

SIMPLE RULES TO

Improve Your Design

White Space

Create breathing room

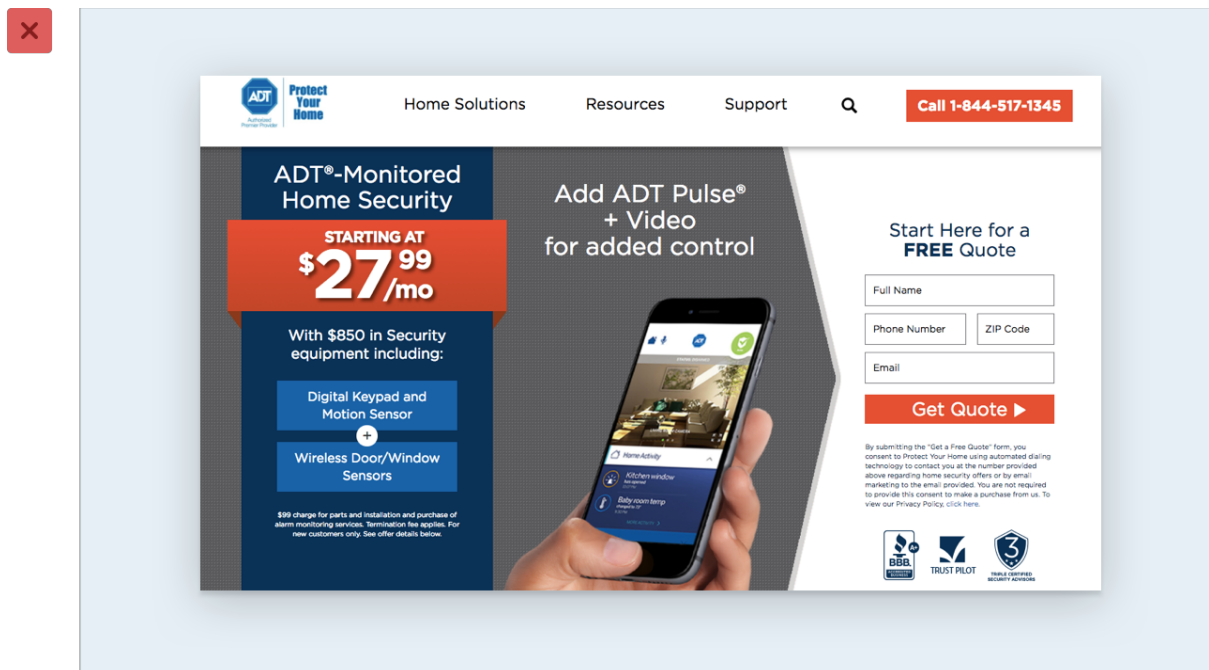
If I could only give you one advice on how to improve your design it would be this: use enough white space. It's the most basic thing you can implement to see improvements right away.

When starting out designing it's easy to be lulled into the idea of avoiding white space, to believe that clever design is the art of fitting as much information on the screen as possible.

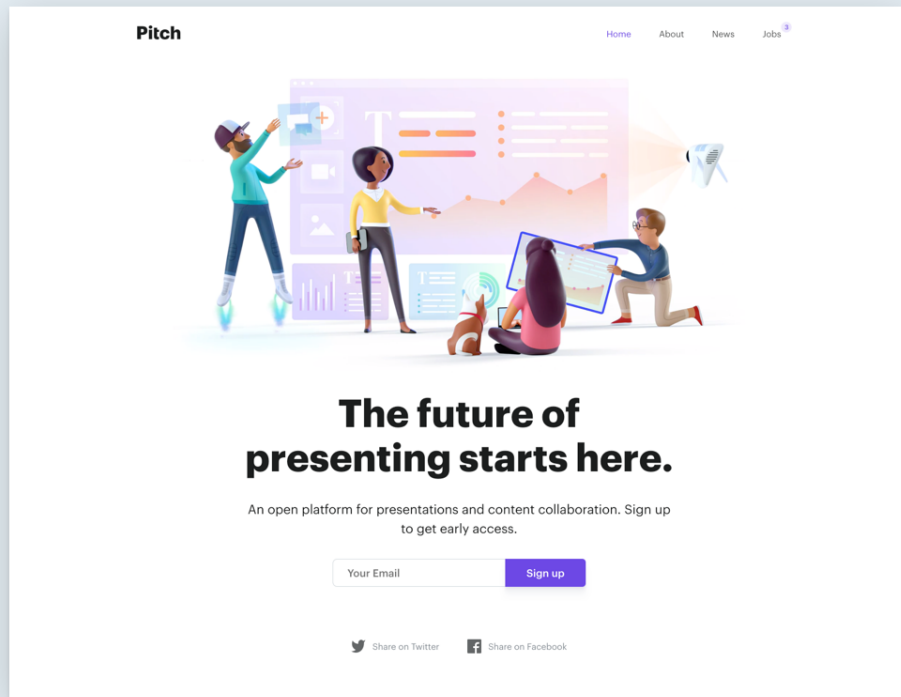
Not true.

In most cases it's the other way around. The more white space you use in your design, the better it feels. Don't see white space as a space containing nothing, it's an active element which enhances everything around it. Use it as a tool.

Elements in a design needs breathing room to be effective. Let's take a look at the following examples:



The image shows a screenshot of the ADT Protect Your Home website. The layout is clean and professional, utilizing a lot of white space to make the information easy to read. The header includes the ADT logo, navigation links (Home Solutions, Resources, Support), a search icon, and a call-to-action button (Call 1-844-517-1345). The main content area is divided into three sections: a large blue and red box on the left for ADT-Monitored Home Security pricing, a central image of a hand holding a smartphone displaying the ADT app, and a white box on the right for a 'Get Quote' form. The form includes fields for Full Name, Phone Number, ZIP Code, and Email, followed by a 'Get Quote' button. Below the form, there is a small disclaimer and several trust badges (BBB, TrustPilot, and a 3-year warranty badge). The overall design is modern and user-friendly, demonstrating effective use of white space.



Which one do you feel more inviting? The example on top is cramming in a lot of information in the given space. There's nothing really standing out. It wants everything to be in focus. It wants you to grasp all at once — the product, the pricing, how you contact them, and how to request a quote (for something you have no clue about yet.) It's easy to get overwhelmed.

While the one at the bottom does not fit as much, it gives the whole structure "breathing room" — it allows the viewer to make sense of the information, it gives them a "way in" to experience what this is about in more detail. They can make a mental map of how the information is structured.

Give the readers a "way in" to your design.

Start with too much white space

Margin is the space where one block of text/image/graphic ends and where the next block of content starts. It's the main tool for creating breathing room. Margin is the space between the things.

Start with more white space than you think you need. **Exaggerate**. Put in huge margins to start with. Then decrease the space until it feels right. Don't make margins something you add, rather a thing you remove.



A form layout on a light blue background. The form is a white rectangle with a thin border. It contains four input fields: 'Username' (full width), 'Firstname' and 'Lastname' (split), and 'Website' (full width). Below these is a dark grey 'Save' button. There is a large amount of white space between the form and the background, and between the input fields.



The same form layout as above, but with significantly reduced white space. The form is now a dark grey rectangle with a thin border. The input fields and the 'Save' button are now dark grey, matching the form background. The margins between the form and the background, and between the input fields, are much smaller, creating a more compact and balanced design.

Colors

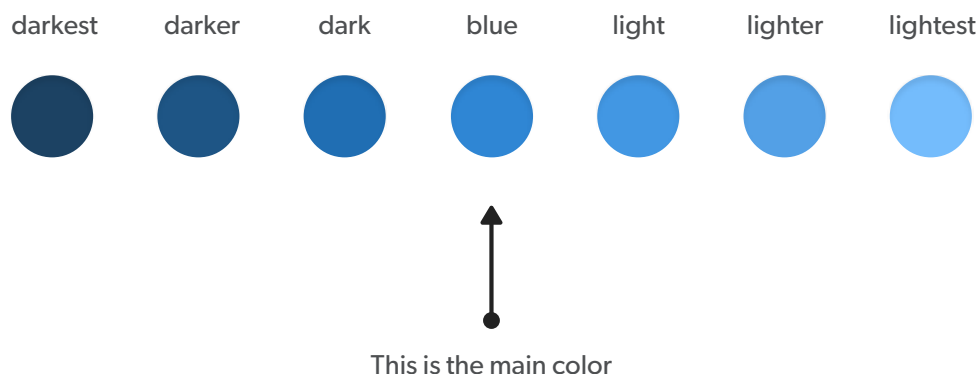
Define your colors up front

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the choice of what colors you can use in your design. "There are so many, where do I start?"

Therefore, limit yourself to begin with. Find a simple color palette that you like. [Colormind](#) is a good starting point to find some inspiration.

But don't believe that you will be able to design your whole interface based on the colors you get back from a generator.

If blue is the main color in your palette, you will need a couple of different shades to be able to "reuse" it at different places in the interface. The best way to do this is to start out with the base color you chose. Then make 3 darker versions of it, and 3 lighter versions of it.



Set up a collection of grays

Whenever you are designing a website or application you will need a basic set of grays stretching from black to white. The same as you did when picking your standard shades for your primary color, you will want to do so for picking a range of grays.

Start with the darkest version. Full black tends to look a bit unnatural on normal screens so go with something like #222222 and work your way up to white. Choose 7–9 shades of gray you can use for your interface.



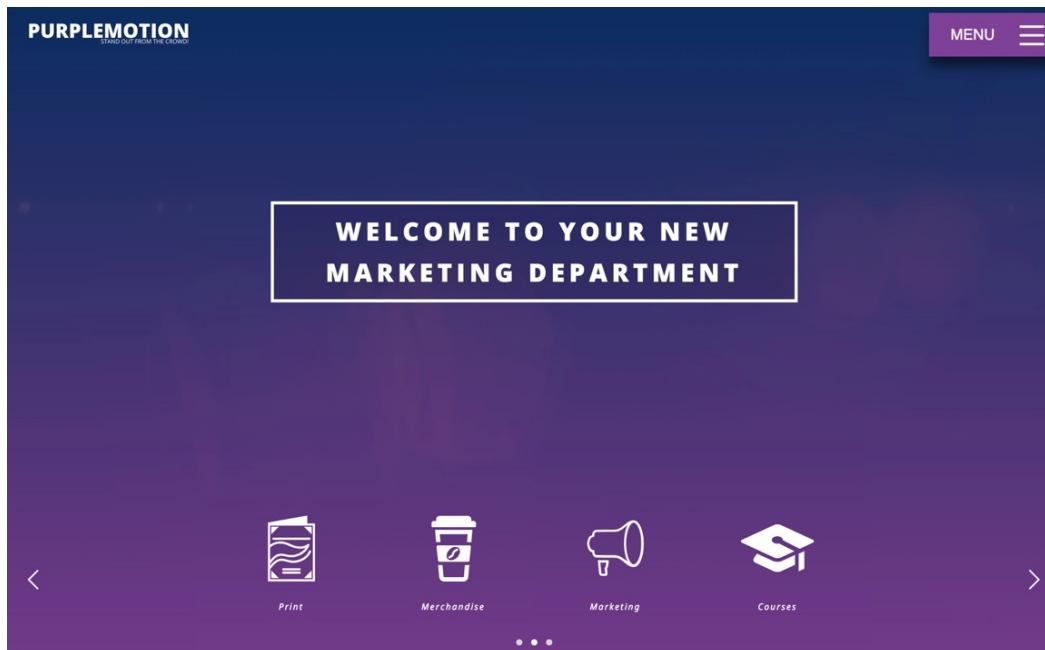
The darkest version will be best suitable for body text and when you need maximum contrast, while the lightest shade is great for background elements and subtle shifts in the design.

Learn basic color theory

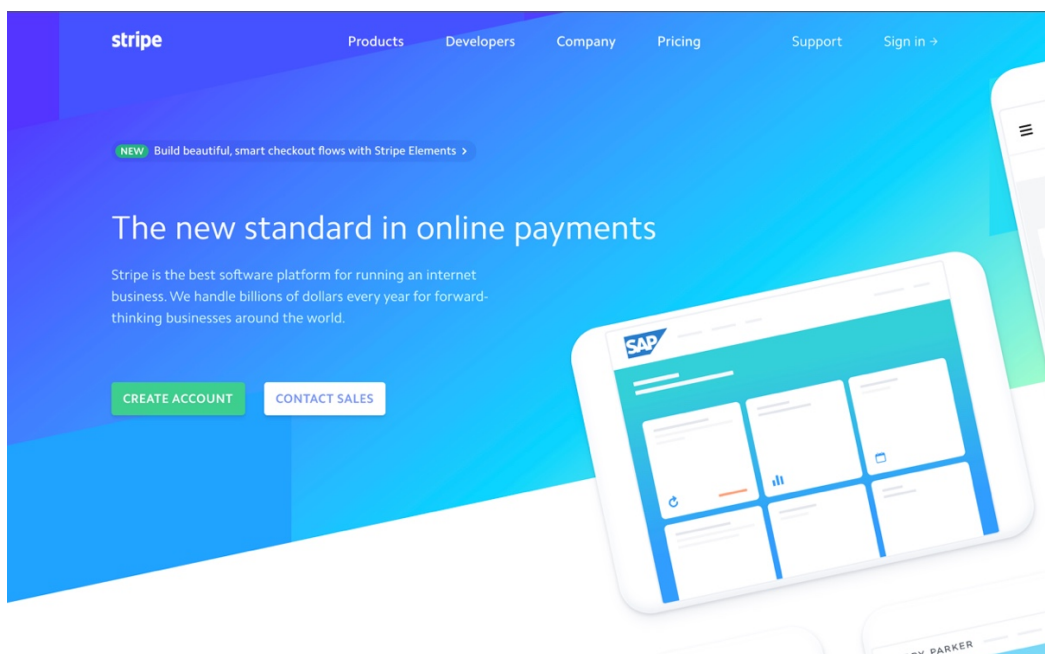
If you want your design to inspire trust and security, you would not use pink or yellow as your primary colors. A better option would probably be to use a blue, or a green.

Familiarize yourself a bit with which colors work together, and what each color stand for. Pay attention to how different colors feel to you.

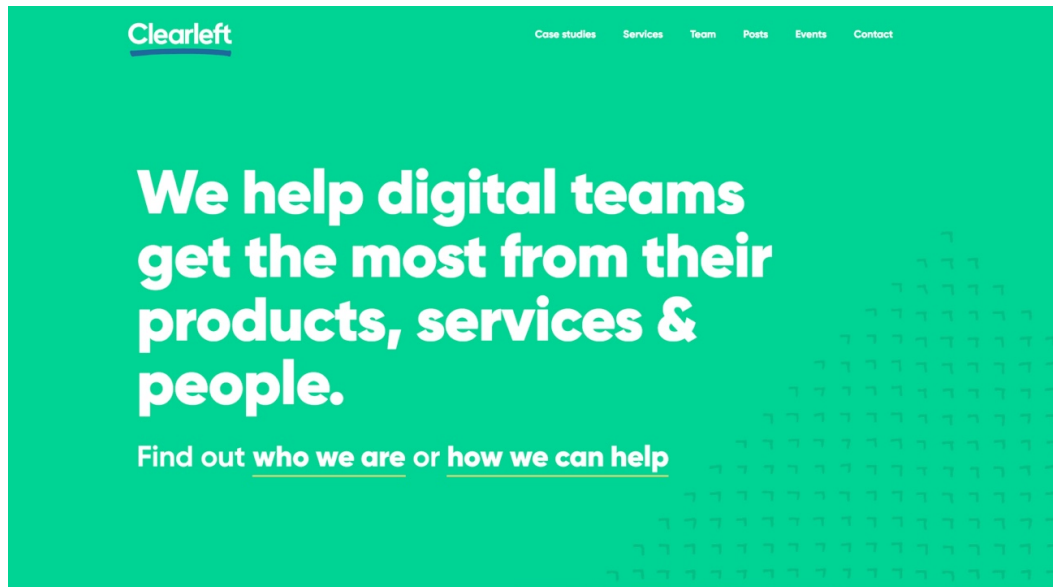
Purple for instance may suggest a luxurious or romantic feeling:



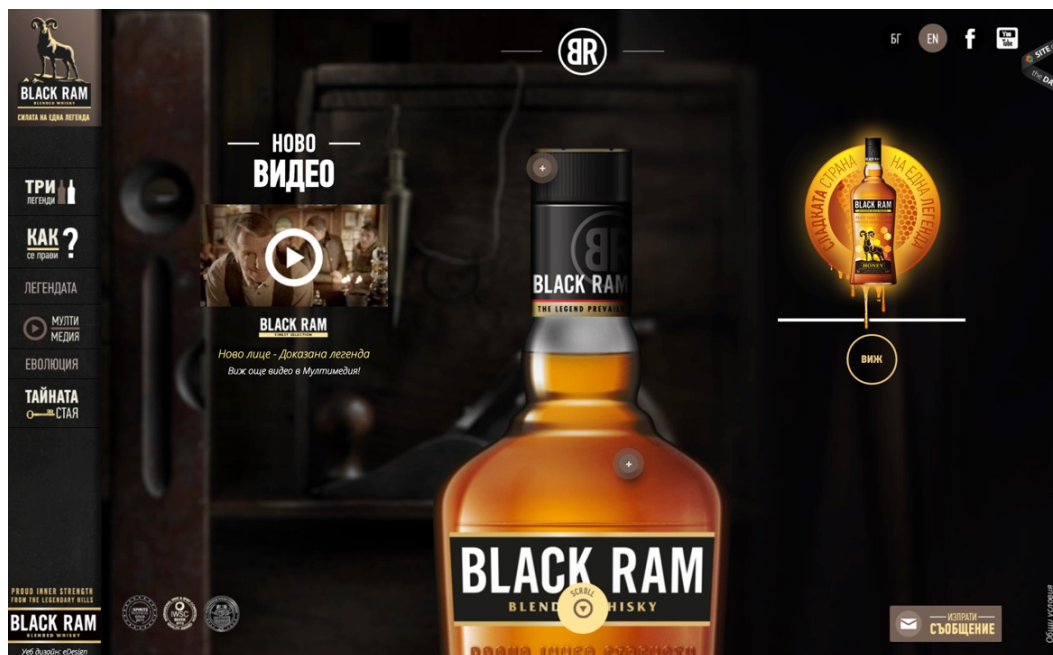
While blue feels more trustworthy, comforting, and relaxing:



And green has a natural and successful feeling to it:



Black is more sophisticated and powerful:



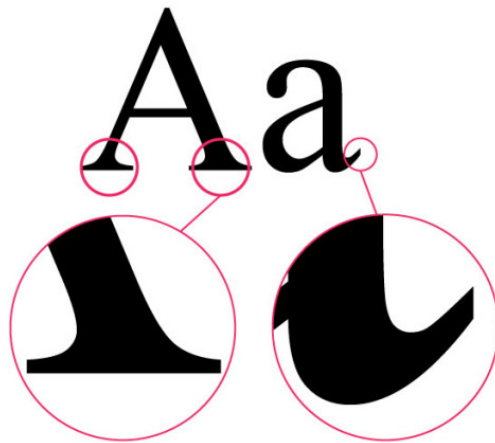
Color meaning is a big topic but I recommend you to read [this article from Smashing Magazine](#) to get a better understanding of how colors play together.

Text

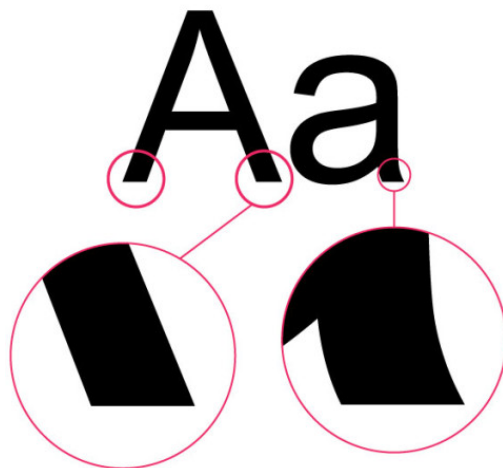
Use a good typeface

There are two main groups for how typefaces are categorized. One group contains something called serifs, while the other doesn't.

Serifs are those little wiggly lines which sits at the end of a character.



Fonts without those lines are called sans-serif fonts and they look like this:



The only thing you need to know about those two groups right now is that when you use serif fonts your design feels a bit more "sophisticated", while when using a sans-serif font you feel a bit more "straightforward" and friendly.

If you don't have much experience in choosing a typeface, I would suggest to go for a more straightforward approach and pick a sans-serif typeface. Here is a couple of great free open-sourced alternatives:

- [Open Sans](#)
- [Roboto](#)
- [Lato](#)
- [Source Sans Pro](#)

With these fonts you can rarely go wrong and using any of them will give you a proper straightforward look to your design.

You may not need more than one typeface

It could be tempting to pick a whole slew of different typefaces which suits various needs in your design. Don't. Your design will look sloppy and messy if you start picking random typefaces for it.

I would suggest to stick to one typeface, but choose one that has at least five weights to it. That is so you can reuse it for headlines, and smaller body text.

Make it readable

Use a font size of at least 16px for your website body copy. Text needs to be clearly readable between 90–100 cm away from your screen. It may be tempting to use a smaller size because it looks more esthetic, and more text can fit on the screen. Remember, "breathing room" is the goal. Not the most amount of content on one screen.



India is one of those countries where you can just walk out the door, pick a street corner, sit down, and watch.

The events that unfold before your eyes are more fascinating, enjoyable and further thrilling than sitting in front of the movie screen at the theater. And what's even better; it never ends.

I came to Bangalore about a week ago and was happy to be met by the greeting from a friend that came and picked me up at the airport, despite it being way awfully late in the night. After an exciting but somewhat endangering bike trip on dark and unhealthy roads, I once again entered the city that I've been so captivated by in the past.

Somewhat later, on an early morning, before the sun strikes with its piercing heat, I walk down one dusty but already crowded street. I'm trying to imagining walking down a similar road in Sweden, then putting this scene as a layer on top in an attempt to compare the two visions against each other, but it's impossible. The difference is too complete.

Too small



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Also check so you have enough contrast for the text and the background color it sits on. Use <https://contrast-ratio.com/> to check that the contrast is enough and that your users will not struggle to read the text.

Check your text rows

Keep your text rows to around 45–70 characters.

This is because you shouldn't have to struggle to find back to which line is next while reading. When the lines are long, it can be easy to lose track of where you are.

When the lines are too short, it's a jarring experience for the reader always having to go back to the start of the line. It's like watching tennis while reading. Not a pleasant experience.

Use proper line height

The line height is the space that sits between the lines of your text. Depending on the lengths of the text row, you will need to increase or decrease this space.

If your rows are longer you will want to increase the line height. Somewhere between 1.5 — 1.8 is good as a general rule.



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Too tight



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But for shorter lines, keep the line height between 1.2 – 1.5. For big headlines you can even go for a line height of 1.0.



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Too loose



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holmberg.io/simple-rules-to-improve-your-design