Powerful Publications

Four Basic Principles

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What are the basic principles?

■ Can you put into words why one design “works” and another doesn’t?
■ When you look at a poorly designed page, can you put into words why it looks amateurish, and can you put into words what needs to be done to make it more sophisticated?

Being able to explain concepts in words helps you pinpoint problems and find solutions more quickly.

Quiz #1

Name at least five reasons why this flyer looks amateurish.

STOCKER/YEARLING CATTLE WORKSHOPS

APRIL 1, 2002

MEET AT BOB’S STEAKHOUSE AT 10:00 A.M.

SPECIAL GUEST-MIKE PATTERSON!

Source: Robin Williams Design Workshop by Robin Williams and John Tollett
Proximity

The main purpose of PROXIMITY is to organize.

- Grouping related items together in close proximity to one another creates organization. If items are not related, move them apart.

- Items in close proximity to each other become one visual unit rather than several separate items. Try to have no more than 3-5 visual units.

- Organized information is more likely to be read and more likely to be remembered.

- A by-product of organization is that you create more appealing white space.
One problem with the previous information is that not one of the items seems related to any other item. If you do one thing, group related items together into closer proximity.

The two items on the left are in close proximity to each other, implying a relationship. Should these two have a relationship?

This could be one way to combine the relationships. The text was changed to upper and lower case which made more room for a strong title. The graphic was also enlarged and it breaks out of the boundary, creating interest.
This list needs some formatting to make it understandable. Everything is close to everything else, so there’s no way to see the relationships or the organization.

The same list has been organized into visual groups, something you probably do already. Experiment with doing this consciously and with more strength.

When grouping items in close proximity, you sometimes need to make changes in the size, weight or placement of text and graphics.

First, delete any unnecessary information. Second, group items together logically and finally, set the groups of information on the page.
**Proximity Activity**

- Select an ad from a newspaper, telephone book or magazine, or use a brochure or newsletter.
- Squint your eyes slightly and count how many times your eye stops. Every stop counts as one visual unit.
- Circle the visual units in your example.
- If there are more than 3-5 visual units, see if elements can be grouped together to form fewer units.
- If you want, use a pencil and paper to sketch a possible arrangement.
Alignment

The main purpose of ALIGNMENT is to unify and organize the page.

- Be conscious of where you place elements on the page. No longer can you just throw things on the page wherever there is room.
- Always find something else on the page to align with, even if the elements are far away from each other.
- Try using the same alignment for all text on the page. That is, don’t center some text and left align other text.
- A by-product of alignment is that it creates a clean, sophisticated look.

Challenge

Try to break away from centered alignment unless you are consciously trying to create a more formal, sedate, (often dull) presentation. Make the effort to try a different alignment for elements on your page.
This text is **centered**. If you are going to center text, make it obvious.

See, in this paragraph it is difficult to tell if this text was centered purposely or perhaps accidentally. The line lengths are not the same, but they are not really different.

This text is **justified** — the text lines up on both sides. Don’t do it unless your line length is long enough to avoid awkward gaps between the words.

**Going to Grass**
Stocker/Yearling Cattle Workshops

April 1, 2002
10:00 a.m.
Bob’s Steakhouse

Free Meal
Special Guest –
Mike Patterson

This example has the text grouped into logical proximity. The text is center aligned and centered on the page.

**Going to Grass**
Stocker/Yearling Cattle Workshops

April 1, 2002
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Free Meal
Special Guest –
Mike Patterson

This has the same logical arrangement, but it is right aligned. Can you see the hard edge on the right? This creates a stronger invisible line connecting the groups of text.
This is a typical report cover.

The strong left alignment gives the report cover a more sophisticated impression. Even though the author’s name is far from the title, the invisible line of the alignment connects the two text blocks.

If you’re going to center text, at least make it obvious. Try using a casual, fun type face to give it some interest.

You can also try making your centered text more dramatic in some other way.
Alignment Activity

- Select an ad from a newspaper, telephone book or magazine, or use a brochure or newsletter.
- Using a pencil and a straight edge, draw lines along all the edges that align. If the alignment is centered, draw a line down the middle of the information.
- How many examples use centered alignment? Did you find any examples using left alignment? Right alignment? Justified alignment? How about an example that uses them all?
- Be aware of the alignment in pieces that catch your attention.
- If you want, use a pencil and paper to sketch a different alignment for an existing piece.

Sometimes it is a subtle lack of alignment, such as centered headlines and subheads over indented paragraphs. The unaligned spots create a messy page: wide indents, ragged right edge of text, centered headlines and the centered photo.

Compare the two examples. At first glance, which page presents a cleaner, sharper image?

Find a strong line and stick to it. If the text is flush left, set the headings and subheads flush left. If there are photographs or illustrations, align them with an edge or baseline.

First paragraphs are traditionally not indented.

A standard typographic indent is about two spaces.
3 Repetition

The main purpose of REPETITION is to unify and add visual interest.

- Repetition of some aspect of the design throughout the entire piece (such as a bold font, a thick line, a certain bullet, color, design element, etc.) ties together otherwise separate parts.

- Think of it as being consistent.

- Repetition is useful on one-page pieces, but becomes critical on multi-page documents.

- Find existing repetitions and strengthen them.
Going to Grass
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Guilty Enter
Wants pawn term dare worsted ladle gull hoe hat search petty yowler coils dept pimple colder.
Guilti Looks. Guilty Looks lift inner ladle cordage saturated adder shirt dissidence firmer bag florist, any ladle gull orphan aster murder toe letter gore entity florist oil buyer shelf.

Wire Nut
"Wire nut, murder? wined Guilty Looks, hoe dint pony tension tore murder's scalings. "Cause dorsal lodge an wicket bear inner florist hoe orphan molasses pimple. Ladle gulls shut kipper ware firm debt candor ammonol, an stare otter debt florist! Debt florist's mush toe dentures furry ladle gull."

Hormone nurture
Wail, pimple oil-wares wander doe ward udder pimple dun wasted toe doe. Debt's jest hormone nurture. Wan moaning, Guilty Looks dissipater murder, an win entry

You've seen this sample before. When you get to the end of the information, does your eye just wander off the page?

Headlines and subheads are a good place to start when creating repetitive elements — you are probably already consistent with them.

In this example, the strong, bold type was repeated. When you get to the bottom of the page, do you find that your eye bounces back and forth between the bold type elements?

Take that consistent element and make it stronger. Use a bold sans serif type to make your page more interesting while increasing the visual organization by making it more obvious.
Repetition is a major factor in unifying multiple-page publications. It should be obvious to the reader that the pages are part of the same document.

Can you point out the consistent, repetitive elements on the two pages of this publication? Some of them include: the double rule at the top of all pages, the typefaces used, the page number typeface and placement, and the left alignment.

Strong repetitive elements guide the reader through the information and make the organization of information very clear.
Repetition Activity

- Select an ad from a newspaper, telephone book or magazine, or use a brochure or newsletter.
- Circle or write down the existing repeating elements. Common repetitions are type styles, graphics and color.
- What repetitions can be created or strengthened?
- If you want, use a pencil and paper to sketch different repetitions that could be used in the piece.

If you find an element that strikes your fancy, go with it. Change the size, the color or the angles. Or add something completely new simply for the purpose of repetition. Use these repetitive elements on all related materials.


4 **Contrast**

The main purpose of CONTRAST is to create an interest on the page and to aid in the organization of the information.

- Contrast is what draws our attention to a page.
- Contrast must be strong. If two items are not the same, make them different. Really different.
- Create contrast with large and small type, a graceful oldstyle font and a bold san serif font, a thin line and a thick line, a horizontal element and a vertical element, or a large graphic with a small graphic.
Contrast works when sizes and weights of type are very different from each other—when everything is large or bold, there is no contrast.

Sometimes other typographic elements have to be there, but they aren’t really that important to the general reading public. Is the volume number that important? It’s okay not to set it in 12-point type.
The Rules of Life

Your attitude is your life.
Maximize your options.
Never take anything too seriously.
Don’t let the seeds stop you from enjoying the watermelon.
Be nice.

Now there is a bigger difference between the thicknesses of the rules. The table appears stronger and more sophisticated.

There is nice, strong contrast between the typefaces here, but the contrast between the rules (lines) is less clear. Are they supposed to be different? Or is it a mistake?

Don’t be a wimp

This is 12-point type.
This is 14-point type.

Size contrast is a common way to add contrast. To make it effective, though, don’t be a wimp. You cannot contrast 12-point type with 14-point type—most of the time they will simply conflict.

If you’re going to make two type sizes different, make them really different—make it obvious.
Contrast Activity

- Select an ad from a newspaper, telephone book or magazine, or use a brochure or newsletter.
- Circle the main elements of contrast you find. When you look at the piece, what is it that you see first? Is the contrast created with type? Is it a great photo or graphic that catches your eye?
- If the piece you selected has little or no contrast, think of ways you could create contrast by emphasizing a focal point.
- Take a piece of tracing paper and trace the outline of the ad. Move this shape around and trace individual elements, rearranging them into a more professional ad.

Size contrast does not always mean making something large. Small type in the middle of a large page also creates contrast and compells you to read it.
The process

Where do you begin when you start to design or redesign something?

■ **Start with the focal point.** Decide what it is you want readers to see first. Create your focal point with strong contrasts.

■ **Group your information** into logical groups; decide on the relationships between these groups. Display those relationships with the closeness or lack of closeness (proximity) of the groups.

■ As you arrange the type and graphics on the page, **create and maintain strong alignments**. If you see a strong edge, such as a photograph or vertical line, strengthen it with the alignments of other text or objects.

■ **Create a repetition,** or find items that can have a repetitive connection. Use a bold typeface or a rule or a dingbat. Take a look at what is already repeated naturally, and see if it would be appropriate to add more strength to it.

■ Make sure you have **strong contrasts** that will attract the reader’s eye. Remember — contrast is contrast. If everything on the page is big and bold and flashy, then there is no contrast! Whether it is contrasting by being bigger and bolder or by being smaller and lighter, the point is that it is different and so your eye is attracted to it.

Source: *The Non-Designer’s Design Book* by Robin Williams

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Keep an idea file

■ Be aware of what other creative people are doing.

■ Keep a file folder (or two) filled with ads, brochures, newsletters, etc. — any item that grabbed your attention.

■ Put notes on them about what exactly makes it effective. Is it a great photo or piece of artwork? Is it the typeface? Is it the combination of types? Is it the strong alignments? Is it the contrast between the elements? Or is it the nice use of white space?

■ Go through these ideas when starting a new project.

Source: *Robin Williams Design Workshop* by Robin Williams and John Tollett

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Possible answers to Quiz #1. Text is centered (alignment); text is all capital letters; text is hyphenated in a bad spot; the time is split; no contrast on the page (contrast); related items are not grouped together (proximity); the font isn’t the most interesting.

Answers to Quiz #2. Contrast was added in the text; the text was changed to upper and lower case in the title; proximity was applied to the information by keeping the speaker with the title; the text was made smaller allowing for more white (open) space; the black border was removed helping create a clean, sophisticated look.

Answer to Quiz #3. Contrast was achieved by reversing the text in a black box and repeating the black at the bottom.

Answer to Quiz #4. Alignment.
Quiz #2

Compare these two layouts. They are both centered, but one looks more sophisticated than the other. What changes were made to the one on the right to give it this higher-quality look, even though it is still a centered arrangement?

Quiz #3

Glance at these two layouts. Which one do you find your eye is naturally attracted to? What is the word for the design principle that attracts your eye in this case, and how was it achieved?

Quiz #4

In this example, which simple principle can be applied that would instantly give it a more professional appearance?