APPLIED PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS AND VISUAL DESIGN

Applied Productivity Tools

Productivity Tools are resources on the Internet that allow individuals and organizations to increase productivity based on specific outputs that can be written, visual, or audio. These are also used to produce professional and quality documents, presentations, databases, charts, and graphs.

Here are the primary productivity tools applied in businesses, education, and different professions:

1. **Word Processor** – an application or a device that lets users write, edit and print documents. Some familiar examples include Microsoft Word, Google Docs, and OpenOffice Writer.

    A word processor offers helpful features that users can use to improve their documents, such as:
    * **Text Copy** – allows copying the same text multiple times in the document.
    * **Text Cut** - differs from copying as it removes the text from its original position.
    * **Paste** – an action done when a copied or cut text is ready to be posted or shown again
    * **Multimedia** – lets the use and insertion of multimedia such as images, video, clip art, and charts in the document.
    * **Text Formatting** – allows personalized and formal changes in the document through font change, font styles such as bold and italic, font size, and font color.
    * **Spelling, Grammar, and Autocorrect** – allows the correct use of defined language used in the document
    * Other features include **tables**, **layout customization**, **search and replace**, headers, **and footers**.

    Word processors also have different types of file extensions, such as text files (.txt), HTML files (.htm and .html), and Word files (.doc and .docx)

Here is an example of utilizing the features of a word processor using Microsoft Word.
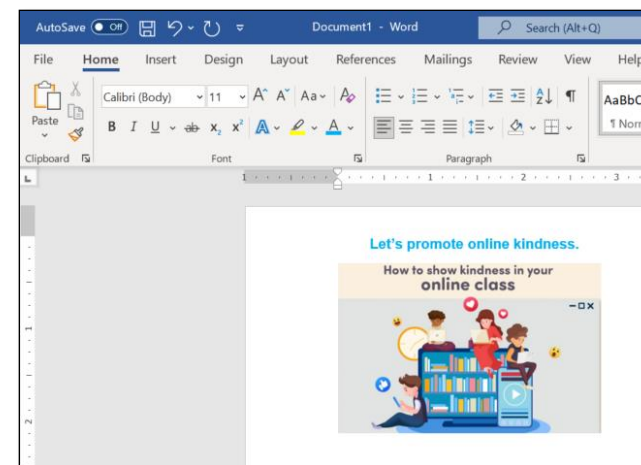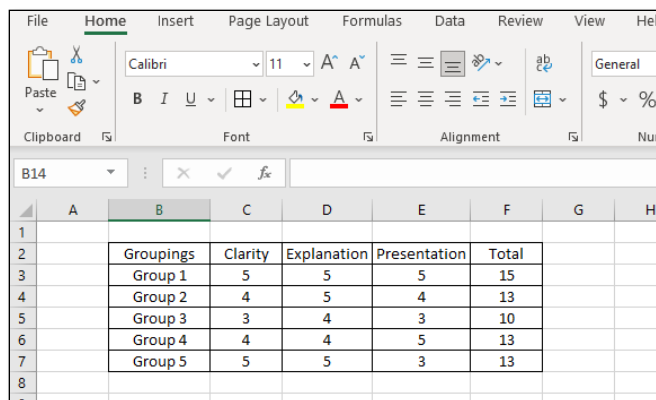

Figure 1. Word features

Figure 1 shows the use of text formatting by highlighting and changing the color of the text, and it also displays the multimedia feature by inserting an image into the document.

2. **Spreadsheet –** or worksheet, a file consisting of rows and columns that help sort, organize, arrange, and calculate numerical data. Popular examples include Microsoft Excel, Google Sheets, and iWork Numbers.

    A spreadsheet is used for various purposes, such as the following:
    * **Forms** – for handling inventories, timesheets, surveys, and personal information.
    * **Finance** – for checking account information such as billing, invoices, receipts, transactions, and budget.
    * **School and Grades** – for tracking the student performance, calculating grades, and quick data consolidation.
    * **Lists** – for simple uses such as to-do, grocery, and telephone lists.

Here is an example of a spreadsheet used for Schools and Grades using Microsoft Excel.

Figure 2. Excel sample

Students are graded on their presentation based on various criteria using Microsoft Excel and its features.

3. **Presentation Program** – a software tool to create a slideshow for professional or educational purposes. A slideshow is presented and explained one slide at a time to discuss a specific topic, report, or data. Famous examples include Microsoft PowerPoint, Canva, Google Slides, and Prezi.

Delivering a presentation requires different skills to succeed. Here are some tips to consider:
- **Simple Structure**: It is essential to have a structure that the presenter and the audience can follow, no matter how complex the topic is. Be direct in highlighting the major critical points without going on tangents.

  Make the presentation cohesive and logical to keep the audience interested by following the 10-20-30 rule by Guy Kawasaki, one of the marketing specialists for Apple, a presentation with less than 10 slides, discussed within 20 minutes, and using a font size of 30.

- **Visual Aids:** Explaining without visual cues makes it difficult for the audience to understand any topic fully. Use informative images and videos to support major key points further, and do not forget to cite external sources.

  In terms of formatting and designing the slides themselves, make use of a minimalistic background, put minimal sentences per slide, and ensure the design fits the theme of the topic.

- **Preparedness and Confidence:** Being prepared and confident in a presentation is the perfect recipe for success. Practicing how to command an audience and preparing all information and materials are vital in the preparation stage.

  And during the presentation, engaging, telling related anecdotes, making eye contact, being personable, and speaking with conviction results in a successful presentation.

4. **Graphic Design Tools** – programs and applications that let users design, edit, animate, and illustrate their work online. Familiar examples include Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, PicsArt, GitHub, and Blender. Types of graphic design include the following
- **Web Design** –planning, conceptualizing, and organizing how online content is displayed, such as on a website.
- **Advertising and Marketing Design** –promoting products and services through ads, logos, brochures, and packaging to attract customers.
- **Motion Design and Animation** – the process of making inanimate objects appear to move in a specific manner.
- **Illustration** –creating visual outputs such as photographs, drawings, and graphs.
- **Publication Design** –designing printed materials such as books, magazines, posters, newspapers, and their online equivalent.

Fundamentals of Graphics Design and Layouts

The fundamentals of graphics design center on appreciating the smallest details that make up the overall composition. It applies to any project that aims to create or enhance a design.

Principles of Graphics Design

The following primary principles provide a good foundation for making any design decisions.

1. **Unity –** the prime principle and objective of all design as other principles aim to serve this result. The coherence of the design elements such as line, shape, texture, color, point, and their positions, gives a sense that all the parts are working together to achieve overall harmony.

2. **Variety –** provides visual interest in what is ordinary and bland. This balance includes excitement and results in a creative design.

3. **Hierarchy –** a primary task to manage and arrange the order of the design elements, including the organization, positioning, and identifying the most important part of the design, the second, and so forth. It provides a visual path for the viewers and achieves effective communication.

4. **Proportion** – refers to the size relationship between elements such as the height and width of a rectangle may have a 2 to 4 relationship, for example. It is vital in publications since the common format, and material sizes will have set proportional ratios.

5. **Balance –** the visual weight distribution of elements within a design. It has two main forms, which are symmetrical and asymmetrical balance. **Symmetrical balance** put elements with equal visual weight on either side of a layout, while **asymmetrical balance** put elements with a more detailed visual weight to balance and contrast "heavier" elements with on one side of a layout.

Graphic design also has support principles that help achieve the primary principles.

- **Size and Scale** – the size of the elements within a composition used as a comparison or measured in units. It is used to create variety and help establish visual hierarchy.
- **Movement** – the prescribed visual path that viewers must follow through a layout with hierarchy.
- **Proximity** – the placement of elements together and apart and the relative size and distance between them. Elements close to each other suggest similarities, while separated imply being unassociated.
- **Repetition –** the placement of elements in a regular pattern that may vary in size and shape to provide variety and unity.

Creating Layout

The process of placing images, text, and graphics together provides the visuals to be printed or published.

Grid subdivides a page vertically and horizontally into margins, columns, lines of type, and space between blocks of type and images. These subdivisions form the basis for a systematic approach to the layout and help establish a grid.

Overall, a grid provides **repeatability** to make similar pages in a multipage design have the same structure, **composition** as ridged confines of a grid is considered a rule of thumb, and **communication** as it organizes essential features and information.

The **Golden Ratio,** or the golden section, is a proportion that has been used in historical designs such as the Great Pyramids, Medieval church designs, and even the Mona Lisa painting. This proportional ratio is roughly **1.618** and is derived from several geometric constructions that divide a line segment at the unique point where the ratio of the line to the largest segment is the same as the large segment is to the small segment. The **Fibonacci sequence** of numbers closely replicates the golden section or golden ratio.

Principles of Visual Message Design

A **visual message** communicates information and ideas using and combining various graphic design elements. It can be in multiple formats, such as advertisements, photographs, webpages, and infographics.

Visual literacy refers to the skills a viewer uses when reading images which are often understated given factors such as attention span and different understanding of visual cues and symbolism.

In creating a visual message, it is important to assess the following:

1. **Audience:** Understanding the audience helps guide and direct the way the message will be communicated to them. A brochure for graduating senior high school students with information and a list of available courses would not work for existing college students.

2. **The purpose and Intention** of the message can be defined based on the target audience's knowledge. Be mindful of whatever the message is by using appropriate and inoffensive ways of communication, including language, slang, images, and symbolism.

3. **Context** in which the viewers will read the message in terms of what platform or tool the message will take. The choice of platform or tool plays a vital role in conveying the message as it determines how the reader interacts with it.

Achieving the three helps take advantage of the following benefits of visual messaging:

- An exciting way of information exchange than text-based
- Generational enjoyment as it is more appealing and allows people to memorize information better.
- Cross-cultural communication as it removes language barriers using more universal signs and symbols.

Effective Visual Message Design Principles

When a visual message is communicated efficiently, it builds trust, rapport, and credibility with the audience.

Here are some design principles for a compelling visual design:

1. Using simple design by avoiding too many different colors or fonts.
2. Using contrasting colors effectively draws attention to specific and necessary details.
3. Using high-quality and original images to avoid confusion and set it apart from others.
4. Using a creative background that blends well with the content to add impact to the image.
5. Use the correct tool and platform to cover and display the message.

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