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Writ 3671 Visual Rhetoric
October 1, 2012

Visual Rhetorical Analysis of the BBC News Page

URL of web page: <http://www.bbc.com/news/>

The web page that I chose to analyze for this assignment is the home page of the BBC news site (located at the URL link above). BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) is a public service broadcaster headquartered in London, England. This broadcasting corporation not only serves the United Kingdom through television, radio, and the web, but it is a worldwide service translated into 27 languages for news and entertainment. The corporation was founded in 1927, and today, it is the largest news broadcaster in the world in terms of number of viewers and staff. For this assignment, my focus will be on the main news page of the BBC site.

Rhetorical Situation

Audience:

The audience for the BBC news home page is pretty diverse. A lot of BBC's readers come from different cultures. Even though BBC can be translated into 27 different languages, the page that I am analyzing is primarily for an audience that can read and speak English. The majority of people who come to this page are people who want a professional, unbiased news site. They are generally interested in international and world news as well as news specific to their countries and regions. The readers of this site are of all ages, young and old, because there are many news topics and sections that attract people from different generations that include science and technology, sports, entertainment, and video. Being a more professional news page and also having more serious, sophisticated content, it would be fair to say that the majority of the readers are college educated (or at least high school educated). A lot of the readers who come to this site are probably going to come from either the middle or upper class, especially because of the more sophisticated content and because the content is delivered through technologies like the web and cellular phones. So, the audience members are also digitally literate (able to understand and find information via digital technologies). In addition, I can assume that most of the readers are regular, loyal visitors to the site, so they expect the news page to be designed and laid out similarly to print newspapers and other online news pages. In other words, readers expect the design of the web page to have a main header at the top of the page, a main feature story with a large image, subordinate news stories and videos below the main headlines, and the text should be arranged into columns. I also will assume that the readers of this site are people who like to keep up with what is happening in the world, and they use outlets like BBC to keep up-to-date with the most pertinent news information.

Purpose:

The purpose of the BBC news page is to inform, to entertain, and as well as to educate readers of all ages because it is a broadcasting corporation, but more important, it is a public service corporation. Thus, BBC tries to satisfy the readers' interests by providing worldly content that is professional, sophisticated, and that is meant for people to learn about the world around them through text, video, images, etc. This purpose of informing people about professional content

matches BBC's reputation as a trusted, unbiased news source. Thus, the purpose of this page is a part of the corporation's ethos to present information in a clear and objective manner (or as much as possible). Although the site's main purpose is to inform and to educate, BBC also tries to entertain its readers through detailed, rarely-seen images, interesting videos, and interactive blogs and comment features to actually engage the readers in what they read.

Context:

There are a variety of contexts in which people use BBC. Readers of the BBC news page are either going to be using the information via the Internet at home, on the go with cellular phones, or by some type of screen device. Some readers might be fans of BBC News on Facebook, follow the latest updates on Twitter, or use some other social media outlet to keep in touch with the site. Thus, users may come across this site while they are logged into social media sites as well. Some people will search for articles when they are actually at the site, or other people will only read the articles from BBC that pop up on their news feeds in Twitter or show up in their emails. Some readers will print out the articles they like, but most readers will keep the information they read online and share the most interesting stories with friends and family via social media and email. Finally, most people will not read the page from top to bottom. They will tend to skip around to different chunks, topics, and links that they find most interesting and relevant to read because most people probably only have enough time to skim and scan the most significant content. Finally, it is significant to point out that there is a cross-cultural context to keep in mind, but this context will not be a major focus of my analysis.

Elements of the Visual Language (Intra, Inter, and Supra)

***Typefaces, fonts, and line weights are estimates.*

	Textual	Spatial	Graphic
Intra-level	<p>Type style is estimated to be Calibri or some related sans-serif typeface like Gill Sans regular for body text.</p> <p>Type size is estimated to be about 11pt.</p> <p>The text is lower case. Not much boldfacing or italics on this page. The body text is very simple and consistent across the page.</p>	<p>There is normal spacing between all of the text characters and units.</p> <p>There is single spacing between the lines of text.</p> <p>There is an extra vertical space between the blue-colored links/headlines in the body of the text.</p>	<p>Punctuation marks include periods, commas, single and double quotation marks, and apostrophes.</p> <p>Commonly used symbols used throughout on this page include %, \$, and comment/dialogue boxes.</p> <p>Links inside the body of the text are highlighted blue like normal convention.</p> <p>The color of the body text is strictly gray except the text that accompanies the video section is white.</p>

Inter-level	<p>There are four levels of headings on this web page:</p> <p>H1 heading (the main headline for the top feature story): Boldface, 36 pt. Calibri/sans-serif. Also, this heading is linked to a news story on a different page.</p> <p>H2 headings (“Magazine,” “Features,” “Comment & Analysis,” etc.): 24 pt., Calibri/sans-serif, Boldface.</p> <p>H3 headings (“Business,” “Technology,” “Sport,” “Health,” etc.): 16 pt., Calibri/sans-serif, bold, linked.</p> <p>H4 headings (the story headlines below the H3 headings that are linked to different screens): 12-pt., Calibri/sans-serif, hyperlinked.</p> <p>The “Most Shared” section of the web page in the side column on the right has numbered, ordered lists for articles that are most shared, most read, and most watched.</p>	<p>All text on web page is left justified.</p> <p>Headings are left justified and align with the images they correspond to.</p> <p>There is an extra space between headings and text.</p> <p>There are approximately 2.5-3 inches of white space in the margins on the left and the right sides of the text.</p> <p>Text is arranged into different sized boxes and rectangles (this is a typical layout for a web page).</p> <p>The main text is divided into small paragraph chunks, and these small paragraphs have no indentation.</p> <p>Text is divided into two columns. The left (main centered) column is wider than the side (right) column.</p> <p>Towards the middle of the page as you scroll down, the H3 headings are grouped and arranged together in the shape of a rectangular box.</p>	<p>There are light gray boxes highlighting and bordering the text in the side column of the web page for emphasis and figure-ground contrast.</p> <p>There are light gray lines that divide the different sections and headings from each other for clarity and arrangement purposes. The line weight is estimated to be 1 pt.</p> <p>Towards the bottom of the web page, there are orange and black boxes highlighting and bordering the text, images, and headings for emphasis and figure-ground contrast.</p> <p>The “most popular” section of the web page uses the numbers 1-10 to order what is most read and shared.</p>

<p>Supra-level</p>	<p>There is a solid red page header with the word “NEWS” (all upper case, approximately 40-pt., and Calibri/sans-serif typeface) on the left side of the header. Also, the date is displayed inside the header to the right of the word, “NEWS,” with 12-pt font and Calibri/sans-serif typeface. This is a typical-looking, conventional page header.</p> <p>There are navigational bars located above and below the header that include the BBC icon.</p> <p>The tab labels within the navigational bars are internal and external links, so the web site is easily searchable and information can be found quickly.</p> <p>There is text (copyright information, contact information, accessibility information, etc.) in the footer.</p>	<p>All images are placed to the left or above the text they correspond to.</p> <p>The single data display entitled “Market Data” is along the right-hand side of the page. The dimensions of the display are about 4 inches tall by 3 inches wide.</p> <p>The scrollable length of the screen is about 4 scroll bars from the top to the bottom of the page.</p> <p>The size of the BBC logo/icon in the header and footer is approximately ½ inch tall by 1.5 inches wide.</p>	<p>The color of the overall page has a white background and a red header.</p> <p>There are framing lines at the top and bottom of the page.</p> <p>The BBC icon/logo is placed in the footer and in the header on the left-hand side. The color of the icon in the header is red and white. The color of the icon in the footer is white and gray for contrast and emphasis purposes.</p> <p>A picture of a red globe is spread over the right-hand side of the header for emphasis and identification reasoning.</p>
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Rhetorical Impact of the Visual Language

Arrangement:

Just like the design conventions of other traditional, professional news pages, BBC's news page is arranged in a strict hierarchical structure. In other words, the more prominent, relevant, and more newsworthy stories are towards the top of the page, and the less significant linked articles or headlines are towards the bottom of the page because readers have to scroll down four scroll bar lengths just to arrive at this subordinate information. Behind the overall, hierarchical structure of the web page (supra-level, spatial mode), the page includes 1 pt. (approximately) gray lines that divide the information into even more sections than the super structure of the page does (inter-level, graphic mode). This strategy makes sense because, based on the rhetorical situation, BBC knows that its readers probably do not have much time to sit down and read the information. So, the web page is arranged so that its readers can find the most important and relevant information more quickly on the web and on their phones.

Within this hierarchical structure, the web page also utilizes an important grouping strategy to divide and separate the different types of content. The designers at BBC grouped and positioned related items in the same box or in the general proximity of each other. For example, all of the "Feature" headlines are grouped in the same box at the top of the screen in the right side column. There is even a visible gray box surrounding the "Feature" group to emphasize that these articles are related because they are all features for that day. Also, all of the video content is positioned near each other (side-by-side) towards the middle of the screen if the reader scrolls down a bit. The most effective grouping strategy is actually towards the bottom of the page after the reader scrolls down past the video section. Underneath the group of feature videos, BBC has arranged all of the major topics of stories and news together in a rectangular box. Topics like "Business," "Sport," and "Health" are all linked to different content and represent different subjects. However, they are all grouped and positioned in close proximity to each other because they all represent H3 level headings (a grouping strategy at the inter-level, textual and spatial modes of design). Finally, also at the inter-level, spatial mode, the web page is arranged into a two-column format that satisfies the readers' expectations as to what is considered a print or online news source.

Emphasis:

One visual cognate that this web page effectively implements is emphasis. This strategy can be seen both at the inter-level and the supra-level of design. First of all, the emphasis strategy is portrayed in the header of the web page (supra-level). The red background for the header (the figure) illustrates a strong figure-ground contrast with the white background of the entire web page. The red header stands out from the rest of the page when the readers come to this site. This strategy makes sense because the audience expects there to be a noticeable, contrasting header for a traditional news source like BBC. Thus, BBC follows the visual convention of designing a header for a web site. Also, inside of the header itself, there are elements that stand out and provide "pop" to the reader's eye. On the left-hand side of the header, the word "NEWS" is the perfect example of the supra-level design for both the textual and graphic modes that illustrates emphasis. The color of the letters of the word, "NEWS," is white, which is in stark contrast with the red background that shows another instance of figure-ground contrast. Also, the capitalization of this word is significant for BBC to emphasize because it alerts the readers that

this page is indeed a news source and not a weather, travel, or blog site (even though BBC provides links to these separate pages).

Emphasis can also be seen at the inter-level of design with the headings. For example, the main news story/heading of the day is right below the header (inter-level, spatial mode). The major headline for this story is always boldface, linked, and more important, the type size (inter-level, textual mode) is much larger (approximately 36 pt.) to emphasize to the readers that this story is very important, relevant information. This emphasis signals to the readers that it is a must read article. As readers scroll down the page, the type size of the headings becomes smaller and smaller. This emphasis strategy shows the readers that the more prominent and more important elements of the page are towards the top of the page (where readers do not have to scroll down). Thus, the emphasis strategy reinforces the hierarchical arrangement strategy mentioned above.

Clarity:

One strategy that BBC implements into its news page very well is clarity. The page invites readability to its site because there is a lot of white space in the background that keeps the foreground and the main content uncluttered and easy to read. There is not only a lot of white space in the margins (about 2.5-3 inches on either side), but there is also extra white space between the divisional lines and the different groups of information. The white space (supra-level, graphic mode) and the divisional lines between the text (inter-level, spatial and graphic modes) add clarity to the page because they invite the readers' eyes to scan content quickly to find what they are looking for in a timely manner. This clear visibility and quick scanning of text is also attributed to the left justified alignment (inter-level, spatial mode) of headings and body text that better organizes the textual elements for clarity. In addition, it allows the readers to continuously flow through the information from top to bottom or scan without much difficulty or confusion. This clarity strategy is especially helpful for BBC's cross-cultural context because the page is translated into 27 different languages and is used in many cultures around the world. Designing the page with a lot of blank space, visual room to navigate, and with visual consistency across the page will not turn off a diverse group of readers.

By keeping the typeface, the font size, and the font style consistent at the inter-level and at the intra-level textual mode, the reader can scan across the lines of text and headings with ease. At most, the web page does not seem to use more than two (maybe three) different fonts and typefaces for text and headings. This consistency is important because it makes it clearer and easier for the readers to pick up certain information and skim headlines on the page. Also, BBC utilizes a sans-serif typeface for the text and headlines (inter- and intra-level, textual mode). This choice in typeface contributes to the clarity and visibility of the document. Because there are no serifs and because there is empty room (lots of white space), the page is easier to read, there is less clutter to make the page more legible, and there is less visual noise as compared to the serif font that has tails on the tips of the letters.

Ethos and Tone:

The ethos and tone strategies for this web page are interrelated, and they are strongly portrayed in the supra-level of design in the textual, spatial, and graphic modes. For example, the BBC icon/logo in the top left corner of the header and the footer shows ethos. When people come to this page, the first thing they will see is the BBC icon, which establishes credibility and trust in the website because most people who come to the BBC news page are already regular readers of

the site (based on my audience assumptions in the rhetorical situation). By seeing a globally recognized icon, the regular visitors of the website (and even new visitors to the site) will automatically identify BBC as a professional, unbiased, and worthy news source. These attributes are reflected in the inter-level textual content as well, but they are mainly portrayed in the formal, professional visual design of the page. In addition, the globe image in the background of the header (supra-level, graphic mode) establishes the ethos of the corporation because the image relates to the fact that BBC is a credible, worldly news page that has a sophisticated voice that lacks bias or distortion. In other words, the image of the globe identifies BBC as a worldly news source that shares information objectively and accurately. Thus, it sets the ethos as well as the tone of the page. In conclusion, the header, the BBC icon, the globe image, and even the framing lines at the top and bottom of the page all suggest to the reader the level of formality and professionalism in which this corporation conducts itself on a daily basis.

Screen Shot of the Top of the Web Page:

Supra-level, spatial mode: the size of the BBC icon in the header is approximately ½ inch tall by 1.5 inches wide.

Supra-level, textual mode: “NEWS” is 40 pt., sans-serif, and all caps. It also shows **emphasis**.

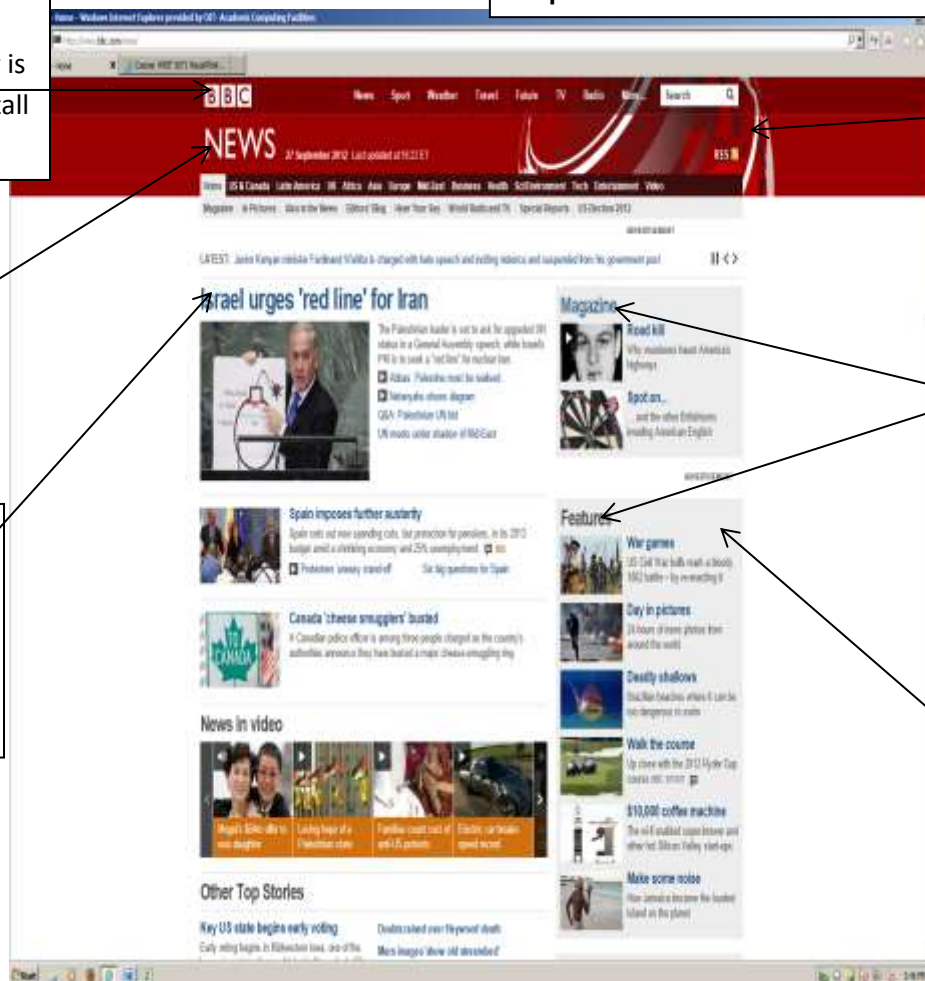
Inter-level, textual mode: H1 Heading is 36 pt., sans-serif, boldfaced, and hyperlinked.

Figure-ground contrast: red header with white background. It shows **emphasis and identification**.

Supra-level, graphic mode: the red globe in the header is placed for **emphasis and identification** reasoning. It also establishes **ethos**.

Inter-level, textual mode: H2 headings (“Magazine,” “Features,” “Comment & Analysis,” etc.) are 24 pt., sans-serif, boldfaced.

Inter-level, graphic mode: There are light gray shaded boxes highlighting the content in the side column for **emphasis and figure-ground contrast** to show the more **prominent information**.



Screen Shot of the Middle of the web page (scrolled down to middle):

Arrangement/grouping

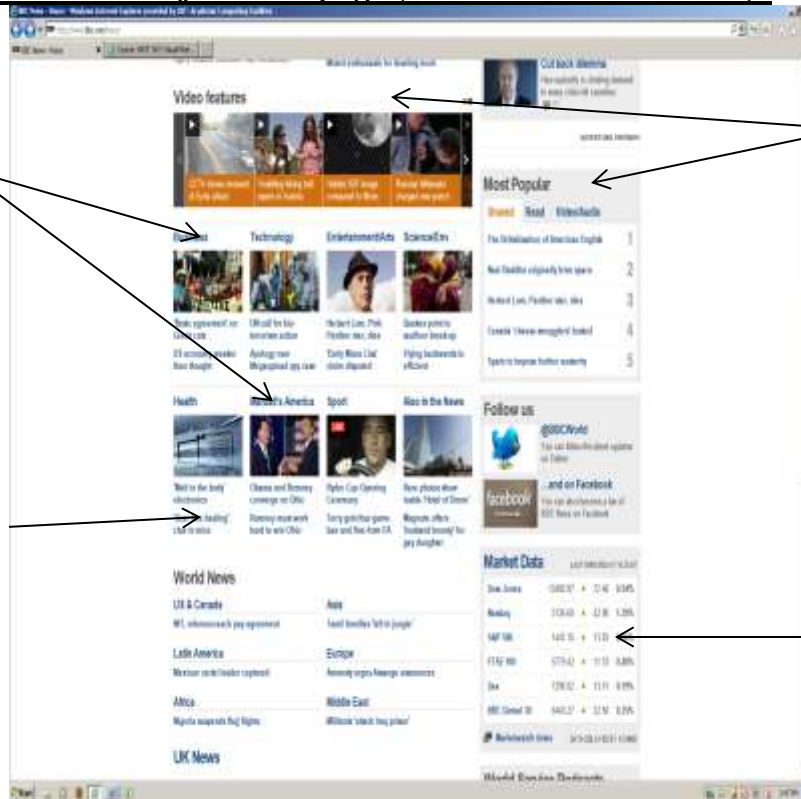
strategy: grouping all H3 headings together in close **proximity** to form a rectangular box.

Inter-level, textual mode:

H3 headings are 16 pt., sans-serif, boldfaced, and hyperlinked.

Inter-level, textual mode:

H4 headings are 12 pt., sans-serif, and hyperlinked underneath H3 headings.



Arrangement: text is divided into two columns like a traditional news source.

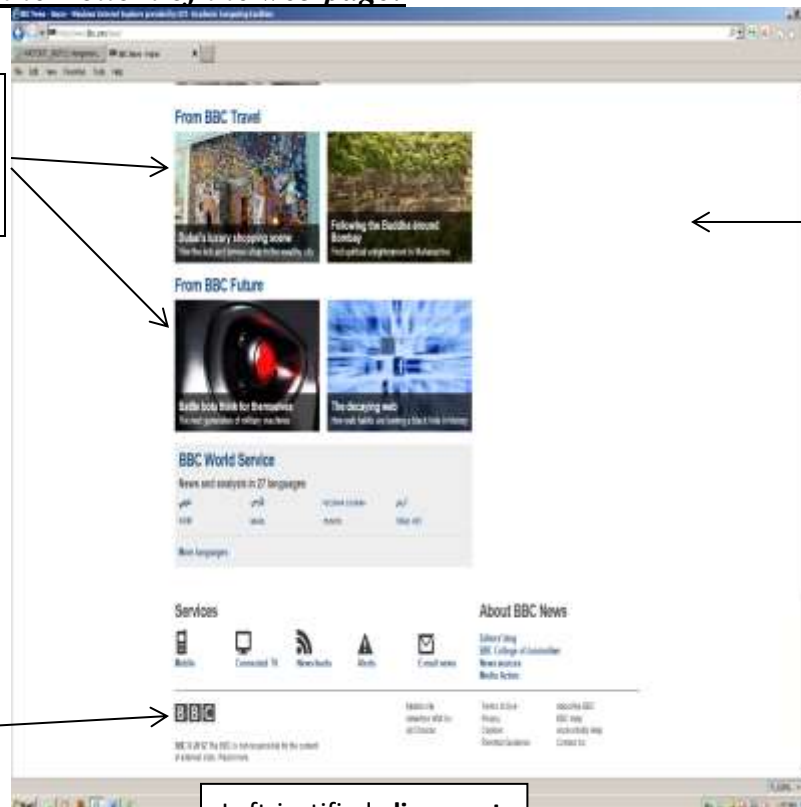
Supra-level, spatial mode: The dimensions of the "Market Data" data display are about 4 inches tall by 3 inches wide.

Screen Shot of the Bottom of the web page:

Grouping/arrangement

strategy: arranging similar content in close proximity to each other.

Inter-level, spatial mode: 2.5 to 3 inches of white space in the margins on either side of the text and images. White space adds **clarity and conciseness**.



BBC logo/icon establishes **the tone and the ethos** of the page. There is also **figure-ground contrast** between the gray background of the icon and the white background of the page.

Left-justified **alignment** of text, headings, and images add to the **clarity** of the page.