



litmus

Foundations of Email Design

LESSON 3

Fonts and Typography

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.

The topic for today's lesson? **Fonts and typography**. Let's dive in.

Fonts & Typography

There's no shortage of factors that can affect the rendering of your emails. Our latest research shows the most popular mobile email apps [update every 1.2 days](#).

We know that typography can speak volumes. But, if you want your email's font to render consistently across email clients, devices, and operating systems, there are several things to consider.

3.1 Fonts

3.2 Typography

3.3 Readability

3.4 Live Text

3.1 Fonts

Web safe fonts

Typefaces that come installed on most operating systems. These include:

- Arial
- Helvetica
- Verdana
- Georgia
- Times New Roman

Web fonts

Typefaces that are pulled in from a server. They are not available on all operating systems.

If your subscriber's email client doesn't support web fonts, they will see a fallback web safe font instead.

Web safe fonts

Pro:

- **Safer to use:** Your subscriber is likely to have these fonts installed.
- **Consistency:** When designing with a web font, you're only seeing what part of your audience will see, whereas with a web safe font, you're seeing what the majority will see.

Web fonts

Pro:

- **More creative freedom:** Wider variety to choose from.
- **Consistency with brand identity:** You can align with your brand font.
- Can have a **fallback web safe font** of your choosing.

Con:

- **Limited number of web safe fonts** compared to web fonts.
- Used pretty frequently and can make it **harder to stand out** and recognize your brand.

Con:

- May require **additional development time** and additional testing.
- Higher risk of email **not rendering exactly as planned**.

3.1 Fonts

Web safe fonts vs. web fonts

While web safe fonts are more “safe” to use, web fonts let you show off your brand.

Web fonts open up new avenues of creativity in typography, allowing you to be creative and accessible—all while sticking to your brand’s look and feel. The catch? With web fonts, **you should have a fallback web safe font in place** for email clients that don’t support web fonts.

Including multiple fonts ensures that if one doesn’t work, there is a fallback or backup font of your choosing—often referred to as a font stack. Without this, the email client will render it’s default font. For example, Outlook’s default font is Times New Roman, a serif font, whereas Gmail will render a sans-serif font.

We shared the pros and cons of each, so ultimately, it’s up to you. Take your pick!



Recommended reading

Get into the details of web fonts in our [Ultimate Guide to Web Fonts](#)—complete with a full walkthrough on how to embed them in emails.

NEXT UP Resources

for font stacks, and more



3.1 Fonts

Resources

For web safe CSS font stacks, you can grab them from [CSS Fonts](#).

Ready to give web fonts a try? Here are some places to start looking.

- [Google Fonts](#) - *Free*
- [Adobe Fonts](#) - *Included with Creative Cloud subscription*
- **Web font services** - *Available on a paid basis; requires correct licensing to use in your emails*
 - [Type Network](#) (Web License)
 - [Process Type Foundry](#) (Web License)
 - [Optimo](#) (Digital Ads License)
 - [Fontspring](#) (Custom Email License)
 - [Typotheque](#) (Web License)
 - [Production Type](#) (Online Advertising License)
 - [MyFonts](#) (Web License)
 - [Commercial Type](#) (Web License)



Some fonts are easier to read than others. Keep accessibility in mind.

NEXT UP
Typography

leveraging it for impact



3.2 Typography

The styling of your written content can make a big impact on your emails.

One of the most effective ways to leverage typography is to create hierarchy to help guide readers through your email.

Lastly, you will read this

Later on, you will notice this

First, you will read this

Then you will read this

After, you will read this

3.2 Typography

Emails are often scanned as the reader searches for anchor points within your email.

You can create these anchor points by leveraging font styles, sizes, weights, and colors. This helps guide your subscribers to the most important part of your email.

We break it down for you in this example.

Overarching messages with big, bold typography

Secondary hero messaging for additional value on open

Primary call to action

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean in ligula sit amet est ultricies egestas. Curabitur congue, lectus vel blandit porta, est nibh egestas massa, eget laoreet justo diam ac leo. Sed varius at turpis a aliquet. Donec scelerisque ac justo eget tristique. Quisque elementum consectetur odio id blandit.

Make the email scannable by highlighting key info in headlines

Suspendisse maximus dolor lacus, in viverra augue semper vel. Sed dolor enim, volutpat blandit elementum nec, pellentesque at nisl. Aenean in placerat lorem. Nulla quis nibh enim. Sed id

Make the email scannable by highlighting key info in headlines

Suspendisse maximus dolor lacus, in viverra augue semper vel. Sed dolor enim, volutpat blandit elementum nec, pellentesque at nisl. Aenean in placerat lorem. Nulla quis nibh enim. Sed id massa ut ipsum feugiat varius.

Secondary messaging can be highlighted in less dominant headlines

Vestibulum in condimentum mi. Morbi consequat enim nec quam bibendum, vitae posuere lectus aliquam. Phasellus id pretium nisl. Praesent eu pretium nisi. Proin lobortis id risus sed ultricies. Vivamus ut purus a mauris interdum finibus eu ut massa.

[Secondary call to action](#)

Smaller font sizes and lighter colours help the reader to see this content as least important. The absence of a headline makes this section hard to scan, therefore this content must be low value.

3.2 Typography

As for typefaces?



We recommend sticking with serif and sans-serif—especially for body copy.

They are the most commonly used typefaces because they're the most readable, and thus most accessible. They also render well when scaled down and at lower weights.

Script and display typefaces can be hard to read and even harder to scan. If used, they're generally reserved for headlines.

Here are web safe fonts best supported across Windows and Mac devices:

Web Safe Fonts

Best supported across Windows and Mac

Sans-serif fonts:

Arial
Arial Black
Arial Narrow
Tahoma
Trebuchet MS
Verdana

Serif fonts:

Baskerville
Courier New
Georgia
Palatino
Times New Roman



Recommended reading

Want to learn how to leverage typography in a meaningful, impactful way? Read our deep dive on [typography in email](#), featuring tips, examples, and more.

3.3 Readability

There are several ways to aid the readability—and accessibility—of your emails. Here are our quick tips to help you get started.



At Litmus, we use 18px for body copy, with 14px applied to tertiary content, such as footer copy, caveats, and captions.

- **Left-align your body email copy**
One of the best ways to support readability is to use left-aligned text. A general rule of thumb: If you have any copy longer than three lines, left-align that copy.
- **Keep line-height to 1.5 to 2 times the size of the text**
The World Wide Web Consortium’s [guidelines around line spacing](#) recommend 1.5 to 2 over single spacing to improve readability.
- **Use a minimum font size of 14px**
Ensure your text is large enough for people to easily read, regardless of screen size. Some mobile devices will automatically enlarge text that is less than 14px.

3.4 Live text

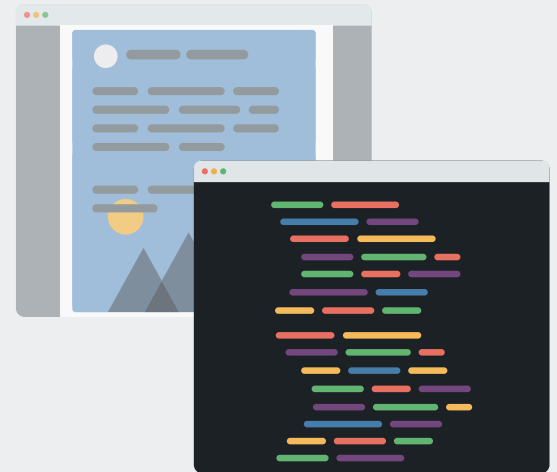
The majority of copy in your email should be included as live text inside of HTML elements.



At the core of the emails we send at Litmus is a foundation of HTML, CSS, and live text that help keep all of our campaigns accessible.

Curious about our stance on image-only emails? They aren't the best for accessibility.

While a lot of brands opt for all-image emails, we suggest using as much live text as possible—styled with CSS to keep it on brand—so people using assistive technology like screen readers have actual content to consume.



Recommended reading

- See why experts say you [shouldn't send image-only emails](#).
- Learn how to make HTML emails instead of all-image ones ([spoiler: It's easier than you think](#)).

Lesson recap



A B C D E F
G H I J K L M N O
P Q R S T U V W X Y
Z 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 :
; < = > ? @ ! " # \$ %
& ' () * + , - . /

- We recommend sticking with **serif** and **sans-serif**—especially for body copy.
- Use a **minimum font size of 14px**. At Litmus we use 18px for body copy.
- Left-align** your body email copy.
- Keep **line-height to 1.5 to 2**.
- The majority of text in your email should be included as **live text** inside of HTML elements for accessibility.

Need a recap? Revisit the previous lessons on [Layouts and Imagery](#) here.