

Page Layout Tips

Effective page layouts capture a reader's attention long enough to get the message across. An effective page layout will also make the information contained in the page easier to understand. There are three important ways of creating an effective page layout: visual hierarchy, visual balance, and visual consistency. In the following discussion, I will present several simple rules of thumb that can be used to create effective page layouts. There are, of course, successful exceptions to all these rules of thumb.

In an effective page layout, each graphic and textual element will have a visual importance that is appropriate to its role in conveying the message; there must exist a visual hierarchy. **The most important elements of the page should grab the readers attention.** The importance of an element is determined by its size and the extent to which it contrasts the surrounding material: a bigger size is more eye-catching, as is an element that is presented in bold or contrasting colors. Ideally, a clear hierarchy must be evident. Summary statements such as titles and key phrases must stand out. Illustrations must not dominate the text that they illustrate. For instance, what is more important in a cover page, the title or the name of the author? Is the title more or less important than any cover graphics? The graphics should add to the overall effectiveness of the document. Graphics should add to the overall meaning of the page, they should not be the main portion of the page.

The elements of a page must also be arranged so that they **appear balanced**. Visual balance has to do with the location of elements, and the relative amounts of material and empty space. If elements that are more prominent are located in the lower half of the page and towards the center or in the lower left quadrant of the page, the overall page appears more stable and balanced. A page does not have to be symmetrically laid out for it to appear balanced, but symmetric pages appear balanced.

The amount of material and empty or white space must also be balanced. If there is too much material, the page will appear busy; if there is too much white space, the page will appear empty. White space also helps to show the different elements on a page. If two different elements are to look distinct, there must be adequate white space between them; if an element needs to be highlighted, increase the amount of white space around it. In particular, there must be adequate white space in the margins of the page; to do otherwise makes the elements "slide off" the page.

A page layout can be made more effective by incorporating structure into the layout. This will create a sense of visual consistency when viewing the document. A structured layout is a consistent layout, with identical headers, footers, page numbers, and column widths. Graphics will be located similarly in different pages, and will be of approximately the same visual prominence.