

Common Website Layouts

Designing a website layout is one of the first steps for web designers. This step takes time and careful consideration since each website has its own goals, needs, and requirements. For example, an e-commerce site would not use the same layout as, say, a personal blog. Simply put, there is no "one-size-fits-all" layout for every website; a layout that works for one website may not work for another.

This assignment will discuss four common layouts along with their unique advantages and disadvantages. Please click on the following tabs to learn more about each layout style.

▸ Single-Column Layouts

SINGLE COLUMN LAYOUT



A single-column website is the easiest layout to build. This layout typically features a header area, a horizontal navigation menu, an area for content, and a footer area. These elements are stacked on top of each other in a single vertical column.

Single-column layouts provide a simple, streamlined "look" to a website. It is extremely predictable and easy to navigate. Despite its simplicity, single-column layouts are popular among personal blogs and websites that use a minimalist design approach.

This type of layout is not recommended for websites that need to display a lot of textual or visual information. A website visitor may find themselves scrolling endlessly down the page just to retrieve a specific piece of information. And because this layout does not feature multiple columns, it can be challenging to display supplemental information.

Single-Column Layouts	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsive; more mobile friendly than a multi-column layout• Simple and predictable layout• Straightforward navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May require visitors to scroll a lot• Unable to display supplemental information

▸ Sidebar Layouts

SIDEBAR LAYOUT





The **sidebar layout** features one or more sidebars positioned adjacent to the main content. The sidebar is a useful tool in web design for the following reasons:

Navigation

While many layouts include a navigation bar on the top of the page, you can use the sidebar to place a navigation menu. A common example is an online clothing store that typically contains the main navigation bar at the top of the page, as well as a sub-navigation menu in the sidebar to narrow down search results.

Spotlight content

The sidebar is a great place to display additional or relevant content that accompanies the main content. For example, you may notice that a blog typically includes a sidebar with a list of recent blog posts to encourage visitors to explore more content. This puts a spotlight on content that may otherwise get lost amongst other content.

Advertise

Because the sidebar is prime real estate property on a webpage, it can be beneficial to integrate advertisements in the sidebar.

Promote a call-to-action

You can place a call-to-action in the sidebar without disrupting the content flow. For example, a sidebar may include an e-newsletter sign-up form or various social icons.

In a **fixed sidebar layout**, the sidebar is fixed, or "stuck," to a certain area of the page. As you scroll down the page, the sidebar will remain visible. As such, the content in the sidebar is easily accessible at any point on the website.

FIXED-SIDEBAR LAYOUT



As previously mentioned, both the sidebar layout and the fixed sidebar layout is ideal if your website contains a great deal of content across many different pages, such as a blog or e-commerce website. However, this layout has a few disadvantages.

For one, it is easy to overload the sidebar with too much information. This creates unnecessary noise around the main content.

Second, sidebar layouts are not the most mobile-friendly. When multi-column layouts are viewed on a mobile device, the sidebar elements typically fall under the main content. This means that a mobile viewer

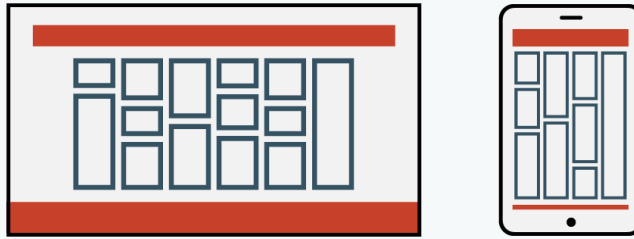
must scroll down to the bottom of the page to view the supplemental content in the sidebar.

To resolve this problem, it is a good idea to develop a mobile version for this type of layout. This is one reason why many website designers ascribe to a "mobile-first" approach when designing a website layout. A "mobile-first" approach focuses on designing a layout for the smallest of screens, such as a mobile device, and then slowly working to larger screens, such as a tablet and laptop.

Lastly, as web design trends move to a more minimalist, "full screen" look, many web designers are abandoning sidebars altogether. However, this is not to suggest that sidebar layouts have no place in web design. As long as a sidebar is simplistic and functional in nature, it can provide a multitude of benefits for a website.

Sidebar Layouts	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Doesn't rely on the traditional horizontal navigation menu• Displays supplemental information• Ideal for websites that contain many pages of content, such as a blog or e-commerce site	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not as mobile-friendly as other layout formats• Easy to overload sidebar(s) with information• Sidebars can seem "obsolete" by those who prefer a more minimalist, sleek look

GRID LAYOUT



Almost all website layouts use a grid pattern of some sort. This is because grids provide stability, alignment, and structure along with a logical template for organizing content. Grid layouts break the page into multiple blocks of varying shapes and sizes. It is important to note that these blocks are not positioned on the webpage sporadically; rather, they align with adjacent elements.

Take, for example, the basic **three-box grid layout** which features one main graphic area and two smaller boxes aligned underneath. The larger box can fit an image or an image-slider. The smaller boxes typically feature an image, block of text, or a mixture of both. The blocks above the main graphic area can be filled with a logo, company name, navigation menu, search bar, or any combination of these elements.

THREE-BOX GRID LAYOUT



At first glance, grid layouts can seem creatively limiting. Even though grid layouts are meticulous in structure, they are surprisingly versatile and flexible. High-quality images, exciting website copy, and an attractive color scheme can bring grid layouts to life. And content blocks can vary in shape, size, and color to accentuate certain information.

Grid layouts are ideal for almost any type of website, and especially those that need to display a large amount of content. This is because grid layouts create a logical structure for website visitors to quickly scan, read, and understand the page content. For example, many online magazines use a multi-column **hierarchical grid layout**, otherwise known as a power grid, to organize articles in order of importance. With this type of grid layout, the column widths tend to vary as you scroll down the page, allowing reads to scan, read, and prioritize information with ease.



The main disadvantage of grid layouts is that they require visual rhythm and balance. Consistency in terms of content arrangement and alignment is necessary for a clean and organized webpage. Further, without visual unity and cohesion, different content elements can appear unrelated to one another. Therefore, the grid determines many decisions regarding the structure of text, images, illustrations, and the overall layout. Because of this, some website designers argue that grid layouts are restrictive and stifle creativity.

Grid Layouts

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compatible with content-rich websites • Provides a logical structure for content; intuitive layout • High readability and comprehension for visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires visual rhythm and balance, otherwise content appears cluttered and unrelated • Requires high-quality images and/or graphics • Grid layouts are restrictive and may stifle creativity

▸ Featured Image or Image-Slider Layouts

The full-screen featured image layout is one of the most popular layouts on the web today. The layout draws attention to a main image or image-slider. By using a single image or image-slider, the layout is apt to accomplish the following:

- Create a powerful first impression
- Tell a story
- Build an emotional connection with visitors
- Enhance the website copy
- Strengthen branding efforts

A common challenge for this type of layout is ensuring the text-based elements, such as a company name or logo, are visible over the featured image. If the text blends into the background image, you may need to change the font color, style, and weight. Further, you can work with shapes and banners to create a barrier between the featured image and the text content.

IMAGE-SLIDER LAYOUT

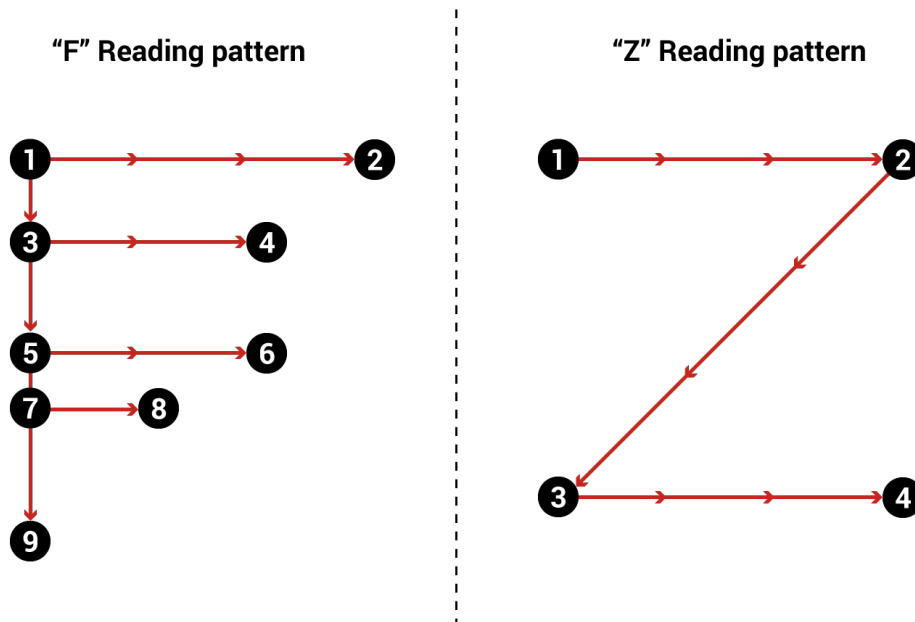


An alternative to this layout is the featured graphic layout which showcases a graphic, icon, or symbol instead of an image. This is ideal for websites that want a bold, yet minimal and sleek look.

Image-Slider Layouts	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A visually appealing way to present a product, a company, or an idea • Modern, sleek, minimal design • Ideal for websites with fewer visuals and more content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any text over the featured image must be legible; requires the right font type and color • Requires large, high-quality visuals • Messaging is important

Reading Patterns

Two common reading patterns in cultures that read left-to-right are the **Z-pattern** and the **F-pattern**. Web designers often consider these patterns when organizing content on a webpage.



The Z-pattern layout is common for webpages that are light on text—such as a landing page, a homepage, or a product page. The reader scans the webpage from top left to top right, then moves to the bottom left, followed by the bottom right. The eye will follow this zig-zag pattern down the page. This explains why so many websites feature a logo and a navigation bar at the top of the page.

Alternatively, the F-pattern layout is ideal for text-heavy webpages such as blogs and news sites. The most popular example of an F-pattern layout is a Google search results page. Generally, readers scan through information in a horizontal direction starting at the top of the webpage. The eye moves down the page vertically looking for clues to the information it seeks. When it finds a clue, the eye will then scan from left to right.

It is possible to employ both Z and F-pattern pages on the same website. For example, the home page may utilize a Z-pattern whereas another, more content-rich, webpage may display information in an F-pattern.

Summary

These are just a handful of the most common website layouts. You may notice that many websites incorporate two or more of the above layouts into one design. For example, a website may include a featured image followed by a grid, or a featured image with a fixed sidebar. Although the number of combinations may seem overwhelming, it is important to remember that a website's layout should serve the overall purpose of your website. Your website's unique purpose, goals, and needs will serve as a guideline for the website layout.

First Impressions Matter

According to onedaylabs.com, ninety-four percent (94%) of first impressions are design-driven.

Online Mockup Tool

There are a variety of tools used to design and plan out a website layout. One such tool, moqups.com, allows users to conceptualize a layout by dragging and dropping different elements onto a mockup page.



Interactive Game: Identifying Common Website Layouts

Identify the common website layout for each website example. Drag the correct layout type to the picture. Watch for feedback.

watch here for feedback

Featured Image

Grid Layout

Sidebar Layout

Single-Column Layout

WANDERLUST MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 22,
The Top 20 Restaurants in
Copenhagen, Denmark

MAY 10
Traveling with Children

NOVEMBER 13
Common Tourist Traps

MAY 15
3 Easy Steps To Create a
Travel Blog

SEPTEMBER 27
Paris Travel Guide

0/4 Complete!

Reset

Print

Sound on

Review Checkpoint

To test your understanding of the content presented in this assignment, please click on the Questions icon below. If you have trouble answering any of the questions presented here, you are always free to return to this or any assignment to re-read the material.



1. True or False?

Grid layouts are popular among personal blogs and websites that use a minimalist design approach.

a. True

Incorrect. Try again.

b. False

Correct. This statement is false. Single-column layouts are popular among personal blogs and websites that use a minimalist design approach.

2. Which of the following is a con to sidebar layouts?

a. They rely on minimalist design principles

Incorrect. Try again.

b. They are not as mobile-friendly as other layouts

Correct. Sidebar layouts are not the most mobile-friendly. An unresponsive sidebar layout requires mobile viewers to scroll down to the bottom of the page to view the supplemental content in the sidebar.

c. They require high-quality images and/or graphics

Incorrect. Try again.

d. They rely on the traditional horizontal navigation menu

Incorrect. Try again.

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