

# Common Web Design Mistakes And How To Fix Them

There are some really bad examples of design out on the web. This guide aims to show you some common mistakes and what you can do about them.

## 1. Default Typeface

The default font for most browsers is Times New Roman (or some sort of serif font). It screams “This site was done by an amateur.” Unless you’re using it very intentionally (as in resized, and in moderation), it’s probably best to avoid it. Take this, for example:

### The Great Gatsby

By F. Scott Fitzgerald

#### Chapter 1

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I’ve been turning over in my mind ever since.

“Whenever you feel like criticizing any one,” he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had.”

He didn’t say any more, but we’ve always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I’m inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores. The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality when it appears in a normal person, and so it came about that in college I was unjustly accused of being a politician, because I was privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men. Most of the confidences were unsought — frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon; for the intimate revelations of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions. Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth.

And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to the admission that it has a limit. Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes, but after a certain point I don’t care what it’s founded on. When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction — Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the “creative temperament.” — it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. No — Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and shortwinded elations of men.

This is a great example of something that could look a lot better. Let's try it with a more modern typeface:

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This one is called Garmond, and it's the same one used in this PDF (if you're reading it as a PDF, anyway). It's still a serif font but it looks a little less like a generic web page this way. I think it's a little easier to read, too.

## 2. Default Font Sizes and Spacing

Speaking of generic web pages, another thing that comes for free is cramped spacing. Fonts are small and the space between lines is tight. Without specifically addressing it or using some kind of framework (like Twitter Bootstrap), a site will look something like the examples above.

You can do a great deal of good by changing just a few defaults. Here's the same example from above, except with some care taken to apply better font sizing and line heights.

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The CSS now looks like this:

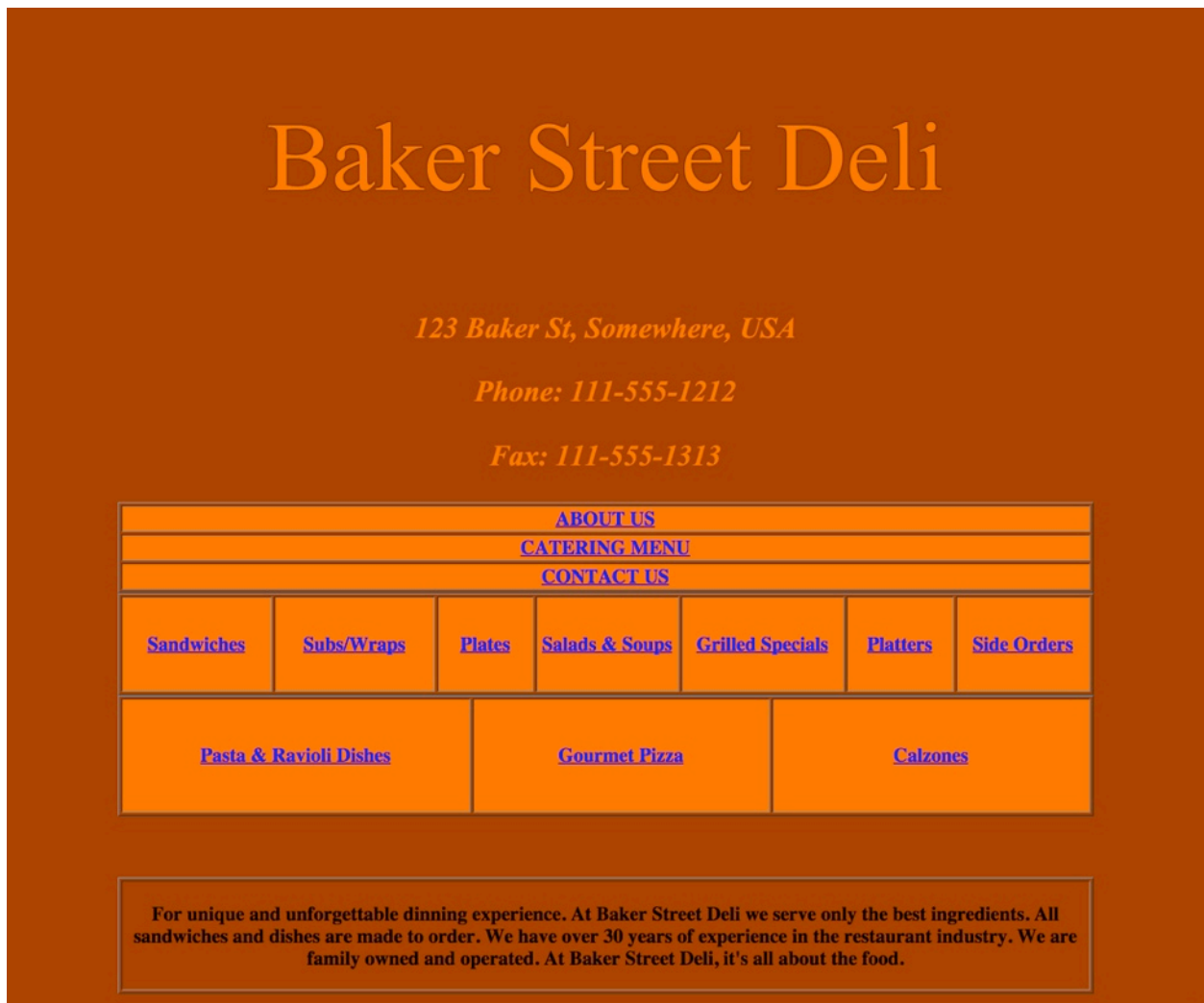
```
body {  
  font-family: 'Adobe Garamond Pro';  
  max-width: 580px;  
  margin: 0 auto;  
}
```

```
h1 {  
  font-size: 68px;  
  margin-bottom: .05em;  
}  
  
h2 {  
  font-size: 32.36px;  
}  
  
p, author {  
  font-size: 20px;  
  line-height: 1.62em;  
}
```

You might wonder where these crazy sizes came from. I used the generator at <http://modularscale.com> to come up with numbers that fit the Golden Ratio, or Fibonacci sequence. I wanted 20px for the main text, and then the 32.36px for the h2 was the next largest number. The h1 would have been 52.36px, but it looked too small compared to the h2, so I bumped it up to 68px. Finally, the max-width is based on the idea that the optimal number of characters per line is between 60 and 70, which worked out to around 30em and 580px.

### 3. Colors

Try to choose colors that make your site easy to read and pleasing to look at. The goal is to *avoid* giving your visitor a headache. For instance, don't do this:



This design hurts to look at.

Take a step back from your design every now and again to see if it makes your eyes hurt. If it does, fix that before you go any further.

One thing that could really help this page is a more neutral background color. Let's try to fix that.

To come up with new colors, I used Paletton (<http://www.paletton.com>), but there are other good color picker tools too.

COLOURlovers: <http://www.colourlovers.com>

Adobe Kuler: <https://kuler.adobe.com>

I chose a Triad color scheme and entered their logo text color (#FF6600) as the base color. It showed orange, blue, and green as colors that would fit nicely together. I tweaked the inner circles to get a very light orange for the background, and used the second-lightest blue for the link color. The palette looked like this:



It's nothing amazing, but after applying just the background and link colors (and removing the bright orange background from the table), it's already looking a bit less painful.

# Baker Street Deli

*123 Baker St, Somewhere, USA*

*Phone: 111-555-1212*

*Fax: 111-555-1313*

<a href="#">ABOUT US</a>						
<a href="#">CATERING MENU</a>						
<a href="#">CONTACT US</a>						
<a href="#">Sandwiches</a>	<a href="#">Subs/Wraps</a>	<a href="#">Plates</a>	<a href="#">Salads &amp; Soups</a>	<a href="#">Grilled Specials</a>	<a href="#">Platters</a>	<a href="#">Side Orders</a>
<a href="#">Pasta &amp; Ravioli Dishes</a>		<a href="#">Gourmet Pizza</a>		<a href="#">Calzones</a>		

For unique and unforgettable dinning experience. At Baker Street Deli we serve only the best ingredients. All sandwiches and dishes are made to order. We have over 30 years of experience in the restaurant industry. We are family owned and operated. At Baker Street Deli, it's all about the food.



We can apply other lessons we already learned, like not using default fonts, to make it look even better. I removed the table borders too.

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[Gourmet Pizza](#)

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## 4. Placement and Grouping

In order for a page to make sense and appear cohesive, the elements need to be grouped in a logical way. This means that related items should be placed in close proximity to each other or grouped by a border or color some other visual element.

In the restaurant page above, the grouping of elements doesn't make much sense.

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The first row of menu items is placed closer to the About Us/Catering Menu/Contact Us links than they are to the second row of menu items. After some rearranging, the page looks a little more logical:



The address info was grouped together and moved closer to the logo. The About Us links were moved further away from the address info, and then separated from the menu links by a horizontal line. Finally, the vertical space between the menu links was reduced, so now those two lines look like they belong together.

There is still a lot that could be done here. The menu links look very disorganized, and the About Us links could be displayed horizontally instead of in a vertical list. But the page sure looks better than it did in its original form.

## **Thanks For Reading!**

I hope you've enjoyed this guide to some common design mistakes and ways to fix them.

If you're reading this, you probably already signed up for my weekly newsletter at [designwithdave.com](https://designwithdave.com), but if you haven't, you should consider signing up!