

Refactoring UI

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Contents

Starting from Scratch	6
Start with a feature, not a layout.	7
Detail comes later	10
Don't design too much	13
Choose a personality	17
Limit your choices	24
Hierarchy is Everything	29
Not all elements are equal.	30
Size isn't everything.	32
Don't use grey text on colored backgrounds	36
Emphasize by de-emphasizing	39
Labels are a last resort.	41
Separate visual hierarchy from document hierarchy	46
Balance weight and contrast.	48

Semantics are secondary	52
Layout and Spacing	55
Start with too much white space	56
Establish a spacing and sizing system	60
You don't have to fill the whole screen	65
Grids are overrated	72
Relative sizing doesn't scale	79
Avoid ambiguous spacing	83
Designing Text	87
Establish a type scale.	88
Use good fonts	94
Keep your line length in check	99
Baseline, not center	102
Line-height is proportional	105
Not every link needs a color	109
Align with readability in mind	111
Use letter-spacing effectively	115
Working with Color	118
Ditch hex for HSL	119
You need more colors than you think.	123
Define your shades up front	129
Don't let lightness kill your saturation	133
Greys don't have to be grey	139
Accessible doesn't have to mean ugly.	142
Don't rely on color alone	146

Creating Depth	149
Emulate a light source	150
Use shadows to convey elevation	158
Shadows can have two parts	163
Even flat designs can have depth.	167
Overlap elements to create layers	170
Working with Images	173
Use good photos	174
Text needs consistent contrast.	176
Everything has an intended size	181
Beware user-uploaded content.	187
Finishing Touches	191
Supercharge the defaults	192
Add color with accent borders	195
Decorate your backgrounds	198
Don't overlook empty states	203
Use fewer borders	206
Think outside the box	210
Leveling Up	215

Layout and Spacing

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.



Set up Two-Factor Authentication STEP 1 OF 3

Every time you sign in to your account, you will need your password and verification code

Setup your phone

Enter the phone number you would like to use.

Country Phone Number

🇨🇦 Canada +1 (555) 555-5555 Next Step



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Enter the phone number you would like to use.

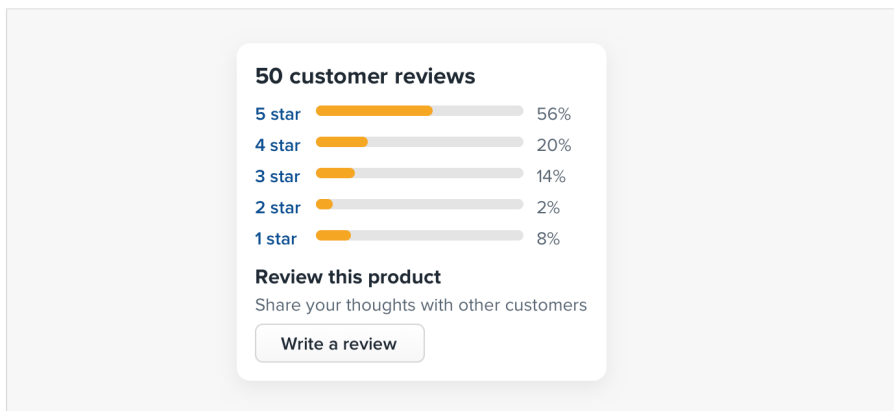
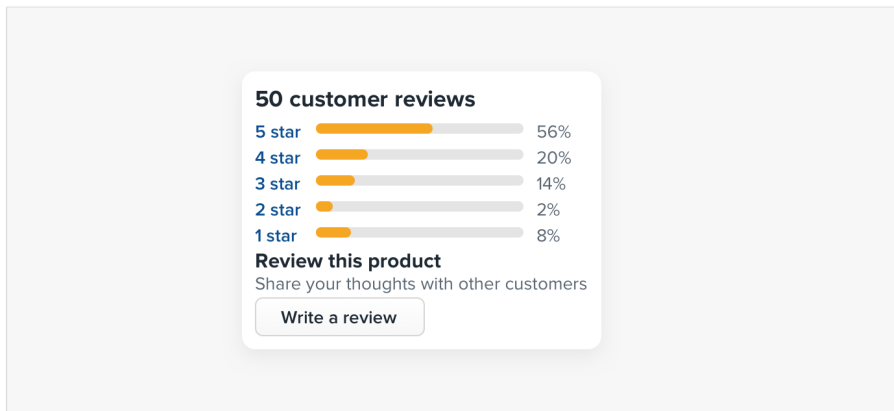
Country Phone Number

🇨🇦 Canada +1 (555) 555-5555 Next Step

Sounds simple enough, right? So how come we don't usually do it?

White space should be removed, not added

When designing for the web, white space is almost always *added* to a design — if something looks little too cramped, you add a bit of margin or padding until things look 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 actually look *great*, you usually need more white space.

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



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You might think you'd end up with too much white space this way, but in practice, 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 a complete UI.

Dense UIs have their place

While interfaces with a lot of breathing room almost always feel cleaner and simpler, there are certainly situations where it makes sense for a design to be much more compact.

For example, if you're designing some sort of dashboard where a lot of information needs to be visible at once, packing that information together so it all fits on one screen might be worth making the design feel more busy.

Game Summary									
 Canada			 United States						
TEAM STATS			#	Forwards	G	A	P	+/-	PIM
SOG 30	FO% 50%	PP 0/1	71	W. Tran	0	0	0	0	0
PIM 6	HITS 36	BLKS 12	15	M. Hoffman	0	0	0	0	0
SCORING			67	T. Valdez	0	0	0	0	0
	Danial Berry Jason Chapman, Jake Sullivan 11:20 / 1st		38	H. Austin	0	1	0	0	0
			45	D. Berry	2	1	2	+1	2
			12	J. Butler	0	0	0	0	0
			19	J. Chapman	0	1	0	-1	0

The important thing is to make this a deliberate decision instead of just being the default. It's a lot more obvious when you need to remove white space than it is when you need to add it.