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The Web Typography Checklist

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Typography creates the parameters with which words and text are displayed, like the laws of physics to our everyday life. But typography and design are two separate disciplines, despite how often they overlap.

That's why we've compiled this handy checklist: six typography criteria for web projects, and the best practices for making sure they're fulfilled correctly.

1. Spacing is adequate.

In typography, spacing encompasses several different variables.

There's the vertical spacing between lines of text (*line-height* on the web), the width of a horizontal line and how many characters fit within it (*measure*), the spacing between letters (*tracking*), and special spacing between letters, such as the shortened space in "AV" (*kerning*).

Luckily, there are some concrete rules to optimize your spacing:

1. Units
- You should use rems and ems, which base their sizes on in CSS to specify how wide columns of text appear with media queries.

- Avoid setting text in pixels, which renders designs static on mobile devices where user may need to zoom in to read properly.

2. Vertical space
- The ideal line-height distance is 120–140% its size. If you're using a base font size of 11pt, experiment with line-height of 1.2 – 1.4 em, or 13.2–15.4 pts.

- The greater the column width, the more line-height it needs to help users find the start of the next line.

- On the web, one space is generally enough between paragraphs. However, you can go as high as 180% before people start to wonder if they're beginning a new section.

3. Horizontal space
- The ideal measure, or column width, fits 52-78 characters including spaces into one horizontal line of text. To simplify, aim for 65 characters per line, give or take 13. This applies to headings as well as body copy.

- Hyphenation in CSS is a wish more than a reliable technique, so avoid excessive gaps between words by left – or right-aligning body copy.

- Typically, kerning is set depending on the font you choose. Only

customize it if you notice a problem.

Read more about line-height in Ch.4 of *Responsive Design Best Practices*.

☐ 2. Color contrast is optimized for legibility.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 have specific rules about contrast for text vs. its background. These guidelines are reliable when designing for people with disabilities and also as a solid overall foundation for readability.

• Run your colors through ColorSafe to check it against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0.

• Check your site with Check My Colours for a line-by-line analysis of contrast on your site.

Photo credit: Color Safe

Read more about contrast in *Web UI Design for the Human Eye* (Vol.1).

3. Sizes are effective.

There are a few considerations when choosing type families, especially the differences between headings and body text. The size of the x-height also matters.

- In general, choose type families in which the x-height is halfway between the bottom resting baseline and the top CAPS line for body copy. You can choose families that exaggerate this more or less for standalone headers and titles.

- Headings are commonly twice the size of body text (or more precisely, 1.96x). However, this doesn't take into account subheadings, or sites that don't have a lot of body text.

Read more about font-size in Ch.4 of *Responsive Design Best Practices*.

4. The typography communicates visually.

Ask yourself if your typographical choices represent your site's personality.

- How do you want users to perceive your site? Minimalist sites benefit from sans-serif choices. Professional and traditional sites prefer classic serif typefaces like Times New Roman.

- Who is your brand talking to? The more experts you expect to visit, the more detailed typefaces you can use.

Read more about typographic voice in *Web UI Design for the Human Eye: Content & Typography*.

☐ **5. Formats are consistent.**

Once you decide concretely on your sizes, type families and styles, you should use them consistently.

- Body text should always be identifiable by its size and line-height.

- Text links should always follow the same format such as underlined or otherwise.

- Headings of the same importance should use the same color, size and spacing.

Read more about type families.

☐ **6. Text is effective on all devices.**

Examine how the text appears on different device viewports.

A user may have a laptop hooked up to a 64-inch screen television to view your page, or they may have a 124mm iPhone 5s. In one case, the screen is across the room and in the other it's maybe a few inches from the user's face. But your typography must still be readable in both situations.

- The further the distance between user and screen, the larger the text should be.

- Compare your website with print material at similar distances to determine what's readable. For example, compare a hand-held business card to a printed wall sign.

- In terms of reading distance, tablets tend to fall between smartphones and desktops – users commonly hold them *slightly* further from their faces than would be the case with smartphones.

Read more about viewports in *Responsive Design Best Practices*.

7. Further Reading

If you found this checklist helpful, we have more advice on typography, and digital copywriting in general. Download our free ebooks below for more reliable rules and expert advice on all things textual:

- *Interaction Design Best Practices: Mastering the Tangibles* – The first installment of our popular Interaction Design Best Practices series explores the rules of typography and advice on copywriting in two full chapters. After all, text often plays half of the role in interaction.

- *Web Design Book of Trends 2015 – 2016* – Want to know the latest typographical trends for the upcoming year? This ebook dedicates an entire chapter exclusively to modern typography, along with 9 other trends.

- *Consistency in UI Design* – Consistency and typography go hand-in-hand, especially considering all the intricacies that need to be consistent. This guidebook explains the best practices for keeping everything in line, including the times that you shouldn't.

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- ✓ Create and collaborate with your entire team in one place

- ✓ Get real time project updates with our Slack integration

- ✓ Go from lo-fi to hi-fi in a single tool

- ✓ Import files from Photoshop and Sketch

Start using it now!