**What is a logo?**

This question probably conjures up vivid images of a famous swoosh or an apple with a bite taken out of it. After all, we all know what a logo is.

A logo is a symbol or design used to identify a company or organization, as well as its products, services, employees, etc.

In its simplest definition, a logo identifies. It’s how your company is recognized and remembered among others. It also functions as the face of your business.

Your logo can also be an opportunity to make a statement about your organization. Take [**Amazon’s**](https://sellercentral.amazon.com/gp/help/external/200573210?language=en-US&ref=mpbc_201713630_cont_200573210), for example. The smiley arrow communicates that the company sells everything from “A-Z” and also represents how happy customers are when they shop with them.

One caveat is that even though a logo can convey a deeper meaning, it doesn’t have to. In fact, most companies struggling to decide on a logo are simply asking too much of it. All three of our designers agreed most people put too much stock in logos (nerdy design pun intended).

So remember, a logo may play an important role, but it isn’t everything.

**A logo isn’t:**

* **Your brand**  
  This is a common conflation, but your logo isn’t your brand. And your brand isn’t your logo. Your brand is intangible; it’s your reputation—what people think of when they hear your name, what they tell others about you and how you make them feel. Your brand is built from a thousand touchpoints with your customers—not from a logo.
* **Your visual identity**  
  When new companies or organizations request a logo, a good designer will say, “You don’t just need a logo, you need a brand identity.” Logos are part of the picture, but they’re not the entire thing. They’re just one image within a larger visual system that includes your colors, typography, photography, visuals, layout, etc.
* **An indicator of success**  
  Your logo isn’t going to make or break your business. [**Enron’s logo**](https://worldvectorlogo.com/logo/enron) was good, but the company’s ethical code wasn’t. [**Two Men and a Truck**](https://twomenandatruck.com/) is a billion-dollar company, and its logo is a stick figure drawing designed on a napkin by the founders’ mother. The best logo in the world can’t save a corrupt business, nor can the worst logo hold back an honest one.

Now that we’re clear on what a logo can and can’t do, let’s start the design process.

**How to design a logo**

Here are two things to keep in mind as we dive in:

1. **Design is a lot of strategy**. Yes, you will have to create something visual at some point. But the lion’s share of the work is strategic, especially at the beginning. Be prepared to do more thinking and decision-making than drawing.
2. **You’re not just designing a logo**. Remember that the logo is only part of a larger visual system, and its individual pieces all need to work together.

To do this right, you’ll want to work in phases. While every designer’s process looks different, the one we’re going to guide you through has five phases:

* Discover
* Explore
* Design
* Refine
* Define

Every phase has its own **goal, process** and **deliverable**. We’ll outline why each phase is important, the series of actions or steps you need to take, and the final deliverable you’re working toward—which you’ll need for the next phase.

**Phase One: Discover**

**Goal**

The discovery phase is the “question” phase. Designers use this time to tease out as much context and background as possible to fully understand their client’s company or organization, its values, business, brand attributes, etc. This is also the time to pose preliminary design questions about the desired look and feel, all possible use-cases and any must-haves or special requests.

For you, this will be more of a self-discovery phase. Your goal is to have a solid understanding of who your company/organization is, what you believe in, what you want to accomplish and how you want to get there. Remember, you’re not just designing a logo. You’re shaping your brand identity.

While you may think you know these things, I encourage you to go through the exercise of writing your answers down. My guess is that there’s some things you haven’t considered.

**Process**

Ask yourself:

* Why do you want and/or need a new logo? What’s the catalyst for this design?
* What is the meaning/story behind your company name?
* Who are your target audiences?
* Who are your main competitors?
* What are your goals for this new logo? How will “success” be measured?
* Who are your 3-5 top brand “role models?” Who’s look and feel do you admire?
* What do you want people to feel when they see your logo?
* What are the values you wish your brand to express?
* What are the unique characteristics of your brand’s personality?
  + For example: Is your brand refined, curious, nostalgic, vibrant, etc?
* What will be the main use-cases of the logo/visual system? Social? Website? T-shirts?
  + Context matters!
* Any special requests or must-haves included in the design? If a visual refresh, anything to maintain from the previous iteration?

**Deliverable**

After you’ve answered these questions, you’ll summarize the answers in a **creative strategy** that provides a general overview of your business. You might include: your objective for the design process, the tone of your brand, visual considerations and an early vision for the design system and logo, including any themes that surfaced in this phase.

Not only will you use this strategy document to guide your next phase, you’ll also use it to judge your success throughout the process. At the end of each phase, evaluate your deliverables by how well they fulfill the vision established in the creative strategy. When personal opinions and preferences inevitably arise, refer back to this document to stay objective.

**Phase Two: Explore**

**Goal**

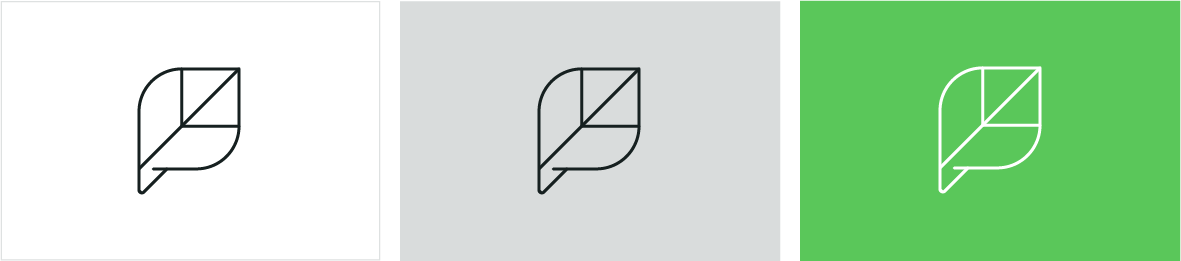
This is your research phase, but “exploration” sounds more exciting. And it is, we promise. The exploration phase might just be the most fun and—as someone who’s embarking on this design process solo, and possibly for the first time—the most helpful.

Essentially, you’ll be turning your focus outward to encounter and explore design out in the world. Your goal here is twofold: Get educated and get inspired.

**Process**

Start simple by googling basic design principles. Read up on the fundamentals like style, color, and typography.

Our designers mentioned that certain principles of color theory can be especially helpful for logo design. Different colors evoke different emotions and behaviors, helping you create the desired emotional response from your audience. It’s fascinating stuff, really.



For example, blue inspires trust, dependability and authority. It’s no coincidence that blue is a popular choice for banks, credit cards and software. Green evokes feelings of peace, growth and health. Companies like Whole Foods and BP use green in their branding to strategically communicate a level of care for the planet.

Discover which color will elicit the feelings you want from your audience.

Once you’ve got a handle on the basics, start gathering intel. Look first to your immediate competitors, then to your broader industry. Don’t just look at logos. Experience the entire visual system by observing brands across multiple channels, ie. website, different social media networks, etc. Take notes. What elements stand out to you, both good and bad?

Next, look outside your industry. Explore what’s trending among the design community. Look to websites like **[Dribbble](https://dribbble.com/" \t "_blank)**, **[Behance](https://www.behance.net/" \t "_blank)** and [**Brand New**](https://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/) for recent creative work from the world’s leading designers. Search #logodesign or other related hashtags on Instagram. The website 99designs also has a [**discover page**](https://99designs.com/discover) for design inspiration you might find useful.

**Deliverable**

Create a **mood board** to collect all the images, designs, color combinations, photos, illustrations and yes, logos, you felt drawn to, and represent the look and feel you want for your brand identity.

If you’re feeling crafty, you can create an actual board by cutting and pasting printed images. But most designers keep it digital. The easiest way to collect is Pinterest, but if you need to share/review easily, just copy and paste your images into a document.

If you’re drawn to several design directions, create separate mood boards for each. Be sure to include short descriptions about how each board’s visual choices express the brand attributes detailed in your creative strategy. Ideally, you’d present these boards to other members of your team or to a decision-maker, and they’d help you narrow down to one direction.

**Phase Three: Design**

**Goal**

Finally! The goal here is pretty straightforward: Take all the considerations and inputs from the first two phases and start generating some logo designs.

**Process**

There’s a lot to consider when approaching how to design a logo:

**Tools**

Before you start, make sure you have what you’ll need to design:

**Pencil and paper**

Sketching some preliminary ideas is a great place. Don’t over-complicate this. Design is an iterative process. Even if you think you can’t draw, create rough sketches of the ideas in your head. Your brain will be forced to think creatively—which is exactly the mindset you need.

**Vector graphic design software**

The industry standard for vector graphics editing software is [**Adobe Illustrator**](https://www.adobe.com/products/illustrator.html?promoid=PGRQQLFS&mv=other)—but it doesn’t come cheap and isn’t necessarily novice-friendly. You could try out similar free tools like [**Inkscape**](https://inkscape.org/) and **[Vectr](https://vectr.com/" \t "_blank)**.

*Why vector*? All logos are vector images, meaning that instead of pixels, they’re made up of lines defined by mathematical formulas. Vectors are easier to modify and scale.

**Fonts**

If you go the above route, you may want to look into downloading some additional fonts. Free font resources include the [**Google Fonts**](https://fonts.google.com/) library and [**Font Squirrel**](https://www.fontsquirrel.com/). You can also purchase fonts at sites like **[MyFonts](https://www.myfonts.com/" \t "_blank)** and **[FontShop](https://www.fontshop.com/" \t "_blank)**.

**7 Types of logos**

Whether you decide to design your logo from scratch or use a template, a good starting point is to familiarize yourself with the seven types of logos:

* **Word mark**

Some brands have no graphic symbol and decide instead to place their company or organization name front and center. In this case, typography is everything. Whatever your font choice, it has to be legible.

* **Brand mark**

Also known as “pictorial marks,” brand marks are the graphic symbol in a logo. These symbols are usually recognizable and create an immediate connection in the minds of your audience. For example, a tooth for a dentist, mountains for an outdoor company, etc.

You’ll need to pair a brand mark with your company or organization name in the beginning. But after time, the symbol alone could serve as a powerful, visual shorthand for a well-known brand.

* **Combination mark**

This type of logo combines both a symbol and a wordmark, creating the more traditional logo “lock-up” we’re all familiar with. Play around with the placement of each element until you find a layout you like. You can also allow for different combinations of the two in certain contexts, which we’ll cover in the “Define” phase.

* **Abstract logo mark**

As their name suggests, abstract logo marks are less recognizable and usually more geometric. They’re great when you want something completely unique to your brand. Again, we strongly advise pairing these symbols with your company or organization name until you’ve built enough brand recognition to let your symbol go solo.

* **Letter mark**

A letter mark, also called a “monogram” logo, is great if your name is long or clunky. You can choose to either abbreviate your name or just use your initials. Typography is just as important in a letter mark as it is in a word mark. Luckily, with fewer letters and less worry about legibility, you can use more creative styling.

* **Mascot**

Depending on your brand personality, a mascot could be fun. Plus, they’re more flexible than your standard symbol because their expressions and contexts can change. Just be sure to use a style that aligns with the message and emotion you want to communicate. If you’re going for a more serious vibe, mascots aren’t a great choice.

* **Emblems**

Emblem logos include text inside a symbol. Emblems, also known as “crests,” have been around for a long time and can communicate tradition and prestige.

**Fonts**

If you decide to go with a word mark or letter mark, remember how important typography is. Like colors, different fonts elicit different interpretations of your brand personality.

There are countless font types, but they all fall into one of three families (also called typefaces): **serifs, sans serifs and script**.

**Serif fonts**

Serif fonts have small lines or strokes attached to the end of the larger strokes in a letter or symbol. These fonts are classic and can be a good choice when you want to communicate trust, tradition and sophistication.

**Sans serif fonts**

These are fonts that have no serifs attached to the letters. The result is a crisp, clean line that looks sleek and modern. Sans serif fonts are the preferred font family for digital because they’re easier to read. If you’re going for a minimalist design, sans serif fonts are the way to go.

**Script**

Script fonts mimic cursive handwriting, creating the effect of a signature. They often feel more authentic and original.

Now that you have all the information for how to design a logo, don’t forget: generate, evaluate, repeat.

**Deliverable**

You should end up with at**least one logo design** to evaluate. It’s also common at this stage to have two or three logos to choose between. In the next phase, we’ll go into more detail about how to evaluate your designs.

**Phase Four: Refine**

**Goal**

If you ended the last phase with several different options, now’s the time to narrow down. Already have a final choice? Great! Let’s put it to the test.

**Process**

Evaluate your designs by asking yourself these questions:

**What makes a great logo?**

A great logo:

* Is Simple
* Is Memorable
* Looks good in color or in black and white
* Looks good large or small

**Where will you use this logo?**

Consider both your primary use-cases—like your website or social media profiles—as well as your secondary use cases, like printed marketing materials, recruitment and event banners, etc.

Don’t stop at considerations. Mock it up on the various backgrounds to make sure the image, words and overall message translate across every medium. Any logo mark should be effective at many sizes, but small, digital applications are critical.

**Deliverable**

By now, you should have **a final logo design** you love. And most likely, it took you a decent amount of time to get every element just right. Our fifth and final phase will help you ensure it stays that way.

**Phase Five: Define**

**Goal**

When it comes to maintaining the integrity of your brand identity, quality and consistency are key. Given the number of places your logo will live—and the number of people who may need to use it—it’s important to define a set of rules and guidelines for how to treat your logo.

And how not to.

**Process**

To start, consider any guidelines you may have about your logo’s **size, color, layout, treatment, positioning, orientation**, etc.

Some questions to ask yourself:

* *Are there only certain color backgrounds your logo should be placed against?*
* *Can your logo be used on top of photography? If so, can you change the color to help it pop?*
* *If you have a combination logo mark, can the elements be separated in certain contexts?*

To ensure your logo maintains a strong impact, don’t be afraid to include some “never” rules to discourage any modifications or distortions to your logo. Otherwise, you’ll wind up with a holiday-colored logo on an email that went out to all 10k of your customers.

**Deliverable**

This is often referred to as a **style guide**. A style guide can be as simple or comprehensive as you need. Recently, Sprout’s Design Systems team built an entire website devoted to our style guide. It’s called [**Seeds**](https://seeds.sproutsocial.com/), and it houses all of our brand, writing and visual guidelines, as well as all the patterns and components our product designers need to build our app.

But you don’t have to build a brand new website to house your brand standards. Just make sure they’re properly communicated to your teams and are easily accessible to everyone. Most designers create a pdf and share it on their company or organization’s internal resource library.

**Conclusion**

After all of that, you might be saying, “Wow, that’s a lot.” We know how you feel. We weren’t exaggerating when we mentioned how much work goes into designing a logo. Designers typically take weeks to work through all the phases. So our last piece of advice is this: Don’t rush. Take the time to go through the exercises we outlined in each phase. Your final design will reflect the level of effort you put toward it.

**What is a Logo?**

* 1. What is a logo and what is its main purpose?
  2. From page 1 of this guide, what are three things it says that logos are not?
  3. In this guide, what are the 5 steps for creating a logo?
  4. What is a mood board or inspiration board? (page 5)
  5. Even if you think you can’t draw, why is it important to sketch out your logo ideas? (pages 5-6)
  6. What are the 7 types of logos?
  7. What are the 3 main types of font?
  8. What are four things that make a good logo? (page 9)
  9. What is a style guide? (page 10)