

Visual Composition Analysis Framework Children's Book Design

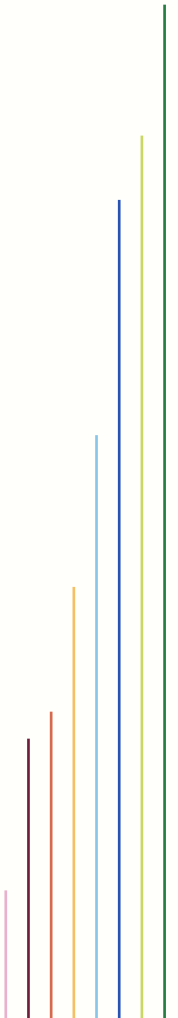
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Introduction

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

About the Framework:

The Visual Composition Analysis Framework (VCAF) has been developed to help researchers, book developers, designers, publishers, and librarians, research and create reading material for children. This framework is designed to act as a measure in research, and as a tool to help determine what and how visual design aspects can be presented in books for children. This framework was developed through a rigorous process involving visual composition analysis, inter-rater reliability testing, and constructive feedback provided by several professional librarians. We have discussed our method of development in our article *Developing a Visual Composition Analysis Framework: What Matters when Designing Books for Children?* (Stanley-Burroughs et al., 2025).

We invite researchers to test, critique and develop the VCAF through additional investigation. We also encourage future research that uses the VCAF to uncover what Types in each category might be 'best' for different groups of readers.

For publishers, book designers, teachers, and librarians, please use this framework in conjunction with research findings, as a guide in your work. Our hope is that this framework allows researchers, and industry professionals to collaboratively create books that children not only benefit greatly from, but also find joy in.

Using the Framework:

When analysing books using this framework, books should be assigned a Type from each category. Types are not accumulative and should be assessed individually based on the categories provided. We have included a form at the end of this document (page 15) that you may use to record book analysis results.



Glossary

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

- Typography:** Typography is the visual style of text, also commonly referred to as 'font style'. (Luna, 2018). When observing Typographic presentation while using this Framework, 'Typographic character presentation' refers to the style of the text. For example: if the typography is presented in 'normal' font but some words are presented in 'italics' or 'bold', that is considered a change in typographic presentation. Expressive typography refers to text that contains visual embellishments that make words appear 'expressive'. In the case of this Framework, you should only consider body typography that is required to be read to understand the written content. Typography such as page numbers, chapter titles, or 'sound effects' that do not need to be read to understand the written content etc., should not be included in your consideration when classifying books with this Framework.
- Paragraph:** When the term 'paragraph' is used in this Framework, it is refereeing to a block of text. It may contain one singular sentence or be made up of multiple sentences.
- Spread:** The term 'spread' refers to the view a reader sees when observing an 'open' printed book. Typically, a 'spread' consists of two individual pages that meet along the binding edge (Berne, 2024). This Framework uses the term 'spread' as opposed to 'page' as sometimes content may be positioned across a 'spread' that is made up of two pages. Therefore, the spread should be considered when classifying a book rather than a singular page.



Glossary

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

Composition Blocking:

This term refers to the arrangement of content within a visual article such as a photograph, or in the case of this Framework – illustrations. It refers to how illustrated content is arranged and the perspective it creates for a reader. For example, in one illustration, a character may be depicted as ‘close up’ to show their facial expression whereas the following illustration might depict an ‘over the shoulder’ perspective of the character to show a reader what the character is seeing. This would be an example of how the composition blocking has changed to show a different perspective.

Greyscale:

Greyscale refers to the commonly known ‘black and white’ shade scale. It is inclusive of the shades ‘black’ and ‘white’ as well as shades of grey.

Category Overview Sheet | Page 1

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

Typographic Presentation

Type A

The book contains no text, or there is no variation in typographic presentation anywhere in the book.

Type B

The typography scale and positioning are consistent throughout the book. However, the typographic character presentation changes in places.

Type C

Typography changes position, scale and presentation throughout. Some text may be considered expressive typography. However, the type does not have illustrated properties.

Type D

Typography changes position, scale, and presentation throughout. It contains typography that is illustrated and expressive.

Typographic Blocking

Type A

The book contains no text.

Type B

On average, the text fills up to $\frac{1}{4}$ of a spread.

Type C

On average, the text fills between $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ of a spread.

Type D

On average, the text fills between $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ of a spread.

Type E

On average, the text fills more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a spread.

Typographic Carry

Type A

The book contains no text.

Type B

The typographic carry follows the typical punctuation rules of the book's published language. Text is laid out in paragraphs, composed of either singular, or multiple sentences.

Type C

The typographic carry mostly follows the typical punctuation rules of the book's published language. However, sentences and/or paragraphs have been intentionally separated, and some punctuation rules may have been broken.

Type D

The typographic carry breaks the typical punctuation rules of the book's published language. Sentences and/or paragraphs have been intentionally separated to convey meaning or to 'show' the reader how the text is 'meant' to be read. Sentences or paragraphs may have been positioned to depict a movement described in the written content.

Illustration Blocking

Type A

The book contains no illustrations.

Type B

The illustrations have single-perspective composition blocking. The subjects within the illustrations are presented from the same perspective throughout each illustration, and scaling within illustrations remains consistent.

Type C

The illustrations have varied composition blocking. The subjects within the illustrations are presented from the same perspective throughout each illustration. However, the scale (how near or far away a subject is presented) changes. Or vice versa – the scale of subjects remains consistent throughout, but subjects are presented from different perspectives.

Type D

The illustrations have distinct changes in composition blocking. The perspective and scaling of subjects within the illustrations, change throughout.

Category Overview Sheet | Page 2

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

Illustration Frequency

Type A The book contains no illustrations.	Type B The book has text accompanied by illustrations on a few spreads throughout the book.	Type C The book has text accompanied by illustrations on not all but most spreads throughout the book.	Type D The book has illustrations on all spreads, and sometimes illustrations are accompanied by text.	Type E The book has no text and only contains illustrations.
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Typography-Illustration Integration

Type A The book contains no illustration and/or no text.	Type B Illustrations are decorative and do not reflect the context within the written story.	Type C Illustrations represent the written story but are positioned alongside/separately from the text.	Type D Illustrations represent the written story and are positioned amongst/between the text.	Type E Illustrations represent the written story and are integrated with the text. Illustrations always add detail not portrayed in the text.
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Typographic Colour

Type A The typography is only presented in greyscale. Or the book does not contain text.	Type B The typography is presented in greyscale and colour. The word/words emphasised using colour appears to be random. The colour used to emphasise the word/words does not appear to add additional meaning.	Type C The typography is presented in greyscale and colour. The word/words emphasised using colour appear to be intentional. However, the colour used to emphasise the word/words does not appear to add additional meaning.	Type D The typography is presented in colour and may be presented in grey scale. The word/words emphasised using colour, and the colour used, appears to be intentional.
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Illustration Colour

Type A The illustration is only presented in greyscale. Or the book does not contain illustration.	Type B The illustration is presented in greyscale and colour. The colour is used to visually emphasise illustrated elements. The colour/colours used, do not correspond to the expected colour of the illustrated aspect in 'real life', or do not reflect details explicitly outlined in the written content. The choice of colour does not appear to add additional meaning, or the colour has been used for decorative purposes.	Type C The illustration is presented in greyscale and colour. The colour is used throughout the illustration. The colour/colours used, correspond to the expected colour of the illustrated aspect in 'real life' or the colour used reflects details explicitly outlined in the written content.	Type D The illustrations contain colour and may contain greyscale. The colour/colours used, always add, or build upon themes and 'meaning' within the written story. The use and choice of the colours used, always add context not explicitly outlined in the written content.
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Typographic Presentation | Definition Sheet

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

Typographic presentation is the visual styling of the text. This includes the typefaces and font used as well as elements of illustrated typography. The following definitions offer further detail about each class. This category applies to text that must be read to understand the story. Decorative typography aspects are excluded from this category.

- Type A** The book contains no text, or there is no variation in typographic presentation anywhere in the book. The text is presented in the same style throughout the body text. No other visual elements are introduced to the typography.
- Type B** The typography scale and positioning are consistent throughout the book. However, the typographic character presentation changes in places. For example, italics, or bold, might be used to emphasise a describing word within the text, however it adds no additional meaning to the story. This classification excludes illustrated typography (see Type C and Type D).
- Type C** Typography changes position, scale and presentation throughout. Some text may be considered expressive typography. However, the typography has no illustrated properties. This Type applies when the styling of the text changes to represent a different 'state' within the book. For example, the font used for one character's dialogue could be different to the font used for another, giving the reader a visual 'cue' as to which character is saying what. Or, certain words may be presented in a different typeface or colour, to create emphasis on the word. This classification excludes illustrated typography.
- Type D** Typography changes position, scale, and presentation throughout. It contains typography that is illustrated and expressive. This Type is applied when the typography fulfils Type C requirements and some of the typography contains illustrated properties. For example, the word 'boom' may be illustrated as an explosion and must be read to understand the story.

Typographic Blocking | Definition Sheet

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

Typographic blocking refers to the amount of text upon a spread — two pages which are viewed together as a 'set' (Berne, 2024). When a traditional printed book is opened, the two pages side by side are the 'spread.' When classifying a book within this category, apply the Type that best describes the average typographic blocking throughout the book — if text fills half a spread on one page, but fills three quarters on all the rest, the book will fall under Type D.

Type A The book contains no text.

Type B On average, the text fills up to $\frac{1}{4}$ of a spread.

Type C On average, the text fills between $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ of a spread.

Type D On average, the text fills between $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ of a spread.

Type E On average, the text fills more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a spread.

Typographic Carry | Definition Sheet

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

Typographic carry refers to how the sentences are visually 'carried' within the paragraph text. It encompasses how sentences are presented on a page based on punctuation, and how one line of text flows into the next. This category addresses the visual structure of paragraph content and whether the position of the text breaks traditional punctuation and grammar rules. Typographic Carry is similar to prose; however, it centres on the visual positioning of typography, rather than the language.

Type A The book contains no text.

Type B The typographic carry follows the typical punctuation rules of the book's published language. Text is laid out in paragraphs, composed of either singular, or multiple sentences. This Type applies to text which has been presented in a typical paragraph format.

Type C The typographic carry mostly follows the typical punctuation rules of the book's published language. However, sentences and/or paragraphs have been intentionally separated, and some punctuation rules may have been broken. An example of this Type is when the text has been presented in a stanza format, but the text still contains punctuation appropriate for the book's published language.

Type D The typographic carry breaks the typical punctuation rules of the book's published language. Sentences and/or paragraphs have been intentionally separated to convey meaning or to 'show' the reader how the text is 'meant' to be read. Sentences or paragraphs may have been positioned to depict a movement described in the written content. An example of this is when the start of a sentence may be presented on the first line, then instead of using a comma, the next segment of a sentence starts below on a new line. This presentation 'shows' a reader the 'flow' of the text and represents breaks in the story with a break in the line. Another example is when the text reads something like "they stepped down" but the word "down" is moved below the previous words in the sentence to mimic the movement described in the written content.

Illustration Bocking | Definition Sheet

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

This refers to the variation of illustration perspectives depicted in a book. This category does not address how many illustrations are within a book (see Illustration frequency category) but instead surveys the blocking of the illustration composition. This encompasses how illustrations might be placed upon a page and the complexities incorporated into how they depict the story.

Type A The book contains no illustrations.

Type B The illustrations have single-perspective composition blocking. The subjects within the illustrations are presented from the same perspective throughout each illustration, and scaling within illustrations remains consistent. This Type applies when a book contains illustrations showing the subjects from the same perspective, and the subjects appear to be the same 'distance away' throughout all illustrations.

Type C The illustrations have varied composition blocking. The subjects within the illustrations are presented from the same perspective throughout each illustration. However, the scale (how near or far away a subject is presented) changes. Or vice versa – the scale of subjects remains consistent throughout, but subjects are presented from different perspectives. This Type applies when a book contains illustrations showing the subjects from the same perspective, but the subjects appear to be 'nearer' or 'farther away' in some illustrations. This Type also applies when subjects appear the same 'distance away' throughout all illustrations, but the perspective they are shown in varies between illustrations.

Type D The illustrations have distinct changes in composition blocking. The perspective and scaling of subjects within the illustrations, change throughout. This Type applies when a book contains illustrations showing the subjects from different perspectives, and the subjects appear to be 'nearer' or 'farther away' in some illustrations.

Illustration Frequency | Definition Sheet

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

Refers to how many illustrations occur within a book.

Type A The book contains no illustrations.

Type B The book has text accompanied by illustrations on a few spreads throughout the book.

Type C The book has text accompanied by illustrations on not all but most spreads throughout the book.

Type D The book has illustrations on all spreads, and sometimes illustrations are accompanied by text.

Type E The book has no text and only contains illustrations.

Typographic-Illustration Integration | Definition Sheet

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

This category refers to how the text and illustrations visually integrate and interact with each other in a book. Additionally, it addresses the relationship between typography and illustration – how the illustrations may represent what is written in the text and vice versa.

Type A The book contains no illustration and/or no text.

Type B Illustrations are decorative and do not reflect the context within the written story.

Type C Illustrations represent the written story and are positioned alongside the text.

Type D Illustrations are representative of the written story and are positioned amongst the text.

Type E Illustrations are representative of the written story and are integrated with the text. Illustrations always add additional detail not represented in the text.

Typography Colour

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

This category refers to the presence and use of colour within typographic elements in a book. This category does not represent 'how much' colour is used but instead addresses the presence of it and whether it has been used to provide additional meaning to the content. This category does not include colour used on the book cover, or end pages. When classifying a book within this category, do so by surveying on the pages containing the main story content.

- Type A** The typography is only presented in greyscale. Or the book does not contain text.
- Type B** The typography is presented in greyscale and colour. The word/words emphasised using colour appears to be random. The colour used to emphasise the word/words does not appear to add additional meaning.
- Type C** The typography is presented in greyscale and colour. The word/words emphasised using colour appear to be intentional. However, the colour used to emphasise the word/words does not appear to add additional meaning.
- Type D** The typography is presented in greyscale and colour. The word/words emphasised using colour appear to be intentional. The colour used to emphasise the word/words does not appear to add additional meaning.

Illustration Colour | Definition Sheet

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

This category refers to the presence and use of colour within illustrated elements in a book. This category does not represent 'how much' colour is used but instead addresses the presence of it and whether it has been used to provide additional meaning to the content. This category does not include colour used on the book cover, or end pages. When classifying a book within this category, do so by surveying only the spreads containing the main story content.

- Type A** The illustration is only presented in greyscale. Or the book does not contain illustration. This Type applies when all illustrations within a book contain only greyscale, black and white. Or the book contains no illustrations at all.
- Type B** The illustration is presented in greyscale and colour. The colour is used to visually emphasise illustrated elements. The colour/colours used, do not correspond to the expected colour of the illustrated aspect in 'real life', or do not reflect details explicitly outlined in the written content. The choice of colour does not appear to add additional meaning, or the colour has been used for decorative purposes. An example of this is when illustrations are presented using greyscale but a some of the illustrated aspects are presented in red to visually emphasise it. The colour has no apparent connection to the words or illustrated content depicted in colour.
- Type C** The illustration is presented in greyscale and colour. The colour is used throughout the illustration. The colour/colours used, correspond to the expected colour of the illustrated aspect in 'real life' or the colour used reflects details explicitly outlined in the written content. For example, an orange would be presented using the colour orange, and 'pink elephant' would be presented using the colour pink.
- Type D** The illustrations contain colour and may contain greyscale. The colour/colours used always add, or build upon, themes and 'meaning' within the written story. The use and choice of the colours used, always add context not explicitly outlined in the written content. For example, colours may be used to depict the mood/ demeanour of different characters within the same story.

Book Analysis Form

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

Book Title:

Typographic Presentation

Type: Comments:

Typographic Blocking

Type: Comments:

Typographic Carry

Type: Comments:

Illustration Blocking

Type: Comments:

Illustration Frequency

Type: Comments:

Typography-Illustration Integration

Type: Comments:

Typography Colour

Type: Comments:

Illustration Colour

Type: Comments:



References

Visual Composition Analysis Framework

Berne, D. (2024). *The design of books: An explainer for authors, editors, agents, and other curious readers*. University of Chicago Press.

Luna, P. (2018). *Typography: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
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Stanley-Burroughs, H., Vanderschantz, N., Timpany, C., & Daly, N. (2025). Developing a Visual Composition Analysis Framework: What Matters when Designing Books for Children? *Placeholder Journal Name*, #(#). Placeholder Publisher.