The Grid

A grid is a network of lines. It is a tool for generating form, arranging images, and organizing information.

The grid can work quietly in the background, or it can assert itself as an active element. The grid becomes visible as objects come into alignment with it. Some designers use grids in a strict, absolute way, while others see them as a starting point in an evolving process.

In the design of printed matter, guidelines help the designer align elements in relation to each other. Consistent margins and columns create an underlying structure that unifies a document and makes the layout process more efficient.

A well-made grid encourages the designer to vary the scale and placement of elements without relying wholly on arbitrary judgement. The grid offers a rationale and a starting point for each composition, converting a blank area into a structured field.

Grids are part of modern urbanism and architecture. The facades of many glass high rises and other modern buildings consist of uniform ribbons of metal and glass that wrap the building's volume in a continuous skin. The street grids used in many modern cities around the globe promote circulation among neighborhoods and the flow of traffic, in contrast with the suburban cul-de-sac, a dead-end road that keeps neighborhoods closed off and private.

The grid imparts a similarly democratic character to the printed page. By making space into numerous equal units, the grid makes the entire page available for use; the edges become as important as the center. Grids help designers create active, asymmetrical compositions in place of static, centered ones. By breaking down space into smaller units, grids encourage designers to leave some areas open rather than filling up the whole page.

Designers are constantly making decisions about size, color, placement, proportion, relationships, and materials as well as about subject matter, style, and imagery. These options can be more easily managed when a few factors are determined in advance. Beginning with a well-defined grid structure can free up the thought process and help to insure a consist and balanced design.

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