Theory: line-height

🕑 7 minutes   0 / 5 problems solved

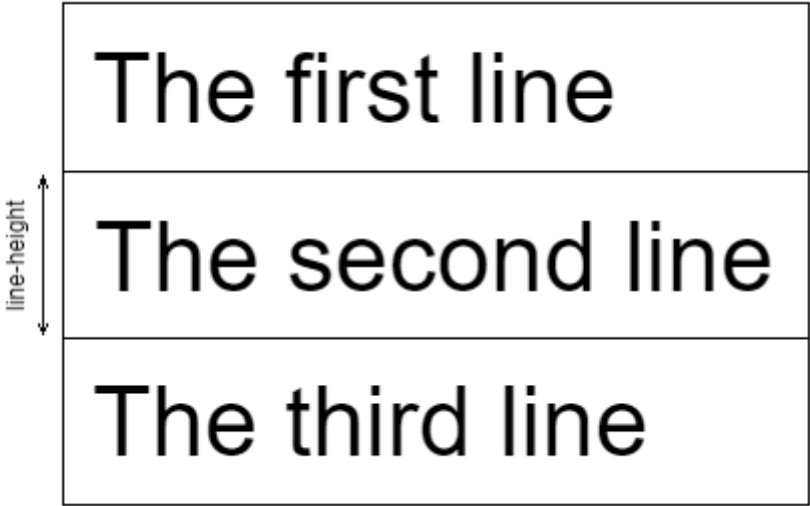[Skip this topic]   [Start practicing]

In this topic, we will talk about the `line-height` property. This property helps to specify the distance before and after inline elements. Browsers define its value automatically depending on the family and size of the text font, but we can change it if needed.

§1. What it is and what it is for

This property quite literally determines the height of a line.

Most often `line-height` is used to change the distance between lines in text. Varying the line spacing makes text more readable and pleasing to the eye.

To appreciate the importance of right `line-height` selection, let's look at the three ways of formatting for one quote:

```
1   div {
2       line-height: 0.7;
3   }
```



```
1   div {
2       line-height: 1.5;
3   }
```



```
1   div {
2       line-height: 2.7;
3   }
```

Current topic:

line-height   ⋯

Topic depends on:

✕ Absolute units [Stage 2]

✕ Relative units [Stage 2] ⋯

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I never travel without my diary. One should

always have something sensational to read in the

train. — Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being

Earnest

The second option seems to be the best, not too crammed, not too spacey. So how can we specify the desired value?

§2. Basic value

The first value that `line-height` gets from the browser is **normal**. This value is calculated specifically for each case and is used if we don't intend to write it on our own. The value depends on the family and size of the text font and usually roughly equals the font size multiplied by 1.2.

```
1   div {
2       line-height: normal;
3   }
```

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind. –
Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream

Well, if browsers set the value themselves, why would we want to change it? It turns out that the default option isn't always good enough. For example, if we set quite a small font size and normal `line-height`, the result may be unreadable:

```
1   div {
2       line-height: normal;
3   }
```

I love the night passionately. I love it as I love my country, or my mistress, with an instinctive, deep, and unshakeable love. I love it with all my senses: I love to see it, I love to breathe it in, I love to open my ears to its silence, I love my whole body to be caressed by its blackness. Skylarks sing in the sunshine, the blue sky, the warm air, in the fresh morning light. The owl flies by night, a dark shadow passing through the darkness; he hoots his sinister, quivering hoot, as though he delights in the intoxicating black immensity of space. — Guy de Maupassant

It will be nicer if we add some space to the text:

I love the night passionately. I love it as I love my country, or my mistress, with an instinctive, deep, and

unshakeable love. I love it with all my senses: I love to see it, I love to breathe it in, I love to open my ears to its

silence, I love my whole body to be caressed by its blackness. Skylarks sing in the sunshine, the blue sky, the

warm air, in the fresh morning light. The owl flies by night, a dark shadow passing through the darkness; he

hoots his sinister, quivering hoot, as though he delights in the intoxicating black immensity of space. — Guy de

Maupassant

So how can we do it?

§3. Unitless values

Let's replace `normal` with some non-negative number for the grey quote above and compare the results:

```
1   div {
2       line-height: 1.5;
3   }
```

> Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
> and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind. –
> Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream

So what did just happen? The browser took the number that we specified in the property and multiplied it by the font size. The resulting number is the new `line-height` pixel value.

For most fonts recommended unitless `line-height` ranges from 1.5 to 1.7.

§4. Length values

We can also use any of the CSS standard units like `px`, `em`, `cm`, and so on. Let's review some examples.

```
1   div {
2       line-height: 20px;
3   }
```

> A garden to walk in and immensity to dream in
> — what more could he ask? A few flowers at his
> feet and above him the stars. — Victor Hugo, Les
> Misérables

```
1   div {
2       line-height: 50px;
3   }
```

> A garden to walk in and immensity to dream in
>
> — what more could he ask? A few flowers at his
>
> feet and above him the stars. — Victor Hugo, Les
>
> Misérables

```
1   div {
2       line-height: 1.5em;
3   }
```

> Nostalgia in reverse, the longing for yet
> another strange land, grew especially
> strong in spring. — Vladimir Nabokov, Mary

```
1   div {
2       line-height: 3em;
3   }
```

> Nostalgia in reverse, the longing for yet
>
> another strange land, grew especially
>
> strong in spring. — Vladimir Nabokov, Mary

§5. Percentage values

One more way to set the `line-height` value is "number + %". Here we do the same with the unitless values: we write how many times the font size needs to be increased using percentages. For example, if we have the font size equal to 20px and the `line-height` equal to 150%, then the browser calculates 150% of 20px, so the final `line-height` is 30px.

Here's the last set of examples for this topic:

```
1   div {
2       line-height: 50%;
3   }
```

> I don't know half of you half as well as I should like;
> and I like less than half of you half as well as you
> deserve. — J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the
> Ring

```
1   div {
2       line-height: 150%;
3   }
```

> I don't know half of you half as well as I should like;
> and I like less than half of you half as well as you
> deserve. — J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the
> Ring

```
1   div {
2       line-height: 300%;
3   }
```

> I don't know half of you half as well as I should like;
>
> and I like less than half of you half as well as you
>
> deserve. — J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the
>
> Ring

§6. Conclusion

There are many ways to make the text on your website more aesthetically pleasing and readable. Adding the right amount of space to the text is one of them.

Let's move on to solving the problems!

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