

Design Guidelines

Advanced Research Skills

Ever wondered how to make a design look **good**? Want tips for taking your designs to the next level? These guidelines can help you put good design principles into practice for any design product.



Proximity

Related info is clumped together with white space separating it from surrounding elements

- › Make sure text elements like titles or captions are close to the section or object they describe
- › Place visual elements like charts or pictures in the section that fits them best
- › Add consistent whitespace around each element including text boxes, columns, and images
- › Keep consistent whitespace between the poster content and the edges of poster board



Alignment

Every element is visually connected to something else

- › Check your design program to see what type of alignment tools it offers
- › Explore potential tools in your program like guidelines, grid system, or auto-alignment
- › Use alignment tools throughout your process to align elements perfectly



Repetition

Design aspects are repeated intentionally throughout the poster

- › Use no more than 2 fonts
- › Use sans serif fonts for headings and serif fonts for body text on printed posters. Use only sans serif font on digital items. See back for more on font!
- › Make font legible and accessible in size and color. Research accessibility guidelines. Print a test version to test legibility and ask peers for feedback
- › Use no more than 2-3 colors. Choose colors early and use them intentionally to tell a story
- › Make sure colors match the tone of the content and event. See back for more help with colors!



Contrast

Design elements are the same, or very different

- › Make headers and titles look different than the body text. See back for examples
- › Have less important text like citations be smaller and important text like headers or titles be larger
- › Make important visuals larger to draw the audience's attention



Balance

The visual weight of a design is equally distributed

- › Use the least amount of text possible. Edit or create new content to fit smaller space if needed
- › Use multiple types of visuals to give your poster variety
- › Don't forget whitespace! Add consistent whitespace around every element

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Still have questions? No problem! Check out even more tricks and tips below.

What's a "serif" or "sans serif" font?

Serif refers to the "little shoes" that fonts can wear at the end of a character. Serif fonts have "shoes" and Sans serif fonts do not. Sans serif fonts are considered more modern and serif fonts are considered more traditional. Uses can depend on both legibility and the tone or visual style of a poster.



Serif



Sans Serif

Serif Fonts:

Times New Roman
Courier New
Bell MT

San Serif Fonts:

Calibri
Arial
Roboto

How do I make my headers stand out?

There are many ways to make a header stand out and choosing one may depend on the tone of the event or content, accessibility and legibility requirements, and your own personal style. Some common strategies include altering the weight, color, spacing, or size of font or adding visual elements like boxes or underlines.

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How do I choose colors?

Color choice is tricky. You can look at this handout to see one example of a way to start. A good strategy is to use a light background, dark text, and accent color(s). In the case of this handout, that's **Yardline White** for the background, **Black** for the text, and **Chicago Maroon**, **Vibrant Turquoise**, and **Burnt Orange** for accent colors. These background and text colors give good contrast for reading legibility. Accent colors can be used to draw attention for storytelling purposes.