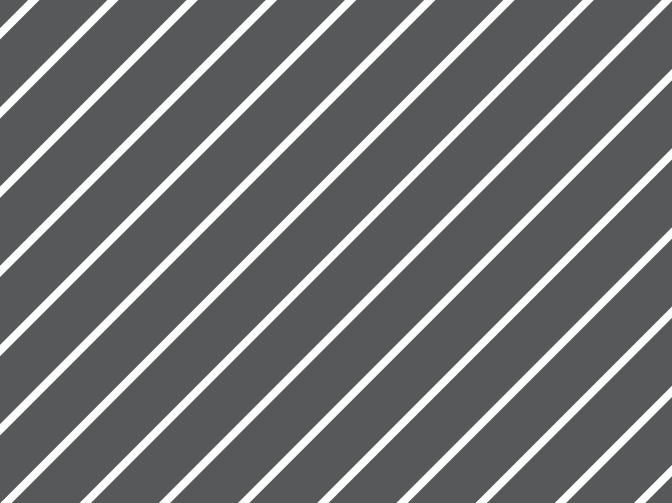


This small book is a very, very, very basic guide to communicating effectively through type and image. In short, this is a brief guide about practicing graphic design. There are a lot of resources out there on the subject matter and I recommend you look at some.

Graphic design is a field with many answers and different perspectives. Much of the content in this guide was taken from the Vignelli Canon by Massimo Vignello which can be downloaded at: www.vignelli.com/canon.pdf

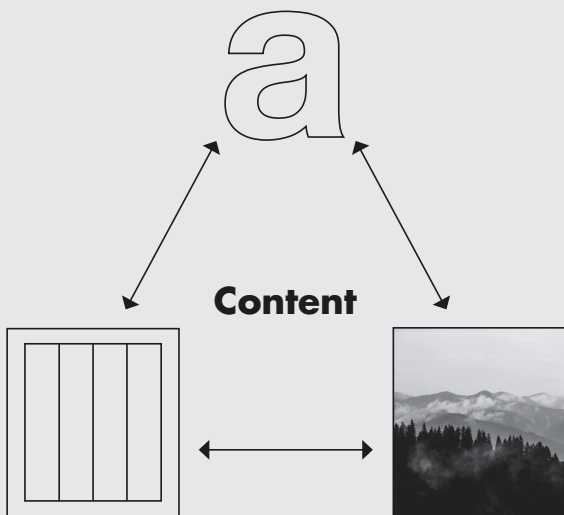
Please excuse the typos and grammar no-nos.



1. **Visual Communication Basics**

A brief guide to graphic design for
non designers

Graphic Design Elements



There are only 3 elements in graphic design, the type, the "page" and sometimes images and graphics. These must always relate to the content and its tone.

Introduction

Generally speaking, graphic design is an extension of written language.

The purpose of writing is to communicate effectively even without being present. Writing's purpose is fundamentally to communicate passively and remotely. Don't think of writing as simply an extension of verbal communication but as a different form of the language that requires different considerations and offers different opportunities. The purpose of graphic design is to communicate and honour those written words effectively.

To communicate effectively requires that the designer understands the subject matter and its deeper meaning. The quality of the writing is often reflected in the design.

In other words ...

Intellectual Elegance: Clarity of thought leads to clarity of words which leads to clarity in design.

A designer needs to have a sufficient understanding of the design problem and must also understand what is most appropriate for the content.


The interplay between content and form can either increase or decrease its effectiveness. Remember that as the designer and content creator you can adjust the content to the form to communicate more effectively.

Reading before Reading

Even though graphic design is based off writing we still understand the visual form of an object before we read a single word. We have in our mind archetypes and a visual understanding of how things should be. A book looks different from an advert and an action movie looks different from a comedy. There are always exceptions to the rules, but to masterfully counter these archetypes requires both a deep understanding and skill set.

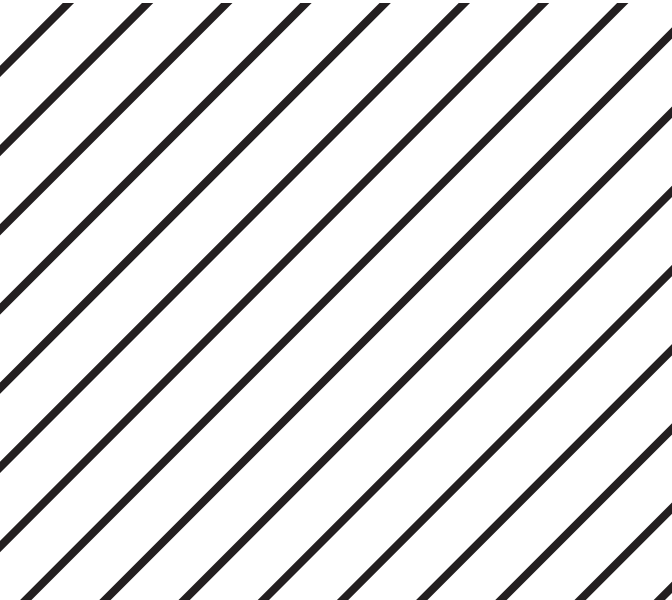
From the visual look of something we can understand what value that object holds. Is this book or poster from an expert or amateur? Is it trustworthy? Does it hold our values?

We can deduce from the look of something its intended audience and if we are part of it. It tells us if we should ignore it or engage with it.



**Appropriateness is
everything.**

**Is it appropriate to the
content and context? There
are limits to the solution.**



Designing it is the last stretch. All your work takes its form at this point.

Sometimes producing graphic design becomes an afterthought, especially since it often comes at the end of a complicated and tiring process of research, writing and content creation.

However, the tail-end of the marathon is no place to slow down! Ultimately, your design will be looked at and people will know from a glance whether it is worthy of their attention.

Design does not have to be flashy or eye catching, but it must be appropriate to the audience (and client).

Visual strength is an expression of intellectual elegance and should not be confused with visual impact.

A little more ...

If we break it down, in graphic design there is 1 key goal and 3 principles.

Key goal (Appropriateness)

That is does what it does well. This is very much like the Swedish word *lagom*, not too much, not too little — just right. Pay attention to the details, all things must reflect the content's meaning and tone.

1. Semantics (The Meaning)

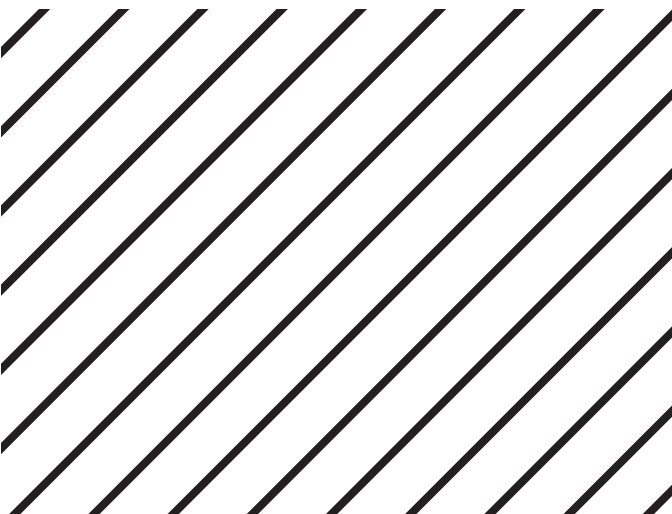
The meaning and deeper meaning of the content. Understand the subject in all aspects and how to relate to the sender and the receiver in such a way that it makes sense to both. Everything has meaning and nothing is arbitrary. This is all tied to research of what has already been done, what is similar, and what can be adopted. Your choices must all reflect the content's meaning.

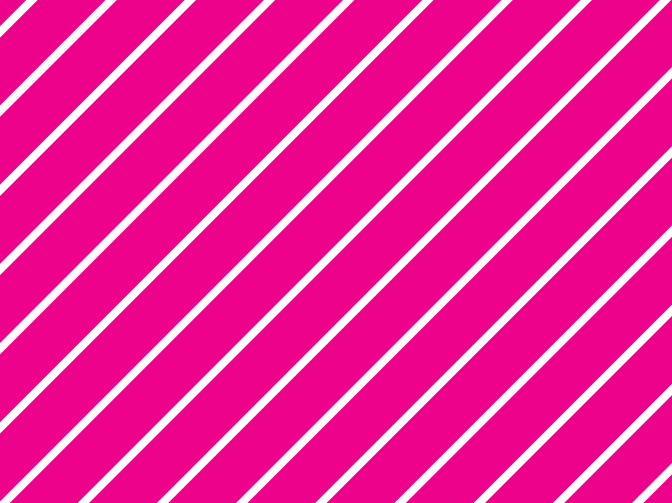
2. Syntactic (The Structure)

What is the overall structure? The grid, the typefaces, the text and headlines, the illustrations, etc. This translates to consistency throughout the design which enhances meaning and creates effective communication.

3. Pragmatic (Reflection)

Revise to fit. See if it works with the intended audience. Reflect on the way it does and does not work and then refine the design. This can sometimes be a challenge to the ego.





2.

Typography Basics

Finding the right typeface

Choosing a typeface

Find a typeface that fits the content in tone and context.

First find a typeface for the main content (i.e. the body type) that fits your content. You can use this typeface for headings at its bold weight and/or at larger sizes.

How does the typeface affect the understanding of the word?

Literature	Science	Product
Literature	Science	Product
Literature	Science	Product
Literature	Science	Product
Literature	Science	Product
Literature	Science	Product

What kind of "Literature" is being read?

What kind of "Science" is being referenced?

What kind of "Product" is being sold?

We use type all around us and certain typefaces are used in specific contexts. We pick up on these usages often without being aware of them. We can often sense when something is inappropriate.

Don't choose a typeface simply through personal preference but decide on a typeface based on questions such as:

1. What industries are associated with this typeface? Is it for a lawyer, doctor, artist, etc.?

Lawyer

Doctor

Artist

Lawyer

Doctor

Artist

Lawyer

Doctor

Artist

2. Who does it represent and appeal to?

Character

Character

Character

Character

Character

Character

3. What tone do you get? Is it approachable, refined, clinical, etc.?

genre

genre

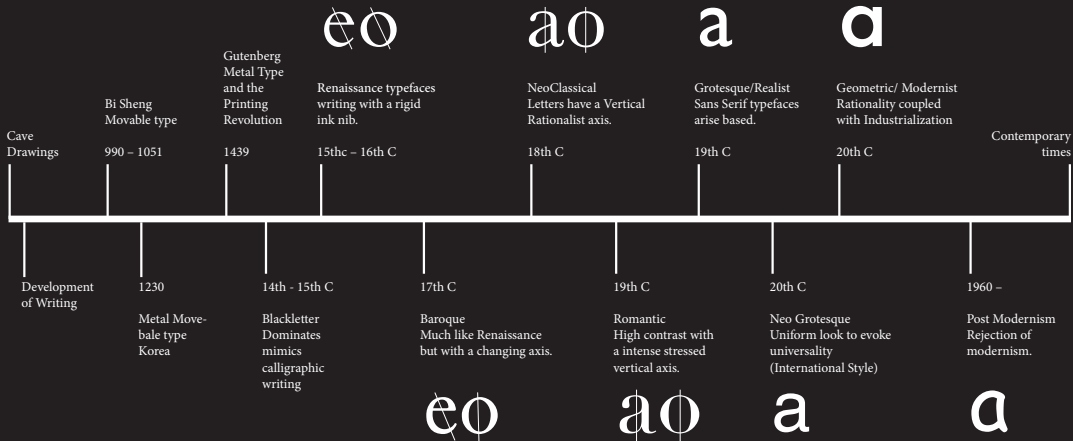
genre

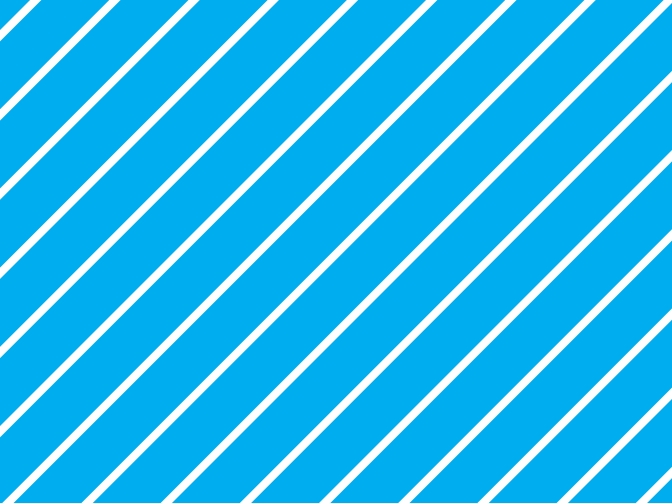
genre

genre

genre

Often the history and era of a typeface can define its meaning. It is a visual representation of the culmination of values and perspectives.





3.

Page Structure Basics

Creating a framework for the page



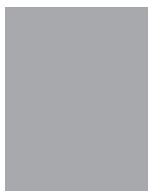
The Page

The proportion and size of a page conveys different meaning and tone.

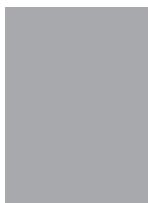
What is the tone of the proportion? Elegant? Logical? Sturdy? How does the proportion relate to the content and its tone?



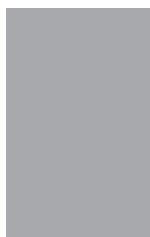
1:1



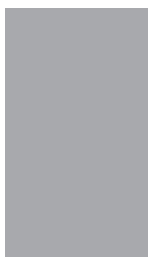
letter



1:√2 (A sizes)



golden section
(close to legal)



1:1.75



1:2

A letter sized sheet indicates something standard, a legal sheet may indicate something formal.

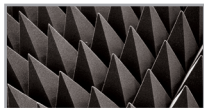
The Grid and Columns

Creating a grid system for how your content will be placed will create a sense of cohesion and unity in your design.

A grid system allows for consistency as well as flexibility. Often, the content and page size will dictate what the grid will be.

Developing the appropriate system for your design requires experimentation and refinement. Once you have something that works, your design will come together easily.

**garden
the
modern
way**

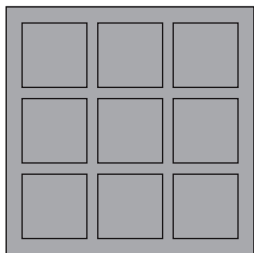
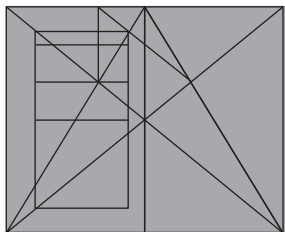
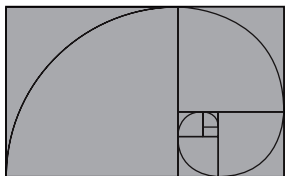


Nulla facilisi. Etiam viverra risus eu nisi gravida dignissim. Proin faucibus facilisis nisi, vel egestas odio suscipit in. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nulla in purus gravida, sodales mauris in, volutpat neque. Nunc lacinia, lorem at sollicitudin maximus, metus augue pharetra massa, in dapibus elit ligula sit amet elit. Phasellus non quam nec lectus molestie feugiat sed ullamcorper quam. Aenean dui magna, cursus sed elit non, hendrerit sollicitudin tellus. Nam eu lacus scelerisque, hendrerit lectus nec, laoreet ligula. Etiam vulputate eu ante at efficitur. Nunc pellentesque dignissim felis id rutrum. Nam eget porttitor sem. Nam eu dui condimentum, sollicitudin nisi dignissim, molestie dui. Suspendisse leo tortor, posuere ac commodo vitae, mattis et ligula. Phasellus viverra quam ipsum, ac porttitor lorem pellentesque in.

Selecting a Page and Making the Grid

If you have the freedom to choose a page size for your design, select something that speaks to the content and its tone. If the content is extremely logical, maybe a square is a good choice, if it is more humanist, maybe use a longer proportion like the golden ratio (1:1.62) to evoke a natural rhythm.

There are many ways to make a grid as outlined below. Sometimes the page hints at a possible system and other times it might be more freeform.



Making the Grid Continued

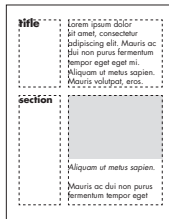
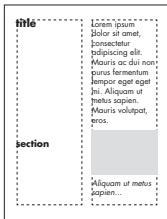
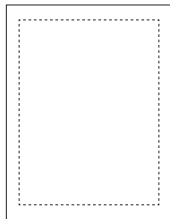
“Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.”

— Michelangelo

In my own experience, I find that the simplest approach is to evenly subdivide the page and then adjust afterwards as the content dictates. I tend to focus on columns initially and align things horizontally afterwards.

For example, for a letter sheet (8.5x11), I would:

1. Place margins, I chose a half-inch.
2. Divide into equal columns (1/2 and 1/2).
3. Place content.
4. Adjust to 1/3 and 2/3 to make things fit and to highlight the image. Then align the objects horizontally.



Whitespace

Space, like rests in music, help your mind to rest for a moment so that it can better understand the upcoming information. Use empty or white space to let the eye rest and make your design easier to read.

Remember that too little space creates a design that will seem busy and overwhelming and too much whitespace may seem wasteful.



4.

Typographic Systems

Putting words to the page





Type Systems

Having a system for type makes the design more consistent, more professional and easier to produce.

Differentiation between titles, headings, body, quotes and captions can create a more dynamic looking page. You can use different type sizes, different weights (bold, medium, regular, light), cases (all-caps, title case), italic and mix thereof.

For example:

Page title

Heading 1

Pull out text, to describe something.

Heading 2

This is the body font. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Mauris quis sollicitudin justo. Integer a bibendum dolor.

"Here is a quote"

"Also used for dialogue"

HEADING 3

This is body the body font. Lorem ipsum dolor

- List Item 1
 - List Item 2

HEADING FOR TABLES

FIGURE 1.0 — An example of a caption

Making a type system

I generally start my system by choosing the appropriate body font and then scaling up and down proportionally for headers or captions and by mixing weights (bold, regular)

For instance:

This is the body type at 10pt.

Header 2 (10pt + bold)

This is simply the body type in its bold weight.

Pullout Text (13pt)

This is simply the body type 1.3x bigger. So
 $10\text{pt} \times 1.3 = 13\text{pt}$

Header 1 (13pt + bold)

This is simply the pullout type in its bold weight

Page title (22pt + bold)

This is simply the Pullout type 1.3^2 times bigger.
So the body type: $10\text{pt} \times 1.3 \times 1.3 \times 1.3 = 22\text{pt}$.

Finding the right body type size

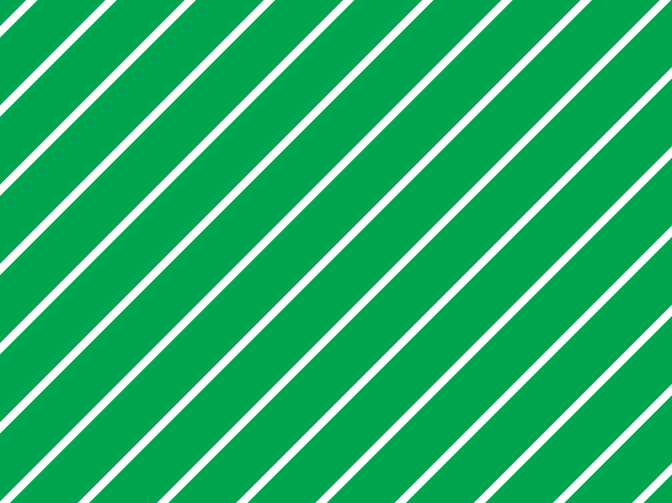
When finding the right body size, the most important thing is to see if it is comfortable to read in its context.

There are many guidelines, such as specific type sizes to use, but take these with a grain of salt, as readability has a lot more to do than simply the size of the type.

For example, a 32pt type guideline for a Powerpoint presentation will seem 3 times larger on 640x480 than on 1920x1080.

In general, use a sample of the body type in it's context to see if it is comfortable to read. Print a section of your poster or book, or project your presentation on a screen and change the type size to gauge its appropriateness.

You can also increase readability with a moderate amount of linespacing. Generally the norm is something in between single spacing and 1.5 spacing. This also depends on the typeface and what reads best.



5.

Graphs and Charts

Considerations for data

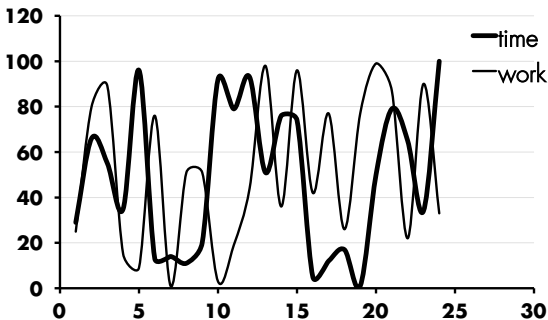
Making Graphs

Match your graph and chart to your overall design system.

Just like an image, make sure that your graph and chart match the overall design system. Remember to use the same typefaces, similar sizes, and the same colours. You can also edit its size to fit the column.

The type on the graph/chart should be as clear and legible as the overall body text.

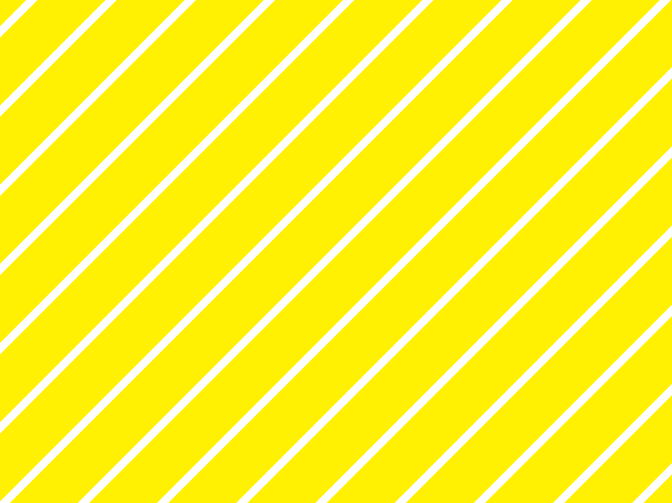
To communicate effectively and to respect the content, keep the graph simple without effects and decorations such as drop-shadows or three dimensions.



Styling Data

Microsoft Excel (and Google Docs) allows for enough flexibility to create consistent and appropriate charts and graphs. Remember that you can always go back and edit the chart's formatting to make it fit within the rest of the design.

You can save the graph as a pdf and insert it into your design.



5.

Choosing Images

What to look for in a photograph

Choosing an image

Your image has to match the content in meaning and tone and must also be of high quality.

You often do not need many images for your design. A single image can be sufficient if it is the right one and communicates exactly what you intend in tone, content and context.

Finding a good image can often be difficult. Look beyond the aesthetic and ask: What is it communicating? Is it simply a pretty picture or does it tell a story? Is its tone appropriate for the subject matter? How will other people read the image?

Furthermore: Is this picture high quality? Are the elements in focus and the edges sharp? Is it too bright or too dark and can it be fixed? Is it at a good resolution? What is its file size?

Technical details for quality

There are a 3 things that are absolutely important.

1. Resolution

72dpi for screen, and the image should be:

Greater than 200kb for a smaller image

Greater than 750Kb for a large size

200 dpi or greater up to 300dpi for print:

For a full 4 x 6 image, greater than 750Kb

For an 8.5 x 11 Image, greater than 2 Mb

2. Proper Focus



3. Contrast

Over exposed & too dark



highlights too strong

too much in shadow

More balanced



more balanced,
simply through
cropping and a
little brightness
adjustment

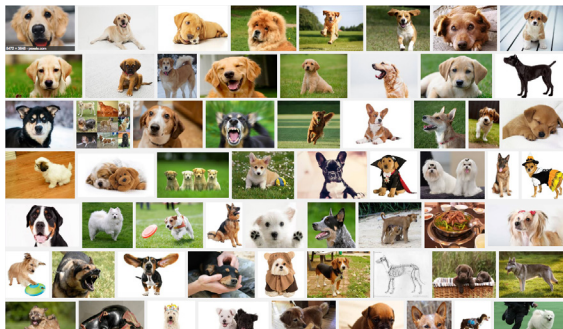
You can often find more information about the image if you open it up in an image editing program such as Adobe Photoshop. You can also make colour adjustments through these programs as well (usually under "Image" or "Adjustment").

Creative Commons and Public Domain

Sometimes, you may not have your own imagery. In these cases, I usually go to Google Images and Flickr and look for images under a Creative Commons Licence. Under a CC0 license, the image can be used for commercial purposes and no attribution is needed.

In the case of Google, I filter my image search to: Size > Large and Usage Rights > Labeled for Reuse.

I then scan through each image thumbnail, analyzing it to see if the image's tone and feel matches the content and if it is large enough.





5.

Symbols and Icons

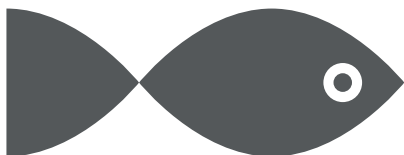
Considerations for simple images



Using Icons

Icons can be used to create graphic and eye-catching designs and encapsulate complex ideas.

Sometimes, in place of a photo, a simple graphic or icon can be used to create a cleaner and more minimal design. Icons can also stand for a multitude of ideas whereas a photo may indicate something more specific. For instance:



Finding Icons

There are many ways to find icons to use in your designs. Two websites that are quite good are: *thenounproject.com* and *flaticon.com*. You can, of course, look on Google and Flickr as well. Again, look for images that are Creative Commons. Some icons require attribution.

Always download the file at the largest size. The PNG format is fine as it is compatible with most programs. SVG (Scalable Vector Graphics) files are great (and my preferred format) as this file format can be scaled to any size without quality loss. However, this format is not compatible with all programs, so check beforehand to see if this format will work for your applications.

You can change the colour of icons in the SVG format with programs such as Adobe Illustrator and the free open-source alternative, Inkscape.

Choosing Icons

When you are using multiple icons, make sure that the look matches between them.

Look at the details such as:

1. Do the colours match?
2. Are the shapes similar?
3. Are the lines of a similar thickness?
4. Are the edges rounded or sharp?
5. Is it the same aesthetic as the others?
6. Is it more abstracted or more realistic?

Which one of these icons does not fit with the others?



Juicer Jug by Creative Stall/Pot by Dilon Choudhury/Toaster by Simon Child/
Silverware by Andrew Was/All from the Noun Project

