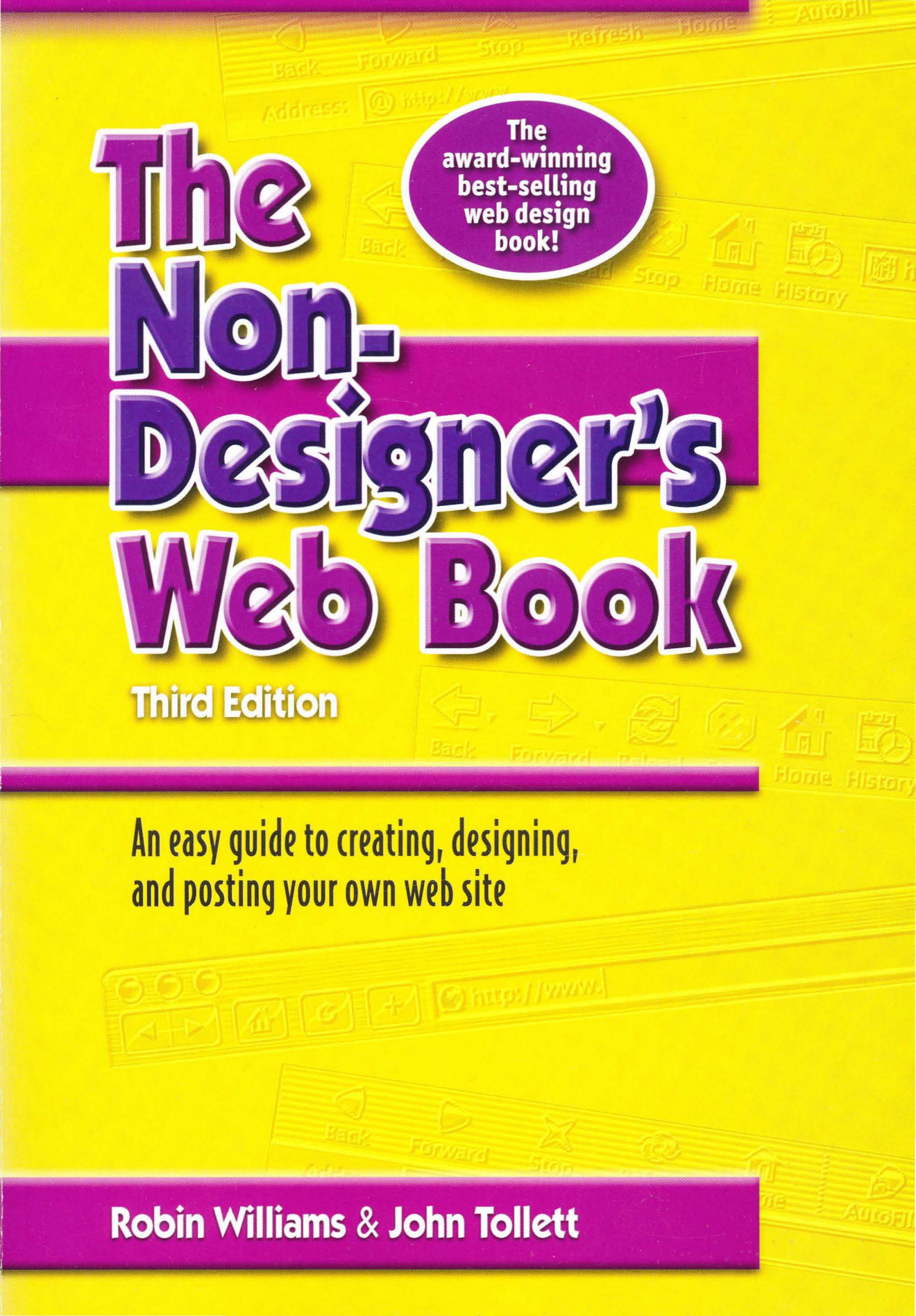Compendium

# CRAP
# 2016

René Birkholm

**Content**

# CRAP

The Non Designers Web Book, Robin Williams et al., Third Edition,
Peachpit Press, ISBN 0-321-30227-7 (p. 113-120, 122-123, 125-131,
156-158, 169-181, 185-193, 220, 246-247, 252-253, 268)          Page **3**

# The Non-Designer's Web Book

## Third Edition

An easy guide to creating, designing, and posting your own web site

**Robin Williams & John Tollett**

# The Non-Designer's Web Book

## Third Edition
## Robin Williams & John Tollett

**It's a part of almost everyone's life now:** surfing the web is everywhere! But if you think web site design is beyond your reach or if you want your existing web site to look fresher and more professional, this is the book you need!

Join the tens of thousands of new web designers who made the first two editions of this award-winning book a best-seller. Robin and John explain the basics in a friendly and easy-to-follow format, offering tips, techniques, design examples, and a wealth of inspiration, topped with a good sense of humor! This new edition is updated to include current web technology, like CSS style sheets and CSS layers, new software tips, and design ideas for both novices and those who need a little refresher!

### First, the basics. You'll learn to:
- Use the World Wide Web
- Surf and search for information
- Build simple web pages

### Next, some design theory. You'll recognize:
- The difference between print and web design
- Basic design principles for the web
- Various approaches to interface and navigation design
- What makes good or bad web design

### Then, on to graphic and technical details:
- When to use different graphic file formats
- How to prepare images, including simple animations
- How to choose web-safe colors and type
- Great tips and techniques from expert web designers
- How to get graphics if you don't want to make them

### After your site is finished:
- Test and fix your site
- Upload and update your site
- Register and promote your site

**Robin Williams** is the author of dozens of best-selling and award-winning books, including *The Non-Designer's Design Book, The Non-Designer's Type Book, Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger: Peachpit Learning Series, The Little Mac Book, Robin Williams Design Workshop,* and *Web Design Workshop*. Through her writing, teaching, and seminars, Robin has educated and influenced an entire generation of computer users in the areas of design, typography, desktop publishing, the Mac, and the web.

**John Tollett** has co-authored numerous books with Robin, including *Robin Williams Cool Mac Apps, The Robin Williams Mac OS X Book, Robin Williams Design Workshop* and *Web Design Workshop,* and more. John has more than 30 years' experience working as a professional designer and illustrator for a dozen advertising agencies, as a freelancer, and as a partner in a web design firm. He has used the Macintosh professionally since 1988, most recently for digital video editing, DVD design, and DVD authoring.

**Book Level:**
All aspiring web designers

**Computer Book Shelf Category:**
Web design

**Peachpit Press**
1249 Eighth Street
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800-283-9444
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510-524-2221 fax
www.peachpit.com
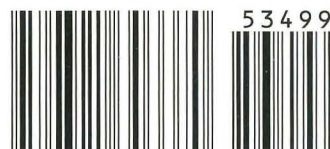
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# Basic Design Principles
## for non-designers
# 6

Anyone can learn the mechanics of making a web page. And anyone can make an ugly web page. Lots of people do. But the only reason so many people make bad web pages is that they don't understand the very basic design principles. If you have read *The Non-Designer's Design Book,* by Robin, you can skip this chapter, except perhaps to see how those same principles apply to web pages. If you haven't read that [bestselling and award-winning] book (we strongly suggest you do), then this section may well be the most important chapter in the book for you. The following chapters talk about things like "interface" and "navigation," which require a little more thought and planning. The concepts in *this* chapter are very simple things that will easily and quickly change dorky web pages into more professional-looking pages. They won't make you a brilliant designer, and they won't land you $20,000 web design contracts, but they will keep you from embarrassing yourself in front of millions of people.

The four basic principles this chapter highlights are **alignment, proximity, repetition,** and **contrast.** These principles are the underlying factors in every designed piece you see anywhere, on screen or in print. If you just remember these four principles, your web (or printed) pages will look clean, neat, and professional. They will communicate more clearly, people will enjoy them more, and you will be proud.

We took the examples in this chapter straight from the web. We don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, and we certainly don't want to get snotty about "sites that suck," so most of the bad examples are ones we recreated based on someone's idea, but we won't tell you who did it. When you look at some of these examples and think, "Nobody would have done that," know that someone did. And they often did it on pages claiming to be "award-winning" and "professional." In many cases, a client had to *pay* someone to do it!

# Alignment

**Alignment** simply means that items on the page are lined up with each other. Lack of alignment is the single most prevalent problem on web pages.

You know you can align items on the left side, the right side, or centered. This is the rule to follow:
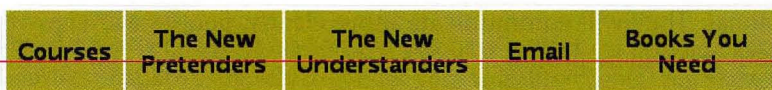
> **CHOOSE ONE.** *Choose one alignment and use it on the entire page.*

Seriously. This means if you choose to align the basic text on the left, then don't center the headline. If you center some of the text, then center all of the text. **Don't mix alignments.**

This one principle will radically change the appearance of your pages. We've put several examples on the following pages. The layouts are directly from existing web pages, but we changed the words to protect the innocent.

We know from teaching thousands of non-designers that you might at first find it difficult to line everything up. A centered alignment is safe—it's balanced, symmetrical, calm, formal. And we know that it makes a person with no background in design feel like they are doing cool things by making some text flush left, some flush right, and some centered. But it looks terrible. It's messy. It gives an unprofessional appearance.

And while you're lining up text and graphics, get that text away from the left edge. It is annoying and distracting to have your eyes bump into the left edge of the browser page every time they swing back to get the next line. When you indent text (also called "block quote"), it also indents from the right edge, helping to prevent the text from ending up in those long, dorky, difficult-to-read lines.

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|---------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|----------------|

*Horizontal alignment is just as important as vertical alignment. It's very common to see buttons as in the example above, where the type does not align horizontally. This "up/down/up/down" shift makes the whole strip look messy. So in addition to thinking about vertical alignment, watch the horizontal alignment of the text in your buttons and links.*

| Courses | The New Pretenders | The New Understanders | Email | Books You Need |
|---------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|----------------|
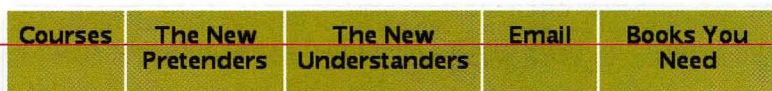
*Type sits on an invisible line called the "baseline." By aligning all the text on the same baseline, the strip of links is neater and more organized. In most web authoring software there is a button for baseline alignment, usually in the table specifications.*

This form has a great start—there are some strong alignments in place. But there are also several places where the type seems to have been thrown on the page at random.

The fields create a strong alignment. So strengthen the look by aligning the other elements to this line.

In general, nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily. Everything should have a reason for being where it is. Don't just throw it and see where it sticks. You should be able to state in words why an element is placed where it is.

With the one simple move of aligning all the elements along one edge, the page is instantly cleaner and more organized. When things are clean and organized, they communicate better.

In these examples, draw lines along all the flush left edges. When a strong edge repeats, it gains even more strength.

Alignment doesn't mean that everything is aligned along the **same edge**. It just means that everything has the **same alignment**—either all flush left, all flush right, or all centered.

You're probably so sharp you noticed that we instantly broke our own rule—we have a flush left AND a flush right alignment on this same page. But notice what these alignments do—they strengthen each other.

The other option is to flush left the field names, as in the top example, which makes a ragged edge against the fields themselves. Rather than have a ragged edge against a strong, straight edge, we combined the alignments so their strengths are together.

**We discourage beginning designers from centering everything.** A centered alignment has its place, but it has to be done consciously—not because you can't think of anything else. One problem with a centered alignment is that it is weak—there's an invisible line down the middle, but the edges have no definition. And because it is so symmetrical and balanced, it's very calm and formal. Is that what you want? (It might be.)
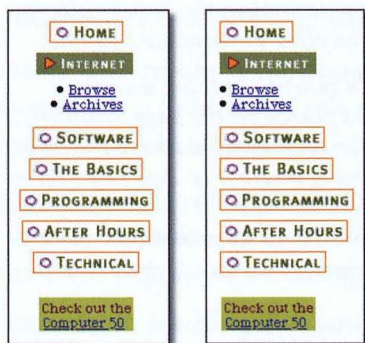


*In the right-hand example you can practically see the invisible line down the side of the elements.*

*Isn't that invisible line stronger than the one going down the center of the left-hand example? The strength of that flush left edge adds strength to the visual impression of the page.*

Now, the centered alignment in the left example actually looks rather nice by itself, doesn't it? But it was on a page where everything else was flush left, which made this centered information look weak, which weakened the whole page.

On pages where there is a lot of information to present, it's critical that the layout follow some strict alignment guidelines. This is not just to make it look prettier—it's for clear communication. If a visitor's eye has to wander all over the page trying to follow the flow of information, they're going to miss something or get tired and go away. In the two examples below, which one can you skim faster and still have a better grasp of what's available?
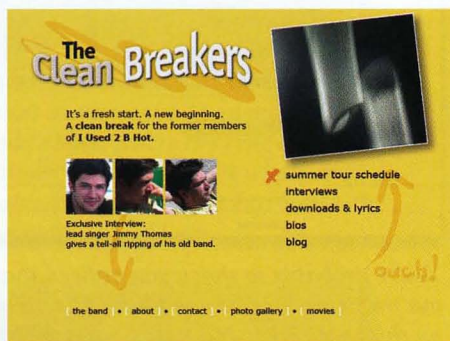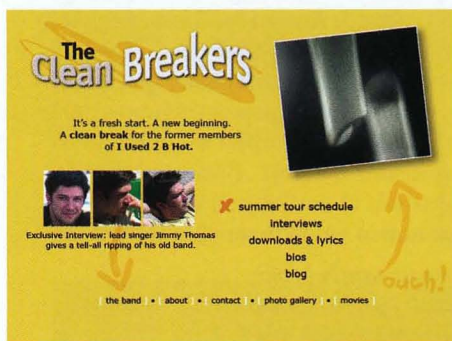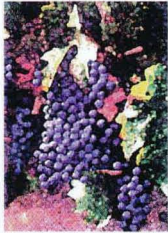


*On the left-hand example, someone wasn't very conscious of where items were placed on the page. It doesn't take any more time to line things up than to not line them up.*

**Turn the dang borders off.** In the example below, the strong edges of the aligned text *can* create the visual separations necessary for the columns, but not if the text is centered and the baselines don't align.

Again, the result of cleaning up the alignment is not just that it looks better, but it communicates better. The table is easier to read.



| Margaux | Romanee-Conti | Ramonet |
|---|---|---|
| Petrus | Mouton | Latour |
| Vogue | Henry Jayer | Dujac |
| D'Yquem | Caymus Special Selection | Opus |
| Montelena | Heitz Martha's | Talbot |
| Kistler | J.J. Prum | Biondi-Santi |
| Taylor's | Graham's | Gaya |

| Margaux | Romanee-Conti | Ramonet |
|---|---|---|
| Petrus | Mouton | Latour |
| Vogue | Henry Jayer | Dujac |
| D'Yquem | Heitz Martha's | Opus |
| Gaya | J.J. Prum | Talbot |
| Kistler | Graham's | Biondi-Santi |
| Taylor's | Caymus Special Selection | Montelena |

*Pages with strong flush left or flush right alignments usually look more sophisticated than pages where there is a mixture of alignments. The alignment creates a unifying force.*

Below is a very typical example of a web page—centered heading, flush left body copy. The flush left elements are bumped up against the left edge. Below are some tips that would help organize the information.
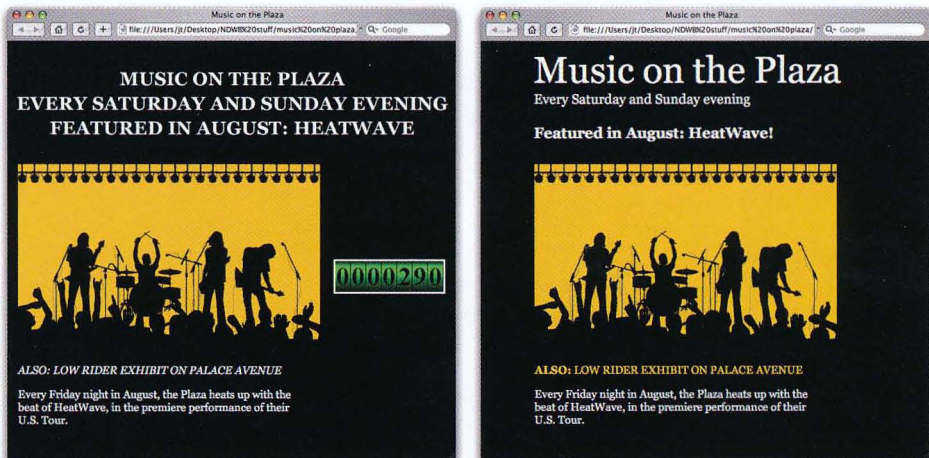


*First, choose one alignment—either center everything or flush everything.*

*Second, move elements away from the extreme left edge of the web page.*

*Third, don't set headline type in all caps. It's hard to read and it looks dumb.*

*Fourth, if you need words in all caps, don't italicize them.*

*Fifth, get rid of the counter. In this case it's superfluous and only serves as junk on the page. If you really want it, put it somewhere else.*

# Proximity

The principle of **proximity** refers to the relationships that items develop when they are close together, in close proximity. When two items are close, they appear to have a relationship, to belong together. When items are physically far from each other, they don't have a relationship. Often on web pages (as well as on printed pages), many items are orphaned unnecessarily, and many other items have inappropriate relationships.

It often happens on web pages that a headline or a subhead is far from the text it belongs with. Sometimes a caption is far from the picture it describes; sometimes a subhead is closer to the text above it than to the text below it. Be conscious of the space between elements. Group items together that belong together.

Open your eyes to the relationships on the screen: squint your eyes and see what elements on the page seem to have connections because of the spatial arrangements. Are they appropriate connections? If not, fix them.
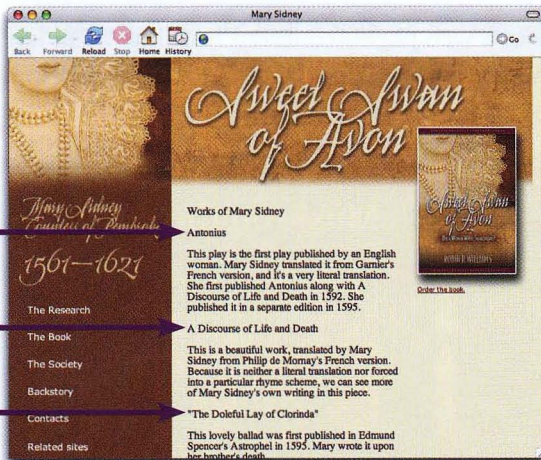


*Notice the headlines (see arrows) in this example. They're not only far away from their respective paragraphs, but there is the same amount of space **above** each headline as there is **below** it. Because of all the space, each headline and each paragraph appear as separate elements. Every headline should be close to what it is related to.*
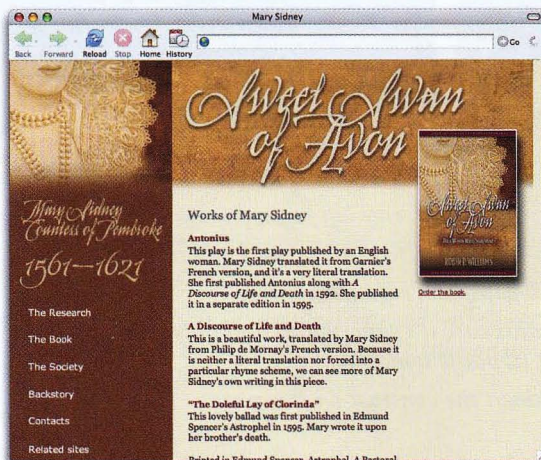


*Now the headlines are closely connected with their paragraphs. The page is tidier and the communication is clearer. We used the technique explained at the bottom of page 121 to get the heads closer to the body copy.*

*You could also use CSS style sheets, as explained on pages 256–260 (which is actually a better solution but not quite as simple).*

When items that belong together are grouped closer together, the information is much more organized and easier to read. The visual spaces create a hierarchy of information. The individual groups of information are still separated by space, but the space is organized and has a purpose—it's not random space that is breaking elements apart that should be together.

So what is it that maintains the unified structure of the piece, if elements are separated by space? Alignment. Those invisible lines connect the various parts of the page.
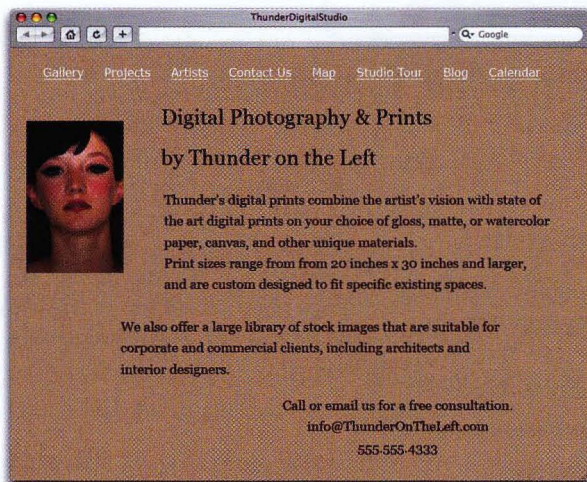


*Count how many times your eye has to jump from one element to another on this page. About seven times?*

*When elements are separated by space, they become visually disconnected from each other. That's one of the reasons you should NEVER hit two Returns between paragraphs—it creates too much separation between items that belong together, as you can see on this page.*
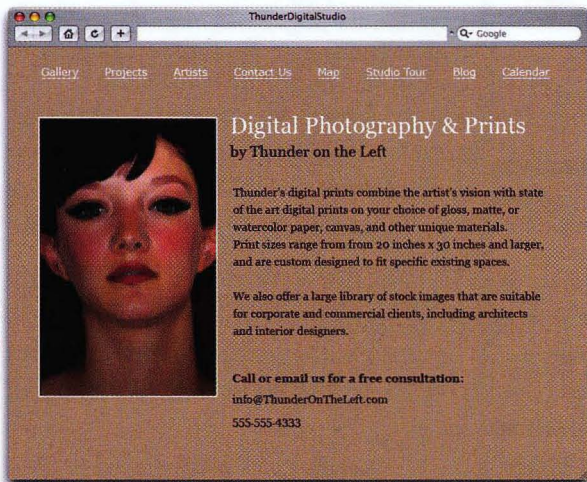


*Notice how and why the different pieces of information have been grouped. Notice how the elements are aligned. Notice how the spacing arrangements provide visual clues as to the meaning and importance of different pieces of information.*

*If this page was set in another language, you would still know what each piece of text referred to because of the spacing.*
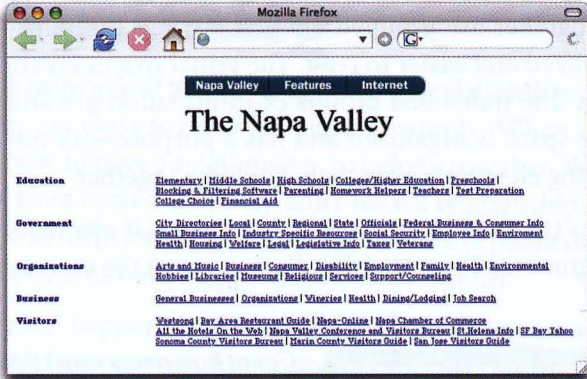
This is a lovely, clean site. The designer created a great solution here to the problem of presenting a large number of links. Let's just tweak two tiny details—
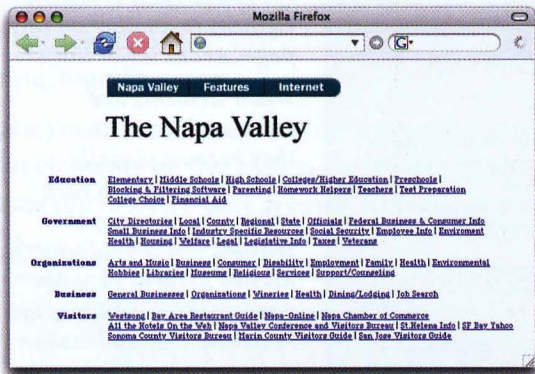


We moved the head over a bit to the left so now it aligns with the body of links. And we moved the links closer to the headings they belong with (that's applying the principle of proximity). This also allows the page to fit within 800 pixels wide so no one has to scroll sideways.
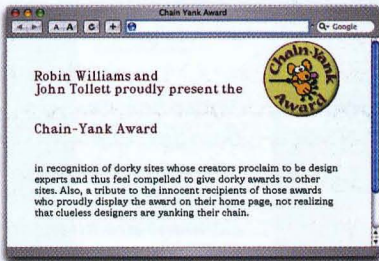


How many separate elements do you see on this page? Four? Each piece of text on the page looks like an unrelated piece because of the distances between elements. There isn't much unity.
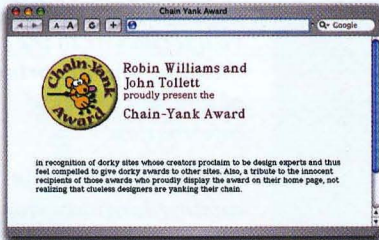


If we group the elements that belong together into clusters, we have a more unified and organized layout with clear relationships.
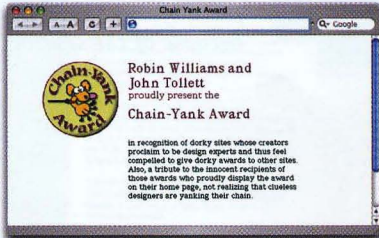


Let's go one step further and strengthen the alignment. There is already a nice, strong line along the edge of the headline. Let's take advantage of that and align the rest of the body copy along that same line.
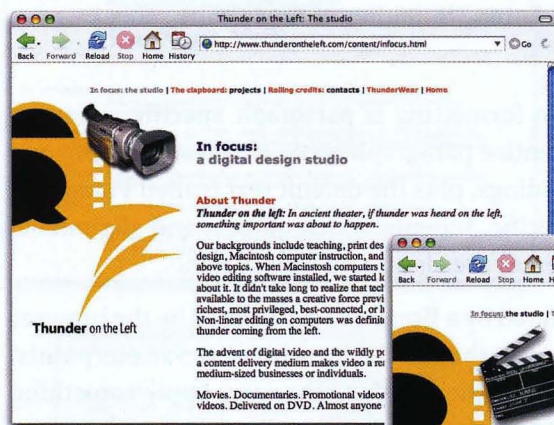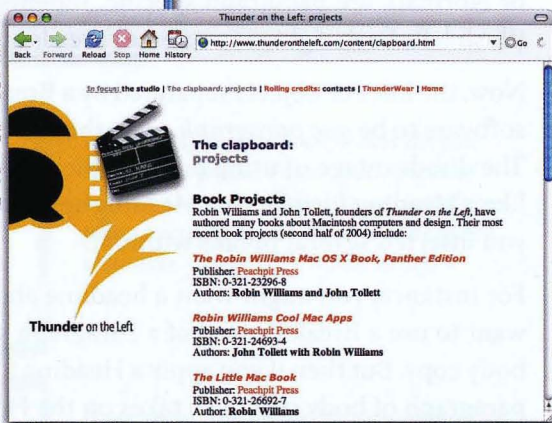
# Repetition

The concept of **repetition** is that throughout a project you repeat certain elements that tie all the disparate parts together. Each page in the web site should look like it belongs to the same web site, the same company, the same concept. Repetition makes this happen.

On a web site, your navigation buttons are a repetitive element. Colors, style, illustrations, format, layout, typography, and so on can all be part of the repetition that unifies the entire site.

Besides unifying a web site, a repetitive (consistent) navigation system helps visitors get the most out of your site because they don't have to learn their way around again on every new page.



*Notice the repetitive elements within each individual page, in addition to those that tie all of the pages together.*

*So exactly what is it that makes these three pages look like they belong together? They're very simply designed:*

- *The logo (that has been **consciously** placed to appear to "bleed" off the edge).*
- *The background page color.*
- *The color scheme.*
- *Repetitive headlines.*
- *The basic layout is repeated on each page.*
- *The subheads and visited links are the same pale color.*
- *The navigation is always in the same place.*
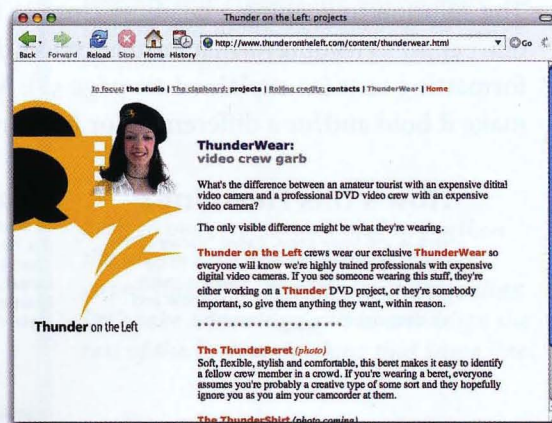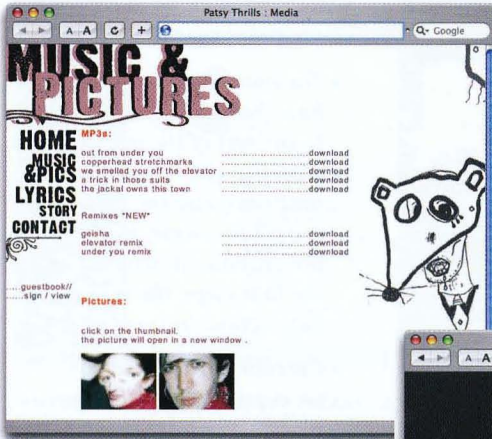
These pages are part of the Patsy Thrills' band web site. Each individual page is nicely done (and there's interesting information), but there is no continuity among the web pages. It looks like different designers were in different rooms designing different pages without ever talking to each other.

*Notice, above, that the graphics bump into the edges **on purpose, as a design choice,** not just because the designer didn't notice or didn't know how to prevent it. It's always amazing to me that you can tell the difference between accidental design and purposeful design.*
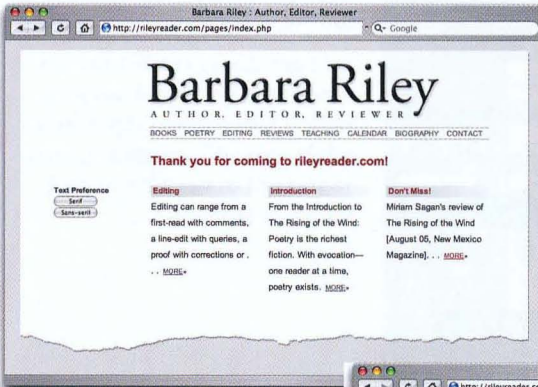
In this site, it's easy to see the repetitive elements— background, typeface, link images, and colors. Notice the nice, clean alignments. Notice that the home page is an excellent example of a page that looks great centered— why? Imagine that same page in Times, all caps. Can you visualize the difference?
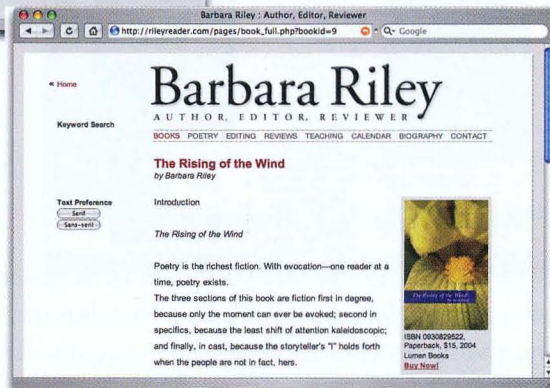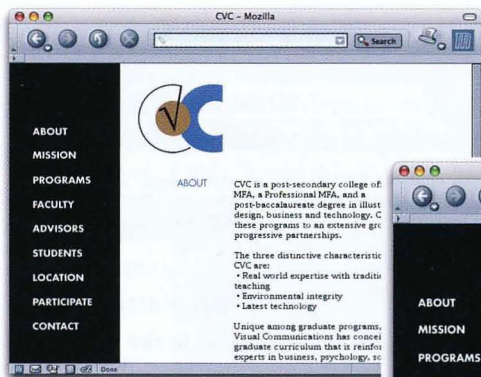
*So exactly what is it that makes this very simple layout look so sophisticated and elegant? Think about it for a minute or two.*

*For one thing, there is very clear repetition, not just in the strong black bar and logo, but in the stark and simple layout, the rules, the spacing, and of course in the colors. In this site you can clearly see how the strong repetition of elements has added a high level of professionalism to the design.*

*Also look at the clean alignments. I guarantee that if some of the text was centered and some flush left, the pages would not feel so strong.*

*The contrast is great, starting with the logo itself. The black and white background is also strong contrast. The size of the logo in relation to the rest of the text is strong.*
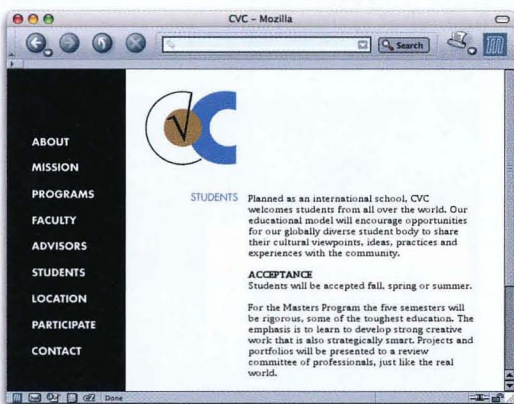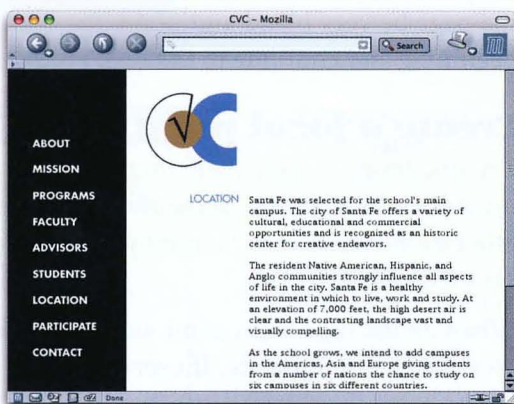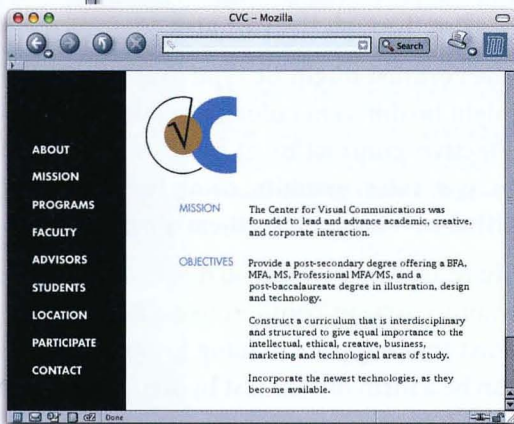
It takes a very self-assured designer to recognize and act on the power of simplicity. Don't get fooled or intimidated by all the hoopla and fancy moving objects on the web. Many great and powerful things are created quietly and with grace.

# Contrast

**Contrast** draws your eye into a page, it pulls you in. Contrasting elements guide your eyes around the page, create a hierarchy of information, and enable you to skim through the vast array of information and pick out what you need.

The contrast might be type that is bolder, bigger, or a very different style. It might be different colors, graphic signposts, or a spatial arrangement. To be effective, contrast must be strong—don't be a wimp. **If two elements, such as type, rules, graphics, color, texture, etc., are not the same, make them very different—don't make them almost the same!**

There are times when you don't want contrast on a page, most often when you want to present continuous text, as in a novel or some articles. In that case, don't interrupt the reading process by throwing contrast into it. Even links can be a form of contrast by virtue of their color, underline, and interruptive status. If you want people to sit and read through an entire piece, then let the page be very bland and uninterrupted, let the readers' eyes start at the beginning and continue to the end. Let the words simply communicate.

## Create a focal point

On any designed piece, whether it is on screen, paper, or a package, there must be a **focal point.** Something must be the dominating force, and the other elements follow a hierarchy from that point down. This focus is created through **contrast.**

When all the type is the same size, as in the heading below-left, there is no hierarchy of importance. If everything has the **same** priority, then **nothing** has priority. But **SOMETHING** should be the most important. Contrast helps define what is important.
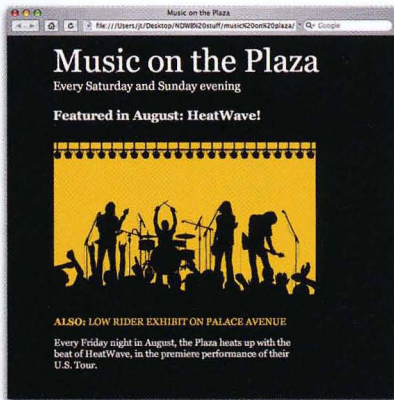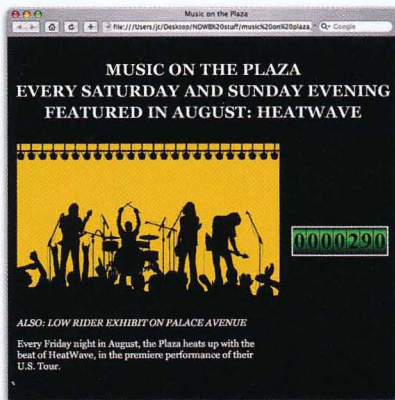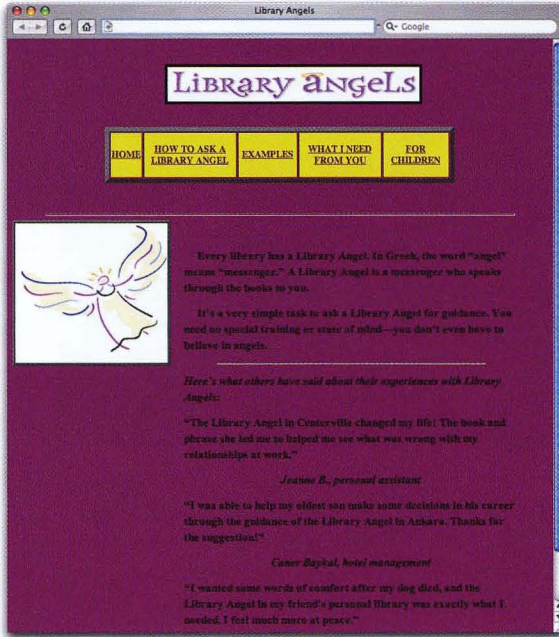
In the example to the left, what is the focal point? Eh, you say, there are three focal points? But which one appears to be the most important of those three? The angel graphic? The links? Are these items **supposed** to be the most important elements?

This page is a little confused about its focal point. Something needs to be the boss. Just a couple of simple changes will make a big difference.
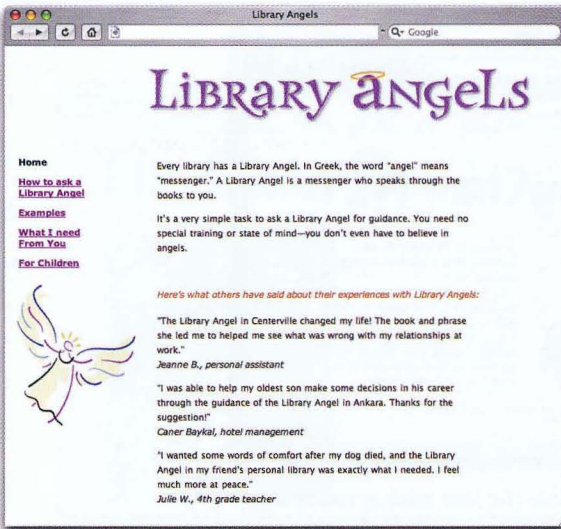


To provide **contrast** and create a **focal point:**

- Take the logo out of its confining box and make it LARGE, make it the focal point by virtue of it being the biggest and first thing you see. It's such a great image—show it off!
- Reduce the size of the links (take them out of the bordered table!) and put them in an appropriate, subordinate position.
- Get rid of the dark background. Black text on a dark background does not have enough contrast.

**And by the way:**

- Remove the box around the graphic. Strong alignments create their own "containers" for holding elements. Boxes with borders just add clutter.
- There's a great **alignment** started—follow it!
- Paragraphs need space between them OR indents—not both!
- **Proximity!** The name of each person should be closest to his/ her own quote.
- **Repetition!** Pick up the colors of the logo and use them in the links and important text.
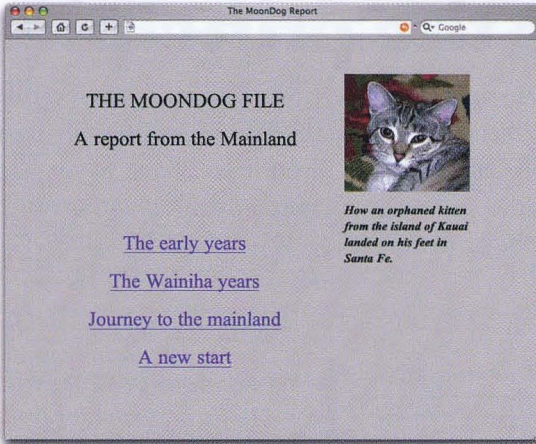
*Oh dear. Too much junk. Too much clutter.
What's the most important element? What do
you read first? How does your eye flow through
the page? The beautiful illustration and the
title get lost among all the other things that
call attention to themselves.*



*Remove superfluous stuff like the line with eyeballs and
the grapes (WHY are they there??). Find the focal point
and make everything else subordinate—contrast in size,
placement, and color. Clean it up—use alignment and
proximity.*

*Also, see page 317 for important reasons why you should
NOT set your list of text links as the first item on your
page, and why—instead—you should write a descriptive
paragraph as the first text on the page.*

THE MOONDOG FILE

A report from the Mainland

*How an orphaned kitten from the island of Kauai landed on his feet in Santa Fe.*

The early years

The Wainiha years

Journey to the mainland

A new start

*If everything is given the same value, then nothing is important, nothing is the focal point. Establish a hierarchy of information through contrast (combined with proximity). Pay attention to how your eye flows through this page. Where does it go first? Next? Are you sure you've read everything on the page? Does someone else follow the same path you did?*



The early years    The Wainiha years    Journey to the mainland    A new start    CatBlog

# THE MOONDOG FILE
### A Report from the Mainland

*An orphaned kitten from the island of Kauai lands on his feet in Santa Fe.*
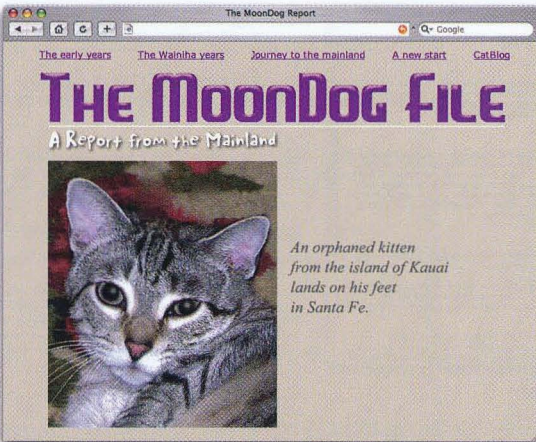
*Reorganize the elements into logical groups defined by space (proximity), give the important elements the visual prominence they deserve (contrast), and unify the various elements by aligning them. Do you find that your eye now has a clearer path to follow? Does someone else follow the same path?*