Sheila Waters

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Intentionally Blank
Design and Layout, Part 4

Unless the principles of good design are applied to specific problems of layout, they remain theoretical. The five principles, as set out in Part 3, are unity, balance, contrast, emphasis, proportion, and movement. In this segment I attempt to explore how these principles can be put to work for utilitarian projects such as awards, certificates, invitations, and flyers, and for pieces using prose and poetry. Thumbnail sketches contrast successful text arrangements with poor design solutions. Each example represents a specific principle, although other principles may be present.

Unity
Unity is achieved by using the three components: proximity, grouping, and repetition. Unity, the aspect of design that embraces all the others will always be present in a successful composition though is not illustrated specifically in this article.

Balance
A: Symmetrical Balance
Radial and the more usual bilateral (mirror image), for the most formal arrangements. Symmetry is suitable for awards, resolutions, certificates, declarations, and for expressing completeness, with no sense of movement

1. Optical centering
Finding the vertical center of a sheet is simple, but the actual horizontal center optically appears to be lower than it really is. If all margins are equal, the bottom margin seems too small. Traditionally, the bottom margin of a mat is deeper than top or sides, in order to prevent the appearance of a picture “falling out.” Mass-produced mats have equal margins so they can be used either vertically or horizontally, thus sacrificing the sense of balance.

Optical center is moved high enough to make the areas above and below it appear to be equal (Fig. 1). This is also seen in capital letters, as crossbars for H, E, and F are on optical center and the upper bowl of B is smaller than the lower bowl.

A centered text, forming a hanging shape, the lines ragged left and right, is more pleasing when the weight is concentrated above horizontal center, with dominant words near the top, rather than below. These may be given emphasis of size and/or weight (Fig. 2). The classically beautiful human face is egg shaped, with the greatest width across the ears and brows, with the jaw line forming the narrow end of the egg (Fig. 3A). If the jowls are the widest and the forehead narrower, we find the face unattractive (Fig. 3B). Likewise, if a layout sags, with more weight
and width below center, the arrangement may feel uncomfortable (Fig. 3b).

2. Margins
Because margins help to isolate the piece from its surroundings, they help to focus attention. Normally that attention needs to be held without being distracted by parts of a design coming too close to the frame looking as it if were trying to escape. In Figure 4a the eye moves comfortably around the text, keeping it within the frame. In Figure 4b movement is trapped
because there are no side margins allowing the eye to move. The block of text feels like a huge piece of furniture in a room, blocking passage between the two ends.

Harmony is preserved when the shape of the text follows the shape of the frame (or mat window), rather than being in opposition (unless that is the specific intention). It is not necessary for every line to extend to fit the edge of a text, as long as the main ones do. In Figure 5 the first of each pair is comfortable, while the second looks unsettled because of the awkwardly shaped negative areas – the text shape is unsympathetic to the frame.

B. ASYMMETRICAL BALANCE

Less formal balance of stable equilibrium without mirror image. Examples include: flush left or right, center balance (but not mirror image), tabulated, and nesting.

1. Flush left: This uses the steel yard or see-saw principle of the heavier weight nearer to the fulcrum (Part 1). The small heavy weight of a logo or decorative element activates the larger margin and balances the larger, lighter text area. This arrangement is suitable for less formal awards and also for quotations (Fig. 6).

2. Center balance: This can be more formal, though is less so than a mirror image format. It is especially useful for quotations. Lines are placed asymmetrically, maybe alternately to the left and right or an invisible central “pole” giving the outside shape of the text the impression of symmetry (Fig. 7a). Avoid trickling to one side – this upsets the balance and the eye is led out of the frame (Fig. 7b). A pair of lines can be seen as if one, pulled apart width-wise, or pushed together, according to how long the paired lines need to be. For example: several consecutive short lines will form an unpleas-
ing "waist" (Fig. 8a). This can be overcome by pulling them apart and overlapping them less (Fig. 8b). Avoid making any consecutive lines align with each other at either end, as a static block effect will occur, spoiling the river-like flow down the sheet.

This flowing arrangement can be used for a prose quotation as well as poetry, if long lines are broken into two or more shorter ones. Normally I begin a new line, with its capital letter, where the poet has done so, to maintain the poem's rhythms. I do not however necessarily feel obliged to write out a poem flush left, or with alternate lines indented, following the exact format of the printed page, as it can restrict calligraphic expression of the words too much. Calligraphers can form a bridge between poet and reader by respecting, interpreting, and clarifying a text, rather than merely using a text as a means toward self-expression, without regard to the specific line breaks indicated by the poet.

3. Tabulated layouts are a more lively development of flush left, allowing more scope for emphasis and contrast. They may have a bias to
left or right, but the total look should be in balance. Negative areas left behind when long lines are extended should have interesting proportions relative to each other vertically. The eye seeks order out of chaos, so searches perpendicularly, expecting matching extensions to form a pattern. One tabulation should predominate to hold the rest of the piece together (Fig. 9).

... Nesting (my own term for want of a better description): This occurs when two pieces of copy appear side by side. In its simplest form, two rectangular columns of text of equal or unequal width appear together, as in a two-column page of a medieval manuscript. They appear as one, divided by a narrow margin between, with wider outer margins (Fig. 10a). If all three vertical margins are equal, the columns tend to pull away from each other (Fig. 10b). The same principle applies to a conventional book spread: the two inner margins (on either side of the gutter) will equal the width of one side margin (Fig. 10c), so that the two single text columns appear as one, within the surrounding top, outside and bottom margins. Columns of unequal width follow the same principle (Fig. 10d).

Freer nesting formats more closely reflect the term, with many variations of the fulcrum principle possible. In all cases, the river of white space of the inner margin is kept as narrow as possible so that the whole is unified (Fig. 11). However, base lines of the two sides are preferably not aligned across the two columns so that the left side is read before the right and not straight across. Aim for a good contrast of weight and sizes of the two areas, with a balanced overall shape. The title, opening words, or an important line of text repeated, can be emphasized in the same or contrasting style (Fig. 12). Fig. 13 has several faults: there is insufficient contrast of weight between the two sides, the columns are too similar in area.
I thought the sun
rose in your eyes
The first time ever I saw you
And felt your heart beat close to mine
I thought our joy would fill the earth
And last till the end of time
And last till the end of time

EWAN MCCOLL

To dedicate forty years of marriage December 27, 1999
Charles and Patsy Forrester

An example of "trembling" (see Fig. 11)
Large uncial in deep violet with dots in gold leaf
Text passes through color wheel from orange through reds, purples, blues, greens,
yellow-ocher to orange, line by line.
larger letters of the same style  heavier letters of the same style  large and heavy letters of the same style
CAPITALS are dominant forms, attracting attention  Small, but heavy CAPITALS are dominant forms  Small, same weight CAPITALS, called small caps, can be used for quiet emphasis

Fig. 14

REGINALD B. SMITH

Fig. 15

Reginald B. Smith
to be interesting, and white holes between them create a distracting focus, trapping the eye.

Contrast
The variables of contrast were covered in Part 1. They are: size, shape, position, direction, number, intervals or spaces, and density or texture. Contrast creates interest and liveliness in the arrangements of the design elements and adds clarity to meaning. Contrast should be clearly defined — not timid and uncertain. If possible, avoid equal proportions of text areas (unless verses of equal numbers of lines, as in a poem), equal proportions of weight differences, negative areas of white space, etc. Use contrast to emphasize dominance of the main idea, and to give focus in order to establish priorities within the text matter.

A. TECHNIQUES FOR PRODUCING CONTRAST WITHIN THE LAYOUT
1. Alter density by using larger letters of the same style, heavier letters of the same style, or larger and heavier letters of the same style (Fig. 14).
2. Use capitals in similar variations, large, medium, or small. Roman capitals, simple or complex, contrast well with almost any minuscule style, even Gothic.
3. Use a different, though compatible style. For instance, uncial is a rounded capital form that would be compatible with italic if their relative sizes were different.

With the exception of the Roman minuscule, contrasting with its matching italic (as we see in type), mixing two or more minuscule styles in one piece generally creates confusion rather than interest. Well designed book typography illustrates this point well. A typical text typeface provides the basic lowercase (minuscules), matching italics, matching capitals for both, and a set of small capitals of similar weight, the height of the body of the lowercase. Each font is available in a wide range of point sizes and different weights,
light, medium, and bold – thus offering a wide variety of combinations within a single style. Calligraphers can adapt any calligraphic style in a similar way to create harmony rather than confusion.

4. Contrast with color using whole lines of colored writing rather than over-emphasizing the first letters of several words (this produces a “spotty” effect). For example, in typical Victorian style engrossing, the initial letters of a name are heavily decorated even within boxes, but the placing of them in a layout is purely arbitrary and can upset the balances. The whole name, written larger than the text, in a color with light touches of decoration added consistently throughout, can be much more manageable and effective (Fig. 13).

**Emphasis**

Emphasis is a form of contrast but it relies more on content and the meaning of the words. Determine the kind and degree of emphasis needed. Strong contrast with large letters makes the words “shout,” while small capitals can give quiet emphasis as in a conversation. It can be helpful to act out a layout by reading it aloud and shouting or whispering according to word sizes and weights. This technique can have a wonderfully moderating effect on over-enthusiastic use of emphasizing important words. A hierarchy is necessary to prevent confusion and establish priorities using the variables of contrast.

**Proportion**

The golden mean, or golden numbers (the universal law of proportion), is very helpful in placing emphasis and distributing groupings of a text in an interesting way (Fig. 16).

**Movement**

Diagonals are dynamic, creating movement and excitement, but will lead the eye out of the
frame if not stabilized with countermovement (Figs. 17a,b,c,d).

Further points to consider
1. Symmetrical and asymmetrical elements are basically incompatible, so combining them in a layout is best avoided by the novice. Asymmetrical elements in a layout appear to be "having a conversation" – balance being achieved by careful consideration of their relationships with each other and each part needing a counterbalance. Symmetry on the other hand implies completeness and self-sufficiency – symmetrical elements tend to isolate themselves – they do not "converse" well with asymmetrical ones, thus splitting the focus.

In Figure 18a the two elements pull away from each other making two separate statements. This is made worse by an overwide inner margin. When both elements are asymmetrical (Fig. 18b), the two elements are unified making one statement, aided by a narrow inner margin. Further examples can be seen in Figs. 19-22.
Fig. 23  
Dispersed elements
Integratesd elements

Fig. 24  
Isolated
More integrated

Fig. 25  
Isolated
Integrated

Fig. 26  
Add a vertical line or ribbon with seal to unify an award

Fig. 27  
Line added, or "line" of space without contrast of weight

Fig. 28  
Unbroken lines, all-over texture
Lines broken into two sections, but all-over texture remains both dull when compared with Fig. 27
Better with a weight contrast
Text is isolated, illustrations lead eye away from text.

Don't stop abrupt better to stop short or pass across it.
2. Improving integration in layouts: Figures 23-28 are examples of dispersed elements and improved integration. Avoid graphic elements that detract from the focus of the text and move the eye away from it (Figs. 29 and 30).

Avoid joining up vertical elements to “make patterns” (Fig. 31), and flourished tails of one line linking with ascenders of the next. Both destroy the natural horizontal reading motion. Be careful with flourishes in general, especially those which distract the eye from the focus of a piece. Remember the maxim, “when in doubt, leave it out,” and “keep it simple, less is more.”

Place the attribution (author’s name) away from the text so that it is not part of it, yet belongs to it; perhaps as much as two line spaces apart. The title generally calls for more interlinear space than the rest of the text (Fig 32).

3. Writing over backgrounds: Avoid colliding lines of text with the edges of a background shape. Instead, cross such edges, otherwise the background shape comes forward and appears to be in the same plane as the writing “floating” above it.

Avoid backgrounds that conflict in weight with the writing on top. This is a common error, especially in printed pieces – even when more than one color is employed. The tonal value of the background needs to be much lighter than one might assume and a half-tone screen should be of a low percentage. An area of lettering is never solid black, as the counters, letter spaces, and line spaces make even heavy lettering far less than 50% black in tonal value.

4. Illustrations: Allow plenty of air around the text and place the edges of an illustration further from the text than the depth of its interline space.

5. Writing as a border pattern: For a rectangle, if possible, begin at the bottom left corner, moving clockwise to the lower right corner if the sentence is continuous. The bottom line should be complete in itself – a description, title or attribution can be appropriate (Fig. 34).

6. Writing on curves and circles: When writing on a curve, make each letter radiate from a center as if the curve is an arc of a circle. In other words, each letter forms the same angle with the point at which it meets the curved baseline. Imagine the letters undulating like the hairs of a furry caterpillar (Fig. 35).

When writing a continuous sentence around a circle it is easier to read if the text begins at the bottom and moves clockwise. Because the bulk of the writing will be in an upright position – with only the first and last few words upside down, the meaning will easily be grasped. The compressions will be at the baseline (Fig. 36a). If there are two separate phrases, these can be split so that both parts are right reading (Fig 36b). The compressions will be at the baseline for the upper phrase, and at the waistline (or upper edge, if caps) for the lower phrase. In either instance the downstrokes should radiate from the center. Make all downstrokes radiate from the center.

In the next edition (Part 5), some finished pieces will be analyzed and discussed from the point of view of expressing meaning, using the “pure” approach of allowing the letterforms and their treatment alone conjure mood and atmosphere.

An internationally known teacher and calligraphic artist, Sheila Waters trained at the Royal College of Art and was elected a fellow of the prestigious London Society of Scribes and Illuminators in 1951. Her work has been widely exhibited and is owned by royalty, private collectors, libraries, and institutions around the world.

See Design and Layout, Parts 1-3 for further explanations and examples.