

geckoboard



How to design
and build a great
dashboard



Introduction

You don't need to be a designer to build a dashboard that clearly communicates your key goals and metrics. Whether you're just getting started or have a dashboard in need of a rethink, our dashboard design checklist will help you achieve the results you're after.

- **Be clear about what you're trying to achieve** – your board's purpose will inform its design
- **Only include what's important** – everything should support your board's intent
- **Use size and position to show hierarchy** – make it clear to the viewer what's most important
- **Give your numbers context** – help your viewers know if a number's good or bad
- **Group your related metrics** – make your metrics easy to find
- **Be consistent** – using the same visualizations and layouts makes comparing easier
- **Use clear labels for your audience** – keep them short and self explanatory
- **Round your numbers** – too much detail could make minor changes seem major
- **Keep evolving your dashboards** – check that your dashboard is encouraging the right behaviour

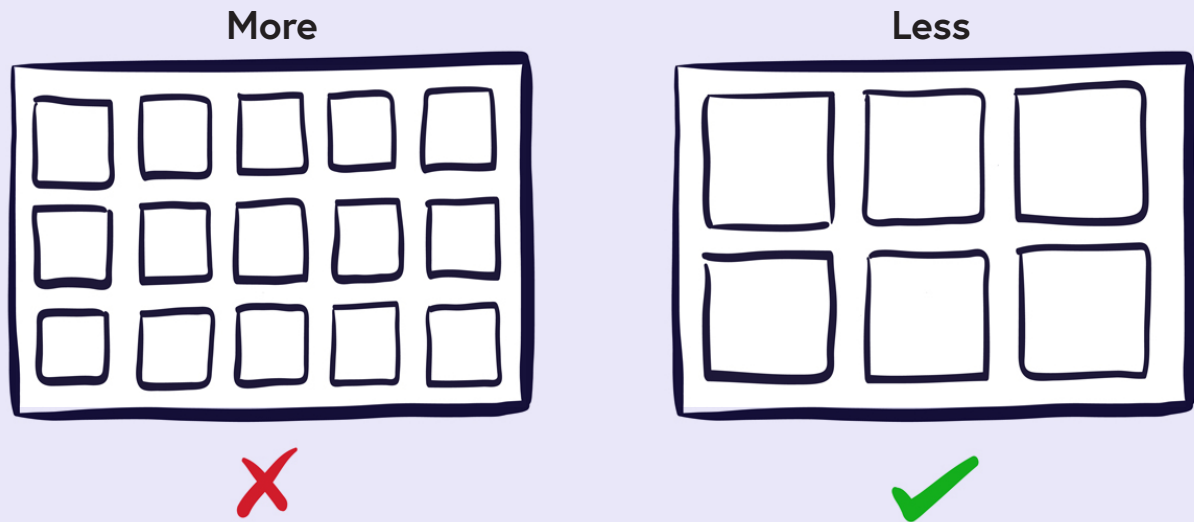
Be **clear** about what you're trying to achieve

The first step to designing any dashboard is to clearly define what you're trying to achieve. What's the purpose of your dashboard? Who's it for? What do you want them to do differently because of it?

Perhaps you're trying to focus your team on a specific goal, or show them how they contribute to the bigger picture. Or maybe you want to make sure a particular type of problem gets noticed quicker. These are all good purposes to keep in mind.

For inspiration, explore Geckoboard's [dashboard examples hub](#).

Include only the most important content



Content is key when it comes to dashboarding. If you're not showing useful metrics then it doesn't matter how you arrange them.

Often you'll already have some goals and KPIs defined, and adding those is a great starting point. Just remember, everything should tie back to the purpose of your board.

Every inch on your TV dashboard is valuable real-estate. Adding too much information can detract from what's important and make everything harder to find. If you're really struggling to fit everything in then you may need more than one dashboard.

When putting any metric on your dashboard you should make sure they:

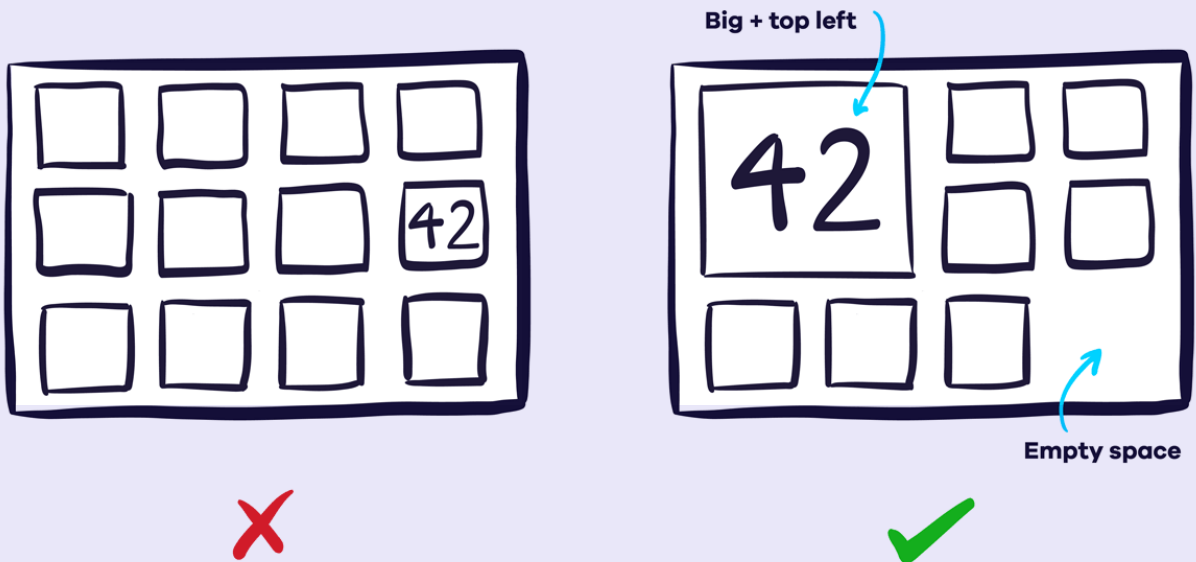
- Match the purpose of your board
- Can be influenced by your team
- Can be easily understood
- Change reasonably often (you don't want to be staring at numbers that never change)
- Don't vary so much that you can't easily detect trends



Break the rules

Your dashboard doesn't have to be totally utilitarian. The most important thing is that it's engaging, so it's ok to inject some fun. If including recent tweets, a stream of new deals, or cat GIFs encourages your team to look at the board more frequently then that's a good thing. Just don't go too wild.

Use size and position to show **hierarchy**



Dashboards need hierarchy to be easy to scan. Use size and position to give emphasize the most important information and to downplay metrics that need to be looked at less frequently. Consistent sizes and clear relationships between elements will help create patterns and visual flow.

In terms of positioning, the top left corner of your dashboard is the best location as that's where your eyes are naturally drawn to first.

Don't be afraid of empty space. It's better to leave a gap than to make something bigger just to fill it.

Give your numbers context

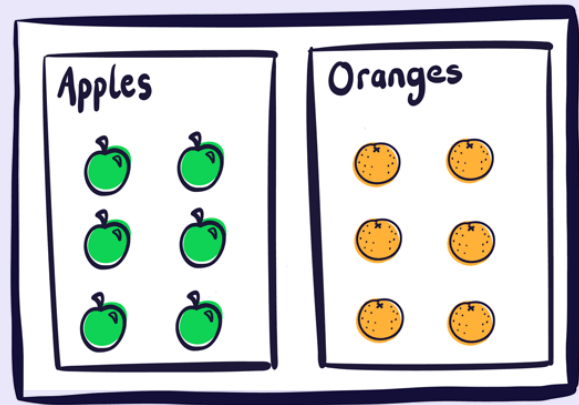
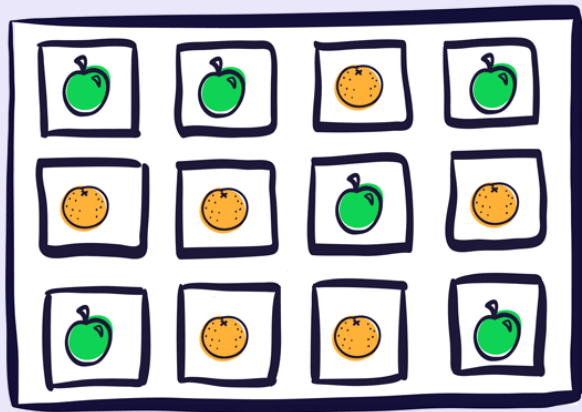


To know if a number's good or bad your viewers need context. Would they know, for instance, that 42 new leads today is out of the ordinary?

One of the easiest ways to do this is to include past data. You could include the same metric for the previous day, or even a line or column chart showing how the metric tracks over a longer period of time. Another technique is to include the average or previous highs and lows.

If you're working towards a goal, include the target as well as your current progress. You can also add warnings for when a metric is above or below a certain threshold to make it easier to spot problems.

Group your related metrics



Positioning the information on your dashboard logically is essential. Grouping related metrics next to each other makes them easy to find — and makes your dashboard's design more attractive.

There are many different ways to group e.g. by metric, product, brand, campaign, region, team or even time period. You may need to experiment with which is most appropriate for your board.

Giving groups a title makes them easier to spot.

Be consistent



With many dashboards you'll find there's an element of repetition, for example you might be showing the same set of metrics for multiple things. Your dashboard will be far easier to read if you use the same visualizations and layouts between groups. It will also look far more pleasing, so avoid the temptation to use a line chart instead of a column just to spice things up.

Use **clear labels** your audience will understand

A key part of your dashboard are the labels that describe each metric or chart. They should be self explanatory, and unambiguous for your viewers. At the same time, you should try and keep them as short as possible to avoid cluttering up your board and getting in the way of the data.

Abbreviations can be helpful too (as long as your audience understand them) e.g. "7d" instead of "7 days". Symbols like '%' can replace the word. You may also get away with a shorter definition for a metric if people are already familiar with it.

Headings can also be used to reduce repetition. Imagine you have the same metric for different time frames e.g. signups today, signups this month etc. If they're all grouped under a heading called "Signups" you don't need to repeat it each time.

Round your numbers



When displaying numbers, don't include more precision than you need. Showing your conversion rate to 3 decimal places or your revenue to the nearest cent when you only care about much bigger changes just distracts from what's important. Plus, including too much detail can make a mountain out of a molehill.

Keep evolving your dashboards

Our final piece of dashboard design advice is the most important. Once you've built your dashboard don't just leave it. Ask you team for feedback.

- What do they look at most often or find most useful, and why?
- What do they never look at or find least useful, and why?
- Is there anything missing that they'd find useful?
- Has it changed anything about the way they work?



Use this feedback to iterate your dashboard.

Check your dashboard is driving the behaviour you intended. Step back from your board every now and then and look at how all the elements work together. Remind yourself what information you're primarily trying to get across and how effectively those important elements stand out. As your goals and priorities change, make sure you update your board.

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**Dashboards people
actually look at.**

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