

# Graphic Design Basics

In many classrooms text-based student assignments, such as the report or research paper, are being replaced with multimedia projects. Students often demonstrate their learning visually. Because of the increased use of graphics in student work, students need to acquire a kind of "grammar" for design as much as for language to create high-quality products.

The amount of instructional time that a teacher spends addressing design issues depends on a variety of factors, such as the subject area, the specific content, the grade level, and the time allocated to the project. In any case, just as a social studies or science teacher must address the specific writing skills and knowledge relevant to their subject areas, all teachers need to include some instruction in basic design principles as part of students' visual literacy. Sticking to a few basic principles and spreading them out over different projects can make teaching and assessing graphic design manageable without detracting from important content-area skills and knowledge.

## Basic Design Principles

**Balance** refers to the visual weight of the components of a design. Balance can be symmetrical where the elements of a design are equally and evenly distributed or asymmetrical where dissimilar objects are balanced with the use of color, size, texture, or shape.

**Proximity** means that items that are closely related to each other should be physically close to each other so they form a group rather than appear as separate elements in a design.

**Repetition** creates cohesion in a design or a series of designs, such as a slideshow, the same way that repeated language connects ideas in text. Repeating an element, such as a layout, a logo, or a pattern, helps readers navigate a design more easily and focus on what you want them to see. It can also give work a consistent feel, mood, or point of view.

**Contrast** creates interest and organization through size, color, shape, and space. "The Principle of Contrast says, 'If two items are not exactly the same, then make them different. Really different.'"

**White space**, or nothing, is an important element of design. The space around elements focuses the viewer's eye on what is important and makes the content on the page easier to see or read.

(Adapted from [Principles of Design](#))

## Assessing Graphic Design

Students learn what is assessed. If we mean for students to think critically about the design of their visual products, we need to assess that trait in their work, similar to how we assess 21st century skills, such as collaboration and problem solving. Consider customizing one or more of the traits from the following rubric and adding it to a project assessment to reinforce the importance of design in visual products.

## Graphic Design Resources

### [Introduction to Graphic Design](#)

A slideshow with illustrations of basic design principles.

### [The Four Basic Principles](#)

A slideshow describing principles of graphic design with lots of examples of how different products are improved with better design.

Notes:

	Excellent	Proficient	Developing	Unsatisfactory
Balance	I use symmetry and/or color, size, texture, and shape in interesting, creative ways to achieve a balanced look.	I use symmetry and/or color, size, texture, and shape to achieve a balanced look.	My design is slightly unbalanced because I didn't consider the visual weight of the different elements.	My design shows little or no attention to how the different elements balance with each other.
Proximity	The elements in my design that relate to each other are connected in interesting, subtle ways that communicate meaning.	The elements in my design that relate to each other are connected in ways that communicate meaning.	I attempted to connect elements in my design that relate to each other, but it's not clear to the viewer how or why they are grouped.	The elements in my design are arranged in a random way with no regard for how they relate to each other.
Repetition	I repeated important design features throughout my project in creative and subtle ways that give it a cohesive feel and communicate my message.	I repeated design features throughout my project to give it a cohesive feel and communicate my message.	I tried to repeat some elements to unify my project, but they are inconsistent and do not really contribute to my message.	I do not use any repeated design elements to communicate my message.
Contrast	I used contrast of size, color, shape, and space, in interesting and surprising ways to add interest and meaning to my project.	I used contrast of size, color, shape, and space, effectively to add interest and meaning to my project.	I use some contrast in my design, but many elements look very similar in size, color, shape, and space.	All of the elements in my design are similar in size, color, shape, and space.
White Space	I used white space creatively to organize my design, to focus the viewer's attention on important elements, and give my design an uncluttered appearance.	I used white space effectively to give my design an uncluttered appearance.	The white space in my design seems random and not carefully thought out.	My design is cluttered with too little white space.
Overall Design	My message is clear and interesting and cohesive throughout all the parts of my project. The layout of my design is creative and uncluttered.	My message is clear and cohesive. The layout of my design is interesting and uncluttered.	My project has a general topic but my message is unclear. My design is confusing and rather cluttered.	The message of my project is unclear and the design appears to be just a random collection of elements.

## For more information

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