes, technically called feet! Feet are the little lines that poke out at the edges of the letters.

Serifs are super easy to read because those little feet create a subtle visual connection between the letters. This readability makes them great for paragraphs of text – you'll see them on everything from blogs to newspapers to ebooks.

Serifs are also well-suited for more serious texts, such as newspapers, textbooks, or bibles. So don't expect to see Serifs on Twitter or Facebook! They are often considered appropriate when you are looking to create an elegant, refined or collegiate aura.

Slab serif typefaces, which have thick blocky serifs (I call them gorilla feet), are super popular right now.

SOME GOOD SERIF TYPEFACES:

Crimson Text

google.com/webfonts/specimen/Crimson+Text

Cardo

google.com/webfonts/specimen/Cardo

EB Garamond

www.google.com/webfonts/specimen/EB+Garamond

quick tip



MIKE FORTRESS
Designer at Oak Studios
@mfortress

I love digital type that looks drawn by translation (such as with a broad nib pen), like Aaron Carambula's crunchy Marais where you can almost see the tool's effects on the form.

Sans Serif

Sans Serif typefaces are simply Serif typefaces minus the feet (sans is, after all, French for without).

Sans Serifs are usually clean and geometric, which makes them easiest to read when they are either really LARGE or really small. You will see Sans Serifs often used for headlines, captions, and short descriptive texts. Sans Serifs fonts tend to be more modern, sporty, fun, and/or casual.

GOOD SANS SERIF TYPEFACES:

PT Sans

<http://www.google.com/webfonts/specimen/PT+Sans>

Raleway

<http://www.google.com/webfonts/specimen/Raleway>

Droid Sans

<http://www.google.com/webfonts/specimen/Droid+Sans>

DISPLAY

Display typefaces have A LOT of personality. We are talking about the kind of typeface that is always dressed up in western gear or techy robot suits. Display typefaces are best used when you need a little bit of flair in your design. And, should be used sparingly for maximum effect. For instance, you wouldn't want to read a paragraph set in a Wild West typeface, but they're great to use when creating attention-getting headlines.

Display typefaces can be anything and can really run the gamut—serious, elegant, fanciful, or silly!

GREAT DISPLAY FONTS:

Sniglet

google.com/webfonts/specimen/Sniglet

Londrina Sketch

google.com/webfonts/specimen/Londrina+Sketch

Codystar

google.com/webfonts/specimen/Sancreek

quick tip



JEN McFADDEN
Co-Founder at Skillcrush
[@jen_mcfadden](#)

I love all of the wonderful, whimsical icons that you can find on The Noun Project. I'm building a little site on the side that aims to encourage kids to get outside and do fun things. Their catalogue of icons are great and include many related to the outdoors and sports.

Script

When you are looking for a fancy font with a lot of style, a Script typeface is your lady.

These typefaces have lots of swoops and curls and sometimes even look handwritten. Script typefaces look awesome for logos, large headlines, and for little details to give something a nice handmade touch.

Script typefaces are typically used when you are trying to make your page elegant, feminine, or fanciful.

GREAT SCRIPT FONTS:

Dancing Script

google.com/webfonts/specimen/Dancing+Script

League Script

google.com/webfonts/specimen/League+Script

Sonsie One

google.com/webfonts/specimen/Miniver

Symbols & Dingbats

Sometimes a picture can say a thousand words. That's when you cue up a Symbol or Dingbat typeface.

Who wants to write out love when a ♥ says it all?

GREAT SYMBOL FONTS

SS Social Circle



symbolset.com

SS Standard



symbolset.com

quick tip



JESSICA HISCHE

Letterer &
Avid Internetter
@jessicahische

I always start designs with black, white and #dedede (a light gray) so that I have a good value range and can pick colors later on in the process.

Color Theory

Color is powerful. It's the first thing a user sees when they open a website and it immediately sets the mood. Before we see the images, or read the text, we feel the colors. Are they warm or cold? Saturated or dull? How are they being used to direct our attention on the page? Are there certain elements on the page screaming for our attention? Others that can be ignored for now?

When I set out to choose my color palette I think a lot about the audience. Is it women? Men? Teenagers? Stumptown-coffee-drinking-hipsters? Or recent immigrants from Trinidad? I try to put myself in their mindset and choose a color that will make sense to them.

I don't mean to suggest that the choices are obvious. Not all women love pink. Not all teenagers are looking for flashy, neon yellow. Not all men love grey. However, you often find that certain color palattes suit the copy, brand messaging or overall tone of a site better than others.

To start, I select four colors: main, secondary, accent, and text color (which is usually a shade of grey).

WHEN PICKING A MAIN COLOR...

I like to use a color that is a bit de-saturated. Why? Because this color is going to be very prominent on your site. You want it to be impactful without being overwhelming. This color should really start to set the tone for your website.

Use your main color for:

- Illustrations
- Backgrounds
- Headlines

WHEN PICKING A SECONDARY COLOR...

I try to find something that nicely complements the main color. This is when you begin to create a color theme for the site.

Use your secondary color for:

- Illustrations
- Sub-headlines

WHEN PICKING AN ACCENT COLOR...

You will use your accent color to call attention to something. Where do you want a user to click? On that "buy this" button? Then you are going to want to make that button a bright color that stands out from the rest of the site. It's a good idea to select an accent color that is bright and saturated.

Use your accent color for:

- Links
- Buttons
- Calls to action

WHEN PICKING A TEXT COLOR...

For text, I like to use a shade of grey. Never black! Having too sharp of a contrast between the text and background can be hard on a reader's eyes. For the majority of text I like to use #414141, but I always use it in combination with a variety of different blacks depending on the importance of the other text. #999999 is great for hints and side notes, and #666666 is a good choice for disclaimer text, "the fine print," or actions you want to discourage, such as canceling a transaction.

Use your text color for:

- Body text
- Headlines
- Disclaimer text
- Calls to action you want to de-emphasize

quick tip



MIKE FORTRESS
Designer at Oak Studios
[@mfortress](#)

I prefer neutral palettes that use a strong accent color in a bold way. Perhaps a white background (#fff), a not-too-dark text value with a little hue in it (#45585f), and a strong accent color (#4e5fff). ← Be careful with that color!

Also, I'm so disappointed that #c0ffee isn't even brown.

Color & the Web

If you are transitioning from print to the web, you might be familiar with CMYK, the way that colors are made in print production.

On the web, every tiny little point on your screen – a pixel – is made up of 3 tiny lights, a red one, a blue one and a green one. As a result, hexadecimal colors describe how much red, blue and green go into a given color (just like mixing paint!).

Each hex color code is made up of six digits. For example, black is #000000. The # tells you it's a hexadecimal color, while the next 6 digits describe how much of each color to use – the first two are for red, the second two for green, the last two for blue. Black has zeroes for everything because it doesn't have any colors in it.

#	00	00	00
	RED	GREEN	BLUE

The larger the numbers, the brighter the colors. The interesting thing about hex codes are that instead of counting from 0-99, like you'd expect, they go from 00-FF. They add on A through F after the number 9, so they count like this:

0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, A, B, C, D, E, F

Basically, this means something like C3 is a bigger number than 83, and FF is the biggest number of them all. Since FF is as high as we go, #FFFFFF means as much red, green and blue as is possible. That's white!

Although you won't need to understand how hexadecimal colors work when you are designing in Photoshop, this becomes really important once you start translating your work into code.

step 6

From Design to Development

The last step in the web design process, if you are not writing your own code, is to prepare your design files for hand off to the development team.

Taking the time to prepare your files, export the graphics and images, and put together a style guide is not only kind to your developers - it's the hallmark of a professional web designer.

This step isn't sexy, but if you want to succeed as a professional web designer, you should take it seriously and do it carefully. This is your baby, and you are preparing to send it out into the world!

ORGANIZE YOUR PHOTOSHOP FILES

- ☒ Group related layers
 - ☒ Organize your layers from top to bottom
 - ☒ Clearly mark all states (hover, press)
 - ☒ Make sure that any smart objects are included in the final package
-

YOUR STYLE GUIDE MUST INCLUDE

- ☒ Background color (hex value) & pattern (if applicable) for all elements that have them
 - ☒ For all headlines, subtitles, body text, and secondary text:
 - Font family
 - Font-size
 - Font-weight
 - Hex color
 - Line-height
 - Link color & style, including hover states
-

-
- ☑ For all buttons:
 - Default, Hover & Press states:
 - Background color (or gradient)
 - Text color
 - Border radius (rounded corner, if any)
 - Width / height, etc.
-

- ☑ Pixel dimensions of major elements, including website body and sidebars.
-

PREPARE ALL ASSETS

- ☑ Include all font files. Make sure they are TTF, EOT, or WOFF files. No OTF files allowed!
-
- ☑ Export all your images and icons as small as possible. I try not to have anything bigger than 60 kb. Export images and photographs as JPEGs, and icons, patterns, and any image that has a transparencies as PNGs.
-
- ☑ Choose an intuitive file naming convention and stick to it.
-
- ☑ Make sure that your file names don't include spaces, or characters other than letters, numbers, and the occasional underscore.
-

Is your design developer ready?

A WEB DESIGN HAND-OFF CHECKLIST:

- ☒ I've got a style guide, and it includes hex values!
- ☒ All images have been exported as JPEGs or PNGs, and are named correctly.
- ☒ I have included all of the font files in EOT, TTF, or WOFF file formats.
- ☒ My PSD is organized and my layers are clearly named.
- ☒ I have included design comps of all states as reference.

Questions & Answers with...



MARTHA GIRDLER
Software Engineer at Etsy
@marthakelly

Q. How do you handle web design when there are too many "hands in the cookie jar"?

A. A CSS Style Guide

CSS Style guides give designers a chance to design and build pieces of the site that other designers and developers can build upon.

Rather than designing an entire new page from scratch, designing pieces (buttons, links, paragraph styles, header styles, icons) for reuse keeps your codebase smaller, more manageable, and helps reuse CSS/images to give your site better loading speed and performance.

Design Technology

I'm a Designer, not a Coder!

quick tip

**ADDA BIRNIR**

Code & Word-Smith for
Skillcrush

@addabjork

Don't be scared of code!
It's totally awesome. So
awesome, that I got my
hair did and made a bunch
of videos to teach you
about it :) Go take a look:
beta.skillcrush.com

Thought we were done talking about “developing” and “code”?
Think again!

There used to be a day when a designer could stick to their PSDs, pushing pixels and blissfully ignoring code. That day has passed. You may be a visual artist, but like it or not, you work on the web so you gotta know how to speak web-speak.

You don't want to be an architect who has never hammered a nail. Or, a cookbook author who never cooks! And more and more tech companies are expecting their designers to carefully push pixels and then turn around and translate it all into code.

So what technologies do you need to know?

The web technologies that you need to know as a designer are all of the languages of the frontend. The frontend of the web encompasses anything that a user sees when they open up their browser. This means all the content, the styles, and the interactions—all that visual stuff that you spend all your time designing!

The good news? If you are meticulous enough to be a web designer, then you better believe you've got a brain for code. And, I would wager a bet that you're going to discover that being able to bring your designs to life is worth the headache of learning to code.

We don't have time in this PDF to go deep into the technologies that you need to know; but, lucky for you, Skillcrush has a whole tutorial platform for that purpose. So go check it out!

The Web Technologies Every Web Designer Should Know:

HTML

HTML describes what each part of a web page is to your browser.

You know when you visit a website and see a headline and a bunch of paragraphs? A computer can tell the difference between a paragraph and a headline because each has its own HTML tag. HTML tags look like this:

```
<p>This is a paragraph.</p>
```

You write HTML just like normal text and save it in a file with .html at the end. HTML is the only thing that you have to have in order to make a website.

CSS

CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) is the language that makes the web look nice.

While HTML tells the browser what different parts of the page are, CSS says what those pieces should look like. For example, p means paragraph in HTML. If we wanted to make all of our paragraphs pink and bold, we'd do something like:

```
p {
    color: pink;
    font-weight: bold;
}
```

CSS is written in a plain text editor and saved with a .css at the end of the filename. CSS lets you add color, fancy fonts, drop shadows, padding and everything else hip and stylish to a web page.

If all you ever do is learn HTML and CSS, you will be shocked and amazed at how much you will be able to accomplish. Developers will love you, you will be able to speak intelligently about your designs, fix issues as they arise, and defend your design decisions from an informed standpoint. And probably make more money to boot!

JAVASCRIPT

JavaScript is a programming language that helps make a web page interactive.

When you view a slideshow or get annoying popup ads – that’s JavaScript. If you see your Facebook Timeline update or Google autocomplete a search term – that’s JavaScript. When most anything changes on a page without you clicking a link – that’s JavaScript!

JavaScript is one of the few programming languages that can work in your browser. Because of its ubiquity and ease of use, it was dismissed by professionals for many years as being a toy for amateurs.

This all changed around ten years ago with the advent of “AJAX” and “Web 2.0.” These were sets of technology that used JavaScript in a whole new way, allowing the Web to be way more interactive than it had been before. So next time you use a Google Spreadsheet or watch a Tweet update on a web page, you can know what’s going on – that’s JavaScript.

JQUERY

jQuery is a library of preset JavaScript tasks that makes it easy and fast to make your site interactive and fun. JavaScript, however, can be a little verbose.

jQuery makes it quick and easy to put JavaScript to work. In fact, the jQuery tagline is “Write less, do more.” Like the sound of that!

So what can jQuery do? Well let’s see...you can do some awesome fade outs, or make a super slick date picker, or make yourself a little mobile app!

Favorite Resources

BOOKS

The Mac is Not a Typewriter

Robin Williams

The Design of Everyday Objects

Donald A. Norman

Don't Make Me Think

Steve Krug

Rocket Surgery Made Easy

Steve Krug

Hand Job: A Catalog of Type

Mike Perry

MAGAZINES

PrintMag

printmag.com

How Design

howdesign.com

GOOD Magazine

good.is/everyone

COLOR PICKERS

Kuler

Browse existing color palettes
or make your own.

kuler.adobe.com

CSS3 Gradient Picker

Easily create gradients that will work
in every browser.

gradients.glrzad.com

FONTS

Google Web Fonts

Free web fonts from Google.

www.google.com/webfonts

TypeKit

A huge collection of web fonts, some free,
some paid.

typekit.com

MyFont

A fantastic collection of fonts.

myfonts.com

AIGA

The association of professional designers.

aiga.org

Swiss Miss

Minimalist design, from all over the world.

swiss-miss.com

Design Mom

Crafts and design inspiration.

designmom.com

Brain Pickings

Art and literary inspiration.

brainpickings.org

Oh Happy Day

Inspiring paper crafts.

ohhappyday.com

Don't Make Me Think

Learn to think like a usability expert.

sensible.com/dmmt.html

TECH RESOURCES

Codecademy

Online interactive way to learn to code.
[codecademy.com](https://www.codecademy.com)

Don't Fear the Internet

Basic HTML & CSS for non-web designers.
Created by Jessica Hische and Russ
Maschmeyer.
dontfeartheinternet.com

HTML5 Tutorials

30 useful HTML5 tutorials that will help you
increase your skills
spyrestudios.com/30-must-seehtml5-tutorials/

GRID SYSTEMS

960

A long standing champion, dependable,
and beautifully proportioned.
960.gs

978

The new kid in town, flexible for multiple
browser sizes, desktop to tablet to mobile.
978.gs

The Golden Grid System

Another great responsive grid system,
based on 18 columns.
goldengridsystem.com

INSPIRATION

Dribbble

Show & Tell for creative types. Designers,
developers and other creatives share
shots—small screenshots of the designs and
applications they are working on.
dribbble.com

AWWWARDS

Recognizes and promotes the talent and
effort of the best developers, designers and
web agencies in the world.
awwwards.com

The World

Look around you. You might be surprised.

BLOGS & ONLINE MAGAZINES

Smashing Magazine

Amazing online resource of web design
and development.
smashingmagazine.com

A List Apart

Explores the design, development, and
meaning of web content, with a special focus
on web standards and best practices.
alistapart.com

Cognition

Brief musings on design, experience & code.
And occasionally, "other."
cognition.happycog.com

UnicornFree

Non-magical advice for creating & selling
your ideas and products. Amy Hoy rocks!
unicornfree.com