

# Top 17 Breakthroughs in Eye Tracking Research

Eye tracking is an incredible tool that allows us to record how users visually digest a page. It captures reactions, visual patterns, and behavior that would otherwise be indiscernible. Most analysis tools on the market merely evaluate explicit user actions, whereas eye tracking affords us a rare glimpse into user reactions and their subconscious.

**1. Present your information in one column.**

Gaze naturally wanders online, so you should make the parameters of your message as unambiguous as possible. Leave multiple-column formats to print publications. Guide your online readers' attention down a single visual path.

**2. Design intuitive menus and buttons.**

Users linger on buttons and menus, so make sure yours are highly visible and well designed. Minimize the learning curve on your website by organizing your content and streamlining your navigation.

**3. Format efficiently.**

Over-formatting is a surefire way to confuse your audience. However, a well-structured set of bullet points and text does wonders for readability. Highlight key points, but don't overload the user with entire blocks of bold text.

**4. Text is king.**

Surprisingly, content (not graphics) is almost always the first thing that draws user attention. Visitors are usually in search of information, not images, so make sure that your important text is the most prominent element of your page.

**5. Distill text into digestible chunks.**

Users do not have the patience to troll for information imbedded in lengthy blocks of text. As a result, extensive copy is usually skimmed or ignored. Shorter sections are more manageable and enable users to pick out key points quickly. Keep it short, keep it sweet, or keep it to yourself.

**6. Leave it blank.**

Pages packed with text and graphics are overwhelming. Blank space allows the eyes to rest. White space is the visual equivalent of a big breath of fresh air; so throw open the windows, cut out the clutter, and give your readers a break every once in a while.

**7. Eyes travel in an F-shaped pattern.**

The most common eye tracking pattern resembles the letter "F". Users first look for navigation at the top of the page, followed by a quick scan of the first few lines of content. Gaze then drops down the left-hand side of the page, briefly skimming horizontally. Take advantage of this "F" pattern by placing the most important information at the top of the page and maintaining attention throughout the vertical stem with informative headers.

**8. Navigation belongs at the top of your page.**

Western users view pages the same way they read books: top to bottom, left to right. If you want users to click through beyond your homepage, navigation needs to be as intuitive as possible. Keep your nav as close to the top or left-hand corner as you can.

**9. Show them the big picture.**

Literally. Smaller images are skimmed because they add to clutter and tend to be uninformative. Users fixate on larger images that reinforce the message conveyed in nearby content.

**10. Keep it real.**

While it's tempting to populate your site with a bunch of models from stock photography, eye movement research shows that the layman doesn't always identify with airbrushed perfection. Models tend to be overlooked because they are so often used in advertisements. The average user relates to images of average looking people.

**11. Size matters.**

Our research shows that when presented with smaller fonts, users focused on reading for comprehension; while on the other hand, larger fonts with the same content prompted scanning behavior. Consider your intentions before selecting font size. If handled appropriately, both large and small fonts can be utilized to your advantage.

**12. Ditch your gaudy designs.**

Clear designs with ample open space make it easier for your customers to discern valuable information. In task-based testing, users found it difficult to identify simple information formatted in large, colorful fonts. The flashier the format, the more the reader assumed that they were being accosted by an ad. Reduce distracting design elements and bring your important content into focus.

**13. Choose your headings wisely.**

Attention spans run short online. Users read the first two words in a phrase much more often than the third and beyond. Visitors scan headers before they commit to reading full text; but if they can't glean something immediately they will pass over the meat of your message all together. Write significant (but brief) headers.

**14. Use sub-headers sparingly.**

Unless they provide vital information, sub-headers tend to be overlooked. Don't feel trapped by formatting conventions; there should never be any dead elements on your site. Rule of thumb: If it doesn't add value to your content, get rid of it.

**15. Place banner ads wisely.**

Although research shows that they are generally overlooked, banners located near the best content receive the most eye fixations. If you rely on revenue from ads, try to incorporate them next to informative areas that already capture visual attention.

**16. Create meaningful text ads.**

Eye tracking studies show that users pay much more attention to text ads than image ads. Use text ads to tell the customer exactly what you can do for them. Users will be more inclined to click through to your site if you clearly illustrate the value that your service or product can add to the task at hand.

**17. Lists, lists, lists.**

You've gotten this far, right? Lists are inherently informative and have a repetitive structure that encourages successive visual fixation. Lists let you know what you can expect to learn and exactly how long it will take. They are the perfect solution for relating a considerable amount of information in a concise format.