

**WEB DESIGN BASICS** Anyone can learn the mechanics required to create a web page. And anyone can create an ugly web page - lots of people do. The reason so many folks make ugly web pages is because they don't understand basic principles of design. The tips presented here won't make you a brilliant designer but they will keep you from embarrassing yourself in front of millions of people. If you remember the 4 basic principles of design, your web pages will look clean, neat and professional - they may even get you a job.

#### **4 Basic Principles of Design are:**

- 1. Alignment**
- 2. Proximity**
- 3. Repetition**
- 4. Contrast**

**Alignment** refers to how objects on a page are arranged with respect to each other. Poor alignment is the most common error on web pages. Basically text and images can be aligned to the left, right or center. The first rule is that if you choose one alignment on a page - stick with it! If you center something, center everything. Don't mix alignments.

In general a centered alignment is safe - it is balanced, symmetrical, calm, formal and often boring. It works great on wedding invitations, or where you have only a few lines of text.

When you use text align left - leave some space between the left edge and the text - use the blockquote tag or an invisible table. If you create a form, line up the text boxes using one edge - don't put the boxes all over the page.

**Proximity** refers to the relationships that items develop when they are close to each other i.e. in close proximity. Place headers close to the paragraphs they belong with. Keep text associated with photos or graphics close to the artwork. By grouping objects together the number of separate elements on the page is reduced making it easier to read and follow.

**Repetition** of colors, shapes, graphics, buttons etc. makes each page on a web site look like it belongs. Use the same color background, text, links through out the web site. Repeat elements such as a logo or other graphic element. When each web page looks different it is hard to know whether or not the page belongs to the same web site. Branding is term which refers to our ability to recognize certain shapes, colors or symbols and associate them with a specific company. Branding is accomplished by repetition and a consistent look and feel on all the company's promotional material including their website.

**Contrast** is what draws your eye into a page. Contrasting elements guide your eyes around the page. Often contrast refers to color, white text on a black background or black text on white background. Contrast also occurs between primary colors Red, Green, Blue. Contrast is low between similar colors e.g. yellow and orange. Make sure your text and hyperlinks can be easily seen. Contrast can also exist in the form of shape. If two shapes are radically different there is contrast between them. As a general rule if two elements, such as type, rules, graphics, color, texture etc. are not the same - make them very different! Don't make them almost the same!

Finally, when you create a web page try to incorporate a Focal Point, a place on the page where the eye should go to. The focal point must be the dominating force. This focus is often created through contrast.

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**Try to avoid the following in your web designs:**

- busy distracting backgrounds
- combinations of text and background with poor contrast
- crowding text against the left edge of the page
- Paragraphs of type in all bold, caps or italics
- using multiple font types keep it one or two fonts
- large text with block or bitmap "look"
- avoid underlined text that is not a link
- graphics that are too large to fit on screen
- graphics with white halos around their edges
- meaningless or useless graphics that are not relevant to the content
- animation that is not relevant to the content
- animated e-mail images, animated cartoons that are irrelevant
- blinking text
- rainbow rules (multicolored graphic bars)
- using frames – they are not "search engine friendly"
- Scrolling messages unless they are relevant
- putting more than one animation on a page
- tables or frames with the side and top graphics too large i.e. they take up more than 20% of the screen view

**Try to incorporate the following into your designs:**

- Simple solid background colors
- make the first page fit inside 800 pixel window
- Text meant to be printed should be on a white light colored background or offer a printer friendly version e.g. PDF format
- Add navigational aids [top], site map, search etc.
- Include contact us link visible on every page
- add alt tags to important graphics and pictures so they can be found by search engines and are accessible to those with visual handicaps

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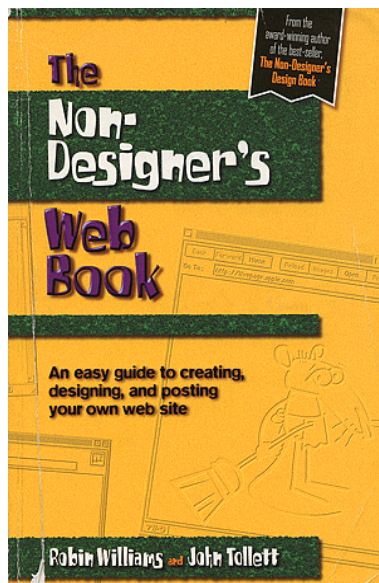
In general if you are new to design - start simple and make your pages look "clean" and open. The biggest mistake you can make is to try and put too much on one page. You can add more as you develop confidence in designing.

Color - too many people choose colors arbitrarily. Color conveys meaning and imparts messages about your content. When you think of red - it means danger, alert, blood. If you think of gold we tend to think of rich, warm etc. Colors also convey different meanings in different cultures. A designer or photographer

understands how to use color and is aware of different meanings of color. If you web site is about nature or trees - it makes sense to use the color green in the design. It is no coincidence that IBM uses the color Blue in its logo. Good design is not something you can learn quickly you have to think, look and study other good designs. Examine magazine adds, television, photographs and ask yourself what makes particular pictures engaging and what makes others boring. What attracts you to some ads and not others?

An effective web site has content that is of value and an engaging design interface. Creating effective design is more difficult than the mechanics of linking pages together - you will improve through practice and studying other well designed web sites. If design is something that interests you then you should try to read as many books on the topic that you can.

See book by **Robin Williams and John Tollett (1998)** The Non-Designer's Web Book, Peach Pitt Press. ISBN 0-201-68859-X Cost \$41.95 CAN This book is highly recommended for those who are new to designing Graphics.



I also recommend "Design Basics Index " by Jim Krause, How Design Books, Cincinnati, Ohio ISBN 1-58180-501 Cost \$35.99". Great book for both web and print design and illustrates how to effectively incorporate photographs on a page. This book is also good for photographers who to learn more about graphic design and composition.