

The Fold

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn what “above the fold” means and how it is utilized and designed for effectiveness. You will also learn about different design principles that should guide designers when designing the homepage or a landing page for a website.

Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. The Fold . . . First Impressions
2. Guiding Design Principles for “Above the Fold”
 - 2a. Identifiable Identity
 - 2b. Content Priority Hierarchy
 - 2c. Attractive, Attention-Grabbing Landing Page
 - 2d. Call to Action (CTA)

1. The Fold . . . First Impressions

“You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.”

This old saying still holds true today and should have a guiding influence on the design of a website’s homepage. If you look at newspapers, you will find that the most attractive story of the day (as decided, at least, by the publisher) is emblazoned in large letters near the middle or top of the front page, surrounded by the name of the paper, the date, and other pieces of information. This is done intentionally to make the paper attract your attention and get you to buy its edition over its competitors. In the printed news industry, the prime retail space in a paper is the top half of the front page, or what you see when the newspaper is folded normally at a newsstand. This is referred to as “above the fold” and is crucial to getting the audience’s attention.

In the case of a website, “above the fold” is the portion of the homepage that the user sees before they scroll down.



The fold is a website designer's first opportunity to make a good, or bad, impression and to get the visitor interested in what the site has to offer.

2. Guiding Design Principles for “Above the Fold”

There are several important design principles that guide how web designers and developers determine which content falls “above the fold.”

2a. Identifiable Identity

When a visitor lands on a website for the first time, it should take no time for them to recognize which organization the site belongs to. The logo, title, brand colors, and font used all play an important part in helping the visitor know they are on the site that belongs to the organization. Additionally, the page should be kept simple and free of clutter.

2b. Content Priority Hierarchy

Two locations where users enter a website are the **homepage** and **landing page**. The homepage is the root page of a website when you enter the domain address into a browser and press Enter. Using a browser to navigate to www.example.com would take you to the homepage of the site, which is typically an HTML file named `index.html`.

IN CONTEXT

The filename `index.html` serves as the default homepage for each directory in a website. The root directory contains an `index.html`, which is the homepage. Additional directories in the site can also have an `index.html`, which will serve as the default landing page for that directory. The filename “index” originated from the original default behavior of a web server, wherein, if no `index.html` file were present, then the server would return an “index” or list of files and folders in the directory.

Websites can also have one or more landing pages that are entry points to the site used for marketing purposes. Landing pages are built for specific purposes, such as a marketing campaign for a new product line. Landing pages may or may not include the typical navigation links found on the site's other pages.

Whether the homepage or landing page is designed, above the fold of these pages is the first thing users see, making it valuable real estate. As such, any content placed within this space should have a high importance or value to the user or the organization.



KEY CONCEPT

Content priority hierarchy is the idea that all information has a different inherent value to the organization according to how much it supports the organization's goals.

When deciding what elements and information should be located above the fold, it should be information that is of high value.

⇒ EXAMPLE

A list of company events is low-value information. Company events impact the company's workforce and do not help the organization move toward its financial goals. Additionally, events that only pertain to the company's workforce would be of little to no interest to the general public.

Purpose statements, important sales promotions, recruitment marketing, and a call to action (CTA) are all high-value information. This includes information and elements that directly support the organization in reaching its goals and would be relevant to site visitors who are most likely potential or recurring customers.



Homepage

The page that users first see when they visit a site using only the domain name, such as www.example.com, and that usually links to the other pages on the website.

Landing Page

A page within a website that is built for marketing purposes and often does not include a typical navigation menu.

Content Priority Hierarchy

The strategic arrangement of information on a website emphasizing more important content over less important content. Also called *information priority*.

2c. Attractive, Attention-Grabbing Landing Page

A website's landing page, particularly above the fold, should also be attractive. The images used should be chosen to reflect the organization's intention and branding style. The image's content and intended subject matter should be clear, obvious, and free from irrelevant elements. The content should also be engaging, dynamic, and usable. Elements above the landing page fold should be dynamic in some manner, such as a timed scrolling image gallery with three to five strategically selected images. Additionally, the elements should be usable or functional. Clicking on anything on the page should perform some action or give some kind of response back to the user. We want to avoid wasting space with static and unresponsive content and take every opportunity to move the visitor toward supporting the organization's goals.

Ads are a common sight on website landing pages. Ads are a revenue opportunity for the site's owner, but they are also a distraction for visitors. If the goal of the website's owner is to generate revenue, then ads may be appropriate. The content of ads is often beyond the control of the site administrator and can have a negative impact on the visual perception of the page, not to mention serve as a possible distraction to visitors and may take them away from the site.

2d. Call to Action (CTA)

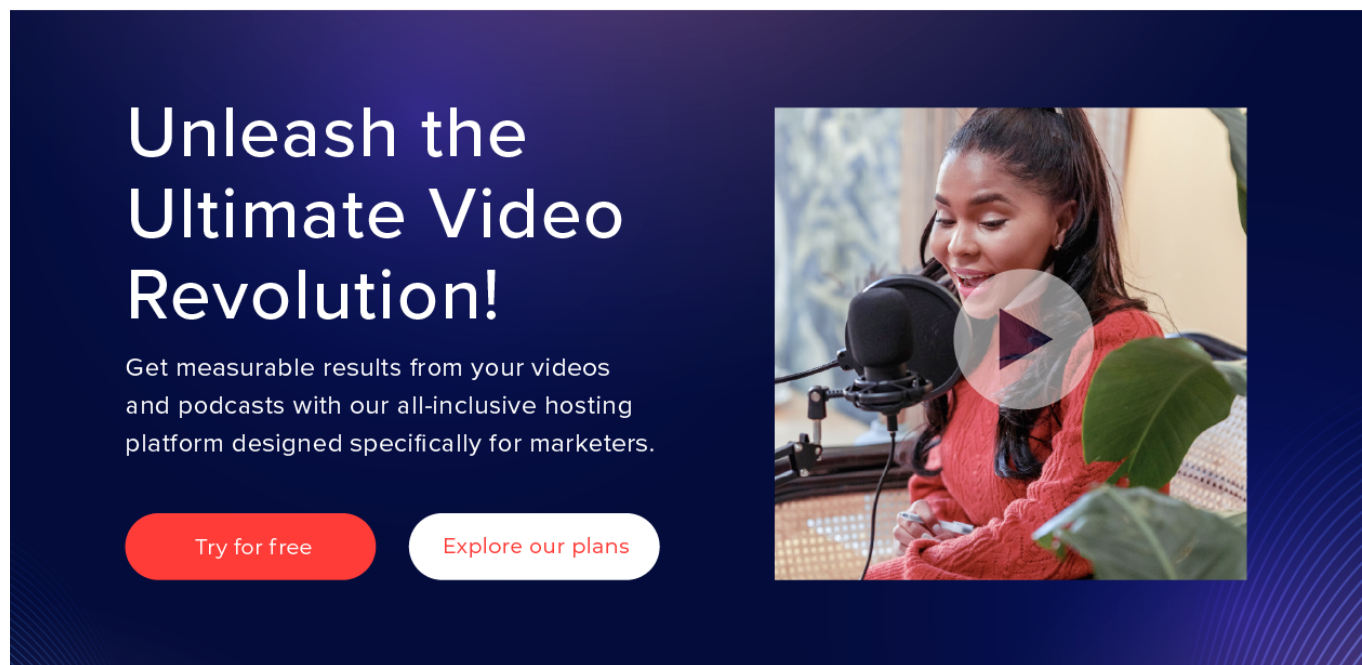
A **call to action (CTA)** is another important marketing element that has the intention of getting the user to take some kind of action to engage with the organization. CTAs usually include some kind of message to the user,

directing them to take action or to get started.

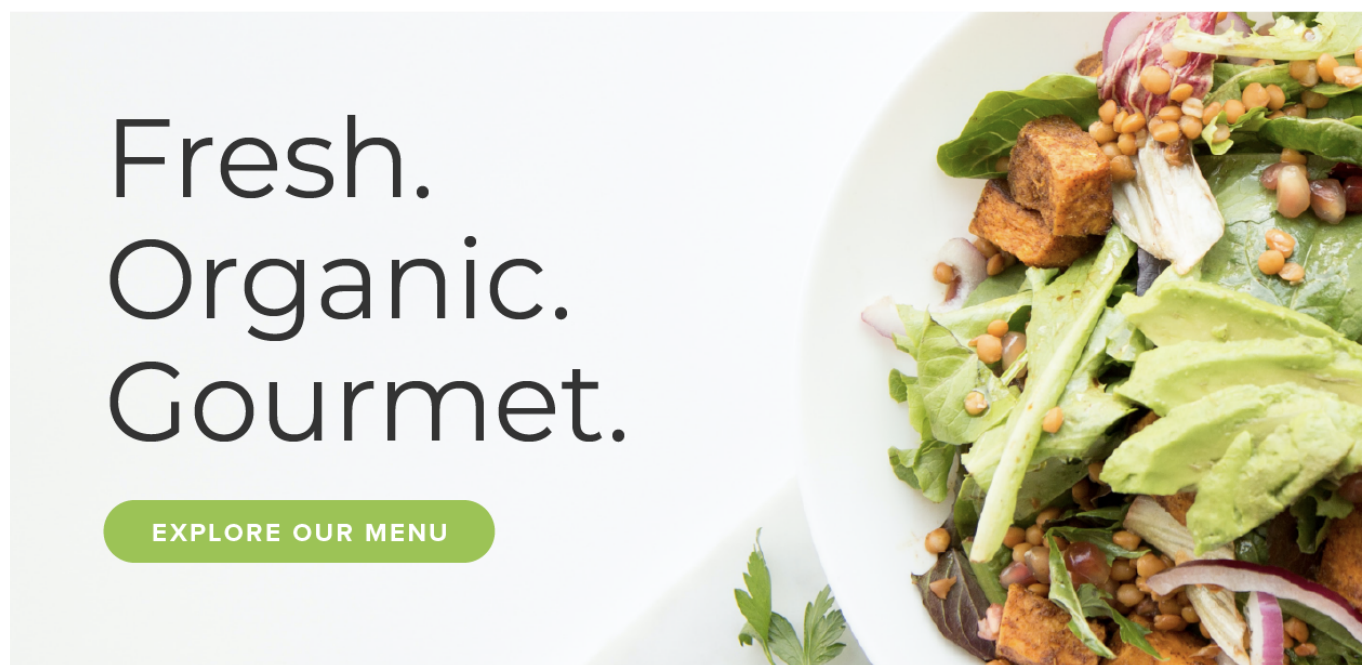
🔗 EXAMPLE

A passive CTA is an intriguing statement or image with the clickable tagline “Learn More >>,” while a more active CTA is a button with the label “Ready to get started?” or “Get started today!”

CTAs are often of high value to organizations and are an ideal element to include above the landing page fold. Notice in the following three “above the fold” examples how the imagery is relatively clean, simple, and not cluttered or busy, and that there are simple and direct CTA buttons that encourage the visitor to take action by simply clicking a button.



This landing page features a dark blue background. On the left, the headline "Unleash the Ultimate Video Revolution!" is written in large white font. Below it, a sub-headline reads: "Get measurable results from your videos and podcasts with our all-inclusive hosting platform designed specifically for marketers." At the bottom left, there are two buttons: a red one labeled "Try for free" and a white one labeled "Explore our plans". On the right side, there is a video player showing a woman in a red sweater speaking into a microphone, with a large play button icon overlaid on the video.



This landing page has a light gray background. On the left, the text "Fresh. Organic. Gourmet." is displayed in a large, dark gray font. Below this text is a green button with the text "EXPLORE OUR MENU" in white. On the right side, there is a high-quality photograph of a gourmet salad, featuring various leafy greens, avocado, chickpeas, and croutons.

SMART FINANCE COMPANION

Welcome to the world of efficient money management, personalized just for you.

SIGN UP



SOLAR PANEL
ENERGY



Contact



My Account



Shop by Category Deliver to 56301 [Change location](#)

12V Monocrystalline Panels

NOW AVAILABLE

Shop Now



Quick Search

Let's Find a Setup That Suits Your Needs

Voltage



Cell Type



Wattage



Kit Type



Shop Now



Chat with an expert

Let's examine the last example above. While it may not be as clean and simple as the first three, this site does take into account most of the guiding principles of designing the site's fold. The large banner image switches automatically to make it dynamic and to showcase different product categories. There are multiple CTAs present above the fold, one to get the visitor shopping immediately (for those who know what they want) and another to get the visitor to start searching (for those who would like to browse and see what's available).

Additionally, the graphics are sparse; they are stylized according to the site's theme and the organization's brand and are well placed. Also, putting a friendly face and name on the homepage can help visitors know there are helpful representatives behind the scenes should they need guidance. The only potential area that may seem "cluttered" is toward the top of the page where you see a header with a search bar, contact info, a help button, a link to log in and manage an account, and the shopping cart link, all of which are pertinent to visitors and recurring customers.



TRY IT

Directions: Visit the website of any college or university. Examine just what you see without scrolling down.

- Does every element on the page have meaning to the visitor or the organization?
- Are there any elements that clearly don't belong or are just taking up space?
- Is the design clean and simple?
- Are there any clear CTAs?



REFLECT

After evaluating the landing pages above the fold, consider changes that you would recommend to improve the page's design and effectiveness.



TERM TO KNOW

Call to Action (CTA)

A message designed to prompt the user to take a specific action.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **the fold**, **the first impression** it makes on new visitors, and how to design it for effectiveness. You also learned about different **guiding design principles** for creating a good "above the fold" design for a website.

Source: This Tutorial has been adapted from "The Missing Link: An Introduction to Web Development and Programming " by Michael Mendez. Access for free at <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/the-missing-link-an-introduction-to-web-development-and-programming>. License: **Creative Commons attribution: CC BY-NC-SA**.

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