How do you create good background and foreground contrast in your designs?

First, you may need to familiarize yourself with contrast. Contrast is the difference between two colors - or how easy it is to tell them apart.

Colors with a higher contrast will be more visually distinct, whereas colors with a lower contrast will be more visually similar. For example, black and white have a very high contrast ratio. Whereas light blue and light purple have less of a contrast.

Of course, in these examples the distinction might be made clearer because of the layout. But what about applying these colors to text? You can have the high contrast black text on a white background. And the low contrast purple text on a blue background.

But how do you determine what is a "good enough" contrast? You can't base it solely on how the text looks to you, as every user will have a different experience. Thankfully, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, or WCAG, provide a standard for this.

Text with a contrast ratio of 4.5:1 is considered the AA standard, which is the bare minimum you should follow to be accessible to most users. Text with a contrast ratio of 7:1 is considered the AAA standard, and ensures the best level of accessibility.

There are a number of websites that can check the contrast ratio between two colors, but most browsers will allow you to do this directly in the developer tools on your website.

Let's open the developer tools and inspect the text elements of the example site.

The black text on a white background has a contrast ratio of 21:1, which more than meets the AAA standard. The purple text on a blue background, however, has a contrast ratio of 1.48:1, which does not even meet the AA standard.

How can you fix this? Well, there are three aspects that impact the contrast ratio.

The first is the hue, which represents the general color type, like red, blue, orange. Let's shift to a hue that is further away from blue. In this case, let's use red.

Unfortunately, this change only brought the contrast ratio to 1.49:1, which means you need to change the saturation, or the "amount" of color present. Let's increase the amount of red in the text. That brings us much closer to the goal, with a 3.54:1 contrast ratio.

However, you can potentially get even closer by changing the last value, which is lightness. Lightness represents how much white is present in the color.

Let's decrease the lightness of the red. Now there is a much darker red against the light blue background, which brings the contrast ratio to 10.34:1.

You could continue to adjust the colors to find the balance between the visual effect you want and an accessible contrast ratio. But it is important to remember that accessibility should always take precedence.