

# Tips for Creating Effective Visual Designs


## Consistency is key.

Don't just throw things together with Word Art so every publication from Commonsense looks different; stick to a look that people can glance at and think, "ah, that's the Commonsense Trust." The following four design principles will help.

## Contrast

Be brave and be very, very bold. Make different elements *really* different if they're not identical. This not only creates energy in the piece but helps differentiate separate items.

### Tips:

- This includes, but isn't limited to, font size. Make some things really big, other things really small—but don't make things only a few points different.
- Don't use all capitals; this doesn't contrast well and makes the design harder to read.
- Create contrast with **Size**, **Weight**, **Structure**,  **Form**, **Direction**, and **Color**.

## Repetition

Make sure some part of the design repeats to show that it's all one unified visual design. It's a matter of being consistent with how you make one whole publication, but also in how all your publications look together.

### Tips:

- Pick one item and repeat it on every page or every poster for an event. It can be lines of a certain color, a clipart icon, whatever.
- Have fun with the repeated element; try sticking it weird places, at strange alignments, for fun.

## Alignment

Alignment creates cohesion among elements. Instead of scattering things all over the page wherever there's space, right- or left-align all the text to group ideas together and to show that they all belong in the same poster.

### Tips:

- Avoid centering information.
- Don't scatter information all over the place.
- Use one alignment per piece; if you use more than one, be very careful it works well.
- Align words flush with pictures, and try placing pictures so the words do align with it.

## Proximity

Group ideas together. Think about what goes together and use spacing and grouping to make it very clear. If you have a list of events, then a contact name and number, clearly separate the events from the contact name and number.

### Tips:

- Don't put information in corners.
- Use tabbing or headings and sub-headings to further organize information.
- Squint your eyes and count the number of elements on a page—you don't want more than about five. If you've got more than five, try to group more together using sub-headings.

# Cool text tricks

There are six major styles of fonts, listed below. You can mix and match fonts to make really interesting designs, just be sure you mix and match *right*. The types of fonts are:

Oldstyle,  
Modern,  
Slab serif,  
Sans serif,  
*Script*,  
Decorative

## Mix it up

You can create emphasis by using these different types of fonts together. For instance, this page I'm using a decorative font for the major headers, but I'm using an oldstyle font for the body text. See how it creates difference and emphasis?

### Tips:

- Try using not only different sizes of fonts, but different font styles for greater contrast
- Try decorating with text—make symbols or appealing-looking single letters part of the design.
- **Do not** mix fonts in the same style (for instance, two different **Modern** fonts); instead of creating contrast, that'll just look a little "off."
- **Do not** slant text without thinking about why it's slanting. Use it to create energy, not just for the heck of it.

## Control their eyes

Using these principles you can control the viewer's eyes. For instance, you can make the viewer's eye bounce between two types of information by making the font style, size, weight, and placement similar:

### **Semicircular Reasoning**

Like well-written **prose**?  
Appreciate excellent **photography**?  
Interested in **daily life** as a married college student?  
Care to engage in the occasional **mental workout**?

Give my blog a try. Check it out at

**[marriage.analogcafe.net/sr](http://marriage.analogcafe.net/sr)**

What do you look at? Think about where your eyes go. If you're like most people, they'll jump between "Semicircular Reasoning" and the URL. You can use this to make people keep looking at a couple different crucial pieces of information in a poster.

## Even more tips

Here are more tips I've collected on everything from brochures to posters to newsletters. I'd like to emphasize once again that the single most important thing is for you all to make posters that look like they've originated from the same organization.

### Flyers & Posters

- Experiment and have fun; make text or pictures big and interesting, and most of all, *unusual*
- Try using one enormous headline or one enormous picture, but don't make the body text big. If they don't get caught by the headline, big body text won't help.

- Use subheadings so the readers can scan for information quickly.
- Repeat header fonts in sub-heads.

## Brochures

- Use a layout similar to or the same as that on the business cards and envelopes.
- Think about where the folds are going to go and don't let text get lost in those folds.
- Think about what the reader will see first, second, etc., and sort/arrange information logically based on that. It can help to make a mock-up by hand first to visualize it.
- Strong alignment means you can occasionally break it for emphasis.
- Make this look similar or the same as your letterhead, flyers, business card...
- **Group** items together. Proximity in particular must be well thought out.

## Postcards

- Come to the point right away.
- Be creative. People receive tons of postcards all the time, so make yours stand out.
- Make it fit with all the other publications Commonsense produces.
- Don't try to cram too much information on. Only include exactly the pertinent details.
- Organize information very clearly.

## Business Cards:

- Don't use a lot of a second color; simpler is probably always better.
- Try different card alignments—both vertical and horizontal—and see which fits your information best.
- Align everything consistently.
- Avoid the clutter of periods, parentheses, dashes, and such; replace what you can with lots of space. This includes writing out street names.
- Don't make the font sizes too big! Just because you can fit the name on the card really big doesn't mean that you should—in fact, probably you shouldn't. Even 10 or 11 point font can be too big on a business card.

## Letterhead

- Use a layout similar to or the same as that on the business cards and envelopes
- Avoid centering.

## Newsletters

- Consistency and repetition are your best friends.
- Make it look like one cohesive thing, so all the pages tie together somehow.
- Use strong alignments and if you break it, go all out.
- Don't indent the first paragraph. Put a hard return between paragraphs, or indent paragraphs slightly.
- Try bolding key points within the text to make scanning easier.

## Newspaper Ads

- Do **not** cram as much information as you can into the ad.
- Leave white space, which will contrast with the paper's text as well as other ads.
- Think of the cleverest headline you can.
- Be specific and clear in the copy as to what you're advertising.
- Don't write a novel in the ad.

## Web Sites

- Employ the four principles, particularly making sure that every page is related to the previous one.
- Logical organization is a must; make it clear what goes to where, and why it should.
- Try to reduce the amount of scrolling visitors have to do.