The key to successful web design is planning. Creating a wireframe can be part of this process.

In web design, a wireframe is a diagrammatic representation of a web page. The purpose of a wireframe is to determine the structure and content for a web page. It displays the elements for a web page in outline. In its strict sense, a wireframe does not use colour or stylistic design features.

Creating a wireframe is an initial part of the design process. It can be created by hand and or with a computer programme such as Photoshop or Illustrator.

**The design process**

A typical design process would start with creating initial sketches by hand. These can be thumbnail size or larger as required. They help to develop ideas for content and layout. Next is creating a wireframe, in order to organize the elements and structure of the page. Next stage would then be to develop the design visually, adding form and colour to the elements, by using a computer programme or detailed drawing. Finally, the build phase where the design is built in code to become a web page.

The design process can be expressed thus:

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sketch

wireframe

graphic visual

code
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Some examples of initial sketches:
Some examples of wireframes:
Creating wireframes with Photoshop and Illustrator

Create a new document that is wider than the width of your proposed page content e.g. if the content is 960px then make the document 1100px or more. This will give you room to work in and, if needed, make notes. Height is not important as long as it is deep enough for the content. Set resolution to 72ppi.

If you wish, use guides to define the content area and other elements for the layout. Pull guides out from the Rulers.
Alternatively, you could use a grid for aligning content to. In PS and Ai, the grid can be accessed via the View menu. The size of the divisions for a grid can be set from the application preferences.

Placement of the grid lines can be positioned from the XY axis. Do this by pulling out the XY axis from the top left corner of the rulers and placing it on the document.

Creating an image placeholder Shape with Photoshop

Photoshop allows you to create your own shapes and save them as Custom Shapes. These then become available in the Custom Shapes library for repeated use.
Custom shapes can be created from one shape or a combination of shapes. For a Custom Shape to be created from a combination of Shapes they must be all combined on one layer.

An image placeholder symbol can be created from a combination of lines drawn with the Line tool. The simplest way to do this is to draw the lines in alignment with a grid: View > Show > Grid.

The process is to make the edges of the box with four lines and then do two diagonal lines across the centre of the box. To begin, draw a line along one of the grid lines to form one edge of the box. Set the weight of the line, in the Shape Options, to around 3-5 px. Before drawing a second edge, ensure that Combine Shapes is selected from the Shape Options at the top of the workspace.

On completion, all the Shapes should be combined on one layer.

When the symbol is complete convert it to a Custom Shape. Do this by going to Edit > Define Custom Shape…

In the dialogue box that follows, give the shape a name and click OK.
The Custom Shape will now become available for use. Choose the Custom Shape tool from the Tools panel and in the Shape Options click on *Shape*:
Creating an image placeholder Symbol with Illustrator

Illustrator allows you to create Symbols and save them into a library. These are graphic elements that you can create and re-use. You can do this to create a wireframe symbol for an image.

To create an image symbol in Illustrator, draw a box with the rectangular shape tool. Holding the Shift key will make it a perfect square.

Set a black stroke for the box and make or leave the fill as none. The Stroke panel can be found on the right of the workspace. It can also be found under the Window menu.

With the Line tool draw two diagonal lines, corner to corner.
Select the image by drawing a marquee around it with the Selection tool.

Open the Symbols panel. The Symbols panel can be found on the right of the workspace. It can also be found under the Window menu.

Click on the fly-out menu for the panel and choose New Symbol…

In the Symbols Options dialogue, give the symbol a name and click OK.
Your drawing is now available as a symbol in the Symbols panel. To use the symbol, simply drag it from the Symbols panel onto the document. Position and resize as required.
How to Read a Wireframe

Whether a client, stakeholder, or new to the wireframe world, here's a quick rundown of how to make sense of it all.

1. Visual Vocabulary
   Familiarize yourself with certain wireframe standards such as those for images, video, and drawing attention to certain areas.

2. Logos & Branding
   Logos will usually be represented the same way as images, a box with a "X" through it, and a text description inside. Grayscale or low-fidelity logos may be placed in the wireframe for certain situations.

3. Color
   Other than links possibly being colored differently, most color and visual design elements are left for the later visual design stage.

4. Hierarchy
   The importance or hierarchy of the information on the page is created by using headings, most often bold or heavier weighted text, of different sizes and location.

5. Links
   Links are represented most often as blue, underlined text. Links may also be a different color, keeping in line with a particular visual design direction.

6. Text
   Text in the wireframe will either be represented by actual copy, or by placeholder text such as Lorem ipsum, sometimes referred to as "greeking".

7. Layout
   All of the elements listed above, keeping in mind whitespace, readability, and hierarchy, collectively make up the overall page layout.

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From the blog

How to read and understand a wireframe

Joe 1 May 24th, 2010


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"Who, this is totally a Twitter feed on our website, man!"
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@Twitter Joe

"I like cats."
@Twitter Jim

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