

Contrast: Design Secret of the Universe

by Laura Lamar. Excerpted from Before & After magazine, originally published in 1992

Design isn't just about making things look good. It's about helping the reader receive information.

Contrast is a designer's most powerful communication tool: It can attract the eye, create visual priorities, establish landmarks, control movement, lead, label, emphasize and define.

I'll go so far as to call it 'the design secret of the universe!'

Contrast can make one thing appear more important than—or different from—something else. It can emphasize meaning and organize content.

Think of weight, scale and form as your primary tools, because they have the biggest impact. Then combine them with one another and with placement, value, quantity and texture to refine and modify their effects.

Use the tools of contrast to emphasize the meaning of design, to change the tone and personality of the words from quiet and subtle to bold and confident, from formal and businesslike to casual and friendly.

*Contrast can whisper instead of **shout** & still be equally effective.*

The diagnostic tools of contrast:



Value

contrasts light and dark, negative and positive, solid and tint, colors with black & white.



Weight

contrasts bold with light, mass with line, thick with thin.



Form

contrasts caps/lowercase, roman/italic, elaborate/simple, square/round.



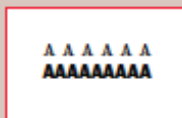
Placement

contrasts high and low, centered versus left or right, together or apart.



Quantity

contrasts many with few, single elements with groupings, often with seldom.



Texture

contrasts tight with loose, airy with dense, smooth with rough, shiny with matte.



Scale

contrasts large with small, tall with short, broad with narrow.

From Before & After magazine, Vol 2 No 4. For a goldmine of design tutorials, visit www.bamagazine.com. Published by John McWade since 1990.