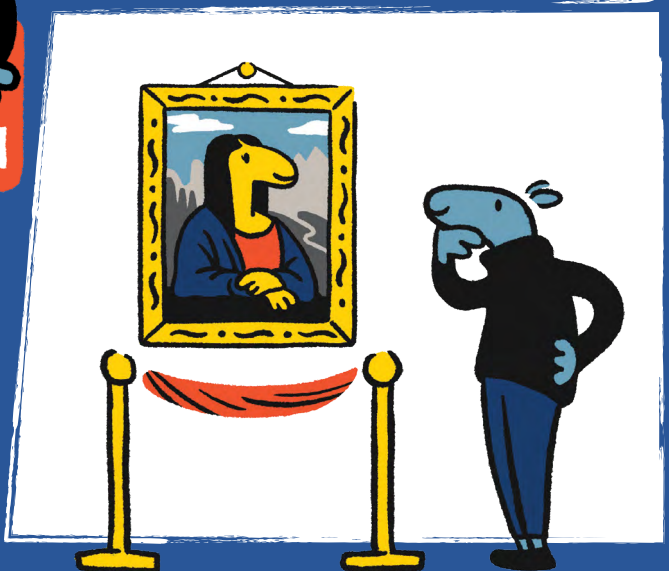




GENERAL DESIGN GUIDE



by THE STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM



GENERAL
DESIGN
by THE
STUDENT Affairs
COMMUNICATIONS TEAM
GUIDE

THE DIVISION OF
 **Student Affairs**

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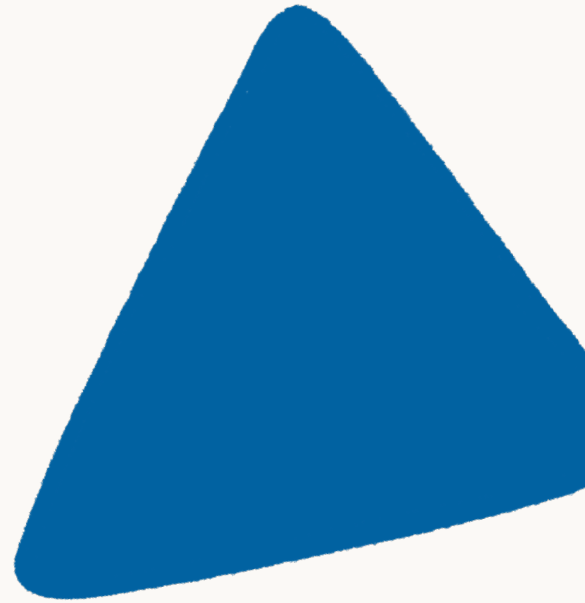
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Composition

Composition is awareness of space.
Consider how objects fit into that space,
and the motivations for why those objects
are placed in those positions.



1

Composition

1A • Hierarchy

Hierarchy is the organization of objects by importance. Size, contrast, and placement contribute to hierarchy.

Take a look at the design example below. If you squint your eyes, the first thing you see is the brand name (Phil's Finest), then to the top (Smoked Cauliflower Bratwurst), then to the tinier, technical text. Notice how the size and style contrasts guide your eye.



Secondary
Next most important

Primary
The most important

Tertiary
This text is read last

Gander design studio for "Phil's Finest"

1B • Alignment

Alignment is a way to organize and present your information. The three main types of alignment are left, center, and right.



Left Alignment

The most common alignment type, easy to read.



Center Alignment

Best suited for headlines and short pieces of text.



Right Alignment

Unique alignment type; has uses but can be difficult to read.

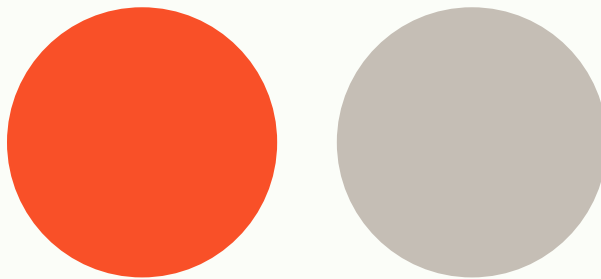
1C • Tangents

A **tangent** is when the edge of one object touches the edge of another object. Tangents are usually unintentional and complicate the reading of a design.

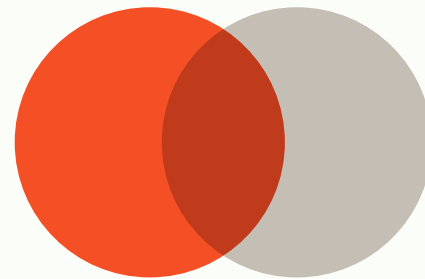
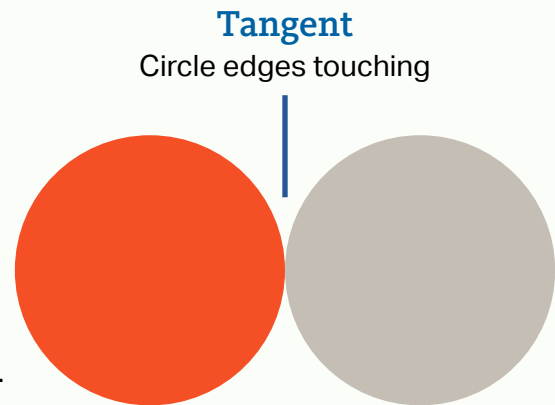
Fix tangents through:

- Adequate space
- Overlap

Placement and size changes can also resolve tangents.



Spacing



Overlay

1D • Breathe Space

Breathe space (or **clearspace**) is the area given to an element (e.g., logo) for an easy read. Often times, it is determined by a relative measure within the design.

Proper breathe space gives the graphic more importance and emphasis. Logos, for example, have mandatory breathe space because of their importance in design hierarchy. Brands will often include guidelines on logo usage. Proper clearspace is often highlighted as one of the most important aspects.







2

Consistency

Keep your audience under your spell.
Consistency allows your audience to stay engaged and focused on your information. Design deviations will distract viewers.

2A • Keeping Elements the Same

When presenting information from a design standpoint, you want your viewer to stay within the experience. Having inconsistent elements such as color, font, or layout will break your spell and distract. You don't want them questioning why there was a random pink circle when your other circles were blue, or why Comic Sans popped up when there was only Helvetica.

Layout

- Create a set of slide layouts and use them throughout.
- Use the same spacing conventions throughout.

Typography

- Use the same typography throughout your presentation (e.g., all headers are the same font and size).

Kievit Slab
NEXA RUST SANS
Activ Grotesk

Color palette

- Stick to your color palette and keep it simple (3-5 colors).





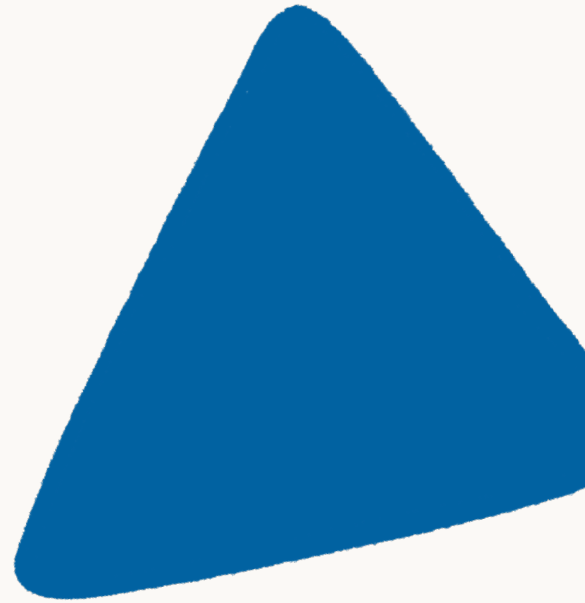
2B • Analyze Templates

Don't be afraid to use templates. Good templates are consistent in style because they have set parameters (typography, size, spacings, colors, graphics). They save a lot of time and effort. You can also dissect and study existing templates to strengthen your own, if you choose.

Websites that offer design templates

- www.canva.com
- www.adobe.com/express
- www.creativemarket.com





Colors

Color is a powerful tool for visual communication. You can strategically use color to convey emotions, draw a viewer's attention to key information, and create harmony within your composition.



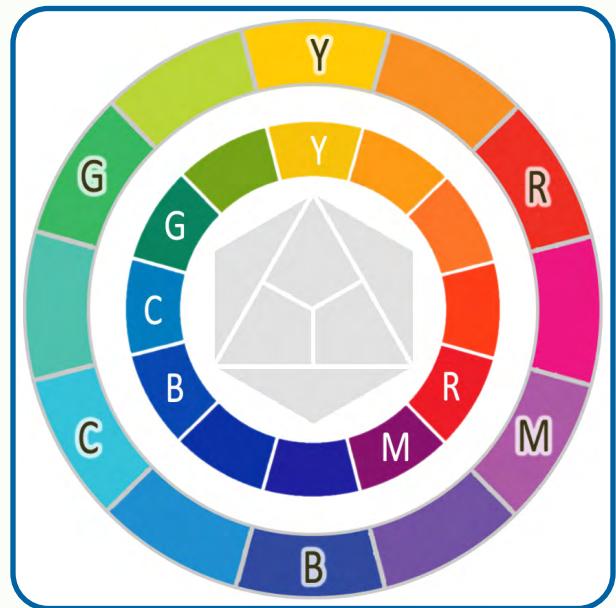
3A • Color Schemes

A **color scheme** is a combination of 2 or more colors used in a design. The **color wheel** can be used as a tool to build harmonious color combinations based on the relationships of colors on the color wheel.

The seven major color schemes are:

- **Monochromatic:** one color, with different saturations and/or values
- **Analogous:** colors next to each other on the color wheel
- **Complementary:** colors are opposite each other on the color wheel
- **Split Complementary:** one dominant color and the two colors directly adjacent to the dominant color's complement.
- **Triadic:** three colors that are evenly spaced, forming a perfect triangle on the wheel.
- **Tetradic:** four colors that form a rectangle on the color wheel, using two complementary color pairs

(Source: edu.gcfglobal.org)

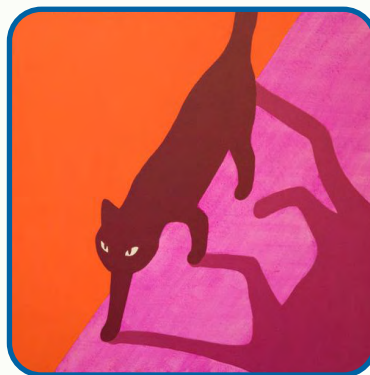


Color schemes in action:



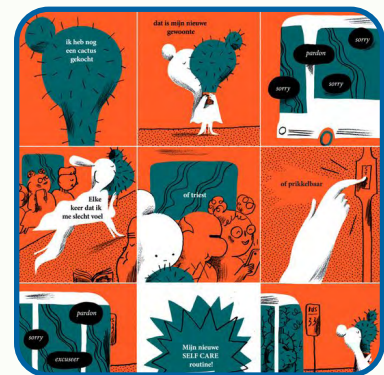
Monochromatic

Credit: Gun Karlsson



Analogous

Credit: Randall Christopher



Complementary

Credit: Charlotte Dumortier

3B • Brand Colors

Consistency is key in branding. If you are representing an organization, seek out their brand guidelines and update your design with their set of defined brand colors.



3C • Color No-Nos

Color Vibration

Colors that are too close in saturation and value will vibrate and be difficult to read. You can test the legibility of your design by squinting your eyes. If the edges of your shapes are clearly defined, then you have sufficient contrast in your design.

To avoid color vibration, adjust the lightness, darkness, or saturation to achieve good contrast between colors.

Here's an
example of
color vibration
(eek!)



Busy Color Palettes

Busy color palettes have too many colors with little contrast. This results in a lack of visual hierarchy (where do I look first?) and presents a muddled tone.

- Use accent colors to draw attention to key points.
- Use neutrals, like black and white, in your color palette to create balance.





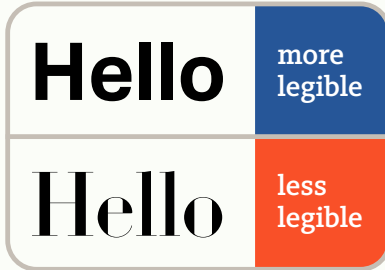
4

Typography

From font choices to heirarchy, there are many considerations when designing text that can affect the tone and effectiveness of your design. Let's dive into a few basics to help you effectively communicate your message.

4A • Text Legibility

Legibility measures how easily text can be distinguished and understood. Text legibility is important for communicating information clearly, which helps readers take in information with as much efficiency and ease as possible. (Source: UXcel)



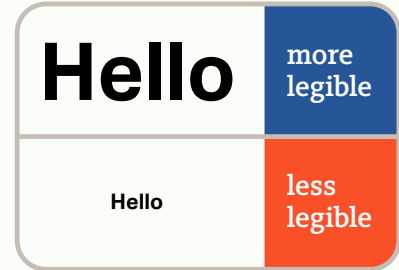
Contrast

Consistency in thickness is more legible. Stark thick and thins are less legible.



Spacing

Breathing room between letters and lines of text helps define the letter shapes.



Size

Make sure that key text is sized at a comfortable scale for reading.

4B • Style and legibility

You don't have to sacrifice on style when thinking of legibility in your design! Think strategically about parts of your design that can sacrifice on legibility to draw attention and prioritize legibility for smaller text and key information.

For larger text (e.g., titles, headings) you can sacrifice a little legibility for style with a decorative font.

For smaller text (e.g., body text and captions) prioritize legibility. Choose a simple, consistent font.

Heading Text

Agniaspe rumquis endionsed
quia quis as que volorb
usamustrum et adi aut duci-
assit eius re re ni net que et
que vellabo. Facid et maxim.



4C • Get the most out of one font

To achieve a cohesive look, it is best to stick to just 1-3 fonts for one design. You can vary the look of a font by switching up different style elements like boldness, size, and capitalization. Changing these dynamics within one font can help differentiate information and establish visual hierarchy.

Change it up!

Here are a few style elements that you can change to create contrast between your words and letters:

- Weight
- Italicization
- Size
- Capitalization
- Color

Heading Text

Bold blue text in italic, followed by main body text in medium weight.

- List text in a lighter weight.
- List text in a lighter weight.
- List text in a lighter weight.

4D • Combining fonts

It can sometimes feel like a guessing game when pairing different fonts. Study other designers' work for inspiration to see what looks successful. Over time, your design instinct will develop as you continue to learn.

Opposites Attract

There is truth in the old adage that opposites attract. Create a dynamic look for your design by combining fonts of different styles! The right font pairings will have contrast, but also complement each other.

Here are some dynamic type duos:

- **san serif + serif**
- **wide** + narrow
- *decorative* + **clean**







5

Dynamic Visuals

Dynamic visuals make projects more engaging and memorable. They help clarify complex information, evoke emotions, and maintain audience interest. Incorporating visuals effectively can significantly enhance the impact of your work.

5A • Images

Images can make your point memorable and understandable. Here are some dos and don'ts to consider when including images in your design:



Dos



Text Overlay

Place mindfully. Place text where it can be read clearly.



Clipping Masks

Cropping your image into a shape can add style. It should fit inside mask with no gaps.



Align Images with Text

Consider placing images near text with a left alignment or with a mindful text wrap.



Don'ts



Distracting Imagery

Busy or conflicting images can distract from the key message of your project.



Stretching

Constrain proportions when rescaling an image to avoid awkwardly stretching the image.



Watermarks

Using watermarked images without permission from the rights holder is not only unprofessional, but also copyright infringement.

5B • Icons

Icons are small, communicative symbols.

Stay on brand

Choose icons that suit the tone of your project and vibe with your target audience.

Use established conventions

Choose icons that are universally recognizable.

Be consistent and keep it simple



5C • Illustrations

Illustrations add character & emotion.

Make sure illustrations don't compete with icons or photos

Stay on brand and use illustrations mindfully to enhance your project.

Keep illustrations consistent

Utilize the same style throughout your project.

Use professional looking illustrations

Find royalty-free platforms to choose quality illustrations.



5D • Graphs & Tables

Graphs and tables visually share your findings.

Keep it simple

Use on-brand colors

Choose main palette or secondary colors for your graphs and tables. Be consistent throughout your project's tables and graphs.

Label everything properly

Pay attention to details. Make sure you copy the correct content.

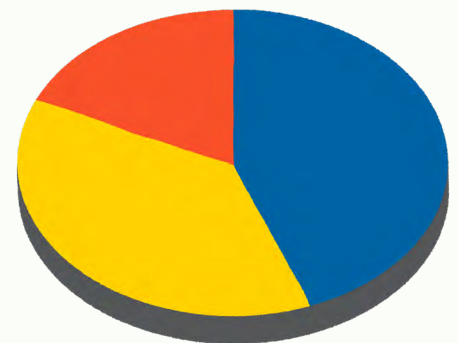
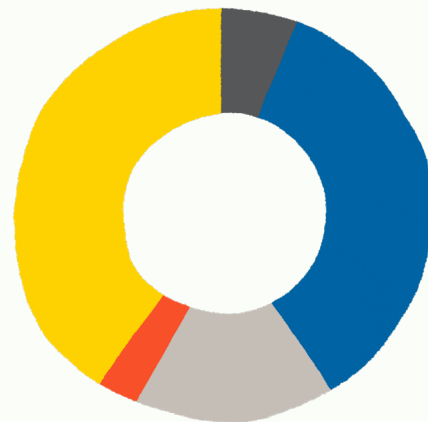
Don't just screenshot graphs from Excel

Screenshots won't allow you to make important changes, updates or adjustments to your graphs.

Keep your fonts consistent

Resources

Google Sheets, Apple Pages, Canva, beautiful.ai







Be Curious & Collaborative

Curiosity and collaboration are fundamental to fostering creativity, innovation, and project success. They encourage exploration, diversity of thought and collective problem-solving which are essential elements to achieving an impactful project outcome.

6A • Inspiration

Inspiration comes when we stay curious.

Search Design Blogs

Gather inspiration from the web and organize it in groups to flush out aesthetic motifs and design ideas.

- [It's Nice That](#)
- [Designspiration](#)

Moodboard

Moodboarding allows you to collect similar images together into themed groups. Moodboarding also helps you articulate these distinct aesthetics visually, which supports easier communication with collaborators.

- [Pinterest](#)
- [Mural.co](#)



Enjoy Art

Find inspiration by staying connected to other artists. Inspiration can hit even when you least expect it. Stay open and thirsty for art of all types.

- Museums
- Art shows
- Fashion
- Concerts

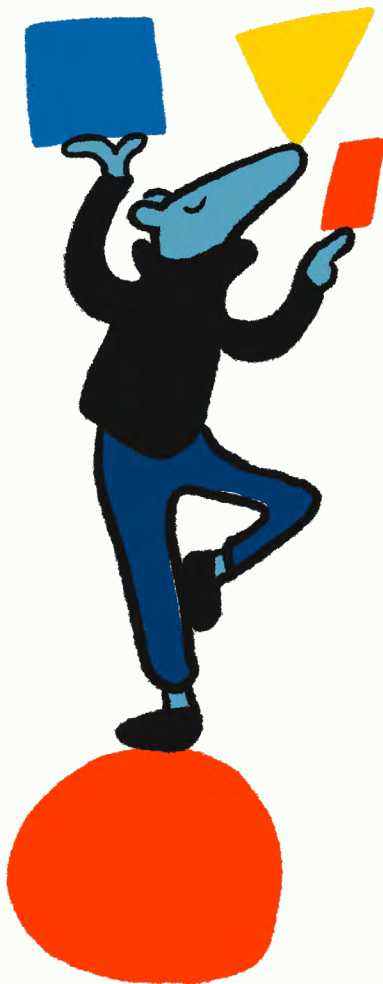
6B • Sharing & Feedback

Sharing & feedback gives you extra eyes, so ask your peers and mentors to review your work.

Collaborative Platforms

These platforms allow you to easily attain feedback from other teammates or stakeholders — all within the project/platform you're working on.

- Canva
- Adobe Creative Cloud
- Google Slides
- PowerPoint for the web (Microsoft 365)



Timing is everything

Before you share, make sure you are truly at a place within your workflow where you are ready to receive feedback.

Incorporating feedback into your work

Try the ideas from the feedback you receive. Even if you don't like the idea at first, give it a try before you dismiss it. A new idea may open you up to something you wouldn't have seen before.



07

Resources

Here's a brief list of resources to learn more about design fundamentals, find online creative communities, and choose assets to form the building blocks for your next design!

Icons

- [Icon Finder](#)
- [Noun Project](#)
- [Streamline](#)

Stock Photos and Illustrations

- [Unsplash](#)
- [Pexels](#)
- [Pixabay](#)
- [UCI Widen](#)
- [Adobe Firefly](#)

Presentation Templates

- [Slidesgo](#)
- [Adobe Express](#)
- [Canva](#)
- [Google Slides](#)
- [Canva Presentations](#)
- [beautiful.ai](#)

Color Palettes

- [Colors.co](#)
- [Paletton](#)

Fonts

- [Google Fonts](#)
- [Adobe](#)
- [Velvetyne](#)
- [DaFont](#)
- [Creative Market](#)

• Instructional Design Articles

- [GCF Global: Beginning Graphic Design](#)
- [Selecting Display Type](#)
- [Canva: Color Theory and the Color Wheel](#)

Design Education/ Communities/Blogs

- [Domestika](#)
- [Do Good Work Youtube Channel](#)
- [Creative Mornings](#)
- [AIGA](#)
- [Cooper Type](#)
- [Dribbble](#)
- [Itsnicethat](#)
- [Designspiration](#)

Free Graph & Chart Making Platforms

- [Google Sheets](#)
- [Apple Pages](#)
- [Canva Presentations](#)
- [beautiful.ai](#)

Moodboarding Platforms

- [Pinterest](#)
- [GoMoodboard](#)
- [Mural.co](#)

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UC Irvine Student Affairs



UCI Student Affairs

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