Final Touches and Consistency

Introduction

Welcome to the final lesson of the Website Design Fundamentals module. In this lesson, I would like to give you a few additional tips and tricks which didn't fit anywhere else. Here are my tested, go-to methods to give that polished feel to my website layouts.

Creating depth

Have you ever noticed how some elements in an interface feel like they're raised off of the page, while others feel they are inset into the background? Creating this effect might look complicated at first, but it actually only requires you to understand one fundamental rule, which is that the light comes from above.
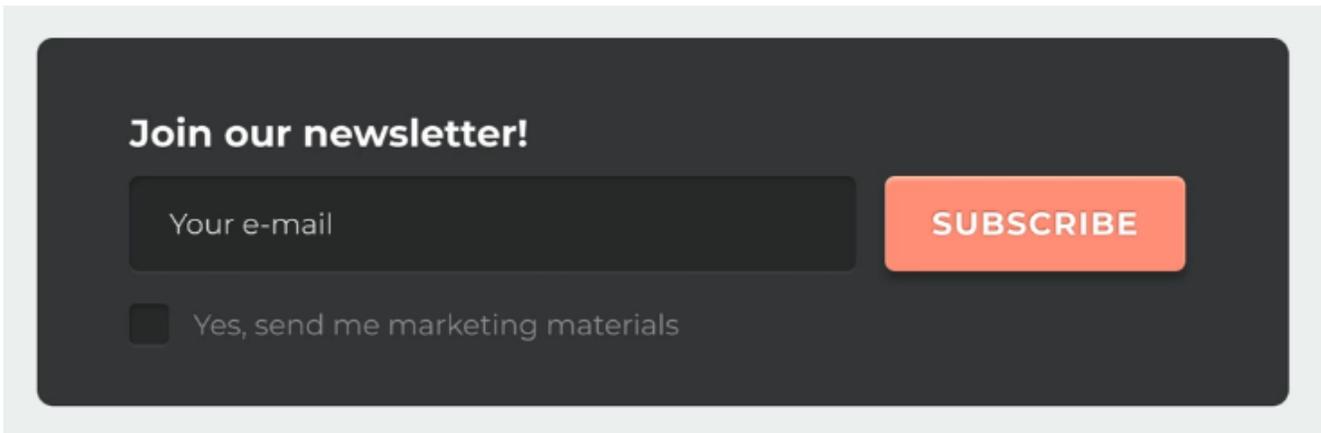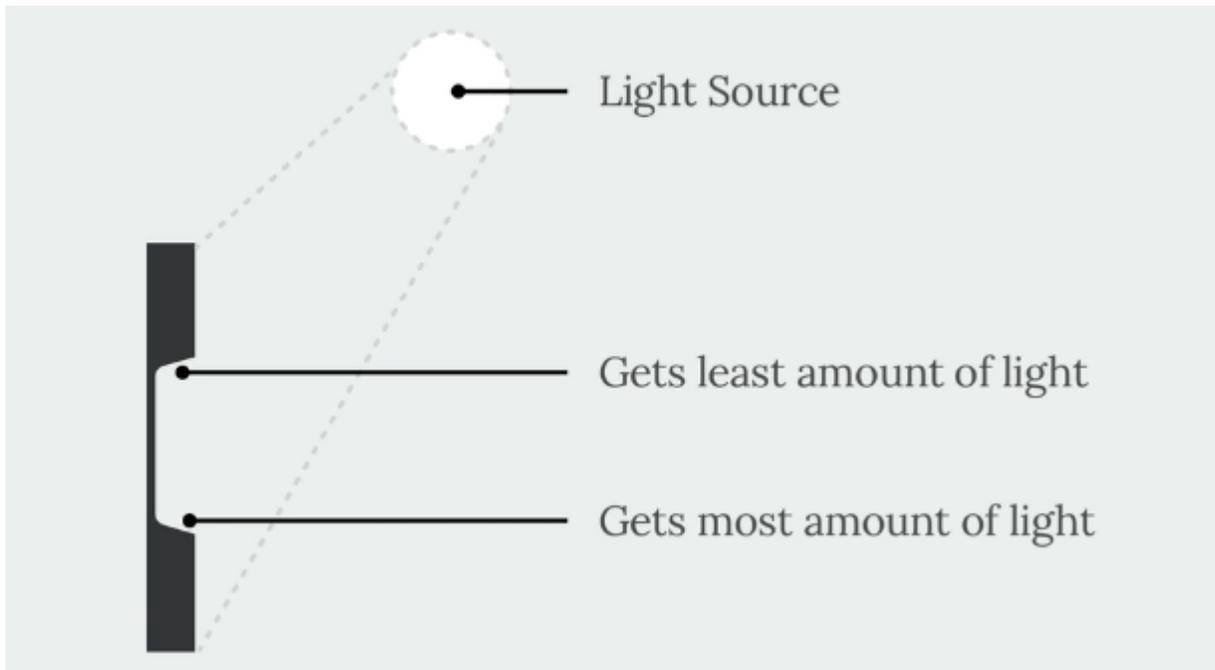
Emulate a light source

If an element is raised, the top edge receives more light, and the bottom edge is darker because it's angled away from the sky, receiving less light.
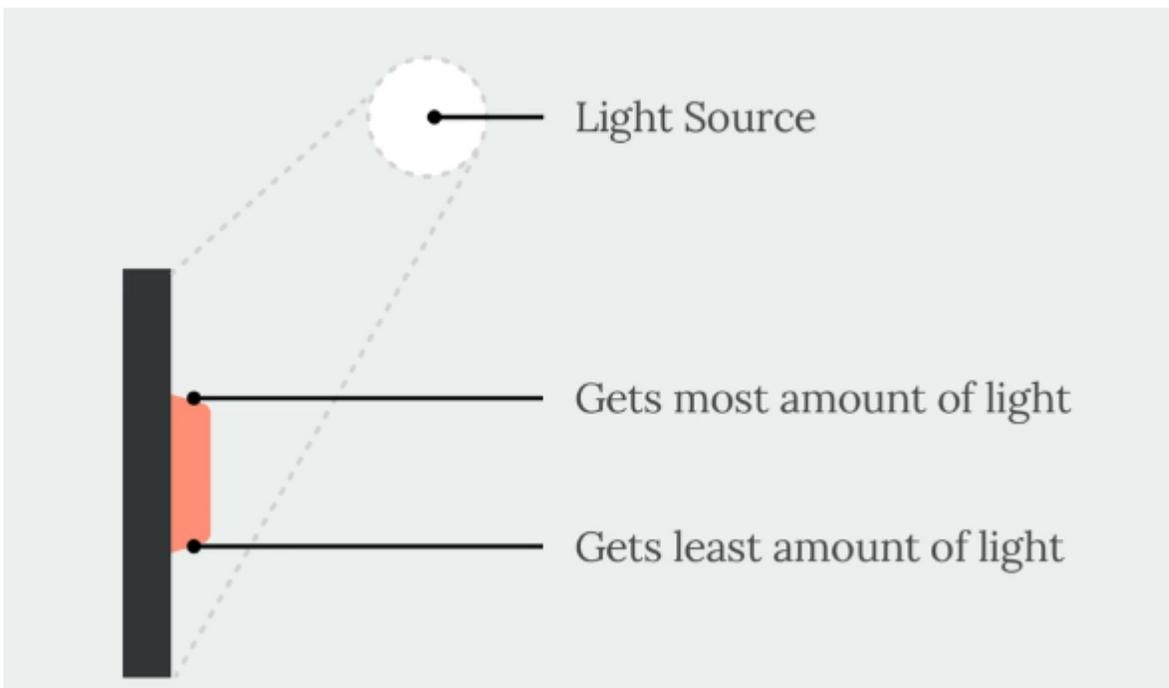

Now, if an element is inset, there's a shadow at the top because the edge above is blocking the light, and the bottom edge is lighter.

To create this effect, all we need to do is mimic the way light affects things in the real world. For example, say you have a button and you want it to feel raised off of the page. You can add a lighter top border or an inset box-shadow with a slight vertical offset, but choose the lighter color by hand instead of using a semi-transparent white if you want the best result.
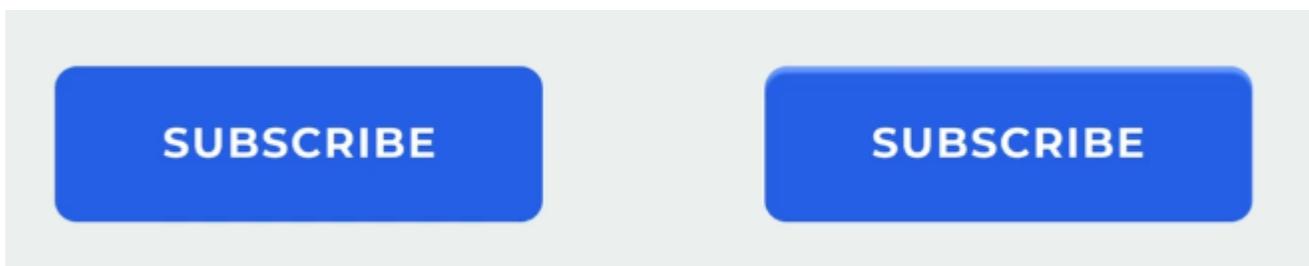

Next, you need to account for the fact that a raised element will block some of the light from reaching the area below the element. You can add a small dark box-shadow with a slight vertical offset, but don't go too crazy - a few pixels is usually enough.
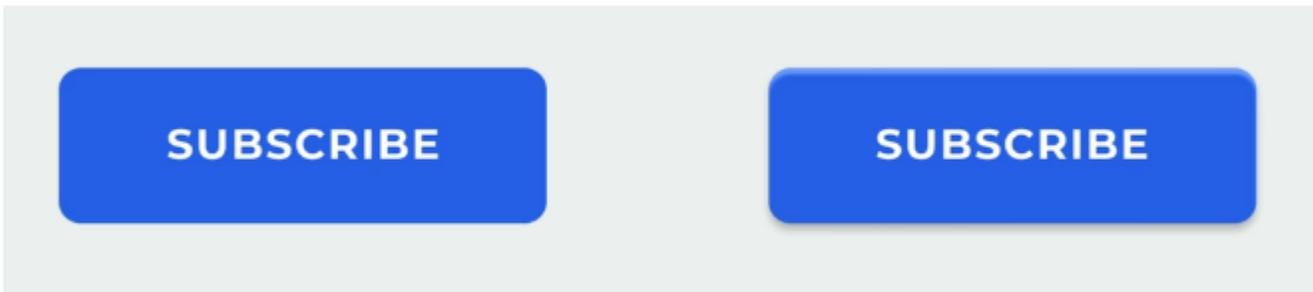
For inset elements, it would work the other way around: the bottom edge should have a slightly lighter color using a bottom border or inset shadow with a negative vertical offset.
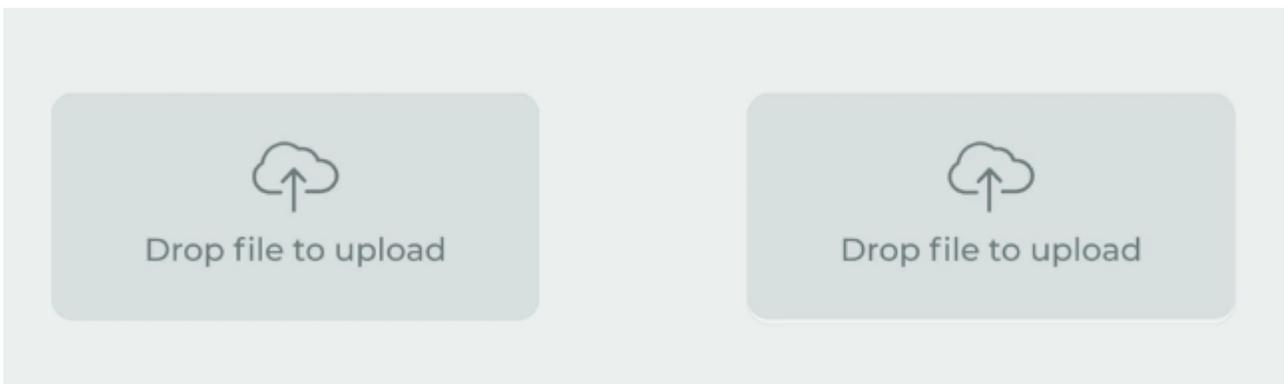
The light would be blocked from reaching the top of the area, so add a small dark inset box-shadow with a slight positive vertical offset to make sure it doesn't show through at the bottom.
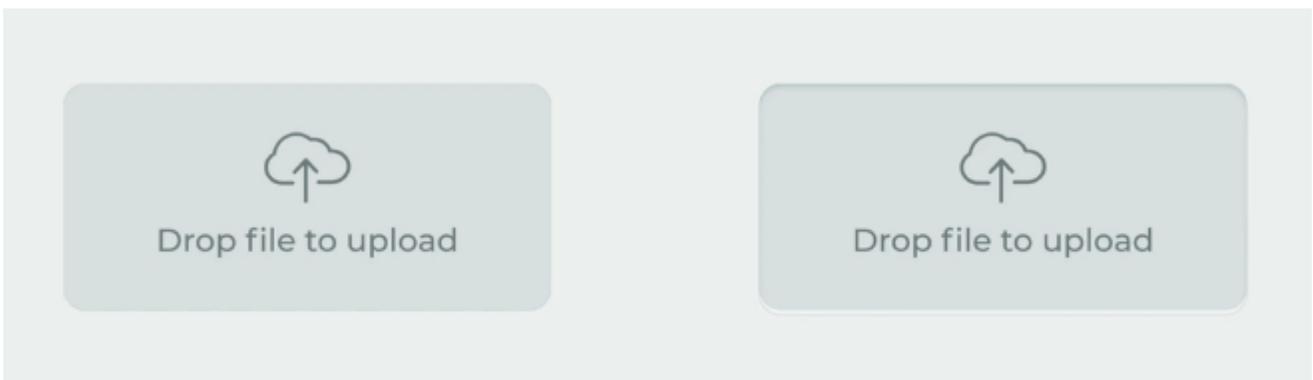
Elevate with shadows

Shadows can be more than just a flashy effect. Used thoughtfully, they let you position elements on this virtual z-axis to create a meaningful sense of depth.

Small shadows with a tight blur radius make an element feel only slightly raised off of the background, while larger shadows with a higher blur radius make an element feel much closer to the user. The closer something feels to the user, the more it will attract their focus.

Just like with color, typography, spacing, and sizing, defining a fixed set of shadows will speed up your workflow and help maintain a consistency in your designs. You don't need a ton of different shadows, five options are plenty. You can start by defining your smallest shadow and your largest shadow, and then fill in the middle with shadows that increase in size pretty linearly.
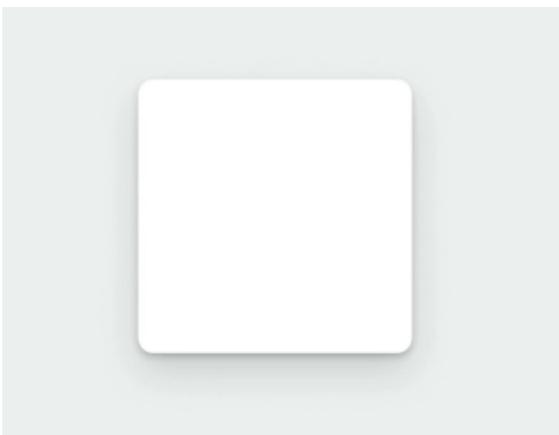
Have you ever inspected a really nice-looking shadow on the side and noticed they were actually using two shadows? When combining two shadows, you shouldn't just experiment randomly until things look nice, because each shadow has a specific job to do.
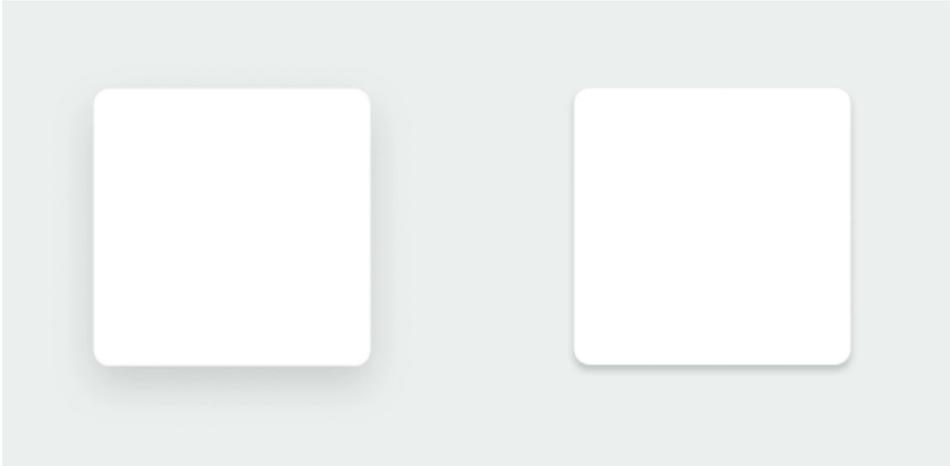
The **first shadow** is larger and softer, with more vertical offset and a large blur radius. It simulates the shadow cast behind an object by a direct light source. The **second shadow** is tighter and darker, with less of a vertical offset and a smaller blur radius. It simulates the shadowed area underneath an object where even ambient light has a hard time reaching.

Phillipp Brumm wrote a smooth **box-shadow generator**. This handy tool will generate shadows with as many as 10 layers. A fun generator and a useful tool if you're looking for ways to add that special touch to a layout.
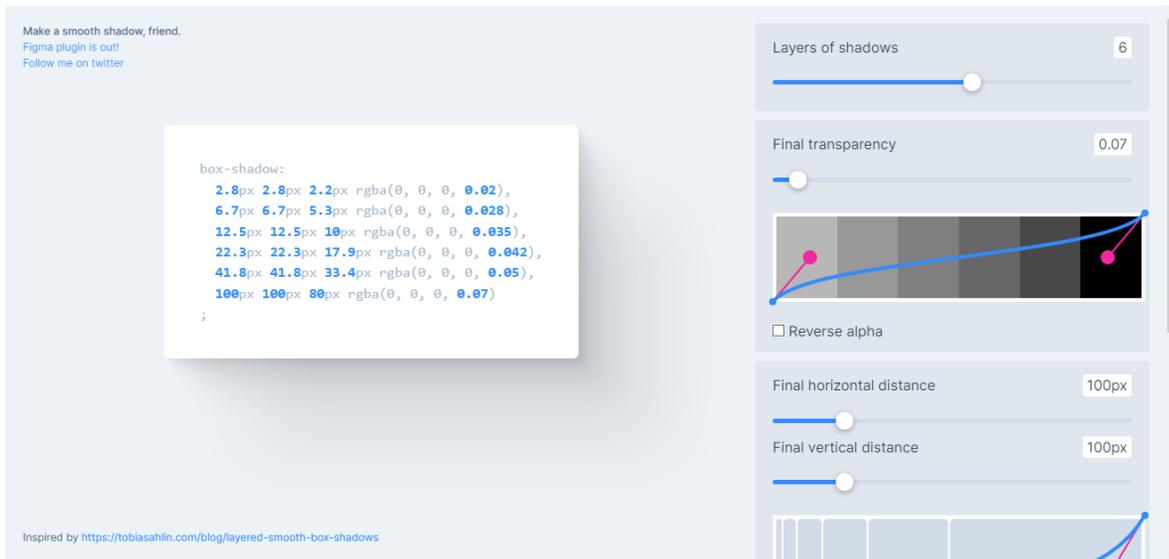
Overlapping elements

Another way to create an effective depth on a page is to overlap different elements to make it feel like a design has multiple layers. For example, instead of containing a card entirely within a row or a section, offset it so it crosses the transition between two different backgrounds.
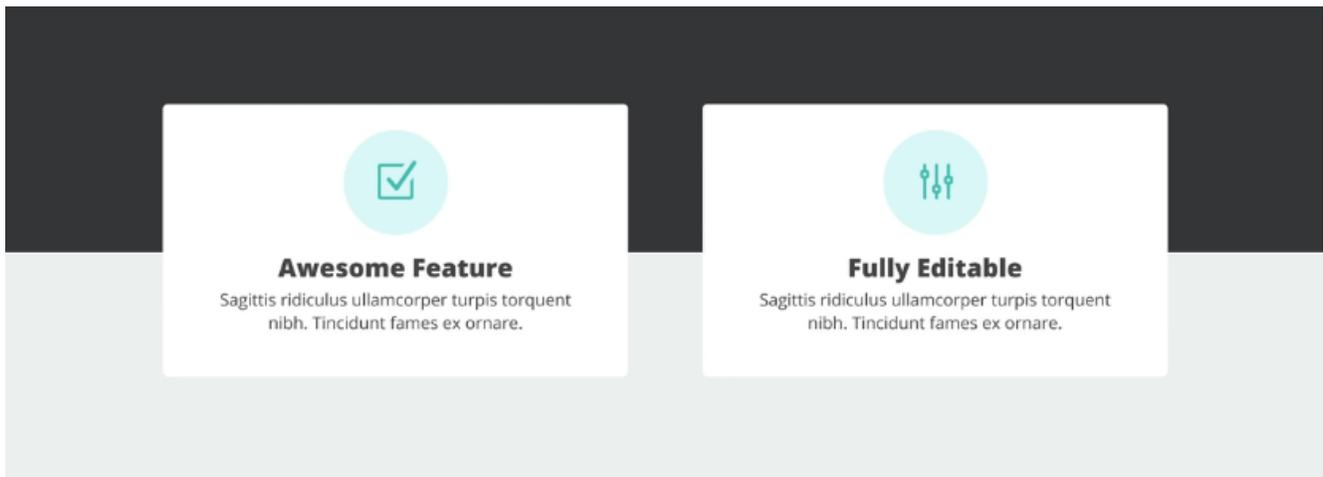
You could also make an element taller than its parent, so it overlaps on both sides.
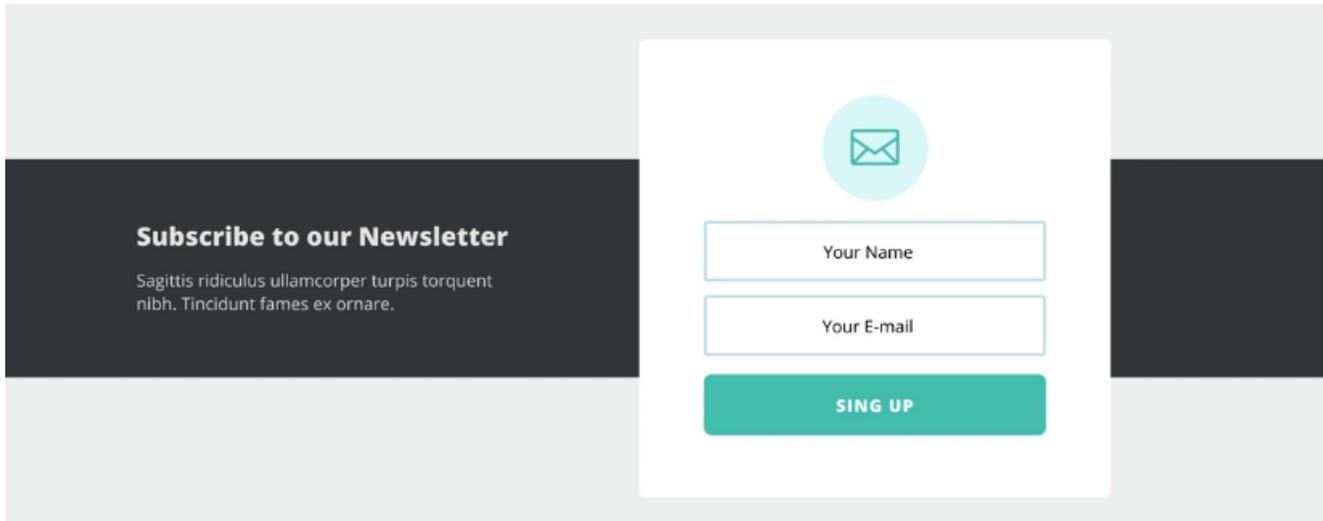
Use fewer borders

This next tip I think is quite important. When you need to create a separation between two elements, try to resist immediately reaching for a border. While borders are a great way to distinguish two elements from one another, they aren't the only way. And using too many of them can make your design feel busy and cluttered, especially if your elements are already using two different background colors.

Even a slightly different background color is usually all you need to create a distinction between two elements, so you can try replacing the border with a subtle box-shadow instead.
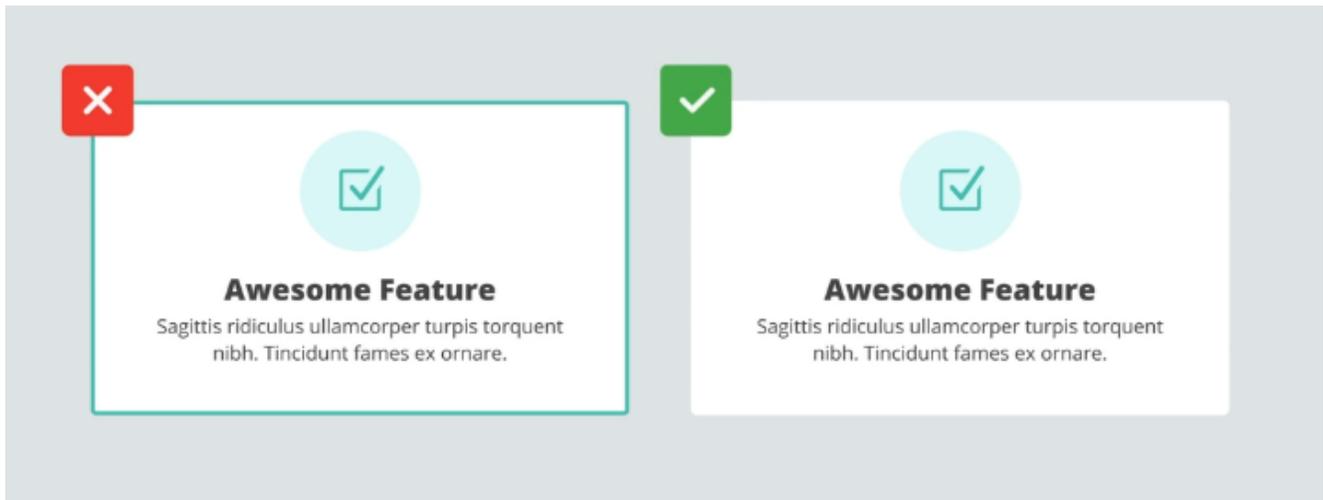
Decorate your backgrounds

Now, the last finishing touch I would like to mention is your backgrounds. Even if you do a great job with hierarchy, spacing, and typography, sometimes a design might feel a little bit plain. A great way to break up some of the monotony without drastically altering the layout is to add some excitement to a few of your backgrounds.

The simplest way would be to **change the color** to emphasize different sections and add some distinctions. You can **use a slight gradient**, but remember - no more than about 50 degrees apart in hue.

Another approach is to **add a subtle repeatable pattern**, and you don't necessarily need to repeat it across the entire background. Adding it along a side edge of the section can look great, too. Just keep the contrast between the background and the pattern pretty low to ensure readability.

Instead of decorating an entire background, you can also **try including an individual graphic or two** in specific positions. Simple geometric shapes or small chunks of repeatable patterns work great. Just remember that, as with anything else, less is more. You don't want to get too crazy.

Decorate your backgrounds

✔ Use a different background color

✔ Use a gradient

✔ Add a repeatable pattern

✔ Add a simple shape or illustration

The importance of consistency

And my final, and probably the most important tip, equally important as "use more white space": I want you to remember **the importance of consistency**.

I mentioned it a lot throughout this entire module: how valuable it is to make intentional design decisions, how important it is to start by defining different design systems. All these methods are to make sure your end results are not only beautiful, but also consistent. It means your website visitors, when clicking through different pages, are taken on this delightful journey which helps meet all the goals the website has.

When the website you build for your client looks great and does its job correctly, your client is happy, your business grows, and the internet is just a little bit prettier, so it's a triple win.

I really hope that you can now clearly see the power of great design. And that is just the start of our journey inside the Divi Stylist Academy, because next, I'm going to help you actually make it happen so that you can apply all these design techniques to your Divi websites with confidence.

Resources

GET INSPIRED:

Box Shadow Generator

Action Items

☐ Browse through all the lessons inside this module and submit any questions you may think of for the live Q&A session.