Document Design

Dieter Rams, a famous German designer whose work has influenced Apple’s design aesthetic, is noted for his formula: “Good design is as little design as possible” (Rams).

As a document designer, you want to
- Attract and interest readers
- Put information into chunks
- Guide readers to information they want or need
- Increase the amount of information the reader remembers

Chunking Similar Information Together

Start by thinking about what information goes together. Should the information be arranged in chronological order? From most important to least important?

Putting information in chunks like the revised Alamo handout helps your reader to find the information he or she wants or needs without having to read the whole document. Adding visual clues like the bulleted lists also makes our document easier to read.
Setting the Margins
Use a 1” margin on the tops, bottom and sides of the document. Make your right margin uneven, or ragged. When you make the right margin even, or justified, you can create odd pockets of blank text. Our eyes tend to follow those blanks down the page. This effect is called a “river.” A “river” shouldn’t run through your document.

Keeping Text Left-Flush
We read from left to right, so start all of your text left flush. Don’t indent. Instead, skip one double space between paragraphs. That’s called modified block style. This handout is written in modified block style.

Choosing Typefaces
Use a 12-point font. Anything smaller will be difficult to see.

People who read English fluently don’t really sound words out. Instead, they read based on the shape of the word. Some typefaces have serifs, those little “feet” or decorative pieces on the ends of each character.

Serifs give words more shape, which makes them easier to read. There’s no typeface called “serif,” but many typefaces have serifs on them, like
- Times New Roman
- Bookman Old Style
- Garamond
Limit yourself to no more than two typefaces per document. Choose one typeface for the majority of your text and one typeface for your headings.

party

Look at the word party. We know that those five letters in that order mean what you’d like to be doing right now instead of reading about document design. 😊 That word has a lot of shape. There are letters that ascend (the “t”) and letters that descend (the “p” and the “y”).

PARTY

Now look at the same word in all capital letters. Not as much shape. Use a combination of upper and lower case letters. Not only is this easier to read because the words have more shape, but some readers interpret all capitals as shouting, especially in online documents.

party

Now look at the same word underlined. We’ve cut off all those wonderful ascenders and descenders. Underlining actually makes words harder to read.

Your most important consideration when you choose a typeface is whether you can easily read it or not. Sometimes you have to type quite a few words in order to see if the typeface is really easy to read.

Bleeding Cowboy typeface is really popular right now.

Comic Sans is rather controversial because it’s so casual and overused. Some people really object to it.

Curlz is cute—for a toddler’s birthday party.

Edwardian Script is hard to read, as are most cursive typefaces.

Remember—you want the reader to pay attention to your message, not to the “cool” typeface.
Using a Sans Serif Typeface for Headings and Subheadings

Use a sans serif typeface for headings and subheadings. “Sans” is French for “without.” Sans serif typefaces don’t have those little feet on them.

There’s no typeface called “sans serif,” but there are some typefaces with the word “sans” in them, like the controversial Comic Sans. Here are some examples of sans serif typefaces:

- Verdana
- Arial
- Myriad Pro

Headings create visual breaks, which make your document look more manageable. Because there’s usually less information in a heading than there is in the majority of the text, we’re not as concerned about the shape of the words. That’s why we use a sans serif typeface for headings.

The headings in this handout are in a sans serif typeface. Notice how we’ve capitalized the first letter of each word except for articles (“a,” “an,” and “the”), small prepositions (like “to,” “of,” and “from”), and conjunctions (“for,” “and,” “nor,” “but,” “or,” “yet,” and “so”).

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**Denton’s Best Value in Specialty Pizza**

UNT students are always on a budget and looking for value pizza. We will compare three specialty pizza joints around town. These independent restaurants all have excellent reputations as top-quality pizza providers for hungry, broke college students in a hurry. We decided to find out which one gives the best bang for your buck.

**Overview of the Options**

We tested three specialty pizza restaurants:

- Cracked Crust
- Mo’s Pizza
- Luigi’s Pizza

**Statement of the Criteria**

We chose the best value in pizzas by comparing:

- Time from order to receipt
- Price per slice
- Area of slice

These criteria represent the needs of UNT’s busy, thrifty students in getting a good deal on pizza.

**Method of Gathering Information**

We visited each of the three pizza joints and placed a single order for a slice of pizza. After ordering, we started a timer and recorded how long it took until receiving the pizza. Then we determined the price per slice by dividing the total price by the number of slices in one standard order. We measured the length of one slice of pizza and determined the area of the whole pizza. We divided that number by the total number of slices in a whole pizza to find the area of one slice.

**Comparison of Options**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Pizza Restaurant</th>
<th>Time from Order to Receipt (in Minutes)</th>
<th>Price per Slice</th>
<th>Area of Slice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cracked Crust</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>$3.00</td>
<td>29.14 inches²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo’s Pizza</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>$3.28</td>
<td>29.25 inches²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luigi’s Pizza</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>$3.46</td>
<td>29.25 inches²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

We recommend Cracked Crust for busy students on a budget. It has the quickest receipt time and the cheapest price. Costing only 80¢ per square inch of pizza, Cracked Crust also takes first place for cost-effectiveness compared to Mo’s Pizza and Luigi’s Pizza. However, if you like larger slices, go to Luigi’s Pizza.

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Document with Sans Serif Headings
Using Elements to Help the Reader’s Eyes Move Naturally
There are many things our eyes and brains do naturally. We want to mimic those things in our design to enhance the effectiveness of our document. For example, we read English from top to bottom, from left to right. It’s our natural inclination to scan from the top left corner of a document down to the bottom right corner.

Designers call that scanning a “Z” pattern. “Z” patterns are really effective for
- Flyers
- Posters
- Covers of documents
Our brains also like things in groups of threes. Remember that the Greeks thought the number three was a perfect number and that the triangle was a perfect shape. If you drew a line between the pictures in this brochure, the lines would form a triangle.

In design, this is called a “visual triangle.” The visual triangle makes our view circulate through the whole document. This increases the likelihood that our reader will read the whole thing. You can have more than one visual triangle at a time. You can have one between graphic elements, between headings, and between the text itself.
Using the CRAP Model for Design

Good design consists of

• Contrast
• Repetition
• Alignment
• Proximity

It’s a funny name for principles that work in design. Let’s look at each one individually.

Using Contrast as a Design Element

Look at the contrast in the ad below. It’s pretty simple, but really effective. The heading creates visual breaks. You could create a similarly effective document in Microsoft Word. See—you don’t have to have expensive software or mad design skills to make an effective looking document!

Black text on a white background gives the best contrast. Keep in mind that colors on the yellow-orange spectrum tend to give poor contrast for text elements.
Using Repetition as a Design Element
In addition to things in groups of three (or in odd numbers), our brains really like repetition. Here’s some really simple repetition with the circles.
Using Alignment as a Design Element

Keeping things aligned makes them “read” as one thing. Our brains can handle one item more easily than trying to make sense of lots of jumbled up elements.

Look at the original document. How many alignments do you see? Now look at the revision. Same words. Same subject. One alignment.

Create the illusion of a left vertical alignment by keeping all of the text left-flush. Remember that we read English from left to right. You’re helping your reader read more quickly by maintaining that left alignment.
Using Proximity as a Design Element
Proximity means “nearness.” It helps us understand which things go together.

This ad really has it all.

**Contrast**—Look at the great contrast with the circles, the dark text, and the light background. The two most important things—“1918” and Richard Phillip Feynman—are prominently contrasted.

**Repetition**—The circles with the split in the middle create repetition. Super simple, really effective.

**Alignment**—Look at how the text is aligned with the split in the circles.

**Proximity**—The text is all grouped together in the same area of the ad.
Works Cited


Graphics Credits (In Order of Appearance)


“A River Runs Through It” Typeface Example. Unknown.


