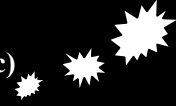


Design Basics... according to Robin Williams (not the comic)



Contrast

Contrast on a page draws our eyes to it; our eyes like contrast. If you are putting two elements on the page that are not the same (such as two typefaces or two line widths), they cannot be similar-for contrast to be effective; the two elements must be very different.

The basic purpose

The basic purpose of contrast is two-fold, and both purposes are inextricable from each other. One purpose is to create an interest on the page if a page is interesting to look at; it is more likely to be read. The other is to aid in the organization of the information. A reader should be able to instantly understand the way the information is organized, the logical flow from one item to another. The contrasting elements should never serve to confuse the reader or to create a focus that is not supposed to be a focus.

How to get it

Add contrast through your typeface choices, line thickness, colors, shapes, sizes, space, etc. It is easy to find ways to add contrast, and it's probably the most fun and satisfying way to add visual interest.

What to avoid

- ❖ Don't be a wimp. If you're going to contrast, do it with strength.
- ❖ Avoid contrasting a sort-of-heavy line with a sort-of-heavier line.
- ❖ Avoid contrasting brown text with black headlines.
- ❖ Avoid using two or more typefaces that are similar. If the items are not exactly the same, make them different!

Repetition

A repetition of visual elements throughout the design unifies and strengthens a piece by tying together otherwise separate parts. Repetition is very useful on one-page pieces, and is critical in multi-page documents.

The basic purpose

The purpose of repetition is to unify and to add visual interest. Don't underestimate the visual interest of a page-if a page looks interesting, it is more likely to be read.

How to get it

Think of repetition as being consistent. Then push the existing consistencies a little further. Turn some of those consistent elements into part of the conscious graphic design. Then take a look at the possibility of adding elements just to create a repetition. At first, simply find existing repetitions and then strengthen them. As you get used to the idea and the look, start to create repetitions to enhance the design and the clarity of the information.

What to avoid

- ❖ Avoid repeating the element so much that it becomes annoying or overwhelming.
- ❖ Be conscious of the value of contrast.

Alignment

Nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily. Every element should have some visual connection with another element on the page. Unity is the goal of all design. It is the most important aspect of design, so important that its achievement excuses any design transgression.

Similitude can be carried too far, resulting in a unified but dull design. Contrastingly, little similarity between elements will dazzle, but the design — and the message it is trying to communicate - will not be unified. So, without unity a design becomes chaotic and unreadable. But without variety, a design becomes inert, lifeless, and uninteresting. A balance must be found between the two.

The basic purpose

The basic purpose of alignment is to unify and organize the page. It is often a strong alignment (combined, of course, with the appropriate typeface) that creates a sophisticated look, or a formal look, a fun look, or a serious look.

How to get it

Be conscious of where you place elements. Always find something else on the page to align with, even if the two objects are physically far away from each other.

What to avoid

- ❖ Avoid using more than one text alignment on the page (that is, don't center some text and right-align other text).
- ❖ And please try very hard to break away from a centered alignment unless you are consciously trying to create a more formal, sedate (often dull?) presentation.

Proximity

When several items are in close proximity to each other, they become one visual unit rather than several separate units. Items relating to each other should be grouped together. You should be able to follow a logical progression through a piece, from a definite beginning to a definite end.

The basic purpose

The basic purpose of proximity is to organize. Other principles come into play as well, but simply grouping related elements together into closer proximity automatically creates organization. If the information is organized, it is more likely to be read and more likely to be remembered.

How to get it

Squint your eyes slightly and count the number of visual elements on a page by counting the number of times your eye stops. If there are more than three to five items on the page (depending on the piece), see which of the separate elements can be grouped together to become one visual unit.

What to avoid

- ❖ Don't stick things in the corners and in the middle.
- ❖ Avoid leaving equal amounts of white space between elements unless each group is part of a subset.
- ❖ Avoid even a split second of confusion over whether a headline, a subhead, a caption, a graphic, etc. belongs with its related material.
- ❖ Don't create relationships with elements that don't belong together!