

6

Design

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Learning Outcomes

- Employ informed and flexible processes for writing and speaking, including: creating and/or finding ideas about which to write; collecting evidence and data; planning and drafting; revising; editing; and **designing** or presenting a message so that it is successfully understood by a specified audience.
- Use various methods of invention, organization, and style to adapt written and oral forms of communication to specific rhetorical situations.
- Write in a correct, clear, and graceful prose style.
- Effectively evaluate and comment on the writing of others to facilitate revision.

6.1 Visual Rhetoric and Document Design

We live in a visual world where every person with access to a computer has all the necessary tools to produce a quality product; our audiences expect quality work and we must meet their expectations. John McWade, author of *Before and After Page Design* adds, "Design has always been important, but the computer has put it center stage. It's no longer enough to have a good product; it must be a good looking product" (*Before and After Page Design*). He continues, "The computer has made designers of all of us." So, how can you

embrace your new designer role?

The Joshua Tree Principle



Designer Robin Williams tells this story, "Many years ago I received a tree identification book for Christmas. I was at my parent's home, and after all the gifts had been opened I decided to go out and identify the trees in the neighborhood. Before I went out, I read through part of the book. The first tree in the book was the Joshua tree because it only took two clues to identify it. Now the Joshua tree is a really weird-looking tree and I looked at the picture and said to myself, 'Oh, we don't have that kind of tree in Northern California. That is a weird-looking tree. I would know if I saw that tree, and I've never seen one before.' So I took my book and went outside. My parents live in a cul-de-sac of six homes. Four of those homes had Joshua trees in the front yard. I had lived in that house for thirteen years, and I had never seen a Joshua tree. I took a walk around the block, and there must have been a sale at the nursery when everyone was landscaping their new homes--at least 80 percent of the homes had Joshua trees in the front yards. And I had never seen one before! Once I was conscious of the tree, once I could name it, I saw it everywhere. Which is exactly my point. Once you can name something you are conscious of it. You have power over it. You own it. You're in control."

I couldn't agree more! Once we have vocabulary to identify something, we can see and use that principle. Rebecca Hagen and Kim Golombisky, authors of *White Space is Not Your Enemy: A Beginners Guide to Communicating Visually Through Graphic, Web, and Multimedia Design* write,

"Visual Culture is a language, and like any language, visual culture has rules that make communication possible" (p. 2).

In our visually dense world, your document's appearance--its design and visual impact--matters, even in academic writing. This Purdue OWL PowerPoint gives advice for technical

writers but the principles it teaches apply to us social science writers too.

As Social Science writers, we will create documents for a wide array of audiences; documents that will need to meet diverse needs, values, and audience expectations. Document Design (vocabulary) we must understand and own are

- serif font
- [san serif](#) font
- decorative font
- columns
- gutters
- bullets
- headings

Williams created an acronym (PARC) to teach us basic design principles.

PARC design principles

Proximity (Grouping)

Items relating to each other should be grouped close together. When several items are in close proximity to each other, they become one visual unit rather than several separate units. This helps organize information, reduces clutter, and gives the reader a clear structure.

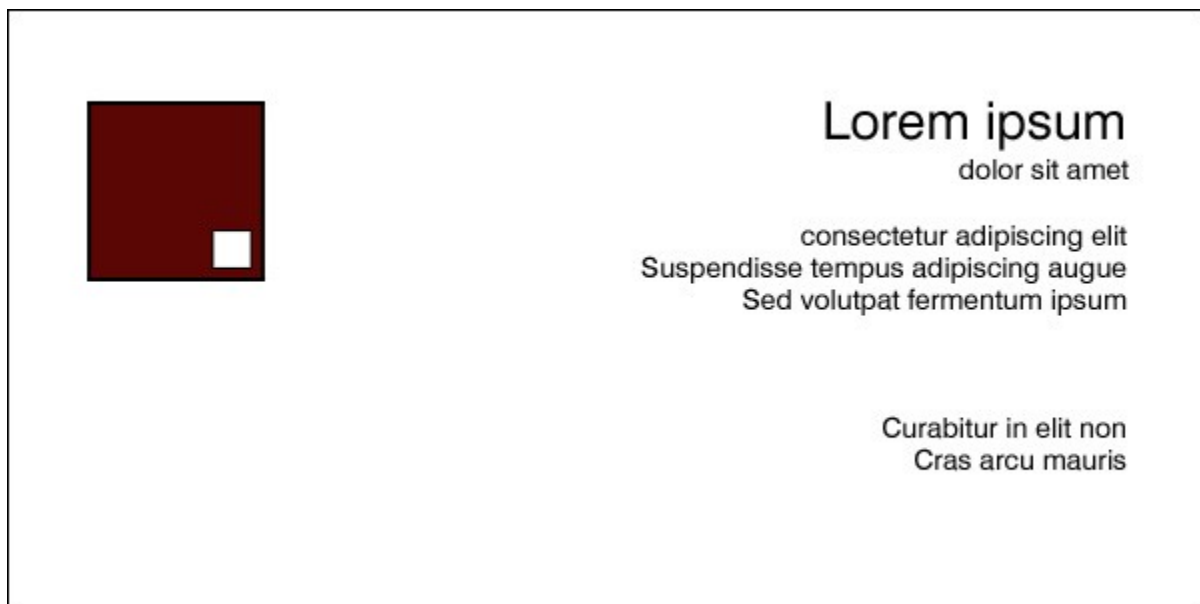


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Alignment

Nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily. Every element should have some visual connection with another element on the page. This creates a clean, sophisticated, fresh look.

Poor page layout;
no visual hierarchy

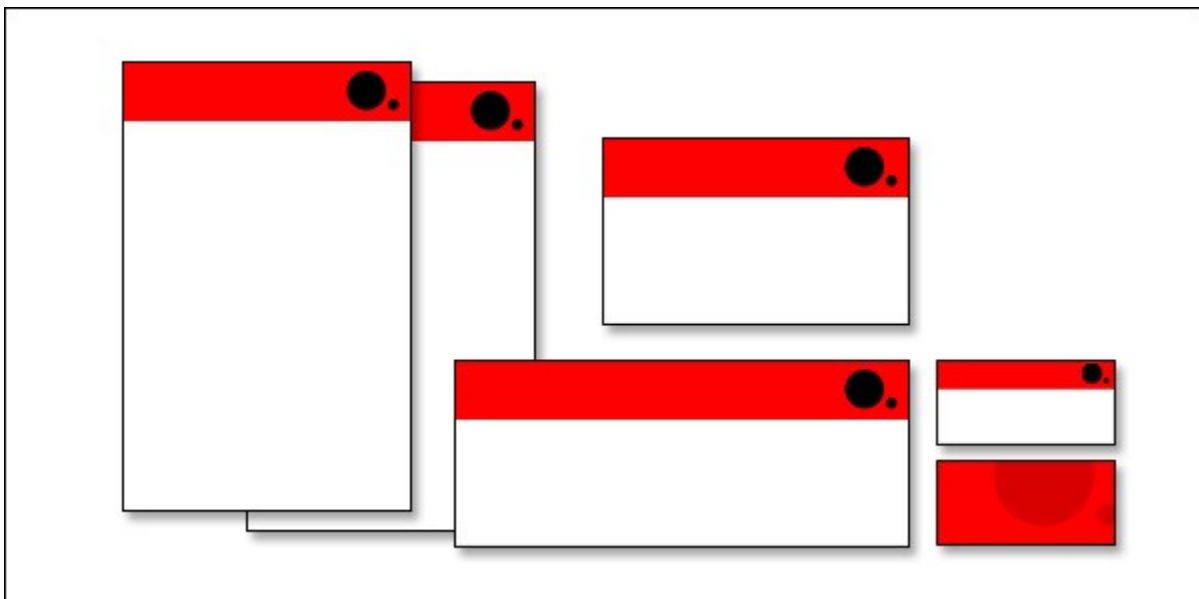


Better layout; predictable, modular,
clear visual structure



Repetition (Consistency)

Repeat visual elements of the design throughout the piece. You can repeat colors, shapes, textures, spatial relationships, line thicknesses, fonts, sizes, graphic concepts, etc. This develops the organization and strengthens the unity.



Contrast

The idea behind contrast is to avoid elements on a page that are merely *similar*. If the elements (type, color, size, line thickness, shape, space, etc.) are not the *same*, then make them **very different**. Contrast is often the most important visual attraction on a page—it's what makes the reader look at a page in the first place.



William's jokingly claims that designers who don't effectively use these PARC design principles get CRAP (PARC spelled backwards). John McWade adds, "Designed correctly, the paper does not appear to be designed at all; what the reader perceives is power and presence. Poor design is like smog. You can see air only when it's dirty. When it's clean it's invisible and you see the fantastic mountains, unaware of the air at all" (Before and After Page Design).

Writers must develop document design skills as 21st Century rhetorical communicators.

[Presentation Guru, Garr Reynolds expands on these concepts.](#)

Additional Page Design tips

- Use the right paper and ink.
- Use consistent page numbers, headers, and footers.
- Use ample and appropriate margins (Leave a one-inch margin around the page).
- Use ragged rather than justified right margins.
- Use list format for easy reading.
- Keep reasonable line length.
- Keep consistent line spacing.

- Use adequate white space to balance the density of print and make the page inviting. (In document design, negative space is often referred to as *white space*).
- Use white space consistently to show organization and hierarchy of ideas.
- Set off headings with white space.

As we study and learn about the basic principles of design our skills will improve.

Discussion Question

What design skills do you already possess?

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