Artifact

Wireframe

An outline of a screen or page that shows what it contains, in what order and how you navigate it, without the final visual design.

Origin

A widespread practice with no single author; Garrett (2002)



What it’s for

It helps decide the structure and priority of each screen before spending time on colors, type and images.

Key elements

Structure, not looks

It shows what goes where, in grays and boxes, so the conversation doesn’t drift to color.

Real content

With real or realistic text, you see sooner when something doesn’t fit or isn’t clear.

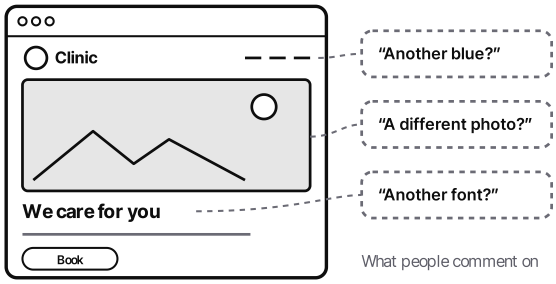
From low to high fidelity

First by hand and fast; more detail only once the structure is clear.

An example

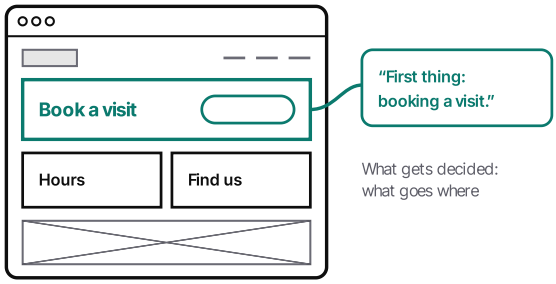
A neighborhood clinic wants a web page for booking appointments.

Straight to the final screen



The team shows a screen with final photo, colors and type, and the meeting goes on opinions about the blue; nobody notices that “Book” ended up small and at the bottom. **The look gets debated.**

The wireframe first



In gray boxes with real text, the talk is about what visitors need: booking moves to the top and the photo goes to the end. **The structure gets decided.**

A wireframe separates decisions: first what goes where and in what order; color and images come later, on a structure already agreed.

How it’s done

1

List the content and actions the screen needs.

2

Draw them as boxes in order of importance, including navigation.

3

Review them with others and adjust before moving to visual design.

Applications in design

When to use it

When you need to agree on what goes on each screen and in what order, before visual design.

Avoid

Presenting a wireframe so polished that people comment on color instead of structure.

Don’t fall for it

A wireframe doesn’t test interaction; for that, link the screens in a prototype.

Connections

Used by

- Information architecture
- Interaction design
- UI design
- UX design

Related to

- Sketching
- User flow
- Mockup
- Prototyping
- AI prototyping

Authors and works

2002	**Jesse James Garrett**	Placed it on the skeleton plane of the experience, where interface design, navigation design and information design come together.

Sources

Original sources

- Garrett, J. J. (2002). The elements of user experience: User-centered design for the web. New Riders.

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