



litmus

Foundations of Email Design

LESSON 1

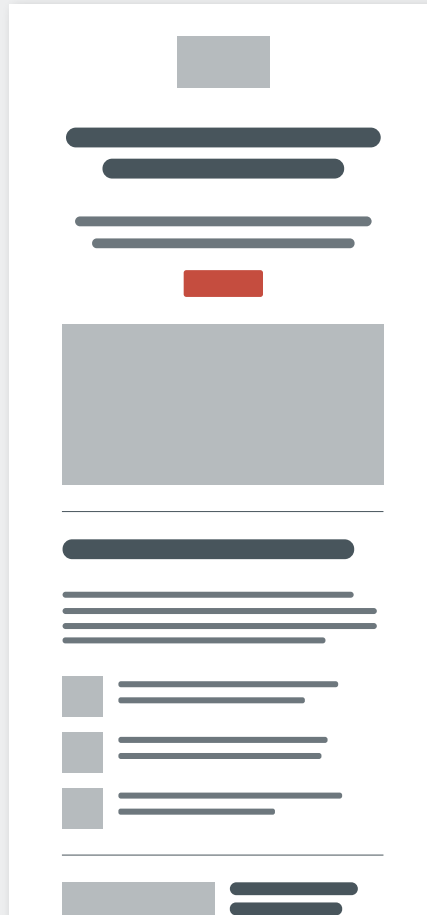
Layouts

Layouts

Imagery

Fonts & Typography

Calls-to-Action

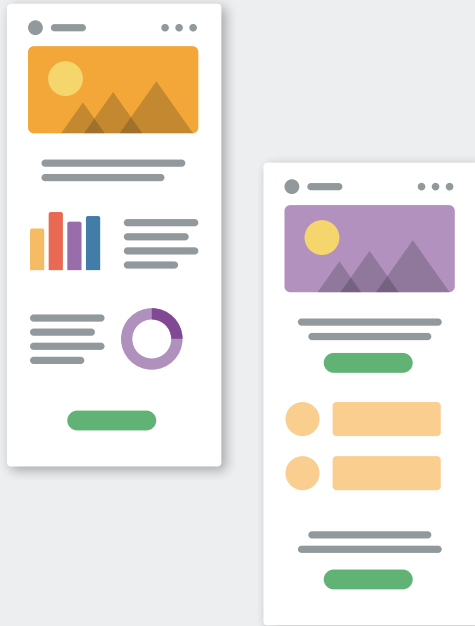


At Litmus, we live and breathe email design. Get a strong, foundational understanding of email design principles, straight from our own email team.

We'll walk you through examples, important considerations, and our recommendations—equipping you with the tools you need to design with confidence.

Use this as a compass to help you navigate what lies ahead of your email design journey.

FIRST UP: Layouts



According to [our latest research](#), the average time spent reading an email is 10 seconds.

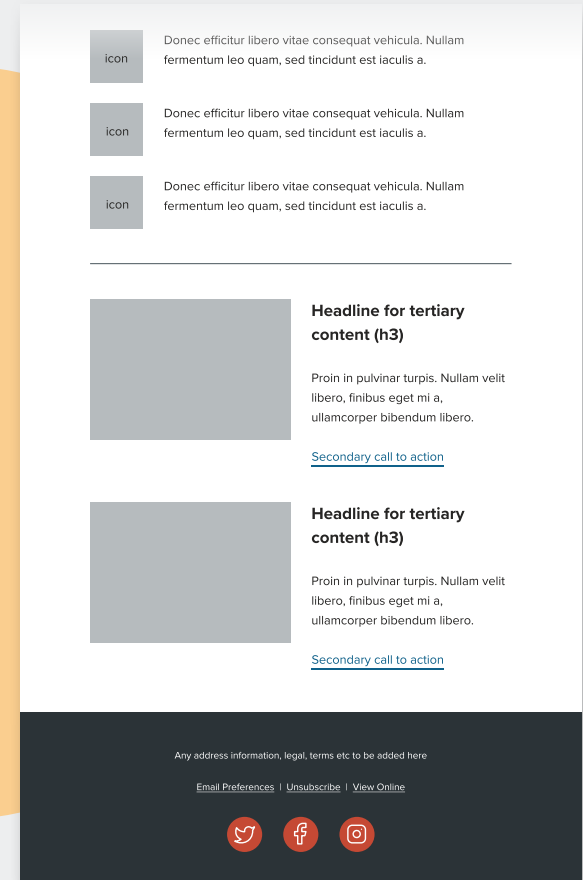
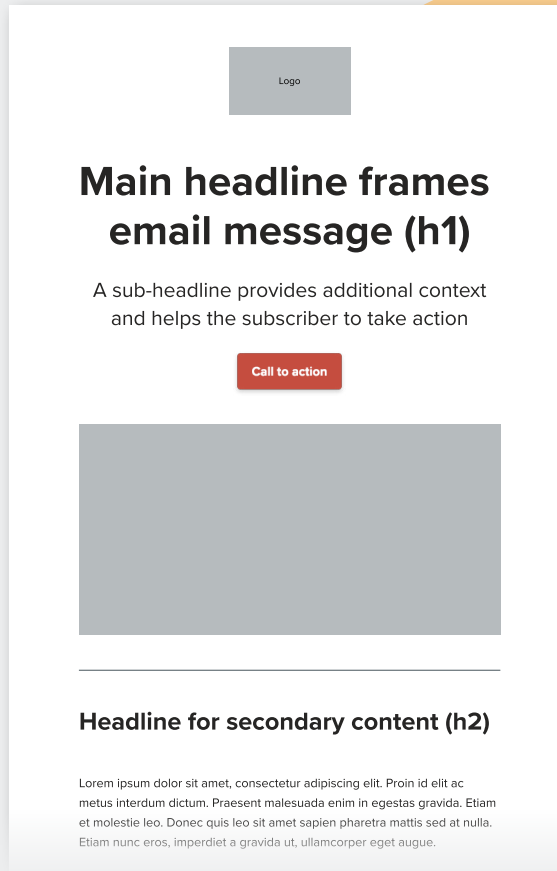
That's why it's important to keep your email layout **simple** and **scannable**.

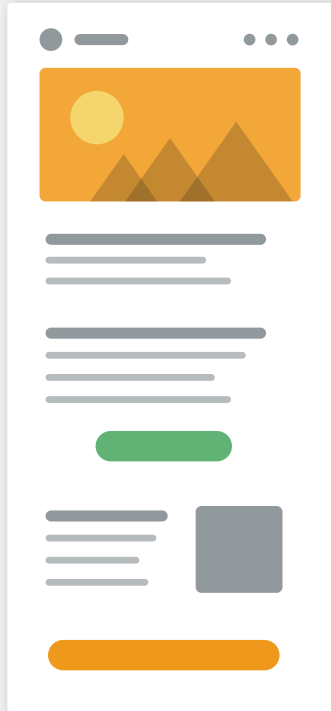
In the following sections, we'll walk you through some important considerations and give our recommendations.

- 1.1 **Sample email layout**
- 1.2 **Hierarchy**
- 1.3 **Layout elements**
- 1.4 **Single- vs. multi-column**

The following is a sample email layout that we'll reference throughout this lesson.

1.1 Sample email layout





✓ Strong visual hierarchy

1.2 Hierarchy

Hierarchy—or creating visual differences that reinforce importance—helps readers consume content in email quickly.

Examples are creating bold, high-contrast headlines above smaller portions of copy and using whitespace between sections to avoid content bleeding together.

By using text size, color, and placement, you can create emails that are easy to scan and read.

NEXT UP

Semantic structure

to create a strong, visual hierarchy





 Strong visual hierarchy

Another important consideration for creating a strong, visual hierarchy is using headings in a semantic way:

Semantic Structure

H1 H1, or your primary headline, should be styled in a way that is deemed more important—like larger font size and font weight—to stand out against other elements.

H2 Reduce the font size for secondary headlines, and consider further styling—such as a lighter weight or color than your H1—to set it apart from your primary messaging.

H3 The same goes with tertiary headlines—aim to differentiate between your headings.

1.3 Layout elements

Hero

The **hero area** is what your subscriber sees on load. It's your shot to get them to take action, so make it count!

Use **big** and **bold** typography to make the purpose of the email clear.

For those who are ready to convert, give them the opportunity to take action with a clear call to action (CTA), or grab their attention with engaging imagery



Main headline frames email message (h1)

A sub-headline provides additional context and helps the subscriber to take action

Call to action

Headline for secondary content (h2)

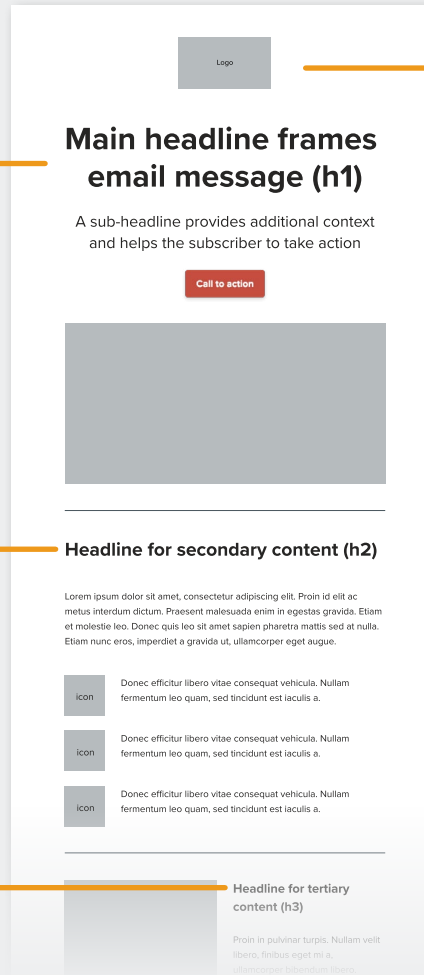
To ensure your emails render well across all desktop screens (without using a horizontal scrollbar), we recommend your emails be **no wider than 640px**.

1.3 Layout elements

Headlines

Headlines are great for scannability and offer subscribers visual anchor points as they read the email and determine what is most relevant to them.

It's best to keep email copy to a minimum. However, for longer emails, breaking up body copy with headlines helps subscribers understand the value of your email without reading every word.



Logo

Having your logo (or a visual identifier for your brand) helps subscribers recognize you on open.

1.4 Single- vs. multi-column layouts

Single-column layouts are especially effective at creating accessible campaigns. They streamline content and help reinforce hierarchy, aiding scannability in the process.

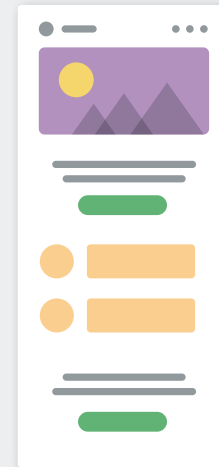


As a general rule of thumb, we recommend single-column layouts.

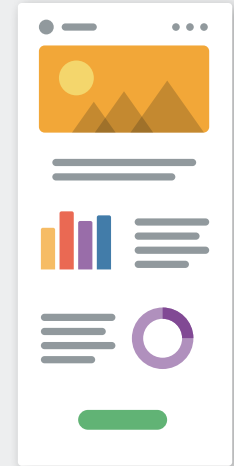
Though single-column layouts are the most simple and readable compositions, they aren't practical in every instance.

Why we recommend single-column layouts

1. Aids in creating accessible emails
2. Easier to adjust across different screen sizes
3. Complex, multi-column layouts can lead to sensory overload for users



✓ Single column layout



✗ Multi-column layout

1.4 Single- vs. multi-column layouts

Although **multi-column layouts** are more complex to design and code, they can be a great option to help shape content and structure hierarchy for emails.

So, when should you use a multi-column layout? Here are some instances:

- Newsletter-style emails
- Emails with secondary and tertiary content
- Emails with more than one action for subscribers to take



Lesson recap



- Always aim to keep things **simple** and **scannable**.
- Create a **strong hierarchy** by using text size, color, whitespace, and font weight—and structuring your headings in a semantic way.
- We recommend designing your emails at a **maximum width of 640px** for desktop.
- As a general rule of thumb, **single-column layouts** are the way to go.
- **Multi-column layouts** can be a great option for emails with **more than one action** for subscribers to take (e.g., newsletters).