Structure of Text: Creating Memory Aids through Typography

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Structure of Text
Creating Memory Aids through Typography
by Donald Armel & Edward Rushton

We see good examples of text use on a daily basis, yet we do not observe what we see. We fail to mimic or comprehend why type is used that way it is.

By using simple typographic principles - classroom materials (handouts, assignments, instructions) can communicate better to the students by visually organizing information, by providing a structure to the information, and by improving a student’s ability to search the information.

Taking from typographic research, illustrations will be made to show how proper and poor typographic use impacts learning.

Contrast Helps Organize
Learning is facilitated when important cues are apparent. Add less important cues as necessary (Fleming and Levie, p. 115). Contrast of tone and size creates a hierarchy among the information elements (Williams, p. 65).

It is much easier to search for salient information when typographic cues are used to leads the reader. Without these cues a page of text becomes one large mass of words which are difficult to navigate short of reading every part.

Never change the font. Use size variations

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Notice how these formatted paragraphs are plain and uninteresting. The selections of typographic designs do not draw attention to important elements.

Compare this format to the same selection without formatting.
Size of Text for Paragraphs

Adult readers have a broad latitude of acceptable type sizes for reader the main body of text. There is not one right size because fonts vary in their basic legibility. In general, adult readers have a basic acceptable reading range of 9 point type to 12 point type with larger being better (Tinker, p. 138).

9 point
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12 point
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Fonts for Paragraphs

Your first choice should be a Roman (serifed) font, second, but not nearly as good, is a sans serif font. All other styles should be avoided (Tinker).

Use Roman fonts
Garamond, Palatino, Times, Baskerville, Century

Carefully Use
Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Futura

Avoid
This This This This This

Length of Lines or Columns

Tinker has conducted many tests to determine the optimal length of a line of text for efficient reading. Short of testing every font in existence and creating a table, his findings can be summarized as follows: minimum line length is 6 words per line and maximum is 12 words per line.

Graphic Elements

Graphic representation of information provides quicker consumption (Kelly). Or, a picture is worth a thousand words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total students</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graduating</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students lost</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


Tinker, Miles. (1965). Bases for Effective Reading. Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.