Fundamentals of design

gordongroup

About the gordongroup

gordongroup is a full-service, one-stop-shop marketing and communications agency, offering a unique blend of creative services including design and editorial for print and digital projects, web, video and other digital solutions, social media, direct marketing campaigns, event management, training and, of course, overarching marketing and communications strategies.

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Fundamentals of design

Design in publishing is about creating meaning. It's about using form, structure, and creativity to get your message across to the few or the many — anyone you want to reach. How do you do this? By creating designs and organizing content in a way that is visually interesting, compelling, and appealing to your target audience.

Whether you're new to CorelDRAW® or an experienced user, you'll find these next few pages useful while you are planning, creating, and revising your designs.

One desirable outcome: Design that works

Have you ever had a difficult time reading a menu, program, or poster? Sometimes, printed material that was intended to make your life easier falls short because elements are placed on the page so haphazardly.

If you want to create designs that work, you need to follow four basic design principles: proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast.

Let's take a closer look at these four principles to see why they're so important in the design process.

Principle 1: Proximity

Have you ever seen designs with text and graphics that just don't seem to work together? Copy and images appear scattered and unrelated, resulting in design anarchy.

The principle of **proximity** dictates that related items be grouped together to form a cohesive unit. By using this principle, you can reduce clutter and increase clarity. Your content and messages become streamlined, so that users are more likely to read and remember them (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Note how each grouping of text and photos is organized on the page. The proximity of related items helps readers navigate through the page content.

Principle 2: Alignment

Every element on a page should have a connection with another element to ensure a smooth, easy read. The arbitrary and illogical have no place in a successful design. **Alignment** creates a clean, sophisticated look that helps draw attention to your key messages and helps connect elements visually (Figure 2).

As a rule, one key element on your page acts as a focal point with which all other elements align. When you add a new element to your layout, align the two elements along an invisible line.

Figure 2: Lining up the elements on the page makes the content appear well thought out and organized — and thus worth reading.

Principle 3: Repetition

It's human nature. Somehow, we need to see, hear, and do things again and again for them to make an impact. Design is no exception.

Repetition of visual design elements throughout your piece — such as colors, shapes, textures, lines, and bullets — can help reinforce important messages. Repetition keeps content unified, organized, and visually interesting, so that the product is more likely to be read (Figure 3).

A word of caution about the repetition principle: be careful not to go overboard. Repeating an element too often can clutter the page and make it difficult for the message to be understood. When in doubt, keep it simple.

Figure 3: Repetition of visual themes — such as circles, color, and typeface — helps to unify the design while leaving room for creativity.

Principle 4: Contrast

Have you ever read material that makes you ask, "What is this piece trying to communicate?" Your confusion could be the result of too many conflicting elements, each competing for your attention, and each having equal weight on the page. To avoid such confusion, highlight the most important elements to contrast them with the secondary ones (Figure 4).
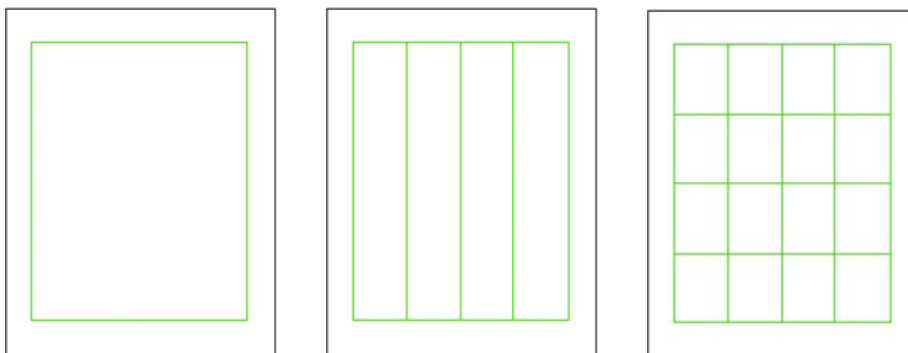
The use of contrast is essential for differentiating elements and organizing them hierarchically in the design. By contrasting colors, sizes, textures, or typefaces, you can create a strong visual presence and draw attention to your key messages. Don't make elements differ only slightly — for an effective design, make elements differ by 180 degrees.

Figure 4: The large-type banner contrasts with the body text, and the larger photo contrasts with the smaller photo. The elements are related but different, and the differences add visual interest.

Grids 101

Where would the design world be without grids? Simply stated, a grid is a framework of crisscrossed or parallel lines that provides a systematic and consistent method of placing objects. Grids are the basis of all design and are fundamental to creating consistent, cohesive, and easy-to-navigate published pieces. Grids can be as simple or as complex as you want them to be. You can easily create grids by using desktop publishing software such as CorelDRAW. Let's look at some common grid formats (Figure 5).

Single-column grid   Multiple-column grid   Modular grid

Figure 5: Common grid formats

The **single-column** grid is the most commonly used format for the page design of books. To create more space for the spine, book designers often make inside margins wider than outside margins.

The **multiple-column** grid is most often used for articles, pamphlets, newsletters, and posters. This grid format can be used in numerous ways. Outside columns are often reserved for images or captions, or a combination of both.

The **modular** grid contains an even number of columns and rows. This format allows an almost endless variety of design combinations (Figure 6).

Figure 6: This modular grid allows for unlimited design possibilities, yet its alignment keeps the page looking clean and organized.

Layout basics

The manner in which you lay out (organize) your content is a central component of the design process. You can draw the reader's attention to the most important content in your piece through the use of size, weight, placement, and spacing. This aspect of the layout is called a design hierarchy. Examples of hierarchical layout can be seen in newspapers, magazines, and posters (Figure 7).

Figure 7: The reader's eye is drawn to the story on the right by the larger headline and text. The content in the left sidebar is less important, so the text is smaller and set against a background of a different color.

Typefaces

A typeface is the design of a set of printed characters. Choosing the right typeface and type size is essential to the successful communication of your message. Typefaces have different personalities, and the typeface that you choose should reflect the message and tone of your piece.

If type is too small or too intricate, readers may decide that reading it is not worth the effort. If you use too much bold, underlining, or capitalization, you create too many competing elements, and your message may be lost. The use of more than three different typefaces on any one piece can ruin a good design.

Typefaces are often categorized on the basis of whether or not they contain serifs — tiny end-strokes at the tops and bottoms of the main lines that form each letter. Even though there are thousands of typefaces (too many to mention in this tutorial), most of them belong to one of six categories (Figure 8).

Oldstyle   Slab Serif   Script

Modern   San Serif   DECORATIVE

Figure 8: Six categories of typefaces

Whichever typeface you choose, make sure that it is both legible and appropriate for your audience. Don't get too fancy! Treat type in a way that enhances its readability and reinforces your message.

Get designing!

Now that you've reviewed a few design fundamentals, are you ready to put them into practice? There is no better place to start than CorelDRAW Graphics Suite X7, a comprehensive software solution that lets you confidently and successfully tackle a wide variety of design projects — from logo creation to multipage marketing brochures and eye-catching signs.