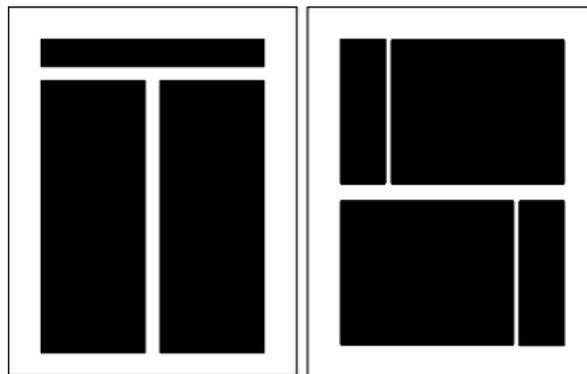


Advanced Higher Graphic Communication

Class 2: Balance

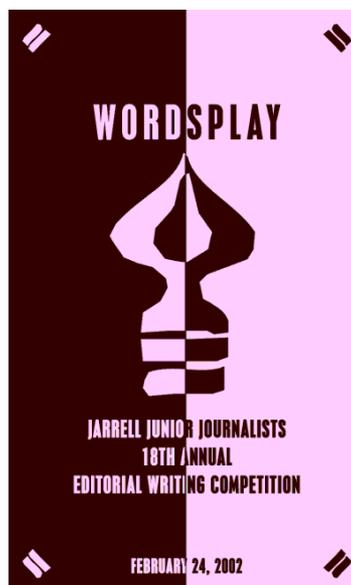
Lesson 1: Symmetrical

Symmetrical balance is easiest to see in perfectly centred compositions or those with mirror images. In a design with only two elements they would be almost identical or have nearly the same visual mass. If one element was replaced by a smaller one, it could throw the page out of symmetry. To reclaim perfect symmetrical balance you might need to add or subtract or rearrange the elements so that they evenly divide the page such as a centred alignment or one that divides the page in even segments (halves, quarters, etc.).



When a design can be centred or evenly divided both vertically and horizontally it has the most complete symmetry possible. Symmetrical balance generally lends itself to more formal, orderly layouts. They often convey a sense of tranquillity or familiarity or elegance or serious contemplation.

See the descriptions below each of these examples that describes how symmetrical balance is achieved in each case.



Vertical Symmetry — Each vertical half (excluding text) of the brochure is a near mirror image of the other, emphasized with the reverse in colours. Even the perfectly centred text picks up the colour reversal here. This symmetrically balanced layout is very formal in appearance.



Vertical & Horizontal Symmetry — This poster design divides the page into four equal sections. Although not mirror images the overall look is very symmetrical and balanced. Each of the line drawings are more or less centred within their section. The graphic (text and image) in the upper centre of the page is the focal point tying all the parts together.

Exercise

Look for examples of balanced symmetry in your own magazines. Do these exercises and answer these questions.

- How many examples of perfect or near perfect symmetry can you find?
- Fold a few pieces in half vertically and horizontally to look for symmetrical balance.
- Look for sections of symmetrical design within larger layouts such as a graphic, a logo.
- How is the symmetry achieved — is it through mirror images, identical placement, or with pieces that are very similar in look and feel?



Asymmetrical/All Over Balance — It can't be neatly sliced in half like a symmetrical design but most of the elements have only small differences in shape and mass. This page achieves an overall balance by use of an underlying grid that spreads the many pieces out over the entire page, more or less evenly.



Asymmetrical Tension — Like a wild, unruly garden, the elements of this brochure cover are barely contained on the page. The plants spring up primarily along the left side but with a few stems escaping and arching across the page. The text, although randomly placed, follows the lines of the plants keeping them anchored to the overall design. The off-balance design creates a sense of freedom and movement.

Exercise

Go back to those class samples to look for examples of asymmetrical balance, do these exercises and answer these questions (to yourself).

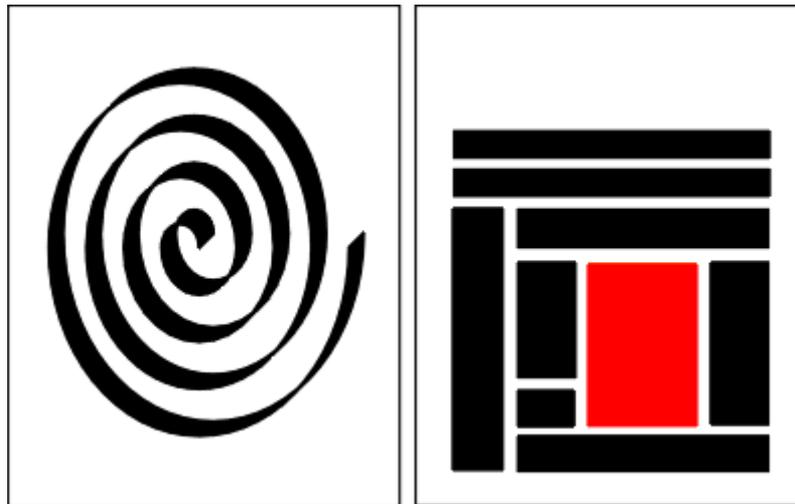
- How many examples of asymmetrical balance can you find?
- Examine the elements within the piece to see how the designer arranged them to achieve a balanced design without symmetry.
- Look for pieces that appear to be intentionally out of balance?
- How does the balance contribute to the mood of each piece? Is it dynamic? Does it appear to move in a certain direction or vibrate on the page?

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Class 2: Balance

Lesson 3: Radial

On square and rectangular pages we generally place elements in orderly rows and columns. With radial designs the elements radiate from or swirl around in a circular or spiral path. Parts of the design must still be arranged so that they are balanced across the width and length of the page unless you're intentionally aiming for a lack of balance.



See the descriptions below each of these examples that describes how radial balance is achieved in each case.



Radial — Here we have an example of radial balance in a rectangular space. The year represents the centre of the design with the subtle colour sections radiating from that centre. The calendar month grids and their corresponding astrological symbols are arrayed around the year in a circular fashion.



Radial — Colours and text radiate out from the apple in the middle of this CD cover design. The effect is almost one of spiralling down into the centre of the apple. The apple itself looks nearly symmetrical but the curving text and the outlines edging off the page to the top and right throws it all slightly off-balance.

Exercise

Go back to those class samples to look for examples of radial balance, do these exercises and answer these questions (to yourself).

- How many examples of radial balance can you find? It may be harder to find examples. Look to elements within other layouts such as graphic illustrations and logos that use a radial balance.
- Does the piece radiate from a central point or does it have a spiral effect?
- Does the design pull you in or send you out to the edges of the piece?

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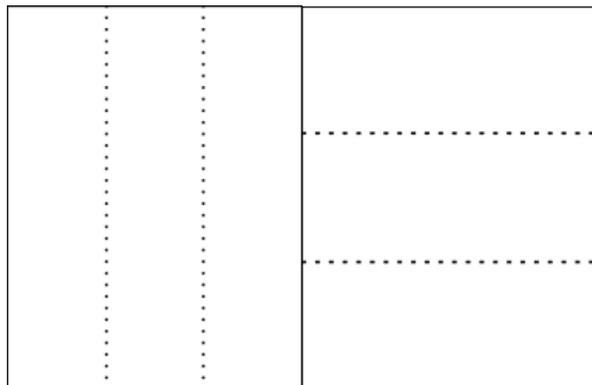
Class 2: Balance

Lesson 4: Rule of Thirds, Visual Centre, Grids

Underlying most of the layouts on the previous pages are three related aspects of page layout.

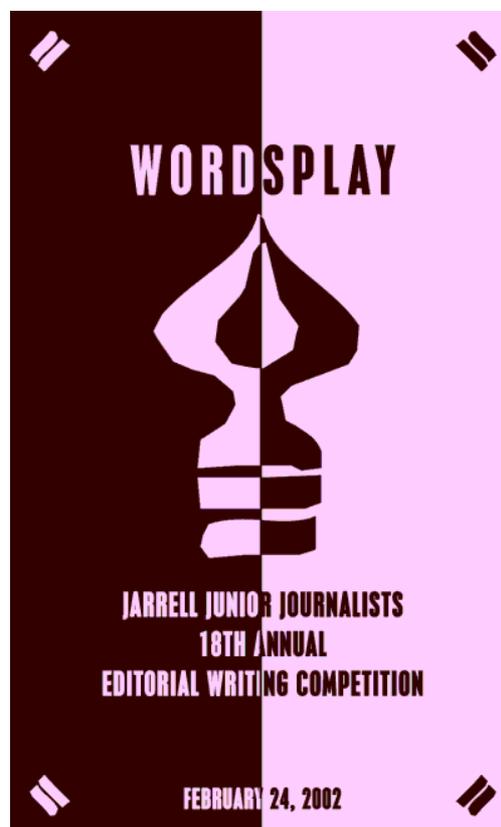
Thirds

The rule of thirds says that most designs can be made more interesting by visually dividing the page into thirds vertically or horizontally and placing our most important elements within those thirds.

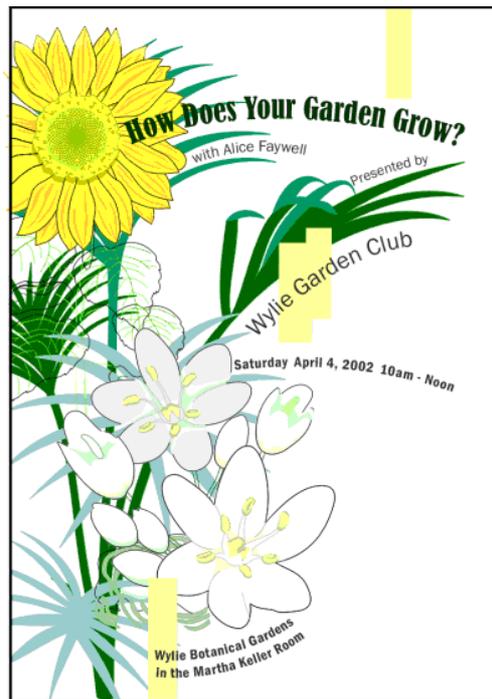


Look at these previous balance examples and see how the rule of thirds is utilized.

Below: In this vertically symmetrical layout the headline appears in the upper third of the page, the logo in the middle third, and the supporting descriptive text in the lower third.

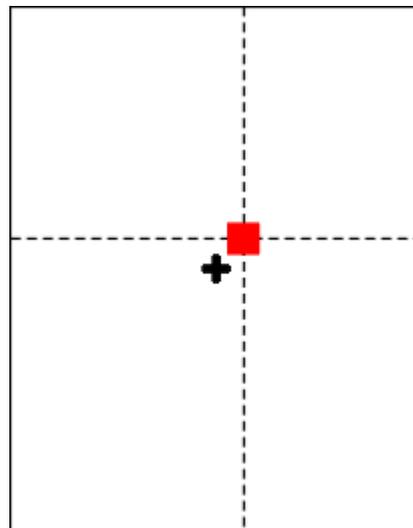


Below: Even this unbalanced asymmetrical design uses the rule of thirds with most of the 'action' in the upper 2/3rd of the layout.



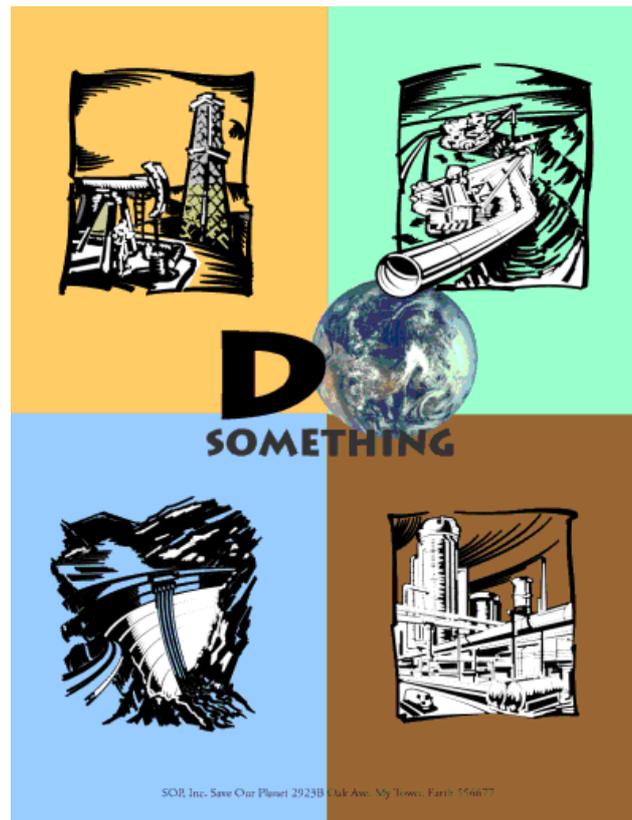
Visual Centre

Placing important elements or the focal point of the design within the visual centre of a piece is another design trick. The visual centre is slightly to the right of and above the actual centre of a page.



See how the focal or centre point of each of these designs actually falls in the visual centre of the page.

Below: It's easy to see the actual centre, it's where the four box corners meet. But the focus is on the earth.



Below: In this calendar, the months emanate from the year located front and (visual) centre.



Grids

Roughly dividing a page into thirds or finding the visual centre are relatively easy and you don't usually have to be exact to achieve your goals. However, constructing the underlying structure of a piece is a bit more complicated — but essential for most designs. Most balanced designs (and even unbalanced ones) rely on a grid. This invisible structure (visible while working in your page layout program) helps ensure that you place all the elements in the right location to achieve balance as well as to help with continuity and consistency of design.

Grids can be simple or complex depending on the needs of the design and the designer.

Sometimes the use of a grid is obvious. **Below:** This asymmetrically balanced design uses a simple three column grid to ensure that each text column is the same width and that it is balanced by the nearly empty column on the left. The grid also dictates the margins and ensures that the page number and header appear in the same place on each page.



Below: A 5x5 grid keeps this design in line. The grid is obvious along the bottom (each square equals one grid square in this layout) but it is invisibly keeping all those random letters in order in the middle.



Grids are an important tool in page layout and desktop publishing. This three-part supplemental material fully describes and illustrates the use of grids.

Grids: Order Out of Chaos

Design grids and their components.

Grids: Consistency & Unity

Use grids to unify design elements.

Grids: Flexible Options

Selecting the right grid; avoid that 'boxed in' look.

Exercise

Look through your own magazines and look for examples of the use of the rule of thirds, visual centre, and grids.

- Roughly divide several pieces in thirds vertically and horizontally looking for designs that seem to fall neatly into these sections. Does the main headline, focal graphic, or other key elements fall squarely within one of these thirds?
- Locate the visual centre of several different pieces. How many designs put a key piece of information or focal point in this area?
- Can you 'see' the underlying grid in your samples? Find an example that appears to use a very simple grid. Find one that appears to use a more complex grid. In each case, how does the use of a grid help the designer achieve a balanced design?

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Class 2: A Balancing Act

Graded Assignment

Create a rough sketch or thumbnail type layout showing any one type of balance: symmetrical, asymmetrical, or radial or a combination within a single layout. You don't have to create an actual page with content. Use boxes, lines, circles, or other shapes to represent text and graphics.

Including the following information:

- Describe the type of balance your sketch represents.
- Describe the mood or feeling this layout is intended to evoke.
- Describe any type of grid or related structural elements you would use.