

# Design Basics for Builders

AI Builder Lab | Quick Reference Guide

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You don't need to be a designer. These 5 rules will make any project look professional. Follow them and your project will look intentional, not accidental.

## Rule 1: Consistent Spacing

Use the same spacing everywhere. Pick a base unit (8px) and multiply: 8px for tight gaps, 16px for standard, 24px for sections, 32px for major sections.

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
Use multiples of 8px • Same gap between similar elements • More space between sections than within them • Padding inside cards and containers	Random spacing that changes from section to section • Elements touching edges with no padding • Giant gaps next to tiny gaps • Zero padding inside containers

## Rule 2: Maximum 3 Colors

Pick a background color, a text color, and ONE accent color. Use the accent for buttons, links, and important elements only. Everything else is background or text color.

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
One accent color for interactive elements • Dark text on light backgrounds (or vice versa) • Consistent color for the same type of element • Use opacity variations of your accent for hover states	Rainbow of random colors • Light text on light backgrounds • Different colors for every button • Bright colors for large background areas

## Rule 3: Readable Typography

Body text: 16px minimum. Headings: 24–32px. Small/helper text: 14px. Line-height: 1.5 for body text, 1.2 for headings. Use one font family (system fonts or Inter/DM Sans from Google Fonts).

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
16px+ for body text • Clear size hierarchy (heading > subheading > body > small) • 1.5 line-height for paragraphs • One font family throughout	Body text smaller than 14px • Everything the same size • Decorative fonts for body text • Mixing 3+ different font families

## Rule 4: Visual Hierarchy

The most important thing should be the biggest and most prominent. Secondary info should be smaller. Guide the eye from most important to least important.

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
Biggest element = most important action • Bold for headings, regular for body • Accent color draws attention to key actions • Group related items together visually	Everything the same size and weight • Accent color on everything (nothing stands out) • Important buttons hidden or same style as text • Unrelated items grouped together

## Rule 5: Whitespace Is Your Friend

Empty space isn't wasted space. It makes content readable and prevents overwhelm. When in doubt, add more space, not less.

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
Generous margins around content • Space between sections • Cards and containers with internal padding • Let elements breathe	Cramming everything together • Content touching the screen edges • Long walls of text with no breaks • Filling every pixel with something

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## AI Prompts for Design Help

Copy and paste these when you need design improvements:

### Quick Design Audit

*"Review my project's visual design. Check for: (1) consistent spacing, (2) color consistency (max 3 colors), (3) readable font sizes, (4) visual hierarchy, (5) sufficient whitespace. List the specific CSS changes I should make. Here's my code: [paste]."*

### Make It Mobile-Responsive

*"Make this page fully responsive for mobile screens (375px width). Use flexbox for layout. Buttons should be 44px+ tall for easy tapping. Text should be readable without zooming. Here's my code: [paste]."*

### Color Palette Fix

*"I'm using too many colors. Reduce my palette to: one background color, one text color, and one accent color. Apply the accent only to buttons and important interactive elements. Here's my CSS: [paste]."*

### Typography Cleanup

*"Improve my typography. Use a clean font (Inter or system fonts). Set body to 16px/1.5 line-height, headings to 24px/1.2, small text to 14px. Make sure contrast passes WCAG AA standards. Here's my code: [paste]."*

### Spacing Standardization

*"Standardize all spacing in my project using an 8px grid: 8px tight, 16px standard, 24px sections, 32px major. Fix any inconsistent gaps. Add padding to containers (16px minimum). Here's my CSS: [paste]."*

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## Free Design Resources

**Colors:** [colors.co](https://colors.co) — Generate beautiful color palettes. Pick an accent color you like and it suggests complementary colors.

**Fonts:** [fonts.google.com](https://fonts.google.com) — Free fonts. Recommended: Inter, DM Sans, or just use system fonts (font-family: system-ui, sans-serif).

**Icons:** [heroicons.com](https://heroicons.com) or [lucide.dev](https://lucide.dev) — Free, clean SVG icons. Copy the SVG code directly into your HTML.

**Photos:** [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com) — Free high-quality photos for any purpose. No attribution required.

**Inspiration:** [dribbble.com](https://dribbble.com) — Browse real app and website designs for inspiration. Search for "dashboard," "portfolio," or "tracker" to see what professionals build.

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Remember: good design isn't about making things fancy. It's about making things clear, consistent, and easy to use. Follow the 5 rules and your project will look professional.