

# Design Excellence

Transform visual outputs from functional drafts to polished, professional results through systematic design refinement.

## Workflow

### 1. Silent Activation

When user requests visual output (presentation, dashboard, HTML, PDF, spreadsheet, etc.):

- Activate this skill automatically
- Do NOT announce activation to user
- User sees only the final polished result
- Only reveal process if user explicitly asks "show me your design thinking"

### 2. Foundation Pass

Before any visual work:

1. Identify the ONE primary message/purpose
2. Ruthlessly prioritize content hierarchy
3. Define primary and secondary actions (if applicable)
4. Cut anything non-essential

### 3. Design System Selection

Choose approach based on context:

Context	Reference Style	Key Moves
SaaS/Dashboard	Linear	Restraint, density, monochrome + accent
Marketing/Landing	Apple/Stripe	Space, imagery, gradient sophistication
Data/Reports	Swiss	Grid, objectivity, clear hierarchy
Developer/Technical	Vercel	Black/white, monospace, sharp edges
Collaborative/Creative	Figma	Rounded, colorful, approachable

## 4. Core Decisions

Make these deliberately (never accept defaults):

### Typography

- Select specific typeface with intention (not system default)
- Define scale: 12/14/16/20/24/32/48 minimum
- Adjust letter-spacing: tighten headlines, widen small text

### Color

- Limit to 3-5 colors maximum
- Assign functional roles (action, neutral, accent)
- Never pure black (#000); use near-black (#1a1a1a)
- Verify 4.5:1 contrast ratios

### Spacing

- Choose base unit (8px standard)
- Apply multiples consistently: 8/16/24/32/48/64
- When uncertain, add more white space

### Layout

- Establish grid (12-column or 6-column)
- Align everything to grid
- Create clear focal point

## 5. Elevation Sequence

Apply in order:

1. **Structure:** Grid, alignment, content blocks
2. **Typography:** Scale, weights, spacing refinements
3. **Color:** Limited palette, functional assignment
4. **Space:** Generous margins, consistent rhythm
5. **Polish:** Shadows, borders, corners, micro-details

## 6. Quality Gate

Before delivering, verify:

- Single clear focal point exists
- Nothing feels arbitrary or default
- Would pass review by Stripe/Linear design team
- Every element earns its space
- Feels hand-crafted, not template-based

# Reference Files

Consult as needed during refinement:

File	When to Use
<a href="#">interrogation-checklist.md</a>	Final quality check before delivery
<a href="#">technique-catalog.md</a>	Need specific technique for a problem
<a href="#">reference-library.md</a>	Choosing style direction, studying exemplars
<a href="#">elevation-protocol.md</a>	Detailed step-by-step refinement process
<a href="#">design-philosophy.md</a>	Guidance on restraint, confidence, taste

## Quick Reference: Common Moves

### ***"Looks Generic" → Apply***

- Tighten headline letter-spacing (-0.02em)
- Replace pure black with warm/cool near-black
- Add generous white space (double what feels right)
- Pick ONE distinctive choice (type, color, or layout)

### ***"Too Busy" → Apply***

- Remove decorative elements
- Reduce to 3 colors maximum
- Increase spacing between sections
- Cut text by 30%

### ***"Lacks Polish" → Apply***

- Align everything to 8px grid
- Add subtle shadows (0 1px 3px rgba(0,0,0,0.08))
- Unify corner radius (pick one: 0/4px/8px)
- Match icon weight to font weight

### ***"Feels Flat" → Apply***

- Add elevation through subtle shadow layers

- Create color contrast between sections
- Vary section backgrounds (alternating light)
- Introduce one bold accent element

## Output Standards

All visual outputs must:

1. Have clear hierarchy visible in 3-second scan
2. Use consistent spacing throughout (no arbitrary gaps)
3. Apply color intentionally (every color has a reason)
4. Feel distinctive (not recognizable as template)
5. Prioritize clarity over decoration