



Eight Simple Rules on Effective Document Design

1. Communicate your purpose

Start by defining the purpose of your design. Are you designing the document for attention or for transparency? Design for attention when your message must compete for your reader's attention. Use the appropriate colors, type and striking visual images to "wow" your readers. Design for transparency when you want to make it simple for readers to quickly understand your message.

2. Simplify your message

Complicated information can be simplified in many ways. One technique is to insert subheads. Subheads guide readers through long articles by breaking them into easily read two- and three-paragraph topics. You can also simplify by replacing text with tables, charts and other graphics.

3. Use selective emphasis

Good design reveals your message's information hierarchy. Important headlines, for example, attract more attention than secondary headlines. Remember, though, never to overuse emphasis. Reserve emphasis for the most important parts of your message. Pull quotes, short quotations used as graphic devices to summarize surrounding material and draw attention to it, add emphasis, while breaking up large amounts of body copy.

4. Add contrast to add interest

Add visual contrast to your documents by using white space, typography and size. Setting headlines in a noticeably different typeface and type size will stimulate your readers' eyes. Size of graphic elements can also add contrast to your pages. Also, the size difference visually communicates which element is more important.

5. Don't overdo the design

Use a few colors and typefaces well. With hundreds of colors and typefaces at your disposal, it's easy to obliterate your message. The best looking documents use minimal colors and color effects.

6. Project the right image

Use consistent type, color and design elements for each document to ensure a distinct and easily identifiable "look" that distinguishes you from your competitors. Your design reinforces your message by projecting an image that creates the appropriate emotional response. The layout, typeface and color choices create documents that project images your readers relate to on an emotional level. Depending on how your design presents your image, readers may perceive your message as professional, friendly, warm, corporate, impersonal, cheap or expensive.

7. Enhance your efficiency and production

Design tools such as document templates, styles and color palettes can be shared between documents to enhance efficiency and speed up production schedules. Use templates to save time and increase consistency by eliminating the need to reinvent the design wheel every time you start a new project.

8. Edit without compromise

Design succeeds by eliminating words rather than reducing type size or line spacing to "fit everything in." Therefore, at every step in designing your next print communication, ask yourself:

- Is it easy for readers to understand my message?
- Does my design project a unique, appropriate and consistent image?