



## Monthly Dose of Design: The Fundamentals of Layout Design

5 April, 2018

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**Learn the basics of great layout design to communicate insights more clearly to clients.**

Our last Monthly Dose of Design explored the [future of communicating quantitative data](#). This month we are going back to the basics. We will tell you how great layout design can enhance your ability to communicate insight to clients and how ignoring layout design can prevent your insights being understood.

Layout and composition are the foundations of good insight communication. Regardless of your medium, understanding the effect layout has on your audience's visual perception is crucial for Market Researchers. By developing your composition skills, your layout can be one of the most effective ways of storytelling. But if used badly, your message could become lost within your layout and you risk communicating the wrong insights. Additionally, having a good eye for composition can have a financial effect on your business as well, behavioural economics suggests that people pay more for better presentation. For example, people are willing to pay more for food served on a plate than on a napkin. Better layout equals a better presentation, which then equals your company being able to charge more money for their services.

### The Psychology of Layout

*"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." – Aristotle*

This is the key concept of Gestalt psychology; a 1920s design movement that underpins the effect layout has on your visual perception. The theory is that the human brain makes sense of the world. It does so by grouping several elements together to form one whole, instead of several separate objects.

From this, five simple principles were established to aid visual understanding:

**1. Similarity**

We group similar objects together to make sense of the world around us. For example, this could be grouping things of similar colour, shape, scale, typeface or even types of information on a page.

**2. Continuation**

The eye visually identifies information by following things. For example, we read text best in a line.

**3. Closure**

Complete shapes or layouts are the simplest things to improve visual perceptions.

**4. Proximity**

The composition of lots of objects manipulates the message of the whole image. If you have text boxes that all relate to each other or are the opposites of each other, the placement is crucial depending on what message you want to give.

**5. Order**

It's essential that there's order and hierarchy to your layout. Otherwise there will be visual anarchy. Therefore, we group types of text into headlines, subheads and body text. Also, if there are too many groups the audience will get visually lost and won't be able to decode the meaning of the document.



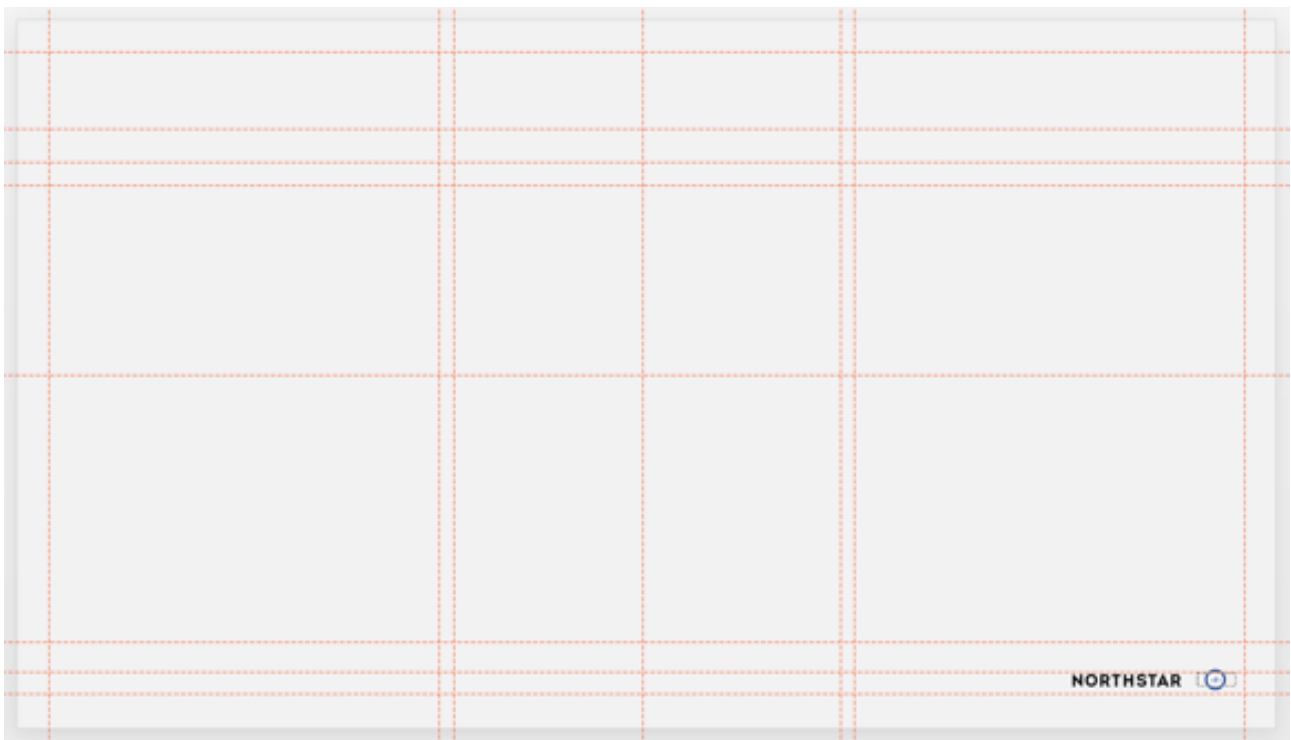
Image Source: <http://sibraco.com/rules-of-design-gestalt-principals/>

Based on these five key principles, we have our own five top tips for great layout design and how to ensure you communicate the right things to your clients.

**Use a Grid**

Before thinking about your layout or aesthetic, a grid is the very first thing you should create. A grid is a set of guidelines you give your document. It includes things like margins and gutters, and most importantly it is to help you guide your layout, it will never be seen by your audience. Firstly, it makes sure your margins are consistent throughout the whole document, it helps keep your layouts clean, tidy and legible, and will guide you as you progress creatively with your layouts. As the designer, it will help you make sense of your layout

and give it purpose by helping you work out what text boxes, images or objects should be aligned to each other.



Depending on the nature of your document, i.e. a content heavy report or chart heavy interactive PDF, your grid can be anything from a three-column vertical grid to a 5 column by 5-row grid. The key is to align things to each other, so they don't appear as if they are floating on the page.

## **Hierarchy**

Hierarchy is essential in any document, regardless of whether it's client facing or stimulus for a focus group, we know this because behavioural economics suggests that the first thing we see about a brand or a product informs our overall opinion of it, therefore hierarchy is crucial because you need to make sure the first thing your audience see's is actually the most important.

## The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

A mad boxer shot a quick, gloved jab to the jaw of his dizzy opponent.

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**“I really like going to the football on a Saturday, the atmosphere and the camaraderie mean a lot to me.”** -Daniel, 19

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When designing each page, you should know before you start what is the most crucial element of that page and what you want your client to remember from it. You should then apply the most appropriate ‘level’ (e.g. title, intro text, quote etc) to that element and build your layout around that. This allows the most crucial elements of your content to be your communication focus point.

### Use Boxes

The key to great layouts is to box up all the individual elements to form one whole, and keep the amount of space between each one consistent. Again, the eye visually perceives things much better when everything is grouped. Furthermore, it will make your layouts much cleaner and easier on the eye, and you will avoid ‘floating’ elements. This does not mean literally put everything into coloured boxes, just group elements where you can.

## The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

A mad boxer shot a quick, gloved jab to the jaw of his dizzy opponent.

Crazy Fredrick bought many very exquisite opal jewels.

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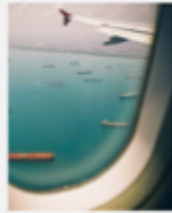
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### Utilise White Space

Give your layout space to breathe. If you overcomplicate your layout or add in any unnecessary elements that don't aid your story, then you will overwhelm your audience and they won't be able to visually interpret the page. Ultimately this could end in your insights not being communicated.



## The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

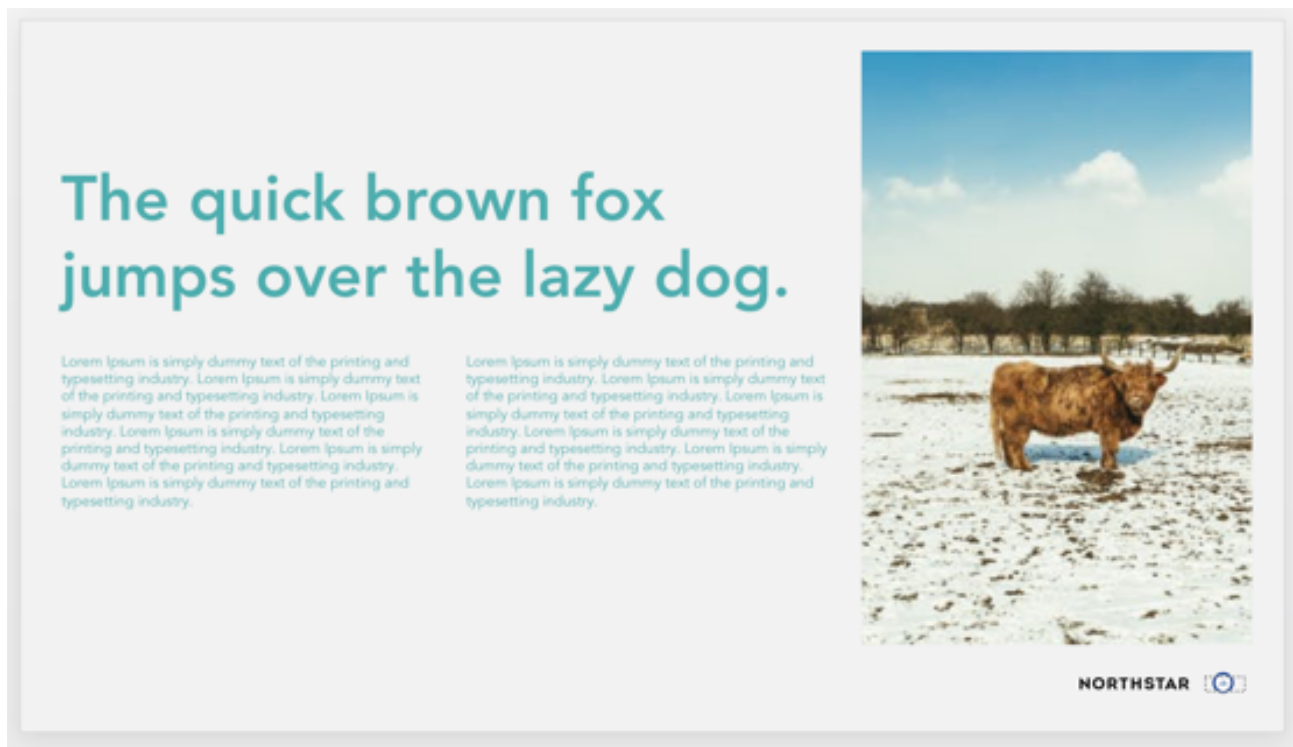
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### Scale & Balance

Earlier we mentioned the importance of hierarchy. A good way to direct your audience's attention to particular areas and make your layouts more diverse is to sensibly use scale. Making statements, quotes or key points bigger or bolder is a great way to pull out the key messages. Having said this, you don't want to make elements too big so that they are screaming at your audience, or make it look as if you have run out of things to put on that page so you have just made something bigger.



Making sure your layout is balanced makes the aesthetic easier on your audience's eye, and makes sure that one side isn't too heavy.

Next time we will be discussing our top tips on how to create the best infographics.

This article was first posted on [Greenbook](#)

By Emma Galvin, Creative Executive & Nicholas Lee, Senior Creative Executive

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