

A modern home office with a wooden desk, a yellow chair, and a floor lamp. The desk is light-colored wood with black metal legs. A bright yellow upholstered chair with wooden legs is in the foreground. A black floor lamp with a white shade stands to the right. The wall behind the desk has several posters and a framed drawing. The text 'DESIGN for non-designers' is overlaid on the image.

DESIGN

for non-designers

tradecraft

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Letter from the editor



Content is king. The rest is just details.

That's the kind of thing I've heard from one of those epic Internet culture debates. You know: comments or no comments? Do round up posts still work? Pop up forms or no pop up forms?

But this debate has a bit more depth. It's one about words vs visuals. Story vs style. Attractiveness vs meaning.

Or at least that's what some would have you believe the debate about content vs design is about.

Here's the thing: yes, words on the page matter as much as anything else (here's [a compelling case for why](#)). If you're a blogger, you're a writer. Hell, if you're a podcaster or vlogger, you're a writer too, you just deliver your writing in a non-written medium. The words matter.

The Internet is changing and words are no longer enough. They're the price of entry for making a living as a blogger, sure. But humans aren't built with the genetic need to read – we created words as a way to communicate.

Now visuals, however, those we were made to interpret. You see a stunning view of a mountain scape and you feel inspired. You see a small child who's been injured and you feel anger. You see a shark and you feel scared.

Design adds a layer of context, meaning, and emotion that can't be captured by words alone.

We see this at work every day. You go to a website or a blog that looks like it was built on 90's era technology and you immediately put your guard up. You go to National Geographic or The Great Discontent and you immediately feel something. A connection. A stirring. An intrigue.

And you haven't even read a word yet.

Design matters. Words matter. It's the marriage of the two that give us story AND style, attractiveness AND meaning, logic AND emotion.

In this month's issue we're covering design principles for non-designers. Everything a blogger needs to know to embrace design as a tool for increasing your reach, building more trust and creating more beautiful art from your work... it's all here.

Our designer, [Charli](#), has lent her years of keen design experience to articles on [how to choose the right blog theme](#), [how to create blog graphics](#), and [how to think like a designer](#).

We've got an amazing video from [Fizzle's Chase Reeves](#) on [how any entrepreneur can confidently create cohesive design](#) with no previous design skills.

Our new contributor, [Kayla Hollatz](#), tells you [why you shouldn't hire a designer to build your first or even second website](#).

And our faithful writer, [Dani](#), rings in with articles on [color theory](#), [typography](#), [a VERY basic guide to understanding code](#), and [101 resources to make your blog beautiful](#).

Will you walk away a world-class designer?

No. But you'll have an increased sense of taste and a more informed opinion about what makes for great design.

Words are the price of entry. Visuals make you stand out above the rest. You can't afford to sacrifice either one. Design is a tool for growing your audience and creating great work. That means it's a tool for earning a living from your blog.

Let's make the internet a more beautiful place to be, shall we?

Barrett and the ConvertKit Team

Design Thinking



Design Thinking: How to Take a Critical Look at Your Blog

Design thinking is a way of making decisions based on solving a problem to arrive at an innovative solution. It's a valuable thing to learn if you want to improve your online business, and trust me, it's less complicated than it sounds. You don't have to be a designer to think like one.

A common misconception of design is that it's about making something look nice. I want to change your mindset on that right away because design is not just about making pretty things. It's about problem solving and making things that work well; not just look good on a surface level. You may have heard this Steve Jobs quote before, but he sums it up well so it's worth repeating:

*Design is not just what it looks like and feels like.
Design is how it works.*

– Steve Jobs

It's easy to understand why design is often thought of as that top layer because that's the bit we can easily see. But design is more than just the icing on the cake. Both figuratively and literally.

If you looked at a delicious baked good you might consider the design to just be the sugary layer and sprinkles you see on the top, when actually it's all the ingredients that were measured out perfectly and combined to make the cake itself. It's the shape of the baking tin that was chosen, the color, the flavor, and yes, it's also the icing and sprinkles (because who wants to eat a cake that doesn't look visually appealing?).



When you look at a nicely designed website, you don't see the hours that went into trying many different layouts for the elements before settling on the one in front of you. You don't see the many different color palettes or fonts that were considered before choosing the one that feels just right. What you see is the end result, and if it has been designed well, that end result will seem simple and beautiful.

Here's the thing: simple takes work.

Beautiful, simple design that flows nicely and functions well is a result of lots of small but important decisions coming together to form a cohesive design. That's where design thinking comes in. And it's important not just for the big things like the layout of your website or eBook, but the smaller details too like the banner on your social media accounts and your blog imagery: everything to do with your brand.

Good design builds trust

You probably know this instinctively already, but readers and customers are more likely to trust your website if it is well designed. [Dr. Brent Coker from the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Business and Economics conducted a study](#) on this and said:

As aesthetically orientated humans, we're psychologically hardwired to trust beautiful people, and the same goes for websites. Our offline behaviour and inclinations translate to our online existence.

More importantly though, the same study also said this:

Being pretty, but with nothing to say, is not enough.

Beauty for the sake of beauty isn't enough to be considered good design. When the famous industrial designer Dieter Rams wrote [10 principles to good design](#) one of them said this: "Good design is thorough down to the last detail".

Six design thinking values to consider for your blog

Paying attention to the details is part of design thinking and it's what separates "making things look pretty" from

solving a problem. Of course, aesthetics matter too, and in this issue you can learn about [typography](#), [color theory](#), and [creating a cohesive visual style](#), but to help you make smart decisions when putting those into action, here are six design thinking values for you to consider and learn from.



Problem solving

Good design has a purpose, and if design is creative problem solving then before you can design, you have to understand the problem. When working with clients (and you may have experienced this yourself if you've worked with a designer before), a designer will often ask 'Why?' a lot to get to the root of the problem.

It's an important step because sometimes the original idea you had in mind might not be the best solution to the problem or perhaps there is more to it than you initially thought.

When you're not working with a designer, you have to be the one to ask yourself 'Why?'.

Say for example you're about to lay out a Facebook ad.

- *Why?* To drive more traffic to your site.
- *Yes but, why?* To make more sales of your new product.

In this case, sure a Facebook ad does seem like a good way to get more traffic and make sales, but it should be considered as part of a wider strategy. You could reuse your layout as imagery on social media to send traffic from many different sources to your site for example.

So now you're no longer designing a Facebook ad, you're designing imagery that will entice people to learn more about your product. This is a much better frame of mind to be working with.

Thinking about the problem helps you decide what to focus on and also what the point is of each graphic you're creating:

- If it's a blog image, perhaps the most important thing is that it will be really shareable on Pinterest. So you'll make sure it represents the post well and uses eye-catching fonts and imagery that fits your brand.

- If it's a YouTube thumbnail, you'll make sure the text on it is readable at a small size and that it represents the most interesting part about the video to stand out from other thumbnails in a subscription box.

First, uncover the problem, then use design to solve it.



Form follows function

Form follows function is a [modernist design principle](#) that means the way something looks should be primarily based on its intended function or purpose. That's why most site navigations feature either a horizontal or vertical list of links grouped together. Their purpose is to help a user navigate around the site, and grouping them together in a clear list rather than scattered throughout the page makes it easy for the user to decide what page to visit next or quickly find the one they were looking for.

The great thing about this is that once you've decided (through problem solving) what the purpose of a piece of design should be, you can use that to help you make decisions on the aesthetics. If the point of your post is to make the reader feel contemplative and introspective, then perhaps you can use [color theory](#) and choose blue as the main color with light, airy photography for the image.

You can apply this thinking not only to each individual design element, but to the design as a whole. If the main thing you want to achieve with a web page is to get a user to click a 'buy now' button, then:

1. Make sure you give them all the necessary info to make a purchasing decision.
2. That button had better be the most gosh darn enticing thing on the page to click on next.



Idea iteration

Sometimes your first idea is your best idea. But not always.

Iterating on your ideas and exploring other options before you dive in and start creating can be a great way to get more creative and to break free from your design comfort zone. Designers will try to think of the problem from many different angles and come up with multiple ideas for

solutions before evaluating them and choosing the one to move forward with.

Use this method of design thinking next time you create an image by forcing yourself to come up with at least three different designs. The first one will be your standard and will be easy, the rest will be harder as you're forcing yourself to come up with new ideas and new ways of arranging things. This visual brainstorming might help you come up with something new and unique!

If you start applying idea iteration, you might just find that it applies to many different aspects of your business. For example, many blogging experts suggest using the same principle for your blog headlines. Some bloggers will brainstorm as many as 30 versions of an article's headline before landing on the right one.



Critiquing your own work

To think like a designer, you need to be able to look critically at your own work. This self-critique is like a check-in to make sure you haven't gone off track, and that you're still solving the problem you meant to solve.

When you think you're done with something, take a step back from it and ask yourself if it solves the problem. Look at it objectively and imagine it in the place it will eventually be posted. Will it stand out? Will it clash horribly with the thing next to it? Does it display the right information?

Developing the skill of critiquing your own work will help immensely not just with your visual elements, but with everything you do as a solopreneur when there's not a team around that you can ask for feedback.



Focus on the details

What separates good design from bad design is often in the details; the little things that perhaps aren't noticeable right away. However, if they're wrong they can make the whole design just feel "off", even if you can't put your finger on why. The trick to catching these little things? Analysing your design closely and going over it with a finetooth comb. Design details to pay attention to are:

- **Typography:** Is the line height set to a good number for your text size to make it nice and readable? Are similar

pieces of text the same size? Is it aligned perfectly?

- **Color:** Are the exact same color values used throughout your design? Do the colors complement each other? Do they highlight the right things?
- **Hierarchy:** Do the most important pieces of the layout stand out the most? (remember, if everything “stands out”, then nothing can really stand out!) When you look at it, are you drawn down the page nicely or do your eyes flick about, unsure what to focus on?
- **White space:** Often what is not there is just as important as what is there. Is there breathing room in your layout? And is the spacing consistent?

It's important to care about these things as they all come together to determine the quality of your design. Sure the world won't end if one paragraph of text uses a 14px font and the other is 15px, but it sure will look more professional if you make them the same.



See the bigger picture

This may seem like a contradiction to the last point, but actually they're two sides to the same coin. To think like a designer you need to be able to zoom in and focus on the small details, but also zoom out and get an understanding of how everything works together. Seeing the bigger picture gives you context to a piece, and will help you make sure that your designs don't just look good individually, but also work together as a whole.

And even bigger picture than that, it's important to think about where your designs fit into your reader's journey. Are they seeing your image when browsing Pinterest for the perfect recipe? Are they likely to come across your site in a Google search for a certain niche interest?

Putting yourself in your reader's shoes will help you not only think about what impression you want to give with your design, but what impression they are likely to get from it based on surrounding information and where they are in their learning.

Design thinking is about questioning

Question yourself. Question the decisions you're instinctively making when you reach for a certain font or

color. Ask yourself 'why' to understand whether your idea is the best possible way to solve the problem. Soon the questioning will become ingrained as part of your process and you'll be thinking like a designer and producing high-quality visuals for your site.

And it shouldn't stop at the visuals. You can apply this methodology to every part of your online business. Need to write a new blog post? Ask yourself what problem your reader is facing that you're trying to help with. What might they already have read before coming to your site? How might this post fit with the other articles you've written this week? What call-to-action do you want to give at the end?

Design thinking can be a way to help you dig deeper with the things you're doing and consider them individually as well as part of your wider strategy. And hopefully you now understand that design is more than just a pretty layer you add on top at the end, it's something to be considered throughout your whole process.

■ *Charli Prangley*



Why You Don't Need to Spend \$10,000 on Your First Website

In 2013, I built my own website.

I went into the process fairly confident since I had designed countless Myspace pages for my friends and knew how to use brushes in Photoshop. I had it in the bag, right?

Well, in my first two years of blogging, I changed my website's design four times. FOUR.

Looking back, I'm not surprised. The visual aesthetics of blogging evolved from large logo headers and cookie-cutter sidebars to hero images and [dedicated homepages](#). Combine that with the change in my blog categories and overall content and you get a blogger who wasn't afraid of experimenting.

DIY-ing my website taught me two valuable lessons:

1. Nothing is set in stone, especially when it involves the Internet.

2. You need wiggle room to grow and the guts to do it on your own.

While many industry leaders tell us we should be outsourcing anything we aren't good at, which when we're first starting out feels like nearly everything, I'm here to say there's power in learning how to DIY different aspects of your business.

This constant state of testing and tweaking when I first started my blog didn't make me feel lost; it made me feel empowered and excited.

I saved myself a LOT of money by building my own website. Can you imagine the tab I would have racked up if I had hired a designer for those four early versions? It also saved me a lot of time because I experimented early on so I knew what I wanted years later.

You may be asking yourself the same question...

Should you build your own website?

If you're just [starting to sell products or services online](#) and aren't currently generating positive NET cash flow each month, hiring a website designer shouldn't be your first priority.

Your bottom line isn't solely dependant on your website design so it's not worth blowing your budget on. [Your budget should be dedicated to helping you develop and promote new products or services](#) while building operational systems for your business with software that works as hard as you do. That's the mark of a successful, sustainable business.

Of course we can all agree that building a business takes some upfront investment, but many of us have more time than money in the beginning. This is totally normal and okay!

Spend your influx of time DIY-ing so when you're ready to outsource in the future, you have a clear idea of what your audience wants and can better articulate it to a designer.

There are more benefits to building your own website in terms of professional development, too. Here are a few...

You don't need to depend on a website designer for website edits

If there's one thing I've learned about building websites, it's that nothing is ever permanent. A few weeks after you press the "publish" button on your site, you'll probably find a few things you want to tweak or add in. It's only natural, especially with your first website.

If you're not DIY-ing your website, those seemingly small changes could cost you extra. Some website designers book out months in advance too, meaning your project could be pushed toward the bottom of their task list. It's understandable, but it makes it inconvenient for you.

One of the major reasons why I DIY-ed my own website was so I didn't have to rely on anyone else's schedule with my product and service launches. If I want to build an opt-in landing page in the middle of the night (which happens more often than I'd like to admit), I can.

You don't need to be a computer engineer or programmer to learn the basics of coding. A little bit of HTML and CSS savvy goes a long way. From one creative blogger to another, trust me; it's not as scary as it looks.

You don't need all the bells and whistles when you're starting out

A "pretty" website design can only get you so far. While you may pin it on your Pinterest board of inspiration, those bells and whistles could distract from the main purpose of your website: *converting your visitors*.

Don't over-complicate the user journey. When you go to a website and see a navigation bar with dozens of links, it's hard to know where to start. The same is true for your visitor.

I have often found this to be the case. That's why my personal website is essentially a collection of the most basic pages: Home, About, a few Services, Portfolio, Product, Blog, and Contact.

Even with a select few website pages, I've been able to attract my ideal clients and book enough projects to replace my old day job income (and then some). Sometimes simple is the way to go!

You know what's better than impressing your website visitors with bells and whistles? Giving them a clear path so they convert.

Building your own website gives you room to grow

In your first year, you'll learn *a lot* by experimenting with your product and service offerings. You may create your first website with a homepage highlighting your photography services but later learn that most visitors are interested in learning about how they can become a photographer.

Armed with this new information, you may want to create a step-by-step course that satisfies this need and edit your homepage when you launch the course. Any feedback you receive from other entrepreneurs, customers, or clients is gold.

No one gets it perfect the first time around, or the fifth time around. The most important thing is that you put something out there and keep listening to what your audience wants.

How to build your own website from scratch

The good news is you may not have to start completely from scratch! Luckily there are many tools and platforms available to bloggers and freelancers that don't require a computer science degree to utilize. Check out these resources to find out how you can start building your own website today!

- [How To Build A Website For Your Side Hustle In The Next 48 Hours](#)
- [How to Choose the Best Blogging Platform for Your Blog](#)
- [How to Choose the Best Wordpress Theme for Your Blog](#)
- [101 Resources to Make Your Blog Beautiful Every Time](#)
- [How to Understand the Code on Your Blog](#)

Ready to build your own website?

Remember that your first website design will most likely change and evolve alongside your blog and business. Instead of feeling pressured to “get it right” the first time, give yourself some grace and go into the website building process seeing it as a learning experience. You may just discover your newest skill!

■ *Kayla Hollatz*



How to Design Your Website if You're Not a Designer



[Watch the video](#)

Did Chase's video get your revved up to tackle the design? Then you just might love Craft + Commerce, our conference coming up this June in Boise. Chase is one of our main stage speakers and will be joined by other top thought leaders like Mariah Coz, James Clear, Nicole Waters, and Seth Godin to share stories of what it actually takes to be an online creator. If you're ready to renew your commitment to creating great work every day, this conference is for you! Find out more at convertkit.com/conference.

Today I want to talk to you about your website, specifically, I want to talk to you about designing your own website. There are more tools than ever today for being able to design your own website. Entrepreneurs all over are doing it themselves. Your products need to sell and the people who land on your site need to trust you. Your message needs to resonate with them. This all happens through the design.

So how can an entrepreneur without any training in design do this by themselves? That's what I want to talk about today. I've got a few ideas I want to walk you through and then some practical tips.

What design does

There's a lot of things you want for your website and a lot of things you think you need. These principles are going to help guide you, center you, and ground you in what really matters for your website. These principles will help you understand that good design actually does.

Design builds trust

When we talk about what design really does, you have to start with trust, because design builds trust. When I land on your website, I want to tell in a second or two if you're trustworthy. You're used to seeing this across the web.

You land on a site and immediately know that you don't like what you see and you don't ever want to give them your email address let alone your credit card information. That is communicated through the design and through the message.

Design helps resonate with your audience

Design should help you connect with your audience. It's the difference between losing a reader or having them track with you. That is resonating. When you get someone on the other side of the Internet landing on your website and they're begging you to tell them more. We need our web design to help us resonate with our audience.

Design helps your audience take action

We need to nudge our audience toward taking certain actions. This is how our business survives. It might be getting on your email list or it might be purchasing a product. Different businesses have different goals and different action that they're asking their customers to take. But on your website, you will want people to take action. Good design of your site will help nudge them toward taking that action.

Simplicity is more effective for your website design

Now, I've been a designer for a long time and I've designed a lot of different kinds of sites, but I will tell you this- your web design (the trust, the resonance, the action that it's going to help people take on your site) all of this is about the effectiveness of your site.

It's not about the fanciness. It's not about the prettiness. It's not about the sexiness or anything like that. When it comes to design, choose effectiveness every time. I just bring that up because a lot of people are trying to make their websites look a certain way and they have no clue how it's going to

work. I want you as an entrepreneur to be thinking, "How is this going to work? How effective is this going to be?"

Now, of course you want the design of your site to look amazing. But simmer down on that because, yes, while you do want it to look amazing, you don't know how to do that yet. Can you stomach that for a second? As a young business you don't have the funds to pay for someone who can make your site look amazing? And you might also not have the design skills to make it work?

Because of all this, I want you to focus on simplicity.

Clutter is confusing. When you want your website to look amazing you tend to start adding more stuff to it. But this clutter is sending all sorts of visual cues and you're probably signaling a lot of confusing things that visitors are trying to understand and they're not resonating. So I want you to focus on simplicity in your design.

Now I know some of you are thinking, "If I go too simple, how am I going to stand out from my competition?"

It's a great question because standing out from the crowd is one of the most important elements of modern business and the truth is you're going to stand out with your message, your unique selling point. Your compelling reason why your reader would buy your product instead of the others that exist is because your messaging will hit home with them.

It's about your message and that's where you're going to stand out.

Tips for an entrepreneur building their website

Now that we've covered what design should help you accomplish, let me tell you how to make that happen for your website.

Use a clear, simple template that won't require much customization.

[Squarespace](#), [WordPress](#), [Shopify](#)- all these places have templates. Normally there's many different templates to choose from, but what I want you to find one that you can use. It doesn't need to be perfect or what you want your

site to look like in five years. [It just needs to work for what you have right now.](#)

One of the reasons why I like this so much is because people who know how to design things are oftentimes designing these templates. That means the design across your site will look relatively similar and consistent—this one of those things that matters with trust.

Because you want to with simplicity and clarity, these built-in or premade templates are all you need. They make everything on your site feel like it goes together. But what's really important here is that you find something you don't need to customize too much. I don't want you fiddling with this thing. All you need is your logo, your images, and your copywriting. You need to get your website out into the world without deliberating over all sorts of stuff.

It will also help you go straight into the things that matter more like whether or not your product is really meeting your customer's needs, or talking to customers, or following up with people who have purchased your product.

Get your message to your audience in the right way

Design serves your message and your message is like your business goals. My business goal on fizzle.co is that I want you to land there and sign up for Fizzle membership. That's the action I want you to take, but in order for you to feel comfortable doing that, I have to show you or talk to you about certain things to get that point across.

For example, I first need to ask if you're even interested in starting a business, then what your goals are, and then I can start pitching you Fizzle after we qualify each other through a few more questions and I tell you what Fizzle is all about and how we can help you solve your small business problems.

That's how I get someone to the sale. This means we don't fit our message into our design, we make our design serve our message because our message is like our unique selling position— and that's what's going to resonate with people.

An excellent image can go a long way

We are visual creatures by nature, so having an image that powerfully communicates your message is a must. If you

have an image that gets my attention and sucks me in, it can be way more effective than text. However, it can also be more clutter.

I want you to be careful with your images. A lot of stock images can feel very cheesy. I would say err on the side of simplicity and clarity again for your images. Maybe sometimes it's better to just have a clear headline and use typography to make it seem interesting.

Two quick tricks on using images:

- **Make the image reinforce your message.** For instance, I might be selling a baby carrier and could use a picture of a woman holding a baby in the carrier and my headline would say it's the most comfortable and safe carries on the market. You're making the image and the pictures giving the same message. So your first trick here is you can make the image reinforce the message.
- **You can have the image play off of, or foil, the headline.** For example, if I was doing something political, I could use a picture of a group of people, signs, and pickets at some rally and the headline could be something like, "Does rallying in the streets for political movements really do anything?" Because of the way those two play off of each other, I'm creating interest

Showcase your action prominently

On your website you're hoping that your visitors take some action. This is how business works online. You'd be surprised how many entrepreneurs aren't clear enough with the action they're trying to get you to take on their website.

Now, different businesses have different goals and different actions that they're requiring, so you need to think very clearly about what action you're asking your customers to take when they visit your website.

A couple tips:

- **Stick to only one action per page.** This might sound kind of strange to you and in some websites it's just not possible. But for the majority of us, it's totally possible. People want to take action when they see it, and it's your job to direct them down the right path. By sticking to only one action per page (or your whole site) you're

making it much easier for them to make the right decision and click that buy button.

- **Be very, very clear on what's in it for your audience.** You'd be surprised how many people are like, "I wrote a free book and that's over here," and leave it at that. You need to tell me what the book is, why it matters to me. Be very clear what's in this action for me.
- **Have a specific color just for your action.** This works really well. You might have black text, white background, blue logo, blue link text throughout every time you have a link it's just blue, right? But then when you have the one action per page, big orange button. Some color that is just meant for these actions, all right? So we're going to be really explicit with what our action is on our webpage across our website. All right, be very clear with what your action is that you want your visitor to take.

You can design your own website now!

All right, with these four guidelines you can design a website that is effective, that resonates with our audience, and gets them to take action even if you don't have design skills. If you feel really strongly about some image or typography or color, you can break some of these guidelines. But remember, these guidelines are here and that they're put here by someone who's worked on lots of websites and worked with lots of entrepreneurs.

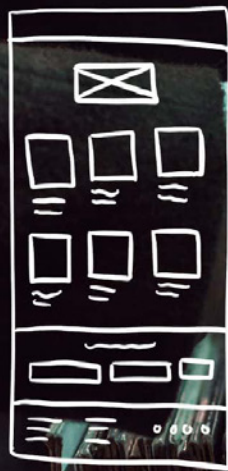
One more thing, countless entrepreneurs just find themselves fiddling with their website. So I want to ask you this one question in closing.

How will you know if your website is working?

Not how will you know if it looks amazing or how will you know if you feel good about it. But how will you know if your website is working?

Like I said, of course we want our websites to look good. We all want to look successful, right? And a website is such a big part of that, but this website has a really important job to do besides making us feel successful, it's being effective. So how are you going to know? Think about it. How will you know if your website is working?

■ Chase Reeves



CHOOSING THE RIGHT TEMPLATE

How to Choose the Best WordPress Theme for Your Blog

Choosing the right theme for your blog is an important step to setting up your own little online empire. [Once you've picked your niche](#) and decided [what blog platform to use](#), the only thing standing in your way of getting your site live is figuring out what you want it to look like.

If you're not careful, you can get stuck on this design and layout phase for a long time. It's often an excuse I hear as to why new bloggers haven't launched yet.

"I just need to tweak the design some more".

Does that sound familiar?

It's understandable that this hurdle is hard to overcome. Your blog is your baby. You're proud of your content and you want the right blog design to show it off to the world.

When you're just starting out it's usually out of your budget

to work with a designer on a custom theme, but that's okay because there's a whole world wide web full of blog themes for many different platforms to pick from. To prevent you from getting stuck in the design phase and to help with the overwhelming number of options out there, here's a guide to picking a great pre-made theme for your blog.

What to look for in a blog template

A quick Google search for your platform along with the word "theme" will show you a near-endless list of sites offering blog templates. You'll see a mix of free and "premium" themes (that you'll need to pay for). Generally speaking, the premium themes are better quality than the free ones, but that doesn't mean that every premium theme is guaranteed to be good quality. Nor does it mean that you can't find good themes that are free- you definitely can! For each theme you consider investing your time and/or money in installing, evaluate it according to the following criteria:

Does the blog template fit your needs?

Before you begin your search, it's essential to figure out what you actually need from a blog template based on your content. The goal of your blog design is to make your content shine, and to create an enjoyable reading experience for your visitors. To get some ideas of what you might need, take a look at the blogs you love reading (chances are the ones you enjoy reading most are probably your favorite blog layouts too).

- What do you find really useful when you're browsing these blogs?
- How does that apply to your own?
- Is your content better read in chronological order? Or would a category-based approach work better for you?
- Do you need a static homepage to advertise other content like products or courses?

Figure out the ingredients of your ideal blog layout and keep hunting until you find a theme that has all the elements you need. Put yourself in your reader's shoes and be sure to keep them at the top of your mind when you're making these decisions. If you run a fashion blog for example, beautiful big photos will be key. And if you're focused more on the writing than the visuals, choose a theme that doesn't rely quite so heavily on photography.

If you're using WordPress, then plugins can often be used to supplement a theme. If you want to be able to showcase your latest video in the sidebar for example and can't quite find a theme that fits what you want, you can use a plugin to add that piece. So if you find a blog template that's nearly perfect, search the [WordPress plugin directory](#) to see if that can help you with the finishing touches.

Is the template responsive?

These days, there is no excuse for not having a site that works well on mobile. In October 2016 mobile Internet use surpassed desktop for the first time, [according to Internet monitoring firm StatCounter](#), with 51.2% of traffic coming from a mobile or tablet device. That means if you want your visitors to enjoy reading your blog you had better make sure it works well on small screens.

Most templates will have it noted whether or not they're

[responsive](#) (meaning they respond to different screen sizes and the layout changes to accommodate, so that your site looks just as great on your phone as it does on your desktop), but you can always check out the example site to make sure by visiting it on your phone or simply dragging the side of your browser in and watching how the theme reacts.

If it does nothing, it's time to put the pretty theme down and walk away to find one that will give your readers a better experience on their phones.

Will you be able to customize it?

A pre-made blog theme should be a blank canvas for you to fill with your own personality and brand. Try not to fall in love with overly designed themes that have a very specific style to them already. Sure that blog template that comes with lots of graphics already in place in the header and footer may look great, but how will it work with your own content? And if you can't swap those graphics out for ones that match your own look and feel, you could end up having a site that looks exactly like the next blogger who decides to use that theme.

They may look great right now, but it will be hard to create a brand for yourself when your blog looks just like three other sites in your niche. Your content is the most important part of the site so you don't want a theme that overshadows it.

The best pre-made themes are basic in the best way, allowing your content to drive the look and feel. You should be able to edit the colors, maybe the fonts too, and upload your logo to create something uniquely you. Look at examples of the theme in use in the wild to determine how adaptable it will be. If the sites shown have the same basic structure, but all have their own flavor, then you may have found a winner.

How easy is it to use?

When you're going it alone, you'll want very clear instructions for installing your theme. Before you commit to buying or before you waste your time downloading a free theme, read the install instructions and check out what support is available for users. If the theme site offers it, read the reviews too. The best place to find this information is in the [Help or Support section](#) of their site.

Are they filled with happy customers? Or frustrated bloggers struggling to get the theme working? This is where purchasing a theme from a reputable site can be a great asset, as many offer to help purchasers through the install process so you won't have to worry about something accidentally going awry!

Blog template checklist
Before you download a blog theme, make sure it fits these criteria.

- DOES THE TEMPLATE FIT YOUR NEEDS?**
Is it right for your content? Does it have all the features you need?
- IS IT RESPONSIVE?**
Will it look great on mobile phones and tablets as well as on a computer?
- IS IT CUSTOMIZABLE?**
How easy will it be to change the fonts and colors to match your own brand and content?
- IS IT EASY TO USE?**
Can you read reviews from happy customers? Will you be able to install it yourself or get support?

ConvertKit

Where to find your blog template

The sheer number of templates available online can be quite overwhelming, but we're here to help. Here are a couple of well-respected theme sites recommended by bloggers to begin your search:

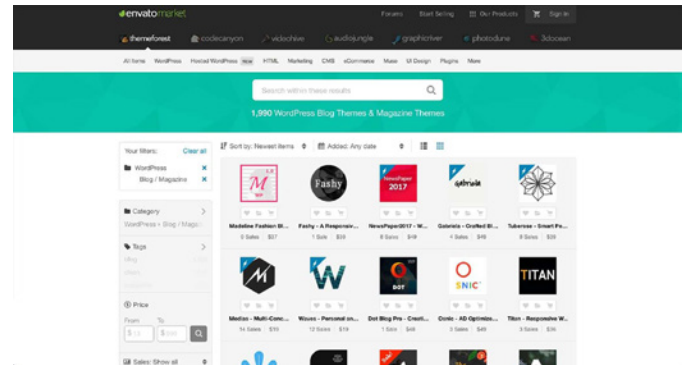
WordPress theme directory



In the WordPress.org theme directory you can filter by features, layout, and type of website you want to create.

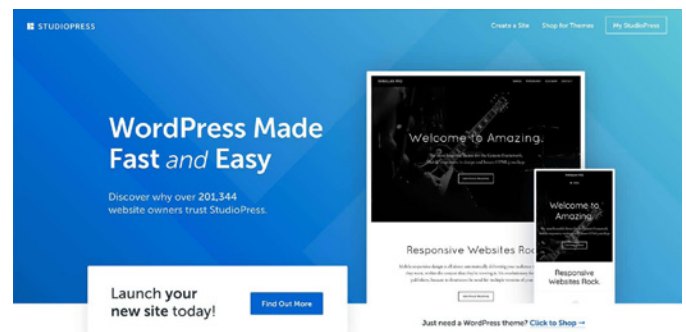
The main directory is full of free themes you can download and install yourself, but they also have a commercial directory with links to sites where you can purchase premium themes that come with some level of support.

Theme Forest

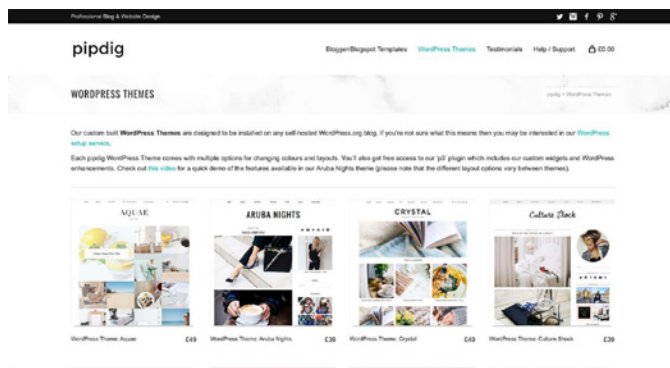


This is a theme marketplace where anyone can submit a blog design for others to purchase. The site tells you how many other people have downloaded that theme, and you can also read reviews and comments. Look out for the "Quality checked by Envato" tick to be sure you're getting one that will work well. They mainly show WordPress themes, but also have themes for Blogger, Ghost, Jekyll and Tumblr.

Studiopress



Studiopress has a great reputation amongst WordPress users. They offer a complete package with hosting included, or you can purchase themes on their own. All themes are easy to customize, trustworthy, and robust.



Popular amongst lifestyle bloggers in particular is pipdig. The themes are well-designed, are easy to customize, and come with free installation. Their customers rave about how great their support is too, so it seems like you get really good value for money here.

Get your website up with the right blog design

Now that you've got your checklist, you know what to look for and where to start your search, there's no more excuses not to get your blog up and running!

If you already have your content ready to go, choosing your theme and setting it all up could be done over the weekend. Think you can make that happen? Imagine having your blog ready for the public by next week!

But remember too that you're not stuck with the theme you choose forever. You'll likely need to update your theme as your content and business evolve and you realize you need different things from your site. So don't agonize too much over the decision: pick something well-designed that you can customize and add life to with your content and you'll be good to go.

■ *Charli Prangley*



Why Color Theory Matters for Bloggers (And how to use it)

Think about the first time you come across a new website. What are your first impressions of that site? Is it powerful, reliable, and trustworthy? Is it calming? Is it energizing?

Now, think about what gave you those impressions. Sure, the content probably played a role in getting to know the business behind the website, but have you ever thought about how the colors of that website can help set the tone for first impressions?

Color is the most immediate way of creating a good first impression online and in real life. People decide whether or not they like a product in 90 seconds or less. And [90% of that decision is based solely on color](#). In other words, color is very important.

Color communicates with your audience on an emotional level and sets the mood, attracts attention and makes a statement. Depending on the colors you choose, you could

create a website that evokes youthfulness, stability, or elegance.

The right colors will also help you stand out from other bloggers. If better branding leads to more attraction, which leads to increased revenue, that means the right blog color scheme can also mean more money in your pocket.

But while color can be the most powerful design element, the challenge is to use color while giving your design (whether it's your website or a new product) a unified and polished look. To understand how to reach this balance, you need to understand the basics of color theory.

What is color theory?

Color theory is sometimes referred to as the art and science of color and encompasses many different aspects of how we interact with color. It explains how humans perceive color, how colors mix, match or clash, the

subliminal messages color communicates, and the methods used to replicate color.

While color theory is something that many people spend their lives studying, you don't have to be a professional designer or color theorist to know how to put color to work for you. For today, I want to help you understand how you can use color theory to create a blog color scheme that matches your brand and mission.

The three categories of color theory you should know

The beginning of understanding color theory comes from understanding how colors relate to each other. Once you know how they interact, it's easier to see which ones play well together and which ones wouldn't make sense to match up. To start understanding this, you'll need to know a little bit about the color wheel and color context and a lot about color harmony.

1. The color wheel



You're probably most familiar with this first concept. I'm sure you've seen posters for the color wheel in your elementary school art class, so it's a pretty easy place to start for color theory.

Basically, the color wheel is an illustration of the logically arranged color hues around a circle, and shows the relationships between primary colors (red, yellow, blue), secondary colors (green, orange, purple), and tertiary colors (colors formed by mixing primary and secondary).

While there are many different variations of the color wheel, the standard idea of the wheel is the basis for color theory.

2. Color context

This next one is tricky. Color context is all about how color behaves in relation to other colors and shapes. That means the way we perceive color changes depending on what is around it.

For example, even though the color in the inner circle is the same throughout each set of three, it can seem to change appearance for us when we swap out different background colors.



It's one of the more complex aspects of color theory so you should be aware of it, but we're not going to worry too much about it for the topic.

3. Color harmony

This final category is what you'll really want to focus on as you're choosing a blog color scheme. Color harmony is all about how to combine colors to create something that is pleasing to the eye. It's what can either immediately engage a reader or completely turn them off.

But you can't just start throwing colors together. There's a rhyme and reason behind how colors work together and color harmony is how you can understand that balance. Here are the six schemes that make up color harmony:

Complementary-

Complementary colors are ones that are opposite each other on the wheel. The high contrast between complementary colors is what makes them look so vibrant when paired together. It's best not to use them all over your blog, but they come in handy when you want something to stand out.



COMPLEMENTARY COLOR SCHEME



Analogous-

Analogous colors are the ones next to each other on the wheel. The type of color scheme is used to create peaceful feeling designs like ones found in nature. When you use analogous colors, choose one to dominate, a second to support, and third for accent.

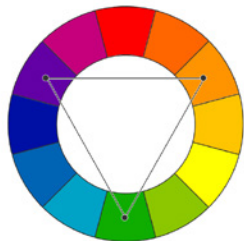


ANALOGOUS COLOR SCHEME



Triadic-

Triadic colors are three colors evenly spaced around the wheel like an equilateral triangle. This scheme is used to create a feel of vibrancy. If you use this scheme, make sure you've balanced them correctly on the color wheel and have one color dominate while the other two are used as accents.



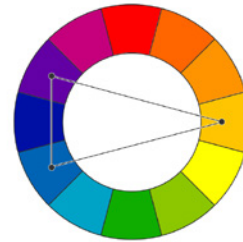
TRIADIC COLOR SCHEME



Split-complementary-

A split-complementary scheme is a variation of the complementary scheme, but instead of using only one

color as a compliment, you use two colors next to each other on the wheel to compliment your main color. By using this scheme, you create a little less tension than the complementary scheme. Because of this, it's a good choice to start with.

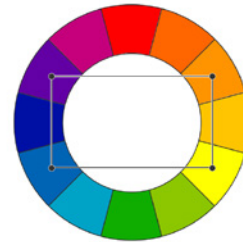


SPLIT-COMPLEMENTARY COLOR SCHEME



Rectangle-

The rectangle or tetradic color scheme uses four colors arranged into two pairs of complementary colors. Because it's made of two complementary pairs, a tetradic scheme can be overwhelmingly vibrant. If you choose to use this scheme, pick one dominant color and let the others support it.



RECTANGLE COLOR SCHEME



Square-

The square scheme is similar to the rectangle, but all four colors are evenly spaced around the wheel...like a square. Use it like you would the rectangle scheme by choosing one dominant color and the others as support.



SQUARE COLOR SCHEME



How to choose a blog color scheme

Now it's time to put all those color schemes to work, but it's not as easy as just picking one color and running with it. The colors you use can affect someone's first impression of your brand which is why you need to think past just using your favorite color. You need to think about the perception other people will have of your brand and how they will interact with it. The main goal is to find a blog color scheme that enhances your mission.

There are many different aspects and processes to work through to get the right blog color scheme. So as you begin your brainstorming, here are couple steps to follow to make sure you find the right colors:

Step 1: Choose a mood

Before you actually start searching and investigating the colors for your blog, your first step is to narrow in on a mood you want to set. By doing this, you're setting the tone for the rest of the design. [Knowing how you want your readers to feel when they come to your site will help you make each design decision from here on out.](#)

Take some time and write down adjectives that describe the mood. Will your site be calm and inviting? Exciting and energized? Strong and empowered? Reliable? Contemplative?

Once you have an idea of the mood you want to set, you can start getting a general idea of what colors can help convey that mood. These aren't strict rules to follow, but it's good to be aware that each color has it's own connection to evoking specific emotions.

For example, just because you're running a financial blog doesn't mean you need everything to be green because it makes your reader think about money. If that were true, all financial blogs would be green and nobody wants that.

Here's a chart of color psychology to help you understand how your color choice can affect your readers...



Step 2: Look at your existing design elements

The second step is take to stock of all the design resources you currently have. Depending on the project, that could mean a logo or other pre-existing branding, graphics, and other images. Often times, you might find that a photo can be the inspiration for your whole color scheme.

Pulling these elements together can help you start to see patterns and color schemes that might already exist or how you need to change direction for your mood setting, find new elements or alter your elements to fit your mood.

Step 3: Choose your dominant color

As in most things, the concept of less is more is very relevant for design and your blog color scheme. Once you've decided on which color harmony you'd like to use for your project, it's important to stick to the rule of choosing one dominant color with one or two accent colors. By doing this, you'll stay away from a multi-colored mess of distraction. It will also help you create hierarchy, establish a unified design, and can direct your reader's eye to the most important information on your site.

Best uses for your dominant color:

- Logo
- Menu tabs
- Call to Action button
- Highlighting important information
- Titles and headlines
- Buttons

Best uses for your accent color:

- Current menu tab (to show the reader which tab they are on)
- Subtitles
- Highlighting secondary information
- Scroll buttons

Step 4: Add in shades and tints

If you do find that you need an extra color or two, you might add in shades or tints of your dominant color. This will give you more variety to choose from while not taking away from the scheme you've set out to use.

SHADES
(Adding black)



TINTS
(Adding white)



Step 5: Find the right tools to help you test and set up your blog color scheme

As usual, there are many sites and tools online that can help you create the right color scheme. Here are a few to get you started:

- [Adobe Kuler](#)- You can generate an entire color scheme from one base color with Adobe Kuler. All you need to do is upload a photo to start extracting colors. It also integrates with Creative Suite apps and gives you downloadable palettes for sharing.
- [Colors on the Web](#)- This tool accepts a color in RGB and gives you a set of schemes based on different mathematical equations.
- [Coolors.co](#)- With this tool you just hit the spacebar and it generates a new theme. Simply click the lock to lock a color in place and change the other colors around it. If you have one main brand color already this will be useful as you can put it in, lock it, then hit the spacebar for ideas of accent and complementary colors.
- [COLOURlovers](#)- This site is a creative community where people from around the world create and share colors, palettes and patterns and discuss the latest trends.
- [Colorable](#)- This tool checks the contrast between foreground and background color and allows you to adjust the colors.

What blog color scheme fits your brand?

After reading through this article, do you think you're ready to find a color scheme that helps promote your brand and mission? Or do you think might need to redesign your website? If this blog post helped you understand how important color is for your business, please share with a friend!

■ *Dani Stewart*



— THE BASICS OF — typography

How to Choose the Right Typography For Your Blog

Any designer that's been around the block once or twice knows the importance of typography. They know that it's more than just the design of those letters. Typography is about the arrangement of the letters, how they fit with the rest of your particular design, how they work with your brand, and they can help you attract the right audience.

Like any aspect of design, good typography should feel effortless. A reader shouldn't see the tedious process of tracking and kerning that went into making a logo or magazine cover page. But it's those little details of type that can make a world of difference between an aesthetically pleasing and readable page and one that looks cluttered and illegible.

Your choice of typography and how you make it work on your blog absolutely makes the difference between good and bad design. And how you use it will help your readers learn more about you and your brand by:

- **Unifying your message-** Seeing the same font throughout a blog helps your audience by creating a consistency they can follow along with.
- **Creating identity-** Typography plays a big role in strengthening your brand recognition. Having a recognizable brand your audience can identify time and again will create interest and promote loyalty.
- **Setting the tone-** Your choice of typeface can determine how your entire blog is interpreted. Choosing between a simple font or a unique font will change how your audience initially interacts with your brand and can even attract the niched audience you're after.
- **Creating readability-** Most importantly for bloggers, good typography creates a comfortable reading experience. As your readers head to your blog on their cell phones, laptops and tablets, you need to make sure they enjoy reading your writing.

So if you're ready to create a more enjoyable reading experience for your audience and create a strong identity for your brand, it's time for you to start feeling more comfortable and confident with typography. This article will

help you learn everything from the terms you need to know to the basic rules of making it work for you.

The difference between a typeface and a font

Understanding the difference between a typeface and a font can be a confusing concept at first. But when you break it down, it's quite simple- a typeface is a grouping of fonts.

More specifically, a font is defined as a complete character set within a typeface, and a typeface family describes a range of designs that are all variations of one basic typeface. While there are a few more typeface styles, these five are the most popular to use.



Serif

These are the typefaces with feet. Serifs are much easier to read in long, printed works like books and newspapers because of the distinctiveness between the letters.

Most common Serif fonts: Times New Roman, Georgia, and Garamond.

Sans serif

Since sans means without, sans serif means without feet. Since these typefaces have a more modern feel and still look good at lower screen resolutions, designers typically use sans serif fonts for blog posts and web documents.

Most common San serif fonts: Arial, Verdana, and Futura.

Blackletter

Blackletter typefaces are known for their dramatic effect and are characterised by thick and thin strokes and swirls on serifs. While they were often used in early manuscripts

(think the Declaration of Independence), this typeface is mostly used in headers, logos, and other signs.

Most common Blackletter fonts: Old English, Fraktur, and Linotext

Script

Just like the name implies, this typeface resembles the fluid and varied strokes of handwriting. Script has two basic distinctions: formal and casual. For both these distinctions, script is most commonly used in designs for invitations, logos, and posters. You should never use a script as body copy.

Most common Script fonts:

Formal: Kuenstler Script, Quarzo, and Platinus Script Pro

Casual: Mistral, Kaufmann, and the Brush Script

Decorative

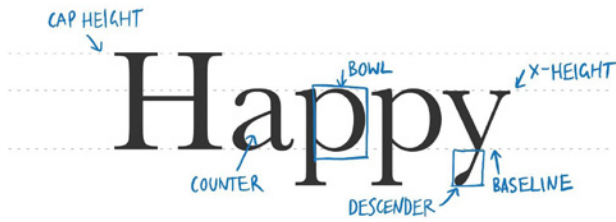
This classification can come off pretty cheesy and should be used with a lot of discretion. I would recommend to only use a decorative font for a logo and never for headlines or body copy.

Most common Decorative fonts: Outlaw, Stencil, and Bauhaus

Each of these type styles has it's own place in the design world. Make sure to [read up more on them](#) to find out all their best uses.

Anatomy of a typeface

If you really want to get deep into typography, you'll soon find out that everything about a typeface can be broken down. From small curls to the empty space inside a letter, each part that makes up a letter in a typeface has a name and designation. When you put all those pieces together, you have the anatomy of a typeface. Here's how that takes shape:



Baseline: The line where the letters sit.

Cap height: The distance from the baseline to the top of the capital letter.

X-height: The height of the body of the lowercase letter. It's located in between the baseline and the cap height.

Bowl: The curved part of the character that encloses the circular or curved parts of some letters, like 'd' and 'b'.

Descender: The longest point on a letter that falls beyond the baseline. Usually for letters like 'y'.

Counter: The empty space in the middle of letters such as 'a'.



Ligature: The stroke that joins adjacent letters.

Stem: The base of a letter, similar to the stem of a flower.

Serif: The slight projection finishing off a stroke of a letter in certain typefaces.

Finial: The tapered end of letters such as 'e'.



Ascender: The portion of a letter that extends above the mean line of a font. That happens when a letter is taller than the font's x-height.

Cross bar: The bar that goes across the inside of the letter and connects one side to another.

Terminal: A type of curve that you see at the top of the letter 'f' or the end of the letter 'j'.

Spine: The curvy body of the letter 's' – and only the letter 's'.

Six typographic concerns that affect your designs

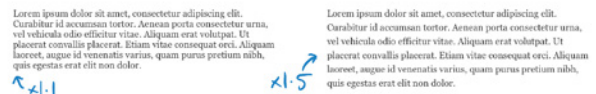
Once you have your vocabulary down, it's time to understand what it means to play around with your typography. There's always something new to learn with a design skill this wide-ranging, but most designers find themselves adjusting and balancing out these six typographic concerns on the daily.

Size



When you're pairing typefaces in a design, it's a good idea to use two that are similar in x-height. This will create a consistency and harmony between the two different fonts.

Leading



When you're working with typography for an online design, leading means line-height. It's how text is spaced vertically in lines. Think about your research papers in high school when you used single or double spacing. It's kind of like that. For readability, a general rule is that your leading value should be 1.25 to 1.5 times greater than the font size.

Kerning

Aviation Aviation

Kerning is the amount of space between letters and the process of adjusting letters to create the right amount of space to avoid gaps or squished copy. The natural kerning is not always accurate and sometimes needs to be tightened or loosened to create a more appealing look. This process will be most important when dealing with large, highly visible text like headlines and logos.

Tracking

Aviation

Tracking is similar to kerning, but it relates to the spacing of the whole word and is done after you've figured out your kerning. This should be carefully used to change the spacing equally between every letter at once.

Measure

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Curabitur id accumsan tortor. Aenean porta consectetur urna, vel vehicula odio efficitur vitae. Aliquam erat volutpat. Ut placerat convallis placerat. Etiam vitae consequat orci. Aliquam laoreet, augue id venenatis varius, quam purus pretium nibh, quis egestas erat elit non dolor.

Measure refers to a line's length. Depending on how long or short your measure is, you will need to adjusting your leading. Generally speaking, if the measure is long, the leading should be increased, and vice versa. For a single column design, many designers believe 65 characters is the perfect measure.

Hierarchy

Heading ^{←h1}

SUB HEADING ^{←h2}

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Curabitur id accumsan tortor. Aenean porta consectetur urna, vel vehicula odio efficitur vitae. Aliquam erat volutpat. Ut placerat convallis placerat.

If all type was the same size, it would be hard to know what was the most important information on a page. Creating a hierarchy with different weights, styles, and sizes of fonts helps to create a flow of importance for your readers. The bigger and the bolder the text, the higher the positioning it takes on the page, meaning the quicker your reader's eyes will go to it.

Basic rules of typography

Putting all this information together can be overwhelming. So instead of trying to learn everything about leading and kerning, and memorizing every part of typeface right now, let me give you some simple and actionable steps you can take to start correctly utilizing typography for your blog.

Choose the right font

First and foremost, the primary goal of design is communication. That means the readability of your type is top priority. That also means you need to make sure your type is connecting to your audience. This is more than just making certain that your copy is impeccably written. It's also about ensuring that the font you use fits your market.

How-to: Consider the medium where your audience will read you work and choose a font that that works well with that medium. (I gave you some good examples to start with up in the typeface families section).

Limit the number of fonts you use

This is a really common mistake people can make with typography. Instead of taking the less is more approach, you'll often see an overload of conflicting fonts that clutter up a design. A lot of designers recommend that two to three fonts throughout your website and blog should be a maximum in most cases to avoid this problem.

How-to: Look within the same font family when you want to add another style, and choose fonts that compliment each other and your medium.

Watch alignment- when in doubt, go left

The location of your wording can also have an effect on the readability of your work. Choosing the correct alignment will help direct your reader's eye to right place on your page.

How-to: Here are common uses of each alignment-

- Left- most common because it's easy to read
- Center- use for posters, branding, etc; makes it easy to balance out a bit of type for aesthetics

- Right- mostly decorative; not recommended for large chunks of text
- Justified- good for longform, multi-column layouts ; makes a neat left and right edge; can have problems with spacing

Set up grids

This point is really about thinking how your type fits in relation to other things on your page and creating a balance for it. Using grids will help you ensure that everything on your page is working together to create balance and a cohesive look.

How-to: Before you start your design, split your page into thirds using guidelines. Just like [the rule of thirds in photography](#), you can use these guidelines to arrange your elements and create balance. (Side note: you can use any grid you like, but a three column grid is good to start with if you're unsure)

Follow a hierarchy

Creating hierarchy with your typography will help your reader know where to look first on your design. When you can do this well, you create a path for you reader to follow through your blog so they get the right information at the right time.

How-to: Think about what the most important pieces on your page are. For blogs, make use of your h1, h2, and h3 styles for headings and subsections within posts. Most themes will already have h-tag styles established. You can edit these to match your own preferences based on everything you've learned in this article.

Avoid widows and orphans

A widow is a term for a line of text that belongs to a paragraph and has moved over to the next column. An orphan is similar, but a single word on its own on a line, poor little thing. When these two issues happen in your content, it takes away from your readability as well as the overall aesthetic of your design.

How-to: You can manually edit the text to adjust the line length to remove the problem by creating a soft return (press shift +return) on the word in front of the orphan. You

can also adjust the textbox or column size to create more space to move the type.

Don't stretch your type

When fonts are created, they are built with specific attention to their shape and proportions. When you stretch them out in height or length to fit a space you're actually taking away from the beauty of its design and the function it was created for.

How-to: Look for fonts that both complement your design and fit the space and medium you are needing them to.

How will you use typography?

Now that you have the basics down, you can go create your own typographic designs for your blog. What will you do first? A new logo? Some graphics for social media? A cover for your new eBook? At a very minimum, you can choose a beautiful font that resonates with your readers and fits with your new blog theme.

■ *Dani Stewart*



How to Create Graphics for Your Blog

So, you need to design a graphic to promote your new course, eBook, or blog post. Where do you begin? You want something that looks great and will entice people to buy, download, or read your content, but you don't know the right way to go about it.

Should you hire a designer to work with you on this? Unless it's part of a wider branding strategy or blog redesign, probably not, for the same reason that [no entrepreneur should pay \\$10,000 for their first website](#). No, you can learn to create your own beautiful blog imagery yourself, and I'm here to help! Here's a design process to follow.

The makings of a great blog graphic

There are five main steps that go into designing a blog graphic:

- Purpose: Deciding what the image needs to achieve.
- Imagery: Choosing a photo or graphic that fits your brand and the message you want to convey.
- Color: Working with a [color palette](#) that matches your brand and stands out.
- Fonts: If words are needed, think about the [typography](#) on your image.
- Bringing the elements together: Using simple software to bring your image to life.



Purpose: Know why you want a graphic

Creating a good blog graphic first involves understanding its intention. Of course you want it to look good, but design is more than making things pretty. Design can have a positive impact on the number of visitors who purchase your product or share your article and can bring in a new audience. Rather than setting out to create an image that looks nice (that's a given), instead you need to decide you're

going to create an image that fulfills a need.

Ask yourself what you want to accomplish with the graphic.

- Does it need to visually encapsulate the article?
- Encourage people to click?
- Look enticing enough to share on Pinterest?
- Communicate an important concept?
- All of the above?

Cool, keep that as top of mind when deciding on your visual elements and make sure they align with your goal. ([Read more about design thinking here if you need a hand understanding that.](#))

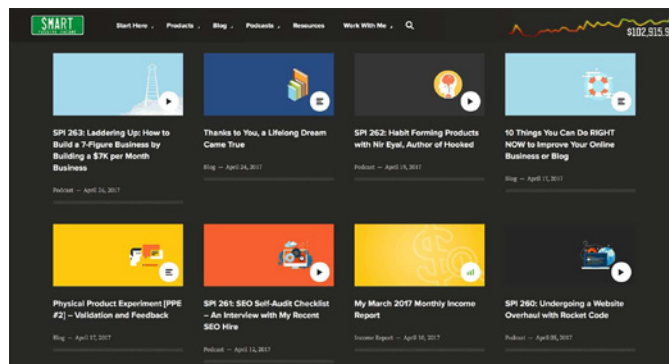
Imagery: Pick the right images for your brand

The imagery you use in your blog graphics should be cohesive and tie in to your brand. You've got a few different options here. You could go for:

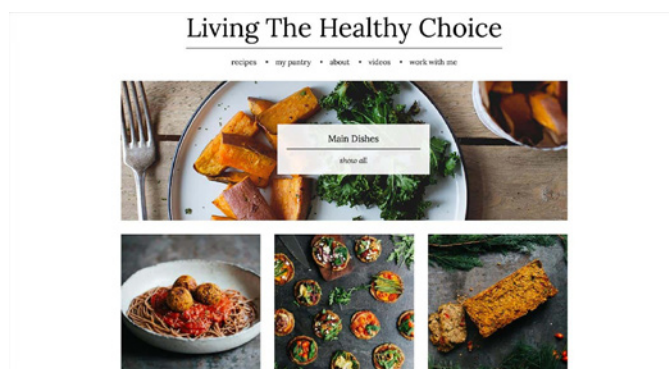
- A photo
- An illustration
- Maybe even a texture

The option you pick will depend on what best suits your content or your brand. Photos are great for creating a personal connection and for showing highly visual subject matter, but if your content is more conceptual or theoretical, then illustrations or a texture could work really well for you (and save you trying to come up with a relevant photograph).

Think about how the image will look not just on this single blog post, but in your blog directory too. When you see a grid of six of your posts together, you want them to all feel like they fit together without looking exactly the same. Pat Flynn does a great job of this with the illustrations he uses to accompany the posts on [Smart Passive Income](#). They're all different, but they belong together.



For photographs, taking the approach of an [Instagram theme](#) (where you try to post photos that have a similar style or tone to them) works great for a blog too. Pauline from the food blog [livingthehealthychoice.com](#) has this down! Her blog imagery is beautiful on its own, but it's clear that the photo style is a part of her brand, and looks great together in the directory too.



If you don't have the photography skills of Pauline or access to an illustrator to create custom graphics like Pat Flynn, here's some of my recommended resources for sourcing imagery:

- **Stock photography** – The cliché [woman laughing with salad](#) is a bit cheesy, but there are many sites that offer elegant, beautiful stock photography without the cringe-factor. [Unsplash](#) and [Death to Stock](#) are great resources we use for the ConvertKit blog, but keep in mind that the more popular a resource site is, the more common it is to see the images used on other blogs. If you're using stock photos it's a good idea to add graphics or text to them to tie them in with your brand and make them more unique.
- **Taking your own photos** – You don't need a fancy DSLR or professional training to take great photos. Going the DIY route for photography will guarantee you unique, personal images for your blog. Check out [these tips for](#)

[taking great photos with your phone](#) and [this guide to taking beautiful flatlays](#) to get you started.

- **Graphics and illustrations** – [Creative Market](#) has pre-made graphics or illustrations for purchase to suit just about every style, and they also give away freebies weekly that you could use on your blog. [Iconfinder](#) is also a great resource for, you guessed it, icons to represent an article topic.
- **Textures** – [Lost and Taken](#) and [Subtle Patterns](#) have beautiful background textures that would look great with an icon or text on top to accompany a blog post.

(And if none of those resources strike your fancy, check out our post with [101 graphic design resources](#) for a whole lot more)



Color: Leverage your brand's color scheme

While it's often enough to stop at imagery, if you're going for a graphic approach or want to use text over your images you need to be working with a consistent color scheme. Stick to your brand colors or colors that complement your brand colors and the image you're using. Don't be afraid to mix it up here for added interest.



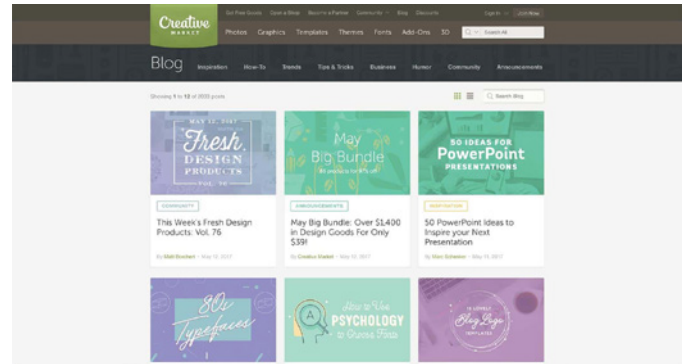
I love the way Mariah Coz uses her color palette on [Femtrepreneur](#). The images all have a similar layout, but she creates variation by mixing up the colors in each image.

If you need a hand choosing a color scheme for your blog, check out our post on the basics of [color theory](#) and get to color picking!



Typography: Use words to supplement your imagery

Adding text to an image is a great way to make it super compelling for Pinterest as a potential reader will know exactly what article they're about to click into no matter what the pinner has titled the image on their board. You can pick a great font and simply type the name of your article on an image, or you can flex your design muscles and try some typographic arrangements like the beautiful images on the [Creative Market blog](#).



It's only fitting that they have beautiful typographic images as they're a great resource for beautiful fonts! We shared more font sites in our [design resources](#) post, but keep in mind that free fonts are more likely to be seen everywhere than a font you pay for.

If you want your [typography](#) to stand out from the crowd either find a creative way to use a free font or get your wallet out and pay for a lesser-used font that will be a bit more unique to you. And make sure you read up on typography basics to get your head around the nuances of working with type.



Bringing it all together: Create gorgeous blog graphics

Once you've gathered together the assets, you'll need to use some form of design software to combine them and produce your blog graphic. There are loads of great free tools to help with layouts, like [Canva](#) and [PicMonkey](#), that allow you to upload images to create your own design or pick from a template to give you a head start.

You might find however that some of the beautiful assets you've downloaded could require more robust design software to edit if they're a .psd, .eps or .ai file. An [Adobe Creative Cloud subscription](#) gives you access to tools like Photoshop and Illustrator to edit these (along with a bunch

of other stuff), but if you're not quite ready for that yet, check out [Gimp](#) as a Photoshop alternative and [Vectr](#) as an option to try instead of Illustrator for working with vector assets. And for a little taste of Adobe without the high price tag, check out their social media image building tool [Spark](#).

Now for the nitty gritty of making your graphic:

1. Whatever software you're using, you'll first need to create a canvas that's the size you need your blog image to be (this will depend on your blog design, but 1080x720px is a good place to start if you're not sure). Then start building your graphic from the base up.
2. Add your image then arrange your text on top of it. A tip here to create balance in your image is to place your text on the opposite side of the main focus of the photo or graphic.
3. It's easy to get carried away with different fonts, icons and colors, but the age-old rule of 'less is more' definitely applies to blog graphics. Don't try to overload your image with every new asset you've downloaded. Instead pick one or two and save the rest for future images! Remember the graphic is there to support your content, not overshadow it.
4. If you're struggling for inspiration, get layout ideas from [Pinterest](#), [Dribbble](#) or [Designspiration](#), but don't be tempted to copy designs you see exactly. The point of creating your own unique blog imagery is just that: to be unique! You can still take inspiration from these sources without directly copying by remixing, and being influenced by multiple images and styles. Writer [Austin Kleon](#) has a great book on the topic of 'stealing like an artist', where instead of copying one person, you take little pieces of inspiration from different work you see and put your own spin on them to combine them and make something new! So when you look for inspiration, make sure you're being inspired by multiple different sources and aren't copying one too closely.
5. Export your image when you're happy with it by saving it as either a .jpeg or .png and upload it to your blog!



Putting your blog graphic design process into action

Now that you've got a process to follow, it's time to get to work on creating beautiful images for your blog. It's worth putting in the time and effort as the right graphic can increase the shareability of your post, entice more people to buy your product, and strengthen your brand.

■ *Charli Prangley*



<HTML> & CSS

How to Understand the Code on Your Blog

It's hard to believe there was once a day when only designers and developers could create websites. Now we have pre-made templates, [blog themes](#), and [platforms](#) that make it easy for anyone to build their own site. No need for a background in design or years of coding, all you need to do is find a content management system you're comfortable with, a theme you like, and then navigate a drag and drop editor to get the job done.

But while these blog templates and WYSIWYG editors enable you to [put your website up over a weekend](#), there still may be times when you need to add a little extra customization to hit your branding standards. When those times come, you'll need to be familiar with HTML and CSS.

Now, don't let those acronyms scare you. Today we're going to decode the coding. We're going to talk about what they are, what they do, and how you can use them for some very basic customizations for your website.

HTML and CSS defined

HTML and CSS are two coding languages that are independent of each other, but both work together to make your website look good. HTML, or HyperText Markup Language, is a set of tags that give content structure and meaning by defining it. CSS, or Cascading Style Sheets, style the appearance of your content. It tells the browser what the content in those tags should look like.

Basically, HTML is the cake recipe and CSS is the decoration on the cake.

Now we'll dive into the details of what these two languages look like and how they are used.

How to recognize HTML on your blog

HTML tags are the opening and closing tags that surround the content of your website that create structure. They

are the basic building blocks for web design. For example, these tags separate headers from the body content and create paragraphs inside the body content. You'll recognize them as the content enclosed in carrots (<>).

You won't need to actually know all the HTML tags unless you're planning to create your website from scratch, and I'm guessing you're not planning on doing that. But it's still good to recognize the most common HTML tags for when you might want to edit bits and pieces of your website.

```
<div> ← opening div tag
<h1>Blog post title</h1> ← heading
paragraph → <p>Introduction to the blog post.</p>
 ← image
<a class="button">Read more</a> ← link
</div> ← closing div tag
```

- <html>: Wraps around the whole page.
- <head>: Contains important information that isn't visible, but tells the browser how to display your page correctly. For example, linking to web fonts and stylesheets, as well as meta information important for SEO.
- <body>: This denotes everything you see in the browser.
- <div>: These are your building blocks. Think of them as a container unit that encloses other page elements and divides the HTML document into sections.
- : Span tags are for adding a style to something without putting it in its own div tag.
- <h1>, <h2>, <h3>: These are your heading tags. H1 is the largest heading and the sizes gets smaller as the heading number gets higher.
- <p>: Paragraph tags tells the browser the text should be on a new line and adds space between paragraphs
- <a>: Anchor tags create links () that tell the browser where to go.
- Image tags look like this: They're how images are displayed in HTML.
- : These are your ordered list tags that are numbered.
- : These are your unordered list (bullet points by default)
- : This tag stands for list item, so each point on the list. They can be styled to get rid of the bullet point.



[Watch the video](#)

Always remember when using HTML tags that you need to close them off when your item ends. That means you'll add a backslash to the beginning of the tag. For example, at the very end of your page, you'll add </html> to close everything out.

How to recognize CSS on your blog

CSS is the style sheet language used for describing the presentation of your website. In other words, it's what makes your site look the way you want it to. It defines everything from color and margins to lines and background.

A line of CSS has a very particular set up. First you call a class or tag then you put the styling instructions within curly brackets. The property is the part of the page you want to change and goes on the left. The value is the bit you change to style how you want and is on the right. Both are separated by a colon. Every line ends with a semicolon (if your styles don't seem to be working, it's often because you forgot a semicolon or to close a curly bracket!)

Once it's all done you will have a line of CSS that looks like this:

There are endless possibilities for styling in CSS, but here are a few basics you'll likely need to deal with when editing

```
class name
↓
.my-class {
  background-color: #F2F2F2;
}
↑           ↑
property   value
```

your own site:

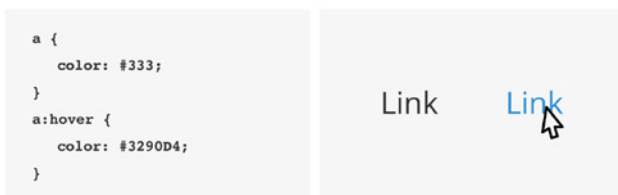
- Hexadecimal values for colors – These are the numbers that tell a browser what color to display on your page. You can find the right HEX color with a [color picker](#).



- Styling text- The main ways you can change your font are
 - Font-size
 - Text-align
 - Font-family



to change how it appears on hover



element while margin adds space outside of it.



For everything else, there is a great resource to look to for a CSS property list: <https://www.w3schools.com/cssref/>

And if you want to dive a bit deeper into learning enough code, here are a couple great places to start:

- <https://teamtreehouse.com/>
- <http://www.dontfeartheinternet.com/>
- <https://webdesign.tutsplus.com/courses/30-days-to-learn-html-css>

Make your own website edits today

With these basic lines of code, you can feel ready and able to make small customizations to your website. Want a bigger font for your header? You can do it with by changing the font-size for h1 in the stylesheet. Want to create a bulleted list on your homepage? Now you know how with your tag.

The possibilities are endless, but don't go too crazy. Remember, a well designed site is a simple site.

 Dani Stewart



101 Resources to Make Your Blog Beautiful Every Time

No matter how amazing a design may be in concept, it's the execution of that concept that makes or breaks the design. Whether you're a professional designer or an online entrepreneur making your side hustle work by stepping up your design skills, you'll quickly understand that a designer's execution is closely tied to the resources they use.

Types of design resources and design inspiration

Design resources can cover a wide variety of needs. The first thing you probably thought of was tools and software. From editing images to laying out a web page, these resources are how great designs are created.

You might also have thought about the places you can download pieces for graphic design like icons, backgrounds, and typography. These types of resources are what connect

the design to your visual identity and brand. How you use them in design tells a story to your audience about who you are.

But the resources you might not have thought of involve places of inspiration. Design can take a toll on your creativity. There will be days when your muse is hard to find and you have a hard time coming up with ideas. Knowing where to look to cultivate your inspiration when you're feeling empty is just as important as the place you download your icons.

And even if you are rolling in creativity, these sources of inspiration are still important to look to to compare and contrast your ideas with nature, other designers' work, and the world at large.

101 design resources to bookmark

For all these points of design, you need an arsenal of go-tos for everything from icons and typography to backgrounds and color inspiration. After all, if you're in the middle of a

project, you don't want to pause to scour the Internet for an infographic creator, do you? You need to already know which tool you like working with the best and where to find it.

To help you start building your own design resource library, I've gathered 101 links for you to click through. You'll see there are a variety of options for each type of resource, so make sure to click through them all and find the tools, sources of inspiration, and software that work best for your workflow, aesthetics, and client projects.

Backgrounds:

[CSS Author](#)

[Graphic Mania](#)

[Lost and Taken](#)

[Subtle Patterns](#)

[Tech and All](#)

[Tech Radar](#)

[Texture King](#)

[Texture Palace](#)

[Wegraphics](#)

Color Inspiration:

[Colourlovers](#)

[Flat UI Color Picker](#)

[Plenty of Color](#)

[Web Creme](#)

Color Search:

[147 Colors](#)

[Color Explorer](#)

[ColorHexa](#)

[Colrd](#)

[Coolors](#)

[Hailpixel](#)

[Material Palette](#)

[Shutterstock Spectrum](#)

[TinEye](#)

Graphics (icons, vectors):

[Creative Market](#)

[Design Instruct](#)

[Endless Icons](#)

[FlatIcon](#)

[Font Awesome PS](#)

[FreePik](#)

[Fribbble](#)

[Iconfinder](#)

[Pixeden](#)

[Noun Project](#)

General Design Inspiration:

[99designs](#)

[A List Apart](#)

[Abduzeedo](#)

[Creativeblog](#)

[CreativeRoots](#)

[Designer Daily](#)

[Dribbble](#)

[HOW Design](#)

[The Best Designs](#)

[The Dieline](#)

Infographic/Graph Creators:

[Canva](#)

[ChartBlocks](#)

[Draw.io](#)

[Easel.ly](#)

[Infogr.am](#)

[Piktochart](#)

[Venngage](#)

[Visage](#)

[Visme](#)

[Visualize.me](#)

Layout Inspiration:

[Aisle One](#)

[Behance](#)

[Designspiration](#)

[The Book Design Blog](#)

Logo Inspiration:

[Behance](#)

[Logo Ed](#)

[LogoDesignLove](#)

[Logolounge](#)

[LogoMoose](#)

[Logospire](#)

[Designspiration](#)

Stock Photography:

[Death to Stock](#)

[Fancyrave](#)

[Getty](#)

[Life of Pix](#)

[Magdeleine](#)

[Pexels](#)

[Pixabay](#)

[PicJumbo](#)

[SplitShire](#)

[Startup Stock Photos](#)

[Stocksnap](#)

[Unsplash](#)

Software/Tools:

[Adobe Creative Cloud](#)

[Balsamiq Mockups](#)

[Layerhero- Free Lorem Ipsum Generator](#)

[InVision](#)

[Mock Up Zones](#)

[Placeit](#)

[PSDDD.](#)

[Tiny PNG](#)

Typography:

[8 Faces](#)

[Creative Market](#)

[Fonts in Use](#)

[Font Squirrel](#)

[Fontshop](#)

[FreeTypography](#)

[Handwriting Fonts](#)

[I Love Typography](#)

[OpenFoundry](#)

[Type for You](#)

[Typecast](#)

[Typetoken](#)

[Typewolf](#)

Web Design Inspiration:

[Admire the Web](#)

[Awwwards](#)

[Behance](#)

[Unmatched Style](#)

[Webdesign Inspiration](#)

Now you're ready to design

With these tools, sites, and other resources you're now ready to improve, beautify, and brand your blog with a cohesive style. Now, just because I gave you 101 resources doesn't mean you need to bookmark them all. Find that ones that work with your branding, your workflow, and your audience and stick with what works for a while. Once you've mastered a few skills, then it's time to maybe add a couple more.

The point is, now you know where to look to create designs for your blog without the obstacle of scouring the Internet for what you need. So get out there and start designing today!

■ *Dani Stewart*



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