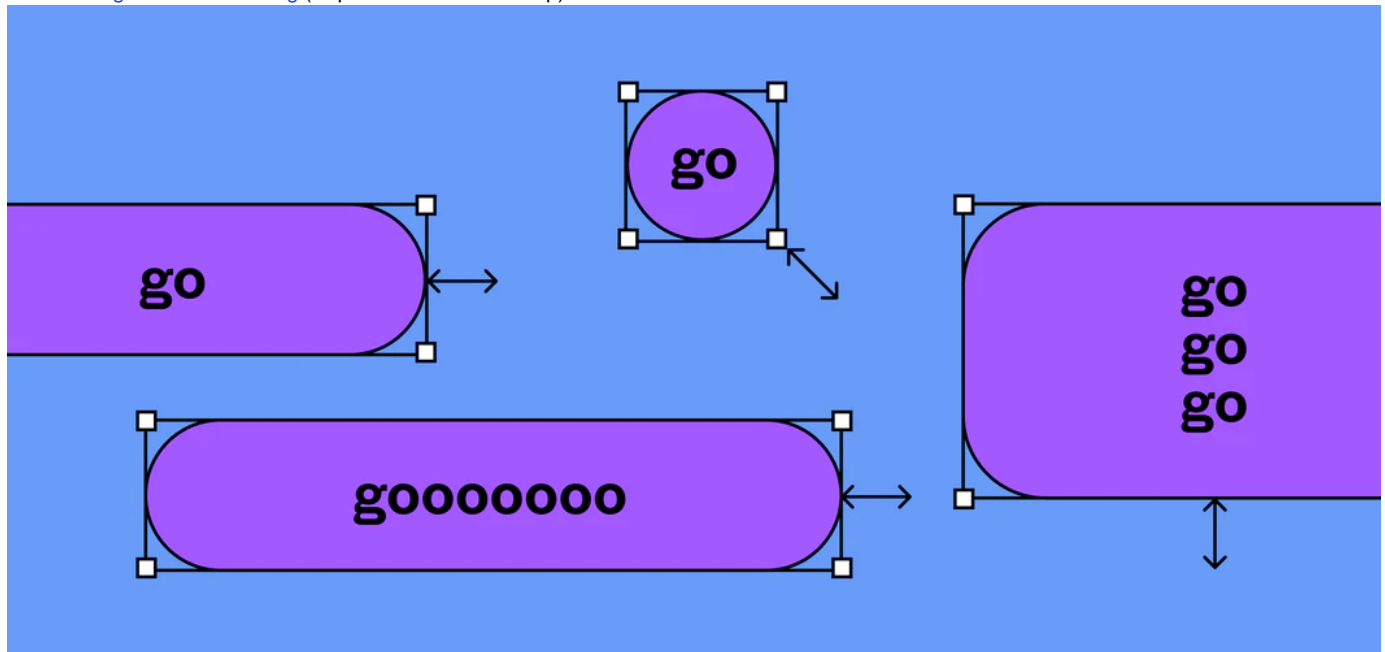


Figma Auto Layout (2020)

This mainly pertains to the major update that released late Nov/early Dec 2020.

[PD studio recording](#) (skip to 11:09 for the recap).

[Brand design review recording](#) (skip to 14:08 for the recap).



Auto layout at a glance

For those that are new to Auto Layout, you can think of Auto Layout as Figma's approach towards helping designers create responsive designs. With the initial release happening in 2019, Auto Layout basically lets one create dynamic frames that resize to whatever content is within the frame. For basic examples like having a button dynamically resize based on the content (label text/icon or whatever), Auto Layout worked great.

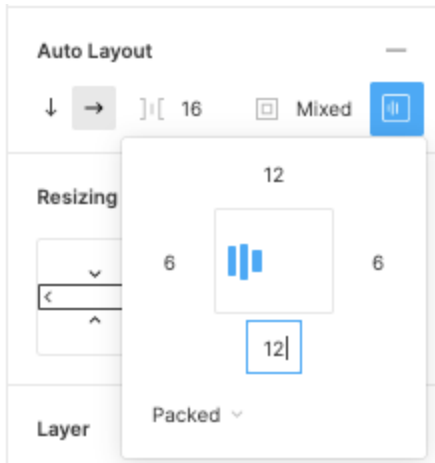
However, the feature was not yet widely adopted and most importantly not the most user friendly or intuitive. In addition, there were some shortcomings - here are some examples:

- users were not able to resize Auto Layout frames without having to manually adjust the spacings between child frames.
- It was not clear that Auto Layout frames could only be dynamic based on height (vertical) OR width (horizontal).
- you could only left, center, or right align child contents within Auto Layout, which made it quite inflexible/not 'responsive'.

In short, Auto Layout was a definitely a breakthrough within the Product Design world, but it was still much much limiting.

What's new in 2020

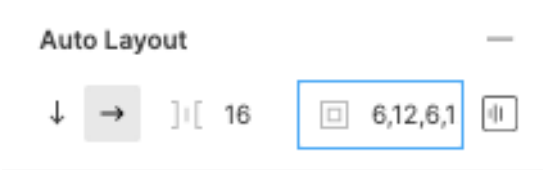
Individual padding



Now, you can adjust the padding for components *nested* in Auto Layout. **Previously, you could only set paddings for top + bottom or left + right.** Now, you can control each padding separately: you can now set different values for padding top, right, bottom, and left. Referencing the image above, you can see that Figma has a nice diagram to show you the top, right, bottom, and left paddings set individually.

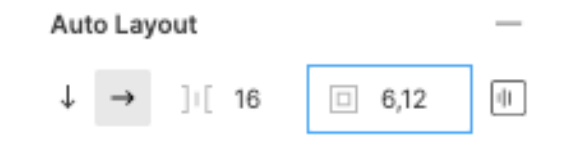
Individual padding can help us have more control over our layouts and spacing, so this is a huge plus!

Pro tip - brought to you by CSS



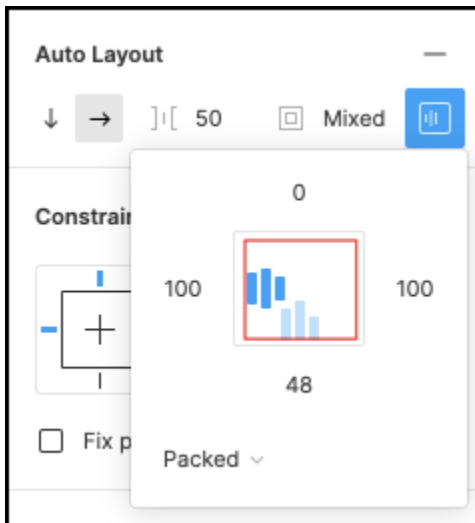
Moreover, you can now write padding as you would in CSS (for those CSS lovers out there). It's not *exactly* like CSS, but you can now write padding as 6, 12, 6, 12 which is equivalent

to padding: 6px, 12px, 6px, 12px; in CSS. Alternatively, you could even just write 6, 12 which would correspond to padding: 6px 12px; in CSS which also is the same as padding: 6px, 12px, 6px, 12px;



Layout options

Alignment control & distribution



Alignment control

Previously (as of 2019's launch), you could only align child items within an Auto Layout frame either horizontally or vertically. Now, that's changed - you can now align children within an Auto Layout frame with the alignment tool (the box inside the padding, highlighted in red). The alignment tool now lets you align content to the center, edges, or corners of frame**.

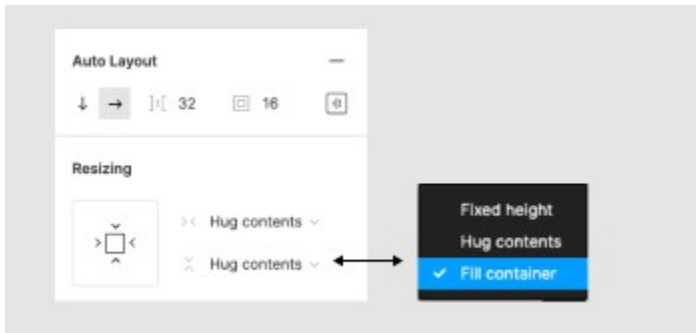
****Note:** Confluence does not do GIFs so it's hard to accurately portray what's happening.

Distribution

Within padding, you can also see that there's a dropdown that has the option `packed` or `space-between`. This control helps align or distribute child content within a frame:

- `packed` - you define the space in between (typically set by the padding)
- `space-between` - automatically distributes the child elements evenly across the container think, **responsive**

Resize Menu



This is kind of a hybrid feature, as it combines Auto Layout as well as constraints. Within an Auto Layout frame, you can now configure with three options:

- `fixed height` or `fixed width` - (depending on if the Auto layout frame is configured to vertical or horizontal)
- `hug contents` - similar to what Auto layout used to do - fit around container for height/width
- `fit container` - stretches the content to fill the parent container (**this is the magical responsiveness we've been all waiting for**)

Now, you can create really responsive components that resize dynamically**!

****Note:** we still can't make content like a stack of cards rearrange based on breakpoints/resizing of the screen.

Resources

- [Behind the feature: the making of the new auto layout](#)
- [Figma's Auto Layout Update \(Nov 2020\). A Responsive Design Heaven.](#) (another good resource explaining the new features)
- [Figma Auto Layout playground \(Figma file\)](#)