

S e a n M c M a n u s

7th
Edition

Web Design

make your website a success!

in
easy steps

PLAIN ENGLISH

EASY TO FOLLOW

FULLY ILLUSTRATED

IN FULL COLOR



From the author

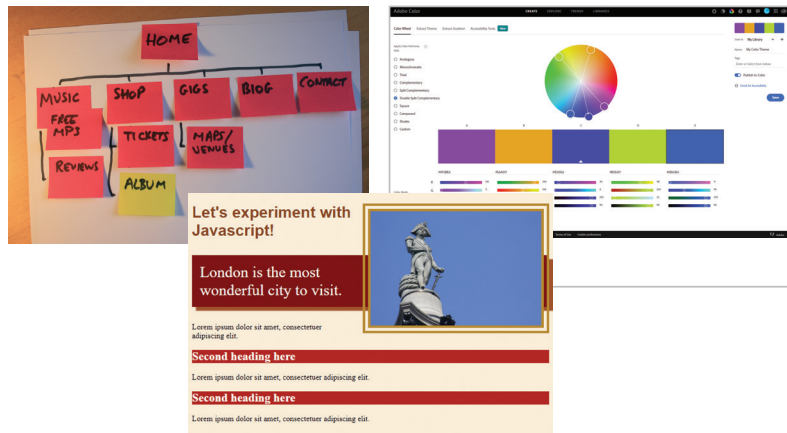
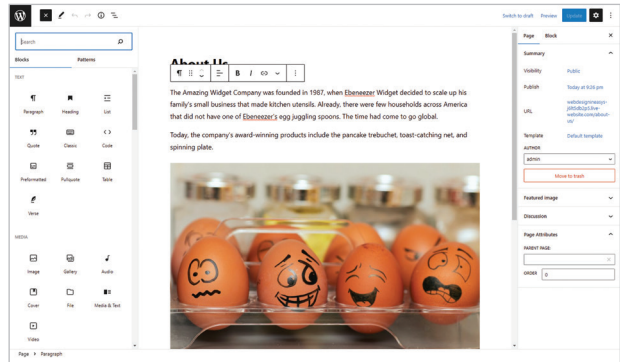
Why are some websites a joy to use, and others so frustrating? Why do some designs draw you in, while others put you off? Most importantly, how can you make sure that your own website is easy for everyone to use, and helps you to achieve your business or life goals?

Web Design in easy steps shows you how to build a website that looks great and delights visitors. Among other things, you'll discover:

- What makes a website that people really love.
- The page layout and navigation patterns of top sites.
- How to use HTML, CSS and JavaScript to build your site.
- Ways to propel your website up the search engine rankings.
- How to make a responsive site that looks great on mobile phones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers.
- Ways to bring your site to life with animation, video and audio.
- How to measure your success and refine your site over time.

Newly updated to cover responsive design, this book guides you through the complete process of creating a website.

It takes you from your first plans, through design and construction, to finally launching your site and measuring its success. Along the way, you'll pick up ideas from some of the most successful websites, and will find out the right way to build your site using the best of today's technologies.



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4

Layout and design

Your layout needs to communicate order and consistency so that the design looks professional and is easy to use. The fonts, colors and images you choose will combine to create the look and feel of your website.

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The layout and design guidelines in this chapter are just that: guidelines. Just take care that you don't break them without thinking about them first.



Don't be afraid to leave some empty space – at the bottom of a column, for example. It gives your design breathing space.



Use whichever tools you find easiest. You could start with pen and paper, use an art package like Adobe Photoshop, or go straight into an HTML prototype.

The role of your design

Now that you've spent some time planning and creating content, it's time to look at the layout and design of your web pages. Your website design needs to achieve the following goals:

- **Encourage engagement.** Your website design needs to inspire visitors to look around your site and spend some time there. It's easy to focus on this aspect of the design, but don't get carried away. Keep the purpose of your site in mind throughout its development; otherwise, you might end up with something that is beautiful, but otherwise useless. Different styles will resonate with different audiences, which is why it's important to understand your target visitors first.
- **Communicate order.** Whether you have five pages or 500, your website design needs to make it easy for people to understand which pages are more important, and which parts of each page are most important.
- **Define the boundaries of the website.** Because people can move between websites so easily, it's important that they understand when this has happened. Using a consistent design across your web pages helps to reassure visitors that they are still on your website. You can create different layouts for different page types (your homepage and product pages are bound to look different, for example), but these should share the same design elements. Avoid using radically different color schemes or graphic styles on different pages, otherwise visitors might think they've gone to a different website. Anything that makes the visitor think about using your website, instead of just getting on with doing so, is a barrier to your site achieving its goals.
- **Feel easy to use.** Your site navigation needs to feel intuitive to visitors so that they can easily find things. They want to spend time using your content, not trying to figure out how to find it. Navigation is so important that Chapter 5 is dedicated to it.
- **Inspire confidence.** If you have a site that visitors consider to be professionally designed, they're more likely to come back or spend money with you. People will (sometimes subconsciously) judge the quality of your expertise or services based on how professional your website looks.

What is your look and feel?

The look and feel of your website is what results from all the decisions you make about its content and design.

It is a combination of:

- The images you use – both the style of your content images and photography, and the choice and arrangement of any decorative images.
- The attitude suggested by your text, and the language it uses.
- The color scheme you have chosen.
- The fonts you use to convey your information and draw attention to important elements.
- The way you arrange elements on the page to accentuate what is important.

You need all these elements to work in harmony. If you were promoting an industrial rock band and had lots of metallic textured images, it would look strange to have a fancy handwritten font or lots of bright kid-friendly colors. Sometimes you can subvert conventional wisdom, but it's usually better to play it safe.

Using design elements consistently sends a signal to your visitors that you've paid attention to the details. It's easy to put things onto a screen. It takes more care to combine them so that they look like they belong together in a single design. Work within a palette of four or five colors (plus shades or tints, as appropriate). Make the spacing between different elements on your web page consistent. Choose one or two fonts and use them throughout.

The rule of thumb is: if things look similar, they should be exactly the same. If they're nearly the same, it just looks sloppy. If you don't want things to look the same, then make them radically different. Leave no doubt that you have deviated from the norm to add contrast or emphasis, or to call attention to something.

When you're developing the elements of your look and feel, keep your intended audience in mind. Think about the kinds of magazines they read, the TV shows they might watch, the films they prefer, and their favorite websites (until yours is built, at least). Use a visual language that will make them feel at home.



Professionals often create the look and feel in an art package, like Photoshop. They make an image of the whole web page. This image can then be sliced up to make the background and foreground images that will form part of the finished website.

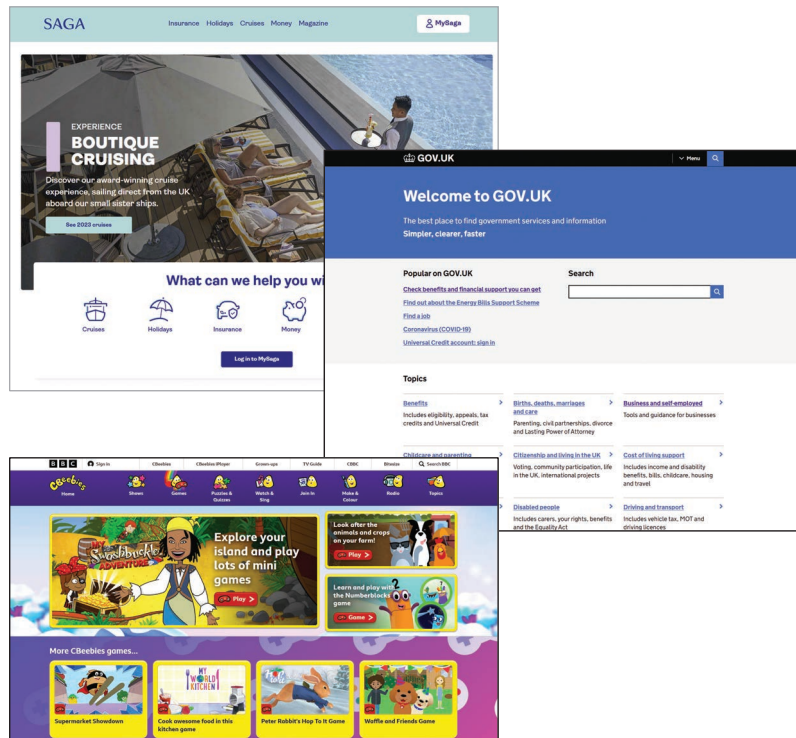


Take a critical look at market-leading sites that cater for a similar audience to yours. It will give you an idea of what others think is a suitable design for your audience and it will also show you what your visitors are used to seeing.

The right look and feel

Here are three websites that cater for different audiences. You can see how the design of each matches its visitors' needs:

- The website for UK government services (www.gov.uk) is almost text-only, making it extremely fast. The site aims to help readers find what they need quickly, despite the huge amount of content. Concise descriptions guide visitors to the services. At the top of the page are links to popular content and a prominent search box.
- Saga (www.saga.co.uk) offers services including insurance and holidays to the over 50s. The homepage uses large promotional images featuring people who are over 50 so that visitors feel like they belong on the site. The experience is like browsing a shop.
- The CBeebies games website is designed for children (www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/games). It uses text sparingly and keeps the language simple. The navigation uses cartoon icons and the games have audio instructions, so even children who cannot read can use the site. The colors are bold and exciting.

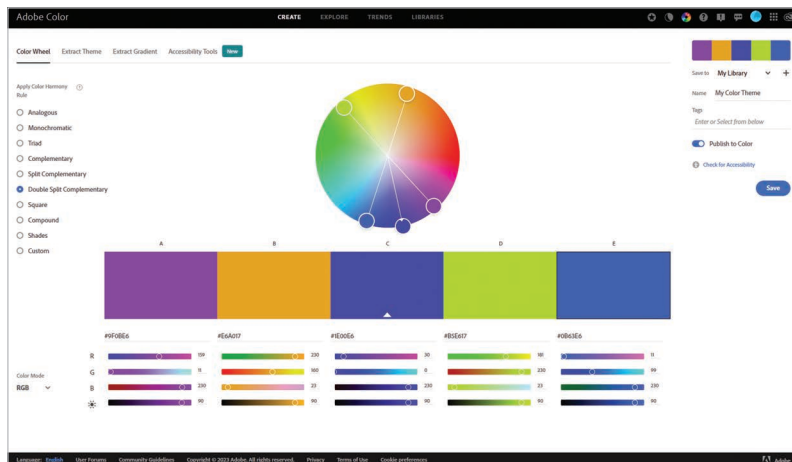


You don't have to use guesswork. You can invite members of your audience to give you feedback on every stage of your design.

Creating a color scheme

The typical computer can display millions of colors, so how do you choose a handful that work well? The good news is that there are lots of tools that encapsulate the important color design theories, and they're often free. Here's a suggested approach:

- 1 Open a color scheme tool. Adobe has a free one at <https://color.adobe.com>. You might have one built in to your web design software or image-editing software.



- 2 Choose your starting color. You usually do this by clicking it on a color wheel. On Adobe's tool, click and drag a circle on the wheel.

- 3 Choose what type of color scheme you would like to create. A monochromatic scheme uses shades of one color. A complementary scheme uses two colors that are directly opposite each other on the color wheel. A triad uses three colors that are the same distance apart on the wheel. There's also a split complement triad, which uses one color, and the two colors beside its complement on the other side of the wheel. An analogous color scheme uses colors that are next to each other on the color wheel.

- 4 Note the color numbers in the palette provided. You'll need to put them in your CSS code later.



Most major websites use black text on a white background for their core content. It offers the best contrast, so it's easy to read.



Color wheels encapsulate important design theories. Using a color wheel is the easiest way to create a harmonious color scheme.



The Color Contrast Check tool at https://snook.ca/technical/colour_contrast/colour.html checks whether there is enough contrast between your foreground and background colors for easy readability.



Don't get carried away with fancy fonts: remember that the most important thing is that people can comfortably read your message.

Choosing fonts

The style of text you use on your website has a huge impact on its design. Some fonts are playful, some are business-like; some speak of tradition, while others look futuristic. All this information is conveyed before somebody has even read what the text says.

You should use fonts that convey the personality of your site, where possible, but there are some technical limitations.

The fastest and most efficient solution is to use the fonts installed on the visitor's device. But visitors use a variety of devices, and you don't know for sure which fonts they will have.

You can give the browser a list of font options, so you could request a daring and relatively rare font and give the browser a safe substitute if that font isn't available. You could use a font that comes with Adobe Creative Suite or Microsoft Office, for people who have those packages – for example – and declare a basic font that comes with the operating system, as a back-up.

If you want to use a font that isn't installed on the visitor's computer, you need to send it over the internet with your web page, which is called embedding it. Not all fonts can be embedded for licensing reasons, and the way to embed fonts varies by browser model and version. Embedding a font increases the download size of a web page, too, slowing it down.

Google Fonts simplifies the process of embedding fonts. It provides an easy way to embed fonts from its own catalog. It sends the smallest possible file, depending on the browser being used, so it helps to improve the user experience.

See Chapter 7 for instructions on adding fonts to your web page.

Harrington

Jokerman

Old English Text

Palace Script

Rage Italic

Revia

ROSEWOOD STD

Snap ITC

STENCIL STD



You can create a distinctive design using unusual fonts for headings and standard device fonts for the main text of the page. Chapter 7 includes a list of safe fonts that are on Windows, Mac and Apple mobile (iOS) devices.

Planning a responsive design

In the past, organizations often created separate websites for different user groups. In particular, they made text-only websites for those using assistive technology such as screen readers, and they created a separate version of the website for mobile devices.

There were a number of problems with this approach. The accessible sites were often neglected and missed key information. Managing multiple sites was complex, too.

One site for all

Today, you don't have to create separate websites for specific audiences. There are too many different devices and configurations for you to cater for them all anyway. Instead, you should aim to create a single responsive website design that adapts to the device that is viewing it. The site should work well on assistive devices such as screen readers, too.

Analyzing responsive designs

Let's take a look at a responsive design.

1

I'm looking at the website of London's Royal Albert Hall at www.royalalberthall.com. If the website has changed since this book went to press or you're curious about what your competitors do, you can use a different site. I've gone to the **Visit Us** page. View the web page in your usual desktop browser.

The screenshot shows the 'VISIT' page of the Royal Albert Hall website. The page has a dark red header with the Royal Albert Hall logo and navigation links: WHAT'S ON, VISIT, OUR 150TH, ABOUT THE HALL, SUPPORT US, and SHOP. Below the header, there are several sections: 'FAQs' with links to Food and Drink, Tours, Getting Here, Families, Daytime Visits, Shop and Merchandise, Accessibility, Accommodation, Hospitality, Private Boxes and Events, Venue and Seating Plan, and Security; 'SUPPORT US' with a call to action for donations and a list of donation options; 'YOUR VISIT' with four featured images: a portrait of Queen Victoria, a set of silverware, a scene from the hall's interior, and the exterior of the hall; and 'TOURS' and 'GETTING HERE' sections with brief descriptions and images.



A well-designed website will work on any device and web browser.



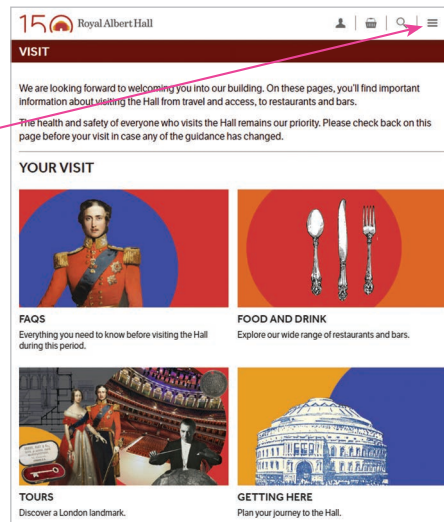
Desktop screens are getting bigger, but long lines of text are hard to read. Many sites set a maximum width for the page content, to make sure it's easy to read on even the largest monitors.

...cont'd

- 2 Drag the right edge of your browser window to make it narrower. As you narrow the window, you'll see the design respond. The site will reflow to use the available space.
- 3 When the window width reaches a particular point, you might notice new design rules kick in. On the Royal Albert Hall site, for example, the sidebar disappears and the long navigation menu at the top is compressed into a hamburger menu.



A hamburger menu has an icon showing three horizontal lines. It's called that because it looks a bit like two slices of bread with a burger between them. When users click or tap the hamburger icon, the full menu opens.



- 4 Visit the same site on your mobile device. On the Royal Albert Hall site, much smaller pictures are used, and the text appears beside them instead of underneath them. The site's logo is smaller, too. These screenshots and your own experiments show how a responsive site can tailor the layout, depending on the screen space available.



Using clean alignments

Grids are routinely used for designing print products. Newspapers, for example, use column-based layouts. Sometimes, a picture might span two, three or four columns. But it rarely spans two-and-a-half columns, because that tends to look messy.

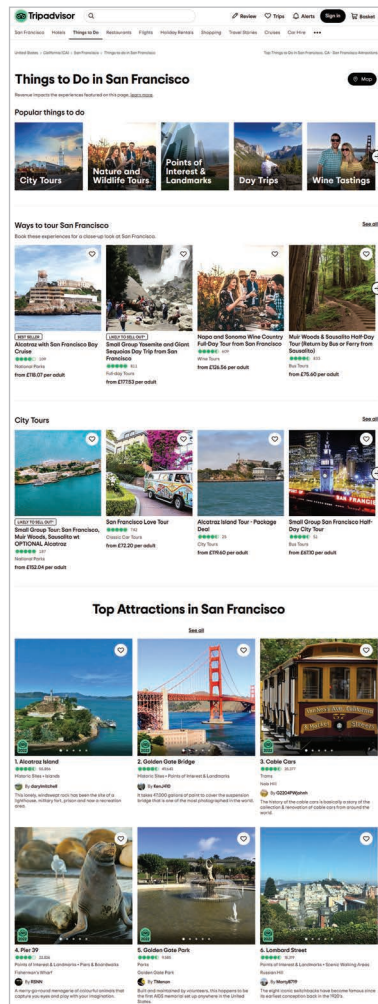
Web designers often use a grid to help them position content on screen. Organizing items in boxes supports responsive web design, because the design can change the size and number of boxes on each row, depending on the width of the browser window.

On the **Things to Do in San Francisco** page on the Tripadvisor website (www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g60713-Activities-San_Francisco_California.html), you can see the grid clearly.

The logo, navbar (see second Hot tip), headings and content boxes all line up with the same invisible left margin. The right edges of content boxes all line up, too. Everything in a row is the same size and aligned vertically.

Each horizontal panel is divided into equal-width content boxes. The number of items in the rows varies, but rows with the same number of items are perfectly aligned with each other.

It's a good idea to use a grid-based layout when you can. Not everything has to sit rigidly on the grid: you can break out of it for emphasis, and to create some pace in the design. But, if nothing lines up, a web page can look amateurish or chaotic.



Even content pages can benefit from a responsive grid layout. You might have a wide box for your article (where space allows) but you can still line it up sharply with your navbar and sidebar.



The “navigation bar” or “navbar” is the main group of links for getting around the website (see page 60).

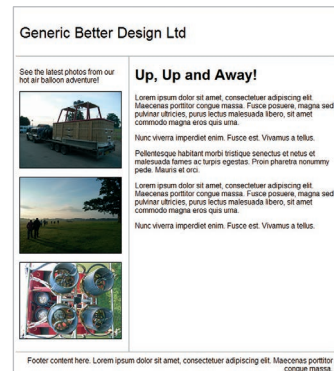
Tips for good alignment

To ensure your web page lines up well, follow these steps:

- 1 Mark up your content correctly, using the correct HTML tags, to identify a heading or a list item, for example. By default, HTML brings consistency, ensuring that all headlines and bullets line up. You'll learn more about HTML in Chapter 6.
- 2 Take care when adding spacing using CSS (changing the padding and margin around an element). This can introduce inconsistencies that throw out the natural alignment that HTML gives you. You'll learn how to control spacing using CSS in Chapter 7.
- 3 Be careful if you're using a visual editing system to build your web pages. They will often let you place content wherever you want on the page, but won't alert you if you're a few pixels out in lining things up. That can lead to designs that look sloppy.
- 4 It's easier to create a strong alignment, and the impression of good design that goes with it, if you align content with the left or right edge of the page or content box. If you center content, the alignment is harder to see. Centered paragraphs are also harder to read, because the start of each line is harder to find. Newcomers often want to center everything, but you should limit your use of center alignment to a few carefully selected parts of your design.

Right: The inconsistent alignment and center-aligned text look messy.

Far right: The pictures line up with each other, the text above and the company name. The left-aligned main text looks cleaner. The footer is right-aligned with the right margin of the main content box. This is far from a complete web design, but it does show the difference good alignment makes.



Thinking above the fold

As well as column-based layouts, there's another idea the web has borrowed from the newspaper industry: the fold.

When broadsheet newspapers are laid out for sale, they're folded across the middle and only the top half can be seen. The bit that's on show is said to be "above the fold".

Newspapers are designed to have their major headlines and photos in this top half of the page so that people are drawn to them and pick up the paper. The newspaper's branding also appears prominently in this top half so that people can recognize it immediately.

In web design, the term "above the fold" is used to refer to the first screenful of content. It's what people can see without having to scroll the page, so it is their first impression of your website.

It's essential that your website's identity or branding, and its navigation, appears above the fold. By having multiple columns of text, you can also start several different stories above the fold and invite people to click to read more or scroll down the page to finish reading.

Of course, the fold doesn't appear in the same place for everyone. It varies depending on the screen resolution and the device used. So, you need to design your responsive site so that your most important elements are always visible at the top of the page.

People don't always notice the scrollbar, so you need to provide a visual cue to encourage people to scroll down the page. An easy way to do this is to box some of the content, and stagger where the boxes end. People will understand that if they can't see the bottom border of the box, they haven't seen everything.

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Other countries <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Germany• France• Spain• Italy	<p>Nunc viverra imperdiet enim. Fusce est. Vivamus a tellus.</p> <p>Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Proin pharetra nonummy pede. Mauris et orci.</p>



If a long web page covers lots of different topics, ask yourself whether this should be split into different pages for a better user experience.



People are comfortable with scrolling content. It's okay to have a long web page if the content justifies it. People don't want to read an article split across multiple pages instead.

Far left: The user has no clue that this page continues below the fold (the red line).

Left: Boxing the left column tells the user the web page continues below the fold, prompting them to scroll.

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