The Joshua Tree Epiphany

This short chapter explains the **four basic principles** in general, each of which will be explained in detail in the following chapters. But first I want to tell you a little story that made me realize the importance of being able to name things, since **naming** these principles is the key to having power over them.

Many years ago I received a tree identification book for Christmas. I was at my parents' home, and after all the gifts had been opened I decided to go out and identify the trees in the neighborhood. Before I went out, I read through part of the book. The first tree in the book was the Joshua tree because it only took two clues to identify it. Now, the Joshua tree is a really weird-looking tree and I looked at that picture and said to myself, "Oh, we don't have that kind of tree in Northern California. That is a weird-looking tree. I would know if I saw that tree, and I've never seen one before."

So I took my book and went outside. My parents lived in a cul-de-sac of six homes. Four of those homes had Joshua trees in the front yards. I had lived in that house for thirteen years, and I had never seen a Joshua tree. I took a walk around the block, and there must have been a sale at the nursery when everyone was landscaping their new homes—at least 80 percent of the homes had Joshua trees in the front yards. **And I had never seen one before!** Once I was conscious of the tree—once I could name it—I saw it everywhere. Which
is exactly my point: Once you can name something, you're conscious of it. You have power over it. You own it. You're in control.

So now you're going to learn the names of several design principles. And you are going to be in control of your pages.

**Good Design Is As Easy as 1-2-3**

1. **Learn the principles.**
   They're simpler than you might think.

2. **Recognize when you're not using them.**
   Put it into words -- name the problem.

3. **Apply the principles.**
   You'll be amazed.

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**Good design**

is as easy as . . .

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   They're simpler than you might think.

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   Put it into words — name the problem.

3. **Apply the principles.**
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**typefaces**

*Times New Roman Regular* and *Bold*

*Univers 75 Black*
*Univers 65 Bold*
*Cochin Italic*
*Petroleum (numbers)*
The four basic principles

The following is a brief overview of the basic principles of design that appear in every well-designed piece of work. Although I discuss each one of these principles separately, keep in mind they are really interconnected. Rarely will you apply only one principle.

**Contrast**

The idea behind contrast is to avoid elements on the page that are merely similar. If the elements (type, color, size, line thickness, shape, space, etc.) are not the same, then make them very different. Contrast is often the most important visual attraction on a page—it's what makes a reader look at the page in the first place.

**Repetition**

Repeat visual elements of the design throughout the piece. You can repeat colors, shapes, textures, spatial relationships, line thicknesses, fonts, sizes, graphic concepts, etc. This develops the organization and strengthens the unity.

**Alignment**

Nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily. Every element should have some visual connection with another element on the page. This creates a clean, sophisticated, fresh look.

**Proximity**

Items relating to each other should be grouped close together. When several items are in close proximity to each other, they become one visual unit rather than several separate units. This helps organize information, reduces clutter, and gives the reader a clear structure.

**Umm . . .**

When gathering these four principles from the vast maze of design theory, I thought there must be some appropriate and memorable acronym within these conceptual ideas that would help people remember them. Well, uh, there is a memorable—but rather inappropriate—acronym. Sorry.
Proximity

Very often in the work of new designers, the words and phrases and graphics are strung out all over the place, filling corners and taking up lots of room so there won’t be any empty space. There seems to be a fear of empty space. When pieces of a design are scattered all over, the page appears unorganized and the information may not be instantly accessible to the reader.

Robin’s Principle of Proximity states that you group related items together, move them physically close to each other so the related items are seen as one cohesive group rather than a bunch of unrelated bits.

Items or groups of information that are not related to each other should not be in close proximity (nearness) to the other elements, which gives the reader an instant visual clue to the organization and content of the page.

A very simple example illustrates this concept. In the list below, on the left side, what do you assume about all those flowers? Probably that they have something in common, right? In the list below-right, what do you assume? It appears that the last four flowers are somehow different from the others. You understand this instantly. And you understand it without even being conscious of it. You know the last four flowers are somehow different because they are physically separated from the rest of the list. That’s the concept of proximity—on a page (as in life), physical closeness implies a relationship.
Take a look at this typical business card layout, below. How many separate
elements do you see in that small space? That is, how many times does
your eye stop to look at something?

Ralph Roister Doister       (717) 555-1212

Mermaid Tavern

916 Bread Street         London, NM

Does your eye stop five times? Of course—there are five
separate items on this little card.
Where do you begin reading? In the middle, probably,
because that phrase is boldest.
What do you read next—left to right (because it’s in English)?
What happens when you get to the bottom-right corner,
where does your eye go?
Do you wander around making sure you didn’t miss any corners?

And what if I confuse the issue even further:

Ralph Roister Doister       (717) 555-1212

Mermaid Tavern

916 Bread Street         London, NM

Now that there are two bold phrases, where do you begin?
Do you start in the upper left? Do you start in the center?
After you read those two items, where do you go? Perhaps
you bounce back and forth between the words in bold,
nervously trying to also catch the words in the corners.
Do you know when you’re finished?
Does your friend follow the same pattern you did?

W
or
B
be
th
When several items are in close proximity to each other, they become one visual unit rather than several separate units. As in life, the proximity, or the closeness, implies a relationship.

By grouping similar elements into one unit, several things instantly happen: The page becomes more organized. You understand where to begin reading the message, and you know when you are finished. And the "white space" (the space around the letters) automatically becomes more organized as well.

A problem with the previous card is that not one of the items on the card seems related to any other item. It is not clear where you should begin reading the card, and it is not clear when you are finished.

If I do one thing to this business card—if I group related elements together, into closer proximity—see what happens:

Mermaid Tavern
Ralph Roister Doister

916 Bread Street
London, NM
(717) 555-1212

Now is there any question about where you begin to read the card? Where do your eyes go next? Do you know when you're finished?

With that one simple concept, this card is now organized both intellectually and visually. And thus it communicates more clearly.
Shown below is a typical newsletter flag (sometimes called masthead). How many separate elements are in this piece? Does any item of information seem related to any other, judging from the placement?

Take a moment to decide which items should be grouped into closer proximity and which should be separated.

The two items on the top left are in close proximity to each other, implying a relationship. But should these two have a relationship? Is it the Society that's amusing and peculiar, or "The Shakespeare Papers"?

How about the volume number and date? They should be close together since they both identify this particular issue.

In the example below, the proper relationships have been established.

Notice I did a couple of other things along the way:

I changed everything from all caps to lowercase with appropriate capitals, which gave me room to make the title bigger and stronger.

I changed the corners from rounded to straight, giving the piece a cleaner, stronger look.

I enlarged the swan and overlapped the edge with it. Don't be a wimp.

Because the text is going to drop out of the dark background, I changed the small font to Trebuchet so it wouldn't fall apart when printed.
When you create a flyer, a brochure, a newsletter, or whatever, you already know which pieces of information are logically connected, you know which information should be emphasized and what can be de-emphasized. Express that information graphically by grouping it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correspondences</th>
<th>Correspondences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowers, herbs, trees, weeds</td>
<td>Flowers, herbs, trees, weeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Greeks and Romans</td>
<td>Ancient Greeks and Romans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical characters</td>
<td>Historical characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes on motifs</td>
<td>Quotes on motifs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snakes</td>
<td>Snakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iambic pentameter</td>
<td>Iambic pentameter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical devices</td>
<td>Rhetorical devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic devices</td>
<td>Poetic devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First lines</td>
<td>First lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collections</td>
<td>Collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small printings</td>
<td>Small printings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitschy</td>
<td>Kitschy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dingbats</td>
<td>Dingbats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>Thematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villains and saints</td>
<td>Villains and saints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinks and recipes</td>
<td>Drinks and recipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>Quizzes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun but difficult quizzes</td>
<td>Fun but difficult quizzes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obviously, this list needs some formatting to make it understandable. But the biggest problem with this list is that everything is close to everything else, so there is no way to see the relationships or the organization.

| The same list has been visually separated into groups. I'm sure you already do this automatically—I'm just suggesting that you now do it consciously and thus with more strength. Notice I added some contrast to the headlines and repeated that contrast.
Sometimes when grouping items into close proximity, you need to make some changes, such as in the size or weight or placement of text or graphics. Body copy (the main bulk of reading text) does not have to be 12 point! Information that is subsidiary to the main message, such as the volume number and year of a newsletter, can often be as small as 7 or 8 point.

First Friday Club
Winter Reading Schedule

Friday November 1 at 5 p.m. Cymbeline
In this action-packed drama, our strong and true heroine, Imogen, dresses as a boy and runs off to a cave in Wales to avoid marrying a man she hates.

Friday, December 6, 5 p.m. The Winter’s Tale
The glorious Paulina and the steadfast Hermione keep a secret together for sixteen years, until the Delphic Oracle is proven true and the long-lost daughter is found.

All readings held at the Mermaid Tavern, Grand Hall. Sponsored by the Community Education Program. Tickets $10 and $8
For ticket information phone 555-1212
Also Friday, January 3 at 5 p.m. Twelfth Night
Join us as Olivia survives a shipwreck, dresses as a man, gets a job, and finds both a man and a woman in love with her.

Not only is this page visually boring (nothing pulls your eyes in to the body copy to take a look), but it is difficult to find the information—exactly what is going on, where is it happening, what time is it at, etc. It doesn’t help that the information is presented inconsistently.

For instance, how many readings are in the series?
The idea of proximity doesn't mean that everything is closer together; it means elements that are intellectually connected, those that have some sort of communication relationship, should also be visually connected. Other separate elements or groups of elements should not be in close proximity. The closeness or lack of closeness indicates the relationship.

First Friday Club
Winter Reading Schedule

Cymbeline
In this action-packed drama, our strong and true heroine, Imogen, dresses as a boy and runs off to a cave in Wales to avoid marrying a man she hates.
November 1 • Friday • 5 P.M.

The Winter's Tale
The glorious Paulina and the steadfast Hermione keep a secret together for sixteen years, until the Delphic Oracle is proven true and the long-lost daughter found.
December 6 • Friday • 5 P.M.

Twelfth Night
Join us as Olivia survives a shipwreck, dresses as a man, gets a job, and finds both a man and a woman in love with her.
January 6 • Friday • 5 P.M.

The Mermaid Tavern
All readings are held at The Mermaid Tavern in the Grand Hall
Sponsored by the Community Education Program
Tickets $10 and $15
For ticket information phone 555-1212

How many readings are in the series?
First I intellectually grouped the information together (in my head or sketched onto paper), then physically set the text in groups on the page. Notice the spacing between the three readings is the same, indicating that these three groups are somehow related.

The subsidiary information is farther away—you instantly know it is not one of the readings, even if you can't see it clearly.
Below you see a similar example to the one on the previous page. Glance at it quickly—now what do you assume about the three readings?

And why exactly do you assume one reading is different from the others? Because one is separate from the others. You instantly know that event is somehow different because of the spatial relationships.

**First Friday Club**

**Summer Reading Schedule**

1. **Henry IV**
   - Still trying to get to the Holy Land to atone for Richard’s death, Henry is beset by many troubles, including the willful debauchery of his son, Hal. Because these Henry plays are closely connected, we're going to read them both in one day.
   - June 4 • Friday • 1 P.M.

2. **Henry IV**
   - We carry on with the tales of Falstaff and Hal. Hal proves to his father he is a decent son and heartbreakingly rejects his good friend Falstaff.
   - June 4 • Friday • 6 P.M.

3. **Henry V**
   - Does Hal really have to be so cruel to his friends? Is that what being a king is all about? Hal, now Henry V, marches into France to win Agincourt.
   - July 9 • Friday • 6 P.M.

**The Mermaid Tavern**

All readings are held at The Mermaid Tavern in the Great Hall
Sponsored by the Community Education Program
Tickets $19 and $5; cash only
For ticket information phone 555-1234

It's really amazing how much information we get from a quick glance at a page. Thus it becomes your responsibility to make sure the reader gets the correct information.
The designer's intention with this dance postcard was probably to create something fun and energetic, but at first glance, can you tell when and where the classes are happening?

By using the principle of proximity to organize the information (as shown below), we can communicate immediately who, what, when, and where. We don't run the risk of losing potential customers because they give up searching through the vast field of slanted text.

Don't feel like you have to somehow portray “dancing” (in this case) through your design. At this point, if your choice is between clear communication or amateur design, choose clear communication. Upgrading your design skills is a gradual process and begins with clear communication.
You're probably already using the principle of proximity in your work, but you may not be pushing it as far as you could to make it truly effective. Really look at those pages, at those elements, and see which items *should* be grouped together.

**Want to be an UNDERSTANDER?**

How'd you like to... 
understand every word and every nuance in a Shakespeare play?

Can you imagine... 
going to see a play performed and actually understanding everything that's going on?

What if you could... 
laugh in the right places in a play, cry in the right places, 
boo and hiss in the right places?

Ever wanted to... 
talk to someone about a Shakespearean play and have that person think you know what you're talking about?

Would you like to... 
have people admire and even esteem you because you know whether or not Portia cheated her father by telling Bassanio which casket to choose?

It's all possible.

Live the life you've dreamed about!

Be an Understahnder!

For more info on how to wise up and start your new life as an Understahnder, contact us right away: phone 1-800-655-1212; email: Ben@TheUnderstahnders.com

The person who designed this mini-poster typed two Returns after each headline and paragraph. Thus the headlines are each the same distance from the body copy above and below, making the heads and body copy pieces appear as separate, unconnected items. You can't tell if the headline belongs to the text above it or below it because the distances are the same.

There is lots of white space available here, but it's all broken up. And there is white space where it doesn't belong, like between the headlines and their related texts. When white space is "trapped" like this, it tends to visually push the elements apart.
Group the items that have relationships. If there are areas on the page where the organization is not perfectly clear, see if items are in proximity that shouldn’t be. Use the simple design feature of space to make the page not only more organized, but nicer to look at.

Want to be an UNDERSTANDER?

How’d you like to...
understand every word and every nuance in a Shakespeare play?

Can you imagine...
going to see a play performed and actually understanding everything that’s going on?

What if you could...
laugh in the right places in a play, cry in the right places, boo and hiss in the right places?

Ever wanted to...
talk to someone about a Shakespearean play and have that person think you know what you’re talking about?

Would you like to...
have people admire and even esteem you because you know whether or not Portia cheated her father by telling Balthasar which casket to choose?

It’s all possible!
Live the life you’ve dreamed about—be an Understader!

For more info on how to wise up and start your new life as an Understader, contact us right away:
1.800.555.1012
Ben@TheUnderstanders.com

If I do just one thing to this piece, if I move the headlines closer to their related paragraphs of text, several things happen:
The organization is clearer.
The white space is not trapped within elements.
There appears to be more room on the page.
I also put the phone and email address on separate lines—but grouped together and separated—so they’ll stand out as important information.

And you probably noticed that I changed the centered alignment to flush left (that’s the principle of alignment, as explained in the next chapter), which created more room so I could enlarge the graphic.
Proximity is really just a matter of being a little more conscious, of doing what you do naturally, but pushing the concept a little further. Once you become aware of the importance of the relationships between lines of type, you will start noticing its effect. Once you start noticing the effect, you own it, you have power over it, you are in control.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gertrude's Piano Bar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STARTERS:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gertrude's Famous Onion Loaf - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gazpacho or Asparagus Spinach Soup - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Garden Tomato Salad - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sliced Vine-Ripened Yellow and Red Tomatoes with Fresh Mozzarella and Basil Balsamic Vinaigrette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet's Chopped Salad - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cubed Cucumber, Raddishes, Avocado, Tomatoes, Jarlsberg Cheese, and Romaine Leaves Tossed in a Light Lemon Vinaigrette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caesar Salad - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House-Made Dressing, Parmesan and Crotons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean Ceviche - 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lime-Marinated Baby Scallops with Red Pepper, Onions, Cilantro, Jalapenos, and Orange Juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrimp Cocktail - 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Large Shrimp with House-Made Cocktail Sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENTREES:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Steak, 16 oz. - 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotisserie Chicken - 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Fish, 10 oz. - Market Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grilled Shrimp - 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans Lump Crab Cakes with Warm Vegetable Coleslaw, Mashed Potatoes, Spinach and Romesco Sauce - 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grilled Portobello Mushroom Stuffed with Ricotta Cheese, Garlic, Onions and Spinach, Served Over Mashed Potatoes - 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand Rack of Lamb - 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbecued Baby Back Ribs - 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Lobster Tail, 10 oz. - Market Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf &amp; Turf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Lobster &amp; Boz Filet - Market Price</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lest you think no menu could be this bad, know that I took it right out of a restaurant. Really. The biggest problem, of course, is that all the information is one big chunk.

Before trying to design with this information, write out the separate pieces of information that belong together; group the elements. You know how to do this—simply use your brain.

Once you have the groups of information, you can play with them on the page. You have a computer—try lots of options. Learn how to format a page in your software.
In the example below, I put more space between the separate menu items. Of course, one should almost never use all caps because they are so hard to read, so I changed it to caps and lowercase. And I made the type a couple of point sizes smaller, both of which gave me a lot more room to work with so I could put more space between the elements.

Gertrude's Piano Bar

Starters
Gertrude's Famous Onion Leaf - 8
Grilled or Asparagus-Spinach Soup - 7
Summer Garden Tomato Salad - 8
Thick vine-ripened yellow and red tomatoes
with fresh mozzarella and basil Balsamic Vinaigrette
Ham and Cheese Salad - 7
cubed cucumbers, radishes, avocados, tomatoes, Swiss cheese,
and romaine leaves tossed in a light lemon vinaigrette
Cesar Salad - 7
house-made dressing, Parmesan, and croutons
Caribbean Ceviche - 9
lime-marinated baby scallops with red pepper, onions, cilantro,
jalapenos, and orange juice
Shrimp Cocktail - 14
two large shrimp with house-made cocktail sauce

Entrées
New York steak, 16 oz - $27
Rotisserie Chicken - 17
Fresh Fish, 10 oz - Market Price
Grilled Shrimp - 24
New Orleans Lump Crab Cakes - 18
with warm vegetable rouelle, mashed potatoes, spinach,
and Romesco sauce
Grilled Portobello Mushroom - 18
stuffed with Roquefort cheese, garlic, onions and spinach,
served over mashed potatoes
New Zealand Rack of Lamb - 26
Barbecued Baby Back Ribs - 24
Australian Lobster Tail, 10 oz - Market Price
Surf & Turf
Australian Lobster & 8 oz Filet - Market Price

The biggest problem with the original menu is that there is no separation of information. In your software, learn how to format so you can make exactly the amount of space you need before and after each element.

The original text in all caps took up all the space so there was no extra, blank, "white" space to rest your eyes. The more text you have, the less you can get away with all caps. And it's okay to set the type smaller than 12 point! Really!
In the example on the previous page, we still have a little bit of a problem separating the "Starters" and the "Entrees." Let's indent each section—watch how the extra space defines these two groups even further, yet clearly communicates that they are still similar groups. (I enlarged the size of "Starters" and "Entrees" also, which is the principle of Contrast.)

Gertrude's Piano Bar

Starters
- Gertrude's Famous Onion Loaf - 8
- Gazpacho or Asparagus-Spinach Soup - 7
- Summer Garden Tomato Salad - 8
-iced vine-ripened yellow and red tomatoes with fresh mozzarella and heirloom Balsamic vinaigrette
- Hazel's Chopped Salad - 7
-cubed cucumbers, radishes, avocado, tomatoes, feta cheese, and romaine leaves tossed in a light lemon vinaigrette
- Caesar Salad - 7
-house-made dressing, Parmesan, and croutons
- Caribbean Creole - 9
-lime-marinated baby octopus with red peppers, onions, cilantro, jalapeño, and orange juice
- Shrimp Cocktail - 14
-five large shrimp with house-made cocktail sauce

Entrees
- New York steak, 16 ounce - 27
- Rotisserie Chicken - 17
- Fresh Fish, 10 ounce - Market Price
- Grilled Shrimp - 24
- New Orleans Lump Crab Cakes - 18
-with warm vegetable coleslaw, mashed potatoes, spinach, and Remoulade sauce
- Grilled Portobello Mushroom - 18
-stuffed with smoked cheese, garlic, onions, and spinach, served over mashed potatoes
- New Zealand Rack of Lamb - 26
- Barbequed Baby Back Ribs - 24
- Australian Lobster Tail, 10 ounce - Market Price
- Surf & Turf
- Australian Lobster & 8 ounce Filet - Market Price

We really don't have enough room to add more space before "Starters" and "Entrees," but we do have room to make an indent. That extra space under the heading helps to separate these two groups of information. It's all about space.
Rarely is the principle of proximity the only answer to a page. The other three principles are intrinsic to the design process and you will usually find yourself using all four. But take them one at a time—start with proximity. In the example below, you can imagine how all of the other principles would mean nothing if I didn’t first apply the appropriate spacing.

**Gertrude’s Piano Bar**

**Starters**
- Gertrude’s Famous Onion Loaf 8
- Gazpacho or Asparagus Spinach Soup 7
- Summer Garden Tomato Salad 8
  - chilled vine-ripened yellow and red tomatoes with fresh mozzarella and herb basilamic vinaigrette
- Hamlet’s Chopped Salad 7
  - celery, cucumbers, red bell peppers, red onion, radishes, jalapeño cheese, and asparagus leaves tossed in a light lemon vinaigrette
- Caesar Salad 7
  - house-made dressing, Parmesan, and croutons
- Caribbean Ceviche 9
  - lime-marinated baby scallops with red peppers, onions, cilantro, bell peppers, and orange juice
- Shrimp Cocktail 14
  - five large shrimp with house-made cocktail sauce

**Entrees**
- New York Steak, 6 oz 27
- Rotisserie Chicken 17
- Fresh Fish, 8 oz  Market Price
- Grilled Shrimp 14
- New Orleans Crab Cakes 18
  - with lump crab meat, remoulade sauce, and vegetables
- Grilled Portobello Mushroom 18
  - stuffed with goat cheese, garlic, parsley, and tomatoes, served over mixed greens
- New Zealand Rack of Lamb 30
- Barbecued Baby Back Ribs 24
- Australian Lobster Tail, 10 oz Market Price
- Surf & Turf: Australian Rack Lobsters 16 oz filet Market Price

I chose a more interesting typeface than Times New Roman—that’s easy to do. I experimented with indenting the descriptions of the menu items, which helped to clarify each item a little further.

It bothered me that the prices of the items were tucked into the text (with dorky hyphens), so I aligned them all out on the right where they are easily visible and consistently arranged. That’s the principle of alignment, which is coming right up in a couple of pages.
The simple principle of proximity can make web pages easier to navigate by collecting information into logical groups. Check any web site that you feel is easy to get around in—you’ll find information grouped into logical clumps.

The information on this page is muddled. Look at the site links just under the title. Are they all equal in importance? In the arrangement above, they appear to be equal in importance—but realistically they’re not.
I have to repeat myself: Intellectually, you already know how to use proximity. You already know how to collect pieces of information into their appropriate groups. All you need to do is transfer that skill to the printed page. Use space to define groups of elements.

I moved all the site links into one column to show their relationships to one another.

I set the quotation farther away from the main body copy since it's not directly related.

I also used the principle of **alignment** (discussed next, in Chapter 3): I used flush-left alignment and made sure each element lined up with something else.
Summary of proximity

When several items are in close proximity to each other, they become one visual unit rather than several separate units. Items relating to each other should be grouped together. Be conscious of where your eye is going; where do you start looking; what path do you follow; where do you end up; after you've read it, where does your eye go next? You should be able to follow a logical progression through the piece, from a definite beginning to a definite end.

The basic purpose

The basic purpose of proximity is to organize. Other principles come into play as well, but simply grouping related elements together into closer proximity automatically creates organization. If the information is organized, it is more likely to be read and more likely to be remembered. As a by-product of organizing the communication, you also create more appealing (more organized) white space (designers' favorite thing).

How to get it

Squint your eyes slightly and count the number of visual elements on the page by counting the number of times your eye stops. If there are more than three to five items on the page (of course it depends on the piece), see which of the separate elements can be grouped together into closer proximity to become one visual unit.

What to avoid

Don't stick things in the corners or in the middle just because the space is empty.

Avoid too many separate elements on a page.

Avoid leaving equal amounts of white space between elements unless each group is part of a subset.

Avoid even a split second of confusion over whether a headline, subhead, caption, graphic, etc., belongs with its related material. Create a relationship among elements with close proximity.

Don't create relationships with elements that don't belong together! If they are not related, move them apart from each other.
Alignment

New designers tend to put text and graphics on the page wherever there happens to be space, often without regard to any other items on the page. What this creates is the slightly-messy-kitchen effect—you know, with a cup here, a plate there, a napkin on the counter, a pot in the sink, a spill on the floor. It doesn't take much to clean up the slightly messy kitchen, just as it doesn't take much to clean up a slightly messy design that has weak alignments.

Robin's Principle of Alignment states, "Nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily. Every item should have a visual connection with something else on the page." The principle of alignment forces you to be conscious—no longer can you just throw things on the page and see where they stick.

When items are aligned on the page, the result is a stronger cohesive unit. Even when aligned elements are physically separated from each other, there is an invisible line that connects them, both in your eye and in your mind. Although you might have separated certain elements to indicate their relationships (using the principle of proximity), the principle of alignment is what tells the reader that even though these items are not close, they belong to the same piece. The following pages illustrate this idea.
Take a look at this business card, the same one you saw in the last chapter. Part of its problem is that nothing is aligned with anything else. In this little space, there are elements with three different alignments: flush left, flush right, and centered. The two groups of text in the upper corners are not lined up along the same baseline, nor are they aligned at the left or right edges with the two groups at the bottom of the card (which don’t line up along their baselines, either).

Ralph Roister Doister (717) 555-1212

Mermaid Tavern

1027 Bread Street  London, NM

The elements on this card look like they were just thrown on and stuck. Not one of the elements has any connection with any other element on the card.

Take a moment to decide which of the items above should be grouped into closer proximity, and which should be separated.

Mermaid Tavern
Ralph Roister Doister

1027 Bread Street  London, NM (717) 555-1212

By moving all the elements over to the right and giving them one alignment, the information is instantly more organized. (Of course, grouping the related elements into closer proximity helped, too.) The text items now have a common boundary; this boundary connects them together.
In the example (repeated below) that you saw in the proximity section, the text is also aligned—it's aligned down the center. A centered alignment often appears a bit weak. If text is aligned, instead, on the left or the right, the invisible line that connects the text is much stronger because it has a hard vertical edge to follow. This gives left- and right-aligned text a cleaner and more dramatic look. Compare the two examples below, then we'll talk about it on the following pages.

Mermaid Tavern
Ralph Roister Doister

1027 Bread Street
London, NM
(717) 555-1212

This example has a nice arrangement with the text items grouped into logical proximity. The text is center-aligned over itself, and centered on the page. Although this is a legitimate alignment, the edges are "soft"; you don't really see the strength of the line.

Mermaid Tavern
Ralph Roister Doister

1027 Bread Street
London, NM
(717) 555-1212

This has the same logical arrangement as above, but it is now right-aligned. Can you see the "hard" edge on the right? There is a strong invisible line connecting the edges of these two groups of text. You can actually see the edge. The strength of this edge is what gives strength to the layout.

The invisible line runs right down here, connecting the separate pieces of text.
Do you tend to automatically center everything? A centered alignment is the most common alignment that beginners use—it's very safe, it feels comfortable. A centered alignment creates a more formal look, a more sedate look, a more ordinary and oftentimes downright dull look. Take notice of the designs you like. I guarantee most designs that have a sophisticated look are not centered. I know it's difficult, as a beginner, to break away from a centered alignment; you'll have to force yourself to do it at first. But combine a strong flush right or left alignment with good use of proximity and you will be amazed at the change in your work.

Business Plan
for
The Shakespeare Papers

by Patricia Williams
February 25

This is a typical report cover, yes? This standard format presents a dull, almost amateurish look, which may influence someone's initial reaction to the report.

Business Plan
for
The Shakespeare Papers

by Patricia Williams
February 25

The strong flush-left alignment gives the report cover a more sophisticated impression. Even though the author's name is far from the title, that invisible line of the strong alignment connects the two text blocks.

typefaces
ITC American Typewriter
Medium and Bold
typefaces ESP
Minister Light and Bold
Stationery has so many design options! But too often it ends up with a flat, centered alignment. You can be very free with placement on a piece of stationery—but remember alignment.

This isn’t bad, but the centered layout is a little dull, and the border closes the space, making it feel confined. A flush-left alignment makes the page a little more sophisticated. Limiting the dotted line to the left side opens the page and emphasizes the alignment.

The text is flush right, but placed on the left side. The letter you type will have a strong flush left to align with the flush right of this layout. Be brave! Be bold!
I'm not suggesting that you *never* center anything! Just be conscious of the effect a centered alignment has—is that really the look you want to portray? Sometimes it is; for instance, most weddings are rather sedate, formal affairs, so if you want to center your wedding announcement, do so consciously and joyfully.

You are warmly invited to attend!

Centered. Really rather dull.

You are warmly invited to attend!

If you're going to center text, then at least make it obvious!

You are warmly invited to attend!

Experiment with uncentering the block of centered type.

You are warmly invited to attend!

If you're going to center the text, experiment with making it more dramatic in some other way.

typeface
Anna Nicole
Sometimes you can add a bit of a twist on the centered arrangement, such as centering the type, but setting the block of type itself off center. Or set the type high on the page to create more tension. Or set a very casual, fun typeface in a very formal, centered arrangement. What you don’t want to do is set Times 12-point with double Returns!

O thou pale Orb
that silent shines
While care-untroubled mortals sleep!
Robert Burns

O thou pale Orb
that silent shines
While care-untroubled mortals sleep!
Robert Burns

This is the kind of layout that gives “centered” a bad name: Boring typeface, type that is too large, crowded text, double Returns, dorky border.

A centered alignment needs extra care to make it work. This layout uses a classic typeface sized fairly small (relatively), more space between the lines, lots of white space around the text, no border.

O thou pale Orb
that silent shines
While care-untroubled mortals sleep!
Robert Burns

Emphasize a wide, centered layout with a wide spread. Try your next flyer sideways.

Emphasize a tall, slender centered layout with a tall, slender piece of paper.

typefaces
Times New Roman
Century Old Style
Potrero
Alfa Script
You're accustomed to working with text alignments. Until you have more training, stick to the guideline of using one text alignment on the page: either all text is flush left, flush right, or centered.

This text is **flush left**. Some people call it quad left, or you can say it is left aligned.

This text is **flush right**. Some people call it quad right, or you can say it is right aligned.

This text is **centered**. If you are going to center text, make it obvious.

In this paragraph it is difficult to tell if this text was centered purposely or perhaps accidentally. The line lengths are not the same, but they are not really different. If you can't instantly tell that the type is centered, why bother?

This text is **justified**. Some people call it quad left and right, and some call it blocked—the text lines up on both sides. Whatever you call it, don't do it unless your line length is long enough to avoid awkward gaps between the words because the gaps are really annoying, don't you think?
Occasionally you can get away with using both flush right and flush left text on the same page, but make sure you align them in some way!

Robert Burns
Poems in Scots
and English

The most complete edition available of Scotland’s greatest poet

In this example, the title and the subtitle are flush left, but the description is centered. There is no common alignment between the two elements of text—they don’t have any connection to each other.

Robert Burns
Poems in Scots
and English

The most complete edition available of Scotland’s greatest poet

Although these two elements still have two different alignments (the top is flush left and the bottom is flush right), the edge of the descriptive text below aligns with the right edge of the thin rule above, connecting the elements with an invisible line.

typefaces
Aachen Bold
Warnock Pro Light Caption
and Light Italic Caption
When you place other items on the page, make sure each one has some visual alignment with another item on the page. If lines of text are across from each other horizontally, align their baselines. If there are several separate blocks of text, align their left or right edges. If there are graphic elements, align their edges with other edges on the page.

Nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily!

**Example 6: Value of a resistor in an electrical circuit.**

Find the value of a resistor in an electrical circuit which will dissipate the charge to 1 percent of its original value within one-twentieth of a second after the switch is closed.

There are two problems here, right? A lack of **proximity** and a lack of **alignment**.

Even though it may be a boring ol' chart, there is no reason not to make the page look as nice as possible and to present the information as clearly as possible. When information is difficult to understand, that's when it is the **most** critical to present it as clean and organized.
Lack of alignment is probably the biggest cause of unpleasant-looking documents. Our eyes like to see order; it creates a calm, secure feeling. Plus it helps to communicate the information.

In any well-designed piece, you will be able to draw lines to the aligned objects, even if the overall presentation of material is a wild collection of odd things and has lots of energy.

**Example 6: Value of a resistor in an electrical circuit.**
Find the value of a resistor in an electrical circuit which will dissipate the charge to 1 percent of its original value within one twentieth of a second after the switch is closed.

![Diagram of electrical circuit](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>q(t) = 9 volts</th>
<th>q(0) = 0.69 volts</th>
<th>t = 0.05 seconds</th>
<th>L = 8 henrys</th>
<th>C = 0.0001 farads</th>
<th>R = 360 ohms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>q(t) = 0.253889</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simply lining up the elements makes all the difference here. Notice not one item is on the page arbitrarily—every item has some visual connection with another item on the page.

If I knew what this chart was talking about, I might choose to move the box on the right even farther to the right, away from the big chart, keeping their tops aligned. Or I might move the lower box farther away. I would adjust the spacing between the three charts according to their intellectual relationships to each other.
A problem with the publications of many new designers’ is a subtle lack of alignment, such as centered headlines and subheads over indented paragraphs. At first glance, which of the examples on these two pages presents a cleaner and sharper image?

**Violate Huskings**

Darn Honor Form

Henny chesmatic stary offer former’s deducer, Violate Huskings, as wet hoppings darn honor form.

VIOLATE! sorted delo former, Watcher setting darn fu? D铬hize nor porn caunst gut attch setting darn during causing? Carn pop uter delo chest!

Arm tarred, Fodder, resplendent Violate warly.

Watcher tarred fur? utter starchy former, hoe dink half much symphony further gull.

**Fetter pegs**

Are hudge diet dez muck make dink moaning! Ditcher curry dos buckles fuller sloh dam tater peg pan as foder pegs?

Yup. Fodder. Are fetter pegs.

Ditcher mail-car caves an swap outer cav staple! Off cure, Fodder. Are moles outer cav an swapped outer staple, fetter checkings, an clammed upper header inner checking-holes to gudder eller acher, an wan darn tater vestibule guarding toe peck eller bags as warm offer vestibules, an watched an eared pore closing, an letter hearse an...


This is a very common sight: headlines are centered, text is flush left, paragraph indents are “typewriter” wide (that is, five spaces or half an inch, as you may have learned in school), the illustration is centered in a column.

Never center headlines over flush left body copy or text that has an indent. If the text does not have a clear left and right edge, you can’t tell the headline is actually centered. It looks like it’s just hanging around.

All these unaligned spots create a messy page: wide indents, ragged right edge of text, centered heads with open space on both sides, centered illustration.

Try this: Draw lines on this example to see all the different alignments.

**Typefaces**

*Formata* Bold

*Warnock Pro* Regular
All those minor misalignments add up to create a visually messy page. Find a strong line and stick to it. Even though it may be subtle and your boss couldn't say what made the difference between this example and the one before it, the more sophisticated look comes through clearly.

**Violate Huskings Darn Honor Form**

Here's a common curiosity offered
former's dodger, Violate Huskings, an wart hoppings darn honor form.
Violate ilk weeter fodder, oleed Former Huskings, how
hatter repetitions for hung furry retch—an furry stompy, infect,
pimple orphans set deh Violate's folder were noting button, oiled
moues. Violate, honor undue her, woelected furry grass parum—jest-
er petty little form gull, sample, manifested, an uneffected.

**Tarred gull**

Was meaning, Former Huskings
nothing hase dodder setting honor
cheer, during nothing.
Violate! sorted dale farmer,
Wrapper setting darn fee?
Denture nor yore cannon get
retch setting darn during nothing?
Germ pup oath debt cheer!
Arn tarred, Fodder, supple-
dent Violate wearily.
Wrapper tarred fee? aster stony
former, how dint half much
symphony further gull.

---

**Fetter pegs**

Are badger dint due much woke
dish meaning? Ditcher curry due
hurkles fuller slub darn titter
peg-pan an fetter pegs?
Yap, Fodder. Are fetter pegs.
Ditcher null ear cage an sweep
etter pace staple, Ciff court.
Fodder. Are muck ulter caws
an swapped etter staple, fetter
sheekings, on clowned upper
udder inner checking-horse toe
godfer ulter ache, an was darn
titer vestibule guarding too peck
etter bogs an warms offer vesti-
hule, as watched an earned yore
clothing, an fetter hearse an…
Ditcher would either hearse,
the inter-captured oiled Husk

---

**Find a strong alignment and stick to it.** If the text is
flush left, set the heads and subheads flush left.

First paragraphs are traditionally not indented. The
purpose of indenting a paragraph is to tell you there is
a new paragraph, but you always know the first one is a
new paragraph.

On a typewriter, an indent was five spaces. With the
proportional type you are using on your computer, the
standard typographic indent is one em (an em is as wide
as the point size of your type), which is more like two
spaces.

Be conscious of the ragged edge of your type. Adjust the
lines so your right edge is as smooth as possible.

If there are photographs or illustrations, align them with
an edge and/or a baseline.
Ladle Rat Rotten Hut

The story of a wicked wotf and a ladle gull

by H. Chace

Wanting term dare worried ladle gull hot its melt murder inner ladle conglage honors Rich offer judge, dock, florist. Dish ladle gull orurn worry Funky ladle rat clock wetter ladle rat hut, as far disk rastin prime cahler Ladle Rat Rotten Hut.

Wen meaning Ladle Rat Rotten Hut's murder colder head, "Ladle Rat Rotten Hut, hereby ladle basing winzome bunen barter an whitker cockles. Tick disk ladle basing tutor conglage offer grain-murder has lift horner outer site offer Pharos. Shaker label Dun stopper laundry wontal Dun stopper pack Bureau Dun daily-jolly inner florist, an yonder nor oneishm-stanchen, dun stopper torque yet strainen!"

"Hee-woks, murder," repudiates Ladle Rat Rotten Hut, an tickle ladle basing an ettered elf. Honor wrote tutor conglage offer grain-murder, Ladle Rat Rotten Hut's tunten anomalous wotf.

"Wot, wot, wot!" set disk wicked wotf. "Evensent Ladle Rat Rotten Hut! Wotves are putty ladle gull going wizard ladle basing!"


"O blue etter gray kaka wotf," setter wicked wotf, buter taught tomb shelf. "Oll tickle shirt court tutor conglage offer grain-murder. Oll ketchup wetter letter, an des—O bale!"

Soda wicked wotf tucker shirt court, an slimy ratchet a conglage offer grain-murder, piced inner window, an one debtor pore oil warning wotve lion inner bet. Inner flesh, disk abdomenal wotf lipped honor bet, pcunched honor pore oil warming, an gagled erup. Dan disk ratchet ammonial yet honor grain-murder's nut cop an gat-gus, any cufild age inner bet.

"O Grammar" creates ladle gull historically. "Wotve bag tor-gull! A nervous oussage bag tout!"

"Battered lucky chew whip, sweat hard," setter blus-Thursday wotf, wetter wicked small honor phase.

"O Grammar, wotve bag noisel! A nervous oor oussage anomalous progressiv!"

"Battered small your whip, dilking," whistlered dode wotf, ante mouse worse wadding.

"O Grammar, wotve bag murder gull! A nervous oor oussage bag mucul!"

Daze worry on-finger-put ladle gull's lost wot.

Can you see what has made the difference between this example and the one on the previous page? With a colored pen, draw lines along the strong alignments.
I want to repeat: Find a strong line and use it. If you have a photo or a graphic with a strong flush side, align the side of the text along the straight edge of the photo, as shown at the bottom of the page.

**Porche**

Porche worse jester pore ladle gull hoe lift wetter stop-murder an toe heft-cisterns.
Daze worming war furry wicket an shellfish parsons, spatially dole stop-murder, hoe
dint lack Porche an, infect, word orphan traitor pore gull mar lichen ammonol dinner hormone bang.

Porche's furry guard-murder whiskered, "Watcher crane a-hoar!"

There is a nice strong line along the left edge of the type, and there is a nice strong line along the left edge of the image—you can see the pink dotted line I drew along those edges. Between the text and the image, though, there is "trapped" white space, and the white space is an awkward shape, which you can also see with the pink dotted line. When white space is trapped, it pushes the two elements apart.

**Porche**

Porche worse jester pore ladle gull hoe lift wetter stop-murder an toe heft-cisterns.
Daze worming war furry wicket an shellfish parsons, spatially dole stop-murder, hoe
dint lack Porche an, infect, word orphan traitor pore gull mar lichen ammonol dinner hormone bang.

Porche's furry guard-murder whiskered, "Watcher crane a-hoar!"

Find a strong line and use it. Now the strong line on the right side of the text and the strong line on the left side of the image are next to each other, making each other stronger, as you can see by the pink lines I drew. The white space now is floating free off the left edge. The caption has also been set against the same strong line of the edge of the image.
If your alignments are strong, you can break through them consciously and it will look intentional. The trick is you cannot be timid about breaking the alignment—either do it all the way or don’t do it. Don’t be a wimp.

Guilty Looks Enter Tree Beers

When given terms were voiced
Indie gall hoe hat search potty
Youker calls death pimple colder
Guilty Looks. Guilty Looks lift
Inner Indie cardage saturated
Adder shirt dissidence former
Bag florist, any
Indie gall orphan
Sister murder toe
Letter goe entity
Florist all buyer shell.
"Guilty Looks" exist murder
Angerly, "Honorable terms are
gardener anthous suture stopped
Quo-chist! Guiter door florist!
Scentilly MUG!
"Wire cut, murder!" rind
Guilty Looks, has die never
Peony tension toe murder's
Strangled.
"Cause dorsal lodge en wicket
Beer inner florist hoe orphan
Malates pimple. Indie galls
Shut kipper ware firm debt can-
dar annonz, an store outer debt
Florist! Debt florists' much toe
destures fury Indie gull!"

Even though that inset piece is breaking into the text block, can you see where it is aligned on the left? It is possible to sometimes break completely free of any alignment, if you do it consciously.

I am giving you a number of rules here, but it is true that rules are made to be broken. But remember Robin's Rule about Breaking Rules: You must know what the rule is before you can break it.
Summary of alignment

Nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily. Every element should have some visual connection with another element on the page.

Unity is an important concept in design. To make all the elements on the page appear to be unified, connected, and interrelated, there needs to be some visual tie between the separate elements. Even if the separate elements are not physically close on the page, they can appear connected, related, unified with the other information simply by their placement. Take a look at designs you like. No matter how wild and chaotic a well-designed piece may initially appear, you can always find the alignments within.

The basic purpose

The basic purpose of alignment is to unify and organize the page. The result is similar to what happens when you (or your dog) pick up all the dog toys that were strewn around the living room floor and put them all into one toy box.

It is often a strong alignment (combined, of course, with the appropriate typeface) that creates a sophisticated look, a formal look, a fun look, or a serious look.

How to get it

Be conscious of where you place elements. Always find something else on the page to align with, even if the two objects are physically far away from each other.

What to avoid

Avoid using more than one text alignment on the page (that is, don't center some text and right-align other text).

And please try very hard to break away from a centered alignment unless you are consciously trying to create a more formal, sedate presentation. Choose a centered alignment consciously, not by default.