THE AWARD-WINNING, BEST-SELLING BOOK ABOUT DESIGN!

For nearly 20 years, designers and non-designers alike have been introduced to the fundamental principles of great design by author Robin Williams. Through her straightforward and light-hearted style, Robin has taught hundreds of thousands of people how to make their designs look professional using four surprisingly simple principles. Now in its fourth edition, The Non-Designer's Design Book offers even more practical design advice, including a new chapter on the fundamentals of typography, more quizzes and exercises to train your Designer Eye, updated projects for you to try, and new visual and typographic examples to inspire your creativity.

Whether you’re a Mac user or a Windows user, a type novice, or an aspiring graphic designer, you will find the instruction and inspiration to approach any design project with confidence.

Level: Beginning / Intermediate
Category: Graphic Design
Cover Design: John Tollett

ROBIN WILLIAMS is the author of dozens of best-selling and award-winning books, including The Non-Designer's Presentation Book, The Non-Designer's InDesign Book, and Robin Williams Design Workshop. Through her writing, teaching, and seminars, Robin has educated and influenced an entire generation of computer users in the areas of design, typography, desktop publishing, the Mac, and the web.

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design
and
typographic
principles
for the
visual
novice

Robin Williams
Peachpit Press
San Francisco
California
To Carmen Sheldon,  
my comrade in Design,  
my friend in Life.  
with great love,  
R.
More matter is being printed and published today than ever before, and every publisher of an advertisement, pamphlet, or book expects his material to be read. Publishers and, even more so, readers want what is important to be clearly laid out. They will not read anything that is troublesome to read, but are pleased with what looks clear and well arranged, for it will make their task of understanding easier. For this reason, the important part must stand out and the unimportant must be subdued . . . .

The technique of modern typography must also adapt itself to the speed of our times. Today, we cannot spend as much time on a letter heading or other piece of jobbing as was possible even in the nineties.

Jan Tschichold 1935

typefaces
Modenica Light and Black
## Design Principles

### 1. Introduction
- The Joshua tree epiphany: 11
- The four basic principles: 13

### 2. Proximity
- Summary of proximity: 15
  - The basic purpose: 32
  - How to get it: 32
  - What to avoid: 32

### 3. Alignment
- Summary of alignment: 33
  - The basic purpose: 54
  - How to get it: 54
  - What to avoid: 54

### 4. Repetition
- Summary of repetition: 55
  - The basic purpose: 68
  - How to get it: 68
  - What to avoid: 68

### 5. Contrast
- Summary of contrast: 69
  - The basic purpose: 84
  - How to get it: 84
  - What to avoid: 84
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flyers .......................... 125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips on designing flyers ........ 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a focal point .......... 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use subheads that contrast .... 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition ...................... 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment ...................... 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters .......................... 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips on designing newsletters ... 132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment ...................... 132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph indents ............. 132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Helvetica/Arial! .......... 132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readable body copy ............ 132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures .......................... 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips on designing brochures ... 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast ...................... 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition ...................... 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment ...................... 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity ...................... 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcards .......................... 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips on designing postcards ... 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What's your point? .......... 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grab their attention .......... 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast ...................... 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general ...................... 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising .......................... 141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips on designing ads .......... 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast ...................... 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type choices .................. 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse type .................. 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Résumés .......................... 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips on designing résumés ..... 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast ...................... 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition ...................... 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment ...................... 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match the design to the medium ... 148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9 The Essentials of Typography

One space after punctuation ................................................ 152
Quotation marks ................................................................ 153
Apostrophes ...................................................................... 153
  Little Quiz #4: Apostrophes ............................................. 155
Dashes ............................................................................ 156
Special characters ............................................................. 158
Accent marks .................................................................... 160
Capitals ............................................................................ 161
Underlining ....................................................................... 162
Kerning ............................................................................ 163
Widows and orphans ........................................................ 164
Miscellaneous ................................................................... 165

10 Type (& Life)

Concord .......................................................................... 168
Conflict .......................................................................... 170
Contrast .......................................................................... 172
Summary .......................................................................... 174

11 Categories of Type

Oldstyle .......................................................................... 176
Modern ............................................................................ 177
Slab serif .......................................................................... 178
Sans serif .......................................................................... 179
Script .............................................................................. 181
Decorative ........................................................................ 182
Be conscious ...................................................................... 183
  Little Quiz #5: Categories of type .................................... 183
  Little Quiz #6: Thick/thin transitions ............................... 184
  Little Quiz #7: Serifs ...................................................... 185
Summary .......................................................................... 186
12 Type Contrasts 187
Size ......................................................... 188
Weight ...................................................... 192
Structure .................................................. 196
Form ......................................................... 200
Direction ................................................... 204
Color ......................................................... 208
Combine the contrasts .................................. 214
Summary .................................................... 215
  Little Quiz #8: Contrast or conflict ................. 216
  Little Quiz #9: Dos and don’ts ....................... 217
An exercise in combining contrasts .................... 218

A Few Extras

13 Does it Make Sense? 219
The process .............................................. 220
An exercise .............................................. 221
Okay—redesign this! .................................... 222

14 Answers & Suggestions 223
Quiz answers ............................................ 223
Designer Eye suggestions ............................. 225

15 Typefaces in this Book 229
Primary faces .......................................... 229
  Modern .................................................. 229
  Oldstyle ............................................... 230
  Slab serif .............................................. 230
  Sans serif ............................................. 231
  Script .................................................. 232
  Ornaments .......................................... 232
  Decorative .......................................... 233

Back matter 234
Mini-glossary ........................................... 234
Resources ............................................... 234
OpenType ............................................... 235
Is this book for you?

This book is written for all the people who need to design things, but have no background or formal training in design. I don’t mean just those who are designing fancy packaging or lengthy brochures—I mean the assistants whose bosses now tell them to design the newsletters, church volunteers who are providing information to their congregations, small business owners who are creating their own advertising, students who understand that a better-looking paper often means a better grade, professionals who realize that an attractive presentation garners greater respect, teachers who have learned that students respond more positively to information that is well laid out, statisticians who see that numbers and stats can be arranged in a way that invites reading rather than snoring, and on and on.

This book assumes you don’t have the time or interest to study design and typography, but would like to know how to make your pages look better. Well, the premise of this book is age-old: Knowledge is power. Most people can look at a poorly designed page and state that they don’t like it, but they don’t know what to do to fix it. In this book I will point out four basic concepts that are used in virtually every well-designed job. These concepts are clear and concrete. Once you recognize the concepts, you will notice whether or not they have been applied to your pages. If you don’t know what’s wrong with it, how can you fix it? Once you can name the problem, you can find the solution.

This book is not intended to take the place of four years of design school. I do not pretend you will automatically become a brilliant designer after you read this little book. But I do guarantee you will never again look at a page in the same way. I guarantee that if you follow these basic principles, your work will look more professional, organized, unified, and interesting. And you will feel empowered.

With a smile,
Repetition

The Principle of Repetition states: **Repeat some aspect of the design throughout the entire piece.** The repetitive element may be a bold font, a thick rule (line), a certain bullet, design element, color, format, spatial relationships, etc. It can be anything that a reader will visually recognize.

You already use repetition in your work. When you make headlines all the same size and weight, or add a rule a half-inch from the bottom of each page, or use the same bullet in each list throughout the project, you are creating repetition. What new designers often need to do is push this idea further—turn that inconspicuous repetition into a visual key that ties the publication together.

Repetition can be thought of as **consistency.** As you look through a sixteen-page brochure, it is the repetition of certain elements, their consistency, that makes each of those sixteen pages appear to belong to the same brochure. If page 13 has no repetitive elements carried over from page 4, the brochure loses its cohesive look and feel.

But repetition goes beyond just being naturally consistent—it is a conscious effort to unify all parts of a design.

It often happens in Life that we need repetitive elements to clarify and unify. A certain number of the guys above are on the same team, but we can’t tell.

The repetition of their clothes makes it immediately clear that these guys are some kind of organized entity. We do this sort of thing all the time.
Here is the same business card we worked with earlier. In the second example below, I have added a repetitive element: a repetition of the strong, bold typeface. Take a look at it, and notice where your eye moves. When you get to the phone number, where do you look next? Do you find that you go back to the other bold type? Designers have always used visual tricks like this to control a reader’s eye, to keep your attention on the page as long as possible. The bold repetition also helps unify the entire design. This is a very easy way to tie pieces of a design package together.

When you get to the end of the information, does your eye just wander off the card?

Now when you get to the end of the information, where does your eye go? Do you find that it bounces back and forth between the bold type elements? It probably does, and that’s the point of repetition—it ties a piece together; it provides unity.
Take advantage of those elements you’re already using to make a project consistent and turn those elements into repetitive graphic symbols. Are all the headlines in your newsletter 14-point Times Bold? How about investing in a very bold sans serif font and making all your heads something like 16-point Mikado Ultra? You’re taking the repetition you have already built into the project and pushing it so it is stronger and more dynamic. Not only is your page more visually interesting, but you also increase the visual organization and the consistency by making it more obvious.

**THE ELIZABETHAN HUMOURS**

In ancient and medieval physiology and medicine, the humours are the four fluids of the body (blood, phlegm, choler, and black bile) believed to determine, by their relative proportions and conditions, the state of health and the temperature of a person or animal.

**Eyes have Power**

When two people fall in love, their hearts physically become one. Invisible vapors emanate from one’s eyes and penetrate the other. These vapors change the other’s internal organs so both people’s inner parts become similar to each other, which is why they fall in love— their two hearts merge into one. You must be careful of eyes.

**Music has Power**

Songs of war accelerate the animal spirits and increase the secretion of blood in phlegmatics. Songs of love reduce the secretion of choler; slow down the pulse, and reduce melancholic anxiety. Lemnius (1505–1568) wrote that music affects “not only the ears, but the very arteries, the vital and animal spirits, it erects the mind, and makes it nimble.” Marsilius Ficino (1433–1499) wrote in his letters: “Sound and song easily arouse the fantasy, affect the heart, and reach the inmost recesses of the mind; they still [quiet], and also set in motion, the humours and the limbs of the body.”

**Wine has Power**

Ken Albala states: “Wine is the most potent corrective for disordered passions of the soul. In moderation it reverses all malicious inclinations, making the impious pious, the avaricious liberal, the proud humble, the lazy prompt, the timid audacious, and the...”

Headlines and subheads are a good place to start when you need to create repetitive elements, since you are probably consistent with them anyway.

So take that consistent element, such as the typeface for the headlines and subheads, and make it stronger. Make it a design element in addition to a useful element.

**typefaces**

Brioso Pro Regular
Matchwood Bold
Do you create multiple-page publications? Repetition is a major factor in the unity of those pages. When readers open the document, it should be perfectly and instantly obvious that page 3 and page 13 are really part of the same publication.

Point out the elements of repetition in the two sample pages below.

Consistent double rule on the tops of all pages.

Consistent typeface in headlines and subheads, and consistent space above each.

This single rule repeats across the bottom of each page.

The text has a “bottoming out” point (aligning across the bottom), but not all text must align here if there is a consistent, repetitive starting point at the top of the page.

Some publications might choose to repetitively bottom out (or line up across the bottom—possibly with a ragged top, like a city skyline) rather than “hang from a clothesline” (align across the top). Use one or the other technique consistently, though.
If everything is inconsistent, how would anyone visually understand that something in particular is special? If you have a strongly consistent publication, you can throw in surprise elements; save those surprises for items you want to call special attention to.

**To do:** Point out the consistent, repetitive elements of this book.

---

**Evanescent wan think, itching udder**

If everything is inconsistent, how would anyone visually understand that something in particular is special? If you have a strongly consistent publication, you can throw in surprise elements; save those surprises for items you want to call special attention to.

**To do:** Point out the consistent, repetitive elements of this book.

---

**Moon-late an steers**

Violate worse jest wile aboard Hairy, hoe worse jester pose form bore firming adjoining form. Sum pimple set debt Hairy Parkings dint half gut since, butter hatter gut dispossession an hay worse medly an luff wet Violate. Infect, Hairy wandered toe merrier, butter worse toe skirt toe aster.

O Hairy, cute Violate, jest locker debt putty moan! Arsenate rheumatic? Yap, inserted Hairy, lurking.

---

**Arsenate rheumatic**

- Sniff doze flagrant odors.
- Moon-late an merry age.
- Odors firmer putty rat roaches inner floor guarding.
- Denture half sum-sing impertinent toe asthma?
- Hairy astor fodder.
- Conjure gas wart hopping?
- Violate dint merry Hairy.
- Debt gull run off wot a wicket bet furry retch lend-lard.

---

**Evanescent further acme, dare wooden bather checking. Effervescent further peg, way wooden heifer basking. Effervescent further lessens, dare wooden bather ditches. Effervescent further oddest, way wooden heifer pitchers. Effervescent further classes, way wooden kneader class bums. Effervescent further bash tops, way wooden heifer bash bums. Effervescent fur merry seed knee, way wooden heifer shakster. Effervescent further tucking, way wooden heifer languish. Effervescent fur daze phony warts, nor bawdy cud spick anguish!**

---

**Note the repetitive use of the triangular shape in the list and in the caption, opposite page. That shape is probably used elsewhere in the publication as well.**

---

**All stories and photos or illustrations start at the same guideline across the top of each page (also see the note on the opposite page about “bottoming out”).**

---

**typefaces**

Bree Thin

Arno Pro
To create a consistent business package with a business card, letterhead, and envelope, use a strong display of repetition, not only within each piece, but between all the pieces. You want the person who receives the letter to know you are the same person who gave her a business card last week. You might want to create a layout that allows you to align the printed letter with some element in the stationery design.
Repetition helps organize the information; it helps guide the reader through the pages; it helps unify disparate parts of the design. Even on a one-page document, repetitive elements establish a sophisticated continuity and can pull together the entire piece. If you are creating several one-page documents that are part of a comprehensive package, it is critical that you employ repetition.

The Mad Hatter
- Wonderland, England

Objective
- To murder Time

Education
- Dodgson Elementary
- Carroll College

Employment
- Singer to Her Majesty
- Tea Party Coordinator
- Expert witness

Favorite Activities
- Nonsensical poetry
- Unanswerable riddles

References available upon request.

Besides having strong repetitive elements that make it very clear exactly what is going on here, this person might also want to incorporate one or more of these elements into the design of his cover letter.

typefaces
Myriad Pro Regular and Bold
Zapf Dingbats (n = 3)

Repetitions:
Bold typeface
Light typeface
Square bullets
Indents
Spacing
Alignments
If there is an element that strikes your fancy, go with it! Perhaps it’s a piece of clip art or a picture font. Feel free to add something completely new simply for the purpose of repetition. Or take a simple element and use it in various ways—different sizes, colors, angles.

Sometimes the repeated items are not exactly the same objects, but objects so closely related that their connection is very clear.

It’s fun and effective to pull an element out of a graphic and repeat it. The little heart motif could be applied to other related material, such as envelopes, response cards, balloons, and everything would be a cohesive unit, even without repeating the same heart.

**Train your Designer Eye:** Name at least five other repetitive elements on this little card. (Suggestions on page 227.)

This card uses a centered alignment. What was done to help it avoid looking amateur?
Often you can add repetitive elements that apparently have nothing to do with the purpose of your page. For instance, throw in a few petroglyph characters on a survey form. Add some strange-looking birds to a report. Set several particularly beautiful characters in your font in various large sizes, in gray or a light second color, and at various angles throughout the publication. Just make sure it looks intentional rather than random.

Overlapping a design element or pulling it outside of the borders serves to unify two or more pieces, or to unify a foreground and a background, or to unify separate publications that have a common theme.

The great thing about repetition is that it makes items look like they belong together, even if the elements are not exactly the same. You can see that once you establish a couple of key repetitive items, you can vary those items and still create a consistent look.

**Train your Designer Eye:** Name at least seven repetitive elements. (Suggestions on page 227.)
Using the principle of repetition, you can sometimes pull an element from your existing layout and create a new element that ties it together.

The dashed letters inspired the dashed concentric ovals hinting at a sound wave. Once you start noticing what can be repeated, I guarantee you’ll enjoy developing so many options.

**Train your Designer Eye:** Name at least four other repetitive elements on this little card. Also note where elements are aligned. (Suggestions on page 227.)

---

**Train your Designer Eye:** Name at least three repetitive elements on this card. Also note where elements are aligned. (Suggestions on page 228.)
The repetitive element does not have to be a graphic or clipart. It can be spacing, rules, fonts, alignments, or anything that you consciously repeat.

This is very typical: Times New Roman, centered, typewriter quotation marks. Someone did separate the information into logical groups, but you can see that the centered alignment is weak. There is an attempt to fill the corners.

Decide what you want to focus on. This version has a focus on the speaker. Regarding the Principle of Repetition, what are the repeated elements? You can see where the Principle of Alignment has been applied, and this ad also uses the Principle of Contrast, described in the following chapter.

This version has a focus on the topic. Notice the black bar is repeated in a thinner version at the bottom. A repetitive element that pulls things together can be that simple.

R. William Whetstone Memorial Committee
presents the Twentieth Memorial Lecture

Dr. Euphemia May Weber
Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience
at the
University of California, Yountville
on
"A Hundred Years of Science"

Monday, September 27, 8 p.m.
Reilly Rooser Auditorium, Truchas
Free admission

A Hundred Years of Science

Dr. Euphemia May Weber
Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience
at the University of California, Yountville

Monday, September 27, 8 p.m.
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This Twentieth Memorial Lecture is presented by the R. William Whetstone Memorial Committee

A Hundred Years of Science

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Free admission

This Twentieth Memorial Lecture is presented by the R. William Whetstone Memorial Committee
Sometimes the mere suggestion of a repeated element can get the same results as if you used the whole thing. Try including just a portion of a familiar element, or use it in a different way.

If an image is familiar to a reader from your other marketing material (page 37), all it takes is a piece of it to help the reader make the connection. What is another repetition here?

This typewriter image, of course, has been used on all of the Screenwriting Conference’s promotional material, so at this point we don’t have to use the entire image. Once again, as in the example at the top, we see the advantage of using just part of a recurring image—the reader actually “sees” the whole typewriter.
Repetition provides a sense of professionalism and authority to your pieces, no matter how playful. It gives your reader the feeling that someone is in charge because repetition is obviously a thoughtful design decision.

You can see that repetition doesn’t mean you have to repeat exactly the same thing. Above, the headlines are all different colors, but they use the same font. The illustrations are all different styles, but all rather funky and ‘fifties.

Just make sure you have enough repetitive elements so the differences are clear, not a jumbled mess. For instance, in this example you see that the recipes all follow the same format and there are strong alignments. When there is an underlying structure, you can be more flexible with the elements.
Summary of repetition

A repetition of visual elements throughout the design unifies and strengthens a piece by tying together otherwise separate parts. Repetition is very useful on one-page pieces, and is critical in multi-page documents (where we often just call it being consistent).

The basic purpose

The purpose of repetition is to unify and to add visual interest. Don’t underestimate the power of the visual interest of a page—if a piece looks interesting, it is more likely to be read.

How to get it

Think of repetition as being consistent, which I’m sure you do already. Then push the existing consistencies a little further—can you turn some of those consistent elements into part of the conscious graphic design, as with the headline? Do you use a 1-point rule at the bottom of each page or under each heading? How about using a 4-point rule instead to make the repetitive element stronger and more dramatic?

Then take a look at the possibility of adding elements whose sole purpose is to create a repetition. Do you have a numbered list of items? How about using a distinctive font or a reversed number, and then repeating that treatment throughout every numbered list in the publication? At first, simply find existing repetitions and then strengthen them. As you get used to the idea and the look, start to create repetitions to enhance the design and the clarity of the information.

Repetition is like accenting your clothes. If a woman wears a lovely black evening dress with a chic black hat, she might accent her dress with red heels, red lipstick, and a tiny red pin.

What to avoid

Avoid repeating the element so much that it becomes annoying or overwhelming. Be conscious of the value of contrast (see the next chapter and especially the section on contrasting type).

For instance, if the woman were to wear the black evening dress with a red hat, red earrings, red lipstick, a red scarf, a red handbag, red shoes, and a red coat, the repetition would not be a stunning and unifying contrast—it would be overwhelming and the focus would be confused.
Index

A

accent marks, 160
acronym for basic design principles, 13
advertising, 141–144
Alignment, Principle of
basic principle of, 13, 33–54, 87
breaking it, 132, 133, 136
comparison of different text alignments, 37, 42
messy alignment example, 46
mixing alignments, 72
sitting on the ground vs. clothesline, 58
soft vs. hard edges, 35
strengths of, 87
use baseline of text, 44
visual connection, 54
all caps
bad examples of, 26
caps vs. lowercase form, 154–155
when to use, 201
why not to use, 161, 190, 201
analogous colors, 101

Anguish Languish

ANSI codes
for accent marks, 160
for special characters, 158
apostrophes, use of, 154–155

Arial, don’t use it, 126, 132
ascenders, 186
asymmetry, 85

B

badges, examples of, 40, 134, 182
baseline
explained, 186
use for alignment, 44, 47
Before & After Magazine, 235
blank space. See white space
body copy, body text
defined, 235
brothers, lose them, 130, 223
uncrowd the text in a border, 166
bottom out, 58
branding, 114
break the rules, when to, 51, 225
brochures, 133–136
Brunel University London, 36
Brutus in Julius Caesar, 39
bullets
definition of, 235
how to type •, 158–159, 166
in a list, not hyphens, 166
relationship to text, 18
Burns, Robert, 43
business cards, 117–120
reinforce your package, 134
business package, 60
C

CafePress.com, 116, 235
Canva.com, 235
cap height, 186
Caveglia, Jerry, 43
centered alignment, 35
examples of, 40–42, 41
impression of, 36, 54, 87
make it look intentional, 42
suggestions for, 38–41
Chace, Howard L., 2
clothesline, 58
color
analogous combination, 101
black, 97, 111, 209–213
blue, red, yellow, 96
choosing, how to, 108–109
CMYK, 110–112
color models, 110–112
color wheel
analogous combination, 101
complementary colors, 98
image of full color wheel, 102
monochromatic colors, 104
primary colors, 96
secondary colors, 96
shades and tints, 102–105
split complements, 100
tertiary colors, 97
triads, 99
complementary colors, 98
contrast of, 208
comparison of typefaces, 212–213
effects of, 208–213
cool vs. warm colors, 107, 208
effectiveness in marketing, 137
examples of contrasts in, 74, 80, 82–83, 208
hues, 102
in black-and-white, 209
monochromatic colors, 104
primary colors, 96
RGB color model, 111–112
secondary colors, 96
shades and tints, 102–105
split complements, 100
tertiary (or third) colors, 97
tints, 102–105
triads, 99
warm vs. cool colors, 107
web colors, which model to use, 112
white, 97, 111
Wildflower Theory of Color, 106
color palette, how to use it, 103
Conrad, Joseph, 201, 211
color wheel
analogous combination, 101
complementary colors, 98
comparisons
of color in typefaces, 212–213
of type contrasts, 215
complementary colors, 98
concord
basic principle of, 167
examples, 168–169
conflict  
  basic principle of, 167  
  examples of, 170–171  
  how to avoid it, 69

consistency, 120. Also see Repetition, Principle of

contrasting type  
  basic principle of, 167, 187  
  by color, 208–213  
  by direction, 204–207  
  by form, 200–203  
  by size, 188–191  
  by structure, 196–199  
  by weight, 192–195  
  examples of, 172–173  
  summary, 174, 215

Contrast, Principle of  
  basic principle of, 13, 69, 89  
  like wall paint, 84  
  use as repetitive element, 80–81  
  using white space, 144  
  copy machines, design for, 124  
  corners, what not to do in them, 204

D  
  dashes, 156–157  
  Davis, J. Philip, 180  
  dazzling, 177  
  decorative type examples, 182  
  descenders, 186  
  design tips  
    advertising, 144  
    brochures, 136  
    business cards, 120  
    flyers, 128  
    letterhead and envelopes, 124  
    newsletters, 132  
    postcards, 140  
    résumés, 148  
  direction contrasts, 204  
    basic principle of, 204  
    examples of, 204–207  
    use for contrast, 75

E  
  Egyptian fonts, 178  
  em dash  
    how to type it, 158–159  
    when to use it, 157  
  em space as paragraph indent, 47, 132  
  en dash  
    how to type it, 158–159  
    what it is, when to use it, 156  
  envelopes  
    design tips, 124  
    size of, 124  
    standard size, 124  
  Evans, Dana Gwendolyn, 110  
  extended text  
    defined, 235  
    type for, 176, 178  
    type not good for, 177  
  eye, eye flow  
    and white space, 85  
    contrast and, 84  
    examples of, 16, 17, 32, 56, 71, 87

F  
  faxing, stationery for, 124  
  flag, newsletter, 129  
  flush left  
    defined, 42  
    examples of, 36  
  flush right  
    defined, 42  
    examples of, 37  
  flyers, 125–128  
    design tips, 128  
  focus, focal point, 81, 124, 128, 220  
  fonts  
    fonts to let go of, 81  
    for contrast, 132  
    for readability, 132  
    where to buy  
      CreateSpace.com, 235  
      CreativeMarket.com, 235  
      FontSquirrel.com, 235  
      MyFonts.com, 235  
  FontSquirrel.com, 235  
  form, contrasting, 200–203  
    caps versus lowercase is contrast, 200–201  
    roman versus italic is a contrast, 202–203  
  frame. See borders

G  
  glossary, 235  
  gray page, what to do, 195, 210  
  gutter, what is it?, 133

H  
  hang from a clothesline, 58  
  Hazlitt, William, 31  
  Helvetica, avoid it, 132, 136  
  hierarchy, use contrast to show, 194  
  hues of colors, 102  
  invisible type, 176

I  
  identity package, 114  
  indented text  
    first paragraphs not indented, 47, 132, 166  
    “typewriter” wide indents, 46, 165  
    InDesign PDF Magazine, 235  
    inspiration, 94  
  italic, true-drawn vs. fake, 202

J  
  Joshua tree, 11  
  justified type, 42

K  
  kerning, 163

INDEX
INDEX

L
Ladle Rat Rotten Hut, 48, 210, 211
left alignment
eamples of, 36
impression of, 36, 87
letterhead and envelopes,
121–124
Life
accenting your clothes, 68
consistency creates
clarification, 55
design your life, 85
don’t be a wimp, 85
dynamic relationships, 69, 167
physical closeness implies
relationship, 15
rules of, 74
Your attitude is your life, 199
Lindbergh, Ann Morrow, 14
line, drawn, 235

M
McDonald, Nikki, 2
McWade, John, 235
Melville, Herman, 172
messy alignment, 47
modern type examples, 177
monochromatic colors, 104
monospaced lettering, 151, 152
monoweight, 179
multiple-page publications, 58–59
MyFonts.com, 138, 235

N
newsletters, 129–132
contrast in, 70–71
repetition in, 58
newsprint, printing on, 144

O
oblique, 202
odd-sized postcard, 138
Old Singleton, 210
oldstyle type examples, 176
open book, open mouth, 223
optical illusions
reverse type size, 144
orphans, 164

P
paragraphs
first p. not indented, 47, 166
indent one em, 132, 165
indent or extra space, not
both, 166
Pie Day, 38
postcards, 137–140
primary colors, 96
principles of design, 11, 13
review, 85–94
printing, color model for
images, 112
PrintPlace.com, 117, 235
Proximity, Principle of
basic principle of, 13, 15
does not mean everything
is close together, 20
purpose of, 32
review of principle, 86
summary of, 32
punctuation
and quotation marks, 153
following styled text, 165
in parentheses, 165

Q
quad left or right, 42
quizzes
answers to, 223–228
apostrophes, 155
categories of type, 183, 196
color, 112
contrast or conflict, 216
design principles, 90
dos and don’ts, 217
my philosophy on, 223
redesign this ad, 91
serifs, 185
thick/thin transitions, 184
quotation marks, 153

R
radical thin/thin transition, 177
readability, 132
Repetition, Principle of
basic principle of, 13, 55
in brochures, 136
in newsletters, 129
review of principle, 88
summary, 68
unity with variety, 67, 135
résumés, 145–148
Return, after paragraph, 24
reverse type, when not to
use, 144
RGB, 111–112
right-aligned text
eamples, 34, 35, 50
Riley, Barbara, 222
roman type, 202
rules, breaking them, 51, 225
rules (drawn lines), 235
contrast in, 74
Rules of Life, 74, 85

S
Sanford, Arlan, 142
Sanford, Matt, 123, 147
sans serif
putting two or more on a
page, 199
type examples, 179
vs. serif, 198
Sayers, Dorothy L., 201
script type examples, 181
secondary colors, 96
serifs
horizontal and thick (slab), 178
horizontal, thin, 177
illustration of, 176
none (sans), 179
quiz on, 185
slanted, 176
shades of colors, 102–105
Shakespeare Papers
branding of, 114–115
color scheme, 109
Sheldon, Carmen, 3
Sidney, Mary, 135, 207
sixes and nines, 153
size
  contrast, 188
  contrasts in, 78, 82–83
  standard envelope, 124
  type size in business cards, 120
slab serif examples, 178
slanted text, 204
spacing arrangements, 21, 22, 25
  clarifies information, 31, 143
  letterspacing, 163
  one space after punctuation, 152
  Principle of Proximity relies on, 28
special characters, how to type them, 158–159
split complement colors, 100
stress, illustration of, 176
structure, 196–199
  basic principle of, 196
  contrast, 196
  different categories of type, 196, 197
  serif vs. sans serif contrast, 198–199
symbols, use dramatically, 191
T
  tertiary colors, 97
  thick/thin transitions, 176
    little or none, 178
    moderate, 176
    quiz on, 184
    radical, 177
    slight in sans serif, 180
  Thomas, Jimmy, 72–73
  threefold brochure, 133
tints of colors, 102–105
Tollett, John, 2, 113, 116, 131, 219
tracking, 163
triad colors, 99
true-drawn italic, 202
Tschihold, Jan, 4
typogaphy
  dynamic relationships in, 167
  graphic design is type, 149
  list of contrasts in, 215
  on cheap paper, 144
  reverse type, 144
  type size in business cards, 120
  standard envelope, 124
  typefaces
    comparison of color in, 212–213
    how to combine, 187–203
typewriter photo, 151
typographer quotation marks, 153
typographic essentials, 151–166
typography
  dynamic relationships in, 167
  graphic design is type, 149
  list of contrasts in, 215
  reverse type, 144
    typewriter photo, 151
    typographer quotation marks, 153
    typographic essentials, 151–166
    typography
      dynamic relationships in, 167
      graphic design is type, 149
      list of contrasts in, 215
      reverse type, 144
underline, don't do it, 162
unity in design, 54
V
  Van Ness, David, 2
  VIP, visually illiterate person, 221
W
  weight contrast, 192
  White, Jan, 2, 209
white space
  by-product of organization, 32, 142
  defined, 235
  organization of, 17
  to create contrast, 140
  trapped
    defined, 235
    examples of, 24, 50
    solutions for, 50
widows, 164
Wildflower Theory of Color, 106
Williams, Cliff and Julie, 126
Williams, Jimmy Thomas, 72–73
Williams, Pauline, 151
Williams, Robin, 240
Williams, Scarlett, 146
WingDings, 235

x-height, 186

your attitude is your life, 85–89

Z
  Zapf Dingbats, 235
  Zazzle.com, 235