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Introduction to Document Design: Visual Organization

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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Introduction to Document Design: Visual Organization
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Good document design helps readers find and understand information more quickly. It can help organizations and company save time and money. Therefore, before you begin writing, and again before writing your final draft, consider these tips for making your document's design aid in the clarity of your communication.

1. Before even processing the text, readers should get a sense of the document's structure through visual clues such as white space, headings, subheads, bold face, different size fonts, numbered lists, charts, etc.
2. Give them a sense of the organization quickly, and make sure the text supports that organization and comprehension will be helped before your audience even begins to read your document.
3. Rather than trying to fit everything in by reducing font size, good editing eliminates unnecessary words

and sentences. Is your message consistent? Is it unique and appropriate for your audience? Does your writing make it easy for readers to understand your meaning?

4. Use templates (empty documents with preformatted margins, colors, font faces and sizes) to increase your efficiency and productivity.

5. Use selective emphasis: Headings, subheads, italics, pull quotes, and different font sizes are all good ways to organize sections, break up text and

emphasize important points. Be sure not to overdo it, however, or your document will be **more** difficult to read.

6. Keep paragraphs short – they should only contain one main idea. If you are starting a new idea, begin a new paragraph.

7. Use numbered, lettered, or bulleted lists to help your reader follow your thinking.

8. Use spaces between paragraphs, rather than indenting. It simply looks neater. Use single spacing for your text and double spacing between paragraphs.

9. Number your pages. Even in early drafts, this will keep you and your co–authors organized. When the document is finalized, your readers will appreciate being able to turn to a certain page number to find what they are looking for.

Linda Elizabeth Alexander writes marketing copy for nonprofits and other businesses. Contact her today to discuss your next project and get your FREE quote!
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Recommended Undergraduate Classes

By Andrea Jussim

Recommended Undergraduate Classes by Andrea Jussim

In your college years, you should take classes to increase both your general knowledge (breadth) and your knowledge about a particular academic field (depth). I believe that there is enough time to take many classes in both the breadth and depth groups. I've been out of college for more than a decade, and I still think about the classes I took and didn't take. Here, then, are my recommendations for the breadth courses.

Literature, Philosophy, Language, and Linguistics.

--A year of English literature courses, surveying ancient to modern literature.

--One Introduction to Western Philosophy course.

--One Principles of Critical Reasoning or Principles of Argumentation course (a philosophy or speech course).

--A year of a foreign language, unless you are fluent in a second language.

--One Introduction to Linguistics course.

Visual and Musical Arts.

--One Introduction to Art History course.

--One Music Appreciation course or Introduction to Musical Theory course.

Social Sciences

--A year of European History or World History courses, surveying ancient to modern history, unless you've learned European History or World History well in high school.

--A year of American History courses, surveying colonial to modern history, unless you've learned American History well in high school.

--One East Asian History survey course.

--One Introduction to American Politics course.

--One introductory course in psychology, sociology, communication studies, or anthropology.

--One Introduction to Economics course (or maybe a Macroeconomics course and a Microeconomics course).

--One Abnormal Psychology course.

--One Introduction to Statistics course.

Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Mathematics.

--One Introduction to Human Anatomy course.

--One Introduction to Biology course, unless you've completed a year of biology in high school.

--One introductory course in Life Sciences (other than Biology), Earth & Space Sciences, or Atmospheric Sciences.

--One Introduction to Chemistry course, unless you've completed a year of chemistry in high school.

--One Introduction to Physics course, unless you've completed a year of physics in high school.

--One year of mathematics, unless you've completed a year of calculus in high school.

Andrea Jussim is an experienced writer with experience in teaching and research. She entered a prestigious 5-year Ph.D. program immediately after completing her undergraduate studies, but left with an M.A. and her sanity two years later.



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