

HOW TO CREATE PROFESSIONAL DESIGNS IN CANVA

Canva is a free, easy to use online design platform and app that allows non-designers to create beautiful professionally branded designs.

This guide contains tips to help you avoid common design mistakes, and how to use Canva to create stunning professional designs without having to upgrade to Canva Pro.

WELCOME

This guide is to help non-designers create visual messages like a pro. Canva allows users to easily create designs, but it's important to craft your design in a way that represents your brand and attracts your target audience.

This isn't a how to use Canva tutorial/guide as they already have some fabulous tutorials and resources available [here](#).

I often find amateur looking designs are down to common mistakes and I see these time and time again. These mistakes can often be avoided by following some key principles, so I've created this guide to share these with you, helping you to create professional branded designs using the free version of Canva - you don't even have to upgrade to Canva pro!

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

If you produce designs for your business or brand in Canva such as social media posts,

flyers, posters, presentations etc, then this guide is for you.

Regardless of your industry, your brand design or the type of design you're creating, you can improve the quality and professionalism of your design by following some key principles:



Define your key brand elements



Apply your brand kit consistently



Create templates and keep them organised



Pay attention to design details



Adjust your design for each platform/medium

Have fun and good luck creating the designs your business deserves.



I'm Debbie, creative director, designer and strategist at **Clockwork Creative Consultancy**.

Clockwork Creative Consultancy is a creative strategic design studio that helps support businesses in building strong memorable brands and helping them achieve their goals.

For the last 15 years I've worked for SMEs and well-known corporate brands, helping them strengthen their customer experiences and watching how their brand and digital strategies perform.

Now I use that knowledge to help entrepreneurs and small businesses to launch a new business, product or service, drive interactions with desired audiences, or simply create some beautifully designed and engaging materials.

Debbie



DEFINE YOUR KEY BRAND ELEMENTS

Defining your key brand design elements is absolutely essential to creating a professional looking design, and this must be done before you start designing. If you have brand guidelines or have already defined the elements below for your brand then that's great, you can skip this section and go straight to the next principle, *Apply your brand kit consistently*.

Please note: Any screen shots or Canva instructions contained in this guide are for the Canva online platform rather than the Canva mobile app.

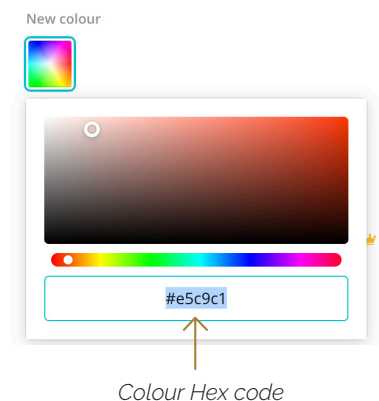
LOGO

For the purposes of this guide I'll assume you already have a logo for your brand or business. Ideally you should have a high resolution png version of your logo with a transparent background so it can be easily placed on your design. Dependent on your logo colours, you may also have single colour versions or other colour variations for use when placing on light or dark backgrounds.

COLOURS

Your colour palette and choice of colour combinations are very important design decisions. You should choose 5-6 colours that are consistent with your logo/brand identity - for inspiration you can see current colour trends from different creative communities [here](#).

You then need to make sure you know the Hex code of each colour as this is the required reference in Canva - *shown right*.



FONTS

I often find non-designers have a tendency to overdo it by using too many fonts and this leads to a disorganised and unprofessional look. Choose 2-3 fonts in Canva that will represent your brand and are consistent with your logo/brand identity.

Pairing the right fonts is crucial as correctly paired fonts communicate a message all on their own. For example, there are fonts that communicate formality and high quality, while others have more of an approachable and light hearted feel.

If you already have brand fonts, you might want to make sure these are available in Canva. If they're not, sadly only Canva Pro allows you to upload your own fonts, but the free version of Canva has a large font selection so you should be able to find similar looking alternatives.

Don't forget to pay attention to the font style you plan to use (light, regular, bold, italic, upper case, lower case etc) and the spacing between letters, all of these can make a big difference in how your designs look.



APPLY YOUR BRAND KIT CONSISTENTLY

A brand kit allows for effective application of your brand elements to achieve that much needed consistency. Strong consistent branding reinforces your identity and communicates who you are, shaping perception and building trust.

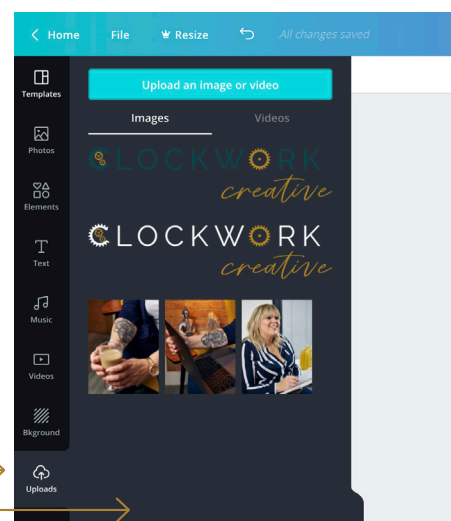
Canva has a *brand kit* feature that is accessible from the left hand main menu on the Home screen and allows you to save your brand elements, but to gain full access to this you unfortunately have to pay to upgrade to Canva Pro. However, you can easily get around this by using the other Canva features, and keeping a *brand sheet* handy with details of your brand elements as a quick reference.

LOGO

Although you can't save any logo files within the brand kit feature on the free version of Canva, you can easily upload files and images once you're in the design view/UI - *shown right*.

You can then easily apply your logo, and other images you've uploaded, to any future designs as they're saved to your account and accessible from the uploads tab.

Click upload button or drag logo files and images here



BRAND COLOURS

The free version of Canva only allows you to save 3 colours in the *brand kit* feature. I recommend saving your 3 most used colours within the kit, then make sure you have the remaining colour references to hand when you're designing.

Sticking within your brand colours or tints of your brand colours is essential to achieving consistency across all of your brand designs.

BRAND FONTS

I would highly recommend deciding on which fonts you plan to use for as headings, subheadings, body copy and any potentially any additional highlighter text, this includes the font style and letter spacing. Again, while you cannot save your brand fonts to the Canva brand kit without upgrading, you can record this on your *brand sheet*.

Another way to help you apply your brand elements easily within Canva and create a consistent brand look and feel across your designs, is to create master templates for different types of designs and posts. See the next principle, *Create templates and get organised*.



CREATE TEMPLATES AND GET ORGANISED

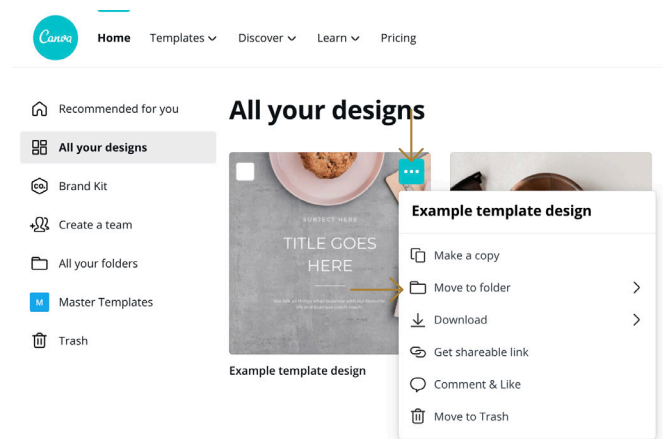
Between your brand design elements, templates and individual designs, keeping organised is vital to maintain consistency and achieve a successful design process for your brand.

FOLDERS

You cannot create or use folders within the design view without having to upgrade to Canva pro. But there is a way around this, when you're in the home screen view you can create two folders without having to upgrade, simply click on *All your folders* from left hand main menu, then click *create new folder* button from the top right corner.

You can then move your master templates into a single folder by clicking on the 3 dots in the top right corner of the design, and selecting *Move to folder* from the drop down menu - *shown right*.

Make use of your second free folder to help keep your designs and templates organised, for example this could be used for specific platform designs or if you manage designs for multiple brands.



TIP: You can view all of the designs you have created by using the *All your designs* view on the home screen so they're not mixed up with the Canva pre-set designs.

CREATE TEMPLATES

To help achieve even greater consistency, I highly recommend creating templates for common designs and posts that you can then use as a starting point for individual designs again and again. For example you could have a suite of Instagram post templates, a poster template, a leaflet template, a Facebook cover photo template and Pinterest post.

You can then easily create a design/post from a template by creating a copy so you don't modify the master template, then editing the text and replacing the imagery within the image frames. To create a copy of your template click on the 3 dots in the top right corner of the design *as shown above*, and select *Make a copy* from the drop down menu. Make sure you then rename the copy of your design so you it is differentiated from the template, then you can edit to create your post.

FILE/DESIGN NAMING CONVENTION

Another way to organise and easily find past designs, is to adopt a consistent naming convention. For example all your templates could follow *Master template name and platform* and individual designs *Design name, platform or medium and date*.



create



ATTENTION TO DESIGN DETAILS

In addition to applying the brand design elements consistently, to create a professional design it's important you pay attention to other details. I have collated the most common design details that are ignored by non-designers to help you create a professional looking high quality design.

ALIGNMENT

One way to create order and symmetry in your design is to properly align elements. A lack of alignment can lead to a design that is messy and unorganised. Rather than placing elements arbitrarily, use left, right and central alignment or grids to arrange elements neatly.

TIP: If you want to position several images in a grid formation, rather than trying to achieve consistent spacing between each image manually, you can use the Canva *grid* feature which can be found in the elements tab on the left hand side in the design view. By selecting a grid, each box acts as a frame for an image, to read more about using *grids* in Canva you can check out their tutorial [here](#).

SPACING

A sure sign of an amateur designer is the lack of space (or negative space) in a visual design. But instead of looking at space as empty space, it should be considered like any other important element of design. The correct use of spacing improves readability and draws the eye to the point of focus, a great example is google, you never roam around wondering where the search bar is!

The spacing between lines of text (leading) is also something you need to consider. Having too much space between lines can cause your text to appear disjointed and not enough, can make the text appear too tight and crowded.

READABILITY

Good design isn't just aesthetically pleasing, it should also communicate a message effectively and text should be easy to read. Placement of text and the amount of words fit into a single line of text, as well as contrast between text and background, all play an important role in the readability.

HIERARCHY OF TEXT

A hierarchy of text is important in a design because it allows the reader to understand, at a glance, the order of importance of text in relation to the rest. It guides the reader from one piece of information to the next with visual ease - *example shown below*.

YOU WILL READ THIS FIRST

Then you read this second

You will read this third and may ignore on a skim.

You will read this last and won't read this while skimming **unless a phase is bolded.**



ADJUST YOUR DESIGN FOR EACH PLATFORM/MEDIUM

DESIGNING FOR DIFFERENT PLATFORMS

It's easily done, you've just created a design for your Facebook cover that you're really proud of and you decide you also want to share it on Instagram. You crop it into a square but suddenly the design looks terrible - do not use it anyway! This is a really easy way to turn a great design into an unprofessional looking one, you should make sure you optimise your design for the space/size/platform you're posting on.

Solving this problem in Canva Pro is particularly easy with their *magic resize* feature, and I won't lie to you, this one isn't so easy to solve in the free version of Canva! You effectively have to manually resize and move elements around to better suit the new space/proportion/size.

Using the example above you've done a design for a Facebook cover photo and you want to use the same design in Instagram, the best way to do this is to open Canva in another tab and select a blank Instagram design. Then go back to the Facebook cover design and select all the elements by dragging your mouse from the top left or right corner of the board down to the opposite bottom corner. Once all the elements are selected simply copy, click back to the tab with the blank Instagram design and paste. You can then drag and resize the individual elements to better suit and fit a square design.

TIP: To resize an image element proportionality you can do so by dragging the corner handles, using the handles on the sides, top or bottom will effectively crop the image within the frame.

DESIGNING FOR OTHER MEDIUMS

Another important factor which is often overlooked is the medium in which your design will appear. If you're creating a design to be printed, like a poster, leaflet, advert etc this can make a difference in the way you go about creating your design.

For example, if you're creating artwork for a professional printer you will need to ensure:

- + Any images you upload are of a good quality, ideally 300dpi.
- + If you have any colour or imagery bleeding off the edge of a page, you will need to make sure that when you export/download as a PDF, you tick the Crop marks and bleed checkbox.
- + Be sure to change the colour mode to CMYK when creating your print ready file, Canva will default to an RGB colour mode, which is the mode for projects displayed on mobile devices and computer screens.

That's a wrap!

I hope you've found this guide and the principles useful. I know there is quite a lot to take in but don't fret, just keep this guide safe and have it to hand next time you're working your magic on Canva.

I believe making sure your designs and visual messages look professional is vital in communicating your brand effectively to your target audience.

Great visuals can bring your brand personality to life and help build brand recognition and trust.

If you've found this information helpful and you'd like to let me know your thoughts please do drop me an email on hello@clockwork-creative.co.uk.

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