

A free sample of the eBook

Bootstrapping Design

Roll your own design.

You're building a business, but great design feels out of reach. What if you could design it yourself?

Available for purchase at <http://BootstrappingDesign.com>.

This sample includes Chapters 1 & 7 and the *Design Critique Cheatsheet*.

If you have any feedback or questions, email me at:
hello@BootstrappingDesign.com.

Thanks for reading!

Jarrold Drysdale (@studiofellow)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

We are bootstrappers: developers, scientists, hackers, founders, marketers, writers, designers, and thinkers who are building the new breed of online businesses.

We are starting businesses—not pandering for design awards. We’re building lean and profitable startups rather than the next Facebook.

If you aren’t a bootstrapper, this book isn’t for you. There are many design books that teach how to become a full-time-job designer and many that teach formal design theory and advanced techniques for readers with years of experience.

This book contains the minimum design fundamentals that bootstrappers must understand in order to launch a business. My intent is to emphasize design basics rather than to reduce the whole of design to a bag of tricks. You’ll notice peripheral topics such as kerning, color wheels, and art history are absent. This is not because such topics are unimportant but because they are neither suitable for beginners nor relevant to their bottom line.

I’m writing this book because design truly affects the success of businesses. I believe in bootstrappers and the businesses they are building, and I know design can help them succeed. I believe great design is for everyone—not just the few fortunate enough to have big budgets.

Attracting More Users

“Getting more users” is the wrong way to think about business. Before you do anything else, including read this book, you should know who your users are, where they are, and how you can reach them. Great business comes from understanding people—we have all seen that truth firsthand.

Design cannot fix a flawed business strategy. My first web app was beautiful by all accounts, but it failed. It failed because I did not understand business nor the customers I wanted to reach. Do yourself a favor: before you start up, learn. Read about business and research your customers. However, be careful who you listen to because there is much bad advice in the startup scene. The only reliable sources of business advice I have found are Amy Hoy’s [30x500](#) class and Ash Maurya’s book, [Running Lean](#).

Design Affects Business

Once you understand potential customers, you can use design to engage them. How? Design strengthens communication. Design exists to support content and deliver ideas with

greater effect, clarity, and insight.

If potential customers do not understand what you are offering, they will not buy your product. So not only do you need to be a good writer; you need to learn to present your message clearly.

However, your goals do not end with making a sale; designers aim to create a painless and, hopefully, even enjoyable experience. Forming an emotional connection with customers cements your brand in their minds.

Research reveals that visual beauty supports business goals. Aesthetics build trust in mere milliseconds, affect purchasing decisions, and even affect perceived value and usability.

(Read about the research at *A List Apart* [here](#) and [here](#), and at [UX Myths](#).)

Design It Yourself

You wouldn't be reading this book if you didn't already see the value of great design. The real question is: why should you be the designer for your business? There are many other ways to fulfill your design needs: themes, templates, frameworks,

crowdsourcing, and (obviously) hiring professional designers.

Hiring a designer is expensive, and when bootstrapping you have to question whether a new, undeveloped idea warrants such a substantial investment. Many of us couldn't afford to pay a designer \$100 per hour even if we wanted to. However, validating the idea before you sink too much money into a project is wise, regardless of whether you can afford it.

Themes, templates, and crowdsourced design never fit the project. They are generic and inflexible. They are created without any understanding of the problem they propose to solve. These methods reveal the difference between design and decoration; you will accomplish more by tailoring a message than you will by slapping any pretty logo on a page.

Frameworks like [Twitter Bootstrap](#) and [Foundation](#) can provide a great starting point for a new project, but still require some design acumen to be fully realized. No framework can do all the work for you.

So instead of any of these, learn to design it yourself. You are absolutely capable of producing beautiful design that supports your business. Keep in mind that later, as your successful business brings in profits, you can even hire a professional designer if you'd like.

But for now, designing it yourself is the best course of action. Be honest—it's the option you fear most. But rather than fearing the edge of the precipice, we're just going to jump off the ledge.

Chapter 7

Typography

Typography presents an incredible opportunity for those of us who are woefully unskilled in illustration or creating custom graphics. It's a surprisingly easy way to add lots of visual appeal to your work.

You'll notice that fonts are a topic of passionate debate in the design community, famously Comic Sans and Papyrus. Furthermore, type geeks have strenuous and detailed criteria for pairing fonts. Ignore all that. The goal for this chapter is to teach you a few simple strategies for getting a custom typographic look without wading through thousands of fonts.

Many design books go into exhaustive detail about typography and explain classifications, historical significance, genres, and other minutiae. Most of this knowledge is of little use for bootstrapping a new business, so I'm leaving it out. If you really want to geek out on the finer points of typography, I'll list a few resources for you at the end of this chapter. However, for the sake of getting your business rolling, here's all you need to know about type.

Display and Text Fonts

As of right now, start thinking about fonts in terms of two uses: *display* and *text*.

Display fonts are for headlines, logos, illustrations, and other features that can accommodate larger font sizes or more decorative typography. The goals for display are emphasis and visual interest.

Text fonts are for paragraphs, long-form content, and prose. Here, the goal is readability.

Some fonts can work well for both display and text. However, many do not. Learning to recognize the difference is important, but there are no concrete rules. Some fonts might not provide enough visual interest in a display setting, while many more decorative display fonts would be nearly impossible to read in a paragraph. If you are unsure about whether or not a font will work for one of these settings, try it. The important point is that you pay attention to the role of the font.

Type Terms

Font: the software file that stores the shapes of letters. Arial is a font file. Arial Bold is a separate file.

Typeface: the design of the shapes of letters. Arial is a typeface design you can use by installing the Arial font file.

Font Weights: Versions of the line thickness in letters, such as regular weight and bold weight. Font families can include weights such as: hairline, thin, light, medium, regular, semibold, bold, heavy, black, and ultra.

Font Styles: Variations in the shapes of letters such as italics and weights, or combinations of the two.

Font Family: The group of font files for each of the styles of a typeface. Arial, Arial Bold, and Arial Italic together form a font family.



Serif

Typefaces that have short wedge shapes or lines at the ends of the strokes of characters.



Sans Serif

Typefaces that do not have serifs.



Slab Serif

Typefaces that have block-like serifs.



Script

Letters are connected like cursive handwriting.

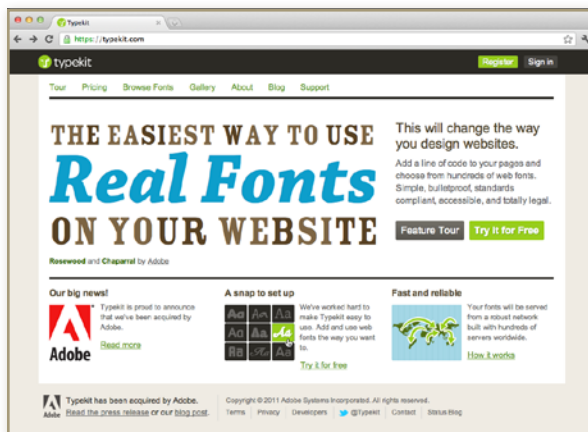


Italic / Oblique

Letters are slanted.

Use Custom Fonts Instead of Defaults

Browser-safe fonts and native device fonts are fine for many uses, but you will always get more mileage out of custom fonts. Custom fonts can contribute visual polish without requiring much extra work.



If you are working on the web, use a service like [Typekit](#) or [Fontdeck](#). These are more affordable than buying fonts to install on your computer, and they provide incredible value. Google's webfonts service is underwhelming because of the poor quality of most available fonts. Also, because of technical challenges and licensing restrictions, running Typekit or Fontdeck is easier than purchasing webfonts to host on your own server and apply via @font-face.

Choosing Fonts for a Project

The best rule of thumb is to limit your design to two font families. This limit simplifies your decision while creating your design. Each time you discover an element that needs a new style, you have fewer options to weigh.

When picking fonts for your project, use one of these strategies:

1. Pick one display font and one versatile text font family.

Using this strategy, you can have a nice, expressive font for your logo or headlines and can fill in the gaps with the more versatile text font. By versatile, I mean a family that works well for paragraphs, but can also work for buttons, subheaders, and navigation when the display font isn't suitable.

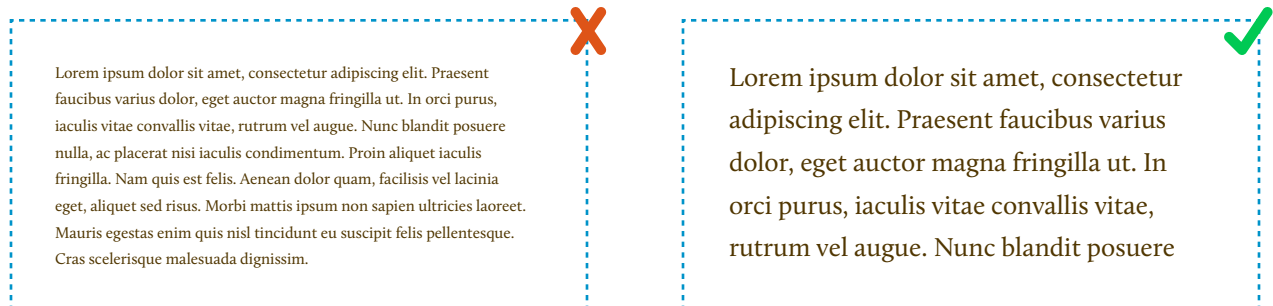
2. Pick one extremely versatile font family and use it for everything.

Some font families are extremely versatile because they include lots of weights and styles. Using one of these

families is a great way to have lots of expressive and dynamic typography that always matches. You don't have to worry about making sure the fonts you pick match. The person who designed the typeface already did that hard work (You'll notice I used this strategy in this book by picking the *Calluna* font family).

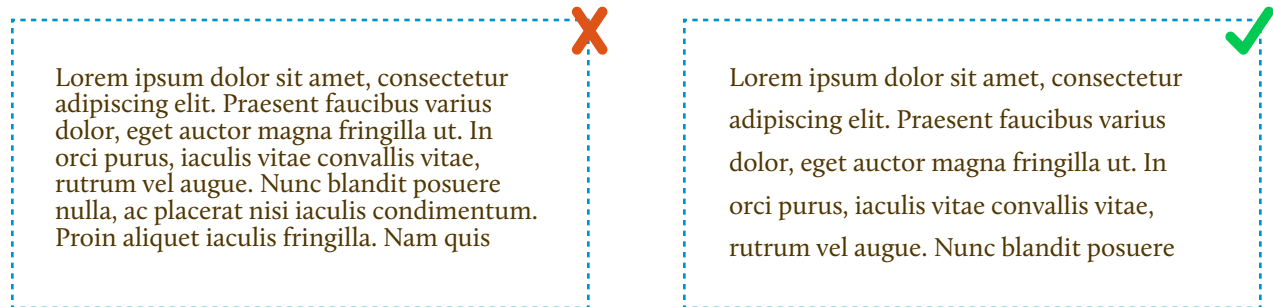
Readability First

Font size.



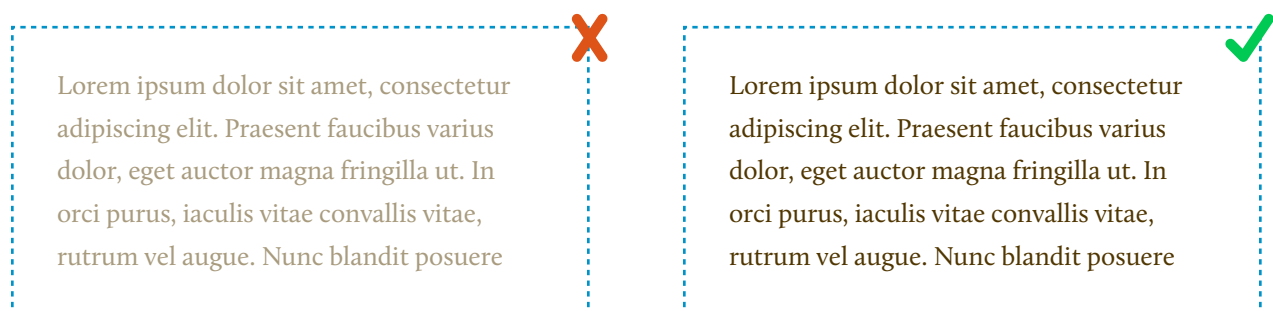
Don't make readers squint. Set paragraph text at a minimum equivalent to 16px, and then pick text sizes for other elements relative to that. Don't decrease the font size if your content looks too long. Instead, edit your content. If your grandma can't read it without her magnifying glass, it's too small.

Line height (or leading).



The spacing between lines of a paragraph is equally crucial for easy reading. Rule of thumb dictates that spacing should equal about 125% of the font size, or 1.25em. You might decide to adjust this depending on the characteristics of the fonts you are using, and that's perfectly fine. In pixels, this translates to 16px size & 20px spacing, 18px & 22px, 20px & 25px, and so on.

Color Contrast.



The contrast between text color and background color affects reading speed. Too many websites have light gray text that's difficult to read on anything but an Apple Cinema Display.

Give readers a break and use high contrast for all your text.

For more, see the *Color* chapter.

Maintain Consistent Styles

If you write CSS, you understand the concept of styles that are applied to multiple elements on a web page. Regardless of the medium, maintaining consistent type styles is crucial for the sake of clarity and readability. This sounds simple, but I'd argue it is the biggest and most common typographic mistake that people make.

Content must be well-organized before you can apply consistent typographic styles.

Many typographic errors are caused by poorly formatted or organized content. As a designer, you are responsible for facilitating communication; you guide the user through the content. This means you must understand which lines are headers, subheaders, or just bold. If you didn't write the content, work with the person who did to get it organized before you continue. This includes maintaining writing conventions for the usage of headers, subheaders, bold, etc.

*Organize
your
content.*

Use the fewest text styles possible.

No project needs five different paragraph styles or eight different header styles. Start with one text style for each of the most common elements and be judicious when adding new styles. Reuse styles whenever possible, unless doing so sacrifices clarity.

Ensure a minimum difference in text styles.

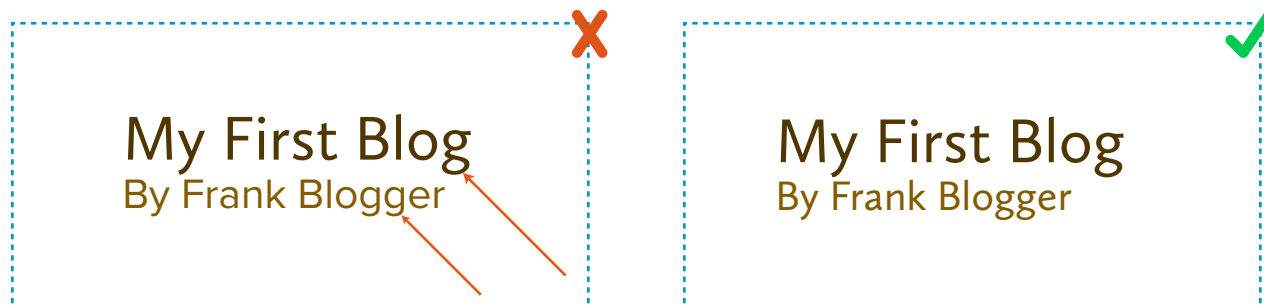
Headers, subheaders, and paragraphs need to be substantially different. For example, do not set a header at 30px bold and a subheader at 28px bold. Readers will not recognize the difference and will struggle to recognize when transitions occur in the content.

Font size is not the only way to differentiate styles. You can also use weight, italics, capitalization, color, and more. For example, main headlines could have a light weight and vastly larger font size, and to contrast, subheaders could be smaller, bold, and in all caps.

How to Know If Fonts Go Well Together

Pairing fonts is challenging. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, typography geeks often pair fonts based on categories and historical genres. Approaching font selection this way requires substantial knowledge before it becomes productive. This is not an effective use of your time, so instead, here are some simple guidelines for pairing fonts.


Don't use two fonts that have a similar style.



*The first example uses two different fonts. The second uses the same font.
Note the differences between the letter “g” in the first example.*

Using two similar fonts can make your design look amateur. There's no reason to use two similar fonts—using only one is always better, since they serve the same purpose, anyway.

Don't use two fonts that have a lot of personality or are highly decorative.



My First Blog
By Frank Blogger


My First Blog
By Frank Blogger

My First Blog
By Frank Blogger

Instead of using two decorative fonts, pick just one of them and use a text font next to it.

Using two decorative fonts in the same design runs the risk of looking distracting, cluttered, and overwhelming. Some recent design trends, such as retro signage lettering, do this—but they require some experience in order to get the balance right. It's not worth the risk and additional time spent while you are trying to get your business off the ground. Instead, just pick one of the display fonts and let it be the center of attention.

Consider using a serif and a sans-serif, possibly from the same family.



My First Blog
By Frank Blogger

Calluna and Calluna Sans are designed to go well together.

A classic and beautiful pairing is a sans serif for display and a serif for text. Inverting this pairing can work, too. The point is that choosing a serif and a sans reduces the likelihood that the fonts will clash because of being substantially different. Even better if your fonts are part of the same font family: they are guaranteed to match, such as a couple of the suggested starter font families in this chapter.

Don't over-think it. Just try it.

Lorem ipsum dolor Morbi accumsan tincidunt augue et aliquam. In et dui.	Lorem ipsum dolor Morbi accumsan tincidunt augue et aliquam. In et dui.	<i>Lorem ipsum dolor</i> Morbi accumsan tincidunt augue et aliquam. In et dui.	Lorem ipsum dolor Morbi accumsan tincidunt augue et aliquam. In et dui.
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Examples of Type Studies. Any of them could be correct—the point is to explore!

The best way to know if fonts go well together is to try them! A common method for doing so is to use what some call a “type study.” A type study is essentially just a template of fake content you can use to switch out fonts for comparison. Use something like [Lorem Ipsum](#) and create a page with a headline and a paragraph. Save several copies of the page and try different font combinations on each. You can do this in any format you want, such as HTML or Photoshop. Print them out and compare. This is easier than switching out fonts repeatedly on your real design.

How To Get Started With Typography

Pick your go-to fonts.

Rather than face the staggering volume of choices head on, start small. Choose just a couple of font families that you really like and use them for every project. The truth is, you don't need a new unique font for every project. The best fonts are versatile. They are suitable for a variety of design aesthetics. Pick out a couple of favorites; these are your go-to font families. Then use them everywhere. Later in the chapter, I'll provide a few suggestions to get you started.

Let the font do the heavy lifting.

Decorative or overtly expressive typography is difficult to achieve without looking tacky or unprofessional. For now, be conservative. Delay trying more sophisticated styles until you have some more experience under your belt.

Don't try to force your fonts to be unique by modifying them or drawing special shapes or characters. Beautiful typography is about calling attention to the elegant shapes of

the letters. This is an exercise in restraint. Pick a quality font and let it speak for itself. Type designers spend thousands of hours perfecting every curve and angle of every character in their fonts. Right now, you are no match for their skill. Lend some trust. Let your fonts work for you. That's what the pros do, and that's how you'll get beautiful typography.

*Let the
font speak
for itself.*

Versatile Font Families to Get You Started

Many design books will point you toward traditional fonts like Trajan, Garamond, and Gill Sans. That's fine, but these fonts probably aren't going to give you the look you want for projects like modern web applications (Furthermore, pairing them with node.js, Rails 3, or MongoDB hotness seems downright immoral). So, instead of supplying the old-school staples, I'm going to recommend some newer, more popular, but also impeccably well crafted and timeless fonts as a starting point for your typography adventures. All the fonts below work great for both display and text and are available on *Typekit*.

Calluna & Calluna Sans

Calluna
& Calluna
SANS

All *combinations* are possible
from light *to*
black & ***back***

*Taken from online PDF type specimens for [Calluna](#) and [Calluna Sans](#).
All rights belong to respective creators.*

FF Meta & FF Meta Serif

Meta vs Meta

Meta ist ein Frauenvorname. Es handelt sich dabei um eine Abkürzung von Margaretha ®

Before the development of modern science, scientific questions were addressed as a part of metaphysics known as *natural philosophy*; the term *science* itself meant *knowledge*. The scientific method, however, made natural philosophy an **empirical and experimental activity** unlike the rest of philosophy, and by the end of the eighteenth century it had begun to be called *science* in order to distinguish it from philosophy. Thereafter, metaphysics became the philosophical enquiry of a non-empirical character into the nature of existence. Thus the original situation of metaphysics being integral with (Aristotelian) physics and science, has become reversed so that scientists generally consider metaphysics **antithetical to the empirical sciences**.

FF Meta Serif ® ist eine Schrift, gestaltet von E. Spiekermann, C. Schwartz & K. Sowersby.

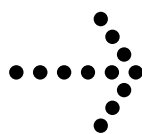
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Kitchen

The Meta forms the northern boundary of Vichada Department. In Puerto Carreño it flows into the Orinoco.

1050 Meta is an asteroid.
Its provisional designation was 1925 RC.

Buffet



SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO asked the fundamental question about the *nature of time*. A traditional realist position in ontology is that time and space have existence *apart from the human mind*. Idealists, including KANT claim that space and time are mental constructs used to organise perceptions, or are otherwise unreal.

Heavy Meta

*Taken from online type specimens for FF Meta and FF Meta Serif.
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Proxima Nova

Proxima Nova Regular

VOYAGER
 supernova
 NEUTRON STAR
 Planetary Orbits
 HORSEHEAD NEBULA
 2001: A Space Odyssey, '68
 APOLLO LANDS ON MOON: 1969
 Vexed Buzz quietly watched Neil jumpin
 VEXED BUZZ QUIETLY WATCHED NEIL JUMPIN
 1957 SPUTNIK 1958 EXPLORER 1961 VOSTOK 1962 MERCURY 19
 1. MERCURY 2. VENUS 3. EARTH 4. MARS 5. JUPITER 6. SATURN 7. U
 Vexed Buzz quietly watched Neil jumping to mark the surface. Vex

© MARK SIMONSON 2006. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.  THIS FONT IS AVAILABLE FROM WWW.MS-STUDIO.COM

*Taken from online PDF type specimens for [Proxima Nova](#).
 All rights belong to respective creators.*

Skolar

INTELLECT

Las EDICIONES DE LUJO, con cuidado

Academic

I can see many things far off

calligraphy

„BERUŠKA 1973-85“

⇒ **sign** ⇐

▫ high x-height - low contrast - serif -

PERPENDICULAR

WWW.TYPE-TOGETHER.COM

*Taken from online PDF type specimens for [Skolar](#).
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Adelle**International**

Conference will be held in **Kopenhagen** in 2009

Modern time***financial reviewers***

School tests for 7 and 11 years old

Newsreel**GLOBAL**

Chic without the suffering: FASHION DISPLAYS its ethical face at the

“Responsibility”***Foreign policy makers***

WWW.TYPE-TOGETHER.COM

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How to Find New Fonts

Take a few minutes and browse some design work that you admire. Jot down the fonts used and build a short list. Then, try them out using the type tester features on [Typekit](#), [Fontshop](#), or [MyFonts](#). You can read more ideas about this tactic in chapter 10, *How To Steal*. Also, the resources below are great places to discover new fonts.

Further Reading & Inspiration

[The Typographic Desk Reference](#)

[FontShop Email Newsletter](#)

[FontFeed](#), blog

[MyFonts Email Newsletter](#)

[Typophile](#), an online typography community

[Fonts In Use](#), a design gallery that labels fonts used.

[I Love Typography](#), blog

[Typedia](#), an online shared encyclopedia of typefaces

[The Elements of Typographics Style Applied to the Web](#)

Design Critique Cheatsheet

Simple ways to evaluate a design.

Just like they teach in design school, only about \$40,000 cheaper.

A free sample from the eBook, *Bootstrapping Design*.

Available at: <http://BootstrappingDesign.com>

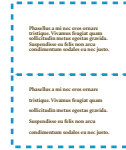
1. **Readability.** Clear enough your grandma could read it without her magnifying glass.



Size

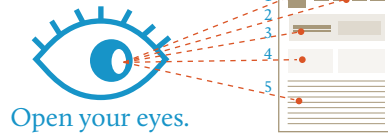


Contrast



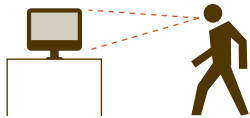
Spacing

2. **Hierarchy.** Guide the user through page elements in order of importance.



Where did you look first?
Second?

3. **Balance.** Feng shui for your <div>'s and <p>'s.



View from 5 feet away.

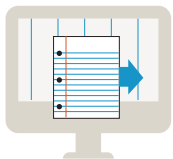


View from 10 feet away.



View upside down.

4. **Alignment.** Get in line or get out.



Hold a piece of paper up to the screen. Move it left to right. Do elements line up to the vertical gridlines formed by the edge of the paper?

5. **Comparison.** Does your work stack up against something you know is awesome?



Does it suck?

OMFG!
Seaux awesome.