

Design Principles Overview

Contrast

“The principle of contrast states that visual elements on a page should look distinctly different from one another. It is used to add visual variety to your layouts and to keep everything on the page from looking alike.”

Contrast in design is unavoidable. As soon as you add an element to a blank page or screen, you’ve created contrast. So you can create contrast with any element and within any principle of design. Use two different typefaces - sans serif for the heading and serif for the text. Use smooth against rough, as in metal and brick in architecture. Use thick against thin, hot against cold color, bright against dull. Use contrast with drama or with a subtle hand, but above all - don’t let it detract from the message. The use of **contrast** within your menus or scenes provides visual interest. Contrast can also show the hierarchy of information in your scene, allowing the audience to easily find the most important information and understand what it is about. Contrast can appear in text or images, in color, size, shape or spatial relationships. Contrast is only effective if it is strong, otherwise it can look accidental.

Repetition

“Repetition is the principle that states that repeating lines, shapes, images, colors, textures, and other visual elements within a page helps establish a unified, cohesive design.”

When designers apply the **repetition** principle, they repeat certain elements in all the materials they put out. This way, they are able to present a unified, cohesive image to the public. The principle of **repetition** can be applied within your website as well. It’s a powerful tool that strengthens your pages’ organization and helps your company establish a strong identity. You can repeat some elements of your design within each page, as well as throughout the entire site. **Repetitive elements** create a sense of organization. The effect is the same as using a consistent unit of measurement--it helps interpret the meaning of the object under consideration, and it helps to identify all elements as part of the same site.

Maintaining similar placement of navigational elements from scene to scene makes it easier for users to understand how to navigate through the work. **Repeating visual elements** gives the work order. Design should be consistent in placement of elements, size and color. A website with consistency in design will allow the user to feel comfortable browsing from page to page. If each section is very different and feels like you have moved into a different site, instead of feeling comfortable, the user will feel disconcerted and confused, resulting in an ineffective communication of your site's message.

Alignment

“Alignment is the visual connection among words, graphics, images, shapes, and lines on a page. The fastest way to make your page look organized is to visually connect, align, elements on the page with other elements on the page.”

Alignment is important whether you are designing a poster, business card or multimedia presentation. You should not place visual elements together in an arbitrarily manner. Every element should have a visual connection to each other. The lack of **alignment** causes major design problems. Strong, sharp edges create a strong, sharp impression. A lack of alignment of visual elements can give a sloppy, disorganized and weak impression. When using **alignment**, make sure it is strong. If the alignment is slightly out, it looks like a mistake. Breaking alignment can be used for emphasis in certain situations, such as to illustrate a button has been pressed down.

Proximity

The idea behind proximity is that “items that are related should be grouped together”.

We usually adhere to proximity subconsciously. But it is the designer’s responsibly to make a conscious effort to make sure all related items (links, visual elements, content matter) are grouped together. This helps to organize your layout.

Economy

The principle of economy states that ‘less is more’. By reducing the amount of visual clutter, you can convey a clearer, stronger message to the viewer. “Less is more” does not only apply to images. You can reduce the amount of fonts, colors, content, or any other element.

Hierarchy

The principle of hierarchy states that the designer has the ability to control what the viewer sees first and second on a page. This is also referred to as visual emphasis.

Almost all pages benefit from the use of emphasis (**hierarchy**) to help structure the visual space and clarify presentation of the information. You should begin by deciding which words, phrases, or graphics are the most important. Once you have decided which visual elements to emphasize, and in which order, then you have developed a visual hierarchy for your page. Establishing visual **hierarchy** – What is your primary message, and which element best communicates that message? Is there a secondary message and an element that best communicates that message? Which visual element is most interesting? Which visual element is the most likely to attract or spark the reader's attention?

To 'read' a scene effectively, it is important to be able to distinguish different levels of importance of elements in the composition. Hierarchy of elements contributes to understanding of a scene. Hierarchy can be displayed by use of a dominant size, location, shape or color.

Typography

"The art and process of skillfully arranging type in a layout"

Simply changing the typeface, size, color, weight, and placement of type in your design can add extra emphasis to your words and enhance the visual appeal of your message.

Color

"When designing a website choose colors wisely. Remember, colors convey emotions and emotions can heavily influence your decision-making process. Your choice of colors for your website should mirror the message and/or feeling you to hope to communicate to the viewer."

- Limit your color palette to no more than three colors to reduce visual clutter.
- Use colors that are appropriate to the theme of your web site.
- Use colors found in key photos or graphics on your web page for added harmony.
- Avoid harsh oversaturated colors. De-saturate colors to approximate colors found in nature and textiles.

Balance

"The principle of balance is concerned with the distribution of visual elements on a page in order to achieve a pleasing and clear layout. The idea behind balance is to avoid clumping elements in one location on a page which can result in one section of the page looking overloaded or busy."

When you achieve **balance**, you avoid 'dead space'. DON'T confuse white space with dead space. White space is intentional; dead space is not. Dead space is merely empty pockets of space without a purpose. If your site is filled with dead space, no relationships will be emphasized, and it won't be visually obvious what items should be understood together. This makes your page look cluttered. **Balance** in composition involves creating a layout of graphics so the result achieves a sense of evenness. **Balance** can be achieved through symmetry, where there is an exact proportion of parts across an axis, or through or asymmetrical composition.

Focal Point

"A focal point is the visual element or part of the page that is most emphasized and therefore where the reader's eye goes to first."

Techniques for creating a focal point include:

- Making it the biggest, boldest, or brightest
- Setting the type in bold, italic, or both
- Adding a special visual effect to the image
- Changing the element's color or angle
- Surrounding the element with lots of white space