

Design Glossary

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26 September 2021

Document Design - ENGL 6618

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Contrast

Contrast helps to clarify communication through distinguishing parts of a message by using differing elements in the design. As Kimball and Hawkins write in *Document Design: A Guide for Technical Communicators*, contrast requires a comparison in order to be utilized as a principle and can be exhibited through shape, color, size, value, and position relative to other objects in a design piece (29). Contrast can be achieved through simple means, such as applying typographical emphasis (bold print, for example) to distinguish headlines from their articles in a newsletter. It can also be more elaborate, such as through the use of complementary colors.

In *The Non-Designer's Design Book, Fourth Edition*, Robin Williams writes, "Contrast not only serves to draw in the eye, but you can use it to organize information, clarify the hierarchy, guide a reader around the page, and provide a focus" (69). The principle of contrast is an effective tool to command attention.

Print newspapers provide strong examples of contrast in practice. Bold, large-font headlines direct the reader to the stories, which are printed in regular typeface. Other headers are distinct from the regular print of the stories, but neither are designed to stand out as prominently as the headlines. Contrast can be achieved effectively in black and white, as evidenced in prominent newspaper headlines (see fig. 1).

Designers of album covers also use contrast as a defining principle of their work. A recognizable use of contrast can be observed on the iconic Blue Note jazz album covers. Because many jazz recordings lacked lyrics, the cover design had to reflect the mood, tone, and style of the music to the potential customer (Dougherty 48-49). The distinct design style of the Blue Note covers often employed the use of contrast in striking, yet simple ways. Background colors were often uniform, but the contrast was evident with the use of lettering in contrasting colors (see fig. 2).



Fig. 1: Image from www.nytimes.com. This New York Times front page from July 21, 1969 is a good example of contrast in black and white. The headline and subheads employ contrasting emphasis to guide the reader to information in the articles.

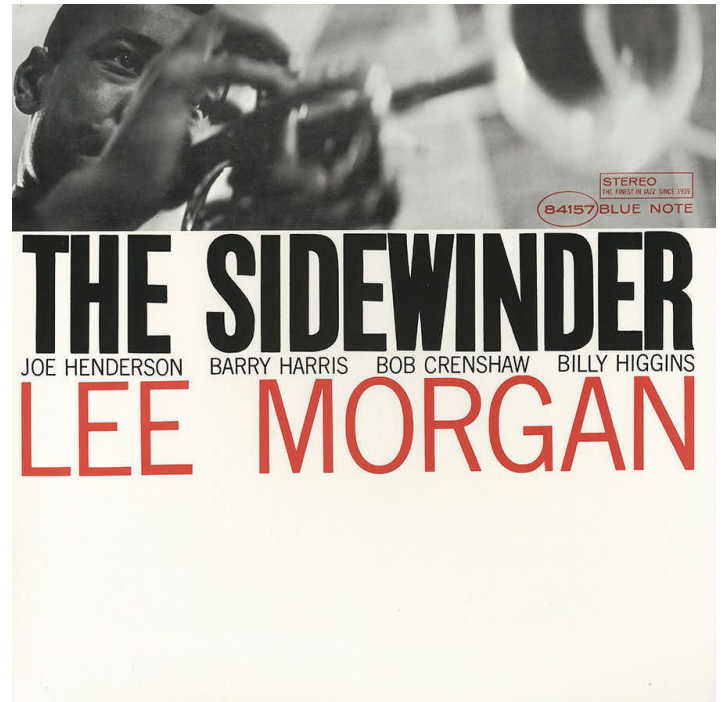


Fig. 2: Image from viljamis.com. Designer Reid Miles uses contrasting color, font sizes, and weight to emphasize Lee Morgan as the lead musician on this classic Blue Note album cover.

Alignment

The principle of alignment is a conscious effort by the designer to visually connect items, resulting in a cohesive unit. Alignment can be implied through invisible lines to bring together elements that might be physically separate (Williams 33). When alignment is created effectively, the reader's eyes will follow implied lines.

In *Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students*, Ellen Lupton says that deciding “to align text in justified, centered, or ragged columns is a fundamental typographic act. Each mode of alignment carries unique formal qualities, cultural associations, and aesthetic risks” (112). The act of deliberately choosing the alignment is part of the greater design scheme.

Justified alignment, in which the right and left sides of the print are even, creates a clean edge on a page but can also result in text gaps in order to maintain the evenness. This type of alignment is often seen in the columns of print newspapers. Williams cautions against using justified alignment unless the line lengths are long enough to avoid gaps (42).

Centered alignment is commonly used among beginning designers, but it can be used well in designs such as formal invitations. Flush left and flush right (or *left-aligned* and *right-aligned*) can be used together if they are easily connected with the implied lines (Williams 38-43).

Different alignments can be used within one design piece if the components can be connected. Effective use of various types of alignment in one document are displayed in the original Woodstock poster designed by Arnold Skolnick (see fig. 3). Skolnick uses a combination of centered and justified alignment throughout the poster. The reader's eye is visually connected to the text by the alignment and placement of the guitar, fingers, and catbird artwork.

Brand logos are also designed with alignment in mind. The Burger King logo (see fig. 4) is one example of a justified alignment in print working with the graphic.



Fig. 3: Image from www.nepm.org. Various types of alignment work together in both the artwork and text to guide the reader's eye through the information presented in this poster designed by Arnold Skolnick.



Fig. 4: Image from 1000logos.net. The justified alignment of the letters to the top and bottom hamburger buns contributes to the overall effect of the 2021 Burger King franchise logo.

Hierarchy

Hierarchy orders visual design elements in a way that guides the reader's eye through emphasized and subordinate items to differentiate the importance of each. In short, hierarchy takes the reader from the big picture to a narrower focus. Bold print, indentations, and italics are a few ways to create effective hierarchy. These tools also utilize the principle of contrast to craft hierarchy, which is central to its success in a design (Lupton, Williams).

Style guides facilitate how hierarchy is consistently applied to design projects involving collaboration from different individuals. A style guide might include instructions about header and caption structure that would need to be utilized uniformly.

Structural hierarchy—as opposed to stylistic hierarchy—is of particular importance to web designers. “Structural hierarchies help make websites understandable to search engines and accessible to diverse users” (Lupton 135). By using style sheets, designers can arrange information in a structural hierarchy that allows users with a variety of computer systems and accessibility needs (such as visual impairments) to navigate the web more easily.

An index in a book demonstrates an example of hierarchy in print design (see fig. 5). Readers first need to know the letter of an index entry, after which they can find a list of pages in which the topic can be found.

Many websites provide a good example of hierarchy. Well-structured pages are designed so that search engines will rank the content higher during a web search, and the layout of menus helps to organize the information in a way that guides the reader to what they need. Designers increasingly have to consider how mobile devices will display their information as well (see fig. 6).

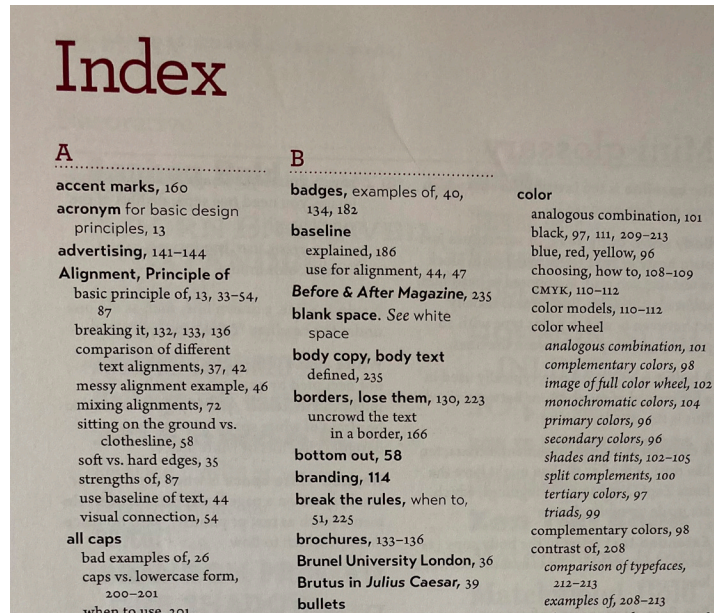


Fig. 5: Index from *The Non-Designer's Design Book, Fourth Edition*, p. 236, Robin Williams. The reader can clearly see the order in which information is organized and make choices accordingly in this index.

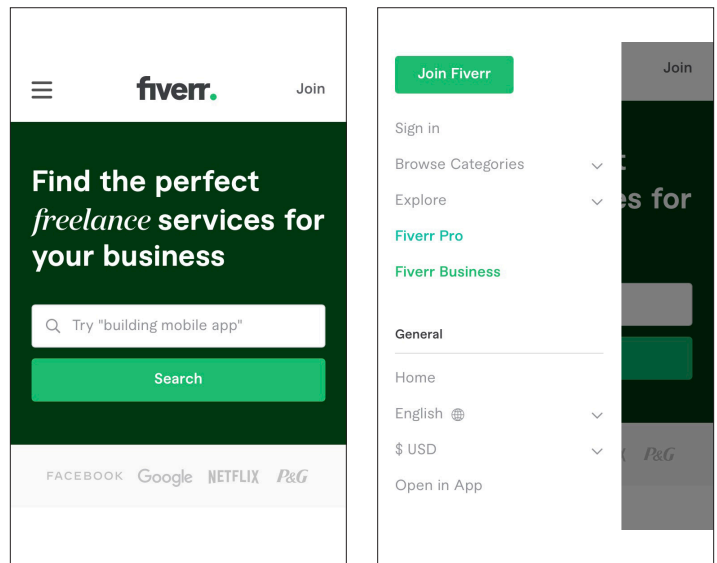


Fig. 6: Mobile homepage and menu page from www.fiverr.com. The hierarchy of this page is set to cater first to business-ess that are searching for freelance services.

Color

As a design principle, color is a powerful tool. The primary, secondary, and tertiary colors on the color wheel provide the basis for various color relationships. The use of color in design can be complex, but even a splash of color as a contrasting element on an otherwise grayscale piece can draw attention to the designer's message.

Primary colors are red, blue, and yellow. Green, purple, and orange represent *secondary colors*, which are created by mixing equal parts of the primary colors. *Tertiary colors* fill in and complete the wheel through the mixing of equal parts of the secondary colors (Williams 96-97).

Complementary colors are opposite each other on the color wheel (see fig. 7) and work well when one is used as a main color and the other is used as an accent (Williams 98). One well-known design using complementary colors is seen in the Los Angeles Lakers logo (see fig. 8).

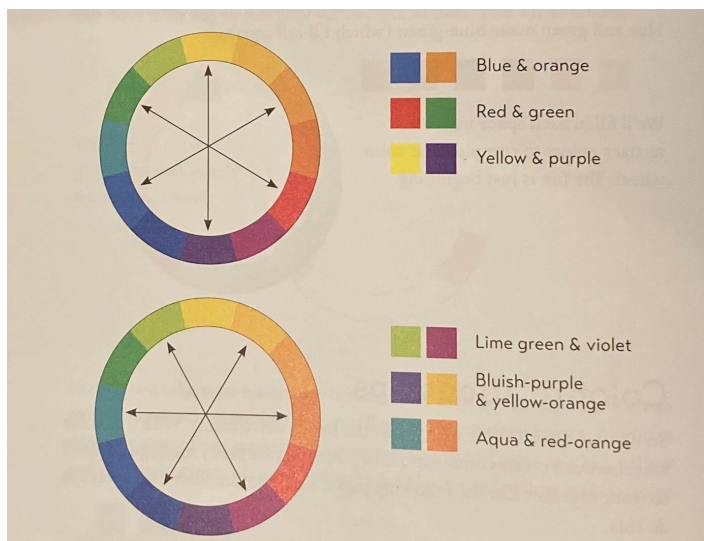


Fig. 7: Complementary color wheel illustration from *The Non-Designer's Design Book, Fourth Edition*, Robin Williams. Complementary colors are easily visualized as opposites on the color wheel.

Analogous colors are next to each other on the color wheel (see fig. 9), while *monochromatic* color schemes involve the use of shades and tints of one hue (see fig. 10). A *hue* is defined as “the pure color” (Williams 102) and is the basis for creating shades and tints. A *shade* results from adding black to a hue, while a *tint* is the result of adding white (Williams 102).

Choosing colors as part of design is driven by content and other factors. Companies might have color requirements for their materials. Color models, which can be intricate, also need to be taken into consideration. If the design is to be printed, the CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, and a key color—typically black) color model is preferred, while a design intended for screen viewing needs to use the RGB (red, green, blue) model (Williams 110-112).

Color can be used as a unifying element along with other design principles to create a cohesive message.



Fig. 8: Image from pixellogo.com. The bluish-purple and yellow-orange colors in the Los Angeles Lakers logo are complementary colors on the color wheel.



Fig. 9: Photo by Sara Garland. Analogous colors are part of the predominant setting in this beach photo. The blue, green, and aqua colors of the sky and water would be in close proximity on the color wheel.



Fig. 10: Image from www.freelogoservices.com. The PayPal logo color scheme uses a monochromatic approach. The value of the hue is adjusted to create different shades of blue.

Proximity

Proximity, in simple language, implies belonging. “Users typically assume that design objects that appear in close proximity belong together. Conversely, design objects that are relatively distant from each other imply that they don’t belong together” (Kimball, Hawkins 31). Objects or words that appear together are assumed to be related, and applying this design principle effectively is a way to convey a clear message.

However, according to Williams, proximity does not always mean that everything in a design is close together. Proximity can be expressed by connecting similarly categorized items in different places by using other visual cues (20). For example, headers in a newsletter or newspaper are not necessarily next to each other, but they can be recognized as logically-connected items by using the same fonts, sizes, and colors throughout the page. The use of additional white space between the last line of a paragraph and the next header can contribute to the feeling of proximity. Increasing spacing between lines is known as *leading*.

Kerning, or spacing between letters, can be used to imply proximity by grouping letters and words more tightly than the surrounding material. Designers have to take readability as well as aesthetics into consideration when using these techniques. In a design or document that is text-heavy with few illus-

trations or photos, changing the spacing can connect elements through the principle of proximity.

Web designers have used the principle of proximity in a variety of ways. In fig. 11, a web design and development agency from the U.K., Buffalo, grouped their clients together in a hexagonal grid pattern to show their relationship as clients of the firm. Users are easily drawn to this section of the page, and anyone seeking web design services from their agency can easily access the pertinent information of their existing clients to see examples of their work.

Business cards often exhibit strong elements of proximity (see fig. 12). With limited space in which to design, grouping related items such as location and contact information help to make a business card a handy reference for a user. In also applying the principles of hierarchy, alignment, and contrast, a well-crafted business card can easily achieve its intended results.



Fig. 11: Screenshot from builtbybuffalo.com. While the brands represented in the hexagons are not necessarily related by content, this web design firm is using proximity to show that they are connected as clients, creating easy access to the portfolio.



Front Side



Back Side

Fig. 12: Image from www.vennage.com. The physical office location is separated by extra space before the web presence, implying that the information is related through the principle of proximity.

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