

## Design Principles from Robin Williams

Proximity, Alignment, Repetition, Contrast

# Review

There is one more general guiding principle of Design (and of Life):

### **Don't be a wimp.**

Don't be afraid to create your Design (or your Life) with plenty of blank space—it's rest for the eyes (and the Soul).

Don't be afraid to be asymmetrical, to uncenter your format—it often makes the effect stronger. It's okay to do the unexpected.

Don't be afraid to make words very large or very small; don't be afraid to speak loudly or to speak in a whisper. Both can be effective in the right situation.

Don't be afraid to make your graphics very bold or very minimal, as long as the result complements or reinforces your design or your attitude.

Let's take the rather dull report cover you see below and apply each principle to it in turn.

**What Goes Around**

**Comes Around**

Lessons from hitchhiking

across the country

Robin Williams

January 1, 2005

*A rather dull but typical report cover: centered, evenly spaced to fill the page. If you didn't read English, you might think there are six separate topics on this page. Each line seems an element unto itself.*

# Proximity

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If items are related to each other, group them into closer proximity. Separate items that are *not* directly related to each other. Vary the space between to indicate the closeness or the importance of the relationship.

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## What Goes Around Comes Around

Lessons from hitchhiking  
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January 1, 2005

*By putting the title and subtitle close to each other, we now have one well-defined unit rather than six apparently unrelated units. It is now clear that those two topics are closely related to each other.*

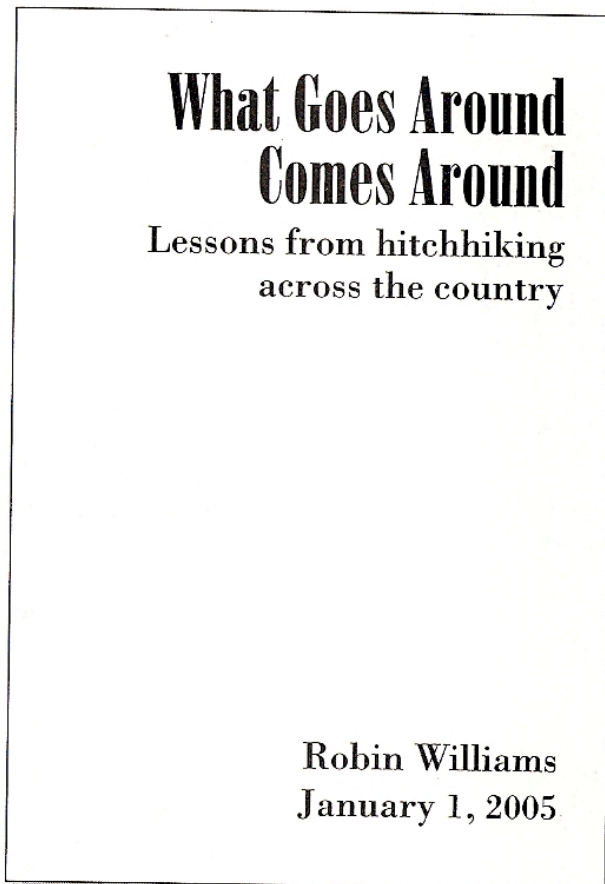
*When we move the by-line and date farther away, it becomes instantly clear that although this is related information and possibly important, it is not part of the title.*

# Alignment

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Be conscious about every element you place on the page. To keep the entire page unified, align every object with an edge of some other object. If your alignments are strong, *then* you can *choose* to break an alignment occasionally and it won't look like a mistake.

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Even though the author's name is far from the title, there is a visual connection between the two elements because of their alignment.

The example on the previous page is also aligned—a centered alignment. As you can see, though, a flush left or right alignment (as shown in the example on this page) gives a stronger edge, a stronger line for your eye to follow.

A flush left or flush right alignment also tends to impart a more sophisticated look than does a centered alignment.

# Repetition

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Repetition is a stronger form of being consistent. Look at the elements you already repeat (bullets, typefaces, lines, colors, etc.); see if it might be appropriate to make one of these elements stronger and use it as a repetitive element. Repetition also helps strengthen the reader's sense of recognition of the entity represented by the design.

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**What Goes Around ▶**

**Comes Around ▼**

Lessons from hitchhiking  
across the country



**Robin Williams**

*The distinctive typeface in the title is repeated in the author's name, which strengthens their connection even though they are physically far apart on the page.*

*The small triangles were added specifically to create a repetition. Although they each point in a different direction, the triangular shape is distinct enough to be recognized each time.*

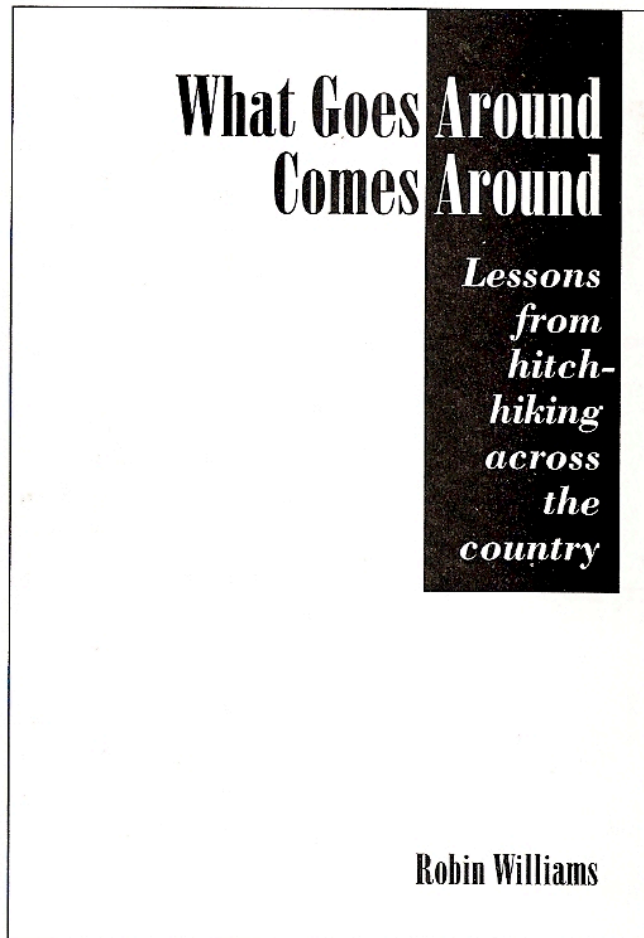
*The "color" of the triangles is also a repeated element. Repetition helps tie separate parts of a design together.*

# Contrast

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Would you agree that the example on this page attracts your eye more than the example on the previous page? It's the contrast here, the strong black versus white, that does it. You can add contrast in many ways—rules (lines), typefaces, colors, spatial relationships, directions, etc. The second half of this book discusses the specific topic of contrasting type.

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Adding contrast to this was simply a matter of adding the black box.

I added a bit of contrast in the type by making the subtitle italic vs. the roman of the title and by-line. (The title is Bodoni Poster Compressed; the subtitle is Bodoni Italic.)

Can you describe where the principles of proximity, alignment, and repetition are also being used in this example?