

Layout and Spacing

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Introduction

Hello and welcome to the lesson about using the correct spacing in your designs. In this lesson, I would like to discuss three different aspects of spacing. First, I will talk about the most important aspect: the white space. We'll talk about what it is and how we can use it effectively.

Next, I'm going to share how you can define and use a Spacing and Sizing System to speed up your workflow and improve the overall consistency. And finally, I will share some additional tips and things to consider when aligning elements on a website.

You need more white space!

OK, let me say this: if you are only going to take away one thing from all the lessons in this module, let it be this: you need to use more white space!

Designers love it, yet website owners want to fill it. Whitespace is often regarded as a waste of valuable screen space. But it is definitely not a waste of space. It's an essential design element and a powerful tool for effective web design.

In fact, many would argue that it is as important as website content. You need to give the content room to breathe! It helps to create a balance and flow so that the website content is easy to read and doesn't overwhelm your visitors.

What is white space?

It is often referred to as "negative space". It is the space left between other elements on a page. It covers everything from line and letter spacing to the space surrounding text and images, to margins and gutters.

Obviously, despite its name, white space doesn't have to be white. You can use any color or lack of it in your negative space.

Effective use of white space creates a design that's enjoyable, comfortable, and easy to interact with.

Functions of white space

1. We can use it to **separate without cluttering**.

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Things like line separators, background color changes, or even blurb cards or shadows - all these elements are used to separate or divide one area on the screen from another area.

You can achieve the same effect just by using white space, and it will declutter your layout, especially if you're going for a clean and minimal look.

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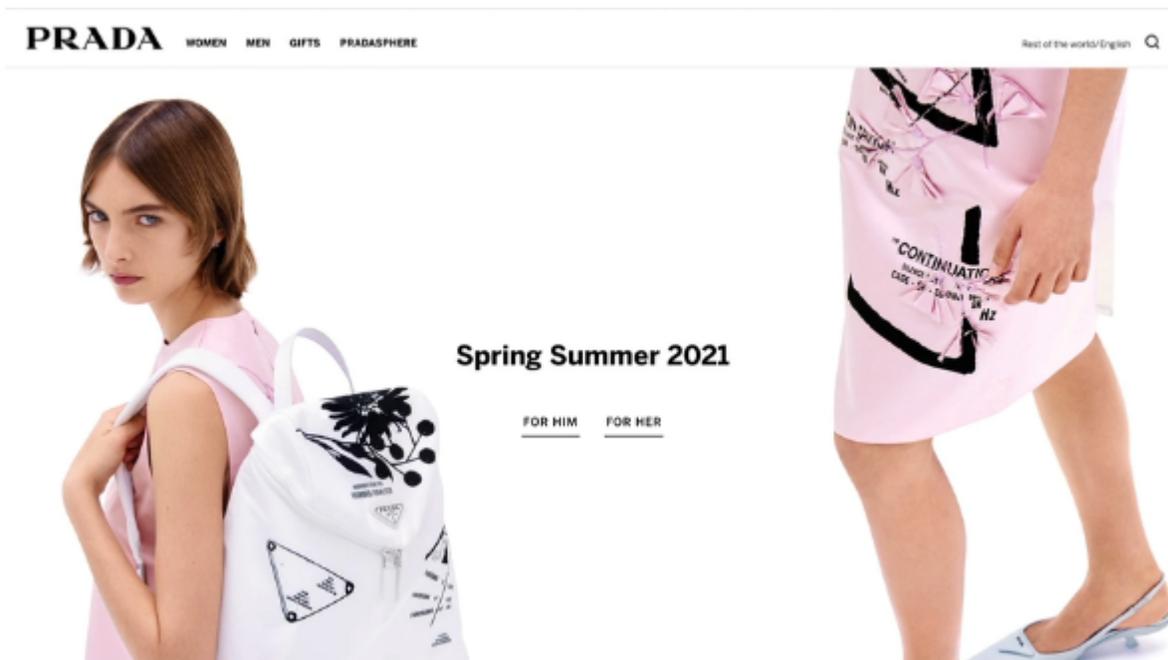
2. You can also use white space to **highlight your calls to action**. If you have an important element, there are a lot of different ways you can emphasize it. You can make it very big, or very colorful, but you can also add a lot of white space around it.



It is a slightly more subtle option and my go-to method for drawing page visitor attention to an element while still having a clean and minimal design.

3. We can also use white space to give an **impression of luxury**. White space is mainly used as a technique of improving the user experience, but it also has this aesthetic use. If you scroll through some high-end brand websites, you'll become aware of how generous use of white space gives an impression of elegance, luxury, and sophistication. And it is really generous.

If you inspect and look closely at these pages you will see that there are hundreds of pixels of empty space in between elements.



4. The correct use of white space in text can greatly **increase readability**. Things like paragraph margins, line spacing, or even letter spacing can influence the legibility of text.

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Text that's tightly spaced feels cluttered and is difficult to read.

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On the other hand, space it out too much, and the reader might feel a disconnection and lose attention.

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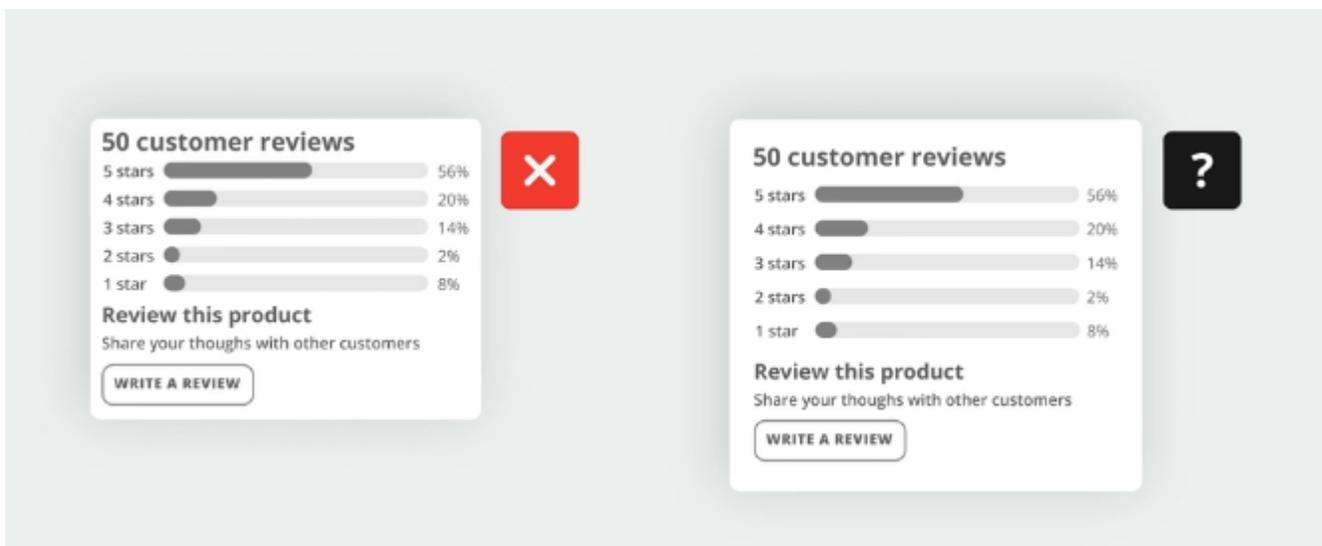
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And if you don't make your content easy to consume, your website visitors simply won't bother. We will talk about it in more detail in the lesson on styling text, but just keep in mind that using correct spacing when styling text is very important.

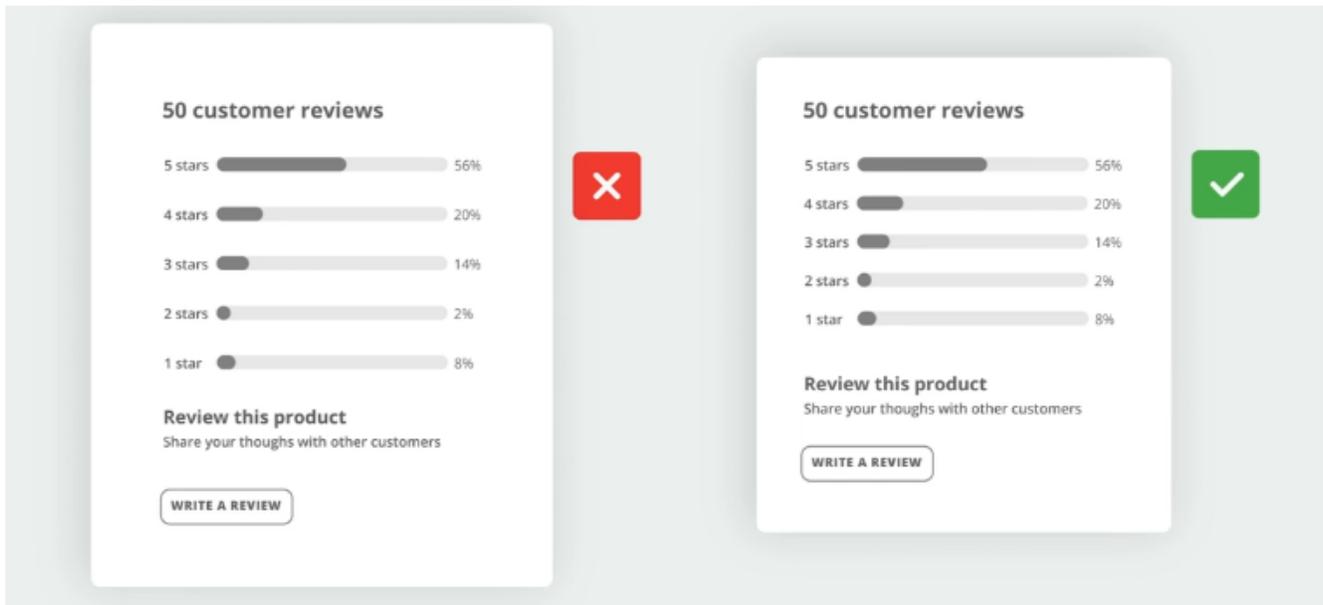
Use white space effectively: start with too much white space

One of the easiest ways to clean up a design is to simply give every element a little more room to breathe. The problem is, when designing for the web, white space is almost always added to the designs as an afterthought. If something looks a little too cramped, too crowded, you add a little bit of margin or padding until it looks better.



The problem with this approach is that elements are only given the minimum amount of breathing room necessary to not look actively bad. To make something look actually great, you usually need more white space.

A better approach is to start by giving something way too much space, and then remove it until you're happy with the result.



You might think you'll end up with too much white space this way, but in practice, even what might seem like a little too much when focused on an individual element ends up being closer to just enough in the context of the complete layout.

Define a Spacing and Sizing System

Apart from using lots and lots of white space in your designs, another thing that can improve your workflow and the end results is establishing a Spacing and Sizing System.

You shouldn't be nitpicking between 120 pixels and 125 pixels when trying to decide on the perfect size for an element. Painfully picking and checking values one pixel at a time will drastically slow you down, and what's even worse, it can create ugly and inconsistent designs.

Instead, try to limit yourself to a constrained set of values defined in advance. For a spacing system to be truly useful, it needs to take into consideration the relative difference between subsequent values.

At the small end of the scale (like the size of an icon, or padding inside a button), a couple of pixels can make a big difference. Jumping from 12 pixels to 16 pixels is an increase of 33 percent, right?



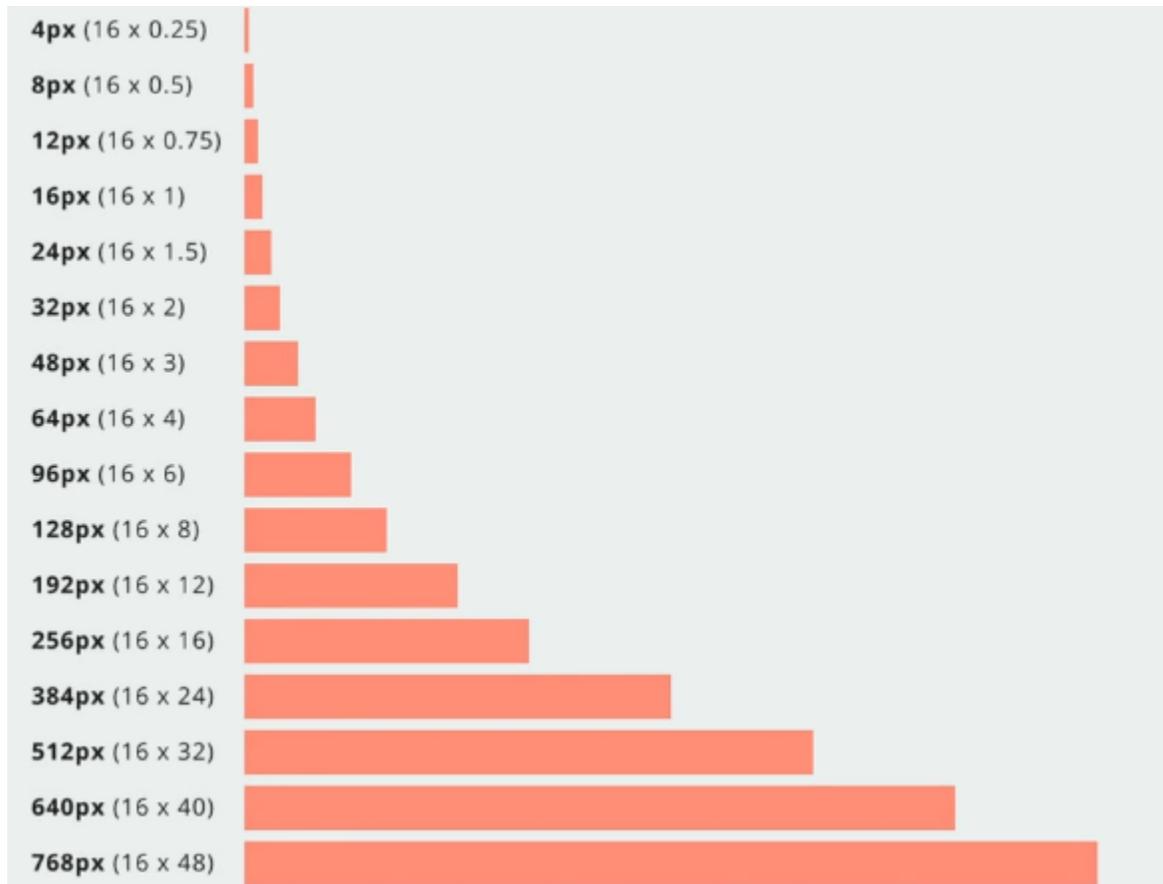
But at the large end (the width of the element or the vertical spacing in the hero section) a couple of pixels is basically imperceivable. Even increasing the width of the card from 500 pixels to 520 pixels is only a four percent difference, which is eight times less significant than the jump from 12px to 16px.



Hopefully, you can see what I mean. If you want your system to help you make sizing decisions easily, make sure no two values in your scale are ever closer than about 25%.

When we define the system, you don't want to choose between random values when sizing an element or fine-tuning the space between elements. You also don't want to build your Spacing and Sizing System from random values either. A simple approach is to

start with a sensible base value, then build a scale using factors and multiples of that value.



So, 16 pixels is a great number to start with because it divides nicely and also happens to be the default font size in most major web browsers. The values at the small end of the scale should start pretty packed together, and then get progressively more spaced apart as you get further up the scale.

Above is an example of a fairly practical scale built using such an approach.

How to use the Sizing System?

Once you've defined your Spacing and Sizing System, you'll find that you're able to work a bit faster. Let's say you need to add some space under an element. You can simply grab

a value from your scale and try it out. If it's not quite enough, the next value is probably perfect.

While the workflow improvements are probably the biggest benefit, you'll also start to notice a subtle consistency in your designs that wasn't there before, and things will look just a little bit cleaner.

I know that Divi comes with default values, often percentage values, but I want to encourage you to consider defining your own instead of relying on the Builder defaults.

It all comes back to planning. If you take a moment to decide on the default section padding, for each screen size you can set it in the Builder as a global preset and you'll be one step closer to a better, cleaner looking website.

Avoid ambiguous spacing

Other than using a predefined scale and being consistent, there are a few more things to consider when spacing your interface elements.

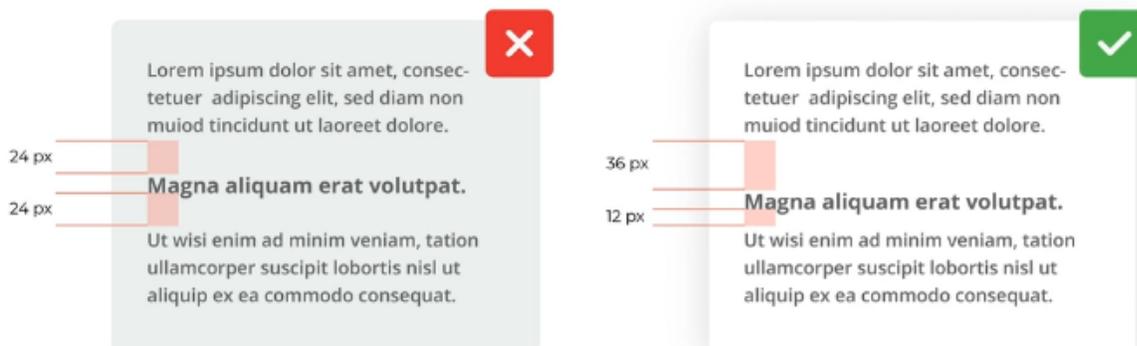
When it comes to spacing, it's very important to avoid ambiguous spacing. It always needs to be very clear to the user which elements belong to each other.

Say you're designing a form with stacked labels and inputs. If the margin below the label is the same as the margin below the input, the elements in this form group won't feel obviously connected.

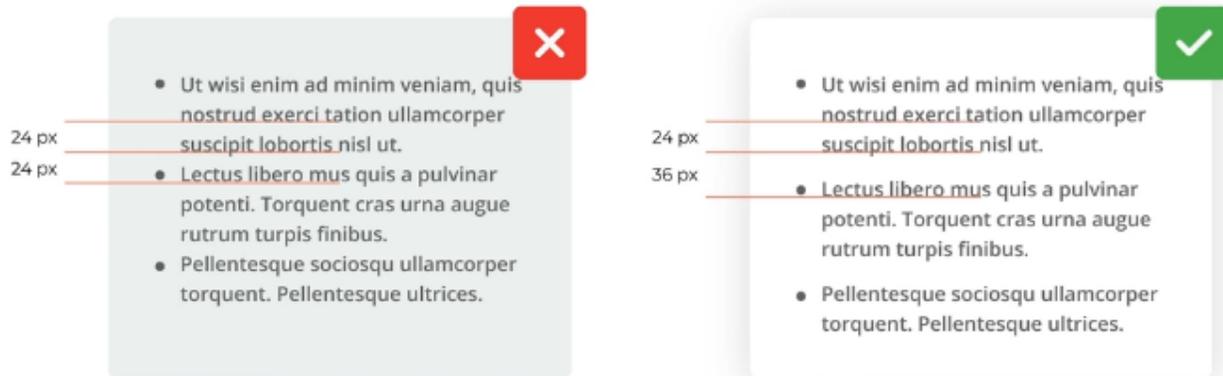


The simple fix is to increase the space between each form group, so it's clear which label belongs to which input.

The same problem shows up in article design when there's not enough space above section headings.



You can also apply this to bulleted lists. When the space between bullets matches the line-height of a single bullet, it also creates this experience of not properly connecting the elements that should be together.



External spacing should always be greater than internal spacing when we're looking at these groups and subgroups of elements in the hierarchy of our page. In other words, when you look at your page hierarchy, you'll always have certain groups. The great rule to follow is that spacing between elements inside the group should be always smaller than the spacing between the group and another group.

Using white space to guide your visitors through the page makes the difference between an effective visual hierarchy and a page with no clear structure or indication of what to do. Hopefully, you'll find all these tips helpful and I'm sure when you start to think about spacing and white space intentionally, you'll start noticing how it improves your end results.

Resources

GET INSPIRED:

Sample Spacing and Sizing System (available in the Downloads section of this lesson)

Action Items

- Try changing the default section and row padding to add too much space, so that it forces you to remove it instead of always adding it when needed. This is a setting hidden in the Theme Customizer -> General and Layout Settings -> Row height and the Section height. Try changing these values to 10 (for 10% top and bottom padding) to see if that helps you consider using more white space in your designs. You can do the same for tablets and phones – in the Theme Customizer -> Mobile panel, this time using pixel values.