

# The Designer's Guide to Web Graphics

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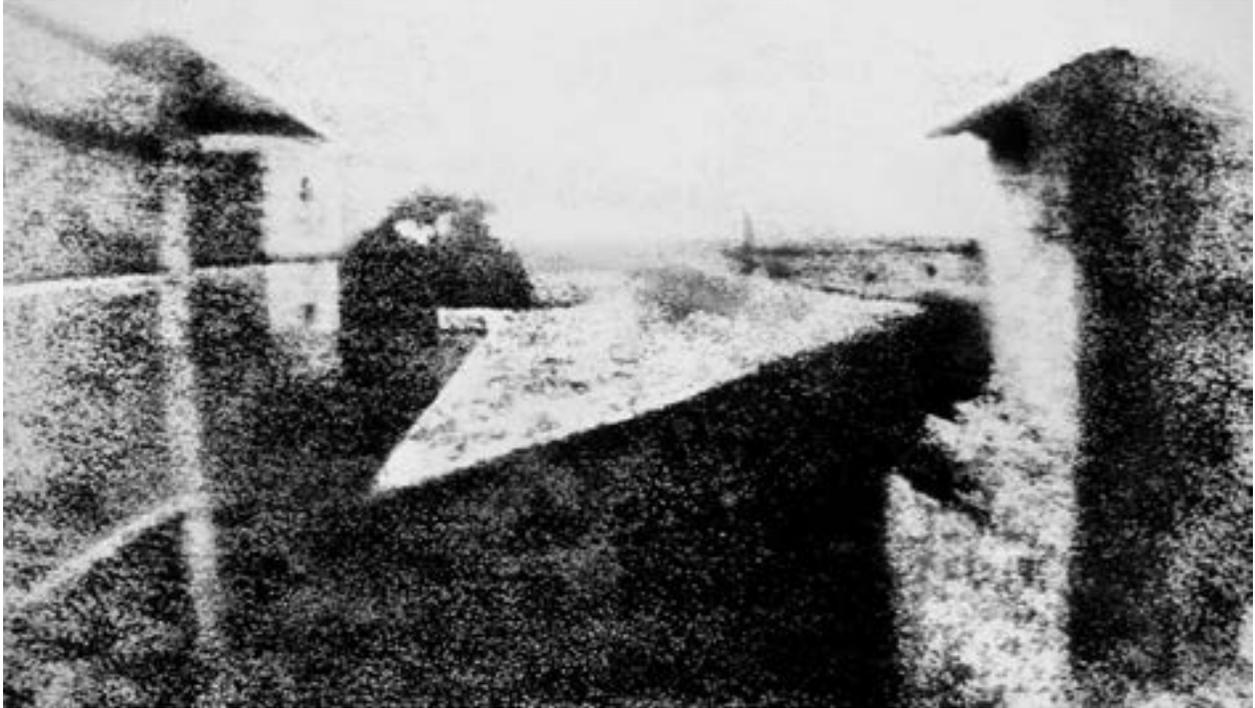
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# Introduction

By Alex Walker



A view from a window (1826) by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce

The image above is believed to be the oldest surviving photograph.

It was created by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826 at Saint-Loup-de-Vareennes, France, and is believed to be an eight-hour exposure taken from his lofty farmhouse window. It's a remnant from a time when creating a single image was an exercise in slow, painstaking magic. A competent painter may have finished more quickly.

When the traditional photography industry hit its peak in 2000, we were taking over 85 billion photographs annually. In 2014, it is estimated that over **1 trillion photos** were shared on across Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, WeChat and the world's social media networks.

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And that only accounts for the photos we *shared!*

It's clear that in 2015, it's never been easier to get access to imagery and other design resources. But that doesn't mean we are out of challenges.

Copyright and intellectual property become bigger issues as technology makes it easier to track down infringing content. Arguably the biggest challenge for designers today is simply finding the resources you need amongst the oceans of possible options. The truth is that an almost limitless choice of typography, images and color can do just as much to freeze us, as it can to inspire.

This short guide is designed to help you tackle some of the key challenges web designers face in 2015.

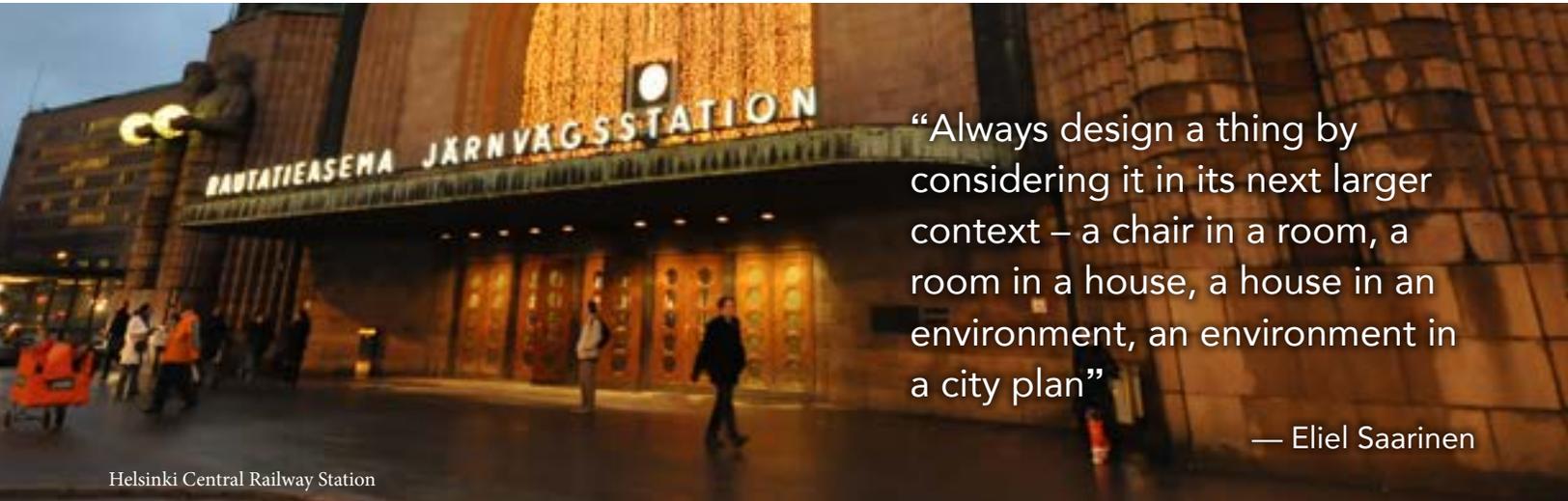
Enjoy!

Alex Walker  
Design & UX Editor  
SitePoint

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# Creating Style Guides for Web Design

By Gabrielle Gosha



Helsinki Central Railway Station

“Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context – a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan”

— Eliel Saarinen

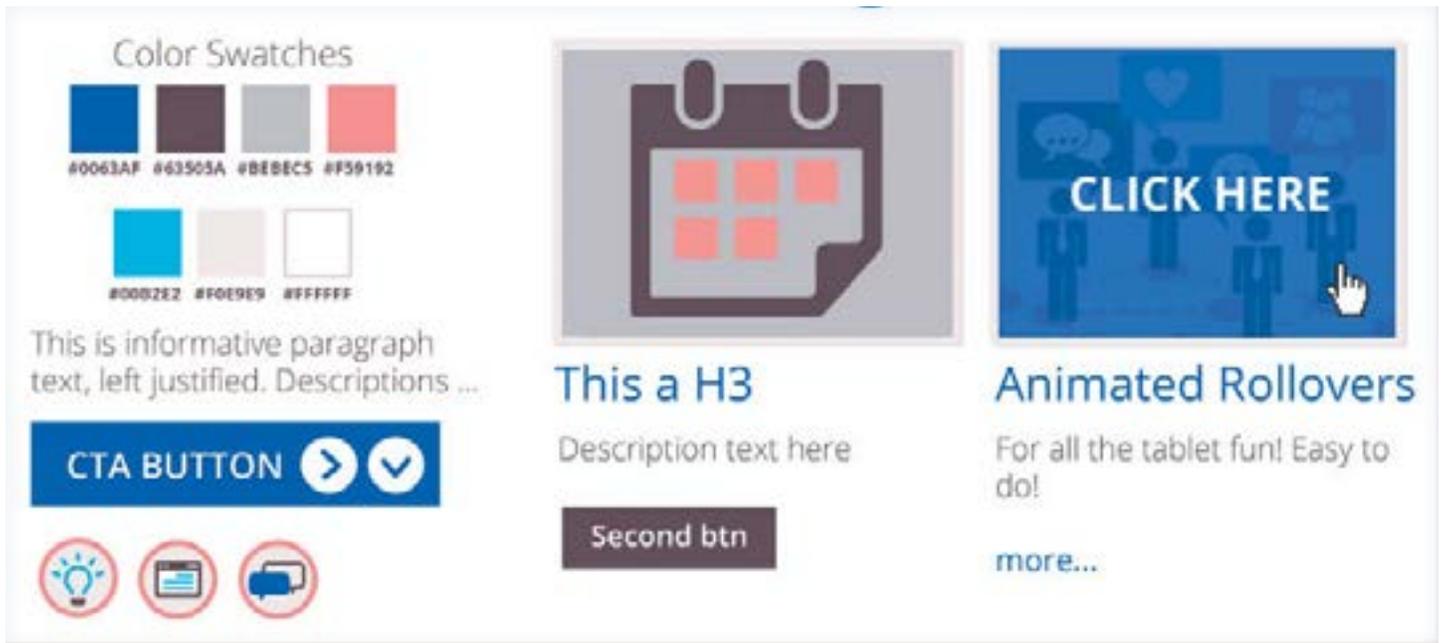
The quote above is from a wonderful, 20th-century Finnish architect called [Eliel Saarinen](#) – and that’s his train station in central Helsinki. While Eliel was specifically talking about architecture, his is a concept that applies to all type of design from sculpture to culinary arts to landscaping to web design.

The unique challenge with web design is trying to get a clear overview of your whole site and its components. Unlike a building, there’s no easy to way to stand back and look at an entire website to get some context.

## So, what do you do?

This is why style guides are so important in web projects. They are often the only way to get an overview of all the components of your site in a single place.

This is why today’s article will be a quick crash course in style guides for web design. Hopefully by the end you’ll be able to create your own for your in-progress or dream site and be able to design a guide that can be edited later for future use and expansion.



## What is a Style Guide?

A style guide is simply the definitive visual documentation for a project, and outlines the rules you set for your brand. It's a set of design guidelines that can be as simple as a one-pager for a small site, right up to Coke's 150-page tome covering umbrella panels and truck painting requirements.

A style guide, for the most part, will map out the rules of all elements, graphics, colors and other related parts that encompass your design and brand.

All in all the style guide is the mother of references and a blueprint to help you maintain consistency from start to finish. No matter what part of your design you're working on the style guide will and should have a guideline or rule to make your job a lot easier. If it doesn't then it isn't a complete style guide.

## Researching Your Brand

Knowing your baby is the first step of developing a style guide. If you don't know anything then chances are you're going to be running to the design ER telling a specialist you "just did something and prayed it would work". So if you have to spend a day, a week or a month to truly understand your brand then do it.

Sure it seems like a boring task but it will be more than worth it. You have to understand the mission goals, statement and the face behind the site.

These understandings will tell you whether York Whiteletter or Bebas Neue in mango peach on a pastel blue background will work on not.

For more on brand research, you can hop over and check out Richa Jain's great article on [Creating a Brand Identity](#).

						
	T-BAR HONEY	T-BAR HONEY				
PANTONE	PMS 718 U	PMS 7408 U	PMS 7534 U	PMS COOL GRAY 6 U	PMS 5275 U	PMS BLACK 5U
CMYK	17-75-93-0	9-53-83-0	12-12-22-0	34-29-31-0	57-57-46-14	55-63-48-75
WEB	D06134	E38B44	E0D7C5	AEAAA6	73676F	291620

T-Bar Honey's Style Guide

## Configuring the Color Palette

Color is a good place to start your style guide.

When deciding your colors it's best to use no more than three core colors, but feel free to branch out as much as you need on shade variations per color.

Your style guide should always reflect the hex codes as opposed to using a name. What *you* may consider canary yellow may not be viewed the same by a collaborator. Most people will go off of the color name or hex code instead of the image.

Along with your hex codes for screen work, it's always useful to provide CMYK values as well as the Pantone color codes – even if they aren't required immediately.

With your color preferences listed, you will most

certainly need to specify when and where a color may be used, and any exceptions. This may not be critical with a small site, but you should do it nonetheless.

Rules and exceptions cover situations like:

- What happens in black and white settings?
- Is color or monotone preferred in small formats?
- What happens in reversed settings (light on dark)?



## Font Selection

Inconsistent type usage is one of the most common design faux-pas on the web, so consistency in your use of type should be some one of the first rules you set.

Not only are fonts inconsistencies tacky but they decrease legibility, particularly for people with vision impairment.

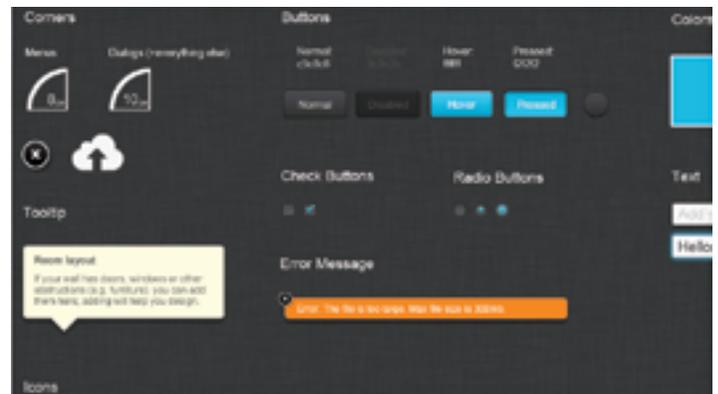


Try to stick to no more than three font types in your design. When choosing your fonts, decide your primary font, the secondary and then (maybe) a tertiary font.

In other words, pick what font will host the main content, the font for your headings and the font for all those smaller areas not covered. Don't forget to specifically list what sizes each font can be maxed out to and the smallest it is allowed to be.

## Defining Buttons and Icons

No matter the style of buttons you are using or trend they are abiding by, you need to set a design rule. Most sites have their own custom buttons so this is important especially if you are doing vastly different from the competitors.

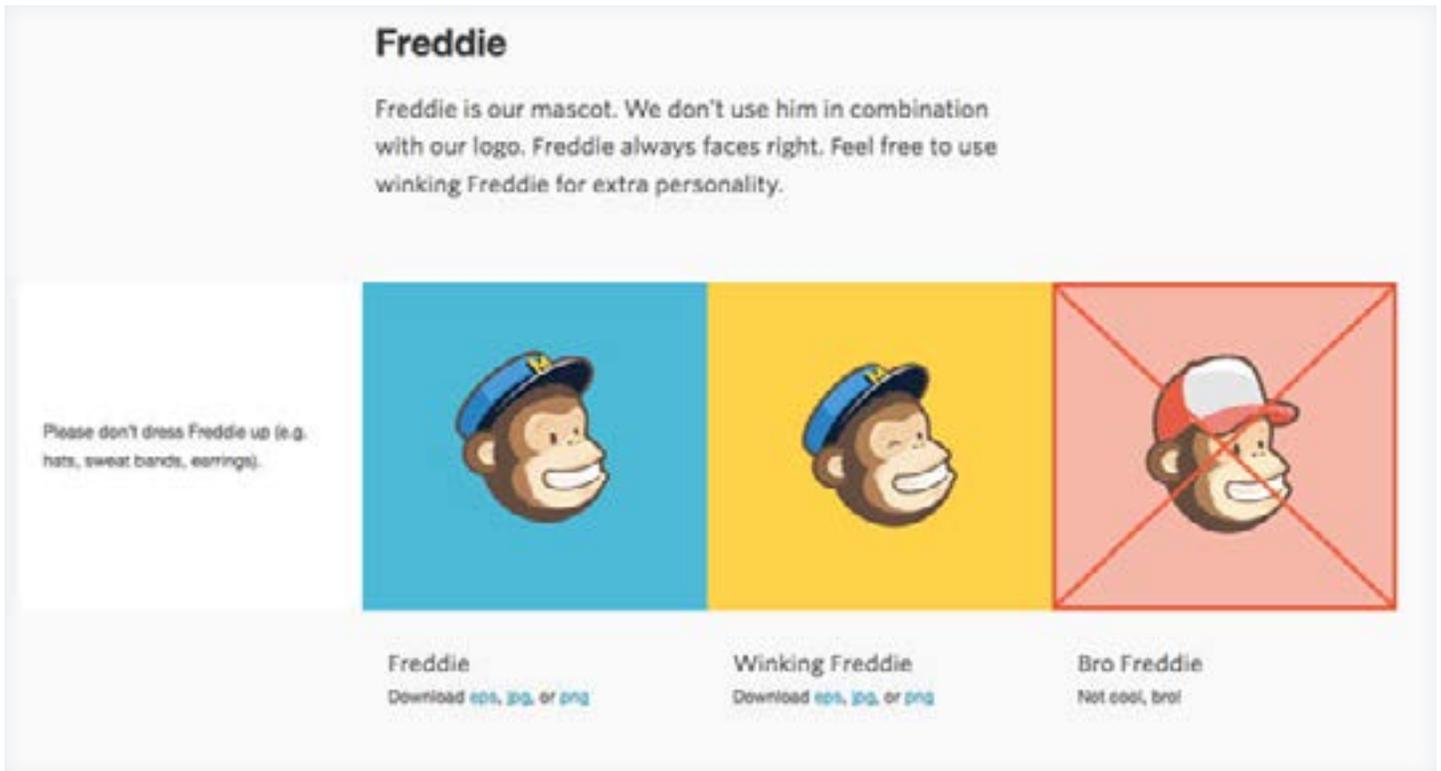


Buttons

As with your fonts, your buttons and icons need usage guidelines. There should be a clear graphic distinction on your guide between your primary and secondary buttons.

As far as your icons go, they should adhere to their own specific rules including their maximum and minimum pixel guidelines listed either beside or inside of an example image.

Color and any further style applied to your icon will be based around your color palette and general voice of the site so make sure to double check to make sure everything lines up.



Mailchimp set rules for using Freddie.

## Imagery and Video Specifics

Your style guide should cover as much as it can including images. Image guidelines are typically created during collaborative efforts where you may be working with writers and designers who are posting and adding content to your site. This will help keep your site looking consistent.

Imagery is subjective but typically for your style guide you want to set size and data constraints. If your site follows a more vintage feel you may want to note that all images should feature a muted color palette. Another site may require that all images must be 500px, 300dpi and be highly saturated.

Videos may also be treated the same but with

slightly different rules. One type of style guide may require that all videos must be from Vimeo and not YouTube with the exception of YouTube videos that are 720p and above and under five minutes. In essence image and video specifications from size to content come down to the brand just like most of the other elements.

## Give a Voice to the Copy

Since brand identity is important you will want to make sure there is a style guide how the “voice” of your content should be. This is more important for larger sites as the creator of a small site that they solely run typically already knows how the character of their site.



Some style guides give directions for the tone of the copywriting.

Your brand research will come into play when it comes to constructing an outline of how the copy should be written at all times. The voice of the copy will let users know how formal or informal the people behind the site are as well as whether or not this site is really for them.

Note that your style guide should not be a dictator in regards to *what* is written – just how.

For instance, a site targeting the homeless may strive to always maintain a thoughtful, positive and warm voice. For more help and reading on how copy can be worked into the guideline check out MailChimp's Voice and Tone.

Gabrielle Gosha



Gabrielle is a creative type who works as a freelance graphic designer, animator, photographer and filmmaker. She has worked doing various jobs from designing logos to filming commercials and animating music videos for both domestic and international music artists.

## Extras

More recently, there has been a movement towards automatically generating a style guide as you code your website. While you could argue this is a somewhat backward approach to guide production, it certainly guarantees that up-to-date documentation is always maintained.

Guide generators exist for a range of technologies:

- **Node.js** [StyleDocco](#)
- **Gulp** [KSS](#)
- **Ruby** [LivingStyleGuide](#)
- **PHP** [Barebones](#)

## The Final Word

Knowing how to create and apply a style guide can not only boost your workflow, but also your design confidence. Designing your own personal guide really doesn't take that long and can be a fun and creative process. Not only do you learn to better edit your work, but you also come to understand your brand more deeply than any simple mission statement could ever teach you.

Give it a go and see what you can come up with.

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# Copyright 101: The 10 Things to Know About Using Imagery

By Sean Hammond

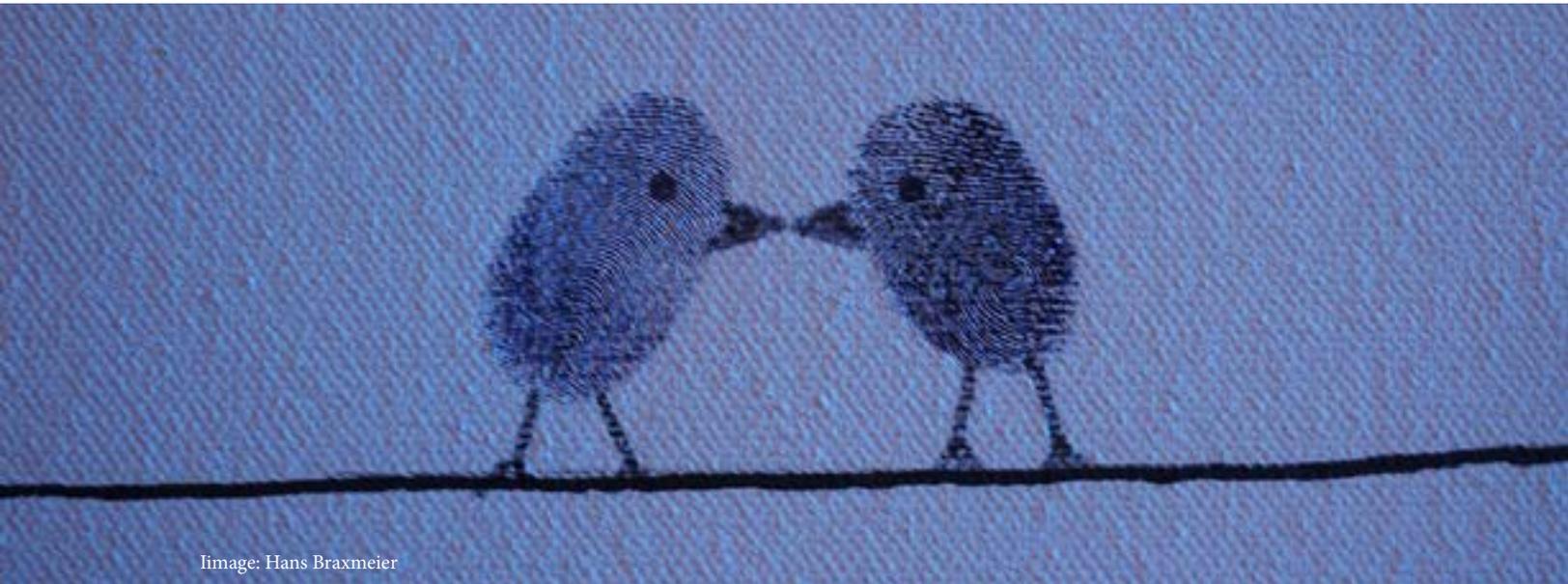


Image: Hans Braxmeier

There's nothing more terrifying to a client – or more embarrassing to your agency – than receiving a cease and desist letter, often demanding a large settlement, for alleged copyright infringement.

To avoid potential litigation, crippling settlements, and loss of credibility- refresh yourself with a basic copyright guideline and avoid common pitfalls.

It's important to note that while I have extensive copyright experience, I am not a lawyer. Any advice or opinions are purely for your consideration.

Lets look at where we stand.



# Copyright law for us normal folk

## 1: What is copyright?

Copyright is legal protection given to content (photos, music, video, writing, etc.) creators for the unauthorized use or duplication of their content.

## 2: Where does it apply?

*Everywhere.* Even if the content has not been copyrighted (legally registered), that doesn't mean it is free to use or in the public domain. Protection is available to both published and unpublished works.

## 3: Is there such thing as a Global Copyright?

No. Every country enforced their own copyright laws. While treaties exist between some countries that support one another's law, each country has their own rules. One common theme rings true: if you don't own a license, you can't use it.

## 4: But what if I was unaware of the infringement

Ignorance is not an excuse and you will be held liable, whether the infringement was intentional or not. **Period.**

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## 5: Who is held responsible for the infringement?

The legal owner of the website. Even if the owner hired a designer / developer, the website owner is responsible for everything on that site. That's not to say an owner won't turn around and hold a developer responsible in a separate civil case, if the infringement was the developer's fault. In regards to the Internet specifically, here is what is protected under U.S. Copyright Law:



- Original text
- Graphics
- Audio
- Video
- HTML, code, and any other unique markup language sequences

All other unique elements that make up the original nature of the material.

## 6: While creating a website, you CANNOT:

- Put the contents of another person or organization's website on your site. You *CAN* quote or paraphrase limited amounts, if you give credit to the original source and the location of the source.
- Incorporate other people's electronic material, such as e-mail, in your own document, without permission.
- Forward someone's e-mail to another recipient without permission.
- Change the context or edit someone else's digital correspondence in a way which changes the meaning.
- Duplicate logos, icons, graphics, photographs, videos, and music from other websites to your site.

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# Scared to death yet?

Feel like your hands are tied? There are plenty of alternatives out there, but it requires a little research and documentation to protect yourself. I recommend taking a screenshots of the terms of use, licensing agreements, and sourcing where you acquired any content.

## 7: Here are the five common licensing terms you'll come across:

- **Freeware** – copyrighted, free to use software. You are allowed to share, but you cannot manipulate or sell without consent.
- **Shareware** – copyrighted, free to use software, however a donation is expected for continued use and support. Accreditation must be given and you are allowed to duplicate / share without consent.
- **Fair Use** – allows copyrighted works to used without permission in a limited way for educational purposes and review.

The application *cannot* negatively affect the economic interests of the copyright holder. For instance, you can write a review of the image, but you can't post the actual image for others to view. Beware, 'Fair Use' laws are vague and open to a lot of interpretation, though courts generally rule in favor of the copyright owner.

- **Creative Commons** – free to use but you MUST follow the rules of license. You must always attribute the creator. Some content may be modified, some may not. Some may require that you allow others to equally share your new modified work. Some licenses allow commercial use, most do not.
- **Public Domain** – This includes facts, ideas, and methods of operation. It also covers creative works whose copyright has expired (i.e. Mark Twain novels).

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Also any works created by a U.S. Government employee within the scope of their employment. This includes works such as NASA photos and images from the Official White House Press Photographer.

**That's all great, but how can you create a fantastic looking website filled with rich photography and graphics?**

### **a). Create your own**

Generating and creating your own content is the safest way to protect yourself, and is becoming increasingly easier and less expensive to produce as technology develops. Most of us own smart phones, point and shoot digital cameras, and have some form of photo editing software.

With an old lamp, and a few, free photographic lighting lessons, you can begin to develop a stock photography library that you will be able to use throughout your career.

You could even consider selling and licensing your images to others who aren't as ambitious.

### **b). If you're a freelancer, dedicate 1 day a month to taking photos**

Just be aware of your background and lighting, and take simple images of calculators, telephones, speakers, mobile phones, handshakes, money, etc.

It can save you a lot of money and heartache in the long run.

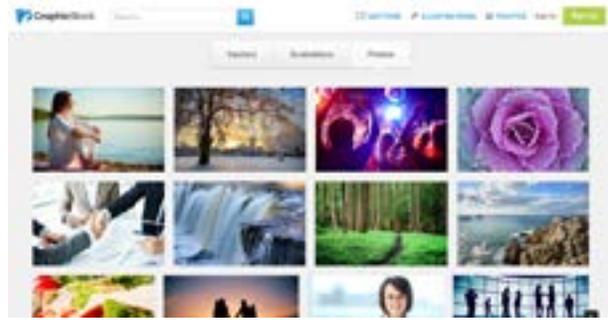
### **c). Contact a photographer directly**

Establish a relationship with a photographer and obtain a license in writing allowing you to use their image(s). There are plenty of amateurs on Instagram and DeviantArt that would be honored for the exposure.

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## d). Stock photography websites

This is scary because you're not only paying, but relying on a third party to provide legally licensed images. Trusted stock providers such as [GraphicStock.com](https://www.graphicstock.com) provide huge libraries of royalty-free graphics and images for a comparatively cheap yearly subscription.



GraphicStock.com

However, if you read almost any microstock photography website's terms and conditions (even the big ones), you'll find that they release themselves from any legal responsibility concerning your use of the image.

Even if you purchased an image, you could still be held liable for copyright infringement, if the microstock company you purchased from didn't originally obtain that image properly / legally.

Remember, sole responsibility of infringement rests on the owner of the website. The court of law has no sympathy for ignorance. Claiming that you didn't know that the microstock company was selling an illegal image, or even scamming you, will not work as a defense.

Moreover, you released the microstock company from all legal responsibility when you agreed to their terms and conditions when you downloaded the image from their website.

With this said, there are multiple scams on the internet that sell illegal photos. There are also many companies that try to bait you into infringement settlements without ever legally owning the image themselves. This isn't pure paranoia.

Google any of the largest stock photography companies, — Getty Images and Corbis — and you'll find photographers suing these companies over photos that were never licensed to their databases. Even Getty Images threatened litigation to website owners over images they don't properly own.

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## 9: Ok. So, who can you trust?

I'm not going to be cynical and say no one. But I am going to encourage you to:

- Always keep your receipts and invoices
- File away those snapshots of the terms of use, license information, and any service claiming to be “royalty free.”

Having documentation will only help should an issue arise down the road. And just so you know, there is not an “official” public domain database.

While sites can compile public domain images, buyer beware of sites claiming public domain. You're relying on the honesty and accuracy of the database owner to properly vet their work.

## 10: One final thing to consider when developing a website

Be extremely careful when using photos from or included in a template. Even if you paid for the template, you are buying the code and layout, not the images. Those images are not licensed to you or to the new website you are creating. Often those photos and graphics were licensed to the original template author **ONLY**, and are used to “demonstrate” what typical content might look like in the template.

Now that probably feels like you just got out of a workplace harassment seminar and can't even say hi to a co-worker, here's the golden rule to live by:

### ***Create the content yourself.***

If you can't, make sure you have acquired the proper license and have it in writing. I know that Google Images is so easy and tempting, but it's not worth it.

While Google's “Creative Commons Search” feature might be a good place to start, the burden of proving that the image has been accurately tagged Creative Commons (and

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which license it falls under) rests on you.

Remember, not all Creative Commons licenses allow commercial use.

*“There’s some fine print, of course. This feature identifies images that are tagged with licenses that authorize reuse. You’ll still have to verify that the licensing information is accurate. We can help you take the first step towards finding these images, but we can’t guarantee that the content we linked to is actually in the public domain, or available under the license.”*

– Official Google Statement

## And Always Keep in Mind..

Photo matching and recognition software is better than ever and it’s only a matter of time before the robots match up infractions. Some even speculate that companies such as Getty Images, actually bait search engines with false information to generate fresh copyright settlements, instead of selling images.

It’s certainly more in their financial interests to find and capitalize upon possible infringements, than it is to properly vet databases and eliminate it.

Be mindful of the common mistakes and take the proper precautions to protect you and your clients. There’s nothing more upsetting than seeing a threatening looking letter demanding thousands of dollars in settlement.

### Sean Hammond

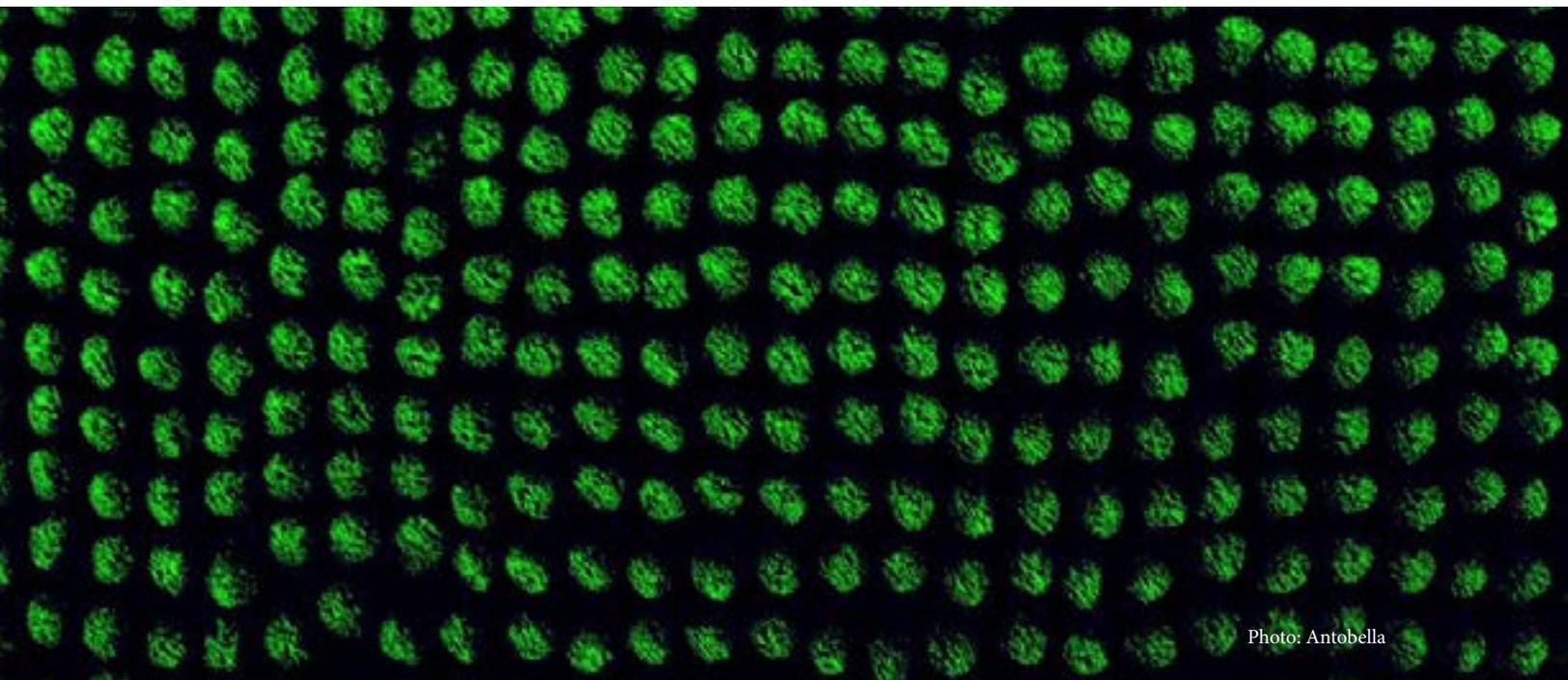


Sean owns and operates the new media company, [Surf Star Media](#). He has been designing and developing sites since 2004 and has been freelance writing for even longer. He has a keen eye for artistry and talent, having worked for Sony Music Entertainment, Warped Tour, and Major League Baseball. When untied from the computer, you can find him whipping up a mean dinner on the grill or exploring the Rocky Mountains.

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# What Do Super High-Res Displays Mean for Your Website?

By James George



When retina displays hit the market, web design experts and web developers gasped at the thought of having to deal with a new resolution.

From a web design standpoint, it was a nightmare. Responsive design dealt with content for different screen sizes and device widths, but pixel ratios were a whole new ball game. Now Apple is releasing iMacs with 5K displays and a lot of web designers are sweating at the thought of scaling everything up once again.



The problem with this comes from the fact that the main consumers for these types of machines are web and graphic designers. We are always upgrading our equipment. We're only human, and we are looking for the most features for our money. The problem is that in order for graphics to appear crisp, so they'll need to create images that are 4 times as large in pixel size.

## Problems Arise

There are several problems that arise when screen resolutions drastically increase. For Retina displays, images doubled in size. Now, with the 5K display, they doubled again, meaning they are 4 times larger than typical images.

## Bandwidth is a limited resource

Serving large images is fine when you're on your desktop computer with a high-speed internet connection. However, it's impossible to ignore the 80% of browsers who are looking at your site on a mobile device. 4X images will crush 3G and 4G internet connections. You will have to serve smaller images to those devices for quick load times and to save as much bandwidth as possible.

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## Another Size to Remember

Not only is it rough on bandwidth, but it's another image size you have to remember. When building a website, you'll have to accommodate those devices, creating an image size optimal for those devices. If you're concerned with conserving resources, it's an issue. A handful of 1-4MB images may not cause an issue, but what if you have thousands?

## How Can We Address These Issues?

Fortunately, our field is working on solutions and workarounds to increasing image sizes. It would make our jobs more difficult to create multiple versions of sites or pages, but with simple scripts and options, we can serve the best version of our site and its files to the right people.

## Images

The newer versions of Photoshop (CS5+) have the ability to export an image in multiple sizes at once. This single feature can save you a few minutes per image of saving it at different sizes, including 2X for Retina displays. All that is needed is for Adobe to add 4X to their size options. It will be as simple as clicking a button and saving the image to a folder.

## Media Queries

Media queries will allow you to serve different images to different devices with different pixel ratios, whether they are 1, 2, or 4. This will give you some degree of control over images looking crisp on the right device.

```
@media only screen
  and (min-device-width: 320px)
  and (max-device-width: 480px)
  and (-webkit-min-device-pixel-ratio: 2) {
}
@media only screen
  and (min-device-width: 768px)
  and (max-device-width: 1024px)
  and (orientation: portrait)
  and (-webkit-min-device-pixel-ratio: 1) {
}
@media screen
  and (device-width: 601px)
  and (device-height: 906px)
  and (-webkit-min-device-pixel-ratio: 1.331)
  and (-webkit-max-device-pixel-ratio: 1.332) {
}
```

# Picturefill

A RESPONSIVE IMAGE POLYFILL



The `picture` element, `sizes` and `srcset` attributes, and associated features allow web developers to deliver an appropriate image to every user depending on a variety of conditions like screen size, viewport size, screen resolution, and more. Picturefill enables support for the `picture` element and associated features in browsers that do not yet support them, so you can start using them today!

Picturefill development is sponsored by [Filament Group](#) and [Bocoup](#), and maintained by the [Picturefill Team](#).

## CONTRIBUTING, BUG REPORTS, AND MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the development of Picturefill and how you can file bugs or contribute fixes, check out [the project on GitHub](#).

This lifesaver allows you to serve images to every user, depending on a variety of conditions you may encounter, with all of the different devices out there. [PictureFill](#) handles situations like screen size, viewport size, screen resolution, and more. It enables the element feature, as well as workarounds for browsers where it isn't supported.

## Other Issues

With all of these issues to address and things to consider, as well as the solutions we've covered so far, there is still the issue with the weight of your site. With these huge image sizes, your site's weight is going to drastically increase. Most hosting companies allow limited resources. Not everyone can afford abundant hosting. The biggest issue is keeping your site's weight down.

## SVG

SVG browser support is constantly evolving, and, if viable for your project, is a great way to cut down on weight. SVG file sizes are small, so whenever you can use them, it will help trim the fat on your site. Responsive SVGs means that the same graphic resizes to fit the screen size and different devices.

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## Image Compression

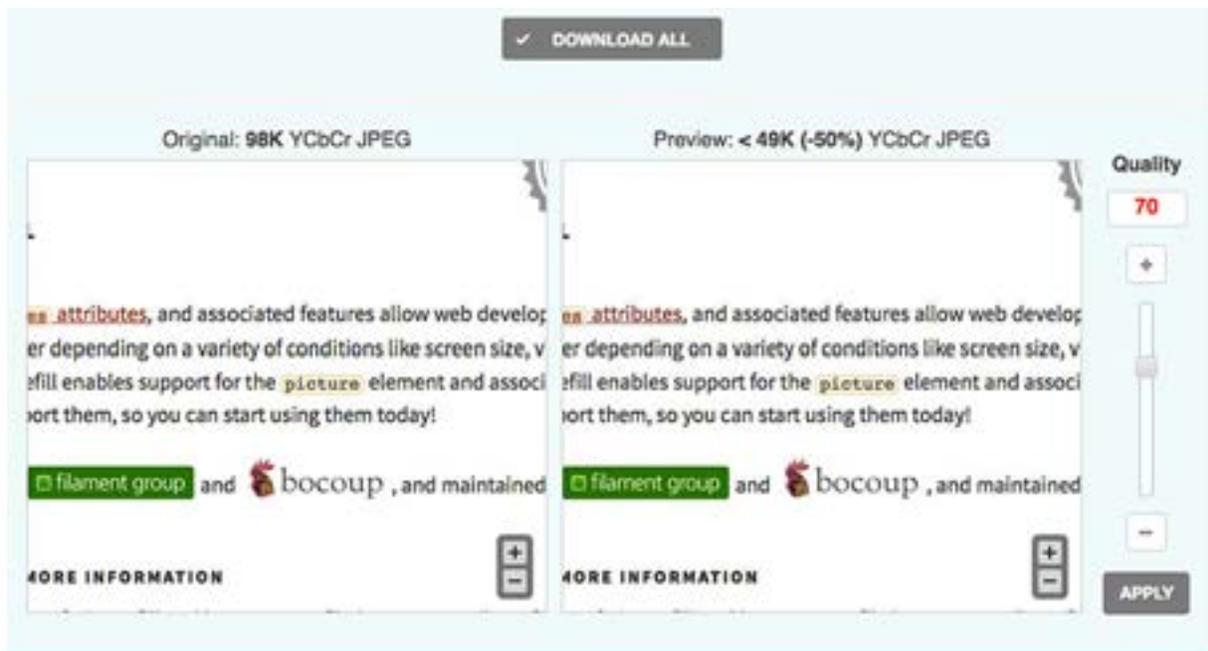


Image compression is another way to cut down on the weight of your site. Just because your images are large and you have multiple copies, it doesn't mean they have to be full size.

There are several image compression services available to use and they are free, too. The top choices are [WP Smushit](#), [TinyPNG](#) and [Optimizilla](#). You'll want to choose the right one for you. You may want to try them out yourself to decide which one gets the best results for your images.

Just as an example, in the image above, I reduced the quality to 70%, but I couldn't notice a visual difference, but the file size was reduced by a significant 50%.

## Services

If you're concerned with eating up too many resources, you can also serve those images from a service such as Amazon Web Services, which is an affordable way to serve files without worrying about hosting limitations. This is a case where you only pay for what you use, which can help serve a lot of files quickly. It really depends on the size of your site.

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## Conclusion

There is no question that screen sizes and resolutions are increasing. Technology is ever-growing and ever-changing, so the need to accommodate the newest devices will always be a challenge. It's important to note that web technology is growing with it.

### James George



James George is a professional web and graphic designer. James is an expert in design, and a professional web designer, with a special interest in WordPress. Founder of [Design Crawl](#), James has been a professional designer since 2005.

It won't be long before we have a rock-solid system in place for handling and serving different images for different screen sizes and pixel ratios.

In the meantime, it is important to keep our sites as lightweight as possible, using the methods we have available.

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# Design Theory: The Rule of Thirds

By Brian Platt



There are plenty of contrasting theories on the topic of design composition. You’ve likely heard people touting the importance of embracing white space and creating harmony through size variation, yet you’ve probably only ever heard one such theory referred to as a rule: the rule of thirds.

Despite the imposing name, the rule of thirds isn’t so much a rule graphic designers and illustrators have to—or, even, should—follow with any certainty; there are infinite reasons to break it. However, it is somewhat of a rule where our brains are concerned, as we’re naturally programmed to perceive more interest and attraction from appropriately oriented designs.

The history of the rule of thirds began long ago in 1783, when a painter by the name of Sir Joshua Reynolds described his thoughts on the “grand style” of the imperfect.

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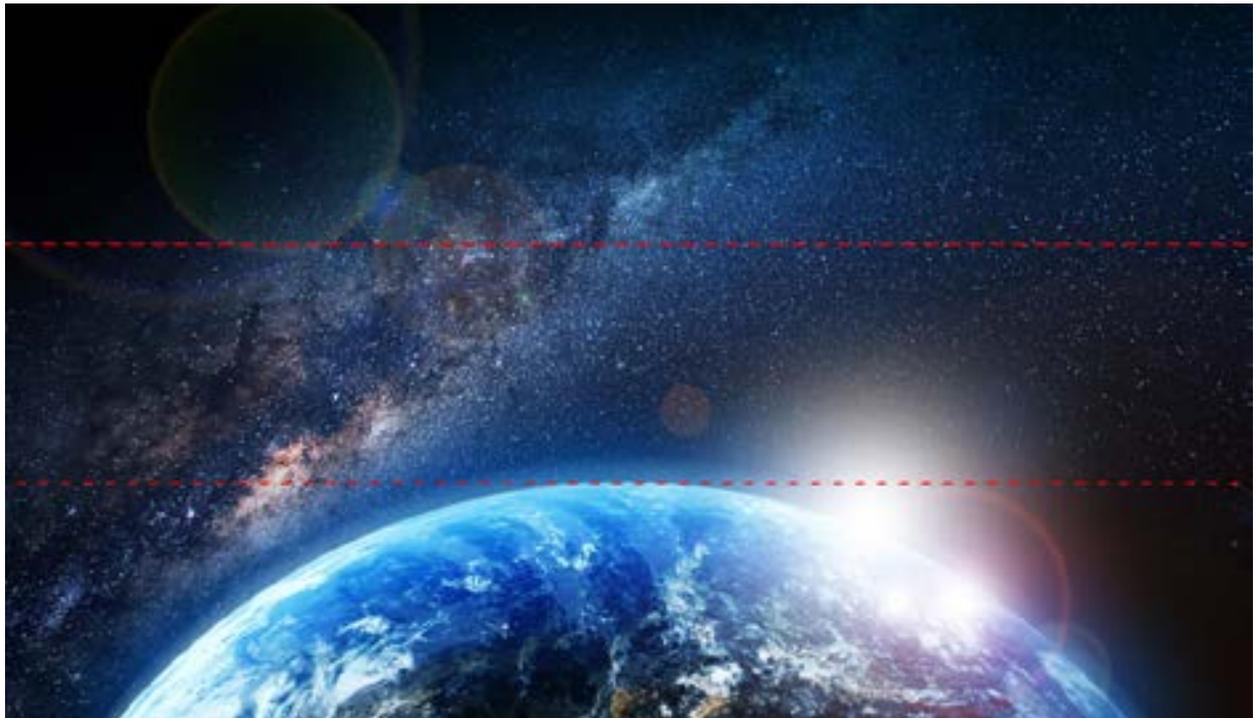
Sir Reynolds believed that paintings were uninteresting when perfectly centered. Their equal portions gave everything equal importance and therefore gave the eyes no hierarchy of focus or suggestion of movement.



Perfectly centered: Reynolds believed centered paintings resulted in an 'awkward suspension' of the subject.

He called the result an “awkward suspension” of the subject.

However, if he divided the same design into thirds as opposed to halves, he found, the resulting contrast led the eyes of viewers more easily from one distinct area of his paintings to another.



This is the reason you'll often find horizon lines on the lower third of a canvas as opposed to the direct center; the result is generally more visually pleasing and comes across as more dynamic.

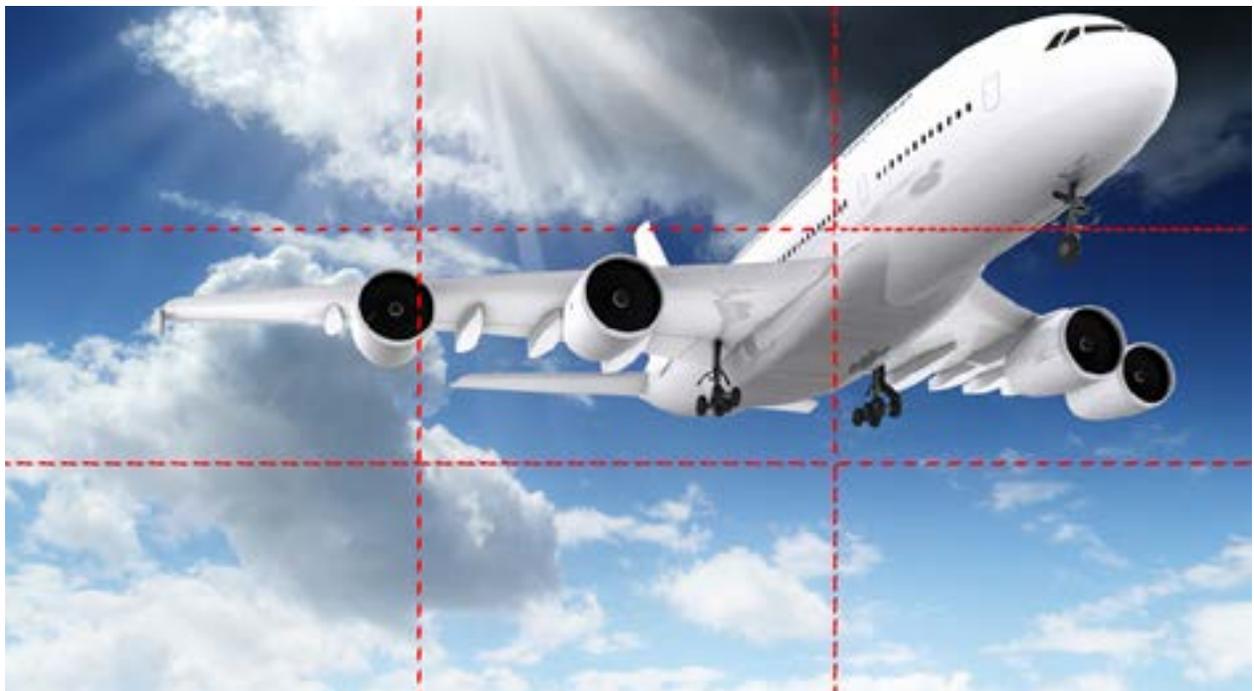
Taking the rule of thirds further, the same idea applies to vertical composition as well as horizontal. Typically, this is expressed in the form of a nine-section grid within which intersecting lines mark areas of particular attraction.



Intersections are important 'power points' in your composition.

Look closer at the same planetary sunrise graphic, and you'll find the sun aligns perfectly with both horizontal and vertical thirds; this is no coincidence.

In fact, whether you're looking at your favorite paintings or stock images involving any subject from [commercial jets](#) to [corporate puzzles](#) and [bicycles at sunset](#), you'll find a great deal of design elements intersect with these "power points" that come together to make the rule of thirds.





None of this means symmetry isn't beautiful, but it is more effective in some places than others—and best [when used intentionally](#), and not as a go-to design theme.

### Brian Platt

Brian is manager of brand development, web site traffic and content and social representation among multiple different sites representing [VideoBlocks](#), [AudioBlocks](#) and [GraphicStock](#).



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# How to Create Stunning Photo Manipulations Using Stock Imagery

By Kaitlyn Ellison



Photo manipulation has come a long way from tweaking celebrity photos to give them brighter smiles. It's an entire art form, one used from something as common as combining buildings to create a unique city skyline or collage—one of those so-hot-right-now faux double exposures—to making complex imaginary worlds come to life.

But some photo manipulations are much more successful than the others. The trick? Attention to detail. You can have the wildest imaginary world pictured in your mind, but if you don't know how to find the materials to create a work of art from it, and how to fit them together, you're not going to be able to make your image come to life.

Photo manipulation is one of those art forms that takes a lot of practice to perfect, so the sooner you start practicing, the better!



Graphic artist Magda Woźniak has mastered the art of image selection. She's able to treat wildly different types of images in such a way that they all fit together perfectly.

## Selecting the Right Materials

When doing photo manipulations, it's important to find the right tools and materials to use as the basis of your work. While you can probably make up for some flaws in the imagery you use through this digital manipulation, the ideal is to work with the best quality images you can find from the start. Here are some important things to consider ...

### Lighting

This is one that you don't want to have to fake—though you can, at a pinch, with a powerful tool like Photoshop. The first thing that's going to throw a viewer off is multiple sources of light in the image. So when you're selecting stock imagery for your piece, give yourself an easier task by finding those that were photographed with similar lighting angles.

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## Color

A little bit easier to vary, as when elements are added to Photoshop in different layers, you have a lot of power to easily manipulate the tones. But it's still a good idea to find images that naturally display the colors you're looking for.

## Quality

How big are the images you're looking for? What's their resolution? Can you see any visible evidence of pixelation? Perform a check on every image to make sure you're using high-level graphics, particularly if you're going to be modifying them significantly yourself.

Here's some further reading on this topic:

- [How to develop your eye for stock photography](#)
- [Creating a Highly Detailed Steampunk Insect](#)

## Putting Your Elements Together

This is where the heavy-duty legwork comes in! You've got to structure your image so that it looks organic. This follows naturally if you're trying to create a realistic image for a website or brochure.

But even an image of a fantasy world will be more believable if it follows the laws of everyday physics.



Alex Samsonov has taken a whole series of disparate elements, cut them out and sized them proportionally to create a magical Arctic masterpiece.

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## Pick Your Poison

You have to decide if you're going to plan or improvise your piece. Designers all work in different ways. When creating an image that doesn't exist in the real world, some like to sketch everything in advance, then search for elements to fit. Others like to work off the cuff, knowing vaguely what the concept of the piece will be, searching for elements that inspire, then riffing off those with accompanying images.

## Keep Organized

When you start importing and isolating images to combine, the key to making any task like this manageable is organizing your layers. Name each layer for exactly what it is, and use folders as much as you can.

You're going to have to treat each layer individually, then combine certain layers into groups to modify. You'll thank yourself for not having to click through each layer to find the one you want to edit next.

## Details, Details, Details

It's tempting to take shortcuts when preparing each asset, but don't be too cavalier with the details. It can take a long time to get just the right cutout of a shape, for example, and it's easy to get a bit lazy and decide you can blend away your mistakes later.

But if you take just a little more time to refine your techniques at this stage, it'll make the next one—unifying the aesthetics of your image—much easier. So take that extra time to refine the edge of your *Magic Wand* or *Quick Selection*.

## Use These Tools

*Lasso*, *Magic Wand* and *Quick Selection* are three popular options for isolating certain parts of images. *Masks* are also a huge deal, particularly when you want to preserve detail.

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**Free Transform** will help you change the shape and perspective of your objects, with options like **Scale**, **Perspective**, **Rotate/Flip** and **Warp**.

The **Blur** tool, with the assistance of **Smudge**, **Clone Stamp**, **Healing/SpotHealing** and **Patch**, will help you blend objects together into one image.

Here's more reading on some cool ways to use these tools:

- [How to Create a Dark Mysterious Hideout from a Rough Sketch](#)
- [8 Ways to get the Selection you want in Photoshop](#)
- [Wrap dazzling effects around your subject in Photoshop](#)

## Adding Those Final Touches

OK—now you've got a bunch of pieces that proportionally fit together. The next step is to unify the aesthetics of your piece.

## Play to a Specific Look

Photo manipulation images all have their own distinctive look—such as dark and grungy, bright and polished, gauzy and surreal. (The examples in this article give a sense of the variety that's possible.)

Make sure you have a clear sense of what feeling you're trying to accomplish with an illustration, and use that as a guide for the color and texture decisions you make.



[Lambda 256](#) heavily uses details like color, texture and gradients to create a unique world.

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## Texture-ify

Speaking of which—don't forget about texture! It's something too many people overlook. Adding the right subtle texture to the various elements of your design will bring it up to that more realistic level, as pieces with a uniformly smooth surface can be eerily sterile.

### Kaitlyn Ellison

Kaitlyn is part of the Community Team at 99designs.com. She grew up in Boulder, CO and went to school at Northwestern University in Chicago. When she's not blogging, she spends her time having adventures and being generally creative. She's all about having new experiences as often as possible!



## Important Skills to Learn

**Adjustment Layers:** just learn all of these. They're the key to getting correct coloring! One handy tip is to pay attention to how different tools adjust shadow, midtone and highlights. Your light layers don't all have to be adjusted at the same level.

**Blending Modes** go hand-in-hand with the other tools mentioned above to help combine images. But they can also be a great way to combine other digital effects with your work, like brushes or textures.

**Brushes** can be very powerful tools to help create movement and flow within a photographic piece. They're also a great tool if you want to create a more abstract art piece with photographic components, allowing you to draw around the central objects in your illustration.



Kinga Britschgi uses all of these techniques to create magical Steampunk landscapes!

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## And Finally..

Here is some further reading on those special final touches that can bring your compositions to life:

- [Master the “grunge” look with this step-by-step Photoshop tutorial](#)
- [Creation an Emotional Abstract Photo Manipulation of a Rose](#)
- [Create a Floating Over-Grown “Tree House” in Photoshop](#)

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# Your Ultimate Resource Guide for Finding Legal Fonts

By Kaitlyn Ellison



Photo: jarmoluk

Like third-party imagery, fonts and typefaces are subject to licensing.

Proper usage of typefaces can be confusing, so the aim of this article is to help clarify what is and isn't ethical use, and to point you toward resources with information on how to use your preferred fonts legally.

## What Is a Font, and Can It Be Copyrighted?

The answer to this question is somewhat complicated, and comes down to a question of typeface versus font. A typeface is the collection of letters and symbols, styled to create a unified collection. A font is the software/mechanism used to produce the typeface.

In the United States, a typeface is not copyrightable, but can still be subject to design patent and trademark. The reasoning behind this is that a typeface's functionality eclipses

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its creativity. On the other hand, a font can be copyrighted, and must be licensed for use, as the software used to create the typeface is considered to have the requisite creativity for copyright.

## If I Outline a Typeface Using Design Software, I'm OK, Right?

With a couple of stipulations, yes. You still have to purchase a license for the font you're using. And you have to personally create the outline, because the actual outlining of the typeface—the combination of points you select to imitate the shape of the type—is copyrighted and belongs to the person who created it.



Photo: Nick Sherman (via Flickr)

## If I Can Outline the Font, Why Do I Need to Worry about Licensing at All?

You, as a user, have to purchase a license to the font in question in order to use it in your design and to outline it. Different fonts have different licenses with different rules, so you always have to check and see how you're allowed to use a given font.

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An EULA (end-user license agreement) is a license between the licensor and the purchaser of a font. You agree to it when you purchase the font, so you'd better know what you're agreeing to with your purchase.

## What to Ask about the Fonts You're Using

The EULA should refer to all of these points, so check for them carefully:

- Is this font legal to use in the context in which you're working?
- Can you use the font commercially? Can you use it in logo, print, web design? Not all fonts are created equally, so make sure you're using one in the right context.
- Can you edit or make modifications to the font in question? (Some fonts are allowed to be modified, and some are not.)
- Can you pass this font on to the client? (The answer is most likely no, but always double check.)

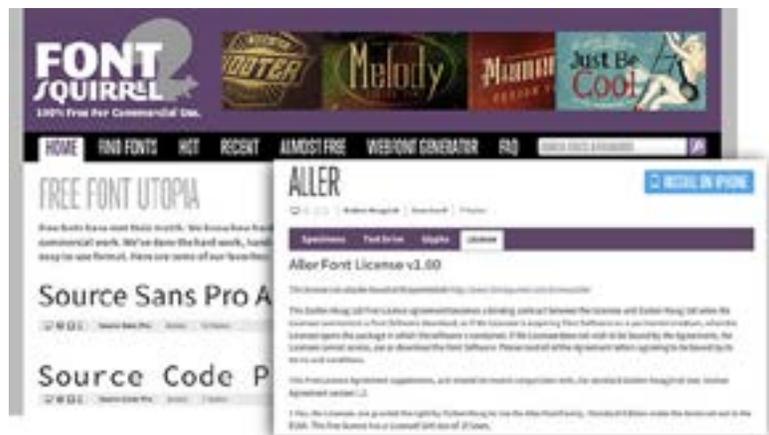
## What Are Good Resources for Finding Fonts?

There are hundreds of places to find fonts online. Here are some of the more dependable sites.

### Font Squirrel

[Font Squirrel](#) has a page dedicated to each font, complete with a button leading to licensing.

For example, the Aller typeface licensing can be found here.



# DaFont

[DaFont](#) doesn't offer complete licensing information on its site directly, but does provide links to the website of each font foundry so you can consult the original source. All you have to do is click on the creator's name or the word "site" next to it.



# MyFonts

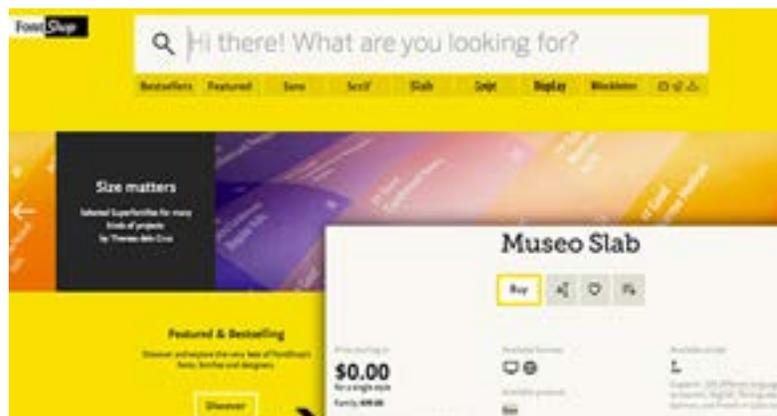
Finding the licensing on [MyFonts](#) is a little more difficult. It asks you to sign up as a member. You then select your font, and on the final page of purchase you're able to read through and check off the licensing agreement and terms of use for the font.



However, my recommendation is that you do a little bit of looking into the font foundry before you select a font at this site, as it may have more complete information on usage.

# FontShop

[Each font](#) has a dedicated page. If you scroll all the way to the bottom, underneath the options for purchase, there's a link to the EULA. More general information can be found on the [FontShop licensing page](#).



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## Conclusion

This all seems like a lot of work, but in the end, if you collect a set of fonts and do the necessary legal research, you're going to save both yourself and your client a lot of time and worry by knowing that you're using your type properly.

### Kaitlyn Ellison



Kaitlyn is part of the Community Team at [99designs.com](http://99designs.com). She grew up in Boulder, CO and went to school at Northwestern University in Chicago. When she's not blogging, she spends her time having adventures and being generally creative. She's all about having new experiences as often as possible!

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# Trending Type: Cool Free Font Roundup

By Alex Bigman



Photo: Unsplash

Here's a roundup of some beautiful, popular fonts that serve a wide range of purposes. Best of all, they're all free! Feast your eyes on them, and get to work with your own modifications.

## Serif Fonts

### Valentina

Valentina is described as “an antique, Spanish Didone”. How's that for an ampersand!

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Otama e.p.

Otama e.p. is a fashionable, modern Didone, described as being good for “selling expensive and fashionable things”.

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Weston

Weston is a rounded slab serif made for logos and headlines.

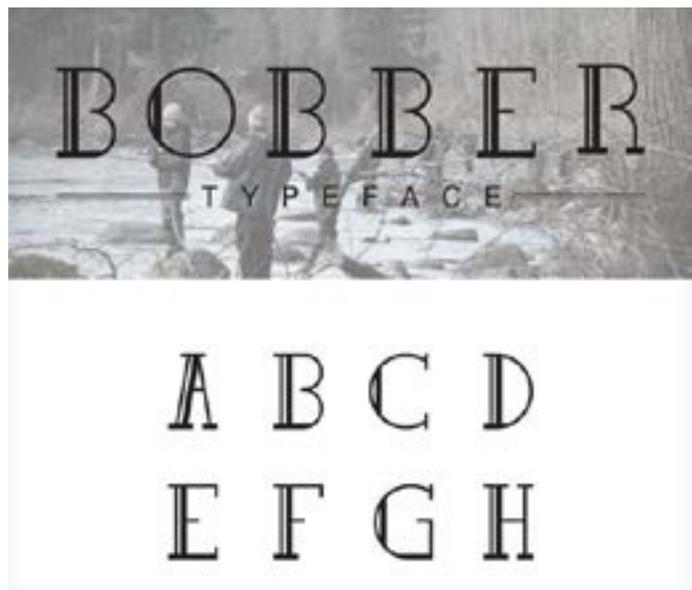
→ [Grab this font](#)



## Bobber

Bobber is a slab serif that evokes an early twentieth century style.

→ [Grab this font](#)



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## Museo Slab 500

Museo Slab 500 is subtle and elegant. This typeface is here to stay.

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Bree Serif

Bree Serif is a charming “upright italic”.

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Banda

Banda’s rounded nubs make it a “semi-serif” typeface. With some modifications, it’s perfect for logos. (Note that only the Regular font is free.)

→ [Grab this font](#)



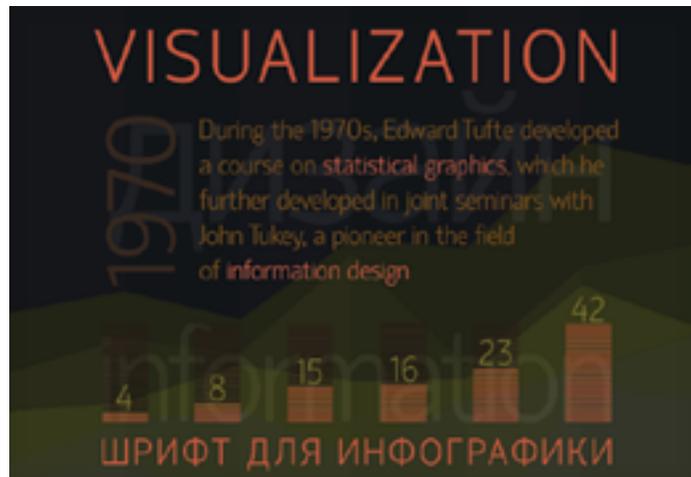
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# Sans-serif Fonts

## Hattori Hanzo

Hattori Hanzo is a supremely readable typeface made for infographics.

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Code

Code is great for pretty much everything.

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Circula

Circula is tall and rounded.

→ [Grab this font](#)



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## Exo

Exo a contemporary geometric font, and the product of a successful Kick-starter campaign.

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Cassandre

Cassandre is a typeface based on its namesake's iconic Art Deco posters.

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Ostrich Sans

This gorgeous sans-serif typeface has a very long neck and a great selection of styles and weights.

→ [Grab this font](#)



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## Static

This is monospaced, geometric typeface with a wide range of uses.

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Bebas Neue

This simple sans-serif typeface is definitely a keeper.

→ [Grab this font](#)



## Alex Bigman

Alex contributes from New York City on topics ranging from branding and typography to the history of design.



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# 6 Unique Geometric Fonts You Need in Your Toolkit

By Simone Sala

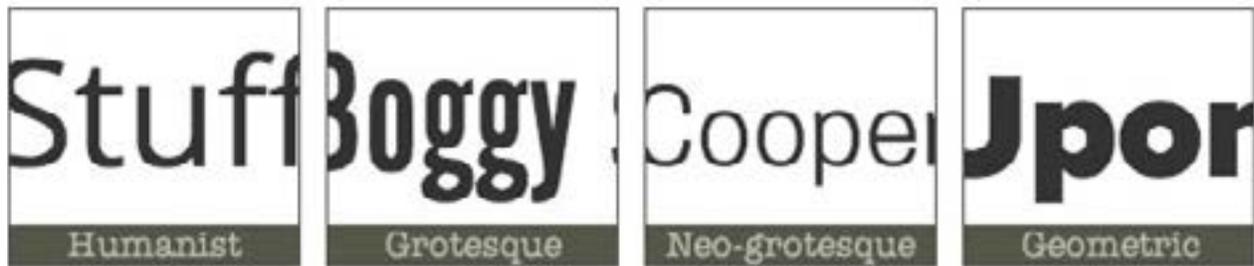


Image: jackmac34

Typography is one of the most dynamic and ever-changing areas of design and has a huge bearing on the overall UX of your work. Indeed, typography gives us the chance to evoke moods and feelings in the users just by selecting the appropriate fonts for the circumstance.

In both websites and mobile applications, sans-serif fonts are generally preferred for their lack of visual embellishments – serifs are thought to work better on paper than screen. This makes sans-serif a good fit for the flat design aesthetic while keeping the overall readability high.

But there are more categories than just serif and sans-serif. Sans-serif fonts can be subdivided into four categories: **Humanist, Grotesque Neo-grotesque & Geometric.**



Examples of Humanist Grotesque Neo-grotesque & Geometric fonts

In this article we're going to look at some designers who really know how to use geometric fonts well – and then we'll pick out a handful of the finest geometric fonts for use in our own projects.

## What Do We Mean By 'Geometric Fonts'?

As the name suggests, these fonts are based on simple geometric shapes such as circles and squares. Geometric fonts are used mainly for headings of printed works, but can also suit web or mobile design projects.

Experts trace the rise of geometric fonts to the [Bauhaus](#), [the German art school](#) which operated from 1919 to 1933. It is no coincidence that 'Futura', one of the most famous geometric fonts, was released in 1927 by Paul Renner, an artist strongly influenced by the Bauhaus movement.

One of the key principles of the Bauhaus was a strong focus on simplicity and function over superfluous decoration. Futura is a classy combination of cut-metal precision and understated elegance.



Futura by Paul Renner

## Geometric Fonts in the Wild

Let's have a look at some examples of how geometric typefaces can be used with good results.

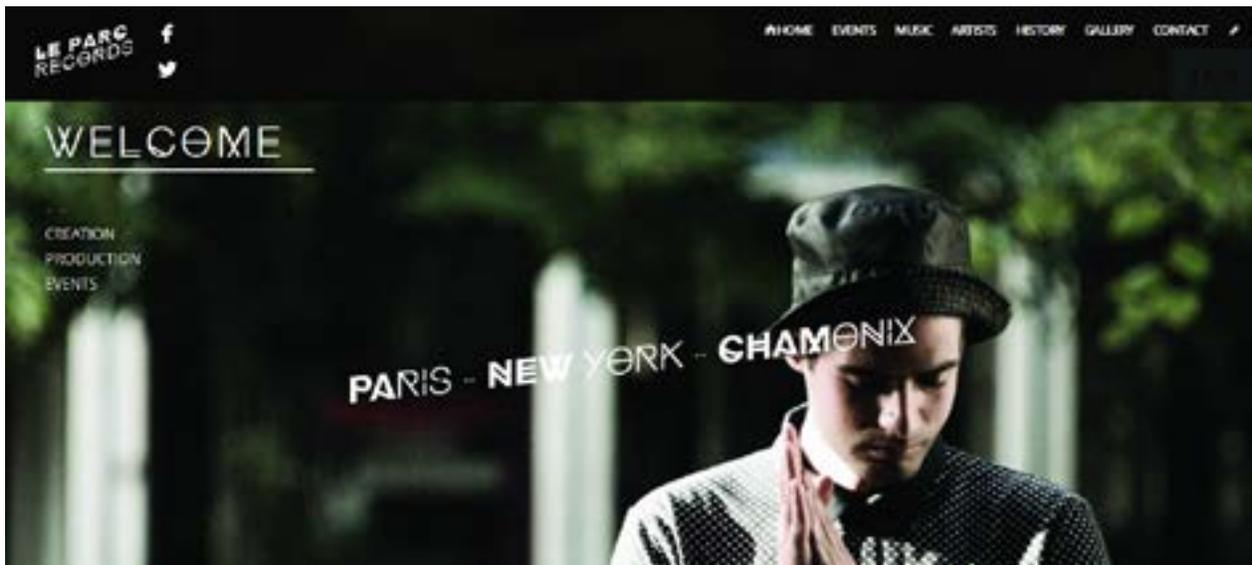
## Jova



[Jova](#) is a construction enterprise which is specialized in renovations of houses and shops.

Their website features an unconventional navigation menu which is based on a grid-style layout and it creates a professional, simple and refined look which goes well with the brand image. The designers decided to write the text with a geometric font: I think it is a good choice because the linearity of the subtle typeface reinforces the overall design.

## Le Parc Records



My second example is “[Le Parc Records](#)”, a music label. Here, the website is able to evoke a dark, contemporary, powerful mood thanks to the combination of rich background images

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and distinctive font choice.

Indeed, while the photography is spectacular, the typeface works beautifully to help bind the visuals together. Although the font is a bit bizarre, it is definitely attractive. The font is a geometric one which has no decorative serifs at the tips of the letters, but instead employs small inserts in some letters such as “O” and “X”.

This shows that geometric fonts not only work well in a sharp, elegant and clean setting like Jova, but also in cooler and edgier situations like Le Parc.

## Comedy Central

The last example is the U.S. television channel, “[Comedy Central](#)”. A few years ago, Comedy Central underwent a rebranding process which introduced a new logo and a new look.



This project was carried out by “[theLab](#)”, a creative production agency, which decided to use the geometric font “[Brandon Grotesque](#)” to evidence the confidence and maturity of the company.

The font always appears in uppercase and it is used in the logo as well as in almost all the text which is present on the website. This evokes an idea of elegance and competence but at the same time, with the help of some images, it lets leak out the sense of humour which distinguishes Comedy Central.

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# Geometric Fonts For Your Library

Now that we have seen how geometric fonts can be used, it's time to hunt down some of the best fonts you can download from the web.

## Attitude

The designer of “Attitude”, Emil Kozole, says that the creation of the font was inspired by the Japanese and American popular culture of the early ‘90s. With this font, the designer certainly wanted to experiment with letters and shapes. The result is a typeface not unlike the one used in “Le Parc Records”.

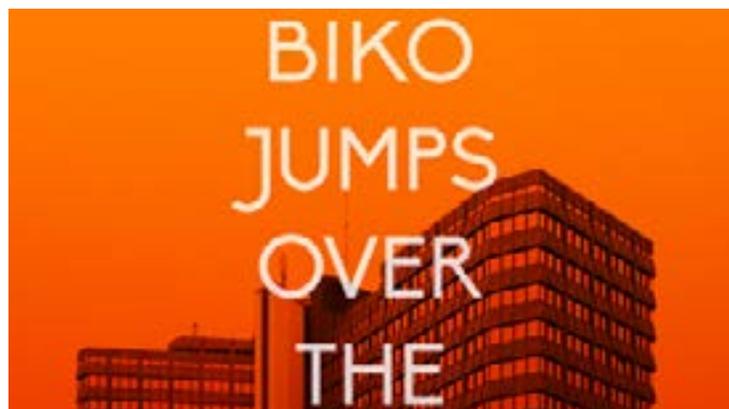


The font has 7 different versions: “regular”, “inline”, “3d”, “sliced”, “soldier”, “drunk” and “wasted”. Each version, with the only exception of “inline”, has 2 different styles: “regular” and “alternate”. Since “Attitude” is minimal but also stylish, it can work well for posters, clothes design, magazines and cd covers and, of course, for headings of websites.

→ [Download link](#)

## Biko

Biko is a geometric sans-serif font created by Marco Ugolini for [Monofonts](#). The name is a tribute to [Steve Biko](#), a South African activist who fought against the Apartheid.



Biko Regular

Biko has a friendly but strong

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character which makes the typeface good for websites, mobile apps, texts and logos. It is available in four different families: light, regular, bold and black.

If you need the font for personal use, you can download Biko for free at:

→ [Download link](#)

Otherwise, if you need it for commercial purposes, you can buy a license at [www.monofonts.com/products/biko](http://www.monofonts.com/products/biko). Prices vary according to the kind of license you look for and in case you are interested in a single family, you can contact the font creator.

## Geomancy



Geomancy is a font developed by “One By Four Studio” and it clearly shows references to the geometric patterns inspired by the style of the French and American Art Deco. The font is designed to only contain uppercase letters, so we wouldn’t suggest using this for body text. I think that Geomancy is much better suited for titles and big posters.

In the package you can find two different versions of the fonts: “Extra Bold” and the thinner “Hairline”. According to the effect you want to create, you can use these families separately or together.

→ [Download link](#)

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## Rometric

Rometric, by Thomas Richardson, heavily draws inspiration from the neo classic style of architecture, mixed with modern angles and geometric shapes. The most recurrent shapes are circles and triangles which are a common motif in [neoclassicism](#).

The aim of the designer was to create a font which could explore and combine old and new trends within a single unique typeface.



What I really like of this font are the three horizontal lines present on every letter: they add a modern appeal and they make this font unforgettable. It's a strange but pleasing meeting point between techno and art deco. Of course, the font should only in headings, rather than in long text passage.

→ [Download link](#)

## Building

Building is a font designed by the [Italian Leonardo Gubbioni](#). He tells us the font was created to “*capture the attention of the viewer in a world where we are constantly assaulted by sensory stimuli*”.



Building by Leonardo Gubbioni

Building works especially well on page titles, packaging and clothes design.

→ [Download link](#)

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## Moderne Sans

Moderne Sans is a clean sans-serif typeface designed by Marius Kempken. The font is inspired by the typography of the 1920s.

Here more than ever, letters are based on geometric shapes: the “O” is a perfect circle while the “M” and “N” are created by combinations of triangles.



Moderne Sans by Marius Kempken

If you download the font, which is free, you will get the uppercase version as well as the lowercase one.

→ [Download link](#)

Over to you. Get Designing!

The fonts I listed above are just a few of my personal favorites, but the web is full of geometric fonts which are waiting to be downloaded and used. Sometimes simple shapes can make the most compelling and inspiring design statements.

### Simone Sala

Simone is a graphic designer who loves technology, design and who is always looking for new trends and innovative concepts. He also likes to give tips and to share his knowledge with other tech-lovers.

