THE AWARD-WINNING, BEST-SELLING BOOK ABOUT DESIGN!

THE NON-DESIGNER'S
**DESIGN
BOOK**
FOURTH EDITION

DESIGN AND TYPOGRAPHIC PRINCIPLES
FOR THE VISUAL NOVICE

ROBIN **WILLIAMS**

The Non-Designer's Design Book

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For nearly 20 years, designers and non-designers alike have been introduced to the fundamental principles of great design by author Robin Williams. Through her straightforward and light-hearted style, Robin has taught hundreds of thousands of people how to make their designs look professional using four surprisingly simple principles. Now in its fourth edition, *The Non-Designer's Design Book* offers even more practical design advice, including a new chapter on the fundamentals of typography, more quizzes and exercises to train your Designer Eye, updated projects for you to try, and new visual and typographic examples to inspire your creativity.
Whether you're a Mac user or a Windows user, a type novice, or an aspiring graphic designer, you will find the instruction and inspiration to approach any design project with confidence. THIS ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO DESIGN WILL TEACH YOU
The four principles of design that underlie every design project How to design with color How to design with type How to combine typefaces for maximum effect How to see and think like a professional designer Specific tips on designing newsletters, brochures, flyers, and other projects

The Non-Designer's Design Book Details

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From Reader Review The Non-Designer's Design Book for online ebook

Thiago d'Evecque says

Livro incrível de introdução ao design para pessoas leigas e sem nenhuma visão pra isso (eu). Tudo é tão didático que é impossível não aprender.

O principal do livro são os quatro princípios fundamentais do design: contraste, repetição, alinhamento e proximidade. Conceitos que eu não fazia ideia mas que, depois de explicados, parecem uma questão de bom senso.

A quantidade de detalhes é o bastante para conhecermos o assunto e não tornar o livro maçante, específico demais. Williams ensina sobre quais tipos de combinações causam conflito ou se complementam, além de sugerir modelos para cartazes, currículos, flyers, etc.

Achei um livro essencial para quem gosta de produzir qualquer conteúdo, mesmo que apenas escrito. As dicas daqui vão clarear muitas coisas que você nem imaginava.

Erika Williams says

This is quite possibly the best graphic design book I have read. The first part teaches you the four basic principles of design, CRAP. Or contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity. It gives a clear overview of each concept and then provides examples of when it is working and when it is failing. It also asks you to actively get involved, not by pointing out all the errors, but by asking you to look for them yourself. Once the four basic principles have been detailed, it moves on to an equally important part of design: typeface.

First the book teaches you how to recognize the major categories of typeface so you can avoid placing fonts that are too similar on the same page, and so that you can effectively combine two typefaces with the maximum amount of contrast.

Of all the beginner design books I have read so far, this one is the easiest to read and the presentation of the four basic principles is clearly written. I used the knowledge and the exercises in this book to streamline the menu at work, and after I submit my changes, we will see if the knowledge provided was worthwhile enough for them to use my design over the layout they started with.

Quan says

The Non-Designer's Design Book was clearly written by a non-writer. I'm not a designer so I won't dispute the validity of what the author, Robin P. Williams, teaches. But getting through this book is just so excruciating because her writing is so amateur. She's a writer in the most basic sense of the word: she knows words and knows that sentences usually need a subject and predicate. That's about as far as her skill extends.

One of my biggest critiques is that Williams writes in a vacuum. She writes about these ideas as if they are

her own unique ideas. She even goes so far as to refer to herself in the third person, telling us to remember "Robin's Four Principles of Design." As if she's seriously the first person in the world ever to think, "Yeah, adding contrast to this flyer is probably a good idea."

But besides just being arrogant and dumb, this raises the issue of credibility. How much can you trust things she says? She's included little-to-no research and cites no outside sources. There's no corroboration, no sense that there's a broader world of designers who also agree with her principles. For all we know, she could just be some mom who lost her job and decided to pull stuff out of her ass to make some money. And she pretty much sounds like that type of person.

My other main issue with this book is that, while it's designed well from a visual standpoint, the design is really stupid from an information standpoint. Often, she'll present an example of something poorly designed and then ask you what you'd change to improve the design. That's a good idea...except that she also includes her own improved design on the same page. It's something like if you were doing exercises out of a math book and the answer key is right next to the math problem. How idiotic is that?

Finally, there's the issue of up-selling that just completely cheapens this book. Within the actual content of the book--not on the book jacket, not on a separate page in the back of the book, but within the space that she's purporting to teach you basic design principles--she is so bold/tacky as to advertise her other books. She really just comes off as one of those self-help douches who get rich by telling others that she got rich off her talents when really she got rich by capitalizing on others' insecurities.

Jerzy says

Very accessible intro for beginners. I always thought you "just have to have an eye for good design" as if it were an inborn trait... but of course there are principles you can learn, and this book strikes me as a good place to begin.

There are plenty of before-vs-after examples, which works really well for me: showing exactly how each principle can be applied.

Some of the "after" examples are still cheesy---but at least they are cleaner and more consistent than "before," and I think that's the point. This book *doesn't* teach specific design choices for conveying a specific style (elegant, minimalist, classic, or whatever). It teaches general principles, so that once you choose a style, you can convey *that style* well (even if it's a cheesy style).

An untrained person's might convey "I don't know what I'm doing / I made these choices by default." After learning these principles, your work will convey "I know enough design to make these choices deliberately" (even if the style you choose isn't one that other people might choose).

Finally, the book has the best novice-level intro to fonts/typefaces I've ever seen (not that I'm an expert). A sensible way to categorize them (finer than just serif vs. sans), helpful examples of what does & doesn't work when, and suggestions for specific nice fonts in each category.
I'm also pleased that she doesn't bother wasting time on the difference between "font" vs. "typeface" (which I've heard a million times, but can never remember, and anyway seems only relevant if you're trying not to annoy OCD graphic designers).

Notes to self:

* In a way, this gives me more appreciation for the "infographics" stuff that statisticians like to make fun of: pretty posters with random numbers made big or called out somehow (but disconnected from each other, not compared on graphs like what *I* think of as "real" data visualization). It does take design skill to make a good infographic---it's just that they highlight isolated numbers in a way that's no different from highlighting isolated words or phrases. Making the "87%" pop out in "87% of statisticians make fun of infographics" is no different than making "Shakespeare" pop out in "Shakespeare was ranked the world's bestest playwright"... whereas making a data visualization that highlights the *connections* between numbers is a different skill.

* p.9: "This book is written for [...among others...] statisticians who see that numbers and stats can be arranged in a way that invites reading rather than sleeping" :)

* p.13: Her 4 main design principles are Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, and Proximity (making for a memorable acronym).
Repetition and Alignment are pretty straightforward.
Proximity is a concept that's helping me understand why my page layouts never look good. I always thought it's most logical to space all the elements apart evenly... But that leaves the reader with no groupings to connect related things, and no way to tell what's important if everything is its own separate piece. See p.20-22 for a great example.
Contrast seems especially relevant to dataviz too: "If the elements [...] are not the same, then make them very different." E.g. if you want people to distinguish groups on your scatterplot, make the points' colors or shapes *very* different, not just subtly different, and so on.

* p.56: "Feel free to add something completely new simply for the purpose of repetition." That is, if you just have text and no graphic that ties your layout together, consider adding something just for the sake of having a motif you can repeat. Nice example on p.82 with the small triangles.
Also, "It's fun and effective to pull an element out of a graphic and repeat it." Her clipart teapot (for a tea party invite) has triangles---so she makes more of them and scatters a few about the page nicely.

* p.63: "Don't be a wimp." This caught my eye a few times flipping through the book (nice case of repetition!), but I was confused... Now I see what she means:
"If the two elements are sort of different, but not really, then you don't have contrast, you have conflict. ... You cannot contrast 12-point type with 14-point type. ... You cannot contrast dark brown with black. Get serious."
Also a nice example on p.68: "Are the rules supposed to be two different thicknesses? Or is it a mistake?"
Again, very relevant to dataviz, as well as presentation (slideshow) design. Your audience should be able to tell when something changes, and it should be clear that the change is intentional: the contrast should be dramatic. Otherwise they'll be wondering: is that font/color/size really different or am I just seeing things? Does it signify something meaningful (helping me by flagging important differences), or was it put in there at random (just confusing the reader)?
This also seems relevant to her discussion of centered alignment on p.38: "The line lengths are not the same, but they are not really different. If you can't instantly tell that the type is centered, why bother?" It's an interesting justification for (almost always) using left- or right-aligned text instead of centered: to help readers see clearly that the alignment is intentional.

* p.75: Just don't use Times Roman and Arial/Helvetica. They are so common that, even to the untrained eye, they convey "I use decades-old defaults instead of thinking about what I do," which doesn't send a

professional message.

* p.100 and 176: good tips on flyers and general design-process tips, which also seem especially helpful for
dataviz, academic posters, slideshows, etc.
Pick a focal point and really contrast it with everything else. ("...if everything is large, then nothing can
really grab a reader's attention.")
Make subheadings that also really contrast the body text, so readers can skim to grasp your point and decide
if it's worth their attention (or find something that'll hook them), instead of being turned off by a massive
wall of text.
Use proximity to group sub-parts sensibly, and use repetition and alignment to help readers navigate these
sub-parts easily.

* p.104: She gets into more detail about typefaces later, but here are concrete suggestions for basic heading-
vs-body distinctions.
Headings: a heavy black version of a sans serif, such as Eurostile, Formata, Syntax, Frutiger, or Myriad.
Body: a classic oldstyle serif (Garamond, Jenson, Caslon, Minion, Palatino, or Warnock Pro Light), or a
lightweight slab serif (Clarendon, Bookman, Kepler, or New Century Schoolbook).

* p.132-138: Great introduction to typefaces, in 6 categories. I knew about serif, sans serif, and other a.k.a.
just plain weird fonts. Her breakdown has 3 groups of serifs (Oldstyle, Modern, Slab Serif); 1 group for Sans
Serif; and 2 groups of "other" styles (Script, Decorative).
Script vs Decorative seems pretty clear, and both are best used sparingly ("if the thought of reading an entire
book in that font makes you wanna throw up, you can probably put it in the decorative pot.")
Sans Serifs are those without serifs; straightforward enough. Also, they usually are "monoweight"---
"letterforms are the same thickness all the way around" unlike most serif fonts. But a few Sans Serifs do
have some thick/thin transition, which makes them more similar to Serifs (and therefore makes them worse
choices if you're trying to contrast them with a Serif). Often good for headings.
As for the three Serif categories:
Oldstyle are classic, invisible, and usually the best for long body text. They are not monoweight---there is a
moderate transition between thin and thick parts of the strokes on each letter, and if you draw a line through
the thin parts of the 'o' or 'a' it'll be diagonal rather than vertical. The serifs on lowercase letters are slanted.
Modern have more dramatic differences between the thick and thin parts of the strokes, and a line through
the thin parts will be vertical ("vertical stress"). The serifs are thin and horizontal, not diagonal. More elegant
but less readable than Oldstyle.
Slab Serifs are like Moderns but thick all around: almost no difference between thick & thin, but still vertical
stress and horizontal serifs. Readable and clean.

* p.158: I didn't know there was a difference between italic vs. oblique or slanted typefaces. You can take the
"roman" (standard?) version of the typeface and just slant everything, but the "italic" version is entirely
redrawn---some of the letters look substantially different than just slanted versions of the roman ones. If
you're using italics for contrast, make it a real contrast by using actual italics vs. roman, and not just regular
vs. slanted roman.

* p.170: "Try to verbalize what you see. If you can put the dynamics of the relationship into words, you have
power over it. ... Name the problem, then you can create the solution."
Again, very relevant to learning dataviz by critique as well.

* p.179: "As a college teacher, all the quizzes, tests, and projects I give are 'open book, open mouth.'
Students can always use their notes, they can use their books, they can talk with each other, they can talk

with me. ... I was much more likely to retain the correct information if I wrote down the correct information. Rather than guessing and then writing down a wrong answer, the process of finding the correct answer on a test was much more productive."
Might be worth trying next time I teach dataviz.

Nelson Zagalo says

Simple, direct and highly effective in communicating minimum rules for good graphic design.

Felipe Farias says

Is a really nice book, the way it is organized, is very didactic. It start talking about the four basic principles of design: proximity, alignment, repetition and contrast. Always using real examples. The other stage of the book is about typography, explaining in detail about types with or without serif. As the title already explains, is a book for beginners. If you are just beginning to study design, I recommend this book.

Kevin Ryan says

Was very informative. Learned bunches!

Ashley says

This is the best design book for non-professionals that I've come across. Williams does a fantastic job, both through text and imagery, of explaining her four basic principles for good design -- contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity. Her advice can be applied to all forms of visual communication, including forms you wouldn't necessarily think of before reading this book. She didn't write more than she needs to, instead letting example images do much of the teaching.

You'll never look at the world the same way after reading this, and that's a good thing if you believe in doing your part to make the world a more beautiful place, one business card and brochure at a time.

Trevor says

I read this book about a year ago and I'm going to complain about it first, and then rave about it.

Complaints:

Some of the text inside is too faint – it is actually quite difficult to read.

Some of her 'examples' look quite unattractive even when they are 'finished'.

Raves:

This is a very clever book. If you are visually hopeless, like myself, it talks you through what to look for in step by step, no assumptions. This is a book that explains both the four elements of visual design (I'll get to that in a second) and six groups of typographic fonts.

If you put together a newsletter or just want to have stuff you write read, this is your first stop.

The first thing to know is that you have to organise stuff on the page according to her rule of 'crap' – Contrast, Repetition, Alignment and Proximity. She discusses these in reverse order to the mnemonic. In summary, group like things together, line them up, repeat elements and be bold in contrasting (bold is always better).

I only ever knew about two fonts and I knew you should only use two on a page and preferably one each from the big groups serif or sans serif – such that if you are using body text that is one, your heading should be the other. Well, that isn't true and she proves it. There are six groups of fonts and they all have family relationships. And like all design, boldness is the key. This is a terribly interesting part of the book and well worth the read.

I learnt much from this book and really enjoyed the read. I've always known there was something to good page design, and had seen enough bad page design to know its value. But without ever having been told the basics I could only assume that the difference between someone doing a good design and someone doing a bad one was more or less something to do with 'the eye'. Now I know there are principles – principles that can be broken, but only with care. It is a good thing to know that such principles exist. She has written another book called "A PC is not a typewriter" which I also must read.

Parham says

simple and clear...

The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?Misericordia? ?????? ❈☀❤❣ says

Takeouts:
- The Joshua Tree Epiphany;
- Very interesting explanations of the WHY of how some things matter visually and work better, ultimately;
- Some very brilliant examples that give even to me, a steadfast adversary of trend aimed at 'making all the things look pretty', a thorough appreciation of properly formatted text, grafics, infografics, etc;
- Tips and tricks! Very cool!

A must read for consultants, editors and other ~~miserable beings~~ **driven professionals** tasked with endless formatting!

Q:
Our eyes like to see order ; it creates a calm, secure feeling. (c) Yeah, if so, our eyes are OCD a bit.
Q:
… even if the overall presentation is a wild collection of odd things and has lots of energy. (c)

Francisco Garcia says

As a software developer I feel identified with designers. In our natural form we tend to "derail" into building something amazing and not so much into something useful or market ready.

The problem tends to be fixed with maturity, but only after lots of interactions with people having other skill sets.

This is a great book to start the foundations that a non designer should have when talking to a designer. You will learn about core issues that should be discussed, but only the very basic ones.

This a is a good start but by no means the solution to deal properly with designers. The book just covers universal fundamentals that apply to printing/comercial works, but many can be reused with web design. Some parts might feel outdated, but are still valid.

Reid says

This book succeeds in fulfilling its promise: educating visual novices about design and typographic principles. It's remarkable to me that this book works so well when I've seen others fall flat (I'm looking at you, Nancy Duarte!) in educating a beginner audience about design principles. It's especially impressive when you figure in the fact that this book is not very long or slickly produced. Hell, it's not even in color! But I think this is a part of Williams' success. The book's message is simple and extremely clear. She doesn't overwhelm the reader; she keeps her examples (and the book is 80% examples) sparse so the points she's illustrating are clear.

As an educator, I appreciate how the book is full of practical examples and quizzes. It actually forces engagement, rather than just hoping you're already transfixed by the topic at hand. The examples are simple and effective. There's a great sequence on pages 79-83, where she slowly transforms a boring report cover (it only has 20 words of text and no illustrations) into something more interesting by applying her four principles one at a time.

I also appreciated her emphasis on typography. Again, she keeps things simple by introducing six basic classifications of type, then she quizzes you to make sure you've got it. She then moves beyond the basics and shows how her design principles (particularly Contrast) can be applied to type.

All in all, this is a fantastic book that does exactly what it advertises. I would recommend this book to anyone who has ever had to design so much as a yard sale flyer.

Samantha says

O livro é super legal pra quem não tem nenhuma noção de design, como eu, haha. Foi uma leitura que precisei fazer para a aula de Editoração Eletrônica, e me ajudou muito a pensar melhor na hora de diagramar as coisas.

A escrita é bem didática, bem leve e fácil de ler. E os exemplos ajudam muito a visualizar o que a autora está ensinando. Adorei o livro!

Elizabeth Rose says

The Non-Designer's Design Book is of immense practical value to anyone who doesn't have formal training in the field of design. This volume focuses on graphic design, devoting about half of the book to a study of typeface. There is enough information here to orientate someone with no concept of design (like me), but this Williams makes no pretense of this being a master class.
I highly recommend this book to anyone who lacks a degree in art, but has to make their own business cards, fliers, or brochures. There are also valuable tips for designing one's own website and resume.