Color, Grids, Spacing & Alignment | Design Challenge

Professor Bilge Mutlu

Design Challenge

What to design: Three screens from the same app that share a unified visual system — plus one adapted variant that proves your system supports intelligent adaptation.

Pick a domain:

— **E-commerce:** Product page, cart, checkout
— **Social media:** Feed, profile, notifications
— **Productivity:** Tasks, calendar, notes
— **Health/fitness:** Stats, goals, activities
— **News/media:** Articles, categories, bookmarks

Requirements: Color & Grid

1. Accessible Color

— Color scheme + primary/secondary

— Semantic colors (success, error, warning)

— Contrast tested with WebAIM

— Document: scheme name, hex values, ratios

2. Consistent Grid

— 4-col (mobile), 8-col (tablet), or 12-col (desktop)

— Same grid on all screens

— Draw grid lines on at least one screen

— Annotate gutters and margins

Requirements: Spacing & Alignment

3. 8pt Spacing

— All gaps from the scale: 8, 16, 24, 32, 48px

— No arbitrary values

— Write values next to gaps

4. Clear Alignment

— Edge, center, or baseline

— Draw the invisible lines

— Same alignment discipline across screens

Adapted Variant

Redesign your primary screen for a different context.

Choose a trigger: **dark mode** · **compact mode** · **high contrast** · **focus mode**

What changed (surface):

— Color value shifts

— Density changes

— Theme / contrast adjustments

What stayed (structure):

— Grid lines identical

— Element positions unchanged

— Spacing relationships consistent

— Alignment lines persist

Process

Sketch Ideas (10 min)

— 2–3 quick layout variations
— Don't commit too early

Refine with Systems (25 min)

— Pick your best direction
— Apply all 4 requirements
— Use grid overlay template

Create Adapted Variant (10 min)

— Trace grid and alignment lines
— Swap color values
— Annotate what changed vs. stayed

Document Decisions (5 min)

— Label palette and contrast ratios
— Draw column lines, write spacing values
— Label surface vs. structure on variant

What Good Looks Like — and Common Pitfalls

Strong submissions:

— Three screens that feel like one app

— Every decision documented

— Clean layout — grid visible, spacing rhythmic

— Accessible colors — tested, not assumed

— Adapted variant holds together

Common pitfalls:

— Arbitrary spacing (15px, 18px → use the scale)

— Forgetting contrast in both themes

— Inconsistent grid across screens

— Moving elements in the variant (structure break!)

— Forgetting to annotate the adaptation

Timeline & Submission

— **Today:** In-class studio — sketch and refine all 3 screens + adapted variant

— **Friday:** Bring your **annotated screens** for critique

— **Due next Monday.** Submit:

  — Your **3 annotated screen designs** (PDF or image)

  — Your **adapted variant** with surface/structure annotations

  — Your **color palette** with contrast ratios documented

  — **2–3 photos** of your sketchbook showing process