

Designing for Readability: A Guide to Web Typography

Choose clear and recognizable letterforms

Text is most legible when the eye can easily distinguish between letters. Some typefaces are designed to simply be slick and rhythmic—pleasing to the eye. Legible typefaces have far more nuance among the letters.



Distinctive Letters

Forms that are too repetitive can make text illegible, so each letter should have a distinctive shape.

 lll SERAVEK	 III TAHOMA	 lll CERA PRO	 lll GILL SANS
 qp TIMES	 qp BODONI	 qp IMPACT	 qp OPTIMA

Open Forms

Letters that are airy and open are less likely to blur into closed shapes.

 C HOEFLER TEXT	 C PROXIMA NOVA	 C HELVETICA	 C COURIER
 S MYRIAD PRO	 S BRANDON	 S ROBOTO CONDENSED	 S SUPER CLARENDON

Clear Terminals

Distinguishable beginnings and endings of letters help the eye recognize individual forms.

 jaf BASKERVILLE	 jaf PT SERIF	 jaf HELVETICA
-------------------------------	----------------------------	-----------------------------

Letterform Contrast

Body text requires some contrast within letterform stroke width, but shouldn't go too far where certain strokes begin to disappear.

Body Text

LOW CONTRAST < **Ags - Ags - Ags** > HIGH CONTRAST

Headline Text

Format text for the highest level of legibility

After a typeface is chosen, formatting it for onscreen reading is just as important. Decisions like color and size always contribute to the reading experience.



Body Text Size

Type size depends on the distance at which a reader is positioned from the screen. General rules apply, but testing a design on all screen types is essential to ensuring a pleasant and legible reading experience.

 12-16pt	 15-19pt	 16-20pt
-------------	-------------	-------------

Leading

The space between lines of text depends heavily on the chosen typeface. Follow the general rule: The smaller the typeface, the tighter the leading.

15/18	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Donec semper nibh quis tortor ultrices lobortis. Curabitur lacinia lorem dui, vel vestibulum erat.
20/26	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Fusce auctor, mi at lectus justo maximus.

Line Length

The number of letters on a line can contribute to reader's fatigue, so keep the line length to 45-75 characters per line.

CHARACTER COUNT

45 57 75

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Donec semper nibh quis tortor ultrices lobortis. Curabitur lacinia lorem dui, vel vestibulum erat rhoncus finibus. Duis eget dolor tincidunt, laoreet ante lobortis.

Color Contrast

To make body text legible for all types of readers, choose colors that provide a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1, according to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

 1.3:1	 2.2:1	 4.5:1	 6.7:1
-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------