

## **BASIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR CREATING EFFECTIVE VISUAL AIDS**

SLIDE 1: “There is no right or wrong in graphic design, only effective and ineffective communication.” It is not the intent of this professional development module to convert you to graphic designers. Instead, the purpose is to help you become more aware of the basic design principles graphic designers use to make their publications more effective. It is our hope that you will begin to use these principles in organizing effective visual aids for use in your classroom. Whether you are creating a test, handout, PowerPoint slide, rubric, or bulletin board, how you organize the information can impact how well you communicate the information to your students. Simply put, effective visual communication is an important part of being an effective teacher!

SLIDE 2: In reviewing the content of this professional development module it may be helpful for you to use the following tools to take notes, summarize key points and identify ideas to implement in your classroom:

[Cornell Notes Sheet Example](#) - Sample Cornell Notes Sheet that demonstrates how to take notes, summarize key points, and identify specific ideas for implementation.

[Cornell Notes Sheet Blank Form](#) - Blank Cornell Notes Sheet for use in taking notes, summarizing key points, and identifying specific ideas for implementation.

[Mind Map Example](#) - Example of how to use a mind map to take notes, summarize key points, and identify specific ideas for implementation.

[Mind Map Blank Form](#) - Blank Mind Map for use in taking notes, summarizing key points, and identifying specific ideas for implementation.

[Professional Development Action Plan](#) - Form to use in taking ideas for implementation from the professional development module (from Cornell Notes Sheet and/or Mind Map) and planning to implement them in your classroom.

SLIDE 3: There are three objectives for this module: 1. Define design terms, 2. Explain basic design principles and common blunders, and 3. Examine effective application of design principles. Let’s get started!

SLIDE 4: Some of the common terms designers use may seem unnecessarily complicated. But we use these terms frequently to describe the feelings we have when looking at an effective or ineffective print piece. Symmetry, asymmetry, and axis are related terms that are best defined as a group. In each print publication, there is an invisible line that is usually in the middle of the document. This is called the axis. The line can be vertical or horizontal, but the axis typically divides the paper in half. If you fold a piece of paper in half, either horizontally or vertically, the fold will represent the axis. When design elements are the organized the same way on both sides of the

invisible line, the design is called symmetric. When there is any difference in the organization, the design is asymmetric.

SLIDE 5: Whether or not a design is symmetric or asymmetric usually plays a big role in determining the way the document feels. It may seem strange to think of printed pieces of paper affecting a person's feelings, but, they do! One of the very basic contrasts created by print pieces is the sense of formality. When a document is very rigid or traditional in appearance, we call the design formal. By contrast, a casual document is referred to as informal. One of the easiest ways to influence the formality of a document is to apply rules of symmetry. Formal documents are almost always symmetric about a vertical axis – or center-aligned. Informal documents usually have an asymmetric organization of elements, and sometimes combine multiple alignments – such as left-justified and right-justified. Take a look at the two examples here. The left document is a promotional flyer and the right document is a cover design for a program. Can you tell which is the formal document and which is more informal?

SLIDE 6: Proportion, balance, and tension are related design words, too. When we talk about proportion, we are referring to the relative size of one object when compared to another object. Proportion is easily thought of in terms of fractions. Let's look again at our program cover from the previous slide. The images are laid out in three fairly equal columns, or thirds. The text at the bottom of the cover is about one-fourth of the total document height. Using common proportions typically creates a sense of balance in a document. For example, if the right column of images was noticeably wider than the other two columns, then the design would be out of balance. Similarly, if the text at the bottom did not relate to the overall height of the document, the design would be out of balance as well. Creating a sense of balance is a big part of how a person feels about the printed piece.

Not all publications need to have balance. Sometimes, a lack of balance is a good thing. This is called tension. Tension is defined as a strained relationship between elements in a document where something is out of line and makes the reader uncomfortable. Imagine what would happen if we stretched the image of the man in the white shirt so that the right edge of the image was significantly closer to the right edge of the paper. That would create tension! Everything else lines up in the document. That would be the only piece out of line. Sometimes we want to create tension, but in this case it's probably better to leave the man in the white shirt alone!

SLIDE 7: The last set of words relates to how our eyes move across a document. If there is no system of organization, our eyes tend to roam without focusing on the information. Let's take a look at our program cover again for reference. There are two primary lines, or directions of eye movement, in this design. In the artwork at the top, the position of the two gentlemen (the man in the white shirt and the man sleeping) help to direct our eye to the center of the artwork. Even the front porch helps focus our eye on the center of the images. Once our eye is in the middle, the dark anchor of the barns in the bottom of the center image helps pull our eye downward to read the text. So, the first line of movement is toward the center and the second line of movement is down the page toward the text.

The arrangement, or pattern, of the images helps create the lines of movement. If any two of the images were switched, the pattern would be different and the line would be affected. The pattern and the line combine to create a rhythm across the document which determines how fast or slow our eye moves. Let's move on to the four design principles where we will see more examples of how these terms are applied.

SLIDE 8: There are four basic design principles that we discuss in graphic design: proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast. They are like pieces to a puzzle. All four pieces need to be in place for the puzzle to be solved. Having even one piece out of place can be frustrating to a reader.

SLIDE 9: Proximity refers to the relationship among pieces of information in a document. The goal here is to group related pieces of information together to create information chunks. Proximity establishes relationships among pieces of information, indicates the beginning point for reading, organizes the text, and organizes the white space, or the blank space, around the text. Let's look at our promotional flyer for an example. There are five main chunks of information to read on this document. I can look at the images on the left if I want to, but I quickly get a sense of organization and starting point for this text by just glancing at the document. The bold text, and white space around the text, helps define the chunks of information for me. I can read the entire document, or I can skip to the part that I am most interested in, and come back to the other parts at a later time if I want. The use of proximity is handled well in this document.

SLIDE 10: Imagine if our flyer had the three images organized so that one was in each corner and the logo was in the fourth corner. The text would either have to be in the center or scroll in an out of the white space. It would be very confusing! It would be even worse if we added a fifth image right in the center of the page. Some of the common mistakes we make with respect to proximity are:

- Including too many separate elements,
- Locating visual elements in corners and in the middle,
- Creating equal white space among all elements,
- Creating confusion about which pieces belong together, and
- Creating relationships between elements that do not belong together.

You want to avoid making these types of blunders whenever possible.

SLIDE 11: The principle of alignment states that every element should have a visual connection with at least one other element on a printed page. This helps create a unified document in which elements are related. If one element is not aligned, it looks like it is not supposed to be there, or like it doesn't fit. Let's look at the example of a postcard mailer. The artwork on the left creates a strong, hard edge on the top, left, and bottom sides. The two lines of text at the top and bottom align with this hard edge. If they were even just slightly off, it would look like an alignment mistake was made. The "Exhibition Opening" and "Calendar Signing" text elements are aligned to follow the

angle of the ampersand AND along the center horizontal axis created by the artwork on the left, thus strengthening the connection between the artwork and the text. Finally, the text is aligned along the right side of the mailer. Even though there is not a continuous, hard edge, the fact that the text elements all line up implies the presence of an edge. One subtle item about this piece is that there is some light gray text that floats behind all of the other elements in the document. Those are the names of the artists typed in a block of text and fully justified so that another edge is created around the perimeter of the piece. This not only reinforces the hard edge, but also softens and creates another level of interest for the reader. This example would be less effective if any of the elements were out of alignment.

SLIDE 12: Remember the example we used about the man in the white shirt when we discussed balance. If we stretched his image so that the edges were out of alignment, tension would be created in the document. Sometimes tension is good, but when you don't need it, keep things lined up! Some of the common mistakes we make with respect to alignment are:

- Using multiple text alignment formats on one page – use one method of alignment. Using only one method of alignment doesn't mean everything is lined up along the same edge. It means that one method is used for alignment.
- Using the same text alignment format in every publication – how boring for your students to see the same centered alignment each time you distribute a handout in class!
- Using centered text unless you are creating a formal publication – try other options!
- “Falling cows” – A college design professor used to refer to elements that didn't relate to anything else in the design as a falling cow. He said it looked like the cow just fell out of the sky and landed haphazardly in the design. So, at all costs, watch out for those falling cows! You don't want one of them to squish a really good design.

SLIDE 13: The use of repetition creates consistency in a publication. The principle states that you should repeat some element of the design throughout the piece to create strong graphic symbols. Some examples of things that are easily repeated are:

- Bullets
- A color
- A design element
- Spatial relationship
- Formatting options (bold, italic, underlined, etc.)

Take a look at the resume example. The font used at the top is also used to call out the information chunks. Not only does the element of repetition apply here, but we also see another example of use of the proximity principle to organize a document.

By the way, have you noticed yet, the little puzzle piece in this PowerPoint that is used to identify each of the four main design principles? You won't see it on every slide – that would be too much, but it is there!

SLIDE 14: Can you imagine if ALL of the text was as heavy as the repetitive element used in our resume example? That would be very overwhelming and incredibly difficult to read. Some of the common mistakes we make with respect to repetition are:

- Repeating elements to the point that they become obnoxious, or
- Overdoing to the point of confusion.

Use repetitive elements, but take it easy and avoid throwing too many things into your document.

SLIDE 15: Contrast is created when two design elements are different. When those elements are slightly different, you have created conflict rather than contrast. The principle of contrast states that when two items are different, make them REALLY DIFFERENT! This helps create interest. Some strategies for increasing contrast are to play with:

- Line directions
- Line weights
- Type
- Color
- Texture

Let's go back to our postcard mailer for an example of contrast. Remember the discussion we had about alignment and the various lines used to organize the text. We also talked about the light gray text floating behind the entire design. The size of the ampersand and the weight of the "Exhibition Opening" and "Calendar Signing" text all help to create contrast. Even though the same font is used throughout the document, imagine how boring this document would be if all of the text was the same weight and color!

SLIDE 16: Failing to produce a document with contrast is a huge mistake. What results is a "gray" document in which everything looks the same and nothing looks interesting. Some of the common mistakes we make with respect to contrast are:

- Mediocrity – making things almost different creates a mediocre document; for contrast to be effective, things must be very different. Apply contrast with strength.
- Creating small differences between different elements

If the elements are different, make them REALLY DIFFERENT! Don't be afraid to be BOLD in your design! Exciting publications capture people's interest. If no one WANTS to look at your print material, you cannot communicate your message at all, much less communicate it effectively.

SLIDE 17: Remember, the goal of this module is to help you become more visually aware so that you can become a more effective visual communicator. Don't be afraid to:

- Seek inspiration around you, or

- Adapt your previous publications. Finding a starting point is often the most challenging aspect of designing anything.

Another good strategy to help you get started with graphic design is to get in the habit of:

- Keeping idea files,
- Describing designs with words, and
- Sketching your ideas on paper.

Most of all...HAVE FUN!

SLIDE 18: To read more on this topic, check out [The Non-Designer's Design Book, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition](#), by Robin Williams. Continue to the next slide in the presentation for review questions and feedback.

SLIDE 19: Based on the module, determine if the following statement is true or false. Select the appropriate link below the question to indicate your response.

QUESTION 1:

Formal documents are usually symmetric about a vertical axis or "center-aligned."

The answer is TRUE.

SLIDE 20: Based on the module, determine if the following statement is true or false. Select the appropriate link below the question to indicate your response.

QUESTION 2:

The four basic graphic design principles are balance, contrast, harmony, and repetition.

The answer is FALSE. The four basic graphic design principles presented in this module are Alignment, Proximity, Contrast, and Repetition.

SLIDE 21: Based on the module, determine if the following statement is true or false. Select the appropriate link below the question to indicate your response.

QUESTION 3:

The principle of contrast states that if things are different, make them really different.

The answer is TRUE.

SLIDE 22: Based on the module, determine if the following statement is true or false. Select the appropriate link below the question to record your response.

QUESTION 4:

The principle of alignment states that using multiple alignment formats on a page creates unity among the visual elements.

The answer is FALSE. Using multiple text alignment formats on one page is a primary alignment blunder. The key to the alignment principle is to make sure every visual element has a connection to at least one other visual element on the page.

SLIDE 23: Based on the module, determine if the following statement is true or false. Select the appropriate link below the question to indicate your response.

QUESTION 5:

Using too many repetitive elements can make documents difficult to read.

The answer is TRUE.

Congratulations! You have completed this professional development module.