

**DESIGN TIPS
EVEN NON-DESIGNERS
SHOULD KNOW**

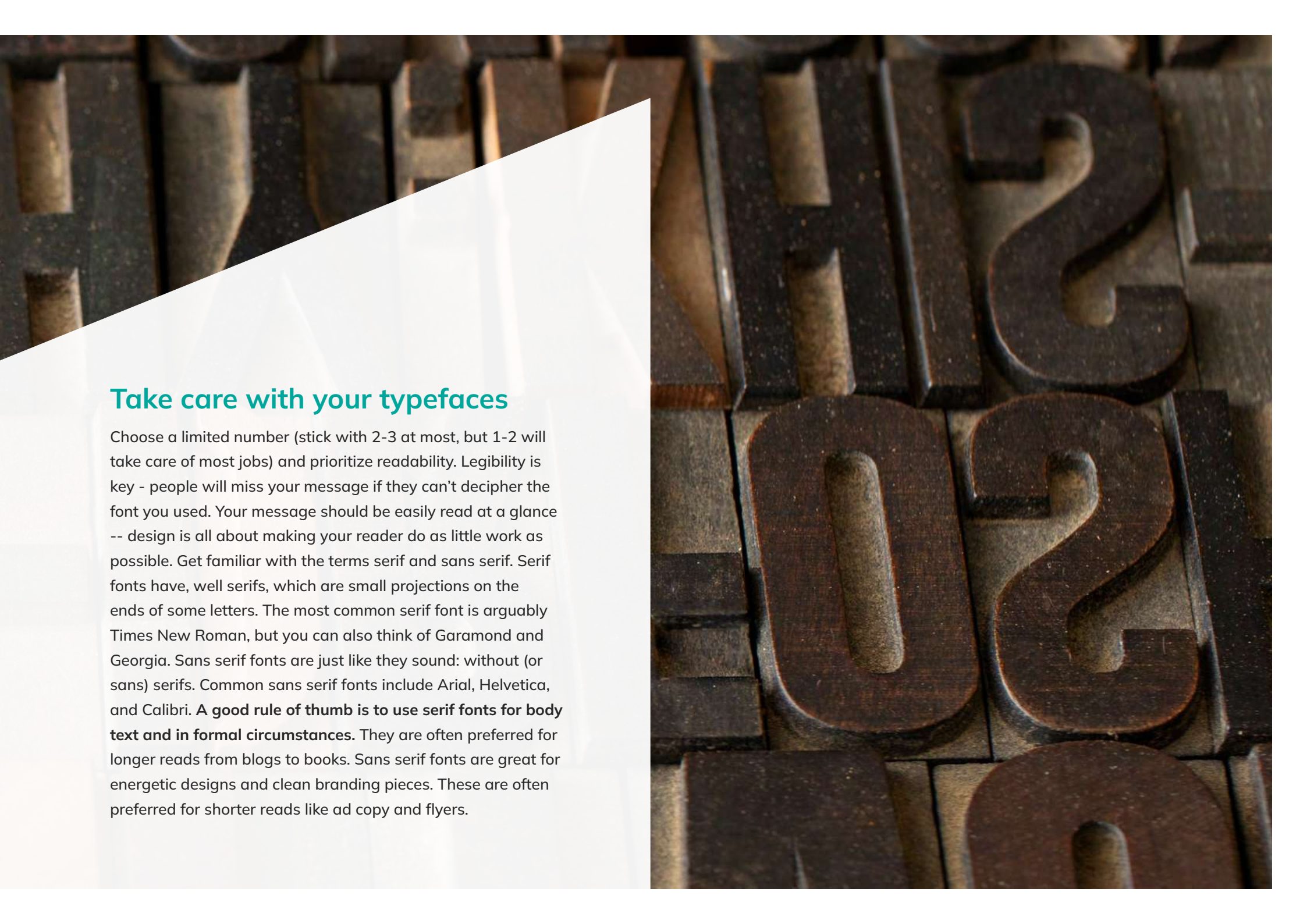


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The idea of a professional graphic designer might seem odd to a non-designer. Especially with all of the design tech like Canva out there, who needs to pay a designer? Well, as it turns out, even with design tools more accessible than ever, designers are still essential.

But perhaps you aren't in a position to hire a designer right now (or perhaps you're just the do-it-yourself type). Either way, the best way to understand design is to do it.

So we've compiled this guide of professional design tips even non-designers should know.



Take care with your typefaces

Choose a limited number (stick with 2-3 at most, but 1-2 will take care of most jobs) and prioritize readability. Legibility is key - people will miss your message if they can't decipher the font you used. Your message should be easily read at a glance -- design is all about making your reader do as little work as possible. Get familiar with the terms serif and sans serif. Serif fonts have, well serifs, which are small projections on the ends of some letters. The most common serif font is arguably Times New Roman, but you can also think of Garamond and Georgia. Sans serif fonts are just like they sound: without (or sans) serifs. Common sans serif fonts include Arial, Helvetica, and Calibri. **A good rule of thumb is to use serif fonts for body text and in formal circumstances.** They are often preferred for longer reads from blogs to books. Sans serif fonts are great for energetic designs and clean branding pieces. These are often preferred for shorter reads like ad copy and flyers.

Check the bleed and margins

While bleed might be an unexpectedly visceral term, it just refers to design elements overlapping onto the parts of a piece that will be trimmed off once printed. When everything was still printed, the term came about due to printer ink running off the page. Even in digital design, elements like background shapes should still “bleed” so the end product has color to the very edge with no unintended whitespace. Of course, not every element should bleed. If your text and photographs need to be on the final design to be readable. This is where setting your margins comes in. Many design programs like InDesign have automatic margin guides to make sure your elements aren’t too close to the edge. However some, like Canva, default to letting you eyeball it, so be wary!

Give yourself some space (literally)

Obviously, having elements overlap is a recipe for a disastrous design, but spacing things out also means keeping a layer of organization to the designs as a whole and within specific elements. Logos especially need their own dedicated space - a good logo designer will give you a guide to show the recommended spacing for your logo. No matter where you use your logo, give it the space it needs and the respect it deserves (or else nobody else will respect it). Other spacing considerations include margins, bleed, and whitespace, but those are important enough for their own tips. Lastly, did you know about special spacing techniques like kerning? Kerning is the spacing between individual letters or characters. Not all design platforms let you adjust kerning, but software like the Adobe Creative Suite does. As a non-designer, kerning should be kept at a minimum and is usually best left to a professional eye. Being aware of this term and how it can influence a design is a great addition to your toolkit.

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Get a refresher on basic color theory

It's okay if this tip brings you back to an elementary school art class. Turns out, the color wheel has a purpose even in your professional life! Take some time to refamiliarize yourself with concepts like complementary, contrasting, and analogous colors. You can play with free tools like [Colors](#) to generate coherent palettes. If you haven't established brand colors, make it a priority. The rule of thumb is to select 1-3 primary and 1-3 secondary colors. These are so named based on the amounts they're used throughout your collateral. **Primary colors will be most associated with your brand, appearing in your logo or as backgrounds on your website.** Secondary colors play a supporting role in design accents like an eye-catching button or highlighting a specific word in a headline.

Color is part of your story

People associate different colors with different emotions, and those associations can also depend on context. For example, a warm brown might not be a great primary color choice for a daycare center (being too boring and “grown-up” for a childlike feeling), but the same brown might be perfect for a local coffee shop. We have so many associations with different colors in the U.S. let alone differences across cultures. Here’s a quick cheat sheet for how most Americans view colors in different circumstances:



Red = action-oriented, passionate, and powerful, or aggressive and dangerous



Orange and Yellow = energetic, childlike, and optimistic, or cheap and campy



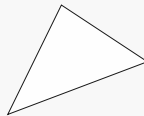
Green = healthy, natural, and organic, or envious and poisonous



Blue = calming, associated with water and air, dignified, trustworthy (the only big downside with blue is its heavy use in design trends today, making it hard to stand out)



Purple = spiritual, mysterious, imaginative, or arrogant and immature



White = clean, pure, and delicate, or bland and empty



Black = powerful, formal, authoritative, or pessimistic and domineering

Align, align, align

A basic design pothole non-designers run into is actually one of the easiest to fix. We get it - when you get into a groove with your design work, it's easy to forget to align your elements. **But keeping your elements lined up is the difference between a messy/cheap-looking design and something that adds authority to your brand and message.** For example, make sure your headers are aligned with the body text -- it doesn't matter if they're center, left, or right-aligned, as long as they are consistent and match up to each other. And this goes beyond just setting the text boxes' alignment via the toolbar. Even if both pieces of copy are left aligned within their text boxes, the textboxes themselves need to be aligned. Don't forget to carry this structuring over to all the other elements. Align all of the elements to make sure the design flows and has clean margins and whitespace.

Keep the contrast

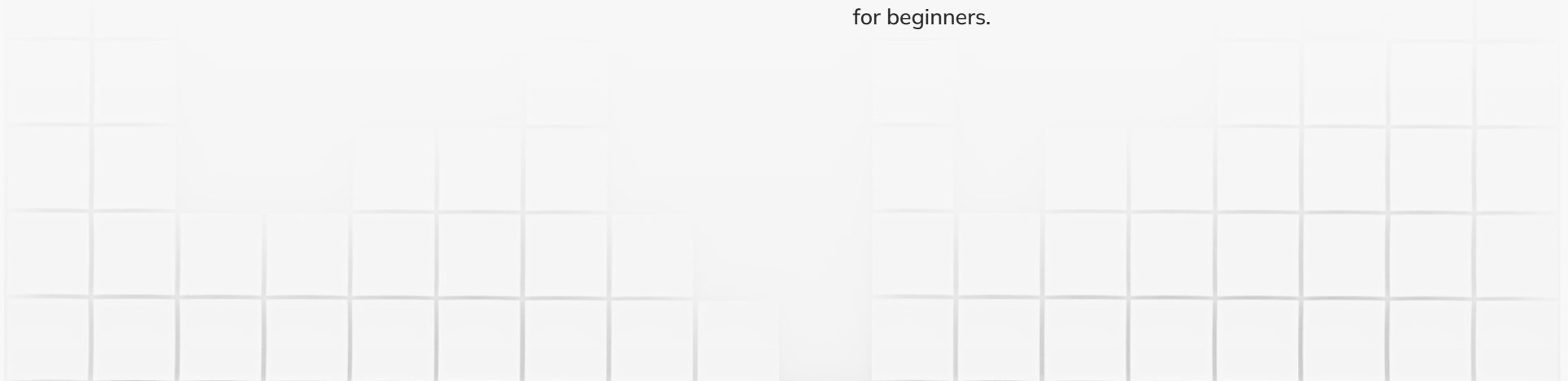
Contrast in size, color, alignment, etc. can be a powerful design tool to draw and focus a viewer's attention. It's also extremely important on a basic level to clearly get a message across. The same goes for size: a headline should by definition be a larger font size than the body copy. If everything is the same size, the viewer will have to work harder to follow along. You should also consider your audience - an ad for Warby Parker should be easy to read even without glasses. In most cases, a design has failed if the viewer has to squint and concentrate to understand your message. That's why contrast is important to nail down.

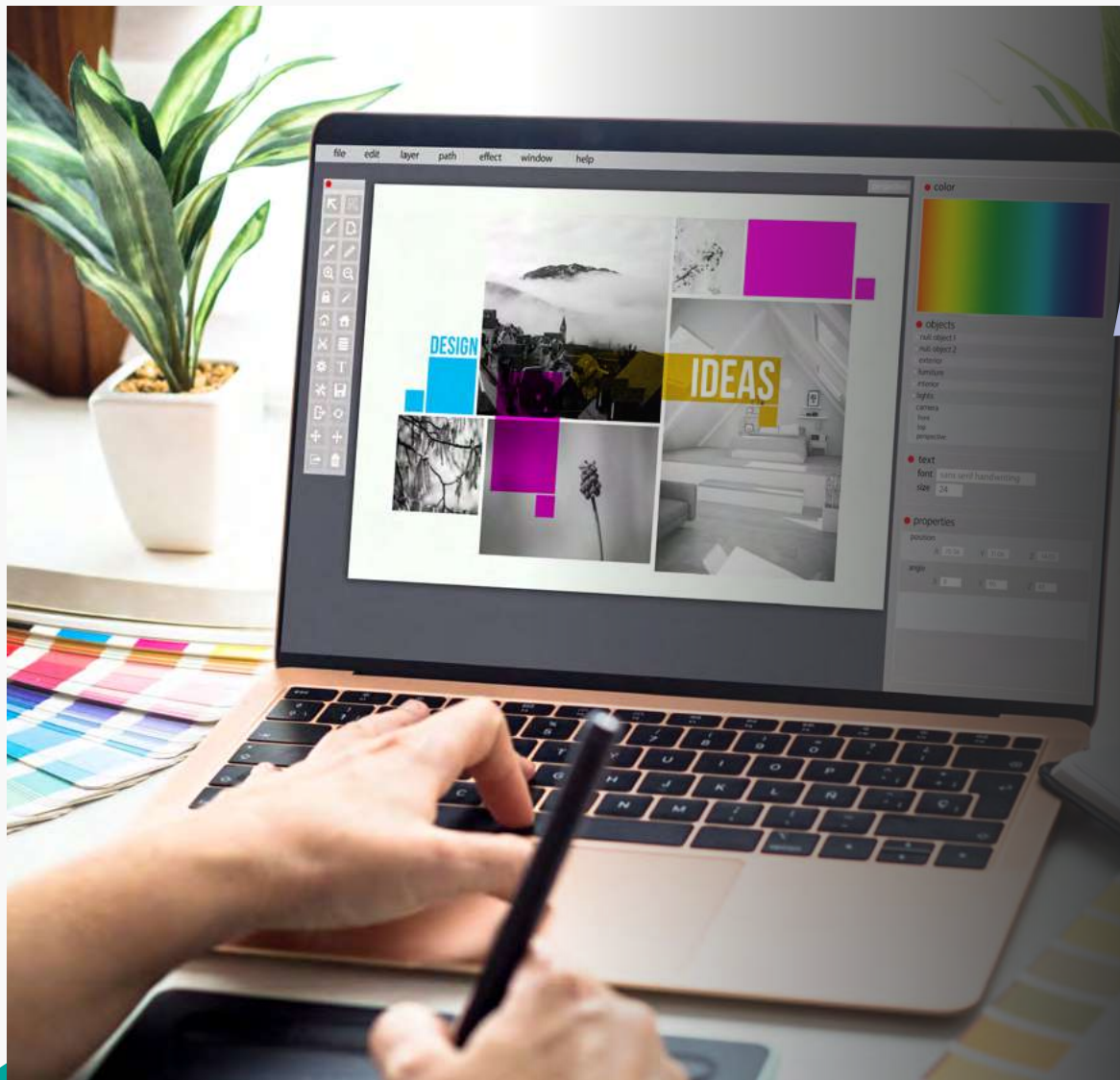
Let whitespaces be whitespaces

Speaking of whitespace... We've all heard that "less is more" but it's easy to get carried away and try to fill every bit of an artboard with design elements. While busy designs can be artistic and functional (creativity is subjective, after all), simplicity is king when it comes to graphic design. That's why you should think of whitespace as a tool instead of ground to cover. It can feel satisfying or even necessary to pack detail in and use all of the blank space, but the end result most often hurts the viewer's comprehension. Also, consider that most marketing designs should act as teasers. You should only include the most essential elements to give a viewer enough information to become interested and take action. Keeping whitespace in mind helps you maintain that intrigue.

Stay on the grid

Now that you know all about bleed, margins, alignment, and whitespace, let's talk about how you put that knowledge into action. Any good design software (even Canva) has a grid feature to help with the above tips. Usually, you can decide what kind of grid you'd like and turn it on and off (to see a design preview without it). Two of the most common grids are uniform square grids and a grid split into thirds. The best grid to use usually depends on your personal preference and the type of project. If you're really new to design, switching on the "lock to grid" feature is helpful. This lets you move your design elements around but it will snap the elements to a grid so you don't need to worry about the alignment yourself. Another grid feature is a margin guide. It operates just like other grids, but specifically marks off a uniform margin to give you a more realistic playing field for your design. There are plenty of other grid and guide options to play around with, but these are our first recommendations for beginners.





**Start with a template,
but make it yours**

**DESIGN TEMPLATES ARE AMAZING
TOOLS FOR NON-DESIGNERS EVEN
IF MANY DISCOUNT THEM AS
COMPLICATED OR CHEATING.**

Starting with a template means not starting with a blank canvas (trust us, those can be some of the scariest things in the world). Templates can make things quicker, but they don't have to. Almost all elements of a good template are editable -- and should be edited to fit your needs and brand. Look for a template the way you'd look for a house: as long as the overall layout and quality are there, you can always make adjustments and aesthetic changes to make it yours.



Keep at it

It's simple on paper, but this is an extremely important tip for any non-designer. Graphic design lives in a unique space. It's part art and part science. Like art, it exists to evoke emotion and convey a clear message. Like science, graphic design involves a lot of research, hypotheses, and testing. The best way to get better at it is to just do it. Sketch your ideas freely, Google tutorials, ask for advice, and borrow ideas from existing designs - whatever it takes to get started. Only by putting designs out into the world will you start to pick up on what works and what doesn't.

WHILE NOT EVERYONE CAN BE A PROFESSIONAL DESIGNER, MOST PEOPLE CAN LEARN ENOUGH TO GET THE JOB DONE. LIKE EVERYTHING, **IT JUST TAKES PRACTICE!**

There you have it: our top professional design tips for non-designers. Be sure to keep this guide handy -- you can even use it as a checklist for your next project. We're wishing you the best on your design journey, and if you decide you'd like some guidance or could benefit from the speed and quality of a design pro, don't hesitate to reach out!



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