

Notes on Document Design PowerPoint (DRAFT)

Following you will find commentary on the slides for the Document Design Presentation. You will also find lots of helpful advice in the Grading Codes handout on line.

Especially study the headings, formatting, lists, and visuals sections.

Document Design

- Guides your readers
- Makes the document attractive

Don't try to read these documents, just look at the shape/layout, and ask yourself which document you would rather deal with. Effective document design helps readers find information quickly and relatively painlessly.

Start with the Basics

- Paper
- Margins
- Line length
- Justification

All of the elements on this slide will make a document easier to read.

- Use non-glossy paper, thick enough to prevent the ink from showing through the back.
- Prefer margins at least 1 inch wide all around. The more complex the material, the larger you

should make your margins.

- Document designers recommend a line length (not sentence length) of approximately 10 to 12 words. Readers may find columns easier to scan.
- Readers find it easier to keep their place in the text when it is left-justified only. Text justified on both sides appears more formal but often has unsightly “rivers” of white and may allow readers to go back and reread the same line more frequently.

Pay Attention to Font

- **Serif vs. Sans Serif**
- Line leading
- Legibility

Font choices can help a reader process information quickly . . . or not . . .

- Serif fonts have the little tails at the edges of the letters, as in Times or Times New Roman. Sans serif fonts are “clean cut”, as in Arial or

Verdana. In US correspondence, use serif fonts for body text. Experts claim it is easier to read; however, in Europe they prefer sans serif fonts for body text. Keep your audience in mind when making your choices. Use can use sans serif fonts for headings, labels, etc. No document should use more than two font families.

- Line leading refers to the amount of space between lines of text: double, single, and any other variations. The more complex your information is, the larger you may want the leading. Also, if you (must) use fancy font, you should use larger leading.
- Choose a legible font. Designers often prefer Times, Times New Roman, Garamond, Arial, not only for ease of reading but because most people have them on their computers. If someone opens an electronic document written in one of those fonts, the computer won't default to some other font and destroy the formatting.

Use White Space Appropriately

- Paragraphing
- Lists

White space helps a reader find the information he or she wants.

- Use double spacing between paragraphs. It makes the document look less intimidating, and helps readers find their place more easily.
- Putting important information in lists makes it easier to find.

Give Your Reader a Guide

- Page Numbers
- Headers/footers

Make it easy for your reader to flip through your document.

- Page numbers go top right or bottom right or bottom middle.
- Headers and/or footers indicate the specific

contents of a page. Think of the headers in the phone book. Headers can also contain items such as company logos and chapter names, but readers need specific page contents the most.

Give Your Reader a Focus Headings

Using highlighted headings helps readers find information quickly and get a good overall sense of the document organization.

- Headings should stand out clearly from the rest of the text. Bold, indenting, and spacing will attract the readers' eye.
- Headings at different hierarchical levels should clearly differ from each other. Designers recommend that subheadings differ from headings by at least 4 points, but capitals, bold, etc. can also help differentiate the levels. Experiment to decide.

Add Interest with Highlights

- Boxes
- Screens
- Bold
- Caps
- Color . . .

Make a document more interesting by using boxes, bold, color, etc. Don't use too many kinds of highlighting or the document will look unprofessional, and not all of these strategies are appropriate for all documents.

- Boxes can mark off a section of text that you want to stand out. However, sometimes readers ignore information in boxes, so use this strategy carefully.
- Screens work like boxes except they have a color background. Remember to use enough contrast so that the reader can see the text easily. Yellow text on a red background is reader abuse. Studies continue to show that black text on a white background provides the best contrast.
- Bold and caps work well to make text stand out, but don't overuse it. Use these tools to pick out individual words and phrases. An entire text block set in either bold or caps fails to emphasize the important points.

- Text blocks set in all caps are not only hard to read, but look like shouting in the internet culture.
- Color usually attracts the eye; however, keep in mind that many people have some form of colorblindness (estimates range from 7 to 20 percent of the population). Also, consider what happens when a color document prints out on a gray-scale printer. If you use color, make sure you combine it with another highlighting strategy such as bold or caps.

Advice

Print out your document early so you can catch all the little details and avoid

- **Split tables**
- **Strange italics**
- **Widows and orphans**
- **Floaters**

Always print out your documents ahead of the deadline, and examine the paper copy carefully. You especially want to make sure to avoid illegible italics and lonely bits of text separated at the tops and bottoms of pages (widows and orphans = sentences and words, floaters = headings).

If you must split a table, repeat the column headings at the top of the next page. Also consider placing the

table sideways (landscape). If you do, make sure the top of the table appears at the bound edge of the document.

Graphics

Quick, how many people voted for Helen Hunt?

It usually takes the class about 6 seconds to find the correct answer in this block of text and shout out the correct answer. It's harder to find information buried in the text. Although do notice that the numerals are

easier to scan for than written-out numbers.

Graphics

Quick, how many people voted for Julia Roberts?

The class usually takes 2 to 3 seconds to shout out the correct answer for this slide. Tables deliver information much more quickly than text. If you find yourself writing a text block with a bunch of

numbers in it or other little pieces of data, consider developing a table instead.

Some recommendations for creating effective tables include the following:

- Use column and row headings
- Make sure the units for numbers are clearly marked in the headings or in the cells
- Use alternately shaded rows or fill in the cell lines. Alternately shaded rows are the easiest to read, but not always practical for printing. Tables without cell lines can torture your readers.

All visuals need the following:

- A figure number and specific title
- A reference to the visual in the text
- Sources identified at the bottom
- Clear labeling of the parts

Reread the formatting and tables sections of the grading codes handout (on line) for further directions.

Graphics

- Display abstract concepts in concrete form.
- Compare relationships among data.

When I show this slide, the audience can usually pinpoint the answer in about 1 second. When used properly, graphics can give a physical form to data. A pie chart works for this data because the pieces differ widely in size. If the numbers were closer, a bar graph might have been more

appropriate. Your textbook has a nice discussion of when to use which graphics.

Graphics

- Employ a universal language

Sometimes pictures can deliver information most efficiently. However, it is very difficult to create effective visual-only communication. Think

about the safety cards you find on airplanes. (I can show you an example if you ask me.) Often visuals are culture-specific—think about the ladies-in-dresses icons for restrooms—and people from other cultures won't understand them. It's usually best to mix visuals with text.

Warning:

- Decorations don't count.

It's not necessarily bad to include a fun picture (the sun with glasses, the magician), but it's much better to use a relevant picture—for example a photo of your product or a drawing of

a step. A picture that is not referred to in the text is just a decoration and may distract the reader. Or it may make a serious presentation seem silly. On the other hand, you might use a visual as an icon if you give it a meaning. For example, you could use the lightbulb to indicate that an idea is new. Make sure to inform your audience of the meaning of the icon.

Warning:

- Keep graphics simple and focused.

Try to streamline your visuals so that they do not contain too much detail. Photographs may look nice, but it may be difficult for readers to focus on the important elements. Sometimes you may prefer

to use a line drawing instead. Also remember to streamline visuals for oral presentations even further. Generally one point per slide works well.

Use Graphics Carefully!

- Cite sources
- Use descriptive captions

ALWAYS cite the source of any borrowed information or visuals. Also don't forget to give them descriptive captions. Often a reader will study the caption of the visual on the page and nothing

else. Therefore, you may want to have not only a descriptive title, but a brief explanation of the visual as well.

In the end . . . (and the beginning)

Consider your reader's needs.

Remember to consider readers and purpose first.