

Design Principles

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Design Principles - a guide



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Steve has spent the last 8 years at cxpartners trying to write the perfect biography for the website. Here's what he got.

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What are they?

Design principles are a set of loose rules that I design to, specific to the project I'm working on. For example:

- Show don't tell
- Don't break the main experience to cater for edge cases
- Enhance conversations, don't replace them

There were also some principles published on the [Government Digital Service](#) a few years back.

Why use them?

They help make design decisions. Often two solutions to a problem will present themselves. You can use the design principles to determine which solution is the most appropriate. Most importantly they help explain and defend design rationale.

Getting a solid set of principles agreed and signed-off by the client gives them a great framework to critique the design against. Critique becomes less about what the client likes and more about what's appropriate to the principles you've set out.

You'll never completely get rid of feedback based on opinions, but design principles definitely help.

How to make them

Writing good design principles is actually quite hard, but worth it. It takes a bit of discussion and a bit of re-writing to get those few statements right.

Design principles should be created once you've got all your research and before you start designing, wireframing or even sketching.

A good place to start is look at any user research that you have and answer the questions: What should we do for the user? What should we not do for the user? Once you've listed the answers out your design principles tend to present themselves.

If you were not the person who conducted any research it's always a good idea to run your principles past whoever did conduct user research to see if the principles you wrote are inline with what they experienced first hand talking to users.

Get the principles signed-off by the client so that they are agreed

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