The difference between a level and a pitchfork is metal that is missing.
The essence of taste is suitability. Divest the word of its prim and priggish implications, and see how it expresses the mysterious demand of the eye and mind for symmetry, harmony, and order. – Edith Wharton (1862-1937)

Wolfgang Weingart, the Swiss designer and design educator, said, “I am convinced that...investigation of elementary typographic exercises is a prerequisite for the solution of complex typographic problems.” That point is equally valid with reference to design problems.

This chapter describes the elementary design components. Mastering them will produce exceptional results regardless of the design problem’s complexity.

Unity

Unity in design exists when all elements are in agreement. Elements are made to look like they belong together, not as though they happened to be placed randomly. Unity requires that the whole design be more important than any subgroup or individual part. Unity is therefore the goal of all design. It is the most important aspect of design, so important that its achievement excuses any design transgression.

Unity exists in elements that have a visual similarity – in, for example, elements that are all vertical (left, top). Unity also exists in elements that have a conceptual similarity, as shown in the collection of things that can be found at the beach (left, center).

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...
There are four ways of relating elements to achieve unity (examples in the right column show more effective treatments):  

1. Proximity: Elements that are physically close are seen as related. At far left, the elements are seen as two groups, captions and images. On the right, each caption is correctedly joined to its image.

2. Similarity: Elements that share similar position, size, color, shape, or texture are seen as alike. The reverse of similarity is intentional contrast: type or imagery that is bigger is seen as more important. Alignment is an especially significant aspect of similarity in which elements that line up with one another appear related.

3. Repetition: Recurring position, size, color, and use of graphic elements create unity.

4. Theme with variations: Alteration of a basic theme retains connectedness while providing interest. In this example the theme is small type set flush left.

Gestalt

Gestalt is a German term, coined at the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar in the early 1920s, that describes a design's wholeness: A design's unity is more than the simple addition of its parts. In other words, each part of a design is affected by what surrounds it. By manipulating the interaction of the individual parts, you affect the cumulative perception (page 60). Gestalt is the overall quality being described when you say, "This design works."

When we look at a building or a painting or a magazine spread, we perceive it first as a whole because the eye automatically seeks wholeness and unity. Rudolf Arnheim, psychologist and
Gestalt describes individual elements relating as a unified whole in these three ways (examples on right show more effective treatments):

1. Figure/ground: Ambiguity between a subject and its surrounding space.
2. Completion or closure: Unfinished forms can be seen as whole (right). They intrigue and involve the viewer more than stable, complete shapes.
3. Continuation: The eye follows a path, whether it is real or implied, as shown with the separated head.

Closure is illustrated in the apparent randomness of the flying birds. On closer inspection, our eyes "connect the dots" and we see that the birds are arranged in the shape of the sponsor's trademark.

Gestalt, or cumulative perception, helps us see a significant message in the arrangement of the dots in the illustration on the preceding page. In a more complex way, gestalt helps us understand the message revealed in a group of images and words designed as a magazine story.
Dominance
Manipulating sizes so one element overwhelms another affects meaning, as shown by this four-step process. Unexpected dominance can make an ordinary idea seem fresh.

Scale
Readers perceive an element as being "small" or "big" in comparison to nearby elements and to natural human size.

Hierarchical
The best design moves the reader across the page in order of the type and images' significance. Content is best expressed as most important, least important, and all the remaining information made equivalently important. Having more than three levels of information is confusing because, while it may be clear what is most important and what is least important, it is rarely clear what the significant difference is between middling material.

Space
Consider white space in relation to the other design components of unity, gestalt, dominance, hierarchy, balance, and color as *primus inter pares* ("first among equals").

To avoid a stale approach to organizing elements on the page, look at the blank area you start with and think of displacing the emptiness with pictures, display and text type, and graphic embellishments like rules. Stay conscious of the remaining empty areas and use it to guide, attract, and arouse the viewer to become engaged.

Dominance

Dominance is closely related to contrast, since there must be contrast for one element to dominate another. Dominance is created by contrasting size (also called *scale*), positioning, color, style, or shape.

Lack of dominance among a group of equally-weighted elements forces competition among them. Readers must then discover their own entry point, which is a chore. Generally speaking, every design should have a single primary visual element, known as a focal point, which dominates the desingscape. Readers then have an obvious starting point and are more easily guided to subsequent levels of information.

Scale, or relative size, is described by English sculptor Henry Moore: "We relate everything to our own [human] size." Scale can be used to attract attention by making the focal point life size or, for even more drama, larger-than-life size. Consciously reversing the sizes of adjacent elements is also arresting.

Hierarchy

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Our eyes respond to elements' relative nearness and similarities, so repeat the same shape (or color or type) to guide the reader to corresponding elements.

Balance
Balance, or equilibrium, is the state of equalized tension. It is not necessarily a state of calm. There are three types of balance. Symmetrical, or formal, balance is vertically centered and is visually equivalent on both sides. Symmetrical designs are static and evoke feelings of classicism, formality, and constancy.

Asymmetrical, or informal, balance attracts attention and is dynamic. Asymmetry requires a variety of element sizes and careful distribution of white space. Because they have more complex relationships, it takes sensitivity and skill to handle elements asymmetrically. Asymmetrical designs evoke feelings of modernism, forcefulness, and vitality.

The third type of balance is overall, or mosaic, balance. This is usually the result of too much being forced on a page. Overall balance lacks hierarchy and meaningful contrast. It is easy for this type of organization to look “noisy.” For that reason, some elements should be placed elsewhere or deleted.

Balance is an important route to achieving unity in design. If the various elements are seen to be in balance, the design will look unified. It will make a single impression. If a design is out of balance, its constituent parts will be more visible than the overall design.

Color
Color is partly artistry but mostly science and common sense. Like good writing and good design, good color is a raw material to be used strategically for a clear purpose. Color contrast has the same potential for communicating hierarchy as typeface, type weight and size, or placement contrasts. Random application or changes in color work against the reader’s understanding just as do any random changes in design.

As a functional way to help guide the reader, color:

- Aids organization, establishing character through consistency. Develop a color strategy. Limit color use as you limit
Colors have particular associations, according to Dr. Max Luecher, a Swiss psychologist. These general associations must be tempered by context and application. For example, blue is associated with calmness and optimism, while red is associated with passion and assertiveness.

Color highlights elements of importance. You read this first, didn't you? Color codes information, simplifying complex data. A color's highlighting benefit is quickly exhausted and devolves into a colorful mess.

People gravitate to whatever looks different on a page.

Provides direction, relating parts to each other. Warm colors move elements forward while cool colors move elements back, so a warm tone should be given to display type that is in front of an image to further the illusion of spatiality. Use graduated tints since there are no flat colors in nature.

Printed color is affected by "ink holdout," the ability of paper to keep ink on the surface and not dissipate by soaking in. Coated papers have high ink holdout and make photos look much sharper. The extra processing makes coated papers cost more. Paper with the lowest ink holdout is the paper towel, whose very purpose is to absorb.

Black type on white paper has the most contrast possible. Any color applied to type will make the type weaker. Counteract this effect by increasing type weight from book to regular or from regular to semibold, and increase type size for optical equivalency.

Everyone perceives light and color a little differently and with their own set of subconscious associations. But all readers respond to usefulness of information. Analyze, define what's useful to the reader, and point out its potential value with color and the six other design components.
Space is what man needs

Man longs for distance and freedom. But mostly he is wedged in: on the street, on vacation, at work, in his living environment. That is why it is more important than ever today to get some personal space. Whether it is the house or the garden or a spacious condo apartment as a mortgage bank we can help you create the space you wish for. Munich.

South German Bodencreditbank

6

How to use the seven design components

Think of shapes 71 | Design evolves 73

Define beauty to be a harmony of all the parts... fitted together with such proportion and connection, that nothing could be added, diminished or altered, but for the worse.
- Leon Battista Alberti (1406-1472)

The seven design components - unity, gestalt, space, dominance, hierarchy, balance, and color - are sliding switches, like a lamp's dimmer, that help achieve visible, effective design (left). While you may choose to have more or less of each of these components, it isn't possible to select just one and not use the others. They come bundled as a group.

Good design necessitates that one element dominate the others in the context of a cumulative perception, or gestalt. Choosing that emphasis suggests a design's starting point. Balance one large or bright element against a few smaller or muted ones.

Function in design is paramount. What is the message? Choose pictures that tell the story. Use color to show what is important. Motivate the reader by arranging the elements in a logical hierarchy. The top left corner of every page or spread is a valuable starting point because readers look there first. Exploit the reader's natural habits.

The purpose of design is emphatically not to fill up all the space. Don't let overabundance make the information in your design impenetrable. As Steven Ledbetter, music historian and critic, wrote, "Beethoven's control of relative tension and relative relaxation throughout the gigantic architectural span [of the first movement of his Symphony No. 3] remains one of the most awe-inspiring accomplishments in the history of music."

Organize elements so all parts fit together to make a unified whole. Find design unity in the elements' commonalities. Organize elements by their shared subject matter, shape, or color.

"...A building is not designed by putting together a series of rooms. Any (good) building has an underlying design concept that binds all the parts together into a whole. Without this it is not architecture." - Edmund N. Bacon (1910- )
Designers have different sensibilities and preferences, which is why five designers given the same pictures and copy would create five different designs. But given a single message to get across, we expect they would develop comparable solutions.

**Think of shapes**

Readers operate subconsciously on these design truisms:

- We read from left to right.
- We start at the top and work down the page.
- Pages in a publication are related to each other.
- Closeness connects while distance separates.
- Big and dark is important; small and light is less important.
- Fullness should be balanced with emptiness.
- Everything has a shape, including emptiness.

Design is, among other things, the arrangement of shapes. Experiment by mentally setting aside the meaning of headlines, copy, visuals, and other elements and treat them as if they were purely shapes (facing page, top). Henry Moore, the English sculptor, said, "The sensitive observer of [design] must feel shape simply as shape, not as a description or idea. He must, for example, perceive an egg as a simple solid shape, quite apart from its significance as food, or from the idea that it will become a bird."

Shapes exist in the realm of figure and ground only. Try overlapping and clustering shapes to create visually interesting concentrations. To simplify a design, reduce the total number of shapes by joining two or three at a time.

Letterforms are shapes that can be exploited in display typography and logo design. It is necessary to see the form of letters before complex typographic ideas can be developed (facing page, bottom). Without exploiting letters’ individual forms and the shape of the space around and within letterforms, the only option is mere typesetting in groups of letters and words.

White space, within type and around columns and pictures, must be considered as a shape. Push it in chunks to the perimeter or to the bottom of the page.

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Create a buffer zone that uses surrounding white space. Interrupt a thick white border on each side to make your space look bigger than it actually is. This technique is used by artist Summer Jellison in her "Glass Owl."

Top row: Students learn to see letters as shape. Each of these studies uses a single letter.

Bottom row: A letterform and textures are combined on a grid. Attention to white space is emphasized.
Design solutions must evolve. Solutions grow from familiarity with the materials at hand. As familiarity grows, the process becomes more interesting, design relationships become clear, and abstraction can be manipulated.

“Design is about making order out of chaos.” Cipe Pineles (1908-1991)

Design evolves

Uncovering and recognizing design relationships takes time. Just as when we walk into a dark room, it takes time to accustom our eyes to the materials at hand.

Design must evolve from basic relationships to more complex, more refined relationships. Start the process by becoming intimately familiar with the content. Read every word of the text. Understand what is being said. Understand, too, why it is being written. Then find out who is going to read it and what the reader's motivation is. Finally, develop a strategy for expressing it to the reader's greatest advantage.

Design evolution should proceed on two levels simultaneously. One is to seek relationships of meaning, which appeals to the reader's need for understanding. The other is to seek relationships of form, which appeals to the reader's need for attraction.

Balancing these two ensures effective visual communication.

Design is spoiled more often by the designer's having been overly cautious rather than by having been overly bold. Dare to be bold.