TEN PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD GRAPHIC DESIGN

1. CONTENT ALWAYS DICTATES DESIGN

2. CONTRAST IS A KEY ESSENTIAL ELEMENT

3. LAYER INFORMATION – CREATE VISUAL HIERARCHY

4. KEEP IT READER FRIENDLY AND USEABLE

5. DON'T OVERDO

6. TYPE SHOULD COMMUNICATE

7. CREATE ALIGNMENTS

8. CREATE DOMINANCE

9. STRIVE FOR INNOVATION

10. ABOVE ALL, BE FUNCTIONAL WITH DESIGN
1 CONTENT ALWAYS DICTATES DESIGN

Storytelling is the bottom line. Always start out with good content and draw the inspiration for the design from that content.

An effective design solution starts with thorough preparation and a good idea. The content always dictates the design, whether you make advertisements, brochures, web pages, or other visual presentations. Content dictates design, otherwise you are just making a design that is purely decorative, rather than helping to convey cognition of content and purpose of the site.

Content should come before design.

In your projects, consider
> what is the purpose of the presentation, then
> decide what content serves this purpose, then
> decide what content should go where (what content is most important), then
> go into your mockups.

If design follows content then it is logical to say that content dictates design. In other words, the job of design is to assist content in engaging viewers and encouraging them to take the hoped for response (for example, to buy something, to go somewhere, to make something). People make (or should make) presentations to show information, demonstrate relationships and explain ideas; they do not/should not make presentations to show off pretty colours, try to impress with fancy fonts or dazzle the audience with technical wizardry.
2 CONTRAST IS A KEY ESSENTIAL ELEMENT

Contrast is the difference between two or more elements (as in parts or components or features). With contrast, a designer can create visual interest and direct the attention of the user. But imagine if all of the elements on a page were the same in style and appearance. There would be no organisation, no flow, and definitely no hierarchy. Content would be nearly impossible to digest. This makes contrast an essential part of effective design. Using contrast effectively is the essential ingredient that makes content accessible to every viewer. It helps the learner navigate what is there, discern relationships, and determine what is most important – all in an effort to convey meaning.

Every element on the page you’re designing has to be positioned, sized, or otherwise distinguished in accordance with its specific importance and place in the overall communicative objective. This makes contrast a powerful and essential tool for designers. Simply put, contrast is at the root of almost everything you will accomplish with design.

There are a lot of ways to create contrast, such as -
Contrasting Text
By creating titles, body text, bold text and underlines you are able to organize the information and provide direction.

Contrasting Size
There are other ways to create contrast—size being one of them. One way is by changing the font size, as seen in the image above as well as below, but the sizes of images have to be carefully considered also – not just image with image but image with text. In the example below the text is noticeable first because of its size (as well as position – at the top).
Contrasting Colour

Another great way to create contrast is through the use of colour. When most people hear the word contrast, they think of colour. Even though the principle of contrast is not limited to colour, it can go a long way in helping the user differentiate elements from one another.

A collection of sauces - the solid band of colour differentiates them easily, while witty ink drawing characters add loads of personality to each bottle

Now Go and Be Different

Learning to create the right amount of contrast in your designs is just like mastering any other principle of design – it takes practice. Take time to study the work of talented designers and see how they are using contrast in their designs. Remember that contrast is all about differences. If two elements are very different in nature, be sure to make their visual differences very obvious. Remember, the key is to use a substantial difference. A font size change that is barely noticeable and colours that are too close in value looks more like a mistake than an attempt to provide emphasis or interest.
Create visual hierarchy. Help the reader understand the method of your news judgement and organise pages. Package information by organising it into modules. Modular design (everything in a rectangle) is still the most effective pattern of design.

The goal of visual design is to communicate. How you organise and prioritise your elements conveys valuable information about their relative importance. Visual hierarchy aids comprehension, reinforces your message, and guides your visitor through your story.

A hierarchy is an organisation of items into different levels of relative importance. Visual hierarchy is naturally enough creating this organisation and prioritisation visually. Through basic design principles you emphasise one element over another so more important content looks more important. You design related elements to provide visual cues that those elements are on the same level in the hierarchy. You organise everything on the page to create a sense of order. Visual hierarchies create centres of interest on your page, communicate additional meaning through convention and repetition, highlight actions you want your visitors to take, and establish patterns of movement and flow.

You create a hierarchy in design by adjusting the visual weights of your element. More visual weight is seen as more important. Less visual weight is seen as less important.

Some of the things that affect visual weight in creating a hierarchy:

- **Size** – As you would expect larger elements carry more weight
- **Colour** – It’s not fully understood why, but some colours are perceived as weighing more than others. Red seems to be heaviest while yellow seems to be lightest.
- **Density** – Packing more elements into a given space gives more weight to that space
- **Value** – A darker object will have more weight than a lighter object
- **Whitespace** – Positive space weighs more than negative space or whitespace
Remember that you have to consider all elements/components when deciding on hierarchy, ensuring that the most important attract attention first – whether it be text or images.
4 KEEP IT READER FRIENDLY AND USEABLE

Don't make it difficult for your reader to use the information you are presenting. Think about the poor design strategies that slow down the reader: italic type, reverse type, all cap typefaces, type on top of pictures, grunge typography.

Consider ways of helping the reader with content: drop caps, text heads, paragraph breaks, white space.

DECORATIVE initials used as drop capitals should be positioned on a text baseline and be sized so that the top of the capital letter aligns with the cap height on the first line of text.
5 DON'T OVERDO

Too much of anything in design can be dangerous. Take a step back from a finished design and squint your eyes. What do you see? Any element that becomes too distracting should be a danger sign.

Even if you do have several smart ideas, too many of them in one place is not only crowded, it also taxes the viewer's mind and memory. A logo or design must be memorable. An overcrowded design is not easy to reproduce in one’s memory. No one will be able to identify that certain something that truly captures the essence of your brand if it is hidden or if they have to think hard and look closely to find it. A design should capture the brand with an almost singular image, colour scheme, or pattern that viewers will come to recognize and associate with your client’s business.

It's counter-intuitive, but simple designs send a more nuanced complicated message than a design with multiple elements. Instead of distracting the mind, it captures the mind and gives the viewer's imagination some room to think as well.

Some designers think that creating a complicated logo design with gradients, swooshes, swirls and drop shadows will give them an upper hand on winning a contest. Well, that is a wrong idea. The simpler the graphics, the better the chances of the logo being appealing. However, simplicity must come with creative sensibility. Example: McDonalds, KFC, Coca Cola are all simple yet powerful logos.
6 CHOOSE AN EFFECTIVE FONT

There are a lot of fonts out there, so many that choosing a font could become an overwhelming decision. You should realise how important your choice in font is.

Typography is a fine art form filled with intricate details, such as weight, kerning, axes, strokes, and counters. These elements affect how we read, although we are rarely conscious of it. The font that you choose could determine how much text your visitors read and how effective your site is.

You should consider your font as part of your design. Remember, letters are images themselves, just images that we read. A font can either enhance or detract from the theme and feeling of your web design.

You are not necessarily bound to one font. In fact, mixing fonts can add dimension to your design. It can also help delineate different types of text. For example, all of the informational text can be a standard sans serif, quotes can be italicised sans serif, and titles can be a larger serif. If you decide to do this, use a discerning eye because it can easily become too busy and tacky.

Below is an example of too many fonts harming the message
There really isn’t a “best font” out there. There is however, usually one font that is better than others for your particular design. Every font serves a different purpose, so your choice in font depends on your design and what you want it to communicate. Just remember to keep the viewer in mind. You also want them to read your content, so make it as legible and accessible for them as possible. Choosing the right font can help you communicate your message more effectively, so choose wisely!
Can you imagine how difficult it would be to find your car in a crowded parking lot if everyone ignored the parking lot stripes and parked in every which direction and angle? Imagine trying to get out of there! Alignment brings order to chaos, in a parking lot and on a piece of paper. How you align type and graphics on a page and in relation to each other can make your layout easier or more difficult to read, foster familiarity, or bring excitement to a stale design.

In the above layout, left, right, and centre text alignments and no overall alignment of text and graphic elements creates a chaotic page. If any two elements are aligned, it's purely accidental. No one alignment is the best.

Nothing guides and directs readers stronger than strong alignments (left, right, centred)

The essential idea of alignment is mind numbingly simple: to line things up - every element that you place onto a page should be accompanied by a logical thought process as to its positioning.

A solid grasp of visual alignment is an unbeatable foundation for all types of design. It is the sort of knowledge that, once grasped, you will use on every single layout you create as a designer. However, despite the fact that it is at the very core of what designers do, alignment seems to be a primary source of most of the poor design seen today.

When possible, use strong alignments that make it easy for your eye to follow the flow of information. Centre alignments are acceptable, but become more difficult to implement properly as the content on a page increases. Left alignments, though arguably boring, are rock solid and should be your default, go-to alignment for much of the work you do. Often, though not always, a right alignment will convey a sense of uniqueness. If you're designing something that needs to stand out and feel different, a right alignment is a great place to start.

Remember that alignment refers to specific items on a page as well as the arrangement of the objects as a whole. Spend time on every design making sure all your elements line up properly with everything on the page. This applies vertically and horizontally along all edges of the design.
In the example below (left) you can see the design elements have been placed somewhat randomly. There is a header, footer, and two columns, but the elements within aren’t placed with a purpose. Text is centred. Elements fall where they will. Overall the design is very amateur. Look how much better the example on the right is simply through alignment. It is already looking like there is some purpose to things. There is now a plan where before there was randomness.

It is no accident that, in the above example, the back of the cat is aligned with the background buildings in the photo alongside – attention to detail like this is important and necessary.
8 CREATE DOMINANCE

Invite the reader in through clear dominant elements.

When you first come across a new design, where does your eye go?
What’s the first thing you see on the page?
Where in the design is your attention drawn?
The answer to all three questions is one of dominance.

Dominance through emphasis of one or more particular elements creates a focal point in your design. It’s where most people will instinctively go when first looking at your work. Dominance will create an entry point on the page from which you can lead the viewer to other parts of the page.

Dominance is the varying degree of emphasis in your design elements. Dominance relies on contrast, since without contrast everything would be the same.

You can create 3 levels of dominance in your work.

1. **Dominant**: The element given the most visual weight, the element of primary emphasis. The dominant element will advance into the foreground in your composition.
2. **Sub-Dominant**: The element(s) of secondary emphasis that will become the middle ground in your composition.
3. **Subordinate**: The elements with tertiary emphasis, given the least visual weight. Subordinate elements will recede into the background of your composition.
9 STRIVE FOR INNOVATION

Don’t be afraid to take chances with design. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn’t. Experiment.

Innovation is a word commonly used in the value sets of many companies. But being innovative means being willing to move boundaries – not least within oneself. There is a difference between being creative and being innovative. Being creative means getting the best out of the given framework. This can be done by any good designer. Creativity is more about psychology than intellect, and there are no secrets to being creative. Actually, there is no such thing as “being more creative”, you are already a creative being. Being innovative means thinking beyond the given boundaries - to take a fresh look and set new boundaries. This takes courage on the part of the designer.

There are moments when we feel stuck trying to tap into our own creativity. This block is merely your mind at work - your mind is creating all sorts of assumptions, self-imposed constraints and self-limiting inhibitions. Here are seven things you can do -

1. **Persistence** – We tend to see the end result of a creative idea in awe, but what we don’t see are the actions, hard work and persistence behind the scene to make the vision a reality.

   “Invention is 1% inspiration, 99% perspiration”, –Thomas A. Edison

2. **Remove Self-Limiting Inhibitions** – “think outside the box”. Encourage yourself to be open to new ideas and solutions without setting limiting beliefs. Remember, innovation is more about psychology than intellect.

3. **Take Risks, Make Mistakes** – Part of the reason why we create self-imposed inhibition is due to our fear of failure. Expect that some ideas will fail in the process of learning. Build prototypes often, test them out on people, gather feedback, and make incremental changes. Rather than treating the mistakes as failures, think of them as experiments. Accept them, then take your newfound knowledge and put it towards finding the best solution.

   “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” –Thomas A. Edison

4. **Escape** – Our environment can and does effect how we feel. The more relaxed and calm we are internally, the more receptive we are to tap into our flowing creativity. This is why ideas sometimes come to us in the shower or while we’re alone. Each of us have different triggers to access our creative energy. Experiment and find what works for you.

5. **Writing Things Down** – Many innovators and creative people keep a journal to jot down ideas and thoughts. Some keep a sketch book, scrap book, post-it notes, loose paper. They all have a method to capture their thoughts, to think on paper, to drop their inhibitions and start the creative process.

   Leonardo da Vinci’s famous notebook was purchased by Bill Gates for $30.8 Million dollars.

6. **Find Patterns & Create Combinations** – Ideas come from other ideas. You can increase your exposure to new ideas, look for patterns and see how you can combine ideas to improve upon existing solutions.

7. **Curiosity** – Many innovators are just curious people who are inquisitive, and like to solve problems. Practice seeing things differently. For example, When seeing the solution to a problem, ask yourself, "What are some alternative ways to doing this?". Ask a lot of questions and challenge the norms or existing methods.

Here are some techniques you can apply to cultivate creativity:

- **Keep a Journal** – Practice writing every thought, idea, and inspiration down. Practice, brainstorming and thinking on paper.

- **Solve the Opposite Problem** – The idea is to invent and brainstorm by solving the opposite problem that you are trying to solve. So, for example, if you are trying to create “The best laptop design”, then start with ideas to create “The worst laptop design”. For each idea you come up with, flip it. For example, if “heavy and clunky” is one idea for “The worst laptop design”, then flipping that might give me “light and sleek” which can be used in “The best laptop design”.
This technique works especially well when brainstorming in a group. The technique sounds so silly that people will become playful when answering. Humour brings down inhibition and encourages people to say things out aloud. People feel less insecure and more open.

**Find A Creative Environment** – Find a relaxing or inspiring environment that triggers your creativity. Try different spots until you find some that really bring out the best in you.

**Do something fun** – If you’re stuck on something, shift your thoughts by going to do something fun and completely different. Come back to it with a fresh mind.

**Partnering** - Find creative partnerships with another. New ideas can surface as a result of two forces that would not have been arrived by a single person. Brainstorm together.

**‘Commit to Failure’** - “Commit yourself to taking enough risks that you will fail some of the time. If you’re not failing, we’re not doing something sufficiently difficult or creative.” -Scott Berkun

**Talk to Someone About It** - When you try to articulate a particular problem to someone, somehow this can articulate the solution as well. When explaining, you are not expecting them to solve your problem, but rather act as a ‘bouncing board’ for ideas.

**Plan for Roadblocks** -Commit to efforts to overcome potential setbacks. It’s worthwhile to identify and have a plan for non-creative items that may inhibit creative thinking. The most common roadblocks people face: Loss of motivation, running out of money, unable to convince key person.

Poster design gives a fantastic canvas for creativity. Like web designs, posters offer great scope for creativity and innovative graphic design. Posters are often created for DJs, events, nightclubs and other interesting subjects that lend themselves well to creative design work.
10 BE FUNCTIONAL WITH DESIGN

It's the bottom line. Don't decorate pages. Don't add anything to “fill up space”. That means no clip art. If the design isn't adding to the information, the reader doesn't need it. Edit it out. Content should be good enough to maintain attention.