



# Website Design

## Webworks – A Workshop Series in Web Design (Winter, Session 1)

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Most of this content is adapted from the *Web Style Guide*, located at [www.webstyleguide.com](http://www.webstyleguide.com). Be sure to check it out if you're interested in developing large scale web projects.

### 1. Introduction

In this class you'll learn how to use the format of the website to represent content to viewers; basically, you'll be learning how to communicate in this format. Since your primary concern is communication, you, the web designer, need to be concerned with your audience, and how they understand things visually. Furthermore, since we're dealing with the internet, you need to be concerned with the technological knowledge of your users.

If you want to learn more about traditional design, e.g. the visual language behind design, advanced color theory, perspective, etc., you might want to take a look at <http://www.mundidesign.com/presentation/index2.html>, where you can download a set of very good tutorials on design.

#### What's good design?

It's subjective. Most people can agree that *google.com* is simple and easy to use; a lot of people like how *yahoo.com* looks. Sites like *bbc.co.uk* are also nice and clean. Note how the interfaces for **the best working designs are hardly noticed**; the operation is so intuitive that you don't realize that it's there at all.

### 2. Before You Design

The most important part of web design, just like anything else, is **planning ahead**. No planning leads to stress, confusion, and indigestion. So plan ahead.

#### Audience

Are you targeting college students, young adults, the tech-illiterate, or kids (who are probably more tech-literate than us)? You should keep your audience in mind when thinking about the design; keep the site complex for nerds, make it simple for soccer moms. A website is nothing without an audience.

#### Updates

Rarely, if ever, is a website placed upon the web and never updated. Estimate how often you want the page updated, whether or not major components (e.g. the main menu or the entire

appearance) will change, and base your design considerations off that. You don't want to have to manually update a quote of the week that's been embedded into twenty different pages.

### Content

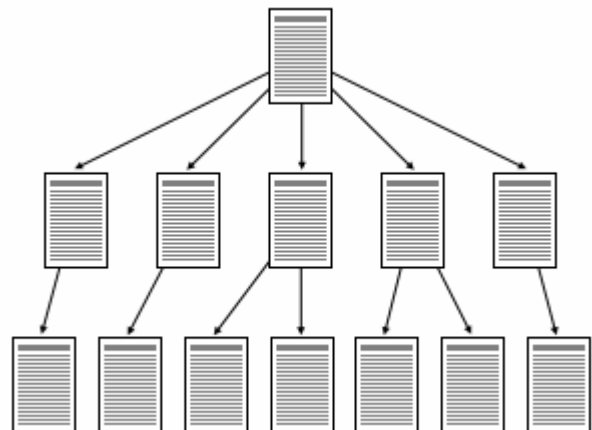
What type of stuff do you want to put on the site? Unless you roughly know what you want on the site, the updating will never end. Adding new content can be simple if you've created the appropriate pages; it can be infinitely more difficult if you need to change something in every individual page when you decide to add one more thing. Know what you want those appropriate pages to be.

### Organizing all that content

Basically, what you want to do is divide your content into units that logically make sense, a procedure commonly called **chunking**. In web design, organization is key; messy content ruins even the best layout.

Each chunk should be coherent in itself; a band's website, for example, might contain a chunk for all their recordings, another chunk for photos, and another for biographies. For sufficiently large chunks, you would repeat the process to get **subchunks**, units that logically fit within that particular larger chunk (e.g. for the photos, pictures from concerts in one chunk and publicity photos in another).

It's good to limit the number of chunks you use to 5-7 (people handle seven options much better than seventeen) to make navigation easier. Not having too many layers of subchunks also helps since each subchunk is an additional layer removed from the user. The fewer times the user has to click before reaching the desired page, the better. If you've grouped everything well, then the user should be able to get to any page in about three clicks or so.



### Plan the site layout

Figure out what goes where. Order chunks by importance. Graphs help. If you know what connects to what, then it'll make everything a lot simpler once you start creating pages.

### Writing for the internet

Be frugal, don't write information the user will probably find useless (like telling them how to use your navigation since the navigation shouldn't need explanation). Stick to the point. Try not to be vague and verbose. Often, people will only look at the top most part of your website so it's a good idea to write in a **journalistic style**, with the conclusion at the beginning of the text and important facts near the beginning. That said, **don't dumb down** your website, simply strive to make it worth your user's time.

## 3. Site Interface and Navigation

Now, we begin designing. Site interface refers to the means that allow the user to move from page to page. In general, this refers to a menu, but it varies site to site; for example, blogs, due to their structure, have interfaces that focus on dates as opposed to separate sections.

**Keep it simple**

There is no inherent connection between pages on the internet; any connection needs to be created. It's a good idea to **be consistent**. Make sure your images look like they belong with each other; perhaps use just one common header image for all the pages, use one basic layout for the entire site and group chunks (and their subchunks) by using distinctive color schemes within this larger layout. Don't overwhelm your user; if you've chunked well, then you should have 5-7 main chunks represented in the navigation.

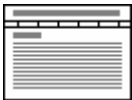
**Make it connected**

Again, there is no inherent connection between pages on the internet. It's a good idea to **make sure that the user can get back to the main page** from any page. After all, you never know what might be bookmarked or sent as a link to others. A graphical header is a good way to do this, especially if it contains links to the main page and all the major chunks.

**Avoid dead end pages** where there's no link back to the rest of the site. For pages that go in sequential order, make it easy to go back and forth relative to that order and consider adding a list of links to the rest of the pages on each page. This is very helpful for forms or instructions.

**4. Page Layout**

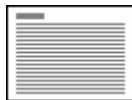
The typical site has one basic layout for all its pages; you need to choose where to put your navigation, where to put your content, and how to arrange it all. In general, layouts have four component.



**Header** - Headers generally contain logos, titles for whatever section the user is in, search bars, etc. They are the first thing that users see; sometimes the navigation is placed here. For example, the header for the New York Times site contains the title of the given section and a search box (as well as ads).



**Menu/sidebar/non-primary content area** - Often the navigation of a website is placed on either the left or right (mostly left since people read left to right) and in some cases on both sides. Besides navigation, sidebars are useful for quick bits of information that aren't substantial enough for an entire chunk.



**Body/content area** - Since this is where all the content belongs, logically it should be the largest area on your page. Notice that if your site consists exclusively of content, it'll probably be hard to navigate.



**Footer** - This refers to the section at the very bottom of your page. Since it's probably read last, if at all, it should only contain non-essential data, such as copyright information, links to the top of the page, etc. Having your navigation here is counterintuitive unless the footer is always visible. It's a good place to put "small text", such as date of site creation, links to legal stuff, etc.



Commonly, designs combine a header and sidebar for navigation. Larger sites often use a header and two sidebars that contain either navigation or small pieces of information.





Notice that the layout on the left is disorderly while the one on the right is aligned through use of a **grid**. Using a grid makes it much easier for the user to view your website.

An easy way to layout a page is to **create the layout in Photoshop** (or your favorite graphical interface) and then convert it over to HTML. Knowledge of HTML is essential as it'll prevent you from designing something impossible to create. After you're done with your mockup, superimposing lines to indicate widths and heights can also help.

## 5. Typography, Accessibility, Multimedia, Etc.

What follows are some general guidelines that vary widely in application and scope.

### Text :: Size

Since screen sizes vary greatly, using 'ems' or the sizes 'small', 'medium', etc., can help users choose how large text looks on screen. If you use absolute measurements (such as pixels), then users with bad vision or high screen resolutions will be unable to read your text. However, most websites out there, professional ones included, do exactly this, so people have probably gotten over it. Always good to be nice though.

### Text :: Spacing

It's much easier to read text that's well spaced vertically, i.e. double spaced, so consider **adding space between lines** (the CSS property "line-height" can be used to do this). Also, it's a good idea to keep the length of the lines in mind; ideally, **ten to twelve words should go per line**; it makes reading a lot easier.

### Text :: Caps

**MONOTONOUS** Not as monotonous  
Initial Caps Cause Pointless Bumps

**Be careful with capitals.** Using all caps is a lot less legible; capitalizing the first letter of each word in a sentence causes bumps.

### Text :: Emphasis

Bold and italic font should be **used consistently and sparingly**; an entire block of text that's bold or italic is hard to read. Underline should be avoided since most internet users assume underlines mean hyperlinks. Using different color can also cause the user to think that the text is a hyperlink, however, different colored text can be a good way of distinguishing introductory text from the rest of the page. Avoid traditional hyperlink colors (blue and purple).

### Text :: Font

Fonts like Times New Roman look great printed, not so great online. Fonts like Georgia (serif), Verdana (sans-serif), and Trebuchet (sans-serif) were designed for online legibility. If you expect your user to print out the document, Times New Roman works well for body text (especially long paragraphs).

### Text :: Antialiasing

antialiased  
not antialiased

For very small text (10pt and lower), it's often a good idea to turn antialiasing off to increase readability (meaning that Photoshop or whichever image

program you're using doesn't blur the edges of your text). There are also pixel fonts on the internet for text 8 pixels tall, etc. (try looking for them at <http://www.dafont.com/en/> )

### **Name/file conventions**

It's good practice to be consistent in how you name files. **Keep file names intuitive and short**; "instructions.html" is a much better name than "inst.html" for a page containing instructions. Note that case matters when uploading to the web; "INDEX.html" and "index.html" are treated differently. **Keep things neat**; pictures stored in an "images" directory, downloadable files in a "files" directory, etc.

### **Graphical embellishments**

Though horizontal rules, graphic bullets, icons, and other visual markers have their uses, overuse causes the page to look confusing and patchy. Only use them when you have a purpose, not just on a whim.

### **Images :: Limitations**

The more images, the longer the wait time. If you expect 56k users to look at your page, reduce the number of images or reduce the size of them; know the costs and benefits of both jpeg and gif image files. In websites, often less is more, so be careful.

### **Images :: File formats**

Since gif isn't "lossy" like jpeg, it's good for use with images that have large areas of solid color and for navigation elements, etc. Jpeg is great for photographic elements; beware of the compression.

### **Images :: Use the 'alt' tag**

When you use images, be sure to always add the 'alt' tag; the contents of the tag are displayed when you move your mouse over the given image or if the image fails to load. If you use images for a critical task, such as navigation, and fail to add 'alt' tags, your navigation breaks when your images break. The 'alt' tag is applied as follows:

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### **Images :: Using images as links**

Though 'alt' tags should allow proper navigation if the user can't see the images, text-based navigation is also very useful. Consider having a list of text links in the footer of the page.

## **6. Color**

It's subjective and complicated. That said, let's get on with it.

### **Color theory**

**Hue** – what people traditionally think of as color; whether something is red, blue, green, etc.  
**Saturation** – how strong the color is; a completely saturated green would look like what we consider bright green, half saturation would make it look teal, no saturation would look gray.  
**Brightness** – Full brightness is white, none is black, pink would be lots of brightness with a fully saturated red hue.

### **Color for web designers**

Color is represented on the computer through RGB. On the internet, RGB is represented in HEX (#000000 is black, #FFFFFF is white, #0000FF is blue). A good tool for Windows users to extract color from anything on your desktop is Pixie (<http://www.nattyware.com/pixie.html>).

### Picking colors

In general, you'll want to limit the number of colors you use; if you're aiming for something elegant, pick one color and pair it with white. Black text on white shows up the best. If you're looking for more colors, it's good to use color complements (such as yellow and purple, red and green, etc). A good color suggestion site is <http://www.colorschemer.com/online.html>.

### What works, what doesn't

Make sure there is **contrast** between text and the background. If you see something you like online, note it and try using their color scheme. If you see anything anywhere that you like, note it and use it. There are software packages that make recommendations for colors; you could use those as well.

Remember that **color affects the mood** of your site. If you're looking for something commercial and mostly uplifting, then you want a very light background. If you're making a band website, bold bright colors, dark rich hues, or even black might be appropriate.

**The less colors, the easier it is to match everything.** Often, an elegant solution will use once color (and several different shades or tints of it) for the layout, so that whatever other color placed on the page stands out.

The more you experiment, the better you'll get. So experiment.



