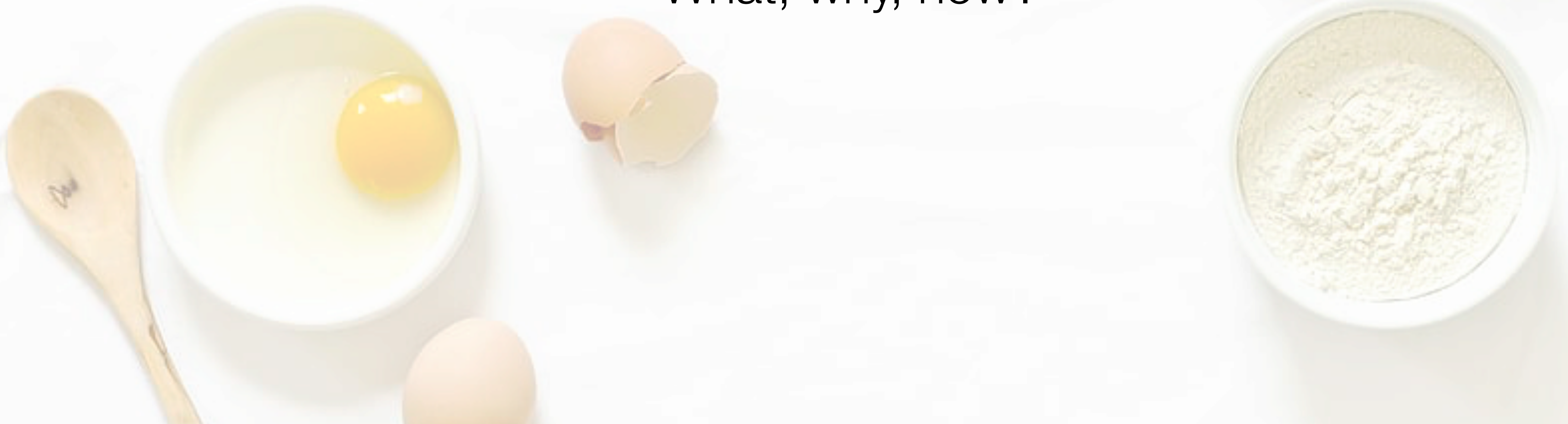


Content Design

What, why, how?



What people REALLY care about... is not your site or app

When someone visits a site or uses an app, they won't care about the stress and thought that went into the site design. They won't care about the debates that went into the choice of typeface or colour.

All they will really care about is getting what they are looking for. If your site or app works the way they expect, good. If not, they probably won't be back.

It does matter... but users don't care.

Users are distracted, they're busy, they skim and stop as soon as they find what seems good enough. They will never pause to learn how best to use your site or app.

So how do we tackle this?

One useful strategy is called **Content Design**.

Content Design says form should follow function. Always.

Content Design is about understanding the range of possible media elements – *text, photos, charts, illustrations, video, audio* – and choosing the best combination to satisfy your audience's needs.

It is very strongly linked to words and writing, but it encompasses more than just that.

Content Design adheres strongly to the principle that *form should follow function*.

As such, it is not really a new concept, although the formalisation of this thinking is a very useful way to understand it.

When form determines function the product may seem more attractive, but it won't work as well or make as much real-world sense.

Form follows function. It also follows convention, so understand what's normal.

So understand, understand, understand

To be an effective content designer it is vital to understand three things:

1. Your audience
2. Your platform
3. Your content

Your audience is an absolute – you can't change them so make everything you do work *for* them.

The platform determines how your content will function – having a sound understanding helps you make effective strategic decisions and edits.

Your content is more malleable – if a more casual tone of voice is needed, if an animation conveys a series of steps more effectively, or even if different words are required for people to find you online, this is where the content designer's job really comes into its own.

Finding your audience

'If you build it they will come' is one of the most misleading things someone can say. It REALLY doesn't work like that!

First, you have to understand your audience. Until you do this you're just crossing your fingers.

'Understand your audience.' Does this sound familiar? It should...



Three things to keep in mind...

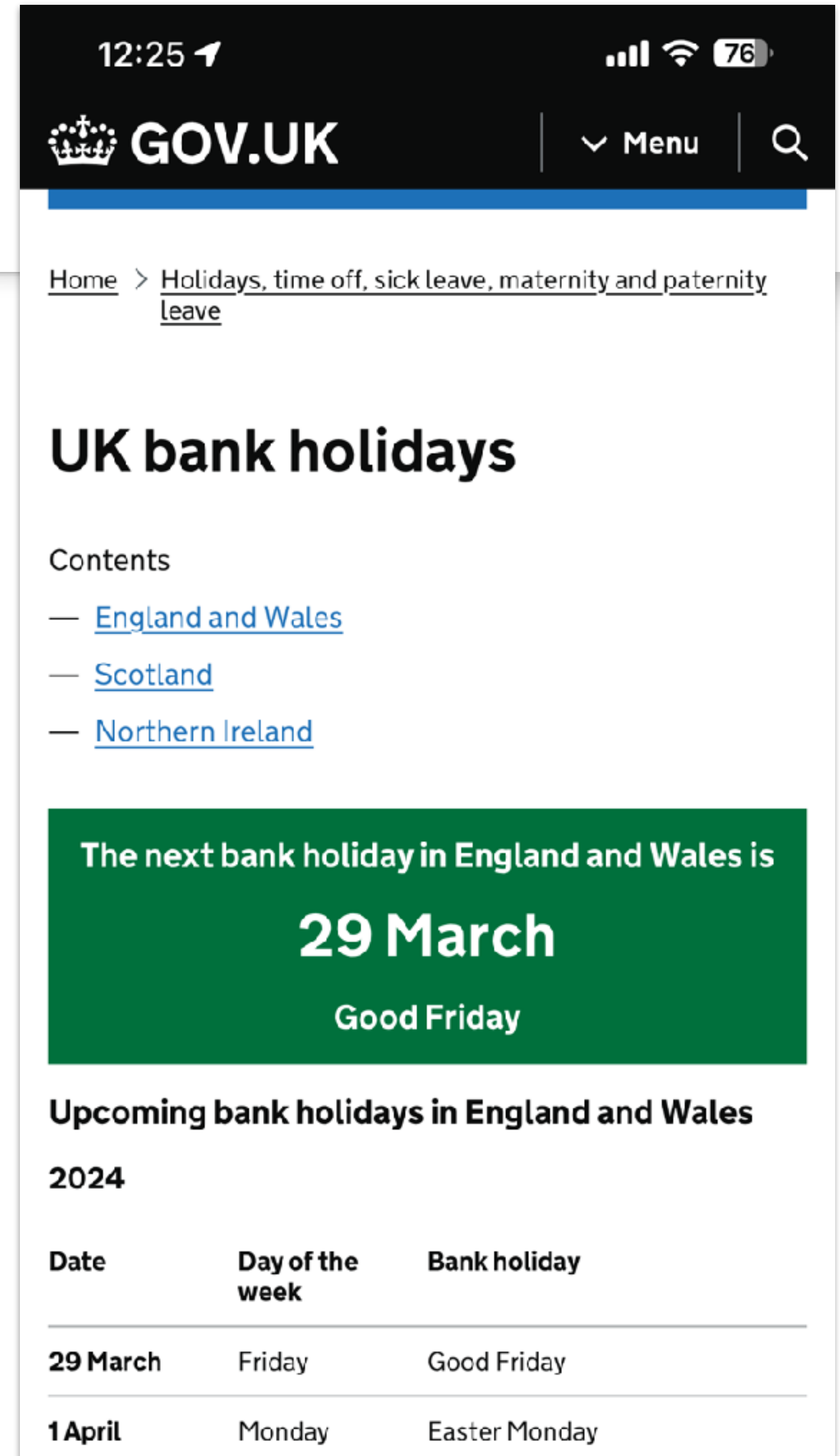
Before you write, draw or lay out anything make sure you know the answers to WHO, WHAT and HOW...

WHO is your audience? Forget your assumptions, make certain you really know this.

WHAT do they want? What are they looking for? Can they (not you) find it?

HOW should you try to speak to them?

This [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) web page lists UK bank holidays. Instead of showing a dense table of all the year's bank holidays, it opens with a big green box that holds the information everybody wants to know: when the next day off is!



So... how?

Understand how to give your users what they want by

- applying data analysis,
- having debates and discussions,
- writing user personas and stories,
- testing, and so on. For example...

Google Trends



Google Trends is a very useful tool for exploring words or phrases in the context of searching – what people really look for. Among other things this will show you:

- How often these phrases appear as search terms
- Where in the world these are most and least used
- Related search terms that work better (i.e. what words to use in your pages)

Back up a minute, what is Content Design?

Content Design is a form of UX design, applied to every kind of content including writing, as well as the creation, selection and use of appropriate media.

In relation to text it could be called 'UX writing': the concept and process of creating textual content that is useful and easy to read, just as UX design is the concept and process of designing products that are useful and easy to use.

The key characteristic is the placement of information at the heart of things; everything else stems from that distinction.

So, seriously, what IS Content Design?

Content Design isn't design in the *classic* 'graphic design' sense; it isn't so specifically about visual optimising.

But it is a critically important facet of the overall creative development process.

And it is all about presenting content in a more appropriate, effective way. Like graphic design.

Like UX design, it is all about understanding users and creating content specifically for them. It is driven by, based on, obsessed with... user needs and desires.

Is content design really graphic design after all?

Part of good Content Design is developing a consistent style, a visual and structural tone of voice.

Do this in conjunction with your wireframe and layout developments.

Think how you can use type, colour and layout to support and strengthen your message. The tone of voice and writing style is also useful.

Codify these things and use them consistently.



The Verge is a good example of content-based design in action. Although the articles can be long and in-depth, the design is light, accessible, consistent across the site, and extremely clear.

Two sides of the same coin?

Content design is...

- About understanding content relevant to your audience and presenting it in an appropriate manner

Graphic design is...

- About understanding your audience and presenting content in an appropriate *visual* manner



And really, both of these things – text content designing and visual content designing – are aspects of UX design.

Okay, not exactly the same... but oh, the parallels!



What writers call stuff:

Introduction
Outline
Rough draft
Scenes
Metaphors
Editing
Table of contents



What digital designers call stuff:

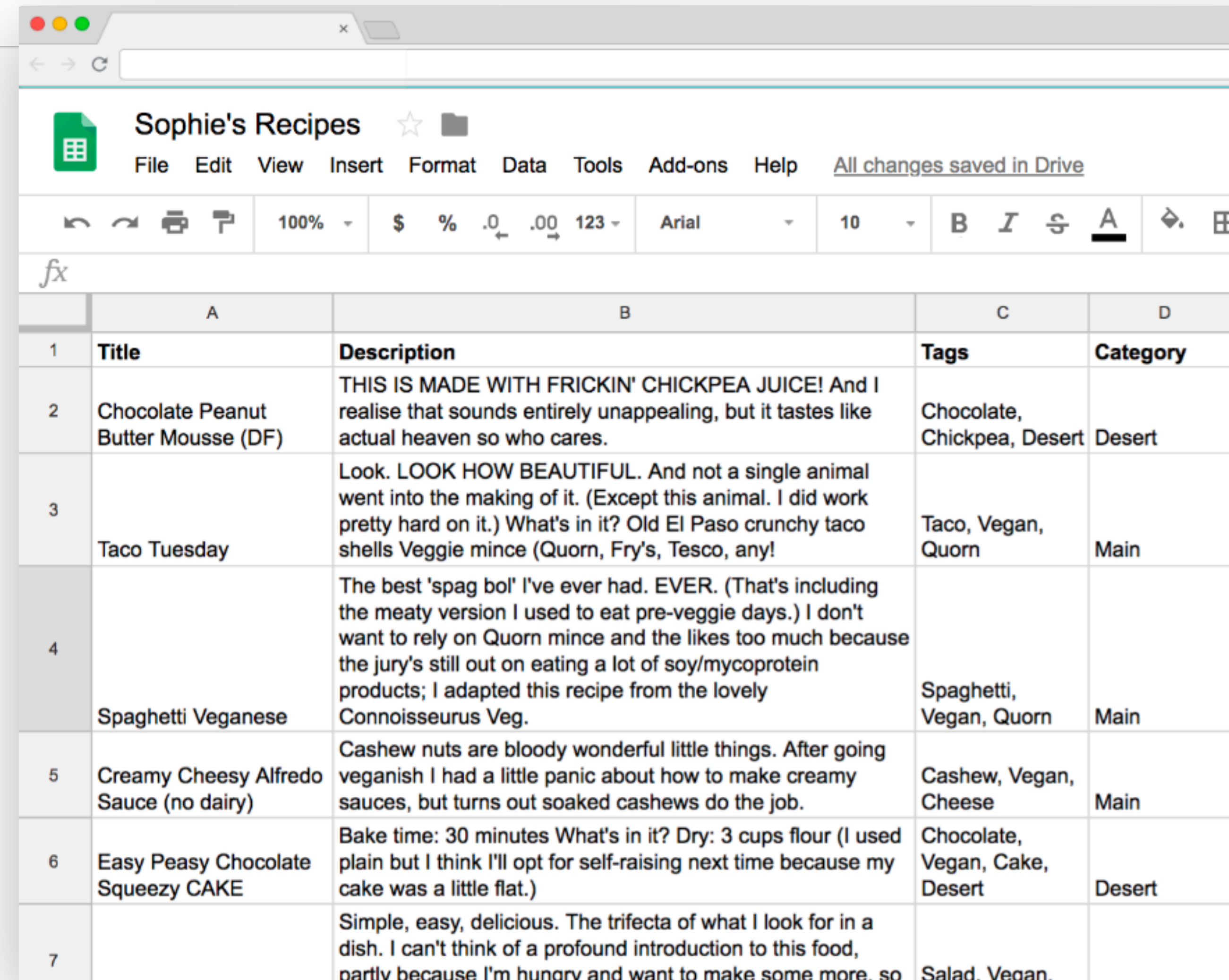
Onboarding
Wireframe
Mockup
Screens
Icons
Iterating
Information architecture

Lorem ipsum dolor sit?

Placeholder text and graphics can help people get started with a design task, but without real content you're guessing.

This can present a dilemma to designers: how can you design if you don't have content and you shouldn't keep using dummy content? Simple...

Prioritise getting content, or at least 'proto-content.' Conduct a content audit. Analyse competitor sites. Prioritise it. It's important, so find a way!



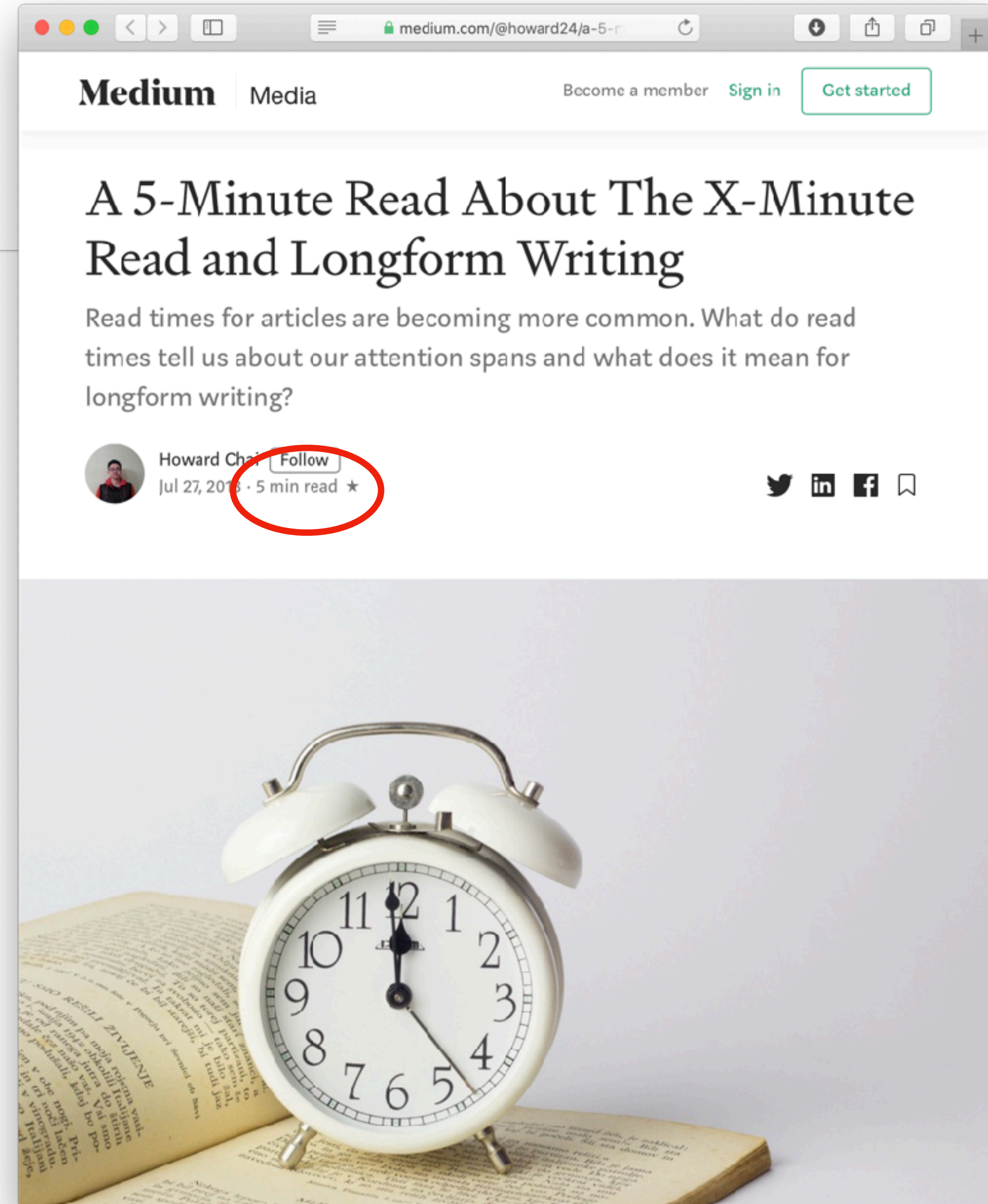
The screenshot shows a Google Sheets spreadsheet titled "Sophie's Recipes". The spreadsheet has four columns: Title, Description, Tags, and Category. The rows contain recipe information, including titles like "Chocolate Peanut Butter Mousse (DF)", "Taco Tuesday", "Spaghetti Veganese", "Creamy Cheesy Alfredo Sauce (no dairy)", "Easy Peasy Chocolate Squeezy CAKE", and "Salad, Vegan".

	A	B	C	D
1	Title	Description	Tags	Category
2	Chocolate Peanut Butter Mousse (DF)	THIS IS MADE WITH FRICKIN' CHICKPEA JUICE! And I realise that sounds entirely unappealing, but it tastes like actual heaven so who cares.	Chocolate, Chickpea, Desert	Desert
3	Taco Tuesday	Look. LOOK HOW BEAUTIFUL. And not a single animal went into the making of it. (Except this animal. I did work pretty hard on it.) What's in it? Old El Paso crunchy taco shells Veggie mince (Quorn, Fry's, Tesco, any!	Taco, Vegan, Quorn	Main
4	Spaghetti Veganese	The best 'spag bol' I've ever had. EVER. (That's including the meaty version I used to eat pre-veggie days.) I don't want to rely on Quorn mince and the likes too much because the jury's still out on eating a lot of soy/mycoprotein products; I adapted this recipe from the lovely Connoisseurus Veg.	Spaghetti, Vegan, Quorn	Main
5	Creamy Cheesy Alfredo Sauce (no dairy)	Cashew nuts are bloody wonderful little things. After going veganish I had a little panic about how to make creamy sauces, but turns out soaked cashews do the job.	Cashew, Vegan, Cheese	Main
6	Easy Peasy Chocolate Squeezy CAKE	Bake time: 30 minutes What's in it? Dry: 3 cups flour (I used plain but I think I'll opt for self-raising next time because my cake was a little flat.)	Chocolate, Vegan, Cake, Desert	Desert
7		Simple, easy, delicious. The trifecta of what I look for in a dish. I can't think of a profound introduction to this food, partly because I'm hungry and want to make some more, so	Salad, Vegan,	

Trends

Medium.com is a good example of both content-rooted design, where clarity of the writing and visual consistency of structure and elements is critical...

And of a small content-based and user-focused feature that has become increasingly common: the 'read time' indicator.



UX design core principles

Be contextual

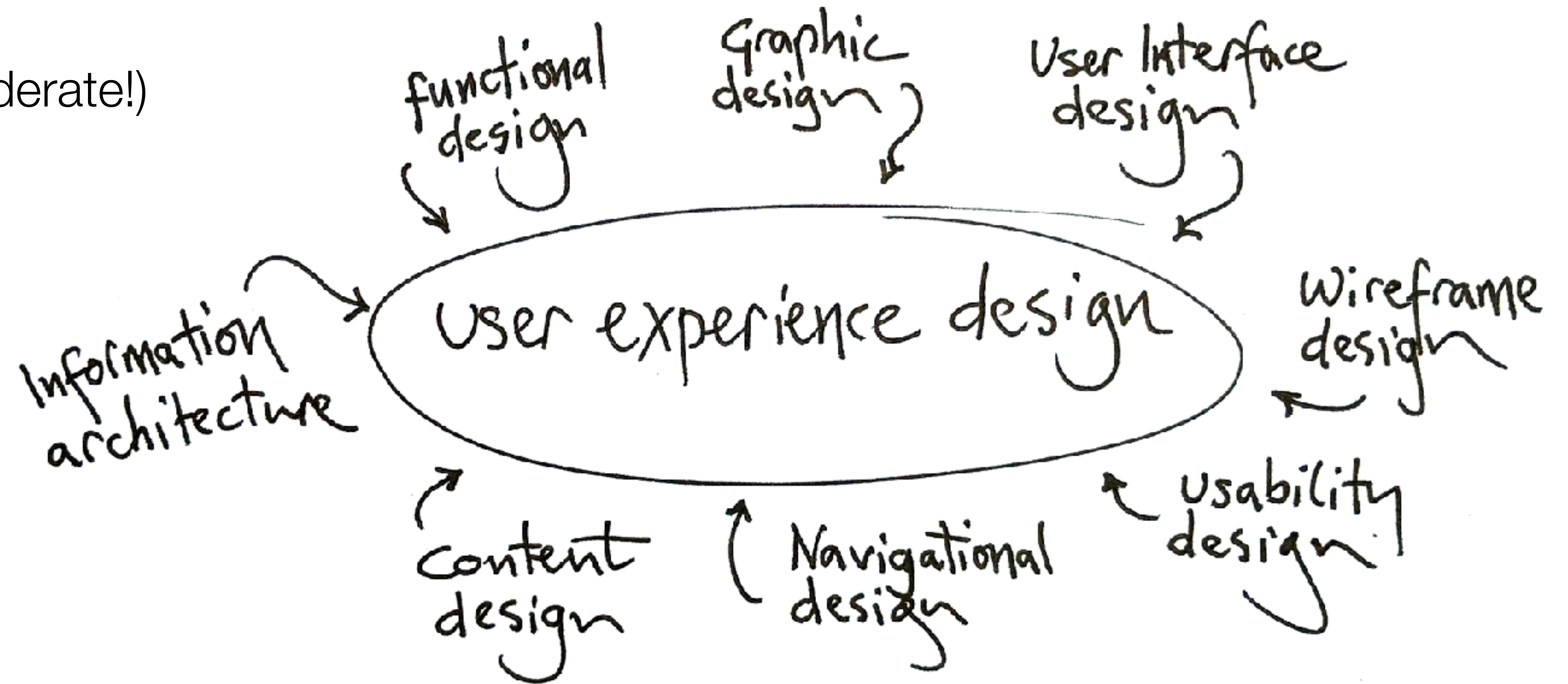
Be human (be kind, considerate!)

Be findable

Be easy

Be simple

Be appropriate



UX design encompasses it all

UX design is the single most important thing in digital publishing, and it includes all other design focuses:

- *Wireframe design* is about creating the most **appropriate layout structures**
- *Content design* is about creating the most **appropriate content**
- *Interface or graphic design* is about creating the most **appropriate visual presentation**



Content Design is clearly an aspect of UX design, one that has a big focus on information. As with the other aspects of UX design, this is an essential ingredient in the UX design pie.

End

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