

Effective page layout for the nonartist



Jean-luc Doumont provides help with and runs training sessions on effective oral presentations, written documents, graphical displays, and related topics of scientific, technical, or business communication. He also trains instructors and facilitates any process in need of structuring. In hundreds of sessions, he has addressed audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities, in English, French, Dutch, and Spanish. He is an engineer from the University of Louvain and a doctor in applied physics from Stanford University.

Master one more skill: format your own documents

Technology blurs traditional roles

Where does page layout start, really?

Clients lack visual imagination

They cannot "see" the final product from a draft

Writing-in-the-layout saves time

by reducing the number of iterations



Effective page layout for the nonartist

Purposes

A question of visual structure

Principles

Three candid discoveries

Processes

Integration for efficiency

More than beauty, pages should possess elegance

Appropriateness

Focus on the purpose: visual structure

Simplicity

Less is more: remove ink, add space

Harmony

Constraint options to coordinate items



Purposes

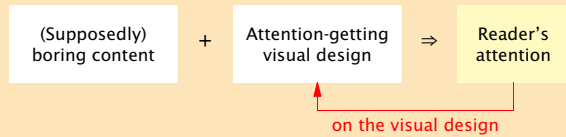
A question of visual structure

It is about revealing the structure,
not about making the page attractive

“I have found that all ugly things
are made by those who strive
to make something beautiful,
and that all beautiful things
are made by those who strive
to make something useful.”

—Oscar Wilde

Self-promoting designs
distract from the content



The visual design becomes “noise”.

The page layout should respect
the principles of the visual world

- Proximity**
Items close together convey related content
- Similarity**
Items looking similar play a similar role
- Prominence**
More prominent items are more important

Violation of the proximity rule:
unrelated items closer than related ones

The underground areas of a repository must comply with the requirements of the general regulations relating to measures in the field of the health and safety of workers in mines, underground quarries and galleries, and with the Royal Decree of November 4, 1996 amending the Royal Decree of January 10, 1979, relating to prevention policy and the bodies responsible for health, safety and the improvement of workplaces in mines, excavations and underground quarries.

1.6.5 Electrical installations
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Electrical installations are governed by the provisions of the General Regulations on Electrical Installations (RGIE/AREI). Underground installations are also subject to the regulations on the use of electricity in mines, excavations and underground quarries (Royal Decree of September 20, 1990 amending the Royal Decree of September 5, 1969).

Violation of the similarity rule:
different items presented in a similar way

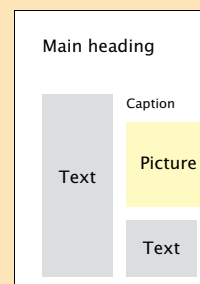
1.4	General design requirements and safety strategy	15
1.4.1	Design requirements relating to long-term radiological safety	16
1.4.1.1	The long-term safety functions of disposal	16
1.4.1.2	The multi-barrier concept and defence-in-depth	17
1.4.1.3	The relationship between the safety functions and the barriers	18
1.4.2	Design requirements relating to the assessment of long-term safety	22
1.4.3	Design requirements relating to safety during the operational phase	23
:	:	:
:	:	:

Violation of the prominence rule:
secondary heading (almost) more prominent

WHEN AND HOW TO USE PICTURES
Visual codings, like other codings, should serve the purpose of the act of communication that they contribute to. Used indiscriminately, for example as a panacea, as a mere attention getter, or as a way to shun translation expenses, they may well detract from the document's intent. Their intrinsic properties, as outlined above, suggest the following three practical recommendations.

When being visual, be truly visual
First, effective illustrations are truly visual, not verbal. In other words, they do not rely on symbolic association and can thus be

Structure is first about how the page looks,
and only then about how the items look



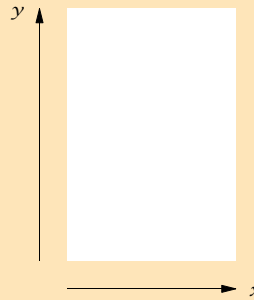
Visual structure
is about
spatial arrangement

Principles

Three candid discoveries

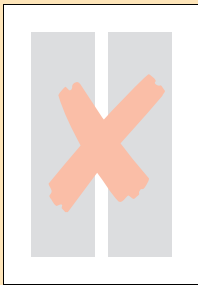
Discovery #1

A page has two dimensions



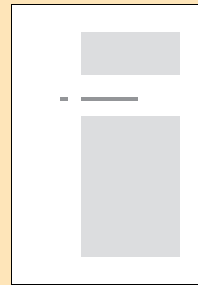
Let us break the vertical paradigm of text processors

Make space for more...



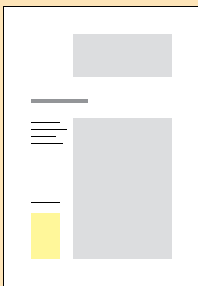
Two columns? Not really, no

Make space for more...



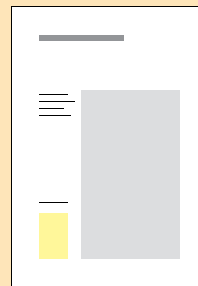
A left margin for... section numbers

Make space for more...



A left margin for... section headings, a blurb, an illustration, ...

Make space for more...



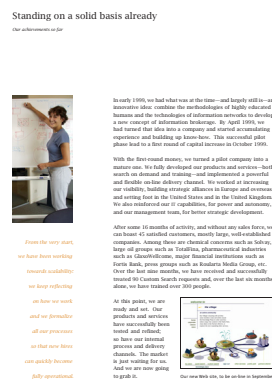
A top margin, too... for main headings

As an example...

A short business plan (less than 20 pages)

focused on visual content (with pictures of people, ...)

with a strong visual structure (with 2-D layout, previews, ...)



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A short business plan (less than 20 pages)

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Discovery #3
Too much freedom is bad for you

There are just so many...

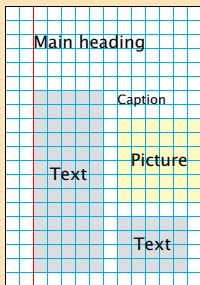
- fonts
- sizes
- styles
- colors
- special effects

Self-imposed constraints:
the key to visual harmony

As a first approximation, let us work with

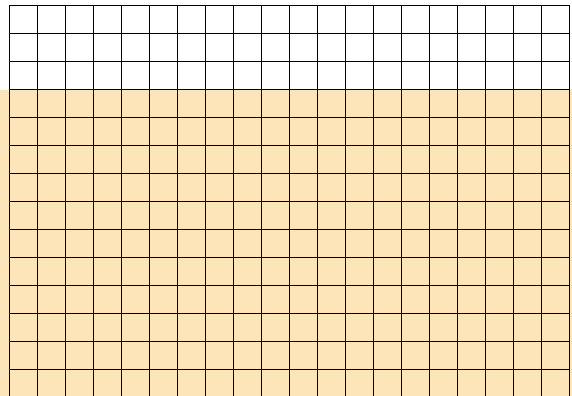
- one font** say Times
- one size** 11 pt
- one style** plain (roman)
- one color** black
- no special effect**

We can usefully constrain
the spatial arrangement, too



Vertically
All dimensions are integer multiples of the line spacing

Horizontally, too
All dimensions are integer multiples of... something



Once we have a working design,
we can relax some constraints

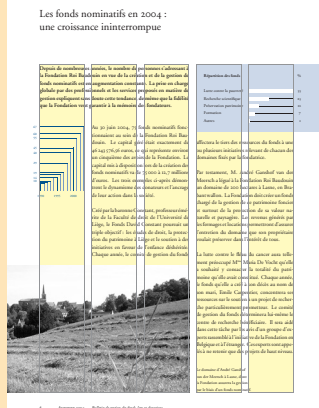
- Text** a few other sizes?
some bold and italics?
one other color?
- Non-text** one other color, in a few tints?
a finer subgrid?

The relaxation of constraints
is subject to three conditions

- It must add value**
increasing the signal, not the noise
- It must be consistent**
across the document or collection
- It must be harmonious**
that is, proportionate, orderly, pleasing

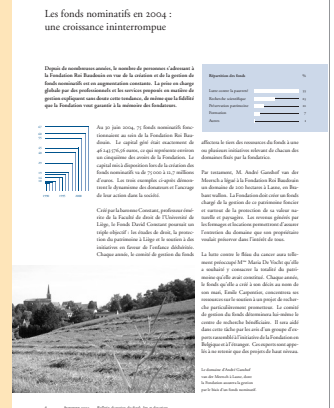
As an example...

An eight-page newsletter
(King Baudouin Foundation)
built on a five-column grid
(double columns for text)
with just a few "liberties"
(coordinated with the grid)



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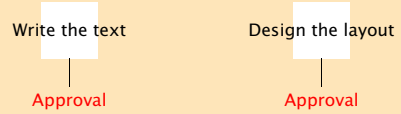
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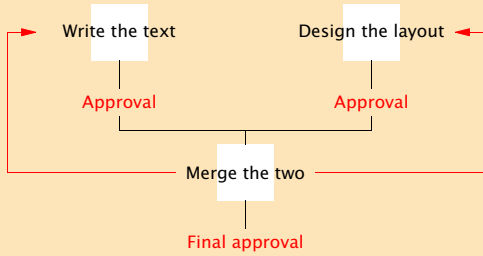
Processes

Integration for efficiency

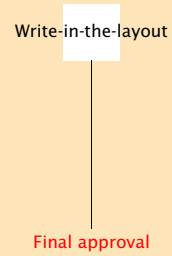
The traditional document creation is a fragmented, iterative process



The traditional document creation is a fragmented, iterative process



An integrated approach is clearly more efficient



As an example...

This page is basically the very first version the client gets to see.



As an example...

By writing in the layout, you can...
 optimize text lengths to fit the page exactly,
 harmonize text and figures in relative size and position,
 write more visual headings that look and sound better.



Dear participant,

As you know, you are registered to participate in a training program on scientific writing that I will have the pleasure to run at Tibotec soon. This message tells you what you must prepare.

The program will be more useful if I can focus it on your own writing situation. To help me do so, please send me two representative publications:

- one that you find an effective piece of writing;
- another that you find less effective somehow.

Please e-mail both documents to me, preferably in PDF format, and no later than Fri 18 Mar 2005.

I look forward to seeing you on Tue 29 Mar 2005. Meanwhile, feel free to contact me with questions.

Regards,

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Full paragraphs

Smart breaks

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