

Images

Images serve many purposes — they establish mood, illustrate or explain a concept, demonstrate a process, serve as documentation, and contribute to the tone of voice of a work overall. Once you've collected your images, evaluate their purposes, which will help determine size and placement. Uniformity in **lighting, color, resolution, and point-of-view** are as important as consistency of **size and placement**. Sequence of images is driven by the narrative you are creating and/or the information you are trying to deliver. The more you are able to control image qualities, the more your design will speak in the manner you intend.

Sourcing and Selecting Images

Creating images — whether photos, illustrations, or infographics — explicitly for your document typically yields the best results because you can fine tune both content and style to resonate with the overall narrative and design. When sourcing images online, be sure to follow usage guidelines determined by the repository or the creator. Creative Commons (<http://search.creativecommons.org>) is a good open source. Google image searches are less reliable. The images are likely to be generic and usage may be illegal.

Even if you do not create your own images, as the designer of any document you must act as editor and art director, which means making tough choices about what to include and exclude. In *The Principles of Beautiful Web Design*, Jason Beaird provides three criteria for image selection: relevance, interest, and appeal. Relevance should be your first criteria; the image must support textual content. Interest can be evaluated both formally and conceptually. The image should be interesting visually and add to the written content. Appeal is distinct from interest. The image should appeal to your audience with an emotional or aesthetic hook. It's easy to get attached to our visual sources, but it is your task to evaluate them as objectively as you can, imagining your reader/viewer's perspective.

After evaluating individual images on their own merits, assess them as a set. All images should be consistent and resonate with the work overall. In *Image and Type: The Language of Graphic Design*, Philip B. Meggs argues for "graphic resonance," a quality the designer achieves by echoing visual moves or motifs established elsewhere in the work. Images can echo each other in color, point of view, scale, lighting, or degrees of realism or abstraction. Those that don't feel cohesive should be eliminated. Once the image set itself is coherent, the designer can play up elements in the typography and color to further reinforce the visual tone.

Formal Aspects

The formal aspects of individual images significantly impact how they are understood as well as the feelings they evoke. Molly Bang's *How Pictures Work* provides a number of basic principles:

- Horizontal shapes provide a sense of stability
- Vertical shapes are more active than horizontal shapes
- Diagonal placement implies motion or tension
- Placement in the top or bottom half of the plane shifts the weight of the subject
- Placing the subject closer to the edge of the picture plane creates tension
- Placing the subject in the center of the picture plane creates a sense of reverence or worship; avoid it unless this is your intent
- The larger the subject, the stronger it feels
- The space between the shapes is as important as the shapes themselves

Size and Placement

Concept and content guide image size and proportion decisions. Primary content should be larger than supporting content, so a final product would be larger than process images, for example. Landscape images would best be framed to emphasize their horizontal nature. Scaling images relative to the actual objects they picture is often useful. The question “How do you know a small thing is small on a page?” is often answered by placing it next to a larger image/thing. Josef Müller-Brockmann notes another effect of size differences among images: “The fewer the differences in the size of the illustrations, the quieter the impression created by the design.”

Image placement is largely determined by proximity to the relevant point in the text. The reader should comfortably see and integrate the referenced subject into their understanding. Certain types of images should be placed consistently so that the viewer develops a visual rhythm, understanding that when their eye falls in one location it will see an image of a similar purpose. Selectively deviating from such a pattern can create moments of emphasis or surprise.

Sequence

When we pick up a book we often look at the pictures first. In fact, we should be able to flip through an illustrated document to understand the text’s narrative arc. This doesn’t mean, however, that the two texts—linguistic and visual—operate precisely in parallel. Visual narratives, like written narratives, are sequential, but with an added element of “space” between images. In *Understanding Comics* Scott McCloud notes that this space between the images, which in comics is the gutter, is where we create meaning between one image and the next. We transform two images into a third thing: the story. This concept applies just as well to illustrations in a document as to comics, and is worth exploring as you sequence images.

Stories can be organized in many ways: chronologically, reverse chronologically, thematically, around a process, or focused only on results. Most stories combine a variety of organizational frameworks. Ultimately sequencing should guide the reader in their encounter of your work. Sequential order is felt as a rhythm. Rhythm creates expectation. Breaking from rhythm results in a rupture. Any such rupture should serve a considered purpose. For example, a full-bleed image coming when no others had come before would create a dramatic impact.

Resolution

Image quality should not be compromised — don’t use a grainy, pixelated image, no matter how great the content. Suitable resolutions for print are 600 and 300 dots per inch. 150 dpi is rarely, but sometimes acceptable depending on the image itself and its use. Image resolution for the screen can be 72 pixels per inch but with the advent of retina screens a resolution of 150 pixels is preferred. Web image resolution is rarely adequate for print work.

Resources

Molly Bang, *Picture This: How Pictures Work* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000).

Michael Freeman, *The Photographer’s Eye: Composition and Design for Better Digital Photos* (Waltham, MA: Focal Press/Elsevier, 2007).

Matt Madden, *99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style* (New York: Chamberlain Bros, 2005).

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Paradox Press, 1993).

Jennifer Van Sijll, *Cinematic Storytelling: The 100 Most Powerful Film Conventions Every Filmmaker Must Know* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005).

Selected image repositories available to RISD students: ARTstor, Cinema Image Gallery, Coloribus Global Advertising Archive, Image Quest, RISD Library Picture Collection, Visual Arts Data Service (VADS); see <http://library.risd.edu/all-resources.html>.