GYATA TABIRI

Inspired. Precise. Purposeful.

Design tokens that make everyday changes easier

By Gyata Tabiri · Revised November 2, 2026

Two values that match today may need to move apart tomorrow. That is the question behind a useful design token: which decisions genuinely belong together, and which only happen to share a number or color?

Name the relationship

A brand color and an action color can refer to the same underlying value while describing different responsibilities. Keeping those roles understandable allows a future change to be discussed with some precision. “Change the primary action” is a different request from “replace this color everywhere.”

Start with the next ordinary change

Imagine changing a button treatment across several pages. Which values should move together: background, text, focus outline, disabled state? Work through a real component before expanding the token list. A large inventory is difficult to use when the relationship between its names is unclear.

Keep an exception near its reason

A shared default should not force every component into the same treatment. Local variation can be appropriate when the content or behavior differs. I would make its scope clear and inspect descendants before assuming a variable change is contained; inherited values can reach further than the immediate selector suggests.

Compare the guide with the material

The same question appears in brand-system work: what is fixed, and where can a local message vary? A documented value earns its place when it helps someone make the next piece consistently, not just when it makes the reference sheet look orderly.

The most useful token names make a future conversation easier. They tell us which decision we are changing before we start changing its value.

Read alongside: Consistency without identical layouts · Which parts of a component should be shared.

Reference: CSS custom properties.