THE NON-DESIGNER'S

DESIGN BOOK

FOURTH EDITION

DESIGN AND TYPOGRAPHIC PRINCIPLES
FOR THE VISUAL NOVICE

ROBIN WILLIAMS

THE NON-DESIGNER'S DESIGN BOOK

design
and
typographic
principles
for the
visual
novice

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Editor:	Nikki McDonald
Interior design and production:	Robin Williams
Cover design and production:	John Tollett
Proofreader:	Jan Seymour
Prepress:	David Van Ness

The quote by Jan White on page 209 is from the out-of-print book *How to Spec Type,* by Alex White. Reprinted courtesy of Roundtable Press, Inc. Copyright 1987 by Roundtable Press, Inc.

The portions of "Ladle Rat Rotten Hut" and other stories, such as "Guilty Looks Enter Tree Beers," "Center Alley," and "Violate Huskings" are from a long out-of-print book by Howard L. Chace called *Anguish Languish.* It is our understanding that these delightful stories are now in the public domain. They are easily found on the Internet.

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

CONTENTS

Designing with Type

12 Type Contrasts 187

A Few Extras

13 Does it Make Sense? 219

14 Answers & Suggestions 223

15 Typefaces in this Book 229

Back matter 234

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,

Robin

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.
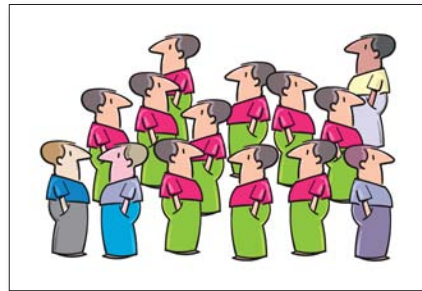
The repetition of their clothes makes it immediately clear that these guys are some kind of organized entity. We do this sort of thing all the time.

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.

Sock and Buskin
Ambrosia Sidney

109 Friday Street
Penshurst, NM
505.555.1212

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

Sock and Buskin
Ambrosia Sidney

109 Friday Street
Penshurst, NM
505.555.1212
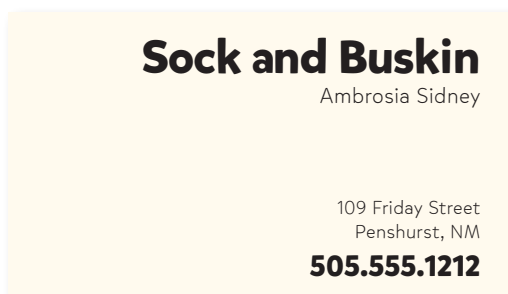
Now when you get to the end of the information, where does your eye go? Do you find that it bounces back and forth between the bold type elements? It probably does, and that's the point of repetition— it ties a piece together; it provides unity.

typefaces
Mikado Bold and Regular

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 temperament of a person or animal.

Eyes have Power

When two people fall in love, their hearts physically became one. Invisible vapors emanate from one's eyes and penetrate the other's. 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!

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.

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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.

Gulls Honor Wrote

Heresy rheumatic starry offer former's dodder, Violate Huskings, an wart hoppings darn honor form.

Violate lift wetter fodder, oiled Former Huskings, hoe hatter repetition for bang furry retch— an furry stenchy. Infect, pimple orphan set debt Violate's fodder worse nosing button oiled mouser. Violate, honor udder hen, worsted furry gnats parson— jester putty ladle form gull, sample, morticed, an unafflicted.

Wan moaning Former Huskings nudist haze dodder setting honor cheer, during nosing.

▶ *Water rheumatic form!*

Nor symphony

VIOLATE! sorted dole former, Watcher setting darn fur? Yore canned gat retch setting darn during nosing? Germ pup otter debt cheer!

Arm tarred, Fodder, resplendent Violate warily. Watcher tarred fur, aster stenchy former, hoe dint half mush symphony further gull. Are badger dint doe mush woke disk moaning. Ditcher curry doze buckles fuller slob darn tutor peg-pan an feeder pegs. Daze worsted furry gnats parson wit fairy knifely dependable twos. Nosing during et oil marks neigh cents.

Vestibule guardings

Yap, Fodder. Are fetter pegs. Ditcher mail-car caws an swoop otter caw staple? Off curse, Fodder. Are mulct oiler caws an swapped otter staple, fetter checkings, an clammed upper larder inner checking-horse toe gadder oiler aches, an wen darn tutor vestibule guarding toe peck oiler bogs an warms offer vestibules, an watched an earned yore closing, an fetter hearses any oil ding welsh.

Ditcher warder oiler hearses, toe? enter-ruptured oiled Huskings. Nor, Fodder, are dint. Dint warder mar hearses. Wire nut?

4

Consistent double rule on the tops of all pages.

Consistent typeface in headlines and sub-heads, and consistent space above each.

This single rule repeats across the bottom of each page.

Page numbers are in the same place and in the same typeface on 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

Effervescent further ACHE, dare wooden bather CHECKING. Effervescent further PEG, way wooden heifer BECKING. Effervescent further LESSENS, dare wooden bather DITCHERS. Effervescent further ODDEST, way wooden heifer PITCHERS. Effervescent further CLASHES, way wooden kneader CLASH RUMS. Effervescent further BASH TOPS, way wooden heifer BASH RUMS. Effervescent fur MERRY SEED KNEE, way wooden heifer SHAKSPER. Effervescent further TUCKING, way wooden heifer LANGUISH. Effervescent fur daze phony WARTS, nor bawdy cud spick ANGUISH!

Moan-late an steers

Violate worse jest wile aboard Hairy, hoe worse jester pore form bore firming adjourning 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, crate Violate, jest locket debt putty moan! Arsenate rheumatic? Yap, inserted Hairy, lurking.

Arsenate rheumatic

▼ Snuff doze flagrant odors.
▼ Moan-late an merry-age.
▼ Odors firmer putty rat roaches inner floor guarding.
▼ Denture half sum-sing impertinent toe asthma?
▼ Hairy aster fodder.
▼ Conjure gas wart hopping?
▼ Violate dint merry Hairy.
▼ Debt gull runoff wit a wicket bet furry retch lend-lard.

13

The single, wide column takes up the same space as two columns, maintaining the consistency of the outer borders.

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").

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.

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.

Robin Williams
•
9 Romilly Court
•
Las Cruces
•
NM
•
88008
•
575.555.1212
•
www.ratz.com
•
robin@ratz.com

Robin Williams
•
9 Romilly Court
•
Las Cruces
•
NM
•
88008
•
575.555.1212
•
www.ratz.com
•
robin@ratz.com

Robin Williams
•
9 Romilly Court
•
Las Cruces
•
NM
•
88008
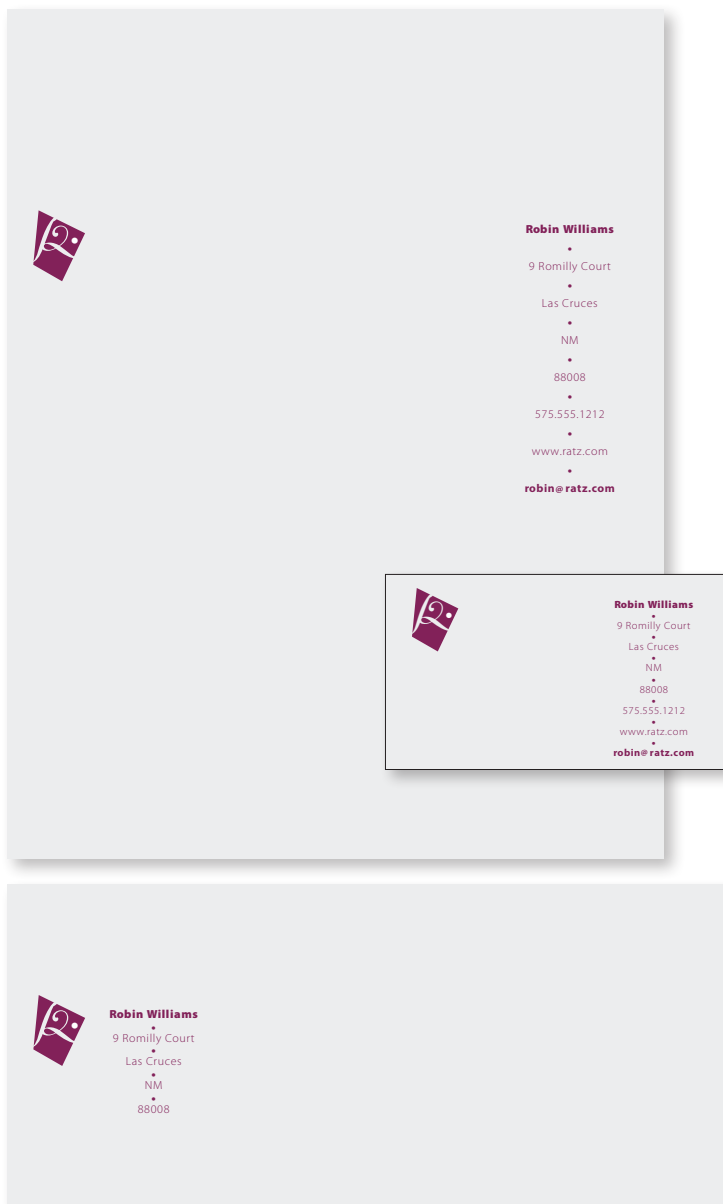
Repetition helps organize the information; it helps guide the reader through the pages; it helps unify disparate parts of the design. Even on a one-page document, repetitive elements establish a sophisticated continuity and can pull together the entire piece. If you are creating several one-page documents 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.

Repetitions:
Bold typeface
Light typeface
Square bullets
Indents
Spacing
Alignments

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
Nexa Light and **Black**
ITC Zapf Dingbats (n = ∎)

typefaces
Myriad Pro Regular and **Bold**
Zanzibar-Regular

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.

PIE JUST WANTS TO BE SHARED
WORKSHOPS *for* PIE ARTISTS

♥

SLAB PIES
When you have a large group for sharing,
consider a slab pie.
With a higher proportion of crust to filling
and easy slicing into squares, your crowd will love it.

♥

JAR PIES
Make sweet pies in small wide-mouth jars,
top them with a lid and a ribbon,
and share the pie joy.

♥

POP-TART PIES
Make a batch of pop-tart pies and freeze them.
Pop them into the toaster
when someone drops by for tea.

MERMAID TAVERN PIE SHOP SANTA FE

typefaces
Transat Text Medium
Brioso Pro Regular and *Italic*
Heart Doodles ♥

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.

reminder

Staff Meeting Today! 2 P.M.

Be There or Be Square!

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.

friday

12 noon

Meet Dr. Sal

tuesday

9:30 P.M.

Diversity Enhancement Training

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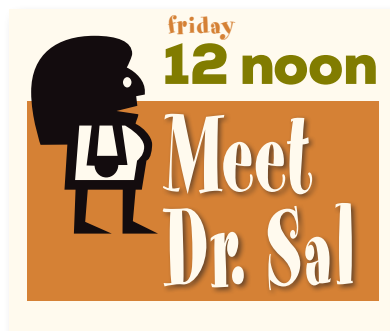
The great thing about repetition is that it makes items look like they belong together, even if the elements are not exactly the same. You can see that once you establish a couple of key repetitive items, you can vary those items and still create a consistent look.

Train your Designer Eye: Name at least seven repetitive elements. (Suggestions on page 227.)
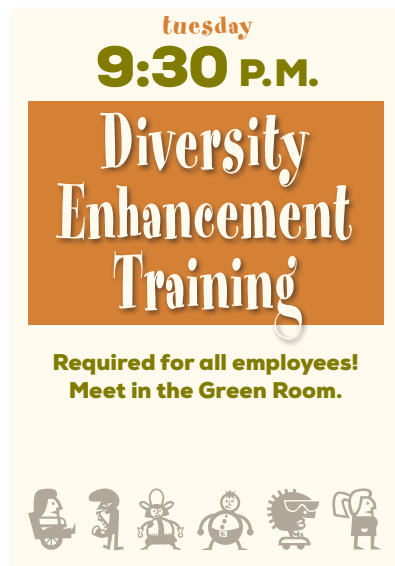
typefaces

Nexa Black

Spumoni

MiniPics LilFolks

Using the principle of repetition, you can sometimes pull an element from your existing layout and create a new element that ties it together.

PATRICIA MAY
RADIO SHOWS

AUTHOR AND STAR
of the hugely popular

Yountville Seniors
Radio Mysteries

SUNDAY . FEBRUARY 25 . 3:30 P.M.

YOUNTVILLE LIBRARY
6516 Washington Street
Yountville • California
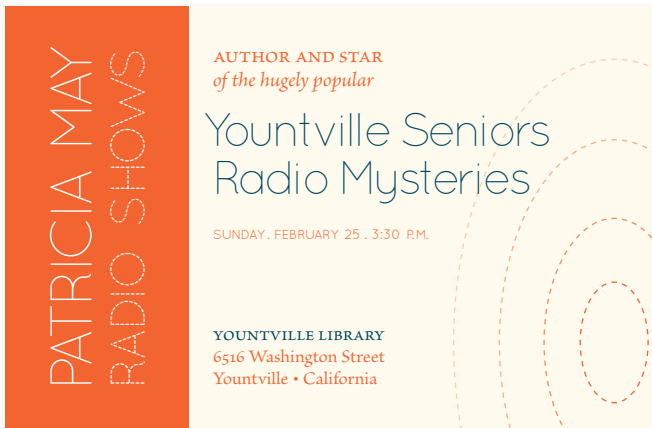
typefaces
Quicksand Light
and Dash

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.)

9 2 7
s a n
d r a

Please bring a guest
and join us for the champagne opening of

Umbrellas & Charcoal

Meet the artist
John Tollett

gallery 927 sandra
santa fe • new mexico

5 to 9 p.m.
march 17
fruit and cheese reception

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.

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

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.

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,
will be speaking on the topic of

A Hundred Years of Science

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

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.

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.
Reilly Rooser Auditorium, Truchas
Free admission

This Twentieth Memorial Lecture is presented
by the R. William Whetstone Memorial Committee

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.

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.

typefaces
PROFUMO
Minister Light and *Italic*

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?

typefaces
Schmutz Cleaned
Bickham Script Pro

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.

annual martini tasting
at the mermaid tavern

Lemondrop

6 parts lemon-flavored vodka
1 tsp sugar
1 part Cointreau or lemoncello liqueur

Combine ingredients in a cocktail shaker half-filled with ice cubes; shake well. Swirl half a lemon around the rim of a martini glass and dip in sugar. Pour the contents of the cocktail shaker into the glass and serve.

classic martini

6 parts gin
1 part dry vermouth
Cocktail olive

Stir in a mixing glass with lots of cracked ice. Strain into chilled glass and garnish with olive.

dirty martini

6 parts gin
2 parts dry vermouth
1 part olive brine
Cocktail olives

Combine liquid ingredients in a cocktail shaker with cracked ice; shake well. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Garnish with one or two olives.

gimlet

8 parts gin or vodka
2 parts Rose's lime juice

Combine ingredients in a cocktail shaker with cracked ice; shake well. Strain into a chilled martini glass.

queen bess martini

6 parts gin
1 parts dry vermouth
2 teaspoons Benedictine

Combine all ingredients in a cocktail shaker with cracked ice; shake well. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass.

cosmopolitan

4 parts vodka
2 parts Cointreau or limoncello liqueur
2 parts cranberry juice
1 part fresh lime (optional)

Combine ingredients in a cocktail shaker with cracked ice; shake well. Strain into a chilled martini glass.

typefaces
frances uncial
Brioso Pro Light
and *Italic*

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 over-whelming. 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