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Barbara Wilson





4 Tips for Basic Web Site Design and Layout

by Barbara Wilson

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1. Make your web site easy to read
2. Make your web site easy to navigate.
3. The layout and design should be consistent throughout the site
4. Your web site should download quickly.

1. Make your web site easy to read

First things first. The most basic rule to consider when planning your web site is that it must be easy to read. If trying to read your pages gives your visitors a headache or causes them to squint, they are going to leave.

What can you do to make your pages easy to read?

Selecting your font. Generally, sans serif fonts in a 10 or 12 point size are easier to read on a computer monitor. I discuss fonts and typefaces in more detail in the “Fonts and Typefaces in Web Design” report.

Don’t use multiple fonts. Changing fonts repeatedly throughout your page is distracting. Using a larger sized font for headlines is acceptable. Or perhaps, substitute a secondary font to accent your main selling points. But use this technique sparingly.

Consider your text and background colors. You don’t want to use a background design or colors that make your text hard to read. Dark colored text on a light colored background is easier to read than light colored text on a dark background. And a solid colored background makes your text stand out better than a background with a pattern or design in it.

Another consideration is the use of colored text. We’ve all visited pages that bombard us with 5 or 6 (or more!) different colors of text. They look like a rainbow. And the

use of so many different colors makes it difficult to concentrate on the message.

Align your main text to the left, not centered. Most people (in the West) are used to seeing left-aligned text and are most comfortable reading that layout. You can use center-aligned text for your headlines to make them stand out and to draw attention to them.

2. Make your web site easy to navigate.

Text links should be clear to your visitor. Visitors generally expect blue under-lined text to be an unvisited link and purple or maroon text to be a visited link. So, avoid using blue or purple under-lined text in your pages unless the text is a link. If you choose to not use these default colors, your text links should be emphasized in some other way (boldfaced, a larger font size, italicized, or a combination of these). Text links should not look the same as any other text on your page. You don't want your visitors clicking all over your page looking for links.

Graphics used as hyperlinks should be clear to your visitors. Buttons or tabs should be clearly marked and easy to read. It is more important that your visitor be able to easily find their way around your site than to use "flashy" graphics for your hyperlinks.

Your visitors should be able to get to what they are looking for in your site within 3 clicks. If not, they are likely to tire of trying and leave.

3. The layout and design should be consistent throughout the site.

Consistency throughout your web site projects a professional image to your visitors.

For example, if you choose a beveled rectangle button style for your hyperlinks, use this button style throughout your web site. Or if your headlines are in red text on your Home page, don't start using blue text for your headlines on interior pages.

This is particularly important if you use color-coded web pages to distinguish sections in a large web site. Typefaces, text and headline alignment, button styles and special effects used on graphics should remain the same. Only the color should change.

4. Your web site should download quickly.

A general rule of thumb is that your page should load in 15 – 20 seconds. (Exceptions to this rule would be artist or graphic designer web pages.)

Any longer and the typical visitor gets tired of waiting and goes somewhere else.

Therefore, choose your graphics and special effects with care and make sure they are optimized for fastest download times. This can be accomplished by making the graphic smaller and/or using a graphics optimization program to reduce the overall file size.

Be particularly careful with animated graphics. Animation looks “cool” and, at first, is eye-catching. But animated graphic files tend to be very large and can substantially increase your download time.

Next, we’ll talk about “Fonts and Typefaces in Web Site Design”. You didn’t know text was a design element, did you?

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Using Fonts and Typefaces in Web Site Design

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When deciding on a text style for your web pages there is one thing that you must take into consideration - the font you choose must be installed on the user's computer for their browser to display your chosen font.

If your chosen font is not available on the user's computer, their web browser will display its default font. This is usually 'Times New Roman' for Windows machines and 'Times' on Macintosh machines.

The terms “fonts” and “typefaces” are often used interchangeably. In fact, they actually have two different definitions.

A font is a complete set of characters in a particular size and style of type. This includes letters, numbers and special characters sets. For example, Arial, **Arial Bold** and *Arial Italic* are actually 3 different fonts.

A typeface contains a series of fonts. There are two basic categories of typefaces: Serif and sans serif.

- Serif (with little “feet”) is a more traditional style and is most often used in print media.
- Sans serif (without “feet”) is a more contemporary, “cleaner” looking style and is most often the preferred typeface for web viewing.

Most typefaces have at least three variations – normal, italic and bold. Some have other variations such as condensed, expanded, demi, demi bold, black, heavy and many others.

The height of typeface is measured in points. Therefore, your fonts generally come in a series of set sizes, such as 10 point, 12 point, 14 point and so on. One thing to keep in mind is that type sizes are not standard. Therefore, one point size in a particular font is not necessarily the same size in another font. All the fonts shown below are 16 point, but they are not all the same dimension.

Standard web-safe fonts are:

Times New Roman, Bold, *Italic*, *Bold Italic*

Times New Roman in Windows or Times on the Apple Mac has a serif typeface and is available on virtually all computers.

Arial, Bold, *Italic*, *Bold Italic*

Arial is a sans-serif font and is available on all Windows machines or Helvetica, which is a very similar font available on the Macintosh.

Verdana, Bold, *Italic*, *Bold Italic*

Verdana is a sans-serif font that is easy to read. This font comes with Internet Explorer 4+ for Windows and Apple Mac machines.

In case the web site visitor does not have the font you have chosen installed on their computer, it is best to specify several fonts all in the same typeface to keep your page as near as possible to the way you designed it.

Use the HTML font tag to specify several fonts with the font you want to use first, followed by equivalent fonts on other machines. In case the user does not have any of these fonts on their system then place the generic typeface last: -

```
<font face="arial, helvetica, sans-serif"> your text </font>
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If you want to display your headlines or other text in a non-standard font, create it as a graphic and insert the graphic on your page. This will guarantee that your visitors will see your page the way you intended.

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Graphic Images Used in Web Site Design

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Including graphics in your web site design can substantially add to the visual appeal of your pages.

Graphics should add to your page's functionality and can greatly increase the visual impact of your message. However, they also increase the size of the page and therefore the time it takes for your page to download, so they must be used carefully.

A good designer will optimize your graphics for size and appearance. A graphic should be optimized to its smallest file size without losing clarity or detail.

The following is a list of graphics that are commonly used on web pages:

Logo - Used for your corporate or business identity. A logo is a stylized representation of your company and can increase brand name recognition. Logos can be text only or a combination of text and a geometric design or graphic. If adding a graphic to your logo, keep it as simple and clean as possible. Remember, a logo is best used for brand recognition and should make an instant statement.

Header Design - Like a Logo, a Header Design should be a representation of your company or business. It includes your company name or business URL. Use it to draw attention to your company slogan or the main benefit of your site or product so that it highlights and emphasizes what your visitor will gain from using your product or service. A well designed site header should be intriguing and capture your visitors attention so that they want to know more.

Footer Design - Complements your Header Design or Logo and goes at the foot of each page. Can include contact information, copyright, company address and company slogan.

Navigation Buttons - Used to help visitors navigate your site. Navigation buttons can be easier to read and find than text links.

Bullet Points - Draw your visitor's eyes to the main points of your sales letter. They are commonly used to highlight your products main benefits or features. They are also used to break up a web page full of blocks of text.

Divider Lines or Horizontal Rules - Commonly used to separate footers, categories within a web page and FAQ questions and answers.

Headings - Text graphics used to preserve a typeface not commonly found on visitor's computers. Headings call attention to important statements that you don't want your visitor to miss. Many people skim down a page reading only the headings to see if the site is worth further investigation. Headings can also be created in HTML text in a larger font and different color than the rest of your page. Don't overuse graphics headings since they can slow down the load time of your page.

Background Images - Used to enhance a web sites visual appeal. These can be a solid color, a geometric element or a photograph. Different colored backgrounds can signify what section of the web site a visitor is in if you have a large site.

Photos - Generally used to make your web site seem more personal and inviting. People like to know who they're doing business with. Make sure the photos you use are appropriate to the business you're in. If you are a Financial Advisor for example, your photo should be professionally done and you should be wearing business attire. A photo of you on the beach playing volleyball would not inspire confidence in your potential clients.

All graphics on your web site should match or be complimentary in color, typeface and effects to give your site a coordinated, professional appearance. For example, use the same font for all your navigation buttons. Your navigation buttons, bullet points and divider lines look best if they are designed using one of the colors in your Logo or Header Design. There are exceptions of course, but this is a general rule that will serve you well.

Remember that graphic images should be used to enhance a web page's function. If the graphics greatly increase your page's download time, you will have to either make your existing images smaller in size, replace them with graphics that are smaller in file size or use the HTML default bullets, dividing lines or colored heading text.

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Using White Space in Web Page Design

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“White Space” is the open space between design elements.

It is most commonly used between paragraphs and around blocks of text (margins). It can also be space in and around graphics.

In short, it is blank space between all of the elements in your page.

White space is an important layout technique often overlooked, or under used, by the inexperienced designer.

White space makes text easier to read and adds emphasis to graphics. It can visually guide your reader’s eye from one element to the next on the page.

It is especially important when designing for the web due to the added eyestrain caused by reading from a monitor as opposed to the printed page.

In order for your web page to be visually appealing, it must include a sufficient amount of white space.

- Keep your paragraphs short and put 1 or 2 blank lines between each paragraph.
- Leave space around your graphics. Don’t let the text run right up to the edge, or over, your graphic designs.
- Create margins on your page. This is especially important if you are using tables on a colored background. Use a cell padding value of 10 - 20 in your tables.

Treat white space as more than just a background. Make it an important element of your page design and layout. You'll find it will substantially improve the visual appeal of your page and strengthen the power of your message.

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Using the Color Wheel

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When trying to develop a color scheme for your logo or web site, you don't have to re-invent the wheel!

The Color Wheel was first developed by Sir Isaac Newton in 1666. It begins with the primary hues (yellow, red and blue) and proceeds in a logical sequence around the wheel by combining adjacent colors.

There are formulas for combining these hues that will guarantee your colors will complement each other and create a pleasing visual experience.

First, let's briefly discuss the basics of the color wheel.

Yellow, red and blue are the Primary colors. These are the 3 base colors that can not be created by mixing or combining any other colors. All other colors are made by combining these 3 colors.



The Primary Colors are yellow, red and blue

Mixing any two Primary colors will create the Secondary colors. For example, combining yellow and red creates orange. Mixing red and blue will give you violet.



The secondary colors are orange, green and violet

Combining two adjacent Secondary colors gives you the Tertiary colors; yellow-orange, red-orange, red-purple, blue-purple, blue-green and yellow-green.

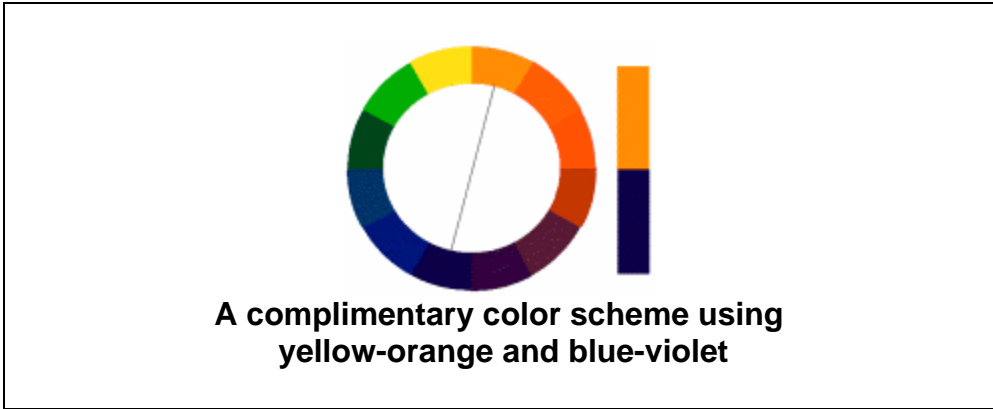


The Tertiary Colors are red-orange, red-violet, yellow-green, yellow-orange, blue-green and blue-violet

You want to select colors for your web site or logo design that create harmony. Harmony can be simply defined as a pleasing arrangement of parts. This is not difficult if you use the color wheel and one of the following formulas.

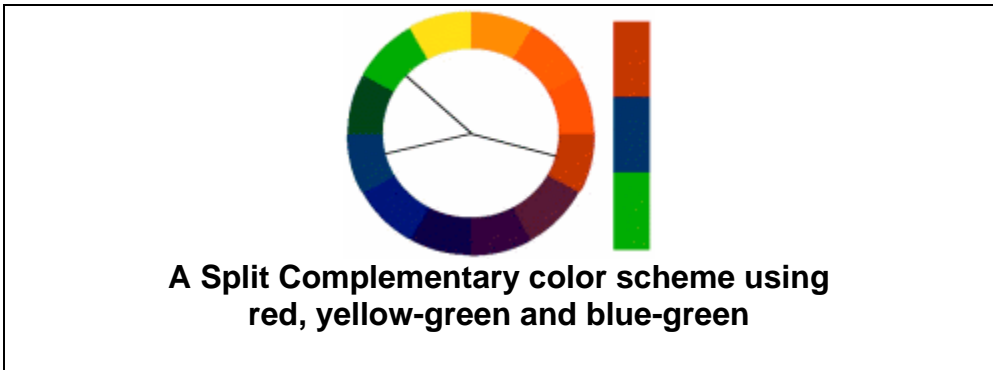
Using Complimentary Colors

Complimentary colors are colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel.



Using Split Complementary Colors

A Split Complementary color scheme is created by choosing any color and adding the two colors adjacent to it's complementary color.



Using Double Complementary Colors

This color scheme uses two pairs of complementary colors. I chose yellow-green and violet, orange and blue-violet.



A Double Complementary color scheme using yellow-green and violet, orange and blue-violet

Using Analogous Colors

Analogous colors are any three colors which are side by side on a 12 part color wheel, such as blue, blue-green and green.



For this Analogous color scheme I used blue, blue-green and green

Using Triad Colors

A Triad color scheme uses colors based on purity. Select any color on the wheel, say yellow. To select your Triad color scheme, draw an equilateral triangle inside the wheel (this will select every fourth color on a 12-part color wheel). Starting with yellow, your Triad scheme would be completed with red and blue - the primary colors. Let's create a Triad color scheme starting with red-orange.



This Triad color scheme was created using red-orange, yellow-green and blue-violet

Your Triad color scheme would consist of red-orange, yellow-green and blue-violet. You can use all three colors in the Triad or any two of the colors.

Using Alternate Complementary Colors

This is another 4-color scheme. You start with a Triad scheme and then add the complement of one of the hues.



An Alternate Complementary color scheme using yellow, red, blue-violet and blue

Selecting a color scheme for your web site using the color wheel guarantees a harmonious use of colors. All you have to do is follow one of the formulas shown above.

Start with your favorite color and see what combinations you can create.

Have fun!

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