

Web style guide

(based on <http://www.webstyleguide.com/>)

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Interface design

Conventional document design

- Basic standards of editorial and graphic design are expected and necessary features of books.
 - title pages
 - page numbering
 - indexes
 - tables of contents
- The Chicago Manual of Style
- The Xerox Publishing Standards: A Manual of Style and Design
- The elements of style, <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>

Web pages

- Web documents are undergoing a similar evolution and standardization.
- The most important difference from conventional documents is the fact that pages are not accessed within a defined linear sequence; as a result, to be “freestanding” they should have
 - An informative title (which also becomes the text of any bookmark to the page)
 - The creator's identity (author or institution)
 - A creation or revision date
 - At least one link to a local home page or menu page
 - The "home page" URL on the major menu pages in your site

User-centered design qualities

- Bandwidth and interaction: Users will not tolerate long delays.
 - The threshold of frustration is about ten seconds.
 - Is your user visiting your web site via dial-up modem connection or via cable modem or via a corporate intranet at Ethernet speeds?
 - Be conservative with Web graphics; Even users with high-speed connections appreciate a fast-loading page.
- Simplicity and consistency: Users are not impressed with gratuitous complexity
 - Follow conventional metaphors; unusual metaphors are difficult to “parse”
 - Use a consistent pattern (most web-site development frameworks offer “templates”) to the layout of titles, subtitles, page footers, and navigation links to your home page or related pages
- Design integrity and stability
 - The web site should not look sloppily built (typos, mixed fonts, low-quality graphics)
 - It should work reliably from the beginning and it should change gracefully

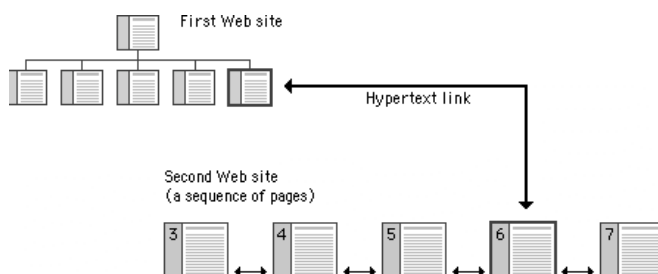
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Navigation - context

- Users should always be able to
 - tell that they are (not) within your site
 - return easily to your home page
- Graphic buttons provide basic navigation links and create a graphic identity



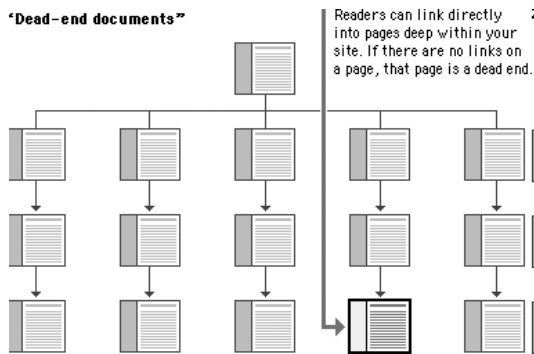
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Navigation - context

- All link-accessible pages (and subsections) should have links to the home page (and other hub pages)
- Pages should be directly accessible, not buried in a deep hierarchy of links



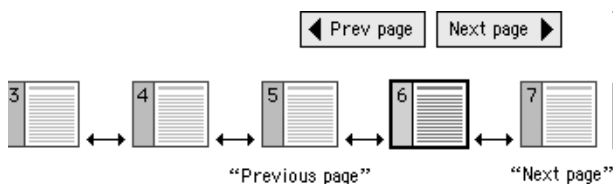
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Navigation - context

- The Browser offers "Back" and "Forward" buttons, whose functions are relative only to the pages you have seen most recently
- In addition, web-site specific "Next Page" and "Previous Page" buttons in a document are fixed links you provide to associated documents.



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Navigation - feedback

- All pages in the web site should provide visual and functional confirmation of the user's whereabouts and options
- The web site should also enable users to provide feedback to the web master

Accessibility

- Alternates: if you provide information in any medium besides plain text, you should always provide an alternate version.
 - Visually-impaired users and users with text-only browsers or those who have turned off image display will hear or see the alternate text in place of the visual content and they will have alternative means of navigation in case of graphical menus.
 - The blank ALT statement hides the graphics (used for spacing) from text-only browsers
- Use style sheets: when you have made a “wrong” choice of color or font, the user can set their browser preferences to override your settings and can apply their own style sheet to address their requirements for accessibility.
- Graceful degradation: what will your site look like to users without best equipment, current software, or good Internet connections?
 - Check your page designs on typically sized display screens (800 x 600 pixels)
 - Try turning off graphics in your Web browser
 - Is your "site optimized for Internet Explorer 5.5 and Macromedia Flash 5"?
- Accessibility guidelines: <http://www.w3.org/WAI>

Site design

Organizing information

1. Divide your content into logical units
2. Establish a hierarchy of importance among the units
3. Use the hierarchy to structure relations among units
4. Build a site that closely follows your information structure
5. Analyze the functional and aesthetic success of your system

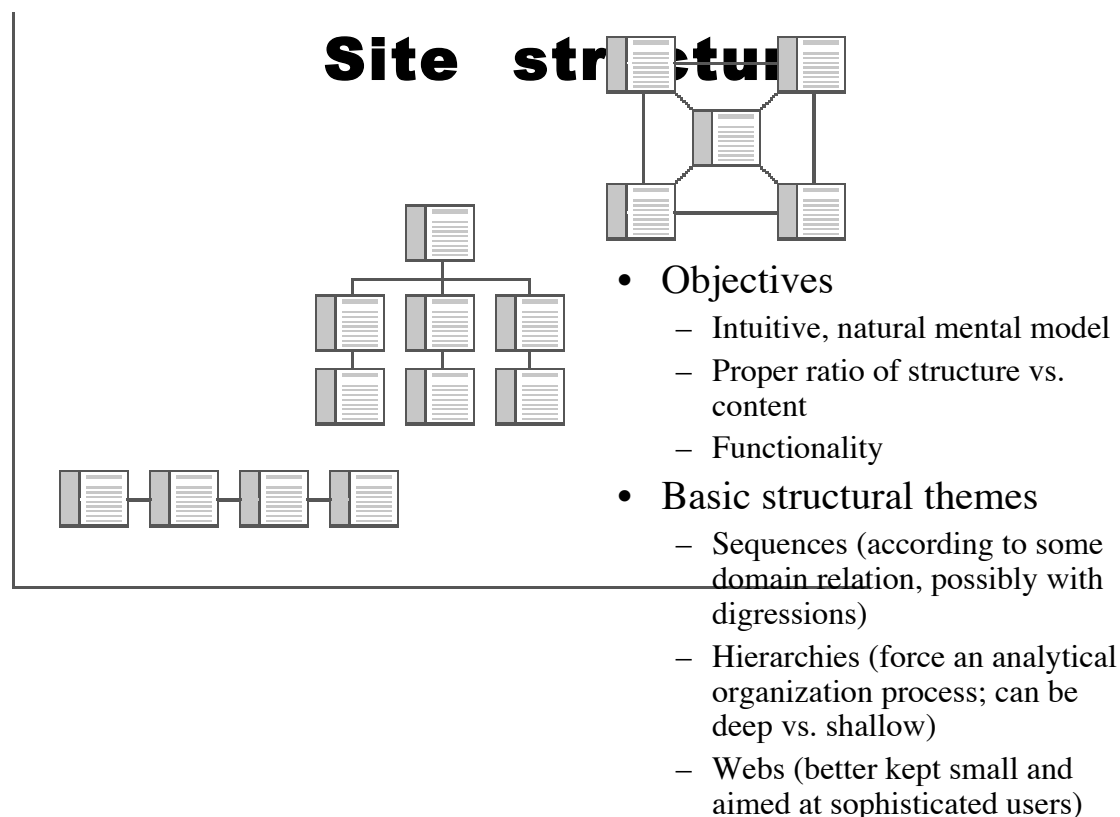
"Chunking" information

- Users do not spend much time reading
- Chunks can link to detailed descriptions
- Chunks should be made to look “uniform” for ease-of-learning
- Chunks can fit in a screen, eliminating the need for scrolling
- How to “chunk”
 - Enable the fast formation of a representative mental model; use a “monotonous”, easy to perceive, domain-specific relation to organize the chunks
 - The web-site structure should neither be too shallow nor too deep

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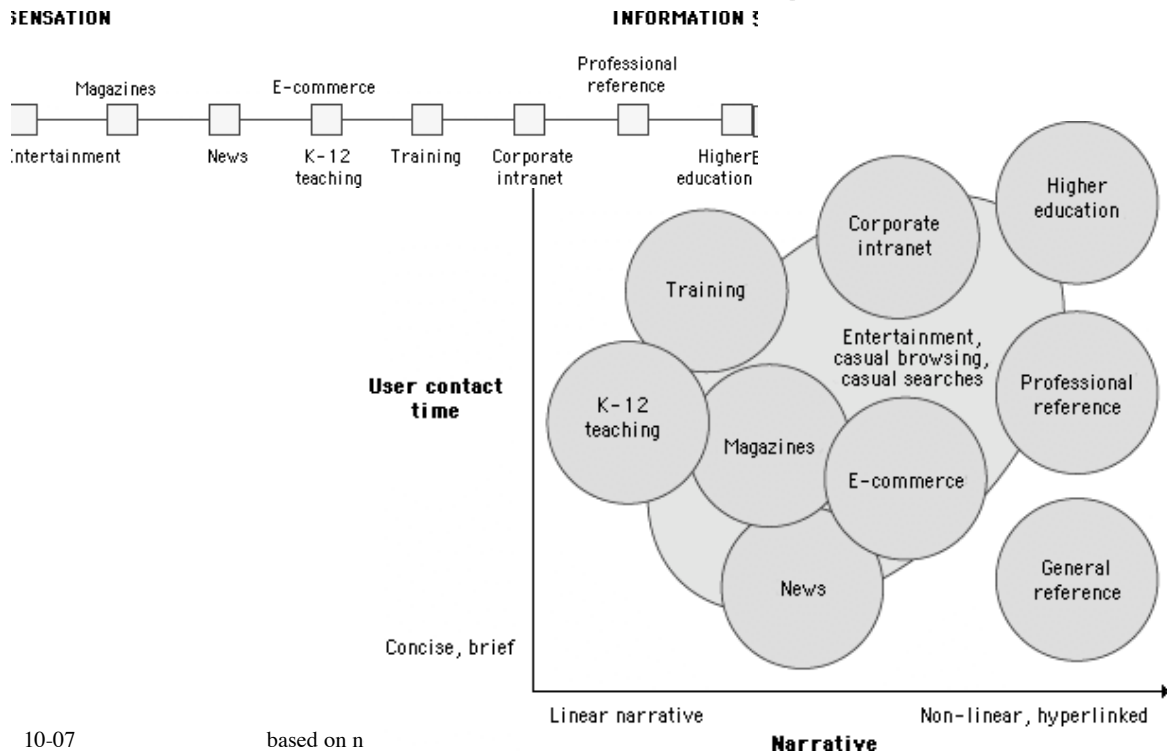


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Site design themes



Training

- The web site should follow a linear design, with no opportunities to digress from the central flow of the presentation
 - "Next" and "Previous" paging functions
- They should warn the user about how long they should last
 - Broken in 1hour modules
- They usually require a user log-in
 - May have forms-based quiz questions with scores stored in a back-end database

Teaching

- They have a strong central narrative
 - With “printer friendly” options to consolidate a sequence of modules in one coherent unit
- They offer more sophisticated, in-depth content with more interesting digressions
- Links to other Web-based resources might be grouped on a separate page
- Continuing education sites are aimed at more knowledgeable users who want JIT information on a particular subject

Reference

- They have no linear underlying structure
- They do not need graphics
- Offer fast search and retrieval, easy downloading and printing
- A well-designed search engine is a must for sites with more than thirty pages, or sites that store long text documents in single Web pages

Entertainment, magazines, news

- Audience is not focused; the site has to be attention grabbing and stimulating
- The notion of "compelling" depends on the audience's expectations.
- The look-and-feel of news sites is usually similar to print newspapers and magazines

E-commerce

- The most important objective is efficient navigation and search leading to the final "place order" button.
 - The most successful commerce sites are simple with spare page design schemes and simple text- or tab-based navigation systems.
- Intelligent search is important
 - If a shopper types in "PDA" and the inventory fails to turn up any products by that exact name, the search engine should default to a list of "personal digital assistants"
- "tabs" is a good navigation system (for up to eight choices)
- Order screens should be concise and deal with individual topics on screens that don't require scrolling.
 - "you are here" progress icons are necessary for context

Home pages

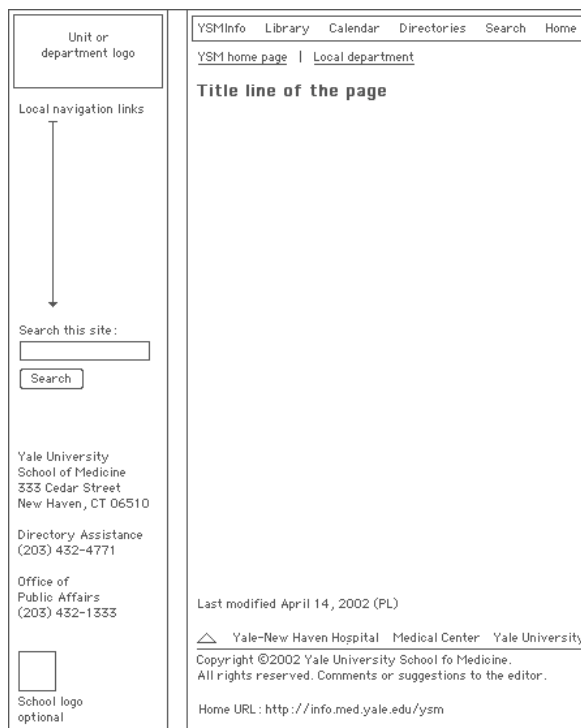
- It is the logical point of entry to the web site
- Assume that readers have a 17x19-inch monitor
- Position matters
 - The top 4-5 vertical inches are sure to be visible
 - Important content should be on the front page, "above the fold"
- Link density should be maximized at the top of the home page
- Design styles for home pages
 - Menu home pages (may link only to home pages of sub-sites)
 - News-oriented home pages ("live" content is attractive; should not confuse the structure)
 - Path-based home pages (possibly according to user profiles)
 - Splash screens (non-functional elegance becomes tedious)
- Graphics or text?
 - Enough graphics for "identity" communication but not too much to slow down access

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The master page layout grid



- May or may not be the same for the home page
- Is used to enforce a consistent identity scheme by incorporating information on graphics, logos, fonts, colors, and wording of page elements (with more or less flexibility)
- Issues
 - What links will be present on every page of your Web site?
 - How does this site fit into the context of the enterprise?
 - Terminology is important

[cknuckles.com/webapps/ companion](http://www.cknuckles.com/webapps/ companion)

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Site guides

- Tables of contents or site indexes
 - The metaphor is that of a book's Table-of-Contents
 - They need not be too detailed, since search will produce all relevant pointers (relevant for product catalogs)
- Site maps
 - Graphic diagrams
 - The metaphor is that of a map
 - Usually abstract
 - May take too long to download
 - Hard to evolve
 - List of links to major pages within the site
 - Effective

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Search features

- Necessary for
 - large sites
 - sites with long documents
 - frequently-evolving sites
- Search engines complement the browsing structure of menus
 - Search is good for specifics
 - Menu structure provides insight to the organization and context
- The search user interface
 - Is dictated by the adopted engine
 - Should make explicit the scope of the search
 - the results page should match the graphic design of the site
- Indexing should be frequent enough to keep up with the site evolution cycle

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Support pages

- Contact information
 - Should include, in addition to email, maps and driving directions, street address and phone/fax numbers
- User feedback
- Bibliographies and appendices of reports
- FAQ pages
 - Very relevant to institution web sites
- Custom server error pages
 - Should be consistent with the graphic look and feel of the rest of the Web site.
 - Should offer some explanation for the error
 - Should point to the home page or search page

Page design

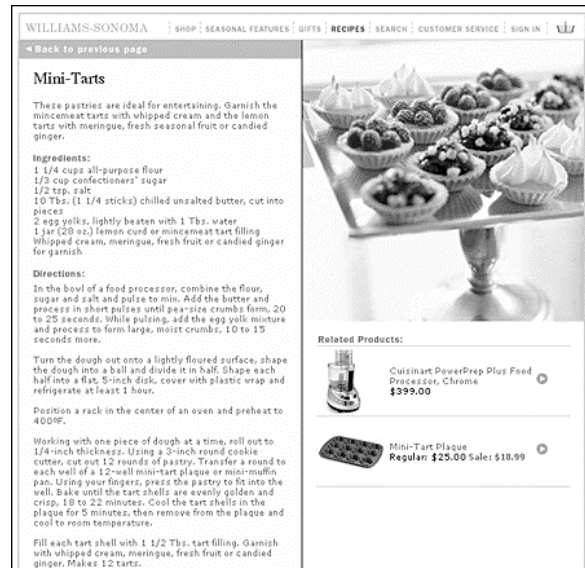
Graphic design

- Graphic design is visual information management.
- The objective is to lead the reader's eye through the page
- The user's eye perceives
 - shape and color
 - foreground elements contrasting against the background field
 - graphics
 - text

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CRAP

- Contrast
 - make different things different
 - bring out dominant elements - mute lesser elements
 - creates dynamism
- Repetition
 - repeat design throughout the interface
 - creates unity
- Alignment
 - visually connects elements
 - creates a visual flow
- Proximity
 - group related elements - separate unrelated ones
- Robin Williams Non-Designers Design Book, Peachpit Press

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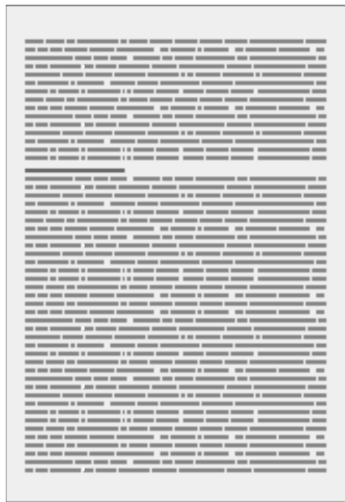
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Contrast

- can be accomplished with
 - Color
 - Font types and styles

Dull; no focal points,
no graphic structure



Stronger visual structure;
better contrast, visual entry points



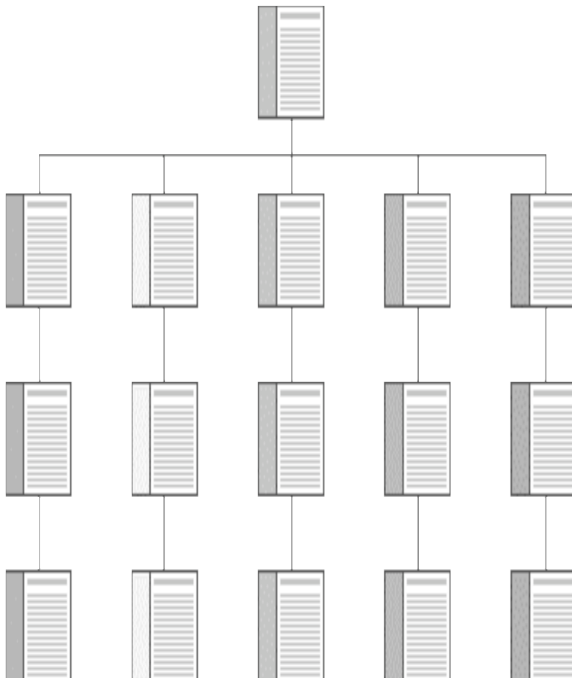
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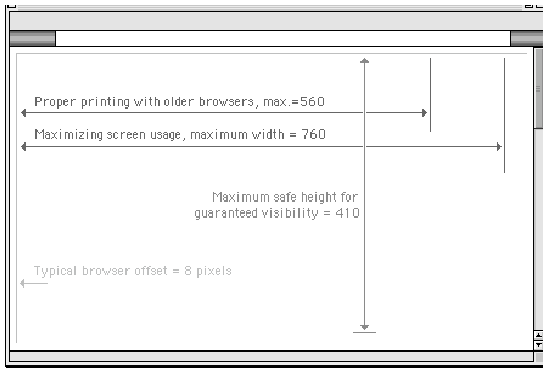
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Repetition

- gives the site a consistent graphic identity
 - supports the conceptualization of a mental model
- with slight variations, creates an intuition of "place"
- makes the site memorable



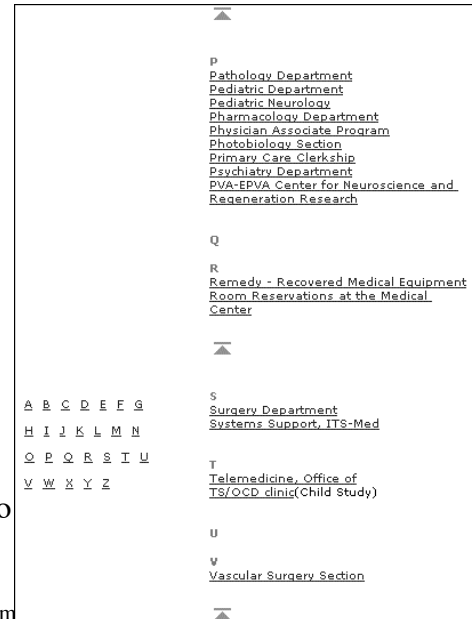
Page dimensions



- Scrolling (especially in two dimensions) is annoying
- Long pages
 - are easy to maintain and to print (assuming no graphics)
 - are more similar to books
 - are difficult to navigate in a “direct access” mode and need “jump” buttons
 - should be avoided for content that is meant to be browsed on-line

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Page design

- Distribute content in “screens”, two screens at a time
- The top screen could be denser - the other will not be read by all visitors; all “must see” content must be above the fold
- Headers should convey identity and context; should not contain big graphics
- Footers should convey provenance (author, revision history)

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Page layout

- CSS:
 - to set margins, to position text and images on the page relative to one another, to hide and show elements, and to stack elements
 - is not consistently implemented
- Tables
 - with no borders but with spacing, alignment, and indents, not borders
- Frames (?)

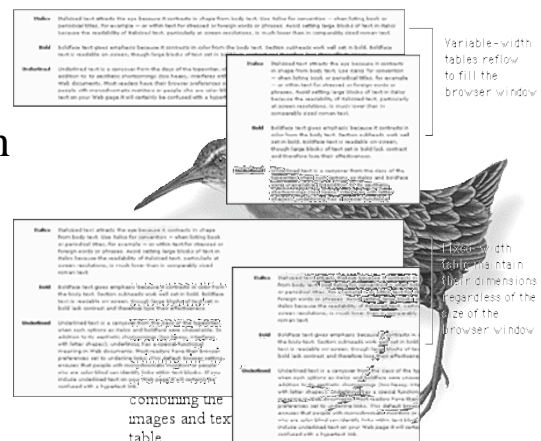
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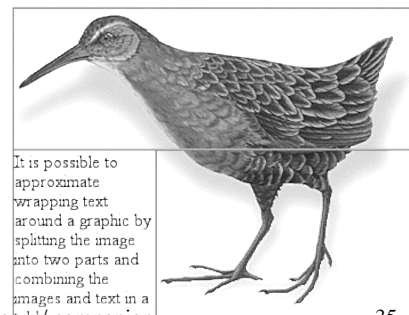
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On tables

- Fixed
 - Flushed left or centered, with an invisible image to prevent it from collapsing
- Resizable (possibly proportional)
- Can also be used for
 - Alignment
 - Background color
 - Rendering of special elements, lists, blockquote
 - Text wrapping



combining the images and text table



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Frames

- Few advantages
 - Flexible maintenance
 - Reuse
- Many problems
 - Navigation confusion
 - May look “ugly” if borders have to show

Summary Todos

- Understand the medium (direct access vs. delivery)
- Include fixed page elements (standard navigation links and “identity” information)
- Don't impose style (content is king)
- Maximize prime real estate
- Use subtle colors (natural pastels are better than bold saturated primary colors)
- Beware of graphic embellishments

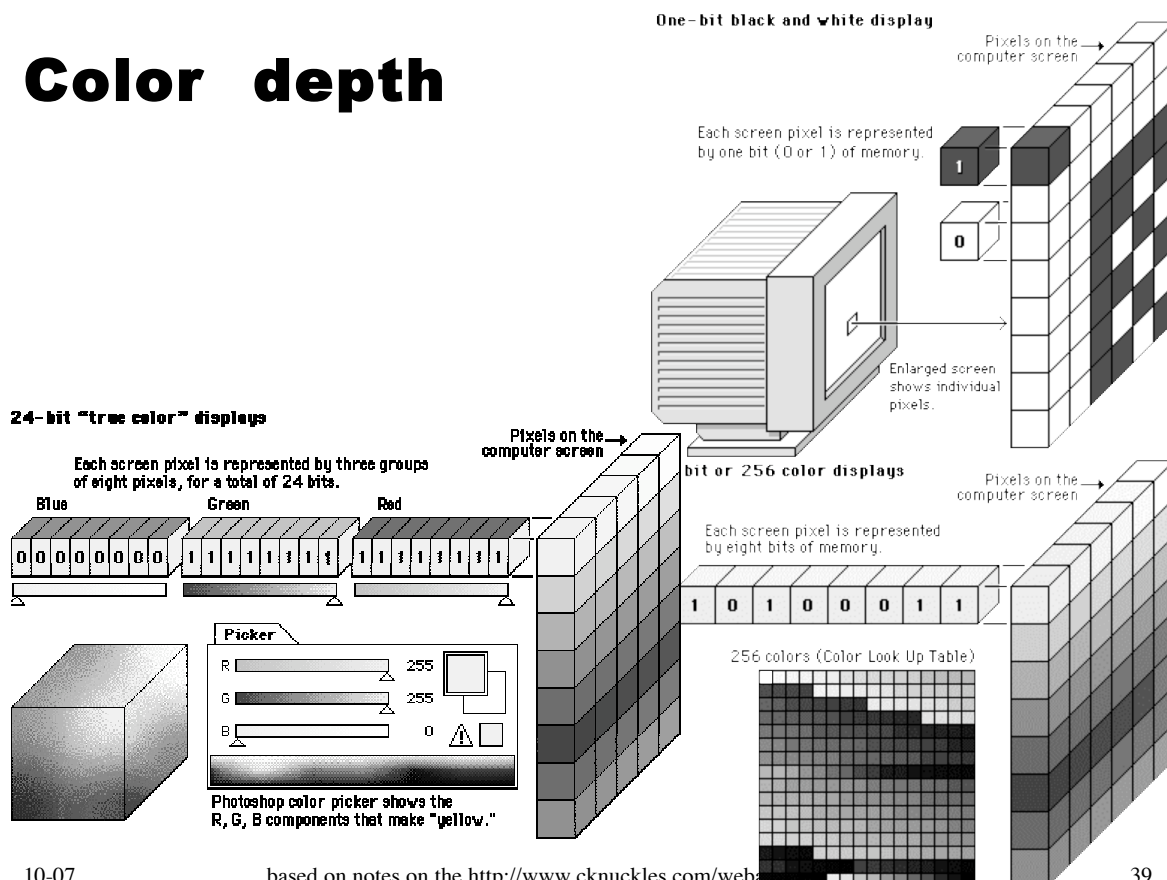
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Color depth



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Browser-safe colors

- When many computers used 256-color displays, and 40 were used for rendering OS objects, 216 colors were available for custom graphics
- All graphics requiring more colors would be dithered to use 216 only, losing detail
- Navigation graphics (at least) should be browser safe

GIF images

- 256 colors
 - Should be designed with a LZW-compressible color scheme
 - No “spurious” colors
 - Large same-color areas
 - Interlacing is good for large images
 - Do NOT use animated GIFs
 - Consider transparency
-
- PNG is a comparable, improved alternative



JPEG images

- True color
- Enable substantial but lossy compression (keep the original)
- Good for smooth color and tonal transitions, with no harsh contrast or sharp edges

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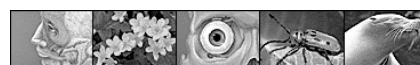
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In comparison

- GIF
 - GIF is the most widely supported graphics format on the Web
 - GIFs of diagrammatic images look better than JPEGs
 - GIF supports transparency and interlacing



- JPEG
 - Huge compression ratios mean faster download speeds
 - JPEG produces excellent results for most photographs and complex images
 - JPEG supports full-color (24-bit, "true color") images



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Multimedia

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NOT eye candy

- Especially not in sites that are aimed at casual visitors
- It makes pages slow to download
- May not be usable, in case of missing plugins

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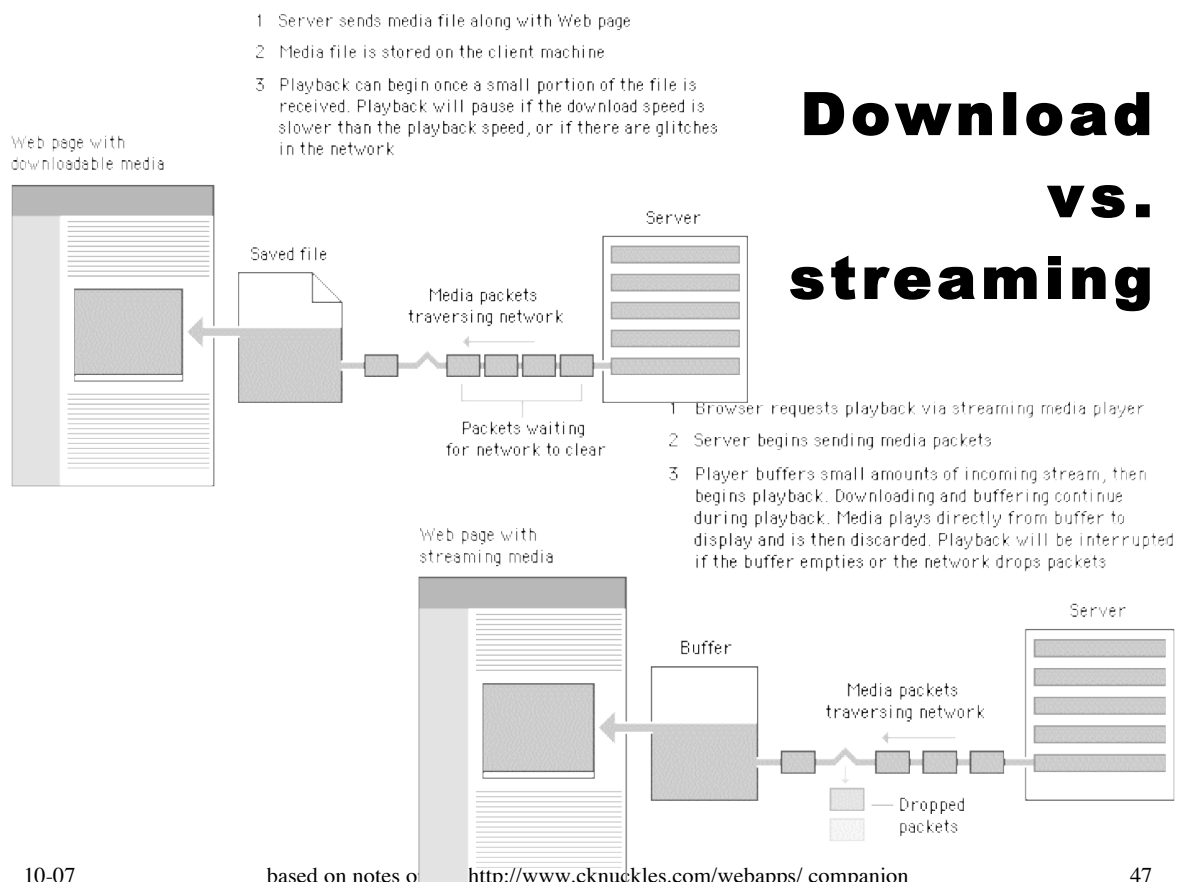
Media Types

- Audio
 - Should be edited for elimination of background noise
- Slide show
 - Still images are smaller than video so their quality can be better
- Video
 - Prefer to shoot original video (close-ups, against a simple monochromatic background, using a tripod with no zooming and panning)
 - When editing, use hard cuts between shots.
 - If you are digitizing original material, look for clips without motion or detail
- Animation
 - Can provide interest, but cannot be controlled
- Because multimedia type is “expensive” to download
 - Inform users before they access a link
 - Give them controls to the “play” process
 - Provide alternatives

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Typography

Alignment

- Margins and space delineate the main text from the other page elements; create a consistent structure; contrast the positive space (text, graphics) from the negative (white) space
- Justification
 - Left is the only choice for text
 - Headings can be anything

Fonts

- Georgia and Verdana were designed specifically for legibility on the computer screen; are not that readable in print where times new roman is preferable
 - Windows vs. mac fonts
- Line length should also be considered
 - fixed-width layout: page layout tables with text cells no wider than about 365 pixels; with 12-point Times New Roman type, this is a line of about 50 characters, 9-10 words
 - flexible layout: increase line spacing to 15 or 16 points
- Font size can be controlled, but windows fonts of the same size look bigger than the corresponding mac fonts
- Antialiasing is not good for small fonts

Capitalization

- Normal sentence capitalization makes text more scannable

MONOTONOUS
RECTANGLES

Monotonous
rectangles

- Emphasis
 - Avoid color text, all capitals, underlining

Editorial style

First we thought the PC was a calculator. Then we found out how to turn numbers into letters with ASCII — and we thought it was a typewriter. Then we discovered graphics, and we thought it was a television. With the World Wide Web, we've realized it's a brochure.— Douglas Adams

No it's really a distributed-components platform

ToDos

- Use the "inverted pyramid" style of journalism: important facts (including conclusions) should be near the top of the first paragraph, to be found quickly.
- Don't "dumb down" content - make it easy to print
 - don't have too much markup
 - choose custom link colors
 - write your text in a good word processor (with no styles), spell check and publish
- Be concise and frugal (avoid "welcome" text)
- Don't waste space in describing the content
- Stick to the point, avoiding catchy phrases
- Cultivate a "distinct" style and attitude (don't become annoying).
- Think globally (avoid culture-specific references)

Links

- Most should be pointing inside the web site, where the style will be consistent
 - Include content as much as possible
- Links to other sites should be “preambled” with an explanation of the fact that they are external and why they are relevant
- Only important links should be part of the content;
 - Navigational links should be in a distinct part of the structure
 - Others should be placed at the end of the text

References

- <http://www.webstyleguide.com>
- <http://usability.gov/guidelines/> (can be used as a checklist)