

**CHAPTER 6**

# Arranging Elements

# Placement of Elements Creates Meaning

Quite possibly, how slides are arranged has the most impact on whether a slide's message is visually clear. Arrangement tells a story. Based on the arrangement decisions a designer makes, a slide can prompt feelings of tension, confusion, and agitation; conversely, it can maximize clarity by employing the following:

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## Contrast

The audience can identify the main point quickly.

## Flow

The audience knows the order in which to process the information.

## Hierarchy

The audience sees the relationship between elements.

## Unity

The audience senses that the information belongs together.

## Proximity

The audience perceives meaning from the location of elements.

## Whitespace

The audience has visual breathing room.

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These are the tools of the slide design trade. It's tough to assemble a great slide without paying close attention to each of these issues. Luckily, these are intuitive concepts. That may already be familiar to you.

Slides begin and end with ideas. It's your job to take these invisible, abstract ideas and determine how they can be best represented in a tangible, visual form. It's the presenter's responsibility to ensure that the audience is guided through this invisible world by making ideas easy to decode.

Many presenters don't understand arrangement as a principle. They will put everything on one slide and assign them equal value. It is critical to determine which visual elements should have prominence so they attract attention first.

Create dominance with some elements and practice restraint with others. Force yourself to make a decision about the priority of the information.

**It's laziness on the presenter's part to put everything on one slide.**



Overcrowding the slide doesn't add to the clarity of the message.

# Contrast: Identifying the Main Point Quickly

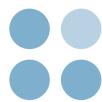
Audiences need contrast. Viewers immediately perceive the difference between the attributes of two or more things, and this focuses their attention. There are many ways to create contrast on a slide; here are some examples:



size



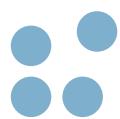
shape



shade



color



proximity

Establishing a relationship between slide elements is an important first step. The contrast in the size of the following text, for example, draws the eye to the larger text as if it's a title or context for the text block. Regardless of where the text is placed, the larger text is perceived as the most important.



Creating contrast in a body of text can be done with size, but also through the use of color. Some versions of the Bible highlight the words of Jesus in red. Below, a quote from Edward Tufte, author of *Visual Explanations*, has a key phrase highlighted in red.

Tufte's design strategy of the smallest effective difference uses contrast wisely yet subtly and only when necessary. He says: ...the idea is to use just notable differences, visual elements that make a clear difference but no more—contrasts that are definitive, effective and minimal.

A common mistake presenters make is assigning contrast unintentionally. Virtually any stylistic difference between two elements suggests something to the viewer on either a conscious or subconscious level. Unintentional contrast can confuse the intended message at best, and contradict it at worst. Remember, all stylistic choices have the potential to suggest importance, urgency, and value. As a result, you should base all such choices on a well-defined purpose.

“Without contrast you’re dead.”

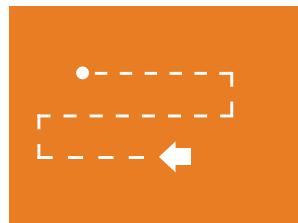
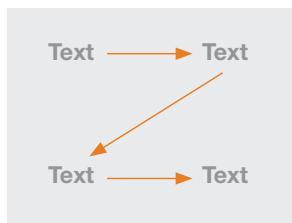
Paul Rand  
Designer

# Flow: Ordering How the Information Is Processed

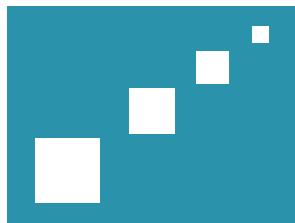
A typical Western reading pattern runs from left to right and top to bottom. Readers are conditioned to start at the top left and scan back and forth across content in a Z-shaped path until they've processed the information.

Jerry Weissman, author of *Presenting to Win*, calls this the conditioned carriage return, as it mimics the movement of the carriage on an old fashioned typewriter.

Readers move their eyes back and forth across a slide until they feel they have identified everything on the slide. They then will assign meaning to the information. If, to make your point, your graphic needs to flow in a direction that's counter-intuitive to natural eye movement, build it over time, with discrete elements appearing in the order you want your audience to process it. Alternately, use a symbol or arrow that clearly marks a starting point. The audience should be able to understand the intended order in which to process the information, without ever feeling lost or overwhelmed.



Using an arrow to mark the starting point draws attention to it where to begin.

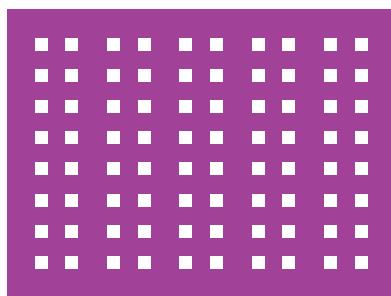
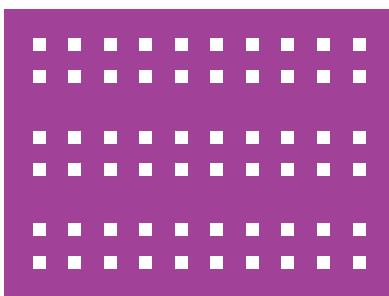


Size and perspective indicate the bottom left as the starting point here.

You should organize slides to guide the audience's eyes through the content in an obvious way. This principle applies not only to text, but to diagrams and images as well.



When using images of people, make sure that they're looking at the content instead of looking away, or fleeing it.



At a glance, the audience should be able to determine whether to read data charts horizontally or vertically.

### TIP

- Avoid more than three layers of information on a single plane.
- Create points of interest (one main point and up to two sub-points).
- Develop flow within the slide intentionally.
- Choose images and diagrams with clear directional flow.
- Select images that flow toward the focal point on the slide or toward the next slide.

# Hierarchy: Seeing Relationships Between Elements

An audience processes hierarchy almost as quickly as contrast. Visual hierarchy, simply put, defines the structure formed when relationships are applied to a set of elements. A simple example of this is the relationship of a title to its body text. Within the hierarchy, the title is the parent and the text is the child. Just like a family lineage, each element in a hierarchy is the child of the element above it, or the parent of the element below it.



Size and location are used together to indicate a decreasing significance from the top left to the bottom right.

Making the bullet points heavier than the title disrupts the logical flow. The audience would have a hard time making sense of it.

Not coincidentally then, the visual structure precisely mirrors the structure of the information it represents. For example, the following diagrams radiate from a core. The core is what binds the elements together and establishes the parent-child relationship. Modifying the size and proximity of the objects changes the meaning behind the relationships and tells a story about their relative importance.

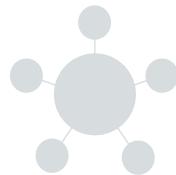
### Changing the Size and Proximity of Objects Modifies Their Visual Story

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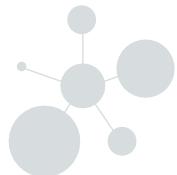
#### Elements Are Equal

Story: We all need to rally together as a team around this goal for which you're all equally suited.



#### Parent Dominates

Story: We all need to rally together as a team around this goal which is more important than activities at the team or individual level.



#### Child Dominates

Story: We all need to rally together as a team around this goal and some of the teams will have bigger challenges than others.

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When your presentation is over, you want the audience to walk away understanding their mission. If you don't intentionally provide that message, the audience will create meaning based on their own interpretation of the information. Make sure that you've presented the graphical hierarchy of your message accurately.

# Unity: Sensing the Structure of Information

You can achieve unity through structure (grid), look (graphical style), and theme (big idea). Here, you'll focus on the grid.

Since every brand and presenter is unique, the grid used should reflect you or your company.

## A grid system provides a flexible way to organize content.

To guide the organization of content, create rectangular regions for placement of elements. Each region is a container for an element, such as a block of text or an image.

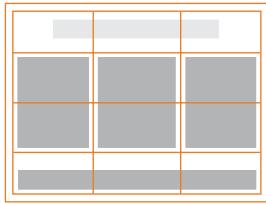
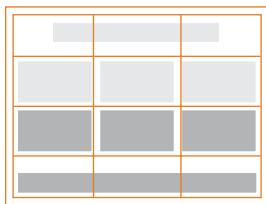
Placing objects within a grid anchors the individual elements so they don't bounce around or appear like they were positioned haphazardly or randomly. This stability helps the audience identify patterns in the placement of content. Having text and graphics show up in the same place, anchored to the same points, helps an audience anticipate where content will appear. Additionally, grids ensure that across multiple slides of a similar layout, elements don't appear to "jump." For instance, if three consecutive slides feature graphs, the location of their axes should remain constant even though the data changes.

Grids also help streamline design decisions for corporations where thousands of employees develop slides independently. Organizations benefit from the ability to re-use slides when they look similar and follow a basic grid system.

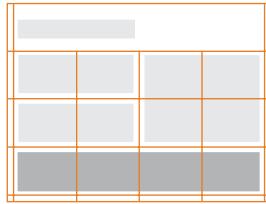
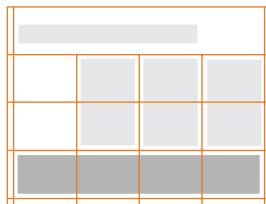
Once you've sketched out a grid that you like, pencil in where you might place images, text, and objects. Be sure to leave plenty of the tiles open to preserve clear space. Now, draw the grid lines in your presentation application and place it on the master slide, being sure to remove the grid when you've completed the design process. To speed development of your presentation in the future, save the grid as a tool by pasting it into a new file or saving it on a slide at the very back of your deck.

The slides below were created in four different grid patterns. The orange grids with gray boxes serve as keys for the slides beneath them. You can see how the elements fit into the grid.

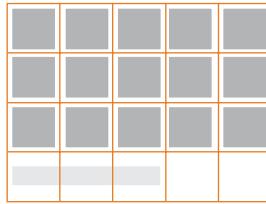
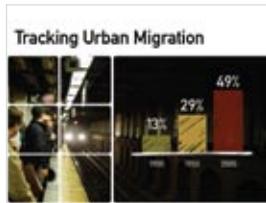
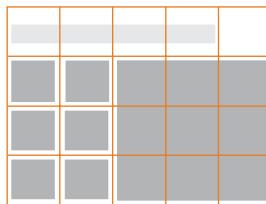
### Three Column



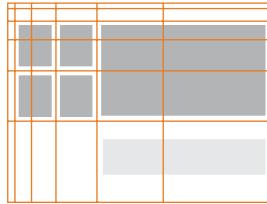
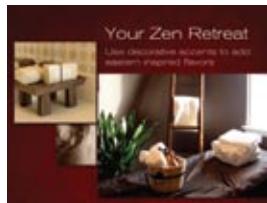
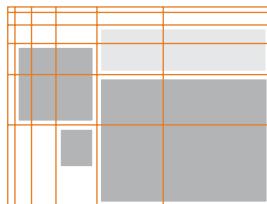
### Four Column



### Five Column



### Fibonacci



■ Graphic  
■ Text

These slides look uniform because the grid gives them structure.



## Case Study: Adobe Controlling Elements with a Grid

Call it the price of success for Adobe Systems. Being the number one developer of software applications for graphic designers means that every piece of collateral, every package design, every advertisement will be scrutinized by the experts, who are also the customers.

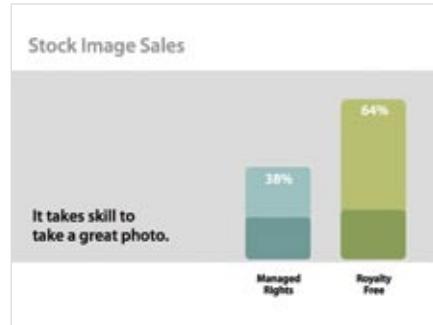
The same goes for presentations, only this time it is personal: imagine not connecting with an audience because they're distracted by the slide layouts. At best, the audience will be mildly critical; at worst, the presenter stands to lose some credibility. The solution? Combine the best in presentation design with the fundamentals of graphic design. The results showcase Adobe's commitment to the industry they transformed.

The image consists of three distinct panels. The left panel is a color palette grid showing various digital media categories: Video (light blue), Magazine (medium blue), Email (dark blue), Web (green), PDA (olive green), LCD (teal), Cell Phone (orange), and Blog (yellow). The middle panel is a collage of nine small images related to creative professionals, including a person at a computer, a blog interface, a night cityscape, and a woman holding a glass. The right panel features a portrait of a man with his arms crossed, with the text 'Maximize Opportunities' above him and the quote 'Approach the future with the creative professional's needs firmly in your sight.' below him.

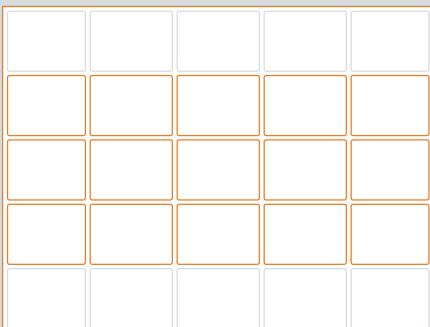
Derived from their product packaging, the fresh color palette reflects Adobe's brand. The dynamic grid provides a way to introduce photography through a series of builds.

**Changing landscape brings opportunity.**

Creative Professional      Photographer      Stock Agency



Breaking the grid can be an effective way to focus attention on specific elements. But make sure that this is the exception and not the rule: overuse will diminish its impact.



Adobe's presentations rely on an underlying 5x5 grid to determine the placement of text, imagery, and objects. Though the shapes and sizes of elements vary, the regularity of layouts produces a sense of structure and solidity. Additionally, leaving the top and bottom channels empty creates a more cinematic feeling while providing space for titles and similar information.

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# Proximity: Perceiving Meaning from Location

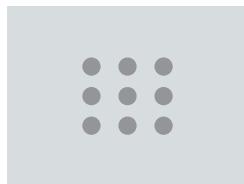
When more than a single element or person appears in a scene, their placement relative to each other tells a secondary story to the image itself. Haphazardly placed elements can leave an impression different than the one intended.

## Space Proximity

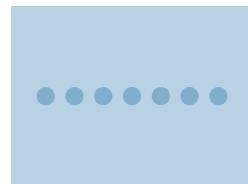
You should place elements associated with each other intentionally. Leave nothing to chance. How the objects are assembled communicates antagonism or protagonism, chaos or order, decline or growth, and so on. Ultimately, your goal is to preempt the audience from making unintended interpretations.



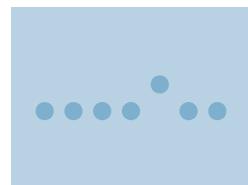
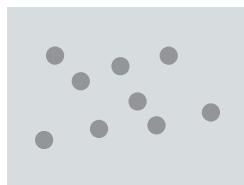
unite • fragment



order • chaos



equal • unequal



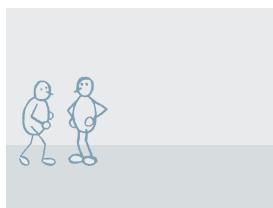
## Other Relationships

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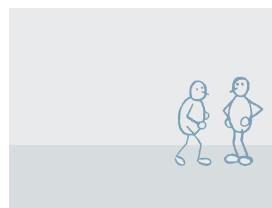
symmetric • asymmetric  
balanced • imbalanced  
consistent • inconsistent  
clear • obscure  
spacious • crowded  
sequential • random  
understated • exaggerated  
attractive • repellent  
deep • wide  
static • active  
distributed • consolidated  
near • far

## People Proximity

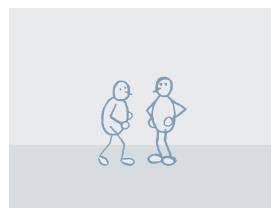
In the theatre, directors position actors on stage in support of the story. For instance, consider the different placement of people in the following frames. Each placement takes on meaning, even without context or knowledge of the narrative of which they might be a part. The following concepts were inspired by Robert Horn's seminal work, *Visual Language*.



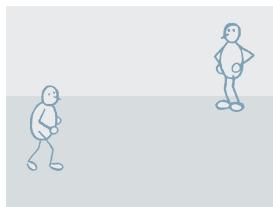
The subject at the left or right edge is often perceived as weak, relative to the subject closer to the center.



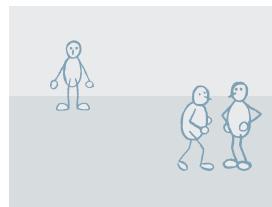
Subjects on opposite sides of the screen are distantly related or perhaps antagonists.



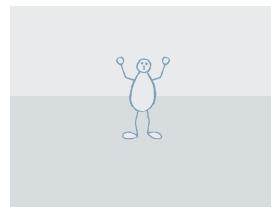
Subjects in the center are perceived as closely related.



A subject at the bottom is frequently perceived as submissive, weak, vulnerable. A subject at the top is often seen as dominant, powerful.



Isolated subjects convey more visual weight than grouped subjects.



A subject with a lot of space in the frame suggests freedom.



Clustered subjects that are out of balance in the scene emphasize action.

# Whitespace: Getting Visual Breathing Room

The visible elements of a slide often receive the most focus. But you need to pay equal attention to how much space you leave open. This is often referred to as whitespace, negative space, or clear space.

Whitespace isn't necessarily white; it refers to the areas of the slide left unused. It could be the empty areas that separate elements from one another or the drama created when an element is set in vast amounts of space. The book so far has discussed the role of hierarchy, flow, and proximity, but until now, the role of whitespace has been merely implied.

Inexperienced presenters often think whitespace is expendable—especially when they need to incorporate unwieldy amounts of content that's "too important" to be distilled or simplified despite its cumbersome density. After all, whitespace by definition carries no information, so what's the harm in filling it up? The harm is that audiences find these slides difficult to comprehend. Whitespace is as much an element of a slide as titles, bullets, and diagrams. In large part, the use or misuse of whitespace determines a slide's effectiveness.

Generally, any slide that needs to sacrifice whitespace to make room for content is packed too tightly. When a slide is expected to present more information than it can comfortably hold, it is no longer the right tool for the job.

Ask yourself, "What can I take away that won't change the meaning?" or "Where can I split the content into more than one slide?" Keep in mind that a slide's value is determined not by the amount of information it contains, but by how clearly it communicates its message.

**It's okay to have clear space—clutter is a failure of design.**

Breaking the content into three slides is much more effective for audiences than being thrown into a one slide mess, and expecting them to interpret the data all at once. Spreading the information across three slides doesn't solve the density problem alone. Displaying the elements sequentially guides the audience through the information.

**Managed Services Value Proposition**

**Logo:** A yellow circle with a blue triangle, a green circle, and a red circle, labeled S, P, and A respectively.

**Grid:**

- S:** Savings in Range of 15-20%  
Static Pricing Model for Contract Term
- P:** Network Availability, Repair & Response & User Services  
Migration/Evolution Offer built into Overall Managed Services Program
- Evolving Offer:** Security Services, Converged Device, Application Support, Analytics, Vertical Solutions, Utility Model Options

**Text:**

- Experience = Over 12 years experience managing over 100 blue chip customers
- Tools = \$20M in Migration tools (27k+)
- People = 500 professionals with > 30% having multiple certifications
- Processes, tools and documentation standards are TL4000 certified.

**Strategic Value Plays:** Traditional, Global, Consolidation, Transformation

**Operational Savings, Guaranteed Performance, Evolution Partner**

**BEFORE:** The slide contains dense information that requires effort to process. The lack of whitespace between various elements makes it hard to derive meaning from content. We divided the content on this slide into three slides shown below.

**Managed Services Value Proposition**

A pie chart divided into three segments: **S** (top), **P** (bottom), and **A** (right). Labels around the chart include:

- S:** Savings in range of 15-20% for contract term
- P:** Migration/Evolution Offer built in to program
- A:** Guaranteed for availability, repair and response and user services

**Managed Services Value Proposition**

A 2x2 matrix diagram with four quadrants:

- Top Left:** Strategic Value Plays
- Top Right:** Traditional
- Bottom Left:** Global
- Bottom Right:** Consolidation

**Managed Services Value Proposition**

<b>Experience:</b> Over 12 years experience managing over 100 blue chip customers
<b>Tools:</b> \$20M in Management tools (27k+)
<b>People:</b> 500 professionals with > 30% having multiple certifications
<b>Processes, Tools and Documentation Standards:</b> are TL4000 certified

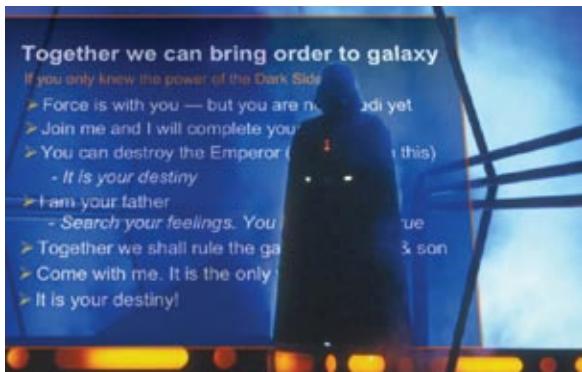
**AFTER:** By distributing the elements across multiple slides, each receives the attention it deserves—and the audience benefits from a better understanding of the concepts.

# Case Study: Garr Reynolds

## A Lesson on Space

By far one of the most significant influencers of great presentation design, Garr Reynolds is transforming presenters through his blog and book, both titled *Presentation Zen*. Reynolds' insights and clever wit systematically cover sound principles for content, design, and delivery.

He believes that "design isn't about decoration or about ornamentation. Design is about making communication as easy and clear for the viewer as possible." Reynolds has his own signature style of large, striking images and enormous amounts of empty space that lead the eye.



Here Garr's blog spoofs the presentation styles of Darth Vader and Yoda.



Even though this is a quote from Reynolds' book, you can probably picture Yoda saying: "Empty space is not nothing; it is a powerful something. Learn to see it."

A photograph of Garr Reynolds giving a presentation. He is standing in front of a large projection screen displaying a Zen garden with white gravel paths and green hedges. He is gesturing with his right hand while speaking. He is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt over a light-colored collared shirt.

"A Zen garden is also a lesson in simplicity. Open space without ornamentation, a few rocks carefully selected and placed, raked gravel. Beautiful. Simple. The Zen garden is very different from gardens in the West that are absolutely filled with beauty, so much beauty, in fact, that we miss much of it. Presentations are a bit like this. Sometimes, we're presented with so much visual and auditory stimulation in such a short time that we end up understanding very little and remembering even less."

Garr Reynolds  
Author, *Presentation Zen*

# Finding Beauty in the Design Around You

Designers create meaning by carefully arranging elements. It's never a haphazard splatter of text and graphics; there is intent and that intent creates meaning. Whether that meaning informs or creates a feeling or structure, it all serves a purpose.

Take a moment and study your environment. Look at graphic design, architecture, and product design. Ask yourself why the designers made the decisions they did. Why did they use the typeface, colors, or particular placement of the elements? Then determine the contrast, flow, hierarchy, unity, proximity, and space.

These elements exist even in nature. Look for them.

Processing the beauty around you is important. When you watch a film, look through a magazine, hike across a spring meadow, attend a ballet, or visit a museum, study the beauty and grow in appreciation for things that are beautiful.

**If you visually ingest beautiful design, you will be able to output beauty. But it takes study and contemplation of what makes those things beautiful.**



Each art form has considerations for how to arrange elements to create meaning and beauty.

**Japanese flower arrangement is designed to create harmony and balance in how the visual elements (flora in this case) are assembled.**

At the onset, the designer plans out exactly the journey they want the eyes to travel across the arrangement. The designer controls the eye movement by stripping all but the essential blossoms out of the arrangement. Similarly, you should remove everything on a slide that doesn't bring emphasis to your point.

## CHAPTER 7

# Using Visual Elements: Background, Color, and Text

# The Ingredients of a Great Slide

Now that you know how to arrange elements on a slide, it's time to identify the elements you'll work with. This section covers best practices to use when determining the elements. There really aren't many decisions to make about them: that's why selecting them thoughtfully and carefully is important. The four visual elements are background, color, text, and images. The first three are covered in this section, and images are covered in the next chapter.



**Background**



**Color**

Aa

**Text**



**Images**

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Each ingredient—background, color, text, and images—determines how your slide elements will look and requires that you make key design decisions. Once you've decided how the elements will look, you can apply the principles from Chapter 6, "Arranging Elements."

There's one specific theme you need to keep at the forefront of your mind—consistency. Choose element styles and then stick with them. These elements actually become visual triggers of your brand. Whether your brand is just you or a major corporation, pick elements that you feel will resonate with your audience, and then stay consistent.

Still, every blue moon, there is also power in breaking the consistency. Let's say your slide design remains consistent for 20 slides. Then, to create a memorable visual moment, you incorporate something inconsistent with the rest of the slides. That inconsistency will stand out. However, if you break the rules all the time, you've lost your opportunity for visual emphasis.

# Background

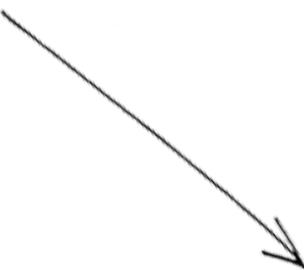
A background is a container or surface on which to place visual elements. It can incorporate anything you want, or it can have nothing on it at all.

You determine whether the surface is opaque or textured, and whether it has a light source, and from where it originates. But first you need to pry yourself away from the default templates with their preordained slide junk. Think through what is really required. What reflects your intent and personality? What reflects your company's brand? What will act in service to your information rather than compete with it? Consider approaching the background in a way never seen before.



Where does it say that every slide needs a logo? The people who have come to hear you speak most likely know who you work for. Use your first and last slides (called bumper slides) to identify yourself or company.

On the other hand, if your boss insists you put the logo on every slide, the lower right is the best place for it because you can wrap the right rag of text around it. After all, the same boss who wants the logo on every slide probably has so much text to shoehorn in, you need to wrap it.



Two of my pet peeves  
are folks who include  
their logo on every slide,  
and that animated paper  
clip in the Microsoft  
Office product suite.



# Backgrounds Are a Surface for Digital Assets

**Backgrounds are intended as a surface on which to place elements. They are not in themselves a work of art.**

They are a setting, surface, or platform. In print design, designers start with a white or blank piece of paper and then place objects on it. You rarely see a brochure where every page has been covered with a crazy design like the one here.

A background creates a sense of space. That space should be open, spacious, and simple. A slide background is like real estate: it's very valuable, so build on it wisely. Avoid the trend to make the background ornamented, crowded, and distracting. Keep the background as simple and intentionally clean as possible. Your background is there to host your objects, not be an object.

**Backgrounds should never compete with content.**



This is an ineffectual slide template with useless ornamentation around the edges. The orange box highlights the active or “live” area of the slide that can be used for graphics. The designer of this template used at least one-third of the available real estate for meaningless graphical elements.

So now that you've seen a case for open space, what do you do with this nice large open canvas?

Ignore all the default masters and look through your company's marketing material to identify visual elements of the brand that are timeless. You can usually identify a grid system, line structures, bounding boxes, color palette, or visual elements that anchor the designs. Pick the more timeless elements that will never change. You can start there as a basis for the background design. If you don't work for a company, then the sky is the limit. However, your decisions still need to reflect your personality.

# Traversing Flatland and Dimensions

## You can create graphics in either a 2D or 3D space. But only pick one.

Using the presentation application as a 2D space would require that you place objects with little or no depth to them onto a flat background surface. It's very striking to have bold flat color and keep the visual elements flat as well. Minimizing depth minimizes complexity. Bold floods of color create a clean surface on which elements can be placed. The layout of this book uses a flat white surface that elements were placed on.

Once you begin to add elements with shadows, lighting, and depth, you're pretty committed to a 3D space. These effects can be as subtle as having images cast soft shadows, or as dramatic as the images on the opposite page.

Moving out of flatland takes courage and a commitment to keeping elements within the “laws of consistency” established by the background and setting. The moment you introduce a glisten or shadow, you've committed yourself to mimicking an environment that now has three dimensions. Highlight, shadows, depth, layers—everything in an environment is consistently influenced by the setting. To help reduce visual vertigo, use the laws of environmental consistency.

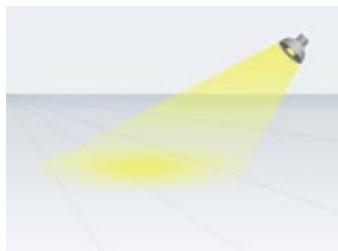
## Laws of Environmental Consistency

---

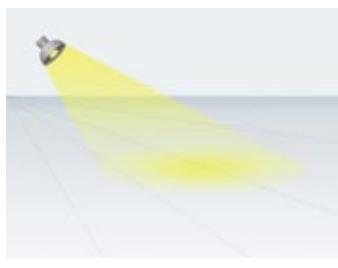
- 1 Consistent vanishing point
  - 2 Consistent light source
  - 3 Consistent effect on the elements
-

Now that applications let users manipulate the light source and perspective, keeping it all consistent is more important than ever. Pick one light source and one vanishing point and stick with it throughout your entire file. To the right are examples of how to keep elements consistent.

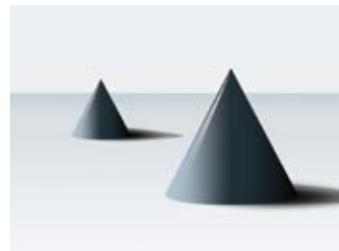
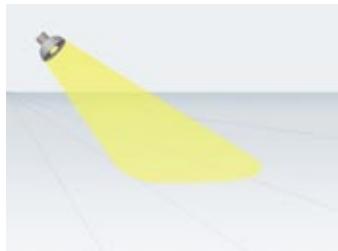
[www](#)



Notice how the cones become smaller to establish perspective. The shadows' angles are also consistent with the light source.



Here the cone has highlights on the left side as opposed to the lighting effect above.



In this setting the light is harsher so the highlights should be brighter and the shadows' edges more defined.

# Creating a Sense of Space

## Look at each slide as if it's an environment.

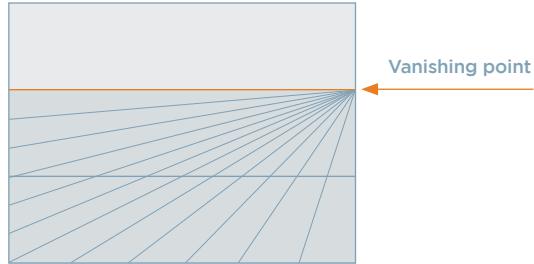
Many folks randomly place a hodge-podge of visual elements on their slides. This could make your audience feel lost in the space that you've created.

If each slide is an environment, then determining the influence that the environment has on your visual elements is critical. The elements need to map into the vanishing point and lighting you establish. Elements that don't fit can make the audience feel unsettled, because they're looking at an unnatural scene, and are thus subliminally frustrated. Think about what your objects would look like in real life with the depth and lighting you've established.

Scenes in real life occur in three dimensions, whereas on-screen they happen only in two. It's easy to make a 2D surface have depth by making some early, simple decisions. But maybe you think you didn't establish an environment. You did, whether intentional or not, the moment you drew a graphic. The style of that graphic determined its environment.

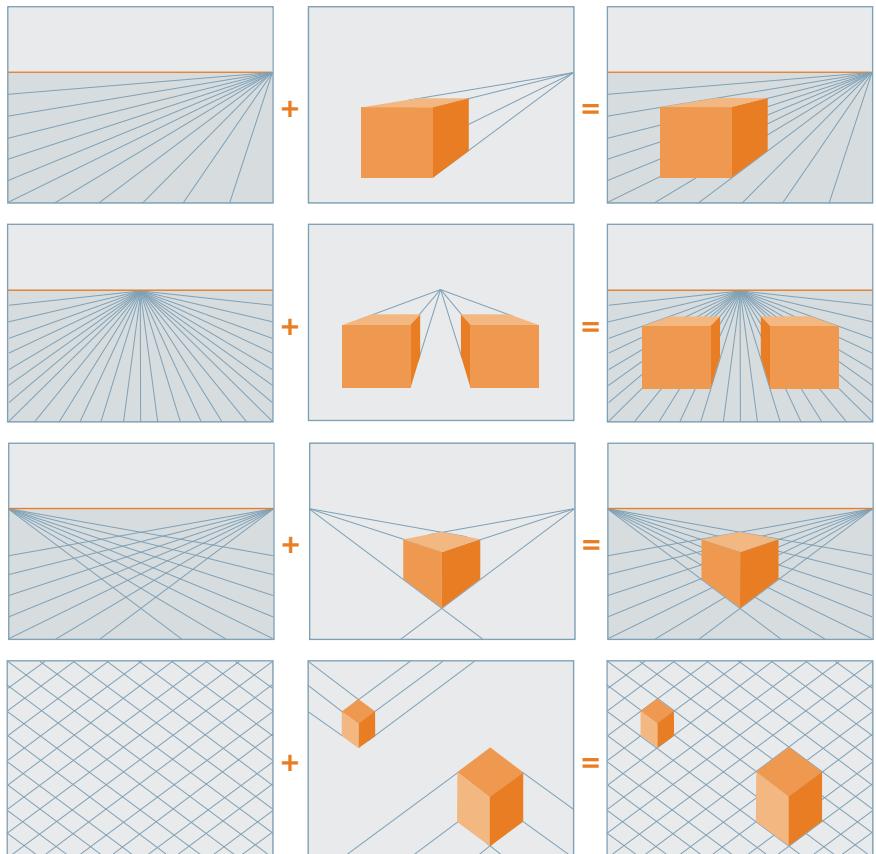


If you choose to go with a grid of thirds, consider using one of the lines as a horizon line.



Draw lines that converge at a point on the horizon. This simulates the vanishing point.

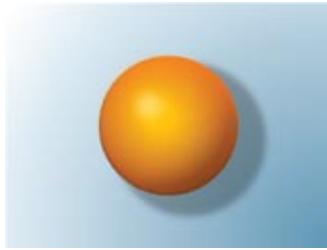
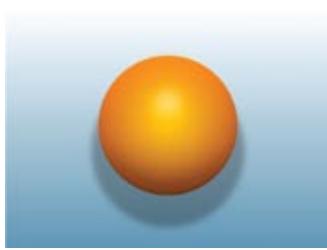
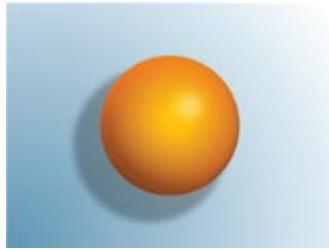
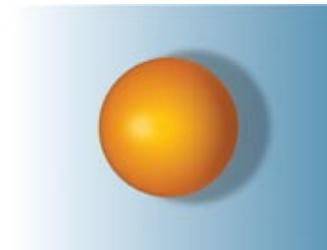
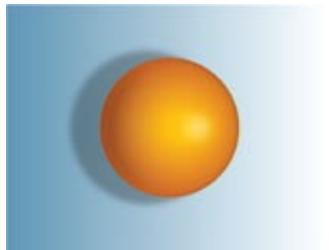
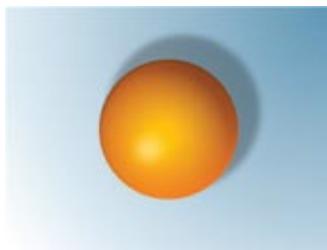
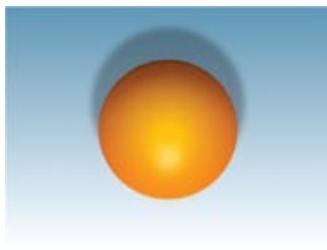
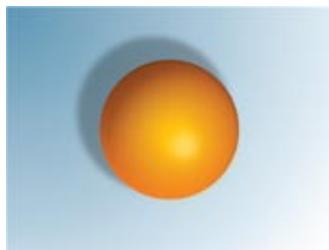
Now that you've determined a horizon and vanishing point, those decisions will influence the objects you place into this environment. The features of the objects you place in the scene need to match what's already there. To the right you can see that the angles on the sides of the cubes change based on the horizon line and vanishing point. Create objects that follow the same vanishing point and horizon line. Do not mix and match the angles of objects in the same scene. If you do, the scene won't look natural.



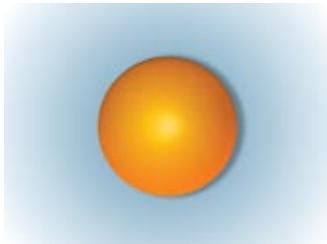
This last environmental example has no horizon or vanishing point. It's an isometric grid.

## Determining the Light Source

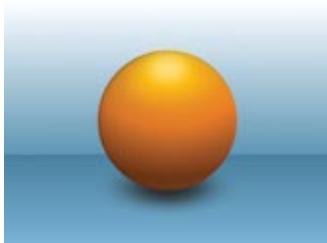
Next, determine the source of your lighting. The source will dictate how light is cast on your background. Determining how light affects your background also influences how light is cast on the objects placed on the background. Light creates shadows and highlights.



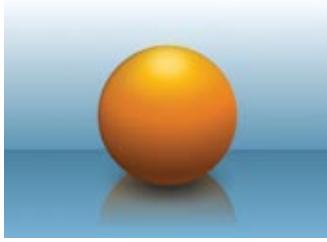
These eight backgrounds have a light source that shines across them. When you place elements into these backgrounds, their highlights and shadows follow the same source of light. For your background, select one angle for the light source and stick with it throughout the presentation.



Adding a soft, circular shadow behind the sphere makes it look as if it is hovering over a surface or in front of a wall, and that you're looking straight at it.



An elliptical shadow placed at the bottom of the sphere makes it look as if it's sitting on a surface.



Adding a reflection below the sphere makes it look as if it's sitting on a very shiny surface.

## TIP

- The background is a surface, stage, or backdrop—not the main focus.
- What's in the background should be subordinate to the real content.
- Avoid adding photos or images to the background. It distracts the audience; they will try to process what the image is and why it has been obscured.

# Color

Color is crucial to your presentation. It sets a tone and helps establish what the audience will expect. It helps communicate what type of journey you will be taking them on. Is it an exciting journey or a serious or dangerous one? Pick colors that properly represent you, your company, and your stance.

## **Who is your audience?**

Determine colors that appeal to the target audience and avoid colors that won't resonate with them.

## **What industry are you in?**

Review the colors of your competitors to ensure that your chosen palette helps you stand out in your field. Also avoid colors that are negative in your industry. For example red should be avoided for a financial institution, but would be okay for a blood bank.

## **Who are you?**

Pick colors that reflect your personality. Whether your brand is vivid and exciting, or repetitive and conservative, select colors that represent it.

Our family went on a train ride from San Jose to Chicago. Amtrak times it perfectly so that the train arrives in Denver right at sunset. This leg was to be the highlight of the journey—descending the Rocky Mountains into the Colorado basin. But unbeknownst to us, during the night the pass over the Rockies was blocked, and in Salt Lake City we were rerouted through southern Wyoming.

The hope of an entire day meandering through the Rockies and descending into Denver was shattered. Instead of a vivid, vibrant, and exciting palette, we had a consistent, monotonous, and conservative palette. Not that a conservative palette is bad, it just didn't match our expectations. Try to meet your audience's expectations.



The Colorado skies were supposed to be the highlight of our journey.



Unfortunately miles of bland landscape deflated the mood of the trip.

## About the Color Wheel

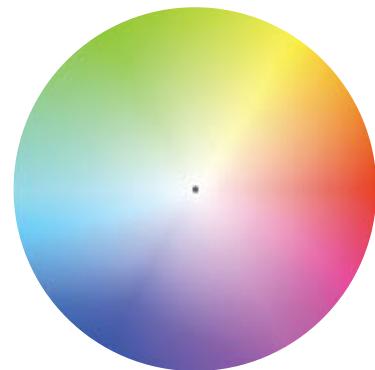
**Understanding and using the color wheel helps you choose a harmonious palette.**

The color wheel helps you visualize the relationships that colors have to one another. Microsoft's PowerPoint and Apple's Keynote applications base their color wheels on the one that Sir Isaac Newton discovered. The wheel uses three primary colors, red, yellow and blue, spaced evenly apart. Blending those colors creates the full color wheel, as shown on the right-hand page.

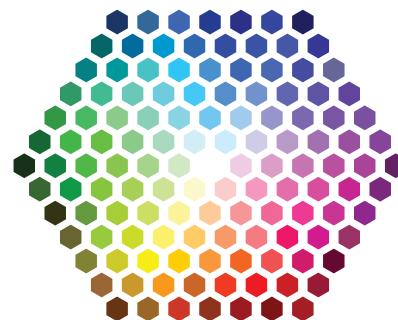
Each pie slice of the wheel has tints and shades of a single hue (true color). The hue on this wheel is four rings out from the center. The colors toward the center of the wheel have white added to the hue, called *tints*, whereas the rings of colors on the outside of the hue have black added to them to create a *shade* of the color.

Presentation applications reference the color wheel's logic in their color picker tools, which is a good reason to understand the color wheel itself.

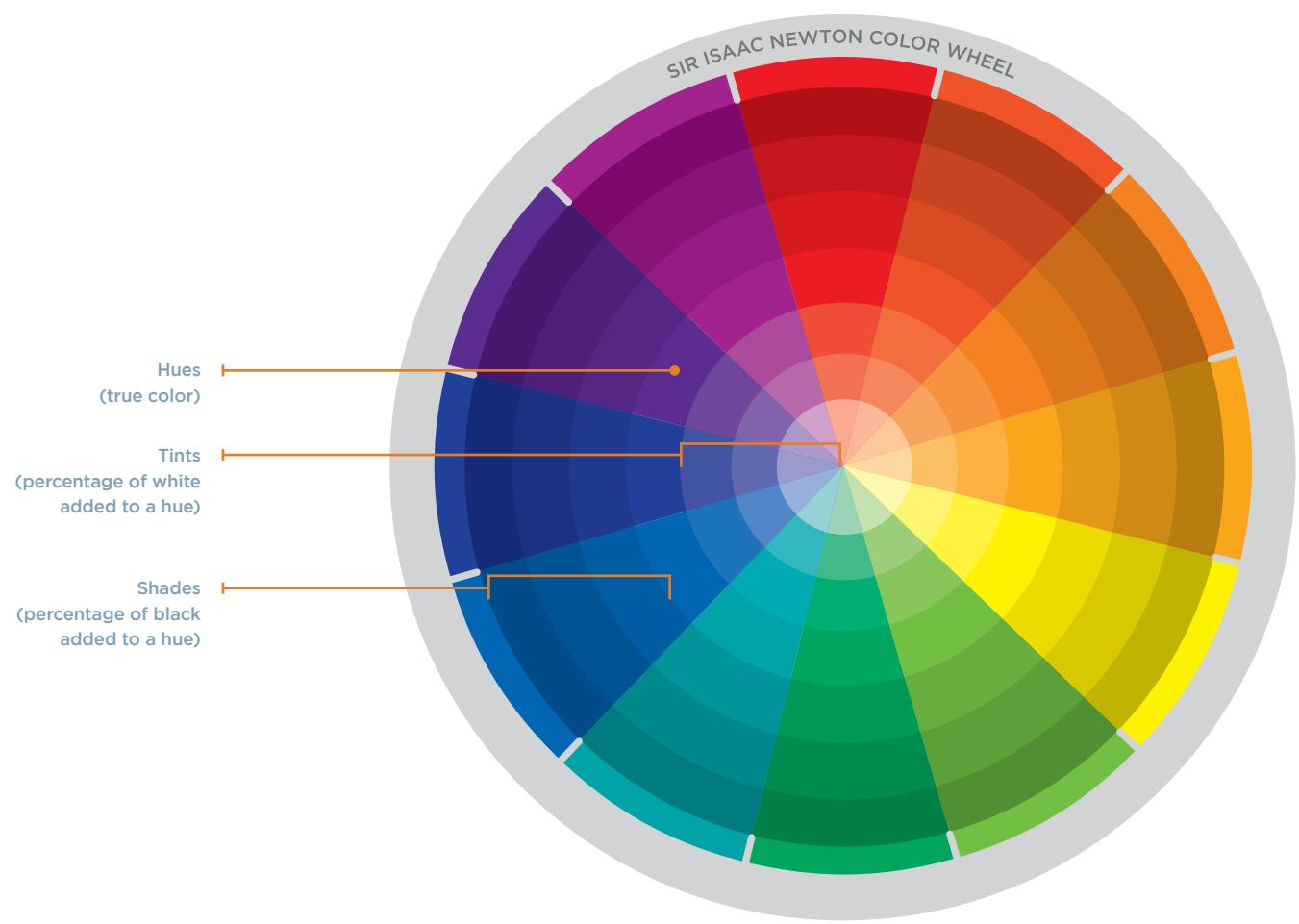
You can select colors for your palette anywhere in the wheel with any saturation of color, but make sure that it contrasts and projects well. There is a bit of a science to creating a pleasing palette.



Apple's Keynote Color Picker



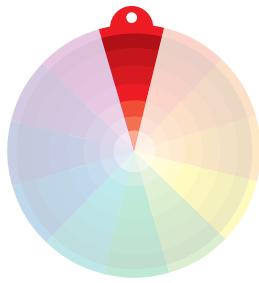
Microsoft's PowerPoint Color Picker



# Using the Power of Color

## Monochromatic

Using variations of the same color can create a striking palette, but it's difficult to use color effectively without adding black, white, and shades of gray for contrast. Select colors with a broad range of tints and shades to provide enough contrast.



Earthy

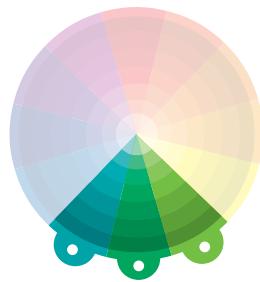


Strong



## Analogous

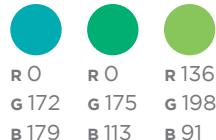
Selecting colors that are touching in the wheel creates a narrow, harmonious color scheme. Similar to monochromatic colors, analogous colors provide a predominantly warm or cool feeling, depending on where they lie on the wheel.



Powerful

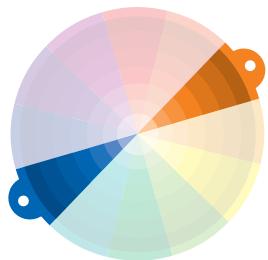


Calm



## Complementary

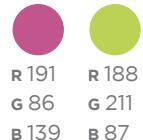
Colors from the opposite ends of the wheel provide the most contrast. If you can stave off the temptation to add more colors, limit them to only two to create a powerful (or even startling) look. But arrange them wisely so they don't clash.



Athletic

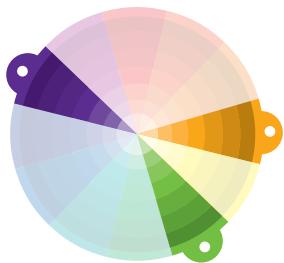


Feminine

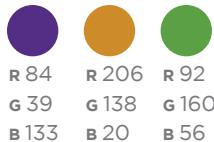


## Split Complementary

This variation of the complementary scheme uses two colors on either side of a directly complementary color. These colors have high visual contrast but with less visual tension than purely complementary colors.



Regal



R 84  
G 39  
B 133

R 206  
G 138  
B 20

R 92  
G 160  
B 56

R 47  
G 179  
B 202

R 241  
G 86  
B 79

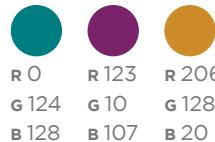
R 246  
G 150  
B 84

## Triadic

Three colors equally spaced around the color wheel create vivid visual interest. Some of the palettes are bold while others are more refined. You can modify this method by using a light tint or dark shade of one of the three colors instead of the pure hue.



Inviting



R 0  
G 124  
B 128

R 123  
G 10  
B 107

R 206  
G 128  
B 20

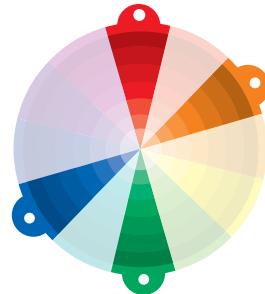
R 13  
G 124  
B 193

R 208  
G 63  
B 65

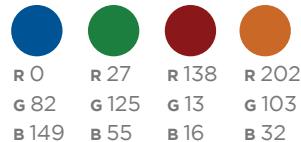
R 252  
G 238  
B 33

## Tetradic

This scheme is popular because it offers strong visual contrast while retaining harmony. It uses two pairs of complementary colors. It's difficult to harmonize this scheme if all four hues are used in equal amounts. Pick a dominant color for your design and use the others to support the main one.



Spirited



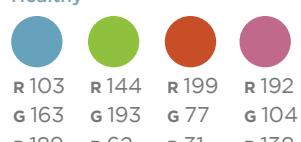
R 0  
G 82  
B 149

R 27  
G 125  
B 55

R 138  
G 13  
B 16

R 202  
G 103  
B 32

Healthy



R 103  
G 163  
B 189

R 144  
G 193  
B 62

R 199  
G 77  
B 31

R 192  
G 104  
B 138

# Choosing Your Colors

Before you can decide on a color palette, you need to determine your background color. With the technological advancement of projectors, there are no restrictions on what background color to use anymore, because most colors now translate well. However, in certain circumstances, a darker background might be more effective than a lighter background, and vice versa.

Two factors determine whether dark or light is appropriate: the formality of the event and the venue size. The human eye requires contrast for visibility, and pure black or pure white backgrounds have the greatest opportunity for contrast since they are without color. Look at the color palettes on the right. Here the PowerPoint color palette appears on various colored backgrounds. The palettes on the black and white backgrounds on the opposite page are completely visible and have full contrast. On the midrange colored backgrounds, the contrast is diminished. Some of the colors are indistinguishable from the background, and portions of the palette are unusable.

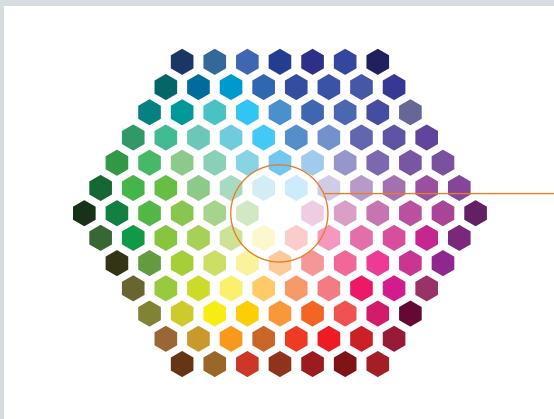
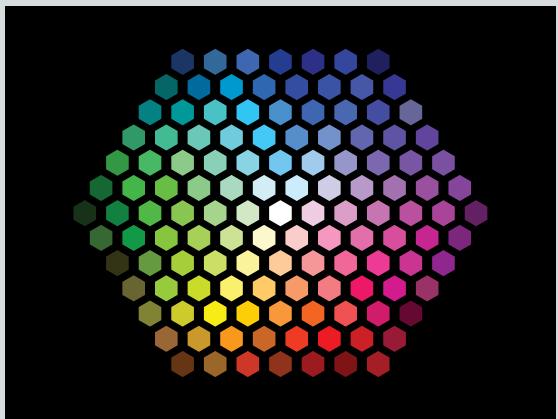
When choosing your color palette, make sure that it contrasts with the background and the other colors you have chosen—and holds up to a projection test. Colors might look great on your computer screen, but then look different or diluted when projected. If color integrity is important to you, either use your own projector as often as possible or arrive at your venue early enough to have time to adjust the projector.

## Dark background

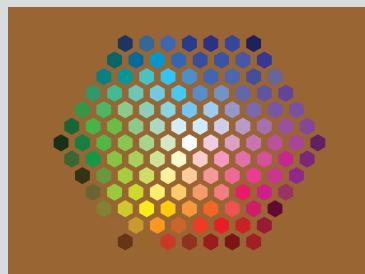
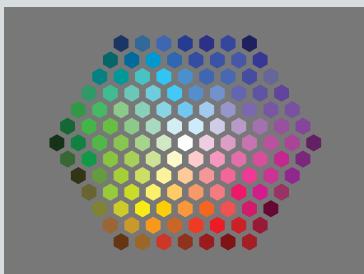
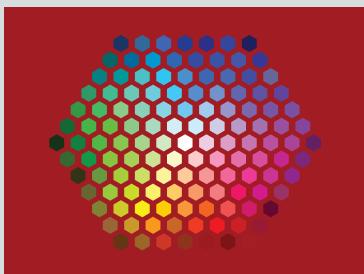
- Formal
- Doesn't influence ambient lighting
- Does not work well for handouts
- Fewer opportunity for shadows
- For large venues
- Objects can glow

## Light background

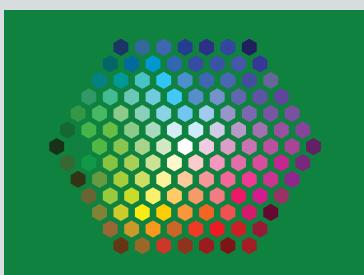
- Informal
- Has a bright feeling
- Illuminates the room
- Works well for handouts
- For smaller venues (conference rooms)
- No opportunity for dramatic lighting or spotlights on the elements



Pastels and light gradients can be “blown out” by the projector and appear indistinguishable from each other by the audience.



Contrasting with the background is critical so the audience can see your content.



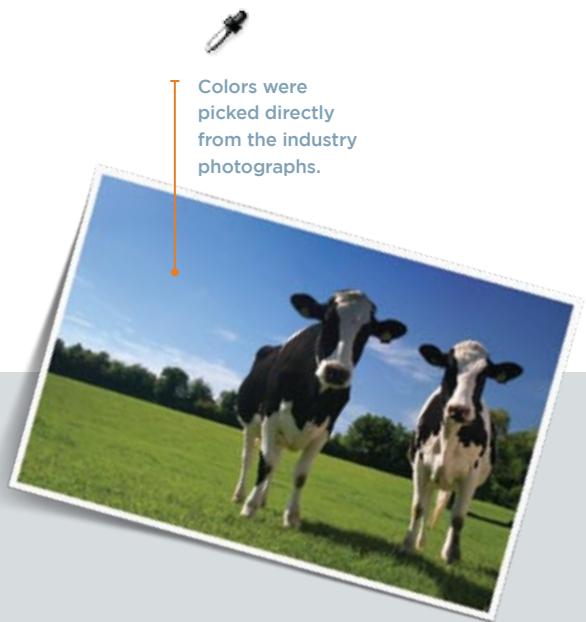
In these samples some colors pop out but many blend in. That's because the background is a midtone instead of very dark or very light. Midtones reduce the contrast.

## Using Industry Color Palettes

Once you know who your audience is, it's pretty easy to determine what their likes and dislikes are. You can determine which color palette will appeal to the audience by understanding their personality (see bottom of pages 130–131 for various temperaments expressed through color). Colors can also seem masculine or feminine, enticing or reserved.

Another way to pick a palette is to identify colorful images within your industry that can influence your corporate color palette. Identify a series of images that support the subject matter.

### Agriculture Industry



R 114  
G 158  
B 60



R 89  
G 149  
B 222



R 250  
G 222  
B 67



R 206  
G 101  
B 54

## TIP

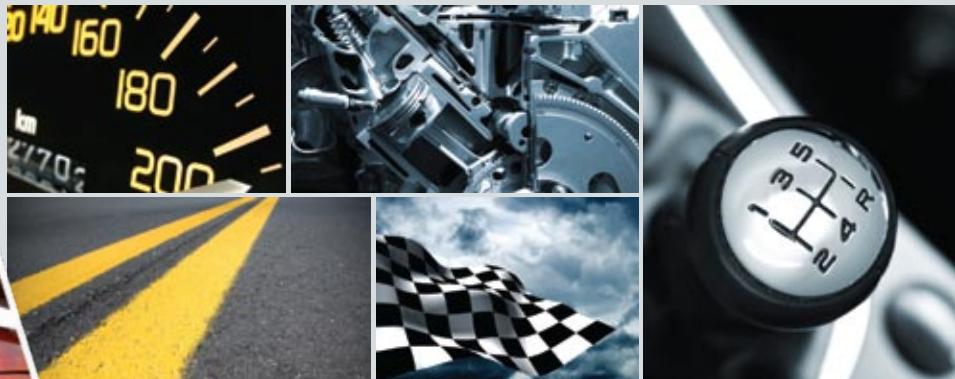
Contrast is important when choosing your palette because projectors vary and the subtle color differences you set up on your computer screen can get lost. Manually tweak the colors while projecting to ensure they translate well.

The example on the previous page uses images from the agriculture industry. By using a color eyedropper tool, the designer pulled colors directly from the photograph.

Each industry palette can be strikingly unique. This palette built for the automotive industry plays up the metals as the base colors, as well as gold. It doesn't incorporate the paint color of the vehicles themselves. Using gray tones as the primary color palette helps the bright colors pop out against the relatively muted palette.



## Automotive Industry



With a neutral color palette, juxtaposing a bright color helps focus attention where needed.

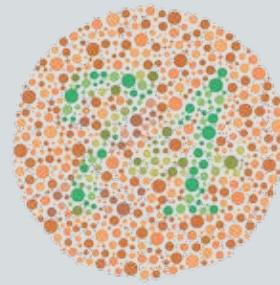
## Assembling a Color Palette

To assemble a palette, ideally select three to five core colors from the color wheel, plus a neutral and a highlight color. A good place to start is to look at the color(s) of your logo or industry-appropriate colors. Based on the color you select, you can experiment with the various methods of combining and coordinating colors from the previous pages. Also experiment with tint and shade.

Neutral colors often serve as a background element and aid in visual hierarchy and divisions of space. You can use neutrals to create an additional background surface as long as it isn't distracting. For example, white serves as a primary background color for this book while bands of pale gray are sometimes used as a secondary background color to anchor slide samples in the case studies. Neutrals can also be used in data charts and diagrams as secondary information. Using a neutral color for secondary data helps blend information into the background. That helps the emphasized data stand out. Neutrals can be in shades of the corporate logo color or a tint or shade of the background color being used. Highlight colors accentuate text and create emphasis in charts and infographics.

When you've selected a color palette, also select light and dark tones of the color set. These dark and light tones determine the depth of range for gradients. For example, when you create an object that has a gradient fill, the dark range would serve as shading and the light tones as the highlight.

Once you've finalized your palette, place it on a slide and project it to ensure the colors contrast well against each other.

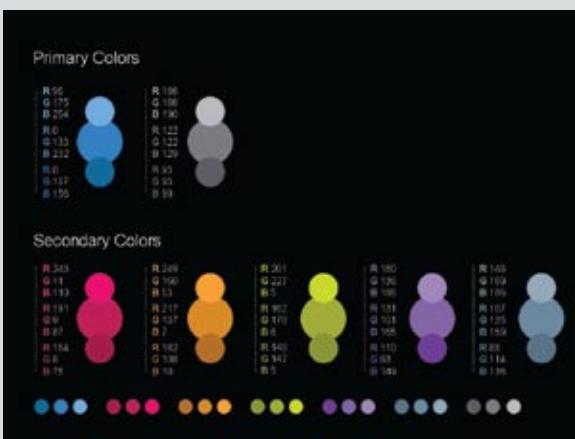
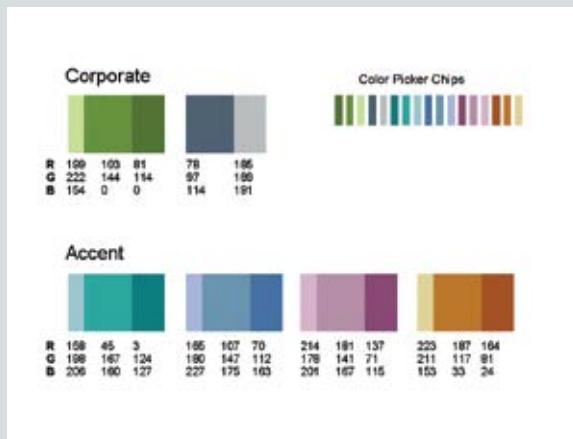
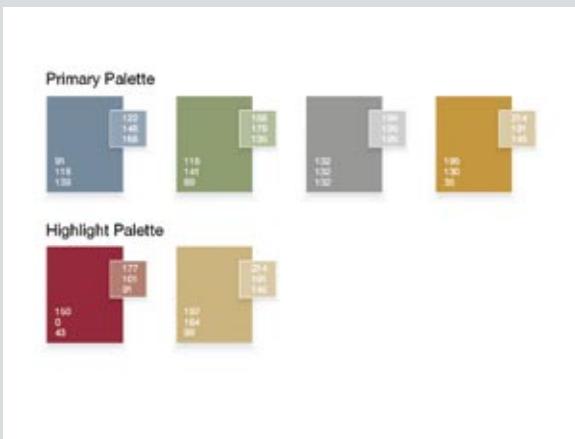


About 1 in 12 people have some sort of color vision deficiency. Be sure to employ varying brightness in color and choose distinguishable shapes to tell your visual story.

Check your slides for contrast before presenting them by converting the file to grayscale and printing it on a black-and-white printer. Anything that's indistinguishable from the background or other components on the slide could be indistinguishable to someone with a color vision deficiency.

The circle above uses various colorized circles to create the number 74. A color-blind person cannot distinguish the orange tones from the green ones. Odds are high they cannot see the number.

How should this affect the color choices you make for a palette which might be seen by lots of people?

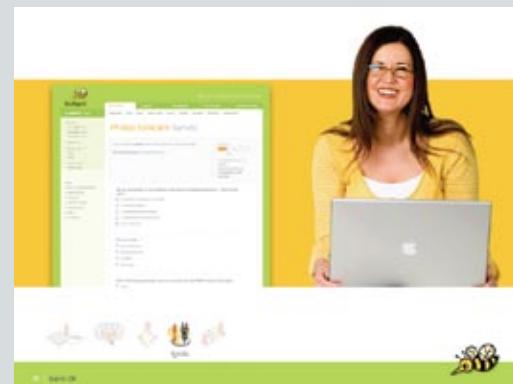




## Case Study: BzzAgent Limiting an Energetic Palette

To harness the power of word-of-mouth marketing, BzzAgent created an infrastructure that enables consumers to share their honest opinions about products. Because their business model relies on attracting people who are brand loyalists as well as energetic communicators, their visual identity—and their color palette specifically—must take a proactive and energetic stance to reflect this.

Take care in selecting images. Have your color palette open while searching for images online. That way you can ensure that the images work well with your palette. Also, when shooting your own photography, have your models wear a wardrobe that complements the color scheme.



For diagrams and illustrations, the designer needed to select additional colors but use them sparingly. The two colors in their existing palette plotted on the wheel as almost an analogous palette because they're so close on the color wheel. We used those colors as a starting point. In an effort to continue to constrain the colors for dramatic appeal, we decided to keep all the colors on one side of the color wheel and select every other color on the wheel (in various shades and tints). We made sure that the new colors played a secondary role to the two colors in the core palette. Beware of visually overwhelming your audience by giving equal value to all colors.



Here's how the palette plots on the color wheel. Selecting colors from one side of the color wheel ensured contrast and color harmony.



It's possible, but extremely challenging, to create diagrams in a palette with only two colors. Adding black sparingly helped emphasize important points by increasing the contrast.

# Text

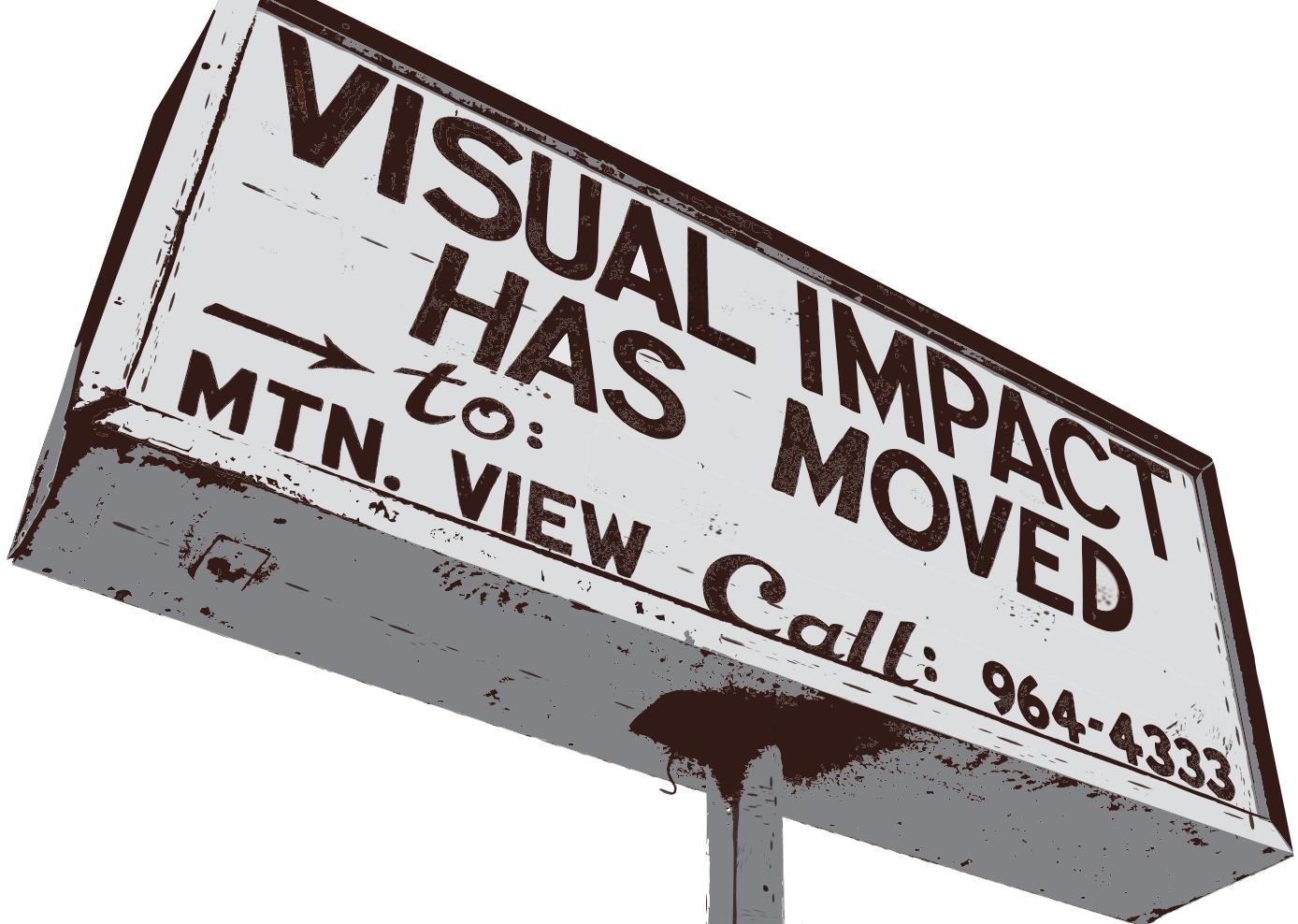
## **Remember the 3-second rule.**

Presentations are a “glance media”—more closely related to billboards than other media. It requires commuters to process quickly as they drive past. Imagine having a billboard full of bullets, drivers would crash trying to process the ads.

Ask yourself whether your message can be processed effectively within three seconds. The audience should be able to quickly ascertain the meaning before turning their attention back to the presenter. For comparison, consider that when billboards first appeared, a public outcry ensued over concerns of driver safety and visual pollution of the landscape. Interestingly, relatively few protests have aired against the visual pollution in meeting rooms across corporate America.

## **Content should lend itself to quick processing, and should be typeset correctly.**

When Apple’s Macintosh first debuted, anyone with a computer could now be a desktop publisher. At Duarte, we dove in head first and were thrilled when a reputable design firm invited us in for a portfolio review. While reviewing our work, the Creative Director’s expressions and line of questions made me squirm. Over and over, she asked probing questions about our typesetting decisions. I could tell she was not impressed. She told us that we needed to master type if we wanted to stand out from all the novices entering the field in droves. We took her advice and studied the masters.



Her advice was timely. Shortly after, we were approached by Adobe and Apple, who both treat type as a critical component to the success of their brands. They took as much care around the treatment of type as they did their concept, copy, images, and layouts. Our accurately typeset presentations helped us land these accounts.

Some might say that typesetting isn't worth the extra time for a presentation. But type is a fundamental part of our culture and has been for centuries. Most people can inherently and easily recognize when type is balanced and used well.

Before computers, typesetting was a specialized skill and honorable profession. Digitization of fonts and the advent of the personal computer spawned a massive generation of users who don't understand the context and beauty in carefully typeset design.

## Dissecting a Font

Every font has its own personality: serious or playful, stately or friendly, bold or humble. Here are two different fonts. Study them and look for the obvious and subtle differences. When you've trained yourself to see the differences, you can make better choices about which font is the most appropriate for your presentation.

Consider the height and weight. Look at the various shapes created by the ascenders and descenders. Notice the unique shapes formed in the negative space of the letters, called *counters*. The two words shown here are the same point size, but the x-height is taller in the sans serif font. Choose a font that accurately reflects the personality of your brand—like the examples shown to the right.



don't vs. don't

There isn't much that turns my stomach more than seeing someone use a foot mark where an apostrophe should be. Make sure your apostrophes have a head and a tail. If they look like splinters it's bad; if they look like tadpoles, it's good.

## Serif

Serifs are intended for a long sequence of words that exceed one line. They have little feet that guide the letters into each other so the letters appear connected, and to help the eye stay within the line of text in dense copy. Serifs possess varying line weights that help the eye identify the letter quickly.

## Sans Serif

The word “sans” means without, so sans serif means without serifs. The letterforms are bigger and bolder. Sans serif typefaces are usually used in children’s books because of their simplicity. Some believe they are more difficult to read, so they are usually used in short bursts like headlines, subtitles, and captions.

The debates still rage about which type is most suited for legibility. The results of many studies are inconclusive, so I conducted my own research from the 28th floor of a Las Vegas hotel. If my earlier premise is true that slides are most comparable to billboards, then sans serif is the way to go. Out of the 40 or so billboards visible from the hotel room, the only ones I could read were set in sans serif type. Debate over, I guess.

A fundamental element of design is how the fonts are combined, scaled, tabulated, and spaced.

## Font

Georgia

Times New Roman

Courier

## Personality

formal, practical

professional, traditional

plain, nerdy

Arial

Tahoma

Century Gothic

stable, conformist

young, plain

happy, elegant

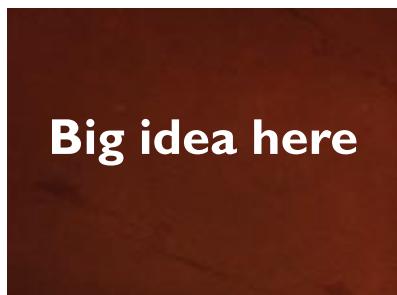
Just like great wine pairing, font pairing can amplify great design. It is best to combine no more than two fonts per presentation. Use one font for headlines and subheads, and the other for blocks of text.

If you need a special font for emphasis, that might justify a third, but rarely. Instead, use color or italics to create emphasis. More than two fonts will make your slides look busy. Choose your primary typeface wisely and select a secondary font to complement it. It's also perfectly fine to use only one font throughout your presentation.

# How Many Words Should Be on a Slide?

There really are no official rules on the word count for a slide. Ultimately, you need enough words to make you comfortable delivering your message. Put enough there to serve as a mnemonic, but go for a very low word count. If you use a plethora of words, your audience will read the slide more quickly than you can explain it, making you strangely irrelevant to your own presentation. One time, for fun, I delivered a presentation by just being quiet and letting my staff read the slides. It was a hoot. We were done at least ten minutes sooner!

The default template in PowerPoint is a slideument. This is not a visual aid; it is a document. Avoid two-line titles when giving a presentation because of the distance the eye has to travel across the slide. In fact, consider doing a presentation with titles only, like the one below.



## Simple Works!

- Succinct text
- Crisp thoughts
- Big ideas
- Clear mnemonic
- Relieved audience

## The Default Blank Template Accommodates a Two-line Title

- Primary bullet is 32 points, which is good
  - Then return and tab for the second level
    - Notice that the bullet style changes at each level
    - With each new tab the font's point size is reduced
      - The smallest text is 20 points, which is slideument size
- When you move to a second point
  - It becomes obvious that this just might be
    - Something you want the audience to read
      - Instead of hearing you present the content
      - In compelling and human way

The standard default PowerPoint template above encourages two-line titles and sub, sub, sub, sub, sub points. It's a document, not a slide.

## Revealing Text

Now that you've determined how much text is on a slide, you need to decide in what order and how quickly the audience should see the text. I prefer to have text build sequentially as I'm not sure why anyone would want the audience to jump ahead. Remember, if the audience can see your bullets, they know the points you're going to make. They'll get bored or agitated waiting for you to catch up with them.

If you choose to repeat an agenda slide in your presentation to give the audience context, gray out previous text so they can visually jump to the current point.

### T!P

Don't animate your text unless it adds value, meaning, or emotion to the content.

## Agenda

- Agenda Item #1
- Agenda Item #2
- Agenda Item #3

Contrasting Text  
“Grayed” Out Text

Contrasting Text  
“Grayed” Out Text

Contrasting Text  
“Grayed” Out Text

Use a lighter or darker shade of the background color to dim text.

# Typesetting

If you plan to use large words by themselves or combine them with an image, take the time to typeset the text.

In the same way that grammar and punctuation errors can distract some of your audience, typographic laziness can irk those with right-brain tendencies. Case in point: Steve Jobs built typesetting features into the very first Mac because he considered his users and had the foresight to see the importance of typesetting. Smart and innovative people do their homework. And these are the people you want as clients. So spend a few moments typesetting. You never know who's in the audience.

Simplicity is powerful.



Type alone can convey messages succinctly. Use a single word or phrase to get your point across. Often, nothing else is needed.



## Ligatures

Ligatures occur when two or more letterforms are joined as a single glyph. The most common English combinations usually begin with the letter “f.” The word “firefly” has two opportunities for ligatures: “fi” and “fl.” In the example to the right, the two individual letters are replaced with a single letterform. The bulb of the “f” combines with the dot in the “i,” creating a unique letterform that replaces two characters. Common ligatures are fl, fi, ft, ff, ffi, ffi.

## Kerning

Kerning adjusts the space between individual letters. A well-kerned font reduces the amount of visually awkward gaps between letters. Turn auto-kerning on in your presentation software. Common letters that need to be kerned manually are capital letters: A, R, T, V, W, Y.

Look at the word “WAR”. It is not kerned. You can see how the slant of the “W” is parallel with the slant on the “A” but there’s a large gap between the two letters. Compare this with the slide on the opposite page where the word “WAR” is properly kerned.

## Letterspacing

Letterspacing—also called tracking—refers to the amount of space between letters that affects the overall density of a word. The slide on the opposite page with the word “spacious” has loose letterspacing.



The word "firefly" is shown again in a serif font, but with better letter spacing and kerning. The letters are closer together, and the overall appearance is more balanced and professional.

AFTER: Ligatures and kerning applied



Final typeset word applied to a slide.

# Typesetting a Block of Text

Paragraph spacing determines the gap between blocks of text. In the case of bullet points, each bullet is considered a new paragraph, whereas a second line in a bullet is not.

Can you see that just above this line of text, the space is larger than the type within the paragraph? Line spacing is the space between lines within a paragraph. Holding down the Shift key and then pressing Return (called a soft return) creates line spacing, whereas pressing the Return key alone (called a hard return) will give you paragraph spacing.

*This is paragraph  
spacing!*

## Title placed here

- Insert your bullet line

### Bullets

Notice the paragraph spacing between each bullet paragraph.

## Title placed here

- Major Bullet number 1
  - Sub-bullet number 1
  - Sub-bullet number 2
- Major Bullet number 2
  - Sub-bullet number 1
  - Sub-bullet number 2

### Sub-bullets

If you insist on using them, they should be spatially associated with the primary bullet. Notice how there's a larger space between the sub-bullet and next major bullet. That's paragraph spacing.

In typesetting terms, a widow is a single word by itself at the end of a paragraph (in this case it is the word “performs”).

“The typographer must analyze and reveal the inner order of the text, as a musician must reveal the inner order of the music he performs.”

Robert Bringhurst

The above text is aligned left. The rag is the shape that the text makes on the nonaligned side (in this case the right side). Look at the shape and determine if it has a distracting shape. In this case the word “reveal” sticks out too much, and the word “performs” in the last line is a widow. Usually all can be fixed easily by making a minor adjustment to the width of the text block, making manual line breaks with a soft return, or both.

“The typographer must analyze and reveal the inner order of the text, as a musician must reveal the inner order of the music he performs.”

**Robert Bringhurst**

Adjusting the text box creates a straighter rag and removes the widow.

# Obeying Gun Laws and Bullet Laws

Guns don't kill people, as the saying goes, but bullets kill plenty. Many an audience has fallen prey to bullet slide after bullet slide, and a dead audience (even metaphorically speaking) won't help you achieve your presentation objectives!

**Protect your audience from the dangers of bullets with a few simple guidelines. First, if you have to use bullets at all, use them sparingly.**

Many rules have been written about how many bullets should be on a slide. But, ignore the 4x4 rule, and the 5x5 rule, and the 7-word per slide rule. Instead, use good design sense to visually compose your bullet slides.



## T!P

Keep a copy of the *Chicago Manual of Style* and *Words into Type* and refer to them often.

Jerry Weissman, author of *The Power Presenter*, strongly believes that when you create a text slide containing bullets, you are, in effect, presenting headlines only. As the presenter, it's your job to put flesh on the bones of the skeletal bullets. The presenter provides the body text around the headline. When composing your bullets, think of them as newspaper headlines. Keep them as succinct as possible and write each line in parallel structure. That means that each one must begin with the same tense and the same part of speech: verb, noun, adjective, and so on. Whether your first bullet is a sentence or just a fragment, make the rest of them the same. And finally, avoid the extra visual complexity of sub-bullets whenever you can.

This bullet slide boiled down the contents from this spread into a brief, parallel structure.

Standard convention traditionally uses title case for titles and initial caps (capitalizing only the first word of the line) for everything else. You can't go wrong with this convention. But some companies have other conventions that are dictated by their brand guidelines. Use all caps sparingly and only for emphasis because, as with e-mail, caps can be perceived as shouting.

Whatever you choose, do it consistently. It's bothersome if some bullets have a period and others don't. Likewise, slides that use title case followed by slides employing initial caps are disconcerting. Bullet points, too, should either all be initial cap or use another convention. Remember, consistency is key.

## Bullet Laws

- Protect audience
- Use sparingly
- Write headlines
- Use parallel structure
- Avoid sub-bullets

# Validating Your Font Size

What is the most appropriate minimum font size? If you have to ask, you may be using your slides as a document. Here are a few good approaches:

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- ① Measure the diagonal length of your computer screen. Let's say it's a 21 inch monitor. Using a tape measure, place a piece of tape 21 feet from your screen. If your screen is 17 inches, place the tape 17 feet away, etc. Then, launch a slide on your screen into slide show mode. Whatever you cannot see from behind the piece of tape probably can't be seen by the back of the room.
  - ② Put your file into slide sorter view. Look at the slides at 66 percent size. If you can still read them, so can your audience.
  - ③ Stand in the back of the room at your venue and click through all the slides so you know what people in the back row will see.
  - ④ Follow the advice of Guy Kawasaki, author and former Apple Fellow: "A good rule of thumb for font size is to divide the oldest investor's age by two, and use that font size."
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## TIP

Stay consistent. For keynotes, don't go smaller than 28 pt. If you are consistently reducing your point size to under 24 pt and using third-level bullets, you have officially created a document and not a slide.



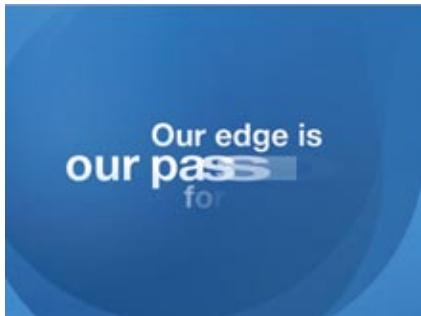
## Playing Text Animations as the Audience Enters

Many times at large venues it's nice to have an animation playing as the attendees fill the room. Often, these "curtain warmers," "splash animations," and "walk-in animations" feature quotes, trivia, factoids, imagery, video, or whatever fits the theme and temperament of your event or presentation. If produced well, these animations can be timed to music and incorporate voice-over audio content as well. They are simple to produce and have just as much impact as a fancy video.

You can also use these animations the way interstitials are used on TV—as mini bites of content that play when filler programming is needed. So at your presentation, when there's a break in the session or a cut to another screen for a demo, these animations fill screen space when the presenter isn't projecting slides.



For a biotech company's sales event, we created a theme graphic that was used throughout the venue and incorporated it into a clean but simple background for a "walk-in" animation.



This simple animation sequence was typeset and animated elegantly. Look at how the “i” in coaching combines with the “l” in excellence. The second “l” in excellence attaches to the dot on the “i” of the word “in.” These subtle typesetting decisions defined how the animations were applied.

[www](#)

