

Summary of proximity

When several items are in close **proximity** to each other, they become one visual unit rather than several separate units. Items relating to each other should be grouped together. Be conscious of where your eye is going: Where do you start looking; what path do you follow; where do you end up; after you've read it, where does your eye go next? You should be able to follow a logical progression through the piece, from a definite beginning to a definite end.

The basic purpose

The basic purpose of proximity is to **organize**. Other principles come into play as well, but simply grouping related elements together into closer proximity automatically creates organization. If the information is organized, it is more likely to be read and more likely to be remembered. As a by-product of organizing the communication, you also create more appealing (more organized) *white space* (designers' favorite thing).

How to get it

Squint your eyes slightly and **count** the number of visual elements on the page by counting the number of times your eye stops. If there are more than three to five items on the page (of course it depends on the piece), see which of the separate elements can be grouped together into closer proximity to become one visual unit.

What to avoid

- Avoid too many separate elements on a page.

- Avoid leaving equal amounts of white space between elements unless each group is part of a related subset.

- Avoid even a split second of confusion over whether a headline, subhead, caption, graphic, or the like belongs with its related material. Create a relationship among elements with close proximity.

- Don't create relationships with elements that don't belong together! If they are not *related*, move them apart from each other.

- Don't stick things in the corners or in the middle just because the space is empty.

When you create a flyer, a brochure, a newsletter, or whatever, you already know which pieces of information are logically connected, you *know* which information should be emphasized and what can be de-emphasized. Express that information graphically by grouping it.

Correspondences

Flowers, herbs, trees
Ancient Greeks and Romans
Historical characters

Quotes on motifs

Women
Death
Morning
Snakes

Language

Iambic pentameter
Rhetorical devices
Poetic devices
First lines

Collections

Small printings
Kitschy
Dingbats

In this list, everything is close to everything else, so it is difficult to see the relationships or the organization even with the headings in bold.

Correspondences

Flowers, herbs, trees
Ancient Greeks and Romans
Historical characters

Quotes on motifs

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Death
Morning
Snakes

Language

Iambic pentameter
Rhetorical devices
Poetic devices
First lines

Collections

Small printings
Kitschy volumes
Dingbats

The same list has been visually separated into groups by adding a little space between each set. I'm sure you already do this automatically—I'm just suggesting that you now do it **consciously** and thus with more strength.

It is critical that you learn to use the *paragraph space before and after* settings in your software, which is how you can apply exactly the amount of space between elements in a text block.

Above, I tightened the leading, or linespacing, between the listed items, bringing them into closer proximity to each other. This gave me enough room to set more space above each bold heading.

typefaces —
Arno Pro Regular
Bailey Sans Bold

Summary of alignment

Nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily. Every element should have some **visual connection** with another element on the page.

Unity is an important concept in design. To make all the elements on the page appear to be unified, connected, and interrelated, there needs to be some visual tie between the separate elements. Even if the separate elements are not physically close on the page, they can *appear* connected, related, unified with the other information simply by their placement. Take a look at design projects you like. No matter how wild and chaotic a well-designed piece may initially appear, you can always find alignments within.

The basic purpose

The basic purpose of alignment is to **unify and organize** the page. The result is similar to what happens when you (or your dog) pick up all the dog toys that were strewn around the living room and put them into one toy box.

It is often a strong alignment (combined, of course, with the appropriate typeface) that creates a sophisticated look, a formal look, a fun look, or a serious look.

How to get it

Be conscious of where you place elements. Always find something else on the page to align with, even if the two objects are physically far away from each other.

What to avoid

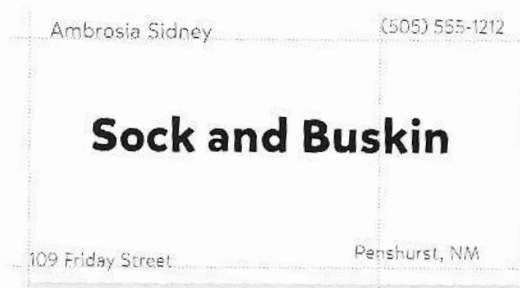
Avoid using more than one text alignment on the page (that is, don't center some text and right-align other text).

And please try very hard to break away from a centered alignment unless you are consciously trying to create a more formal, sedate presentation. Choose a centered alignment consciously, not by default.

Take a look at this business card, the same one you saw in the last chapter. Part of its problem is that nothing is aligned with anything else. In this little space, there are elements with three different alignments: flush left, flush right, and centered. The two groups of text in the upper corners are not lined up along the same baseline, nor are they aligned at the left or right edges with the two groups at the bottom of the card, which don't line up on the same baseline, either.



The elements on this card look like they were just thrown on and stuck. Not one of the elements has any connection with any other element on the card.



Get in the habit of drawing lines between elements to determine where the connections are lacking.

Take a moment to decide which of the items above should be grouped into closer proximity, and which should be separated.



By moving all the elements over to the right and giving them one alignment, the information is instantly more organized. (Of course, grouping the related elements into closer proximity is also critical.)

The text items now have a common boundary; this boundary connects the elements.

In the example (repeated below) that you saw in the Proximity chapter, the text is also aligned—it's aligned down the center. A centered alignment often appears a bit weak. If text is aligned, instead, on the left or the right, the invisible line that connects the text is much stronger because it has a hard vertical edge to follow. This gives left- and right-aligned text a cleaner and more dramatic look. Compare the two examples below, then we'll talk about it on the following pages.

Sock and Buskin

Ambrosia Sidney

109 Friday Street
Penshurst, NM
(505) 555-1212

This example has a nice arrangement with the text items grouped into logical proximity. The text is center-aligned over itself, and centered on the page.

Sock and Buskin

Ambrosia Sidney

109 Friday Street
Penshurst, NM
(505) 555-1212

Although centered is a legitimate alignment, the edges are "soft"; you don't really see the strength of the line.

Sock and Buskin

Ambrosia Sidney

109 Friday Street
Penshurst, NM
(505) 555-1212

This has the same logical arrangement as above, but it is now right-aligned. Can you see the "hard" edge on the right?

There is a strong invisible line connecting the edges of these two groups of text. You can actually see the edge. **The strength of this edge is what gives strength to the layout.**

Summary of repetition

A **repetition** of visual elements throughout the design unifies and strengthens a piece by tying together otherwise separate parts. Repetition is very useful on one-page pieces, and is critical in multi-page documents (where we often just call it *being consistent*).

The basic purpose

The purpose of repetition is to **unify** and to **add visual interest**. Don't underestimate the power of the visual interest of a page—if a piece looks interesting, it is more likely to be read.

How to get it

Think of repetition as being consistent, which I'm sure you do already. Then **push the existing consistencies a little further**—can you turn some of those consistent elements into part of the conscious graphic design, as with the headline? Do you use a 1-point rule at the bottom of each page or under each heading? How about using a 4-point rule instead to make the repetitive element stronger and more dramatic?

Then take a look at the possibility of adding elements whose sole purpose is to create a repetition. Do you have a numbered list of items? How about using a distinctive font or a reversed number, and then repeating that treatment throughout every numbered list in the publication? At first, simply find *existing* repetitions and then strengthen them. As you get used to the idea and the look, start to *create* repetitions to enhance the design and the clarity of the information.

Repetition is like accenting your clothes. If a woman wears a lovely black evening dress with a chic black hat, she might accent her dress with red heels, red lipstick, and a tiny red pin.

What to avoid

Avoid repeating the element so much that it becomes annoying or overwhelming. Be conscious of the value of contrast (see the next chapter and especially the section on contrasting type).

For instance, if the woman were to wear the black evening dress with a red hat, red earrings, red lipstick, a red scarf, a red handbag, red shoes, and a red coat, the repetition would not be a stunning and unifying contrast—it would be overwhelming and the focus would be confused.

Repetition helps organize the information; it helps guide the reader through the pages; it helps unify disparate parts of the design. Even on a one-page document, repetitive elements establish a sophisticated continuity and can pull together the entire piece. If you are creating several one-page documents that are part of a comprehensive package, it is critical that you employ repetition.

The Mad Hatter

- Wonderland, England

Objective

- To murder Time

Education

- Dodgson Elementary
- Carroll College

Employment

- Singer to Her Majesty
- Tea Party Coordinator
- Expert witness

Favorite Activities

- Nonsensical poetry
- Unanswerable riddles

References available upon request.

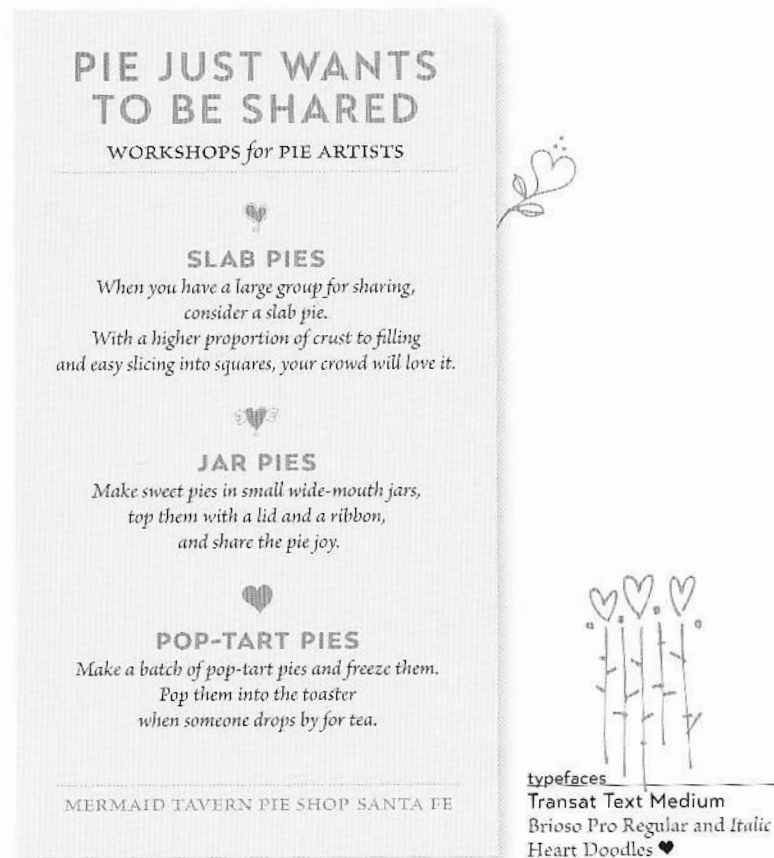
Repetitions:

Bold typeface
Light typeface
Square bullets
Indents
Spacing
Alignments

Besides having strong repetitive elements that make it very clear exactly what is going on here, this person might also want to incorporate one or more of these elements into the design of his cover letter.

If there is an element that strikes your fancy, go with it! Perhaps it's a piece of clip art or a picture font. Feel free to add something completely new simply for the purpose of repetition. Or take a simple element and use it in various ways—different sizes, colors, angles.

Sometimes the repeated items are not exactly the same objects, but objects so closely related that their connection is very clear.



**PIE JUST WANTS
TO BE SHARED**

WORKSHOPS *for* PIE ARTISTS

♥

SLAB PIES

*When you have a large group for sharing,
consider a slab pie.*

*With a higher proportion of crust to filling
and easy slicing into squares, your crowd will love it.*

♥

JAR PIES

*Make sweet pies in small wide-mouth jars,
top them with a lid and a ribbon,
and share the pie joy.*

♥

POP-TART PIES

*Make a batch of pop-tart pies and freeze them.
Pop them into the toaster
when someone drops by for tea.*

MERMAID TAVERN PIE SHOP SANTA FE

typefaces
Transat Text Medium
Brioso Pro Regular and *Italic*
Heart Doodles ♥

It's fun and effective to pull an element out of a graphic and repeat it. The little heart motif could be applied to other related material, such as envelopes, response cards, balloons, and everything would be a cohesive unit, even without repeating the same heart.

Train your Designer Eye: Name at least five other repetitive elements on this little card. (Suggestions on page 227.)

This card uses a centered alignment. What was done to help it avoid looking amateur?

Summary of contrast

Contrast on a page draws our eyes to it; our eyes *like* contrast. If you are putting two elements on the page that are not the same (such as two typefaces or two line widths), they cannot be *similar*—for contrast to be effective, the two elements must be very different.

Contrast is kind of like matching wall paint when you need to cover a ding—you can't *sort of* match the color; either you match it exactly or you repaint the entire wall. As my grandfather, an avid horseshoe player, always said, “*Almost* only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.”

The basic purpose

Contrast has two purposes, and they're inextricable from each other. One purpose is to **create an interest on the page**—if a page is interesting to look at, it is more likely to be read. The other is to aid in the **organization** of the information. A reader should be able to instantly understand the way the information is organized, the logical flow from one item to another. The contrasting elements should never serve to confuse the reader or to create a focus that is not supposed to be a focus.

How to get it

Add contrast through your typeface choices (see the second half of this book), line thicknesses, colors, shapes, sizes, space, etc. It is easy to find ways to add contrast, and it's probably the most fun and satisfying way to add visual interest. The important thing is to be strong.

What to avoid

If you're going to contrast, do it with strength. Avoid contrasting a sort-of-heavy line with a sort-of-heavier line. Avoid contrasting brown text with black headlines. Avoid using two or more typefaces that are similar. If the items are not exactly the same, **make them different!**

The example below is repeated from Chapter 2, where we discussed proximity. It's nice and clean, but notice how much of a difference a little contrast can make.



Remember this postcard from page 19? It gains a little more strength with a strong left alignment.



We gain even more contrast by letting go of the pale purple paper and adding some strong purple on the bright white.

Train your Designer Eye: Name at least five differences between these two cards. (Suggestions are on page 228).

Review of the Four Design Principles

There is one more general guiding principle of Design (and of Life):
Don't be a wimp.

Don't be afraid to create your Design (or your Life) with plenty of blank space—it's rest for the eyes (and the Soul).

Don't be afraid to be asymmetrical, to uncenter your format—it often makes the effect stronger. It's okay to do the unexpected.

Don't be afraid to make words very large or very small; don't be afraid to speak loudly or to speak in a whisper. Both can be effective in the right situation.

Don't be afraid to make your graphics very bold or very minimal, as long as the result complements or reinforces your design or your attitude.

Let's take the rather dull report cover you see below and apply each of the four design principles in turn.

Your Attitude is Your Life

Lessons from raising three children
as a single mom

Robin Williams

October 9

This is typical but rather dull: centered, evenly spaced to fill the page. If you didn't read English, you might think there are six separate topics on this page. Each line seems an element unto itself.

typeface — — —
Times New Roman

Proximity

If items are related to each other, group them into closer proximity. Separate items that are *not* directly related to each other. Vary the space between to indicate the closeness or the importance of the relationship. Besides creating a nicer look to the page, it also communicates more clearly.

Your Attitude is Your Life

Lessons from
raising three children
as a single mom

Robin Williams
October 9

By putting the title and subtitle close to each other, we now have one well-defined unit rather than six apparently unrelated units. It is now clear that those two topics are closely related to each other.

When we move this byline and date farther away, it becomes instantly clear that although this is related information and possibly important, it is not part of the title.

Your Attitude is Your Life

Lessons from
raising three children
as a single mom

Robin Williams
October 9

This is just an example of the huge difference a font can make in the visual impression of a piece. Everything else is exactly the same—size, spacing, etc.

typeface _____
Modernica Light

Alignment

Be conscious about every element you place on the page. To keep the entire page unified, align every object with an edge of some other object. If your alignments are strong, *then* you can *choose* to break an alignment occasionally and it won't look like a mistake.

Your Attitude is Your Life

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October 9

The example on the opposite page is also aligned—a centered alignment. As you can see, though, a flush left or flush right alignment (as shown here) gives a stronger edge, a stronger line for your eye to follow.

The tension created by a flush left or flush right alignment often tends to impart a more sophisticated look than does a centered alignment.

Your Attitude is Your Life

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Robin Williams
October 9

Even though the author's name is far from the title, there is a visual connection, an invisible line, between the two elements because of the strong alignment to each other.

Repetition

Repetition is a stronger form of being consistent. Look at the elements you already repeat (bullets, typefaces, lines, colors, etc.); see if it might be appropriate to make one of these elements stronger and use it as a repetitive element. Repetition also helps strengthen the reader's sense of recognition of the entity represented by the design.

YOUR ATTITUDE IS YOUR LIFE

Lessons from
raising three children
as a single mom

ROBIN WILLIAMS
October 9

The typeface and color in the title is repeated in the author's name, which strengthens their connection even though they are physically far apart on the page.

typeface _____
panoptica egyptian
Hypatia Sans Light

Your Attitude is Your Life

.....
Lessons from
raising three children
as a single mom

.....
Robin Williams
October 9

Here, the dotted rule becomes a repetitive element. Even though these are not the same length, a dotted line is distinct enough to be used in all sorts of ways throughout the document and still be seen as a repetitive element.

Contrast

Would you agree that the examples on this page attract your eye more than the examples on the opposite page? It's the contrast, the strong black versus white, that does it. You can add contrast in many ways. The second half of this book discusses the specific topic of contrasting type, which is the basis of all great graphic design.

Your Attitude is Your Life

Lessons from
raising three children
as a single mom

Robin Williams

October 9

Adding contrast to this was simply a matter of adding the black boxes.

On the opposite page, the dark red font acts as a contrast as well as a repetition.

YOUR ATTITUDE IS YOUR LIFE

Lessons from
raising three children
as a single mom

ROBIN WILLIAMS

October 9

You can also add contrast through your font choice. Here the contrast is not just the heavy black face on the white paper, but also the contrast of a thick font versus its light version, as well as all caps versus lowercase.

In both of these versions, the heavy font and the caps also act as repetitions.

typeface
Modernico Light and Heavy