Typographic Contrast and Flow

As you have probably know, most online readers don't read line by line, instead they scan (from one point to another). For this reason, designers create typographic contrast and flow by emphasizing certain text. Contrast is important because not all the content within a page have the same value, some have greater significance than the others. By creating contrast, you can direct the reader's attention to the important messages and at the same time enhance the visual appearance. Here are seven basic methods on how you can create typographic contrast.

1. Size

Larger font size indicate higher priority because it draws reader's attention, therefore this method is commonly applied on headings.

2. Typeface / Classification

Contrast can be achieved by mixing different typeface classifications. However, due to limited web safe fonts, there are only two main classifications commonly used: serif and sans-serif.

Generally, to create a contrast between the headings and the body text, we use serif font for the headings and sans-serif font for the body, or vice versa.

If you want to go beyond the web safe fonts, there are two more options:

1. CSS image replacement, that is to use CSS to hide the text and replace with a background image. [css + bg image = static graphic img]
2. sIFR (Flash replacement), that is to use Javascript and Flash technology to replace the text with the embedded font. [Javascript+Flash = any font dynamically]

Note: CSS image replacement or sIFR is not practical for long paragraph, so they are normally used for headings.

3. Color

Color contrast is a common way to distinguish between navigation, headings, link, and body text.

You can use faded color to indicate something that is disabled or not available.

Sometime you don't need to make something bigger to get more attention, you can create emphasis by using brighter color, such as red.

You can also use color to distinguish individual word within a group of text.

When small font size combined with lighter tone color, the importance of the text is further de-emphasized

4. Cases

When the same typeface is used for the headings and body text, contrast can be established by changing the case. Uppercase tends to get more attention than

lowercase, therefore it is more suitable for headings. The CSS property to transform text to uppercase is `text-transform: uppercase`.

Tips: avoid using uppercase in the body text or in long sentence because it will reduce readability.

5. Style and Decoration

One of the common mistakes made by most editors (particularly the Microsoft Word users), is the tendency to use the underline decoration to emphasize certain text. This is a big mistake in web typography. Readers will misinterpret the underlined text as a link because the browser underlines the link by default. So, do not underline any text that is not a link when posting on the web.

Instead, you can use italic font style.

6. Weight

Making certain text heavier weight (bold) can also create emphasis.

Another common mistake is that people tend to bold the entire line of text. By doing so, the emphasis/contrast of the text is lost.

7. Space

Space plays the most important part in maintaining flow of your design. Good use of space will tell the reader where to start, when to pause, where it ends, and what to do next.

There are various ways to create space:

- Block break (`padding` or `margin`) is the space in between the block elements.
- Paragraph break (`padding` or `margin`) is the space created after the `<p>` element.
- Tracking (`letter-spacing`) is the space in between the characters.
- Leading (`line-height`) is the space in between the lines.
- Indentation (`padding` or `margin`) is commonly used for blockquote and list elements.

Conclusion

Let's put all these methods together in practice.