week::three
Introduction to Figma Design

What is Figma Design?

Overview

- Figma is a collaborative web and desktop design application with a focus on interface design.
- Includes real-time collaboration features similar to Google Docs, and tools for creating working prototypes of interactive designs.

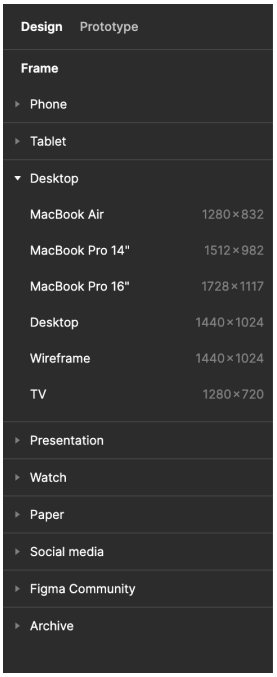
Technology

- Figma is a *web app*—it is built using HTML/CSS/JavaScript as its technical foundation, allowing it to run in almost any web browser.
- Desktop versions of Figma for macOS and Windows are just self-contained web browsers masquerading as a desktop application.
  - While this approach has its benefits, it does mean that the application does *not* take advantage of core OS features from both macOS and Windows.
- Files are stored in the cloud by default.
  - Local versions can be downloads a .fig files and need to be loaded onto the cloud before you can work with them.
- Multiple users can work in the same Figma document at the same time.

Frames & Sections

Defined

- Figma makes extensive use of Frames, which are used to hold all content in a Figma document.
- While it's helpful to think of each frame as a separate "page" of website, there are many other uses for them, including as a holding area for Components and other reusable page elements.
- Typical Figma documents have many, many Frames of many different sizes. Don't worry about the number — use what you need to convey your ideas.



Frame Tool (F)

- The **Frame tool** is the starting point to add, modify, and arrange Frames.

Sizing

- Figma provides many preset sizes for Frames — in this class we will be using the Desktop > MacBook Air option for most projects.
- It's fast and easy to change the dimensions of your Frames, though you'll find it works best to set the width correctly right at the start.
  - Height is frequently changed after the fact.

Section Tool (Shift-S)

- Sections are simply groups of Frames. Sections can be labeled, and when a section is moved, all of the frames move with it.
  - Figma Tip—Drag the section over existing frames to automatically put them inside it.
- Sections can be marked as ready for Dev, allowing you to organize your frames in a way that is helpful for a collaborator to see what is ready for the next steps in a project.

Key Frame Settings

- **Naming** — double-click on a frame name to change it. All frames should have a meaningful name.
- **Layout Guide** — Create, show, and hide an underlying layout grid.
  - While Grids are Frame-specific, they can only be made visible/hidden globally (Shift-G).
  - Frames can have multiple layout grids, and grids are page-specific.
  - We'll primarily use Column grids
  - A good starting point is the use the values shown to the right.
- **Ruler Guides** — Create guides by dragging from the ruler onto the frame itself. To remove, select the guide and drag back to the frame edge, or select it and press delete.
  - To show rulers, select View > Rulers (Shift-R)
- **Fill** — Use to change the background color of a frame.

Saving Files

To Cloud or Not to Cloud

- Figma is a cloud-first application. Its default is to save everything to the Figma cloud.
  - If you like that, great! You are all set.
- You can also save a local copy, if you like, but consider it a *copy* or *backup*; not your canonical file:
  - File > Save as .fig
- There are many advantages to saving in the cloud, which we will explore later, including real-time collaboration with others. Truthfully, Figma works best in the cloud.

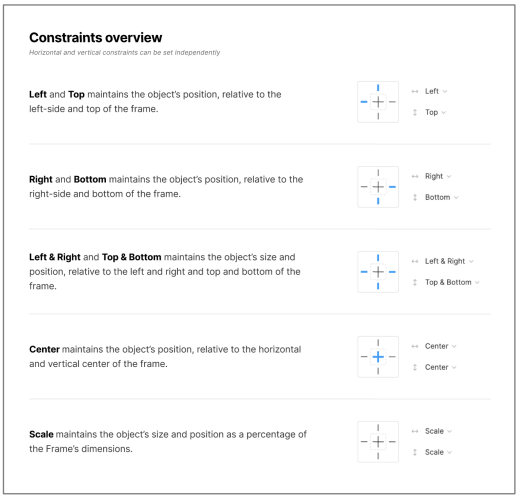
Constraints

Overview

- Constraints allow you to fix elements of your design to different sides of their parent Frame.
- This lets you build fluid layouts to support multiple device sizes and breakpoints within the same group.

Use

- Recommended options include **Left** + **Right** for horizontal (keeps items centered), and either **Top** or **Bottom** (object follows either top or bottom of frame as it is resized).
- From Figma:



Working with Images

Vectors & Fills

- While it might not look like it at first, Figma uses vector artwork to arrange and contain images.
- Raster artwork is simply treated as a type of *fill* in Figma.
- To transform just the *vector shape around the image*, hold down the Command key (and Command-Option to transform all sides at once) .
- To crop and maneuver the image inside of a vector shape, double-click on the image, or select *Crop* from the pop-out panel from the menu that defaults to *Fill*.

Importing

- Figma menu > File > Place image/video...
  - It is also OK to drag-and-drop images from the Finder — I know, crazy stuff!
- To swap out images, select from the right-side panel Fill, then hover over the image preview and select *Choose image*.

Working with Vector Artwork

- Figma fully supports SVG images for vector imagery (and that's about it, which is OK).
- SVGs are imported into new frames, complete with full editing capabilities.

Transforming SVGs

- Use an SVG's image handles to scale and rotate the image.
- Double-click on an SVG to edit the *contents* of an image.
- For vector images, use the Shift key while transforming to scale proportionally (unlike raster images).

Assets

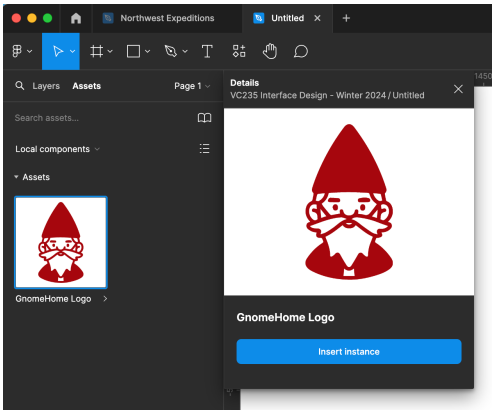
Defined

- A way to store reusable design elements.
- Assets can be edited later, and any linked instances of that asset are updated automatically.
- Can also work with libraries across other Figma documents, including those shared over the Internet.

Asset Management

- While the Assets panel will help you quickly access your document's assets, we also need a place to store *main components*—the canonical version of an element.
- In particular, Components work best if they are stored on a dedicated frame separate from your primary design frames.
- One technique is to create an **Assets frame** at the very beginning of a project to store elements, including colors, imported artwork, and Figma components.
- To do this, simply create a frame of any size and name it *Assets*. When importing or creating asset items, place them on this frame.

Components



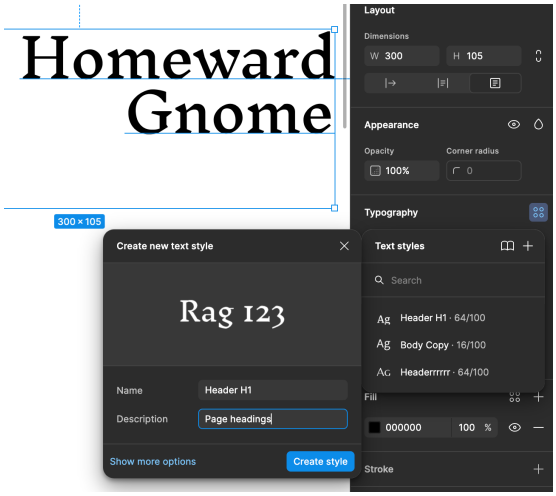
- Components are one the most useful and powerful features of Figma.
- They allow you to create and maintain design elements within your layout.
- Components can be almost anything, but they are most often used for imported artwork and created page elements like menus and footers.
- To create, select the objects you what to convert and select Object > Create Component (Command-Option-K).
- In the Assets panel, find your new component and rename it by double-clicking on the name.
- To rename your Component, switch to the Layers panel, then right-click on the Component to change and select Rename….
- To use, simply drag a Component by its icon in the Assets panel to the desired frame.
  - This places an *instance* of a Component onto a frame.
  - It remains linked to the *Main Component* until the link is manually broken.
- To quickly edit the main component right-click on the asset and select *Go to main component*.
- Imported vector artwork, in particular logos, are good candidates to be transformed into components for repeated use throughout the document.
- Store your components on a dedicated frame.

Working with Styles

Text Styles

- Like InDesign, Text Styles allow for the storage and quick use of collections of typographic formatting.

Process



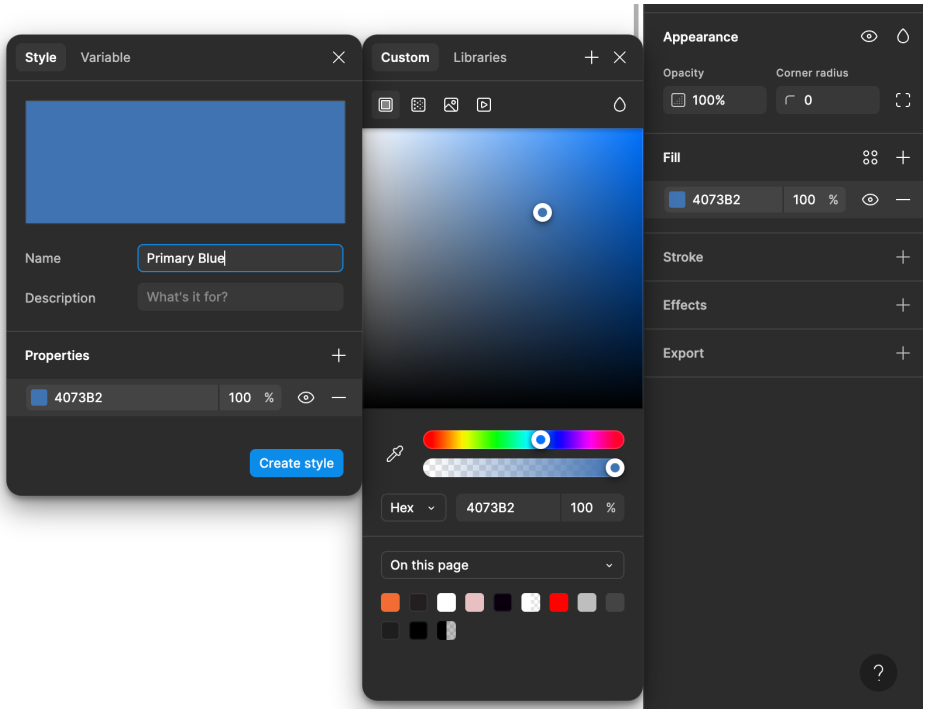
- To create, select text on a frame, apply the desired formatting, then click on the four dots icon (⁘) in the Typography panel, then click on the plus sign to the right of *Text styles*. This will create a Text Style based on the type selected.
- Be sure to give your Text Style a meaningful name, and consider adding a description.
- You will need to apply your new Text Style to the text you created it from. Simply select the text on the frame, then click on the style name.
- To edit, click on the name of the Style in the Text panel, then hover over the name of the style below, then finally click on the *adjust* icon to the right.

Naming

- Consider using names that are similar to the HTML elements used to build hierarchy in web pages. For example, the main text header on a page could be named H1, the subhead H2, and so on.

Color Styles

- Like Swatches in InDesign, you can create a collection of colors that are used throughout the document.
- Color styles are linked to the objects they are applied to, and when the color is altered, all objects using that color are updated.
- To create, draw or select an object on a frame, apply the desired color, then click on the plus (+) button in the color picker panel, then switch to **Style**, then finally give the color a name. This will add the fill color used in the object to your Style library.
- Be sure to give your Color a meaningful name.
- To edit, click on the Color square to the left of the hexadecimal value the Style panel.



Exporting from Figma

Overview

- For our projects, we will be outputting your designs as **static PNG images.**
- These are helpful for viewing your designs at 100% outside of Figma.

Process

- To create the PNG images, select a Frame, then the plus (+) button in the Export panel and make sure **1x PNG** is selected
- To export, select Figma menu > File > Export, then the Export button at the far-right of the window.
- You can drag these images into a Web browser to preview your design in context, or open in Photoshop to view at 100%.
- If your artboards are labeled well, those names will be used and meaningful to you as the filenames when exported by Figma.

Link Creation

- To create a link to your design, click the Share button, then Copy Link.
- When sharing with the instructor, be sure the access is set to “can edit”.