

Visual Hierarchy and Readability of Web Design

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Preface

In this study, we will discuss the important rules of web design, based on hypothesis that basic graphic design rules are not used or ignored in web publishing which we define as new media. These rules can be listed as visual hierarchy rules, gestalt principles and typographic principles.

Web Design

Web publishing has a brief history. From beginning of internet usage in 1990's until this day, for 20 years, a new media which is called world wide web or briefly web is being used in publishing. Initially web publishing used for advertising and informing but in web 2.0 era it developed dramatically. While web was being developed, design concepts were evolving based on new technologies and using ways. Web 2.0 can be defined as a era when interactivity and usage of web sites like blogs, wikis, forums and social networks was raised.

The methods and tools for web design aren't different from the traditional design processes. There is no radical differences between page design of newspapers, magazines, books and web design. Both publishing types are designed with similar rules. The most important difference between web and traditional publishing is that, web designs are shown from computer monitors and traditional designs are applied on paper. There is a radical quantitative difference between the image quality of computer monitors and designs which are printed on paper. On paper high resolutions like 5400 dpi can be used; on the other hand usually resolutions of computer monitors are between 72 and 120 dpi.

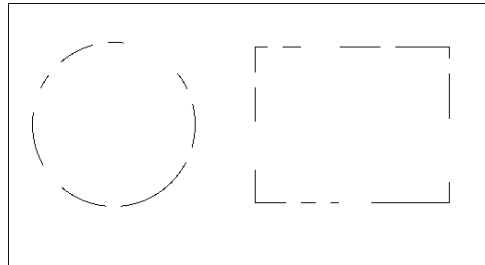
In some mobile devices' and cellular phones' small monitors resolution can be higher as 320 dpi but there is still a big difference with printed materials. Quality difference between printed materials and web brings forth using low quality graphic items in web design. Visual

items like pictures, drawings, texts, animated images and animations which are used in web design have low quality. For example small prints can be used on printed materials but in web publishing small prints between 1 and 8 points won't be preferred. Because small prints like these can not be displayed as clear and readable by reason of low resolutions of monitors.

Gestalt Principles

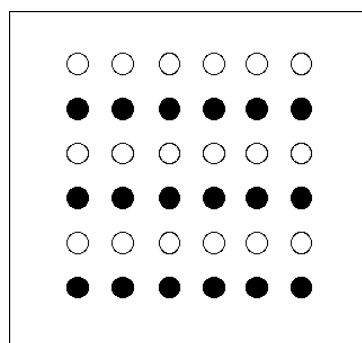
Gestalt approach sets the rules of human perception and it is one of the most important basic rules which directs graphic design. Visual perception of humans has a tendency for seeing objects a whole. For example if we see half of a person's face we can understand who she or he is. Our visual perception has a tendency for compounding the pieces, seeing the whole. Gestalt approach aims to define and analyze working of our visual perception. Gestalt principles can be sorted as Closure, Similarity, Proximity, Symmetry, Continuity, Common Fate.

Law of Closure: Mind adds missing elements to complete a figure.



Picture 1. Law of closure

Law of Similarity: Mind groups similar elements into collective entities or totalities. This depends on relationships of form, color, size etc.



Picture 2. Law of similarity

Law of Proximity: Proximity of elements may induce the mind to perceive a totality.



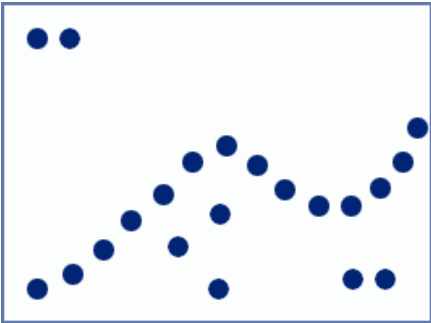
Picture 3. Law of Proximity

Law of Symmetry: Symmetrical visual elements are perceived collectively.



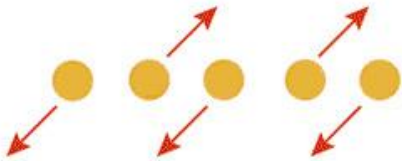
Picture 4. Law of symmetry

Law of Continuity: Mind continues visual and kinetic patterns.



Picture 5. Law of Contiunity

Law of Common Fate: Elements with the same moving direction are perceived collectively.



Picture 6. Law of Common fate

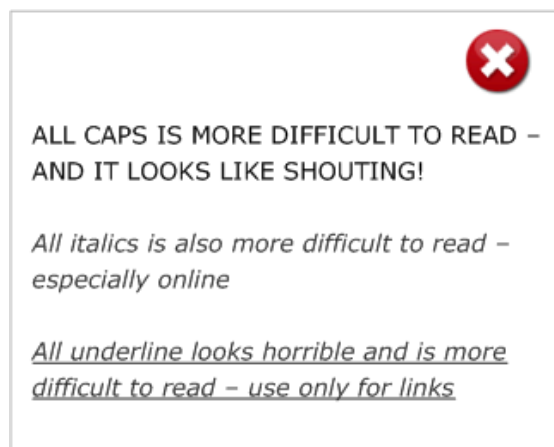
Visual Hierarchy

Visual hierarchy is the visual content based on importance to help visitor's process information in web sites. Our visual perception uses visual hierarchy allways and create a mental model to process information. Also visual hierarchy is so important in web design. Every web design needs the essential element of hierarchy. Hierarchy defines how to read through content. It shows the user were to start reading and where to read through. Hierarchy plays a big role in how scannable a layout is. It is an important technique to achieve readable web design. Visual hierarchy can be created by using visual elements like text size, color and contrast, shape and position.

Tools of hierarchy

Text Size

Using different text sizes is a good way to create hierarchical order. Big text sizes is attractive. Big sizes can be used for headers and titles. Small sizes can be used for main body text. Using sizes more than three is not recommended but other screen contents like advertisements, links or labels may use alternative sizes.



Picture 7. Using capital letters in design

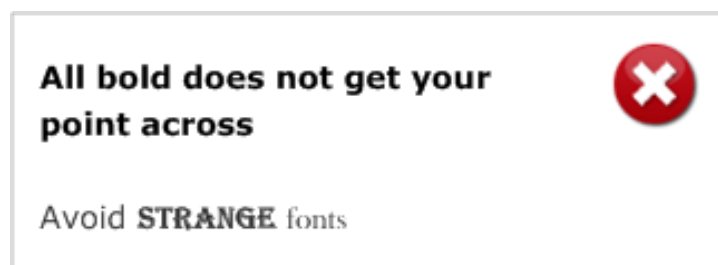
Color and Contrast

Color can be one of the most visually interesting ways to differentiate elements on a page. Contrast will cause eyes to focus on objects that stand out due simply to their difference in color in relation to the surrounding objects. Color refers to the space between letters,

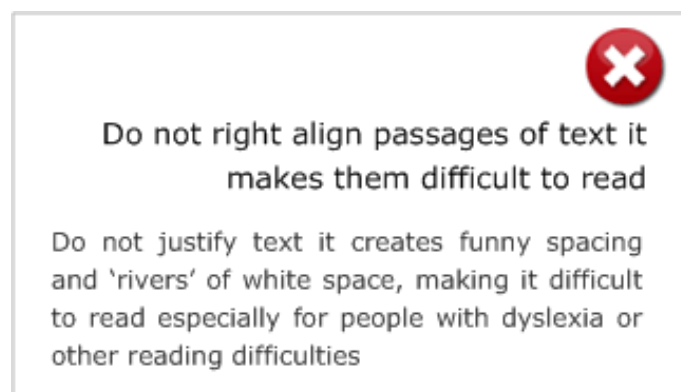
words, and lines of text as well as the weight of the font. Leading, and tracking among other things help control typographic color and can be used to control the hierarchy of your text. Contrast relates to the actual colors chosen for text and the background on which the text sits. The more contrast between text and background the more readable the text will be. Black text on a white background is the easiest to read. From there every combination makes text less readable.

Shape and Position

Sans serif type faces are better for web design but in printed media serif type faces must be used. Fancy calligraphic fonts are difficult to read. Web pages can be complex and less readable if more than two type faces used in design. Text and graphical alignment is important. Left aligned text is easy to read. All Caps are just for headers and titles, also they mean shouting in virtual space. Capital letters are useful because they announce the start of a piece of text (sentence) or an important piece of information such as a name. They lose their effectiveness when over-used. Full capitalisation is more tiring and slower to read, because it reduces recognition by making all letters a similar size.



Picture 8. Using bold and fancy letters



Picture 9. Aligning paragraphs

Readability and Scanning

Readability is a concept that defines quality in visual design. Readers and visitors of web sites can reach information simply with readable design. Scanning is a browsing behaviour when reading and searching in web sites. Designers can manipulate scanning with using visual hierarchical tools.

Designers, design whole web pages to be read. As matter of fact it won't happen this way. Visitors intend to look to most attractive parts of the web sites and visit another one.

Because of this, web designers must use the hierarchy rules and tools to direct visitors attention to whole page. And designers must avoid unnecessary items. Graphic design is visual information management, using the tools of page layout, typography, and illustration to lead the reader's eye through the page. Readers first see pages as large masses of shape and color, with foreground elements contrasting against the background field. Secondly they begin to pick out specific information, first from graphics if they are present, and only then do they start parsing the harder medium of text and begin to read individual words and phrases.



Picture 10. Designer's preferred eye flow



Picture 11. User's eye flow choice

Conclusion

This is a certain fact that, using computer while designing web pages and printed materials make process easier, shorter and it expands possibilities. But expanded possibilities in graphic design through usage of computer, increases probability for designers to leave basic rules of graphic design. Today a lot of web sites is being designed by people who are "curious" but devoid of design know-how. This new designer generation has programming know-how but these people are unaware of basic rules of visual arts. This situation causes increasing visual pollution in web publishing. Photographs, pictures, graphics, colours and all kinds and sizes of type styles are being used by haphazard and devoid of esthetic concerns. Especially academics and academic departments of universities which work in visual design are must look into this issue intensively. In our country number of educated designers are inconsiderable. Usually people who are from different professions can work in jobs which are related to web design. People and associations which work and do researchs about design must bring up negative activities about this area. Consequently web publishing in our country must be developed to a higher level than today.

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