

ALEX BARANOV

Web Interface Handbook



A set of principles & best practices
for creating UI

These are some sample parts of the book. You can buy
the full version of the book here:

imperavi.com/books/web-interface-handbook/

Web Interface Handbook

This is a book about the fundamentals of creating a good web interface. You will find out how to make effective forms, typography, grids, and many other components of web design.

About the author

I'm Alex. Designer and writer. I have been designing websites and web applications for many years and share my knowledge and insights around them. I am passionate about information architecture, UX and design systems. I live and work in Finland.



Drop me a line: ab@imperavi.com

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Chapter 1

Typography

Scanning & Reading

01

Two types of interfaces

When you create a design, you will always come across two types of interfaces: for reading and scanning.



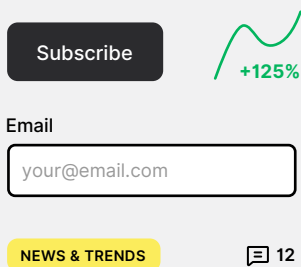
↑ People move from one focus point to the next by scanning the titles on a marketing website. By reading the article people are reading.

Building both types of interface differs from each other in many details and techniques. One uses focal points and accents to grab the visitor's attention and keep the focus on specific areas of the interface. On the other, it is a more vertical design that helps users focus on reading without being distracting.

Two systems of typography

Typography sometimes varies depending on whether you are designing for scanning or reading. The task is easier if you only do an interface for one type. But if you need to do both, it is a bit more complicated, and you will probably need to make two typographic systems: one for scanning and one for reading.

Scanning



Reading

So she was considering in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.

Scanning

Hero

Feature

Card

Tagline

Body text

Reading

Chapter

Heading

Subheading

Body text

⬆ The typography system is not the same for different types of interfaces.

Modular Scale

Automate text sizing

Chaotic and randomly chosen text sizes give chaotic and random results. A systems approach helps to build a scale of text sizes, where each value will be in harmony with the other.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

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 Build typography based on modular scale.

The size scale can be based on the modular scale and harmony of musical ratios. You can use special tools for this, such as *type-scale.com* and *modularscale.com*. By trying different ratios you can find the best scale for your project.

Build contrast by ratio

The ratio you choose depends on how much contrast and hierarchy you want to create in your typography. This often determines the type of project, its overall design and expression.

Ratio 1.5 — High contrast

Giga

Mega

Huge

Large

Base

Medium

Ratio 1.125 — Low contrast

Giga


Mega

Huge

Large

Base

Medium

 Two different ratios create different contrasts.

Create a high contrast between headings and text for a landing page or marketing website choosing a higher ratio. This allows you better focus users' attention on important titles and captions.

Dashboards, mobile, and content-oriented applications need a lower ratio because the hierarchy of headings is less meaningful in these types of projects.

Round up and cut out values

When you have created a modular scale, round the values, and select only those sizes you may need. This simplifies calculations and the use of the modular scale in your work.

| | | |
|----------|-------|------|
| 65.758px | ----- | 64px |
| 58.452px | | |
| 51.957px | | |
| 46.184px | ----- | 48px |
| 41.053px | ----- | 40px |
| 36.491px | | |
| 32.437px | ----- | 32px |
| 28.833px | | |
| 25.629px | | |
| 22.781px | ----- | 24px |
| 20.25px | ----- | 20px |
| 18px | ----- | 18px |
| 16px | ----- | 16px |
| 14.222px | ----- | 14px |
| 12.642px | ----- | 13px |
| 11.237px | ----- | 11px |


 Round up and choose values.

The modular scale makes it easy to find and select size values. Also, the systems approach offers advantages when working in a team. You are building the scale and ratio; each team member will understand how and why the values are created. This will make the work more consistent and accurate.

Control different contexts

The modular scale helps you control text sizes in the same design on different screens more easily. For example, creating scales with different base text on desktop and mobile devices.

| Desktop Scale | Mobile Scale |
|------------------|------------------|
| 11px | 13px |
| 12px | 15px |
| 14px (base size) | 17px (base size) |
| 16px | 19px |
| 18px | 22px |
| 20px | 24px |
| 22px | 27px |
| 25px | 31px |
| 28px | 34px |
| 32px | 39px |
| 36px | 44px |
| 40px | 49px |
| 45px | 55px |
| 50px | 62px |
| 60px | 70px |

 Create different modular scales for different screens.

You simply apply two different typography scales depending on the screen. The interface on the fly becomes comfortable to read on any screen.

Building typography on a modular scale is always a good way to keep your design consistent across different contexts.

Vertical Rhythm

8 pixels or baseline grid is of little importance

Don't search for uniform shapes and intervals that can be lined up automatically in all cases. On the contrary, look for differences, contrast, and make an irregular tempo. This will help you make an unusual and attractive design.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie. Mauris malesuada nisi sit amet augue accumsan tincidunt.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

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The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

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A baseline or 8px grid does not give you a good vertical rhythm automatically.



Variety and contrast creates a unique and interesting vertical rhythm.

Equal spacing between elements or arranging all blocks of text based on the baseline or 8px grid does not make the text visually more attractive or easier to read. Just as in music, so in typography, pauses and changes in rhythm are more important than something boring and uniform.

A proper vertical rhythm is achieved by the contrast and variety of elements, the repetitive spacing, and by the harmonious relationship of those spacing.

Rhythm based on spacing scale

The best strategy for building a vertical rhythm is the spacing scale system based on a chosen unit and its multiples. This allows not only to create harmonious and predictable distances between text elements but also to give the entire design harmony, balance and integrity.

| Scale based on multiple value | | Scale based on line spacing value | | Scale based on body size value | |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | 4px | 0.125 | 3px | 0.125 | 2px |
| 2 | 8px | 0.25 | 6px | 0.25 | 4px |
| 3 | 12px | 0.375 | 9px | 0.5 | 8px |
| 4 | 16px | 0.5 | 12px | 0.75 | 12px |
| 5 | 20px | 0.75 | 18px | 1 | 16px |
| 6 | 24px | 1 | 24px | 1.25 | 20px |
| 8 | 32px | 1.25 | 30px | 1.5 | 24px |
| 10 | 40px | 1.5 | 36px | 2 | 32px |
| 12 | 48px | 2 | 48px | 2.5 | 40px |
| 14 | 56px | 2.5 | 60px | 3 | 48px |
| 16 | 64px | 3 | 72px | 3.5 | 56px |
| 20 | 80px | 4 | 96px | 4 | 64px |
| 25 | 100px | 5 | 120px | 5 | 80px |
| 30 | 120px | | | 8 | 128px |

📌 Three ways to building a spacing scale.

Any rhythm is a system of values that has relationships, connections, and allows you to create predictable and logical padding and margin.

No matter which way of building spacing you choose, it is important to stick to it throughout the design and look for harmonious ratios of values.

Perfect vetical rhythm

The distance values are not the same in a perfect vertical rhythm of long texts or interfaces. They create a varied rhythm and thus make the look of the design or text pleasing.

The quick brown fox

Sed scelerisque id est non vulputate. Ut dapibus nibh eget diam blandit, nec egestas mi viverra. Duis non gravida nunc, eu sodales magna.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Donec dolor nisi, posuere vitae tincidunt et, molestie sit amet purus. Pellentesque consectetur tortor a fermentum blandit. Sed scelerisque id est non vulputate. Ut dapibus nibh eget diam blandit, nec egestas mi viverra. Duis non gravida nunc, eu sodales magna.

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The quick brown fox

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Shutterstock

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The quick brown fox

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Shutterstock

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🔑 Perfect vertical rhythm built on line spacing multiples.

Generally, a good vertical rhythm works with the distances between different design elements depending on their contrast, purpose, and importance on the page/screen.

Responsive Typography

01

Make the heading hierarchy a little weaker

It's always a good idea to reduce the size of big titles on small screens. The heading sizes on mobile don't have the same importance and effect as on larger screens. In addition, they take up too much space sometimes, which is not helpful for good content reading speed.

Desktop

Heading
Heading
Heading
Heading

Small screen

Heading
Heading
Heading
Heading

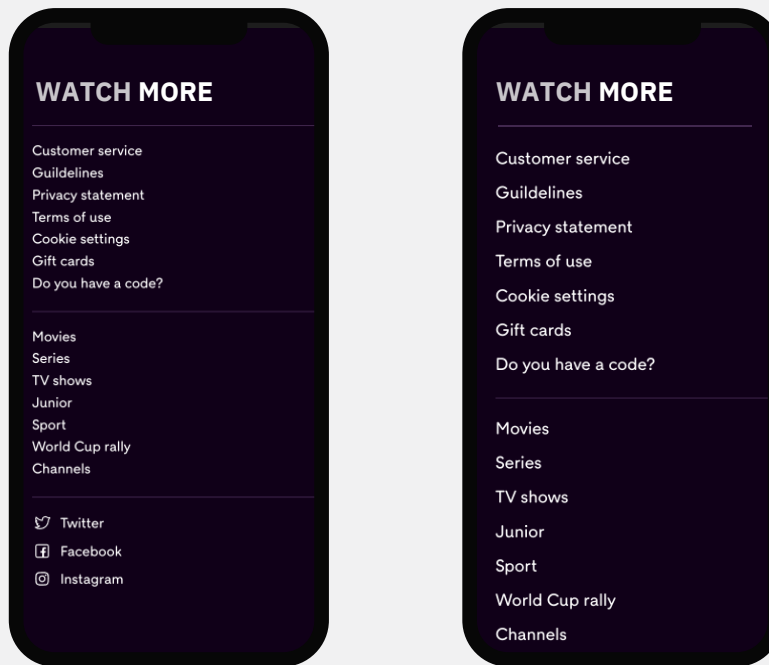
📱 Small screens will need a weaker hierarchy than large screens.

For big screens, it's not important to make headings larger than for normal screen sizes. Users interact with these screens close enough that if the title is too big, they must lean back to read it.

You need to test and verify your choices because too much depends on the interface's context and the information in it. Generally, it's better to rely on testing in practice than automatically increasing all text or heading sizes by a specific ratio on large screens. It's better to look at each heading individually and how comfortable it is to read on the big screen and draw conclusions.

Pay more attention to navigation

Navigation on small screens is essential. It's worth remembering that the clickable area on mobile should be larger than on desktop. So it's a good idea to increase menu links and distances between items.



- ⬆ Insufficient font size and spacing between items, a frequent problem on small screens. You can safely increase the font size for menus and especially the distance for easy tap.

There are no exact rules or magic ratios for all possible screens in responsive typography. Only practical testing can provide answers and insight into how to do things better.

Spacing

Spacing above the heading

An increased distance above the heading helps structure the text better and separate parts of the text from each other. A large space from a paragraph or other content to the heading creates a pause and makes the text easier to read. It also creates an interesting rhythm and adds variety to long texts.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie.

20

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

20

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie. Mauris malesuada nisi sit amet augue accumsan tincidunt.

20

Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.



The heading has the same spacing at the bottom and top.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie.

48

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

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Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie. Mauris malesuada nisi sit amet augue accumsan tincidunt.

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Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.



The heading has a larger spacing at the top.

Smaller spacing for smaller headings

For small headings, it's best to make a smaller spacing at the bottom. It will make the heading closer to the following text. This way, the heading won't be visually detached from the text and will get a good connection to it.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie.

36


The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

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Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie. Mauris malesuada nisi sit amet augue accumsan tincidunt.

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Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.

 The small heading is too far from the text.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie.

36


The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

8

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie. Mauris malesuada nisi sit amet augue accumsan tincidunt.

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Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.

 The small heading is close to the text that follows.

Larger spacing for larger headings

It is good when the big headings have a larger space at the bottom. This creates an ease of reading the text and a good balance. If the distance is too small, the huge heading presses the text with its contrast.


The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

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Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie. Mauris malesuada nisi sit amet augue accumsan tincidunt.

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Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.

 The big heading is too close to the text.


The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

40

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie. Mauris malesuada nisi sit amet augue accumsan tincidunt.

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Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.

 The big heading and text have a good balance of spacing.


Spacing between paragraphs

Eligible spacing between paragraphs is 0.5..1 of line spacing. So, if line height is 24px, good spacing between paragraphs would be 12..24px. This helps separate the paragraphs from each other and makes the text easier to read.

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8 Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie. Mauris malesuada nisi sit amet augue accumsan tincidunt.


8 Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.

 Spacing between paragraphs is too small.

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20 Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie. Mauris malesuada nisi sit amet augue accumsan tincidunt.

20 Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.

 Eligible spacing between paragraphs.

Spacing between paragraphs and lists

There is no reason to decrease the spacing before the list. At first glance, it may seem like a nice trick to improve the connection between the list and the previous text. But such a step rather breaks the vertical rhythm, introduces unnecessary pauses, and worsens the readability of the text.

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8

1. Consensuses of futility
2. Stone and conceptual rationalism
3. The dialectic paradigm of context and subdialectic sublimation

20

Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.



Unequal spacing before and after the list breaks the rhythm.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas varius tortor nibh, sit amet tempor nibh finibus et. Aenean eu enim justo. Vestibulum aliquam hendrerit molestie.

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1. Consensuses of futility
2. Stone and conceptual rationalism
3. The dialectic paradigm of context and subdialectic sublimation

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Maecenas tincidunt, velit ac porttitor pulvinar, tortor eros facilisis libero, vitae commodo nunc quam et ligula. Ut nec ipsum sapien. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis.




The list at the top and bottom has the same spacing as between paragraphs.

06


Spacing between text and the varied rich content

Images, tables, charts, video and any kind of rich content are very different from the text in their appearance and type of data. If the spacing after the image is the same as between regular paragraphs, it doesn't give the reader pause to switch to text.



 Spacing after the image is the same as between the paragraphs.



 Increased spacing after the image.

You can always keep in mind a good rule: any rich and complex content always require special attention. So a simple trick is to increase the distance from such an object, at least after it.

More space after the image will help create text dynamics by pausing between these elements and their different kinds of data.

Chapter 2

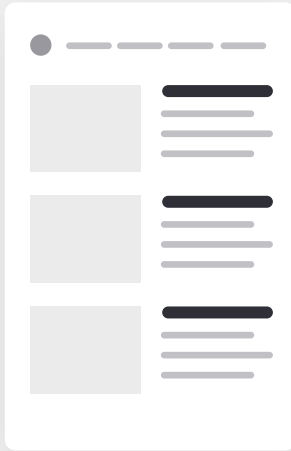
Layouts

Principles

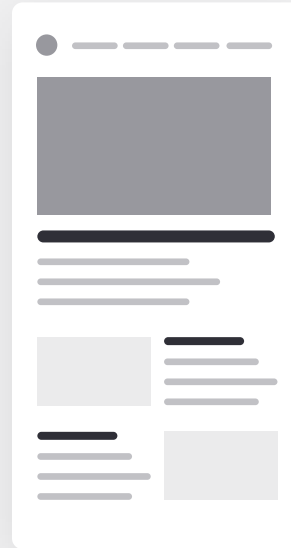
01

Primary and secondary

The whole point of the design is to separate the primary from the secondary. In other words: focus users' attention on the main thing to get to the action or find the information they need as quickly as possible.

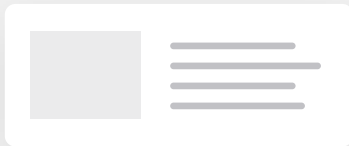


👎 All the blocks are uniform and there is no main one.

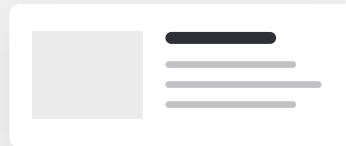


👍 Clearly highlighted the primary.

Good design differs from bad in that users instantly understand what is important on the screen and omit the secondary until they need more detail. To achieve this is a real art and the highest class of designer.

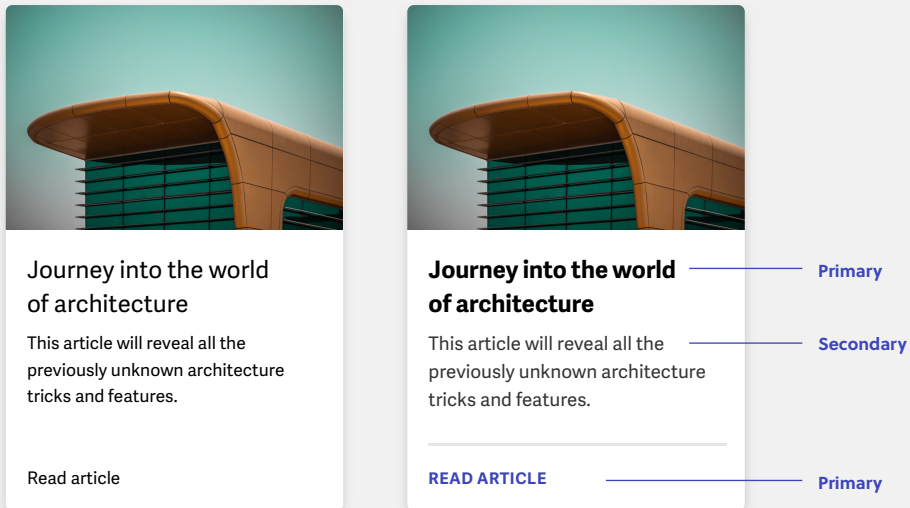


👎 A card without a heading for the text looks secondary as a whole.



👍 The heading gives the card weight, meaning, and a point of focus.

⬇️ The essence of design is to highlight the primary and direct the user's focus on it.

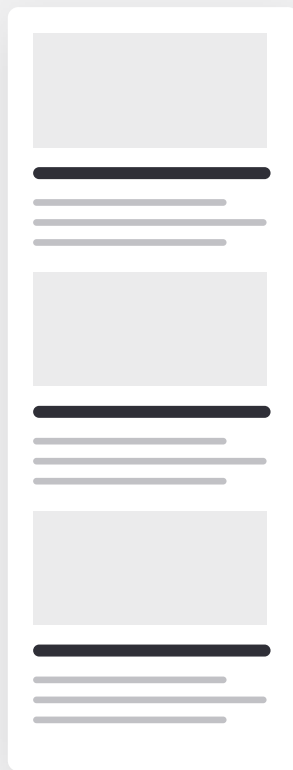



⬆️ Color is one of the most effective ways to highlight the main thing.

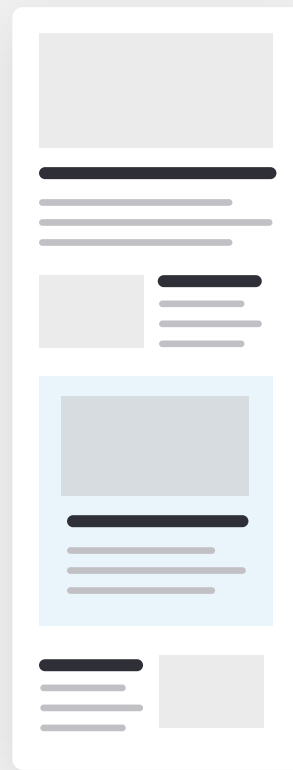
Rhythm and variety


There's nothing more boring than repetitive blocks in a layout. It makes the design look impersonal and monotonous. The user simply scrolls through the page without stopping at anything.

Rhythm and variety affect how engaging the content is for users. The more attractive the layout, the more likely users are to spend more time exploring the site or using the interface.



 Boring and monotonous.

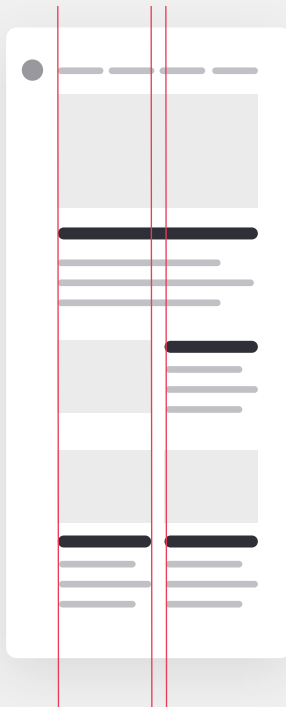


 Interesting and varied.

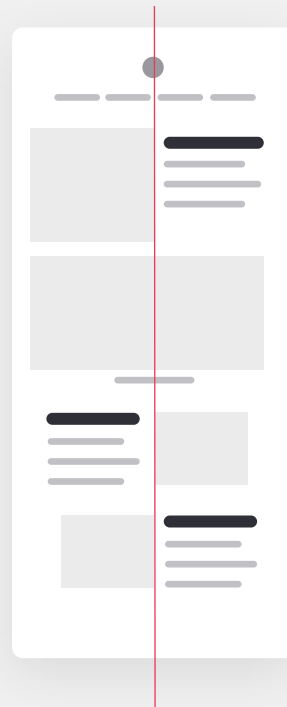
Variety of content and change of rhythm is one of the important rules of design. Rhythm creates music, the design becomes engaging, and the content is something you want to read, look at, and notice the details.

Lines of force

Lines of force are a good way to build a solid and eye-catching layout that is based on vertical points of attraction. It can be several lines or even just one.



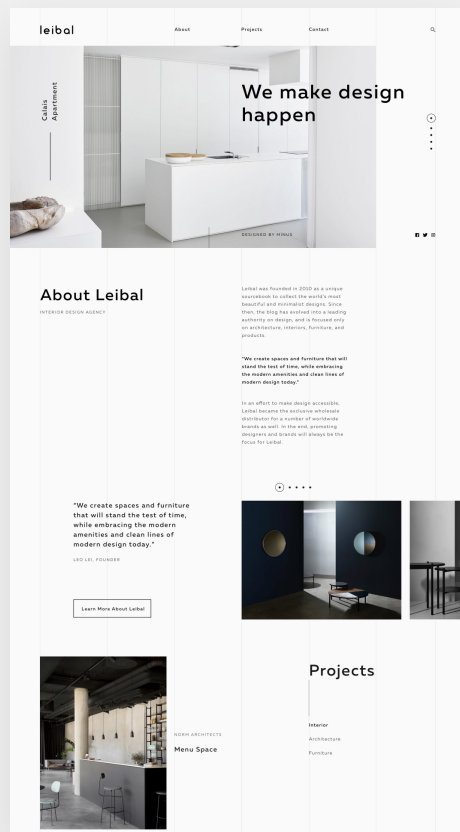
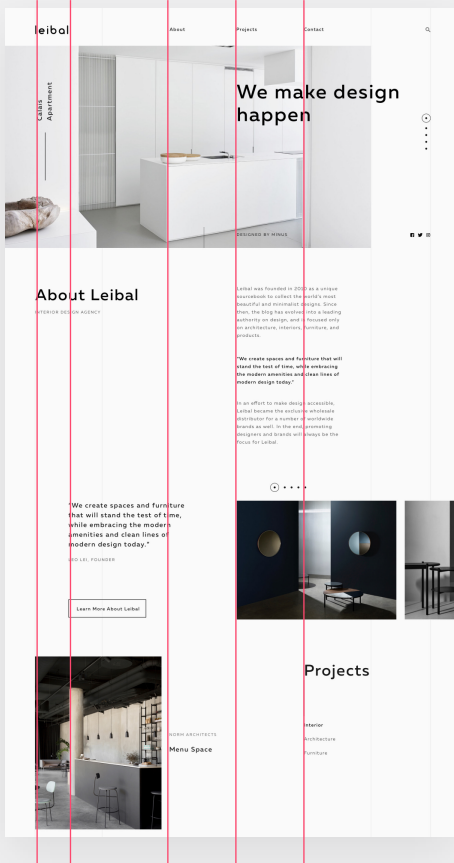
👍 The layout design with several lines of force.



👍 The layout design with one center line of force.

Lines of force provide focal points and control chaos, helping to make a solid layout. Often, lines of force are tied to the logo or top navigation, giving strong points for shifting and distributing content vertically with a meaningful offset.

⬇ Building the layout with lines of force can create an exceptional and cohesive design.

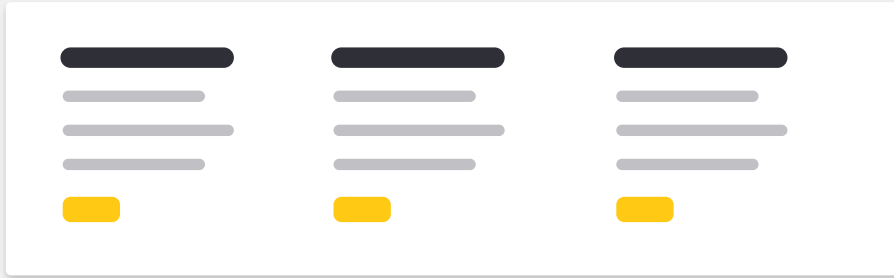


⬆ Sometimes the lines of force can be stronger than building a layout with a grid and columns. Leibal Website by Alexandra Maximenko.

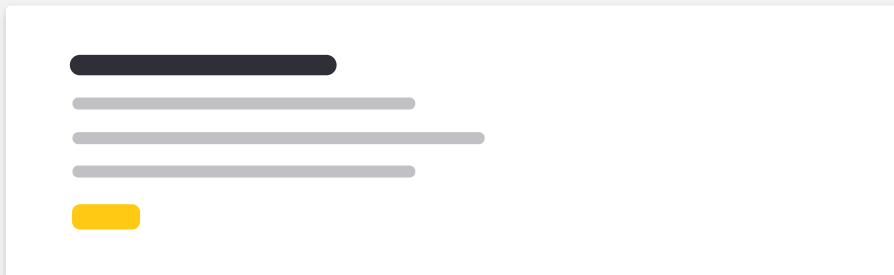
04

One focus, one accent, one action

The most effective and conclusive design comes when you do in one moment, on one screen, in one module - one focus, one emphasis, one action.



👉 Three actions in one moment.



👍 One action at one point in time.

It always works better than lots of links, call-to-actions, accents and color variety. Don't just throw everything in one screen. Think slide-by-slide, each slide is one action, one explanation, one picture.

Design algorithm

There is a design algorithm that always leads to good results. It consists of four steps, following from one to the next, and at each step, you create a solid and finished layer of your work.

1. Content

The first step is to understand what kind of content you're working with, what text, images and other components there are.

2. Structure

The next step is to emphasize the primary and secondary, to separate the text with headings. Understand what blocks the content can be divided into and what relationships are formed.



3. Layout

The third step is to create a layout that reflects the idea and best represents the content and its structure. The way the design should work.

4. Style

And finally, the fourth step: style, color, and other visual details. The way the design should look.

The design algorithm works for any type of project, whether you're creating a content website or dashboard or mobile app.

1. Content



2. Structure



3. Layout



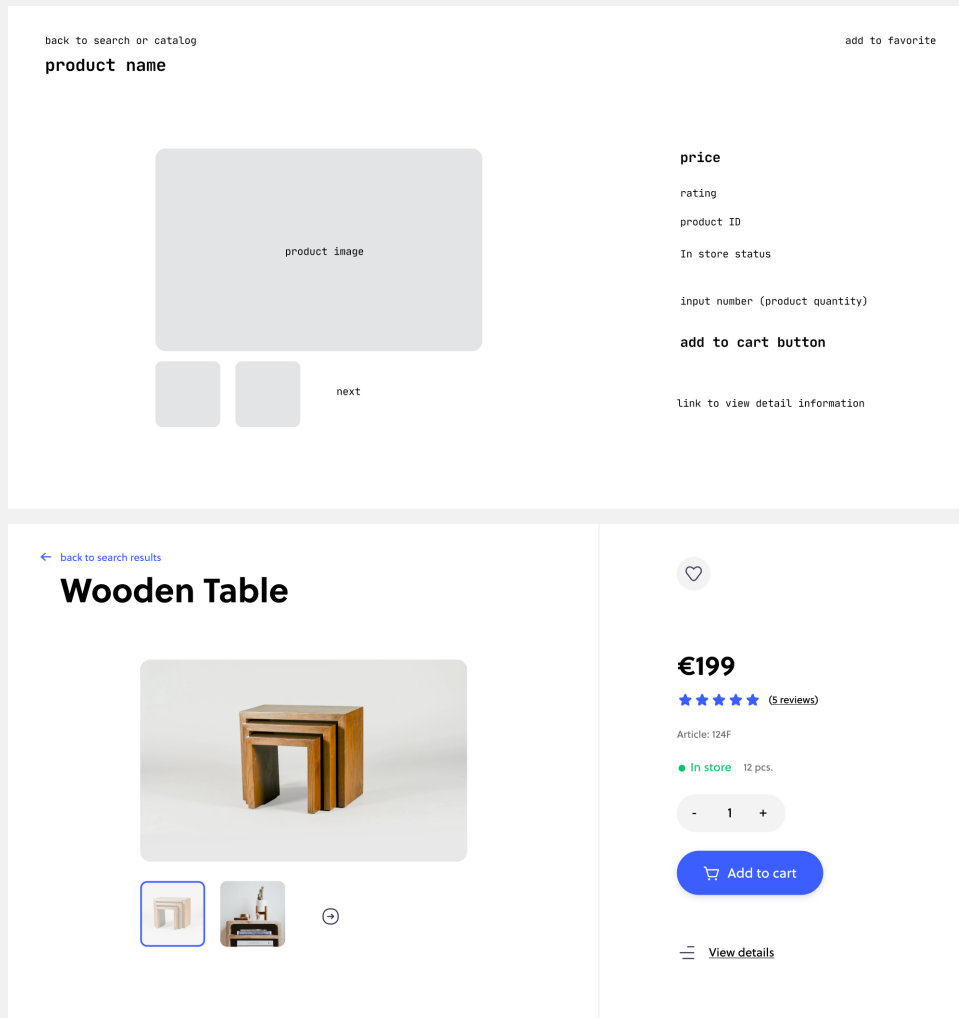
4. Style



Each completed step is already a success and a result. You won't have to jump chaotically from choosing colors and understanding how to make the text on cards to what the main visualization of overall app should be.

Text wireframes

The fastest way to create wireframes is to make them text-based. No blocks, no color, nothing but text. It takes a minimum of time and gives maximum benefit. You can immediately show the client and discuss something already visual. You don't have any trouble making changes. The text is very easy to correct and change.



👍 Text prototypes are quick and easy to make and just as easy to convert later into a finished design.

Chapter 3

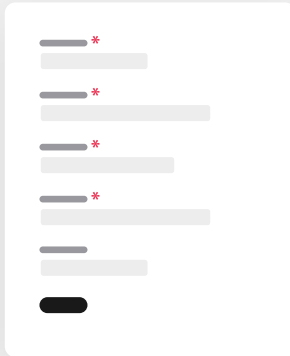
Forms


Required & Optional

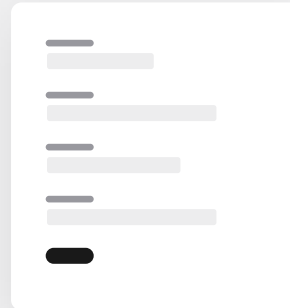
01


All fields are required

If the form has required and optional fields, it is better to remove optional and make all fields required. Then you can remove asterisks (*) and other required indicators from the form. This always makes the form easier and cleaner. And most importantly, it makes it unambiguous — the user just has to fill out the entire form.

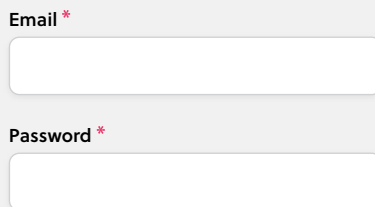
A form with six input fields. The first five fields are followed by a red asterisk (*), indicating they are required. The sixth field is not followed by an asterisk, indicating it is optional. A black submit button is at the bottom.


 The form has required and optional fields.

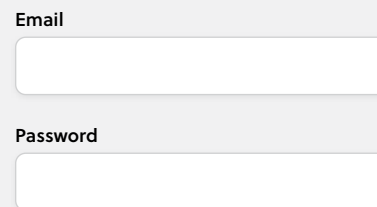
A form with six input fields. All fields are followed by a red asterisk (*), indicating they are all required. A black submit button is at the bottom.


 All fields are required, optional fields are removed from the form.

Users always and by default understand that all fields in the forms are required. So unnecessary indication of this makes no sense. It's exactly the opposite, you need to indicate optional inputs.

A form with two input fields. The first field is labeled "Email *" and the second field is labeled "Password *".

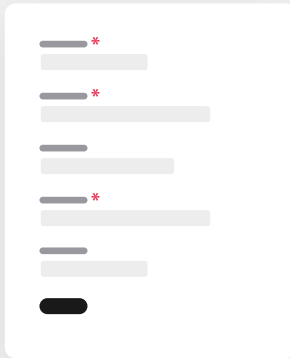
 Indication of all fields as required.


A form with two input fields. The first field is labeled "Email" and the second field is labeled "Password".

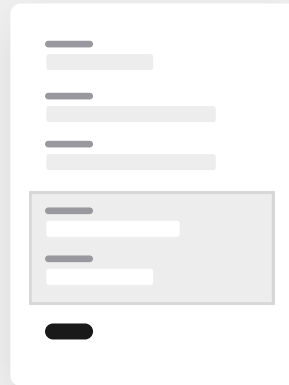
 Users understand that all fields are required.


When the optional mixes with required

It may be impossible to remove optional fields in long and complex forms. For example, if these fields make sense to the part of audience. In this case, a good solution is to separate required from optional.

A vertical form layout with six input fields. The first, third, and fifth fields are marked with a red asterisk, indicating they are required. The second, fourth, and sixth fields are not marked, indicating they are optional. All fields are grouped together without visual separation.

 Optional and required fields are mixed.

A vertical form layout. The first four input fields are grouped together. The fifth and sixth input fields are grouped together and enclosed in a light gray rectangular box, visually separating them from the required fields above.

 Optional fields are in a separate block.

The form should have required fields first, and then the optional separated by a border or background. This visual separation will simplify the form and make it more predictable: it will clarify what the user needs to fill in and what is filled out depending on their case.

Ideally, it is worth explaining in the block of optional fields why these inputs are needed and in what case users should enter data.


Optional fields

An optional field must be reasonable and make sense. What does it mean if we see the optional field 'Company' in the registration form? Why should it be specified? Usually, there is no answer to this question and no reason to fill in such a field either.

Email


Password

Company (optional)

 The 'Company' field makes no sense.

Email


Password

 The form has only those fields that make sense.

You can get additional data later. Now it is important that the user becomes your client promptly.


If you still want to get more data or a certain field for some users will make sense in the future work with the website or service, please explain why you want to get this data and what you will do with it.

Company (optional)

 The 'Company' field makes no sense.

Company (optional)

If you are a team, we provide extra bonuses.

 The hint explains the purpose of the optional field.


When the optional becomes required

Sometimes, all fields are required in forms, although some have no value in the future use of the website. It's really hard to explain why developers and designers do that. Perhaps it is an inconsistency of requirements or just a mistake.

Email *


Password *

Phone *

 All fields are required, although the 'Phone' input does not make sense to use the site in the future.

Email

Password

 The form has the fields that are needed to use the website.

The typical result of such solutions is a low conversion of forms and frequent refusals of users at the step of filling form in.

People don't like forms with something they don't want to fill in and understand why. When I see that somebody want my phone number, but I don't know why or know it won't be important, I always enter 1234567.

Web Interface Handbook

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Alex Baranov

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