Advanced GRAPHIC DESIGN

DESIGN

style

GUIDE
There are as many varying grid structures employed in visual communications solutions, as there are design problems! There is no sure-fire “recipe for success” or “kit-in-a-box” which can be universally applied to all design projects.

FUNCTION OF THE GRID

A grid functions as the underlying graphic structure, plan, or backbone for placement, organization and flow of a design. Serving just as an architectural blueprint for a building design project, the design grid is visible during the planning and process stages – but disappears after the project is completed. A grid is the visible planning structure by which invisible, intangible concepts are transformed into visible, tangible visual communication.

Repetitive elements — those which reoccur throughout the document — include both text and graphics. Throughout a comprehensive project such as a book, the grid is applied to the placement of repetitively similar text elements, such as chapter headings. This provides as additional opportunity to develop a typographic style guide, assigning consistent type attributes (typographic size, weight, color, leading, all capitals, etc.) to all chapter headlines, wherever they appear.

The applied grid acts as a logical system for organization of major design components — to establish consistency, legibility and directional flow of both editorial and visual content.

The grid must function efficiently at both extremes of the visual communication problem, working well for both the most complex and least complex page, document or graphic.

TEXTUAL CONTENT

Within any graphic design project, key textual blocks are specified within a typographic hierarchy, for visual placement:

- primary text — headlines and subheads;
- secondary text — text, emphasized text, captions; and
- supporting text — for specialized design vehicles such as magazines, catalogs or books, in which page footers or page headers might include information such as publication title, date or page number.
GRAPHICS

The grid structure also considers varying treatments of graphics, which can vary in size from small spot-graphics to full-page or double-spread images. Graphics usually are represented as photographs or illustrations (created art in either pixel-based paint or object-oriented software, or as original and traditional arts of painting or drawing by hand).

Statistical or tabular information often works as a graphic, although perhaps entirely composed of alpha-numeric characters. Informational design — in the form of a chart, score or diagram — often operates both as text and graphic, because the reader visually scans these items as one might scan a photograph or drawing. Informational design graphics also require a grid, to establish clear organization and structure of the textual content.

Additional graphical design elements — such as rules, bullets, or abstract shapes — may also be utilized for color encoding or to direct the reader’s eyes to a specific, important or highlighted area of the document.

WHITE SPACE – NEGATIVE SPACE

Filling every available space with textual and graphical information would surely overwhelm the reader. Just as a comma or a dash provides rest and clarity for the reader of a book, white space (negative space) assists the reader in understanding and differentiating content. White space acts to provide closure (finishing one idea, before continuing to the next), separation, and definition. Using white space between differing verbal content clarifies the intent of the author. For example, a highly technical magazine sidebar — filled with statistical information and organized in the format of a graph, chart or matrix — is visually set apart from the main editorial or verbal content. The sidebar content enhances the main concepts, but is designed and presented to visually distinguish it from other ideas.

Also considered within the grid plan are standardized areas of white space (where neither text nor graphics are placed). These may include: exterior margins, interior gutters (if the design project has pages with folds), and column gutters (designated, consistently applied white space between columns).
COLOR USE

Within a design grid, color use contributes to order, logic and function. In informational design, color is used to encode or enrich text elements – to emphasize, de-emphasize, or clarify. A scientific journal might require design order, rather than design chaos. Both the journal’s content and audience would be served well, by a straight-forward approach. However, in a design project created intentionally to defy all order and logic, color can be employed boldly and expressively. Editorial content and audience demographics for a childrens’ magazine (or cereal box) presupposes a radically different and spirited approach to color usage. Even in lower-cost single-color printing – perhaps black only – color variation opportunities exist for strengthening the function of the visual communication. Subdued versions of black, in the form of gray tints or percentages, can either highlight or sublimate textual information or graphical elements.

SYMMETRY & ASYMMETRY

While devising design grids, the obvious choices are symmetrical or asymmetrical. But a grid can also be designed as a hybrid of both spatial design styles, mixing both.

In a symmetrical grid, elements are placed within the spatial whole as mirror images, extending from a middle-point axis. All text columns are the same width and height. They are spaced apart equally (with equal column gutters or white space).

In an asymmetrical grid of three text columns, one column of a narrower width might be reserved for smaller spot-graphics and truncated labels or captions. The other two columns for traditional text could measure wider. This grid treatment allows for varying treatment of smaller graphics and shorter text elements – while still maintaining the legibility which wider columns of text will afford longer passages of text.

Within a hybrid style mixing both symmetrical and asymmetrical grids for the same design project, each element of varying textual or graphical content is assigned unique style properties. Using asymmetry, a designated visual field for several photographs of varying sizes allows the images to be placed randomly in an asymmetrical design. Using symmetry for the textual content defines two or more columns of equal width.
SYMMETRICAL GRID

In this symmetrical grid structure of three equal columns, all elements extend off a center axis point, for the effect of a mirror image.

The page header extends to fill the width of all three columns, with the typography specified as centered.

A two-line, three-column headline is specified as centered.

A two-line subhead, subordinate in size to the main headline, is restricted to two lines; and it is specified as centered.

Three columns are dedicated for text and graphics, all equal column width. Equal gutters separate both text and graphics columns.

All graphics occupy a dedicated column equal in width to the text columns; and the caption is specified as centered.

Margins are established around the page perimeter.
ASYMMETRICAL GRID

In this example of an asymmetrical grid structure in a printed page, the composition of elements is varied.

The page header floats within the full width of the page, with the typography specified as align left.
A two-line, two-column headline is specified as align left.
A two-line subhead, subordinate to the headline, is specified as align left. Its position begins at the second grid column.
Two text columns measure equal column widths. A dedicated column for graphics is wider. Equal gutters separate columns.
The graphics column is further subdivided into two columns.
Margins are established around the page perimeter.
HYBRID OR MIXED GRID

In this example of a hybrid or mixed grid, principles of both symmetry and asymmetry function at a higher level of complexity.

The page header can fill the page width, specified align left. A two-line, two-column headline is specified align left. A two-line subhead, subordinate in size to the main headline, is restricted to two lines, align left. But instead of the expected position of align left, it begins in the middle of the page. Text columns are of equal column width, with equal gutters. Graphics are placed in a second grid design framework. A sidebar design allows for two unequal column widths. Margins are established around the page perimeter.