VISUAL DESIGN

Visual design aims to improve a design's/product's aesthetic appeal and usability with suitable images, typography, space, layout and color. Visual design is about more than aesthetics. Designers place elements carefully to create interfaces that optimize user experience and drive conversion.

Users' first impressions typically form in 50 milliseconds. This fact reflects the visceral level of emotional design—in other words, the user's first impression of or gut reaction to a design. If they don't like what you show them in those critical moments, they will leave. So, visual design is a vital part of your work as a designer. Many people mistake it to mean that designers include attractive elements just to maximize an item's appeal. Actually, you use visual design to create and organize elements to **A) lead the user's eye to an item's functionality, and B) make the aesthetics consistent. For instance, designers compose and arrange website content around each page's purpose and are careful to ensure that content gives off the right visual cues**. The smallest and subtlest details will affect what users think and how they feel. So, you must always show them the right things in the right way. Your enemy here is user uncertainty. If your users have to stop and think about your design, they won't trust it—or you. Therefore, a visual design should draw their attention to the important aspects and strike the balance between a fresh, powerful design and something they expect to see. How you apply visual design will depend on your product, its organization/industry and its users (including their culture). A major factor in visual design is that you work to accommodate user limitations such as cognitive load. For example, you use chunking to help users understand and remember information more easily.

These are some of the most common—and fundamental—elements and principles of visual design:

Elements

1. **Lines** (straight/curved/geometric/organic) – use these to create divisions, textures and shapes.
2. **Shapes** – use lines, different colors, etc. to create enclosed/self-contained areas.
3. **Negative space/whitespace** – use the blank area around a "positive" shape to create a figure/ground effect or calm the design overall.
4. **Volume** – use this to show the rich fullness of all three dimensions of elements on two-dimensional screens.
5. **Value** – use this to set the relationship between lightness and darkness, typically through a light source to create shadows and highlights.
6. **Color** – use this to set the theme/tone and attract attention.
7. **Texture** – use this to define an object's surface.

Principles

1. **Unity** – use this to establish harmony between page elements, so they appear to belong together and users aren't distracted by chaotic (e.g., misaligned) layouts.

2. **Gestalt** – use these principles of how people perceive objects to guide how users interpret your design.

3. **Hierarchy** – use placement, font, etc. to show importance.

4. **Balance** – use this to distribute elements evenly.

5. **Contrast** – use differences in color, etc. to accentuate elements.

6. **Scale** – use this to emphasize elements to establish importance or depth.

7. **Dominance** – use an object's size, color, etc. to make it stand out.
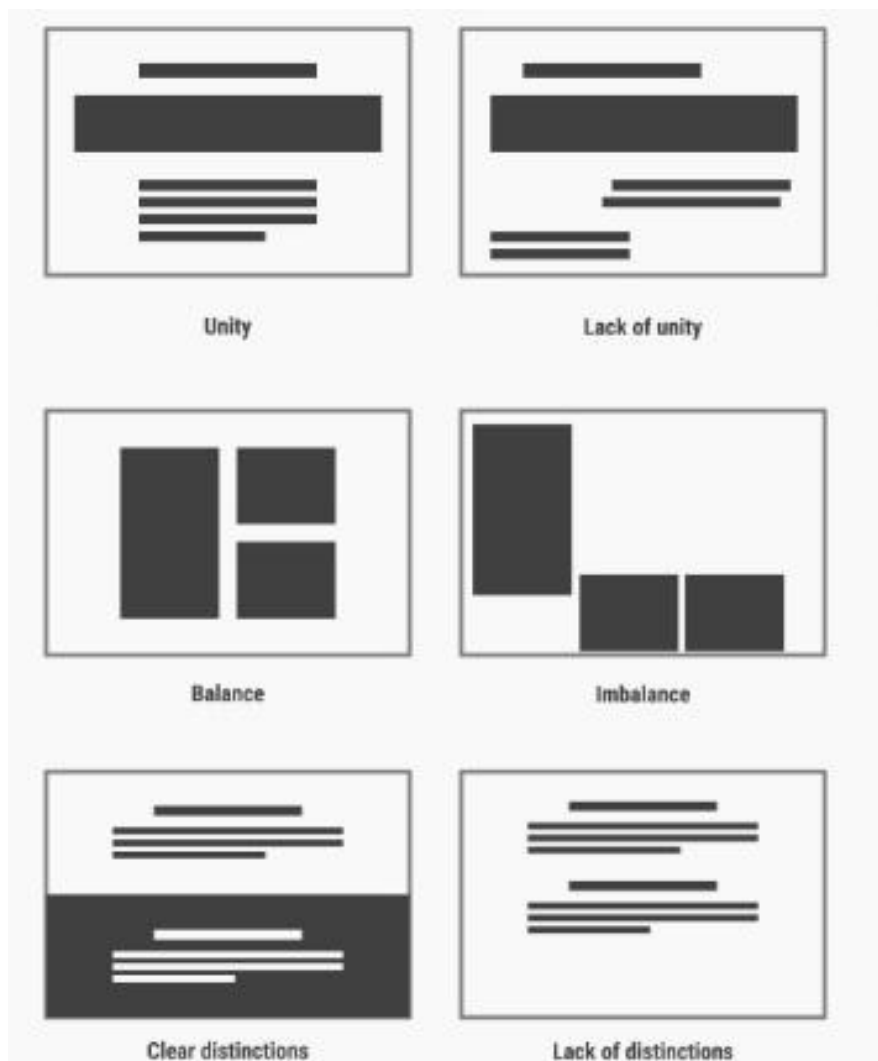
Three examples of the effects of following (or not following) best practice visual design principles