
An important but *NON-obvious* law of UI

Did you know that light comes from the sky?

AND HAVE YOU THOUGHT OF THE RAMIFICATIONS?

I know, I know. I kind of sound like *this guy*:



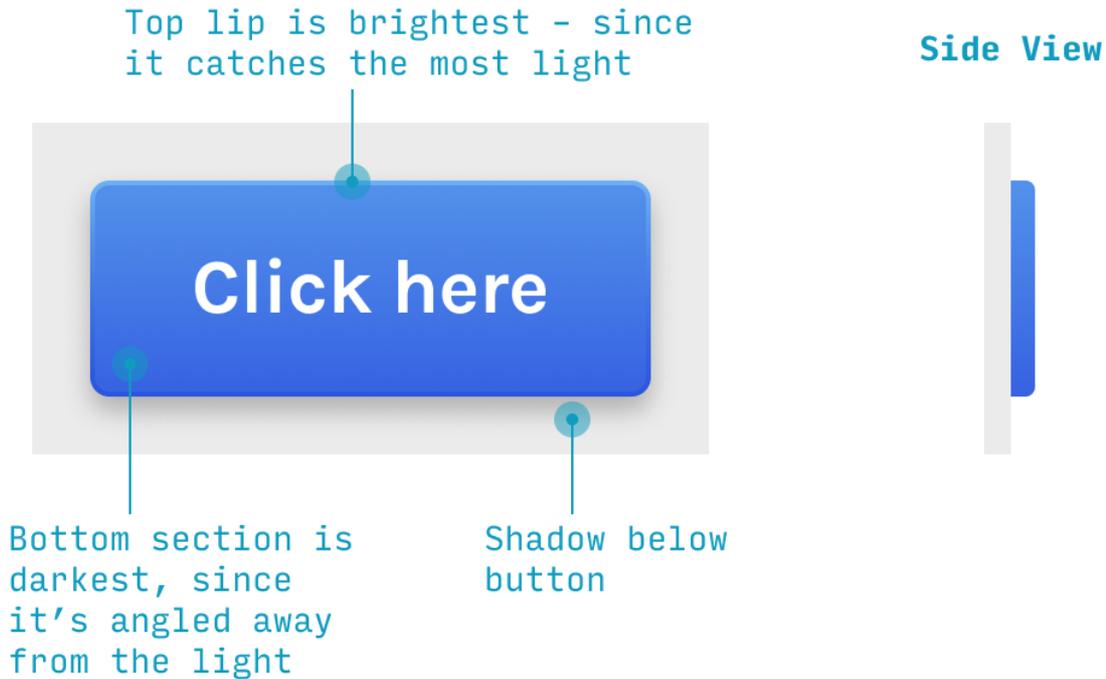
I'm actually just talking about the sun though

But think about it.

When light comes from the sky, it:

- Casts shadows *below* things
- Makes the *top* of things brighter
- Makes the *undersides* of things darker

Even though our screens are flat, designers invest a great amount of time into making many elements on them *appear* 3-D – and the above are the rules they use.



Buttons are *popped out* from the screen – but these rules apply equally to things *pressed into* the screen.



And even in a flat design, these rules still apply – *just more subtly*.

For instance, **content cards should always be lighter than their backgrounds**. This is because they're *popped out* from the surface of the screen, and therefore catch the sun's rays better ●



Darker cards on lighter background seem subtly “wrong”.

The screenshot shows the IndexPro website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'IndexPro' on the left, 'Home', 'Funds', and 'Reports' in the center, and a search bar on the right containing 'Search 500+ funds'. Below the navigation bar, there are two main sections: 'ACCOUNT SUMMARY' and 'POSITIONS'. The 'ACCOUNT SUMMARY' section features a line chart on the left and two data points on the right: '\$240,304.38 CURRENT TOTAL ASSETS' and '\$4,942.59 (+2.1%) TODAY'S CHANGE'. The 'POSITIONS' section includes a 'FILTER BY' menu with options 'All', 'In Progress', 'Complete', and 'Pending', and a 'SEARCH' bar. Below these is a table with columns 'FUND', 'SYMBOL', 'LAST PRICE', 'SHARES', and 'CURRENT VALUE'. The first row of the table shows 'Battery Technology', 'RTX', '\$83.40', '100', and '\$8340.21'.

FUND	SYMBOL	LAST PRICE	SHARES	CURRENT VALUE
Battery Technology	RTX	\$83.40	100	\$8340.21

(This is a **super common beginner mistake**, since design apps *start* with white frames, and it seems *only natural* to add a gray card on top)



White cards on darker background imitates real-world light.

The screenshot shows a dashboard for 'IndexPro' with a navigation bar containing 'Home', 'Funds', and 'Reports', and a search bar for '500+ funds'. The 'ACCOUNT SUMMARY' section features a line chart and displays a current total of \$240,304.38 and a daily change of \$4,942.59 (+2.1%). The 'POSITIONS' section includes filter buttons for 'All', 'In Progress', 'Complete', and 'Pending', a search bar, and a table with columns for Fund, Symbol, Last Price, Shares, and Current Value. The first row in the table shows 'Battery Technology' with symbol 'RTX', last price '\$83.40', 100 shares, and a current value of '\$8340.21'.

FUND	SYMBOL	LAST PRICE	SHARES	CURRENT VALUE
Battery Technology	RTX	\$83.40	100	\$8340.21

Really internalizing that *light comes from the sky* was one of the first big breakthroughs I had as a beginning designer. In fact, I wrote about it in [7 Rules for Creating Gorgeous UI](#) – an article that went viral back in 2014, and paved the way for this very newsletter!

It's also one of the many "**soundbite lessons**" I include in Learn UI Design. I strongly believe that if I can leave every student with **practical and memorable short phrases** that apply widely across their design career, they will be better designers *much quicker* than trying to learn via more theoretical approaches.