



**Graphics  
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## Layout Basics... ... a Design Clinic

**W**e often use Printtips to share information about graphic design. Our purpose for this is simple: the more you know about good graphic design, the better you'll be able to analyze your organization's sales and marketing materials for effectiveness. There is a significant correlation between the success – or failure – of marketing material and how well the information in it is presented and organized. So pull out a flyer or advertisement or product information sheet and follow along as we review the basics of page layout.

### Elements of a page layout

There are four basic elements that are the building blocks of page design:

- The *headline* establishes the purpose of the page;
- The *copy* provides the facts, features and benefits;
- A *visual element* like a photograph or graphic illustrates the copy;
- The *signature* contains the company's name, logo, and contact information.

To make the elements work effectively, they must be organized to consider *hierarchy*—the ranking of elements on the page by importance – and *reader eye flow*, a description of how the reader's eye moves around on the page.

### How readers scan a page

Unless signaled to do otherwise, readers begin looking at a page in its upper left hand quadrant, then scan the rest of the page in a Z-shaped movement: first to the right quadrant, then to the lower left, then finish at the lower right.



This is a quick and efficient way for the reader to determine within seconds whether to continue with reading the copy on the page, or whether to move on to something else.

Knowing the way a reader naturally scans a page allows you to use design in either of two ways. You can cooperate with the reader's natural eye movement and place information organized in a hierarchy that follows the natural eye flow. Or you can direct the reader's eye and guide him through the information hierarchy in the exact order you want him to encounter it. Either technique is an effective way to gain and hold the reader's attention. What is not effective is to ignore hierarchy or to have design elements organized in a way that compete with natural eye flow.

## Layout Basics (continued)

### Hierarchy in page layout

When reading promotional copy, all readers expect to have the question “*What’s in it for me?*” answered, and the sooner the better. Headlines or photographs are often used for this purpose – to quickly capture the reader’s attention so he will understand how this product or service might answer a need and will invest in reading the copy on the page to learn more.

Hierarchy in copy is important, too. Readers are persuaded by benefits which are a consequence of features, so benefits have more weight than features in the copy hierarchy. For an easy way to translate a feature into a benefit, try this trick: state the feature and immediately follow it with the phrase *what this means for you is*. Here are some examples:

Our company has been in business for 38 years. What this means for you is that we are stable and have stood the test of time.

Our product needs only 25 seconds to warm up and be ready to use. What this means for you is the ability to immediately proceed with the task without any annoying delays or wasted time.

### Design elements

The most dramatic elements of a page layout are the headline and the visual element (photograph, illustration or graphic), in part because they are succinct. A well written headline captures the essence of the idea that is supported and expanded upon by the copy, while the visual element allows quick comprehension of a complex concept.

Copy is the heart of the design. Well written copy leaves the reader satisfied that he understands the features and benefits of the product or service and causes him to take further action – to save the material for later consideration, to call for more information, request an appointment, or place an order.

The signature is the information about the company – name, logo, and contact information. Its importance is actually secondary to the headline

and visual element, because it is not needed until after the reader has been persuaded to invest in reading the copy and is ready to take action. If you are running a series of ads in a publication, the signature can serve as an *anchoring element* – an design element that recurs in each ad, always located in the same place.

### Combining reader eye scan, hierarchy and layout elements

Effective marketing materials use reader eye scan to decide where to place design elements, or dramatically compel the reader to move around the page in a specific order. Regardless, it should have an underlying grid of either two, three or four columns as an organizing principle. The columns in the grid do not have to be the same size – in fact, a three-column design of two columns of equal width and the third column of approximately half the width of the other two can be not only interesting visually, but allow for appropriate placement of anchoring elements.

Before beginning any actual layout on the grid, analyze the design elements. Does the headline establish the purpose of the page, and is it written to attract attention? Does the visual element reinforce and expand on the headline’s theme? Is the copy of the right length to tell the story, and does it answer the question *what’s in it for me?* Is the signature assembled to promote response (*i.e.* is the meaning the telephone number or e-mail address prominent and easy to read)?

Now to put it all together. Sketch the underlying grid on a sheet of paper, then rough in where you think each design element should be placed. If you want to organize to replicate reader eye scan, then begin the headline at the upper left corner, put the visual element and body copy in the center, and the signature in the lower right.

For a more dramatic ad, omit the visual element and locate the headline in the middle, surrounded by a lot of white space. In this case, the white space serves as the visual element meaning no photograph or illustration is necessary.

“... *product or service might answer a need...*”

“*Well written copy leaves the reader satisfied that he understands the features and benefits of the product or service...*”

## Layout Basics (continued)

As you rough in the design elements, consider how much space on the grid to allot to each and what shape the element should take. This will help influence the choice of font for body copy and headline as well as the point size for each.

### Analyze and refine the layout

Once satisfied with the rough, set the headline and body copy type and place the actual signature on the page. If the body copy hasn't had final approval, then use a set of nonsense words so you can determine how the font and point size interact with the headline. You can also allocate space for the visual element with a for position only rule – a box that outlines the dimension and shape of the visual element.

With all elements in place, whether finalized or not, you can now analyze the preliminary layout. Look at how the elements relate to each other and decide whether they promote the hierarchy

you intended. Determine whether the hierarchy works with the reader's natural eye scan, or if you have enough dramatic effect to lead the reader in another pattern.

### Ask Us To Critique

Because we know you want the best possible design and layout, we will be happy to look at your preliminary layout and make suggestions if necessary. Call us at (513)248-2121 and tell us when to expect your file or FAX. We'll let you know whether your design is compelling or could use a bit of modification.

Effective design does not come easily. It is a result of studying good design, understanding how to analyze design problems, knowing who the design must appeal to, applying simple design principles, developing a sensitivity to good design, and lots of trial and error.

*“Determine whether the hierarchy works with the reader's natural eye scan...”*

## Ad Layout Formula

**A**dvertising legend David Ogilvy, founder of Ogilvy & Mather advertising agency and creator of well-known copy (“At 60 miles an hour, the loudest noise in this new Rolls Royce comes from this electric clock”) and characters (the man in the Hathaway Shirt; Schweppes and Commander Whitehead), developed an ad layout formula so successful that it became known as the *Ogilvy*. The formula adheres to the order in which researchers tell us readers typically look at ads:

- Visual (photograph or graphic)
- Caption
- Headline
- Copy
- Signature (advertiser's name and contact information)

Here is a basic Ogilvy layout:



The basic Ogilvy layout can be altered to include a coupon (set ad copy in a three-column grid and place the coupon in the third column); headline moved above the visual (when the headline carries more weight than the visual); or copy set in a two-column grid and the headline moved to the right of the visual.

Need some photographs or illustrations to improve your layout? Call us at (513) 248-2121 and we'll browse in our collection of stock photography for something appropriate.



*“...layout can be altered to include a coupon...”*



*“Make headlines larger and use a different font than the body copy.”*

**Q.** *My company needs to advertise in a publication whose advertising rates are straining our budget. Can you provide some ideas for fitting a lot of text into a small space?*

**A.** Over the years, we at TechneGraphics have developed some tricks for organizing text to improve readability. Try these techniques:

- Add contrast to large blocks of text by using headlines, subheads, headers, footers, pull quotes, sidebars and bulleted lists.
- Make headlines larger and use a different font than the body copy.
- Add a one-point rule above and below a subhead and make it span two columns of text.
- Use white space to balance black space by basing the design on a grid.
- Create a drop-cap from three to six times larger than the body copy.

## How To Use Templates



*“Using a template as a basis for your ad will also provide consistency among your ads.”*

*Templates* are pre-designed documents that contain placeholders (such as boxes, dummy text and headlines) that can be overwritten with actual copy and photographs or graphics. Templates may be purchased or you can create your own.

A template can be a great time-saver, can provide design inspiration and can augment the design capabilities of an amateur designer. Using a template as a basis for your ad will also provide consistency among your ads.

If you choose to use an ad template, select one that is appropriate for the job at hand. Begin by selecting a template whose ad is the correct size and does not require extensive alterations. Other tips for customization include:

- *Use your own graphics.* Substitute your own graphics or clip art for what was included in the template. Since graphics also include rules and boxes, you can change the size or location to better fit your needs.

- *Alter the type.* Change the template’s typeface, change the leading (the space between lines), or type justification. When selecting a new typeface, be sure not to stray too far away from the original design. For example, substituting a casual typeface for a formal one will likely compromise the design.
- *Change the color.* Sometimes a dramatic change can occur when color is changed, even if the design is unaltered.
- *Change the background.* Create a reverse (white or light text on a dark background) to draw the reader’s eye. The reverse can be an entire headline or just the single capital letter that begins the headline. Do remember that not all typefaces and sizes are suitable for reverses. Fine serifs can disappear in a reverse.