



The Basics of Graphic Design

Topics Covered in this Tutorial

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Overview

This tutorial examines the process of graphic design for printed publications, presentations, and web sites. Aspects of graphic design that are covered include: steps in the graphic design process, guidelines for creating and organizing layouts, capturing the attention of readers, the elements of design (line, shape, texture, space, size, value, and color), the principles of design (balance, rhythm, emphasis, and unity), and design problems to avoid.

Learning Information and Activities

Graphic Design

Graphic design is the process of creating the appearance of a publication, presentation, or web site in an attractive, logical manner. When done successfully, it attracts attention, adds value to a message, enhances readership and readability, simplifies, organizes, provides selective emphasis, and creates unity.

Steps in the Graphic Design Process:

- Analyze the audience.

- Determine the purpose of your message.
- Decide where and how your message will appear (whether it will be a printed publication, presentation, or web site).
- Establish goals.
- Organize text and graphics.
- Choose an appropriate format and layout.
- Select appropriate typefaces, type sizes, type styles, and spacing.
- Add and manipulate graphics.
- Organize text and graphics.
- Proofread
- Refine and fine-tune.

Creating Effective Layouts

Layout Guidelines

A layout is the arrangement of type and graphics on a printed publication, presentation, or web site. A good layout should serve the purpose intended by the designer, organize the information and graphics in order to create a visual path for readers to follow, and attract the attention of readers. There's no one right way to create a good layout.

General Guidelines for Layouts:

- Determine the purpose of your publication, presentation, or web site before you begin your layout.
- Establish the primary message you want to present and plan your layout around it.
- Choose an appropriate type of media (web page, presentation, printed book, newsletter, or brochure, etc.) and a size.
- Identify the target audience, then write and design the publication, presentation, or web site keeping this audience in mind.
- Consider their interests, reading levels, background, etc.

Organizing Layouts

Good layouts are easy to follow and provide clear reader cues to help readers easily find their way through a publication, presentation, or web page. If readers have to work at finding their way through a publication, they probably won't read it. Arrange and emphasize your information to make your message as clear as possible. Decide what you want the reader to see or read first and position it accordingly, then decide what you want the reader to read or see next. Continue arranging and emphasizing the information until you have included everything. The quality of your layout determines how quickly your readers will be directed through the publication and how fast they will be able to read it.

Guidelines for Organizing Layouts:

- Use different sizes of type for different elements.
- Establish a hierarchy of type sizes for headlines, subheads, text, etc. and be consistent with formatting. (All headlines should be formatted alike, all subheads should be formatted

alike, all text should be formatted alike, etc.

- Make the most important element you want your readers to see the largest and the least important element the smallest.
- Use rules (lines) to separate information into groups.
- Use different weights of type.
- Use white space for design purposes in your publication.
- Position important information in the upper left corner. The upper left corner is usually read first. Place a box around important information.
- Call attention to lists of items by placing bullets in front of them.
- Use colored or reversed type (white type on a dark background) to separate or emphasize.

Capturing the Readers' Attention

Information must be noticed before communication takes place. It has to stand out from the crowd by being different from what is around it. Before you decide how to grab your readers' attention, you should consider who will read it and where it will be seen. Your design should be suitable for your audience and appropriate for its environment.

Guidelines for Capturing the Readers' Attention:

- Enlarge a graphic or photo of something small, so it will cover a large area.
- Tilt an image or a block of type at an angle.
- Surround a small element, such as a block of type or a graphic, with lots of white space.
- Use bright colors for publications, presentations, or web sites that will be viewed in dark or gray environments.
- Use a solid black area or a large white area in your design.
- Crop an image in an unusual way.
- Set important information in an atypical way, such as in a distinctive font.

The Elements of Design

When creating a new layout, you should begin with the basic elements of design: line, shape, texture, space, size, value, and color. These basic elements can produce many different layouts depending on how they're used.

Line

Line is any mark connecting two points. Many different types of lines appear everywhere. Look around you and you'll see lines that are straight, curved, squiggly, thin, fat, and dotted.

Lines can be used to:

- Organize information.
- Highlight or stress words.
- Connect pieces of information.
- Outline a photo or set it off from other elements.
- Create a grid. (A grid is the underlying structure of a page.)

- Create a chart or graph.
- Create a pattern or rhythm by drawing many lines.
- Direct the reader's eye or create a sense of motion. (Create a sense of action by using a diagonal line.)
- Suggest an emotion.

Shape

Anything that has height and width has shape. Unusual shapes can be used to attract attention. There are basically three types of shapes. Geometric shapes, such as triangles, squares, rectangles, and circles, are regular and structured. These shapes work very well as building blocks for graphic design. Natural shapes, such as animals, plants, and humans, are irregular and fluid. Abstracted shapes, such as icons, stylized figures, and graphic illustrations, are simplified versions of natural shapes.

With shape you can:

- Crop a photo in an interesting way, such as in an oval.
- Symbolize an idea.
- Make a block of text more interesting by setting the text into a shape.
- Create a new format.
- Highlight information. You could add a screened or tinted shape to highlight important information.

Texture

Texture is the look or feel of a surface. You can add richness and dimension to your layouts with texture. Visual texture creates an illusion of texture on a printed publication or web page. Patterns, such as the images printed on wrapping paper, are a type of visual texture. Tactile texture can actually be felt. Printed publications can be printed on textured paper that readers can feel.

Texture can be used to:

- Give a printed publication, presentation, or web page a mood or personality.
- Create contrast for interest.
- Fool the eye.
- Provoke emotions.
- Create a feeling of richness and depth.

Space

Space is the distance or area between or around things. Space separates or unifies, highlights, and gives the eye a visual rest.

Space can be used to:

- Give the eye a visual rest.

- Create ties between elements.
- Highlight an element.
- Put a lot of white space around something important to call attention to it.
- Make a layout easy to follow.
- Make type as legible as possible.

Graphic Design Tip:

White space (the absence of text and graphics) is vital to graphic design. The key is to add just enough white space so the eye knows where to go and can rest a bit when it gets there.

You can control white space in the following location: margins, paragraph spacing, spacing between lines of text, gutters (the space between columns), and surrounding text and graphics.

Size

Size is how large or small something is. Size is very important in making a layout functional, attractive, and organized. It shows what is most important, attracts attention, and helps to fit the layout together.

Size can be used to:

- Show which element is the most important by making it the largest.
- Make all elements easy to see.
- Attract attention.
- Contrast two elements to create interest.
- Establish a consistent look throughout a printed publication or web page.

Value

Value is the lightness or darkness of an area. Think in terms of the spectrum from black to white and the many shades of gray in between. Each shade on this spectrum has a value, from the very lightest to the very darkest. Value separates, suggests mood, adds drama, and creates the illusion of depth.

Value can be used to:

- Lead the eye across a page, such as running a dark to light graded area in a background.
- Create a pattern.
- Give the illusion of volume and depth by adding shading to an area.
- Create an image of lightness or darkness.
- Make a layout dramatic with large areas of dark or light shading.
- Emphasize an element.
- Make objects appear to be in front of or behind each other.

Color

Color in layouts can convey moods, create images, attract attention, and identify objects. When selecting colors for a publication or a web page, think about what you want the color to do and what is appropriate for your purpose.

Color can be used to:

- Highlight important elements such as headlines and subheads.
- Attract the eye.
- Signal the reader where to look first.
- Create an image or a mood.
- Tie a layout together.
- Organize.
- Group elements together or isolate them.
- Provoke emotion.

The Psychology of Color		
Color		Associations
	Reds	Energy, Passion, Power, Excitement
	Oranges	Happy, Confident, Creative, Adventurous
	Yellows	Wisdom, Playful, Satisfying, Optimistic
	Greens	Health, Regeneration, Contentment, Harmony
	Blues	Honesty, Integrity, Trustworthiness
	Violets	Regal, Mystic, Beauty, Inspiration
	Browns	Easiness, Passivity
	Blacks	Finality, Transitional Color

The Principles of Design

The principles of design help to determine how to use the design elements. There are four principles of design: balance, emphasis, rhythm, and unity. These principles of design help you to combine the various design elements into a good layout.

Balance

Balance is an equal distribution of weight. In terms of graphics, this applies to visual weight. Each element on a layout has visual weight that is determined by its size, darkness or lightness, and thickness of lines. There are two basic approaches to balance. The first is symmetrical balance which is an arrangement of elements so that they are evenly distributed to the left and to the right of center. The second is asymmetrical balance which is an arrangement of unlike objects of equal weight on each side of the page. Color, value, size, shape, and texture can be used as balancing elements.

Symmetrical balance can communicate strength and stability and is appropriate for traditional and conservative publications, presentations, and web sites. Asymmetrical balance can imply contrast, variety, movement, surprise, and informality. It is appropriate for modern and entertaining publications, presentations, and web sites.

To create balance:

- Repeat a specific shape at regular intervals, either horizontally or vertically.
- Center elements on a page.
- Put several small visuals in one area to balance a single large image or block of text.
- Use one or two odd shapes and make the rest regular shapes.
- Lighten a text-heavy piece with a bright, colorful visual.
- Leave plenty of white space around large blocks of text or dark photographs.
- Offset a large, dark photograph or illustration with several small pieces of text, each surrounded by a lot of white space.

Rhythm

Rhythm is a pattern created by repeating elements that are varied. Repetition (repeating similar elements in a consistent manner) and variation (a change in the form, size, or position of the elements) are the keys to visual rhythm. Placing elements in a layout at regular intervals creates a smooth, even rhythm and a calm, relaxing mood. Sudden changes in the size and spacing of elements creates a fast, lively rhythm and an exciting mood.

To create rhythm:

- Repeat a series of similarly shaped elements, with even white spaces between each, to create a regular rhythm.
- Repeat a series of progressively larger elements with larger white spaces between each for a progressive rhythm.
- Alternate dark, bold type and light, thin type.
- Alternate dark pages (with lots of type or dark graphics) with light pages (with less type and light-colored graphics).
- Repeat a similar shape in various areas of a layout.
- Repeat the same element in the same position on every page of a printed publication such as a newsletter.

Emphasis

Emphasis is what stands out or gets noticed first. Every layout needs a focal point to draw the readers eye to the important part of the layout. Too many focal points defeat the purpose. Generally, a focal point is created when one element is different from the rest.

To create emphasis:

- Use a series of evenly spaced, square photographs next to an outlined photograph with an unusual shape.
- Put an important piece of text on a curve or an angle while keeping all of the other type in straight columns.
- Use bold, black type for headings and subheads and much lighter text for all other text. Place a large picture next to a small bit of text.
- Reverse (use white type) a headline out of a black or colored box.
- Use colored type or an unusual font for the most important information.
- Put lists you want to highlight in a sidebar in a shaded box.

Unity

Unity helps all the elements look like they belong together. Readers need visual cues to let them know the piece is one unit-the text, headline, photographs, graphic images, and captions all go together.

Unify elements by grouping elements that are close together so that they look like they belong together. Repeat color, shape, and texture. Use a grid (the underlying structure of a page) to establish a framework for margins, columns, spacing, and proportions.

To create unity:

- Use only one or two tpestyles and vary size or weight for contrast throughout the publication, presentation, or web site.
- Be consistent with the type font, sizes, and styles for headings, subheads, captions, headers, footers, etc. throughout the publication, presentation, or web site.
- Use the same color palette throughout.
- Repeat a color, shape, or texture in different areas throughout.
- Choose visuals that share a similar color, theme, or shape.
- Line up photographs and text with the same grid lines.

Design Problems to Avoid

Try to avoid these design problems:

- **Tombstoning** - Avoid parallel headlines, subheads, or initial caps in adjacent columns. Tombstones are created when headlines or other highlighted type items appear next to each other in adjacent columns. A reader faced with tombstones on a page may have difficulty deciding what element to examine first. Solutions include changing the alignment of the columns, changing the layout of the page, or editing the text in one column so headlines are staggered.

- **Trapped white space** - Avoid holes in the middle of publications. Trapped white space occurs when a hole appears between a headline and an adjacent graphic, or when an article is too short to fill the column down to the next headline. Solutions include adjusting the size of the graphic to fill the hole or adjusting the text so that the white space falls at the bottom of the column.
- **Claustrophobic pages** - Always provide sufficient white space (breathing room) around columns of text. Claustrophobic pages result when columns of text crowd each other and the edges of a page. Solutions include increasing the size of the margins on the page and adding more white space around individual elements.
- **Whispering headlines** - Headlines should be significantly larger, and often bolder, than the text they introduce. Gray pages result when there's not sufficient contrast between headlines and text. Whispering headlines fail to attract attention to the text they introduce.
- **Similar typefaces** - Strive for maximum contrast when using more than one typeface on a page or within a publication. When using different typefaces for headlines and text, go for contrast. Avoid typefaces that are similar in appearance (style, size, and weight).
- **Underlining** - Underlining undermines readability. Try to use boldface type or italic type instead of underlining. More than a few underlined words cause visual clutter and confusion. Also, it takes more time for readers to separate the words from the horizontal lines.
- **Widows and orphans** - Watch for widows and orphans, which can cause unsightly gaps in text columns. A **widow** is a syllable, word, or less than one-third of a line isolated at the bottom of a column, paragraph, or page. An **orphan** is a word isolated at the top of a column or page.
- **Buried heads and subheads** - Avoid headlines and subheads isolated near column bottoms. Buried headlines and subheads are followed by only one or two lines of type at the bottom of a page. This is not only unsightly, but also distracting. The reader's concentration may be broken by the jump to the top of the next column. Solutions include editing text or using uneven column bottoms.
- **Box-itis and rule-itis** - Avoid overusing boxes and rules. Too many bordered elements on a page lead to overly compartmentalized pages. This can easily occur in newsletters if you use a box to frame each page, then add internal boxes around elements such as nameplates, mastheads, pull-quotes, sidebars, and the table of contents.) The result is a busy effect that interferes with easy reading.
- **Jumping horizons** - Start the text the same distance from the top of the page throughout a document. Jumping horizons occur when text columns start at different locations on a page. The up and down effect is annoying to the reader and creates an unprofessional appearance.
- **Excessive spacing after punctuation** - Avoid placing two spaces after a period at the end of a sentence. Two spaces following periods are needed for typewritten text. But in desktop-published type, the extra space creates large holes between sentences, which is especially noticeable in justified type.

- **Floating heads and subheads** - Be sure headlines and subheads are closer to the text they introduce than to the preceding text. The impact of a heading is weakened if it isn't immediately clear which text it belongs to.
- **Unequal spacing** - Strive for consistent spacing between elements. Pay particular attention to the space between:
 - Headlines in relation to the top and side borders and headlines and text
 - Subheads and text
 - Captions and artwork
 - Artwork and text
 - Column endings and bottom margins
- **Exaggerated tabs and indents** - Default tabs and indents in word-processed files should be altered to be proportionate with the type size and column width. The first lines of paragraphs are often indented too deeply.
- **Cramped logos and addresses** - Sometimes a firm's logo, address, phone number, and other buying information are difficult to read because they're treated as if they were squeezed in with the other information. To avoid this, place the logo first and other important information on the page first, then build the document around them.
- **Too many typefaces** - Avoid a large mixture of typefaces, type sizes, and weights. Discipline yourself to use the minimum number of typefaces, type sizes, and weights necessary to organize your information and create a hierarchy of importance. Each variation in type slows the reader down.
- **Irregularly shaped blocks of body copy** - This makes type harder to read. Flush left type is the easiest to read. Lines without a consistent starting point take more time to read and may cause readers to lose their place as they read.

References

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