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DESIGN INSIGHTS - Weekly Design Principles from Artfuly

1 message

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This series of emails is designed to give a good grounding to beginners, but also to fill any gaps that more experienced designers might have & give fast practical tips, tricks & downloads

Principle 1 - Readability & Typefaces (Fonts)

[RESOURCE FILE DOWNLOAD - Top 10 App & Web design fonts](#)

(This file will kickstart your designs if you're a newbie / student designer)

Font choice can make or break a design - see examples in the **video** further down!

Important considerations

When starting any design, one of the first things you have to do is to choose a font, and there are a lot more things to consider than you might realise, those being:

- **Creating a 'Look' or brand** - Does the thing I'm designing already have a style-guide - if so, grab it and the fonts!
- What is the **delivery format**? App / Website / Printed Materials / Other or all of those? if an app is involved I would choose fonts for the app first, and then move to website and printed styles, because good choices for app fonts are more limited and highly dependent on the app functionality
- Is the font **web safe**?* (more on that below)
- Is the font **free or paid**?, and if paid, is there budget? Make sure you buy a commercial licence if needed
- **Readability** - people must be able to read your text, and a lot can go wrong here...

Common mistakes

I receive a lot of student submissions from people starting out on a UX bootcamp, and often I see:

- A **CRAZY** font choice that's pretty **unreadable**
- Text too **small**
- Text **contrast** poor e.g. light grey on a mid grey background
- **Text over patterns or images** where the image colour blends in with some of the text
- **Full width text** i.e. text right across a landscape page
- Text with **no negative space or padding** around it, e.g. right up against the edge of an image
- **No hierarchy** in the layout of the text - you can use just one font for both headings and body copy, but a more interesting approach is to start with 2 fonts (more below)

If you're a student and you can get those things right, you've already come a long way!

*Web-safe fonts

Tech considerations when choosing fonts

When starting any design, not only do you want to choose an attractive, readable font which suits the brand, but also consider the availability of the font for the end user - if you use unavailable fonts, they are likely to be swapped out and ruin the look of your design as the user views it - that's why one of the easiest options is to use the **free google fonts**.

If a website is designed using a font that is not available on a user's computer, several things can happen depending on how the website is built and the fallback options implemented:

Font Substitution: If the website has a fallback font specified in its CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), the browser will attempt to substitute the missing font with the specified fallback font. This means the user will see the content in a different font than intended, which may alter the visual appearance and typography of the website. The substituted font might have different proportions, spacing, or style, potentially affecting readability and design consistency.

System Default Fonts: In the absence of a specified fallback font, the browser will resort to using the default fonts installed on the user's operating system. These fonts are

typically generic and may lack the specific style and design characteristics of the intended font. Consequently, the website's appearance may deviate significantly from the designer's original vision, potentially resulting in a less visually appealing and cohesive experience.

Download Prompt: In some cases, if a website uses a custom font that is not available on the user's computer, the browser may prompt the user to download and install the font. This option allows the website to display the content as intended, using the specific font. However, this approach relies on the user's willingness to download and install additional fonts, which may introduce friction and impact the user experience.

To mitigate these issues, web designers often utilise web-safe fonts or embed custom fonts using web font services like Google Fonts. These services enable websites to specify a list of fonts to use, prioritising them based on availability. By employing these techniques, designers can ensure a more consistent and controlled typography experience across different devices and platforms.

Overall, it's important for web designers to consider font availability and provide appropriate fallback options to maintain readability, visual consistency, and a positive user experience, even when the desired font is not available on the user's computer.

Font Types

The main font types that you need to know about are **serif**, **sans-serif**, and **display**. Serif fonts are often used in books, sans-serif are often used in apps and websites and display fonts are commonly used for headings.

Serif

Sans Serif

Display

1. **Serif** – Fonts with small decorative strokes (serifs) at the ends of characters, often associated with a more traditional and formal appearance.

2. **Sans-serif** - Fonts without serifs, characterised by a clean and modern design, often used for digital content and displays.
3. **Display** - Fonts specifically designed for headlines, titles, or large-sized text, often featuring unique and eye-catching designs.
4. **Script** - Fonts that mimic handwriting or calligraphy, featuring fluid and flowing letterforms, suitable for elegant and decorative designs.
5. **Monospaced** - Fonts where each character occupies the same amount of horizontal space, commonly used in coding and typewriter-like applications.
6. **Handwritten** - Fonts that resemble natural handwriting, providing a personal and informal touch to designs.
7. **Decorative** - Highly stylised fonts with unique and distinctive designs, often used for creative and attention-grabbing purposes.
8. **Gothic** - Fonts inspired by medieval or architectural letterforms, characterised by intricate and pointed designs, conveying a sense of historical or gothic aesthetics.
9. **Cursive** - Fonts that mimic joined and flowing handwriting, typically used for formal and elegant designs.
10. **Retro** - Fonts that evoke a nostalgic feel, often inspired by typography from past eras, such as the 1960s or 1970s.

The 10 best free fonts for app & web design

I selected these fonts to give a good range of options with some character, which have plenty of font styles (bold, italic etc). These have become my go-to fonts over the years.

1. **Roboto**
2. **Lato**
3. **Poppins**
4. **Open Sans**
5. **Raleway**
6. **Montserrat**
7. **Playfair Display** - The only display font here, feel free to substitute for a different display font!
8. **Nunto**
9. **Quicksand**
10. **Inter**

Font pairing

Quick tip - choose 1 font for headings/buttons and another for paragraphs (body copy)

Font pairing is a crucial aspect of design that involves selecting and combining fonts that harmonise well together. Effective font pairing can significantly enhance the visual appeal, readability, and overall impact of a design. When choosing fonts to pair, designers consider factors such as contrast, similarity, and compatibility. Contrast between fonts, such as pairing a bold and a light font, creates visual interest and helps differentiate various elements. Similarly, pairing fonts with distinct characteristics, such as a serif font with a sans-serif font, can create a pleasing contrast while maintaining readability. Additionally, designers often look for fonts that share certain qualities, such as similar x-heights or proportions, to establish a sense of cohesion and consistency throughout the design. By thoughtfully combining fonts, designers can create a harmonious typographic hierarchy that guides the reader's attention, enhances the message, and contributes to an aesthetically pleasing and cohesive visual experience.

Font pairing websites

A really good google font pairing website is <https://fontjoy.com> where you can 'Lock' one font (Heading, subtitle or body) and quickly generate new pairings until you find one that suits the brand or character you're going after.

<https://www.fontpair.co/all> - shows lots of fonts together in pairs on the page

You can pair those top 10 fonts for Headings and body copy, or you can choose 1 and then another that's not from the list, e.g. choose Playfair Display for headings and then another for body copy - below I put together Playfair Display Italic Bold + Railway Light - which is a serif heading and a sans-serif body copy choice.



Example font pairing

I collected these fonts in a figma file with quick download links which you can see in the video and you can **download a copy of the file** for yourself here for quick reference when you're starting a new design.



Get the figma file here

Get figma software for free

If you're a student you can get the paid version here, and if you're anyone else you can still get a free limited figma here

How to find out what fonts have been used on any website

I use **Fonts Ninja** chrome extension and it looks like this when you use it - it's great because it includes the Font name, size, weight, leading and kerning (Things covered further in my course)

How We Help Clients

Our People

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**Bower**

Bold



52px



60px



0px



#000000

Our Insights



Designing out times

December 8, 2022 – Design makes sense just in good times. CEOs who embrace design enhance strategy and better navigate this age of volatility.

**Bower**

Bold

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

0123456789



Why is bookmarking not available?

Mc Kinsey Sans

Regular

Light

Regular

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

0123456789



Why is bookmarking not available?

Other worthwhile font mentions

You can see **other sans-serif google fonts with over 14 styles here**

It's worth mentioning '**San Francisco (iOS)**' which is the apple font - is the default system font used on Apple's iOS operating system. It was introduced with iOS 9 in 2015 and has been the standard typeface for iOS devices since then.

San Francisco is specifically designed by Apple to be highly legible on small screens, such as those found on iPhones and iPads. It is optimised for readability at various sizes and resolutions, ensuring clear and crisp text rendering on Apple devices.

Did you know?...

"**The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog**" is a sentence often used as a pangram, which is a sentence that contains every letter of the alphabet at least once. It is commonly used for typing practice, testing fonts, and demonstrating keyboard layouts.

My best advice is

Beginners - keep it simple, choose 2 fonts, make sure they work for the end format and have plenty of styling options. Headings are better in bold, extra bold or black, paragraphs are best in regular - or semi-bold if 'reversed out' i.e. white text on a darker background.

Experienced designers - play around with more charismatic fonts and really fine tune the leading and negative spacing for top-class results.



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About the author

I'm a UX/Product Designer based near Berlin, working freelance & remote only / location independent.

I graduated from Loughborough University in the UK with a Product Design degree in 1996, and since then I've worked as a Programmer, Business Analyst, Graphic Artist, Graphic Designer, Web Designer, Snr. UX Designer/Consultant and Entrepreneur. I've also become a Marketing generalist, mostly from running my own startup for 8 years.

Currently I mix my time between Product Design contracts for blue-chip companies such as KPMG & PWC, building my design education site at **Artfully.com** (course and book on visual design principles coming soon), Tutoring for Career Foundry and private students.

Between 2005 - 2015 I worked for many top ad agencies in Australia and you can check out my experience on **LinkedIn**

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