Design Principles

The Four Basic Principles
That Underlie Good Page Design

Some of the information presented in this video will appear on quizzes and exams. Please be sure to pay attention to key points and take notes on the material shown.

Design Principles

- Naming the principles is key to understanding and incorporating these concepts in your own work.

- Once you are aware of the principles, you will begin to see their use (and lack of use) everywhere. It’s a curse really.

Which is stronger?

Both of the layouts below have the same content/message. What makes one more interesting and attractive to the eye? **Why?**

Good Design Is As Easy as 1-2-3

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They are simpler that you might think.
2. Recognize when you are not using them.
Put it into words – name the problem.
3. Apply the principles.
You will be amazed at what an awesome designer you are!

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I’m going to teach you a lot of…

CRAP

Hey, acronyms are great devices when learning new concepts!

The four basic principles

- **Contrast**
  Avoid elements on the page that are merely similar. If the elements are not the same, make them very different. This is often the most important method of attracting attention to your layout.
- **Repetition**
  By repeating visual elements, you develop a flow to the layout creates both organization and unity in the layout.
- **Alignment**
  Elements should not be placed on the page arbitrarily. All elements on the page should have some visual connection to each other.
- **Proximity**
  Elements related to each other should be grouped together. They become one visual unit and provide structure to the layout.

The four basic principles

We will go into more details on each of the four concepts. We will discuss what they are, how to achieve the full use of each concept and the “gotcha” things to avoid.

Next week, we will review samples of these concepts for you to visual make the connection and learn in-depth what they are.

Although we will learn about them separately, keep in mind that **they are in fact interrelated.** Many times by adjusting one, it will affect another. Rarely will you apply just one principle.

1. Contrast

Let’s face it, if our layouts are uninteresting, why would anyone bother to read them? Contrast is one of the most effective methods of creating visual interest that makes a reader want to look at a page.

The important thing to remember is that for contrast to be effective, it must be strong. **Don’t be a wimp.**

We create contrast when elements are different. If you do not have contrast, you have *conflict*. Make sure your page elements are **really different**!

There are many ways to create contrast. Contrast large vs small type; a graceful script type vs a bold sans serif.

Contrast

We can create contrast by using thin lines vs thick lines; cool colors vs warm colors; smooth textures vs rough textures; horizontal elements vs vertical elements; widely spaced lines vs closely spaced lines; small graphics vs large graphics.

Get the idea?

Don’t be a wimp. You can’t contrast 12 point type against 14 point type and expect the reader to see the difference. You can’t contrast dark brown against black.

Contrast summary

Contrast attracts our eyes into a page, our eyes *like* contrast. Elements placed in a layout should be very different. It's like matching wall paint color; you either match it exactly or you repaint the entire wall.

Purpose

The first is to **create interest** on the page. If a page is interesting, the more likely it is to be read.

The second is to **aid in organization** of information. Your reader should be instantly able to understand the way information is organized, the logical flow from one element to another.

Contrast summary

How to get contrast

Add contrast through your choice of typefaces, line thickness, color, shape, size, space, etc.

It’s actually easy to create contrast. Just remember**, don’t be a wimp.** Go big or… you know!

What to avoid

If you are going to make this work, use it with strength. Avoid contrasting a sort of heavy line with another sort of heavier line. Avoid contrasting brown vs black for instance. Avoid contrasting typefaces that are similar. **Make them different**.

2. Repetition

Robin Williams, the author of the book *The Non-Designer's Design Book* states, "**Repeat some aspect of the design throughout the entire piece.**"

How to get repetition

The repeated element may be a bold font, a thick rule, a bullet, color, design element, spatial relationships, etc. You may already use this in your work and be unaware of exactly what you are doing. When you make headlines all the same size and weight, when you add a rule a half-inch from the bottom of the page – **these are all examples of repetition**. What beginners typically need to do is push this concept further by creating visual keys that tie a publication together.

Repetition

Purpose

Repetition can be thought of as **consistency**. As you look through a 12 page newsletter, it is the repetition of certain elements, their consistent use, that makes each of those pages *appear* to belong to the same newsletter.

We are looking for a cohesive look and feel.

Repetition goes beyond just being consistent – it is **a conscious effort to bring unity to all the elements of a design**.

Repetition summary

By repeating visual elements, we strengthen and unify a piece by tying together otherwise separate parts. This is **useful** in single page documents, but **critical** in multi-page documents.

Purpose

The basic purpose to using repetition is to create unity and add visual interest. Never underestimate the power of visual interest to your design. If we want people to read our documents, it needs to be attractive and interesting to look at.

How to get repetition

Be consistent in it’s use, then push that a little further. Consciously push some of these consistent elements into your page layouts.

Repetition summary

Try using a rule @ the bottom of a page or under each headline. How about a thicker rule to make the repetitive element stronger and dramatic? Consider *adding* elements whose purpose is to create repetition. At first **find existing repetition**, then **create repetition**. It's like accenting clothes. Look for what enhances the look you have going on.

What to avoid

Don't repeat the element(s) so much that it becomes annoying or overwhelming. Be aware of the value of contrast here as well.

3. Alignment

New designers have a tendency to place their text and graphics on a page wherever there is space, often without regard to the other existing elements already on the page. The principle of alignment forces you to **be conscious** of where you are putting the elements on the page.

When items are arranged on the page, the result is a stronger cohesive unit. Even when aligned elements are physically separated from each other, there can be an invisible line that **connects** them both in your eye and in your mind.

Alignment tells the reader that even though the elements are not close together, they belong on the same page.

Alignment summary

Nothing should be placed on the page without thought about it's **visual connection** with the other elements. By doing so, we create unity, where separate elements *appear* to be connected and belong. Look at graphic designs that you like, you can always find alignments within.

Purpose

We want unity and organization. It's often a strong alignment that creates a sophisticated look, a formal look, a fun look, or a serious look.

How to get alignment

Be conscious about where you place elements on a page. Always look for a way to align elements across the page.

4. Proximity

Often a new designer's text and graphics are strewn out all over the place, filling corners and filling all remaining negative space. When we do this, the page appears unorganized and the information may not be readily recognized by the reader.

Group related items together; move them physically close to each other so we start to see them as one cohesive group rather than a bunch of unrelated bits and pieces. Items *not* related should *not* be in close proximity. As the designer, it is up to us to provide the reader with clues as to the organization and content of the page.

Proximity summary

When elements are in close proximity to each other, they read as a visual unit. Items relating to each other should be grouped together. **Be conscious of where the eye moves through a piece.** We need to provide the reader with a specific path or order to how we want their eyes to move across the page.

Purpose

The basic purpose is to organize. While other principles may come into play, proximity automatically creates organization.

How to get proximity

Squint your eyes and count the number of elements on your layout. The number of times your eyes stops should be 3-5 (of course depending on the piece).

Proximity summary

What to avoid

- Don’t be lazy and just stick items into the corner because there is empty space there.
- **Avoid too many separate elements on the page.**
- Avoid leaving equal amounts of white space between elements unless the group is part of a subset.
- Avoid even the slightest bit of confusion over whether a headline, subhead, caption, graphic, etc., belongs with it’s related material. **Create relationships with close proximity.**
- Don’t create close relationships if the elements don’t logically belong together! If they are *not* related, move them apart from each other.

More do’s and dont’s

- In design and life, **don’t be a wimp**. Push yourself.
- Do not be afraid to create your designs (or your life) with **white space**. It’s a rest for the eyes and good for the soul.
- Never be afraid to push your layouts. **Try an asymmetrical approach, uncentering your content**. While symmetrical layouts are easy solutions and appropriate to some conyent, I urge you to try new things, even if it’s out of your comfort zone. It is often result in a stronger layout, and it’s ok to do the unexpected when a piece calls for it.
- Don’t be afraid to make your graphics look **very bold** or **very minimal,** as long as it compliments or reinforces your design or your attitude you are trying to get across.

What happened?

How were the design principles used in the example on the below to create a stronger, more interesting layout?

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