WEB DESIGNERS, PLEASE STOP DOING THIS

H HEADINGS
A QUICK GUIDE FOR WEB DESIGNERS

Headings are not for size and styling. They are for structure.
Just because you can, does not mean you should.

Pretty is good. Pretty and structurally sound is better.

H1

One H1 per page

The main topic of the page, and the first heading in the code. It tells users and search engines what the page is about.

```
<h1>Made to measure aluminium
sliding doors</h1>
```

H2

Use H2s for main sections

Break the page into sections. Think chapter titles. Have as many as you need, and make each one describe what sits under it.

```
<h2>Features and benefits</h2>
<h2>Colours and finishes</h2>
```

H3

Use H3s for sub-sections

An H3 sits under an H2 and covers a more specific point. It never appears on its own.

```
<h3>Thermal performance</h3>
<h3>Security options</h3>
```

H4 H5 H6

Only go deeper if you need to

Further sub-sections, always in order, H4 under H3 and H5 under H4. Most pages never need them.

```
<h4>Installation</h4>
<h5>Preparation</h5>
```

THE HIERARCHY IS THERE FOR A REASON

Get the order right and you get:

- ✓ Screen reader users able to jump to the section they want
- ✓ A page people can scan instead of read
- ✓ Search engines that can tell what the page covers
- ✓ The same structure on every page of the site

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- × Two H1s because two modules both default to one
- × Skipping levels, H2 straight to H4
- × Using a heading tag to make text bigger
- × Headings on labels, buttons, menus and footer titles
- × An H3 with no H2 above it, usually an accordion
- × Theme defaults wrapping the logo in an H1 on every page
- × Hidden headings left behind by a demo import

WANT TO GET THIS RIGHT ON EVERY BUILD?

One hour on Zoom, your own builds on screen, and the SEO decisions that happen during a build sorted out for good.

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NON-WANKY SEO

THE DETAIL

WHAT HEADINGS ARE, AND WHAT THEY ARE NOT

Headings are structure, not styling

An H tag tells a browser, a screen reader and Google how a page is organised. It is a table of contents written into the code, and it is not a font size.

If a bit of text needs to be bigger, bolder or a different colour, that is a job for CSS. Style a paragraph or a div. The second you reach for an H2 because it looks right at that size, you have told Google that line is a section of the page, and it isn't.

The hierarchy in full

TAG	WHAT IT IS	THE RULES
H1	The page title	One per page. First heading in the code. Says what the whole page is about.
H2	A main section	Describes what that section covers. Sits under the H1. As many as the page needs.
H3	A sub-section of an H2	Never appears without an H2 above it. Again, as many as you need.
H4 to H6	Further sub-sections	Always under an H3, never alone. Most pages never need them. If you are reaching for an H4, check whether you have an H4's worth of content or whether you just want smaller text.

Don't skip levels

H1 then H3 then H2 is a broken outline. Go down one level at a time. You can jump back up, so an H3 followed by an H2 starting a new section is fine. You cannot jump down.

Labels are not headings

This is the one that catches most builds. None of these are sections of the page, whatever size they are displayed at. They are interface furniture and need styling rather than a heading tag. Marked up as headings, they make the page outline read like nonsense and the page look a lot less focused on its actual topic.

- **Form field labels** such as "Your name" or "Email address". Use a label element.
- **Buttons and CTAs** such as "Get in touch" or "Book a call". Use a button or a link.
- **Footer column titles** such as "Quick links" or "Follow us". Style a paragraph or a span.
- **Everything in the same family:** sidebar widget titles, cookie banner text, breadcrumbs, pricing table column headers, testimonial attributions, stat callouts like "500+ clients", the logo in the header, and carousel slide text.

ON THE BUILD

GETTING IT RIGHT BEFORE YOU HAND IT OVER

Headings have to describe what follows

"Welcome" tells nobody anything. Neither does a heading made of a single word, or a heading that is really a design flourish sitting on its own with no content under it.

If someone read only the headings on the page, they should understand what the page covers and be able to find the bit they want. That is the test.

Things that break pages in builders

Page builders and themes are where most of this goes wrong. Worth checking on every build:

- Theme defaults that wrap the site logo or the tagline in an H1, so every page ends up with the same H1.
- Slider and hero modules that default to H2 on every slide.
- Blog listing pages where the post titles are H2 but the page's own H1 is missing.
- Accordion and tab titles set to H3 with no H2 above them.
- Hidden headings left over from a demo import, sitting in the code doing damage where nobody can see them.
- Two H1s because two separate modules both default to H1.

Why it matters beyond SEO

Screen reader users navigate by heading. They pull up a list of the page's headings and jump to the one they want. If that list is a mix of button labels and design text in no logical order, it is useless to them, and that is an accessibility problem before it is a ranking one.

The quick check before you hand a site over

Run a heading checker, or view the outline in your browser's accessibility tools, and read the headings on their own:

- One H1, and it says what the page is about.
- Sensible order, no skipped levels.
- Every heading describes the content sitting under it.
- Nothing in the list that is really a button, a label or a bit of styling.

Talk to your SEO before you build, not after.

Send the heading structure over at wireframe stage. A two minute check on an outline beats unpicking a finished page six months later.