

CONTRAST

Introduction

Contrast is one of the most effective ways to add visual interest to your page—a striking interest that makes a reader want to look at the page—and to create an organizational hierarchy among different elements. The important rule to remember is that for contrast to be effective, it must be strong.

Don't be a wimp.

Contrast is created when two elements are different. If the two elements are sort of different, but not really, then you don't have contrast, you have conflict. That's the key-Robin's Principle of Contrast states, "If two items are not exactly the same, then make them different... really different."

Contrast can be created in many ways. You can contrast large type with small type; a graceful 'oldstyle' font with a bold 'sans serif' font; a thin line with a thick line; a cool color with a warm color; a smooth texture with a rough texture; a horizontal element (such as a long line of text) with a vertical element (such as a tall, narrow column of text); widely spaced lines with closely packed lines; a small graphic with a large graphic.

But don't be a wimp. You cannot contrast 12-point type with 14-point type. You cannot contrast a half-point rule with a one-point rule. You cannot contrast dark brown with black. Get serious.



If these two "newsletters" came across your desk, which one would you pick up first? They both have the same basic layout. They are both nice and neat. They both have the same information on the page. There is really only one difference: the second newsletter has more contrast.



The first newsletter is nice and neat, but there is nothing that attracts your eyes to it. If no one's eyes are attracted to a piece, then no one will read it.

The source of the contrast with the second newsletter is obvious. I used a stronger, bolder typeface in the headlines and subheads. I repeated that typeface (principle of repetition, remember?) in the newsletter title. Because I changed the title from all caps to caps/lowercase, I was able to use a larger and bolder type size, which also helps reinforce the contrast. And because the headlines are so strong now, I could add a dark band across the top behind the title, again repeating the dark color and reinforcing the contrast.



Contrast is crucial to the organization of information - a reader should always be able to glance at a document and instantly understand what's going on.

This is a fairly typical résumé. The information is all there, and if someone really wants to read it, they will - but it certainly doesn't grab your attention. And notice these problems:

- There are two alignments on the page: centered and flush left.
- The amounts of space between the separate segments are too similar.
- The setup is inconsistent - sometimes the dates are on the left, sometimes on the right. Remember, consistency creates repetition.
- The job titles blend in with the body text.

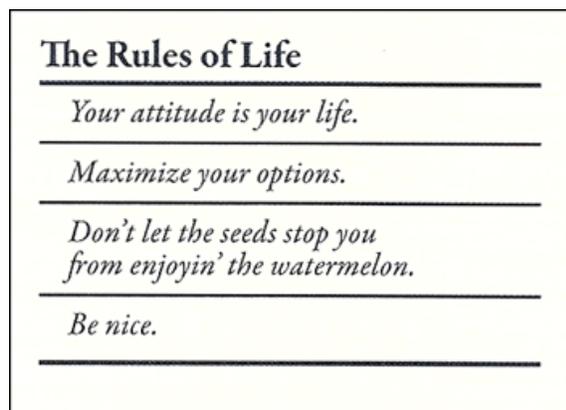
With contrast, the page is more attractive and the purpose and organization are much clearer. Your résumé is someone's first impression - make it sharp!

The problems were easily corrected.

- One alignment: Flush left. As you can see above, using only one alignment doesn't mean everything is aligned along the **same edge** - it simply means everything is using the **same alignment** (all flush left or all flush right or all centered). Both the flush left lines above are very strong and reinforce each other (**alignment** and **repetition**).
- The headings are strong - you instantly know the document type and key points (**contrast**).
- Segments are separated by space (**contrast** of spatial relationships; **proximity**).
- Degree and job titles are in bold (a **repetition** of the headline font) - the strong **contrast** lets you skim the important points.

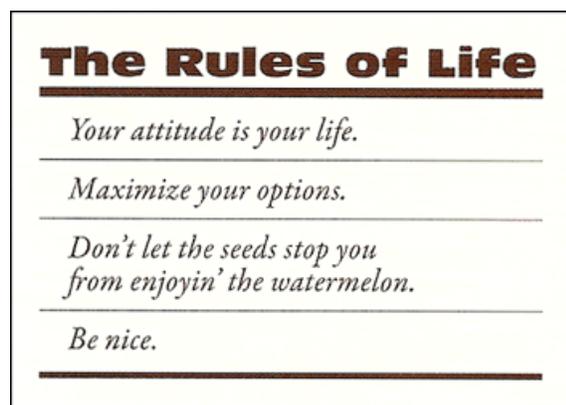
The easiest way to add interesting contrast is with typefaces. But don't forget about rules (drawn lines), colors, spacing between elements, textures, etc.

If you use a hairline rule between columns, use a strong 2- or 4-point rule when you need another - don't use a half-point rule and a one-point rule on the same page. If you use a second color for accent, make sure the colors contrast - dark brown or dark blue doesn't contrast effectively with black text.



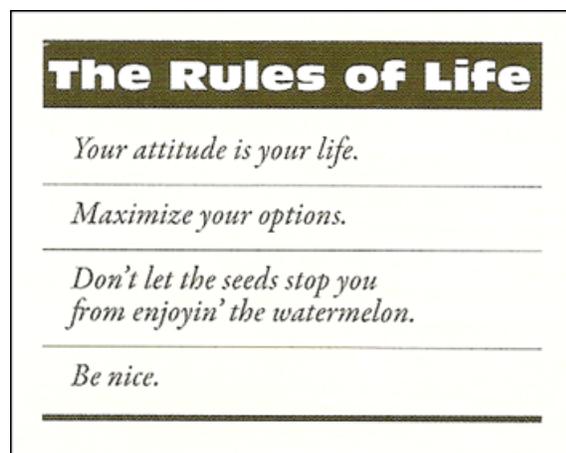
There is a bit of contrast between the typefaces and between the rules, but the contrast is wimpy - are the rules supposed to be two different thicknesses?

Or is it a mistake?



Now the strong contrast between the typefaces makes the piece much more dynamic and eye-catching.

With a stronger contrast between the thicknesses of the rules, there is no risk of someone thinking it's a mistake.



This is simply another option using rules (this thick rule is behind the white type).

With contrast, the entire table is stronger and more sophisticated; you know where it begins and where it ends.

If you use tall, narrow columns in your newsletter, have a few strong headlines to create a contrasting horizontal direction across the page.

Combine contrast with repetition, as in the page numbers or headlines or bullets or rules or spatial arrangements, to make a strong, unifying identity throughout an entire publication.



Besides the contrast in the typefaces in this postcard, there is also a contrast between the long, horizontal title and the tall, narrow, vertical columns. The narrow columns are a repetitive element, as well as an example of contrast.

The example on the next page is a typical flyer. The biggest problem is that the lines of text are too long to read comfortably, and there's nothing to draw the reader's eye into the text.

Create a headline that will catch someone's eye. Now that their eyes are on the page, create some contrast in the text so even if they don't plan to read the whole thing, their eyes will be attracted to certain parts of it as they skim through it. Enhance the layout with strong alignments and use of proximity.

Detox your Body

Detoxification is the most exciting tool in natural medicine for its simplicity, low cost and superior therapeutic results. It's actually fun to participate and you'll feel results almost immediately.

Our bodies detox continuously as a natural function. It's only when our detox mechanisms become overloaded that the process becomes less efficient and symptoms may occur.

Toxins may be internal or external in origin. Pollution or pesticides in our food source put undue stress on our detox organs, the kidneys and liver. Improper digestion and imbalanced gut ecology provide the internal form of toxins in the way of metabolic by-products stemming from certain bacteria which have toxic side effects and therefore impact negatively on overall health by compromising detox pathways.

It has been suggested that toxic overload contributes to more serious conditions such as autoimmune diseases, inflammatory/rheumatoid arthritis and neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Symptoms which may be relieved by following a detox program include:

- Digestive problems
- Irritability
- Headaches
- Joint pain
- Itchy skin
- Fatigue
- Pallor
- Bad breath
- General malaise
- Skin rashes
- Constipation

What a carefully planned detoxification program can offer you:

- Anti-aging effects
- Increased productivity
- Weight loss
- Greater motivation and creativity
- Clearer skin and eyes
- Reduction of allergic symptoms

Dr. Sara Ferguson and Certified Nutrition Consultant Shannon Williams invite you to join them for a 28-day detoxification cleanse. Learn proven methods for detox: How to prepare for a detox; How to safely detox; and What to avoid during detox.

Three mandatory meetings: Thursdays, August 2nd, 9th, and 30th at 7:00 p.m.

Avenues for Health
901 San Ramon Valley Blvd., Suite 130
Danville, CA 94526
Limited Seating. Seminar fee is \$99
RSVP 925-820-6025—Shannon Williams

Please note: This program is not covered by your health insurance. Specific detoxification products are required for successful results at extra cost.

Where do you begin to improve this flyer?

- The lines are so long that a reader is automatically put off. When you have lots of text like this, experiment with using more than one column, as shown on the previous and next pages.
- Pull out key phrases to set in bold so the visual contrasts attract the eye.
- Perhaps start off with the introductory bits of information so a reader begins with an idea of what the purpose of the flyer is. It's less of a commitment to read the little pieces, so you're essentially seducing the reader's eye by providing an introductory path.

Don't be afraid to make some items small to create a contrast with the larger items, and don't be afraid to allow blank space. Once you pull readers in with the focal point, they will read the smaller print if they are interested. If they're not interested, it won't matter how big you set it.

Notice all the other principles come into play: proximity, alignment, and repetition. They work together to create the total effect. Rarely will you use just one principle to design any page.

Since this flyer is to be printed in black and white on colored paper, we used various shades of gray for the ornaments and to add some interest to the title.

Listen to your eyes as they scan through this document - can you feel how they are drawn to the bold text and you are almost forced to at least read those parts? If you can get people that far into your piece, many of them are bound to read more.

Detox your Body

Dr. Sarah Ferguson and
Certified Nutrition Consultant Shannon Williams
invite you to join them for a 28-day detoxification cleanse.

Learn proven methods for detox:

How to prepare for a detox.
How to safely detox.
What to avoid during detox.

Detoxification is the most exciting tool in natural medicine because it's simple, low cost, and gets superior results. It's actually fun to detox, and you'll feel results almost immediately.

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Toxins may be internal or external in origin. Improper digestion and imbalanced gut ecology create the internal form of toxins. External pollution or pesticides in our food put undue stress on our detox organs—the kidneys and liver.

Toxic overload can contribute to serious conditions such as autoimmune diseases, inflammatory/rheumatoid arthritis, and neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Symptoms that may be relieved by following a detox program include:

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- Joint pain
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August 2, 9, and 30

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Limited seating
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BOOK SAVVY

Cynthia Lee Katona
Paperback
228 pages



In teaching how to read literature and enjoy it, Professor Katona provides eleven excellent reasons to make reading a part of everyday life. She includes an annotated list of tried and true page-turners and their movie counterparts. Teachers, students, general readers of literature, and those just developing an interest in reading will find this guide indispensable.

An excellent resource for those with reading addictions but not a lot of time to scour the shelves for that perfect book. Professor Katona has done it for us so we can spend our time reading the books, not finding them.

Christine Bolt, Professor of Business

"Inspiring read!"

"A literary treasure!"

"Kudos for Katona!"

Cynthia Lee Katona currently teaches all levels of English Composition and Literature at Ohlone Community College in Fremont, California.

Which of these two rack cards would you be most likely to take a second look at? This is the power of contrast: it gives you a lot more bang. Just a few simple changes and the difference is amazing!

Contrast is the most fun of the design principles—and the most dramatic! A few simple changes can make the difference between an ordinary design and a powerful one.

This rack card for a great book is a little flat. On second version below, we've added some contrast. Can you name at least four ways contrast was added?

Book Savvy

Cynthia Lee Katona

BookSavvyOnline.com

Paperback

228 pages



In teaching how to read literature and enjoy it, Prof. Katona provides eleven excellent reasons to make reading a part of everyday life. She includes an annotated list of tried and true page-turners and their movie counterparts. Teachers, students, general readers of literature, and those just developing an interest in reading will find this guide indispensable.

An excellent resource for those with reading addictions but not a lot of time to scour the shelves for that perfect book. Prof. Katona has done it for us so we can spend our time reading the books, not finding them.

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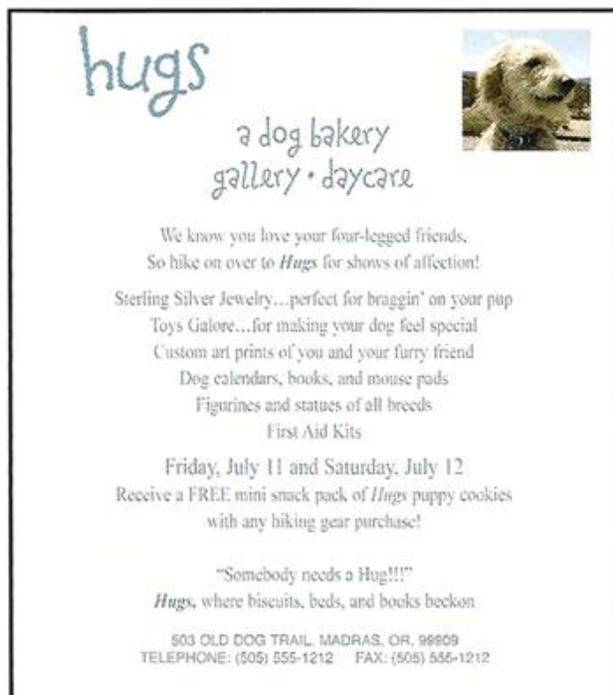
"A literary treasure!"

"Kudos for Katona!"

Cynthia Lee Katona currently teaches all levels of English Composition and Literature at Ohlone Community College in Fremont, California.

Here's how I improved the "Book Savvy" card:

- Changing the headline/ book title from upper- to lowercase gave me room to make it bigger and bolder.
- Since this rack card is an advertisement for a book, let's show the book bigger!
- Far repetition, I picked up the strong black that appears in the book.
- I put the photo of Cynthia on the other side of the card because this side was getting so busy.



Well, there is a little bit of contrast and repetition going on (Can you point them out?) but it's wimpy. This designer is trying, but she's much too timid. I'm sure you've seen (or created) lots of pieces like this. It's okay. Now you know better. (Notice that the adorable puppy is looking away from the name of the store. A reader's eye always follows the eye of anything on the page, so make sure those eyes lead the reader to the focus of the piece.)

Although the second ad looks like a radical leap from the first, it is actually just a methodical application of the four basic principles.

Contrast, of course, is rarely the only concept that needs to be emphasized, but you'll often find that if you add contrast, the other concepts seem to fall into place. Your elements of contrast, for instance, can sometimes be used as elements of repetition.

This ad ran in the local newspaper. Besides the centered alignment, lack of proximity and repetition, and dull typeface, this ad seriously lacks contrast. There is nothing in the design that makes a person want to actually read it. The puppy's face is cute, but that's about it.



Okay, these are the steps to go through to take the first ad and start making it into something like the second ad.

- Let go of Times Roman and Arial/Helvetica. Just eliminate them from your **font choices**. Trust me. (Please let go of Sand as well.)
- Let go of a centered **alignment**. I know it's hard to do, but you must do it for now. Later, you can experiment with it again.
- Find the most interesting or most important item on the page, and **emphasize** it! In this case, the most interesting is the dog's face and the most important is the name of the store. Keep the most important things together so a reader doesn't lose the **focus**.
- Group the information into logical groups. Use **space** to set items apart or to connect them.
- Find elements you can **repeat** (including any elements of contrast).
- And most important, add **contrast**. In the second ad, you see a contrast in the black versus white, the blue logo color, the gray type, typeface sizes, and typeface choices.

Work through each concept one at a time. I guarantee you'll be amazed at what you can create.

Summary

Contrast on a page draws our eyes to it; our eyes like contrast. If you are putting two elements on the page that are not the same (such as two typefaces or two line widths), they cannot be similar. For contrast to be effective, the two elements must be very different.

Contrast is kind of like matching wall paint when you need to spot paint - you can't sort of match the color; either you match it exactly or you repaint the entire wall. As my grandfather, an avid horseshoe player, always said, "'Almost' only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades."

THE BASIC PURPOSE

Contrast has two purposes, and they're inextricable from each other.

- One purpose is to **create an interest on the page** - if a page is interesting to look at, it is more likely to be read.
- The other is to aid in the organization of the information. A reader should be able to instantly understand the way the information is organized, the logical flow from one item to another.

The contrasting elements should never serve to confuse the reader or to create a focus that is not supposed to be a focus.

HOW TO GET IT

Add contrast through your typeface choices, line thicknesses, colors, shapes, sizes, space, etc. It is easy to find ways to add contrast, and it's probably the most fun and satisfying way to add visual interest. The important thing is to be strong.

WHAT TO AVOID

Don't be a wimp. If you're going to contrast, do it with strength. Avoid contrasting a sort-of-heavy line with a sort-of-heavier line. Avoid contrasting brown text with black headlines. Avoid using two or more typefaces that are similar. If the items are not exactly the same, **make them different!**