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Page Layout Tips

Effective page layouts capture a reader's attention long enough to get the message across. An effective page layout will also make the information contained in the page easier to assimilate. There are three important ways of creating an effective page layout: visual hierarchy, visual balance, and visual consistency. In the following discussion, I will present several simple rules of thumb that can be used to create effective page layouts. There are, of course, successful exceptions to all these rules of thumb.

In an effective page layout, each graphic and textual element will have a visual prominence that is appropriate to its role in conveying the message; there must exist a visual hierarchy. The prominence of an element is determined by its size and the extent to which it contrasts the surrounding material: a bigger size is more eye-catching, as is an element that is presented in bold or contrasting colors. Ideally, a clear hierarchy must be evident. Summary statements such as titles and key phrases must stand out. Illustrations must not dominate the text that they illustrate. For instance, what is more important in a cover page, the title or the name of the author? Is the title more or less important than any cover graphics? The appropriate hierarchy must be clear in the prominence of each element.

The elements of a page must also be arranged so that they appear balanced. Visual balance has to do with the location of elements, and the relative amounts of material and empty space. If elements that are more prominent are located in the lower half of the page and towards the center or in the lower left quadrant of the page, the overall page appears more stable and balanced. A page does not have to be symmetrically laid out for it to appear balanced, but symmetric pages appear balanced.

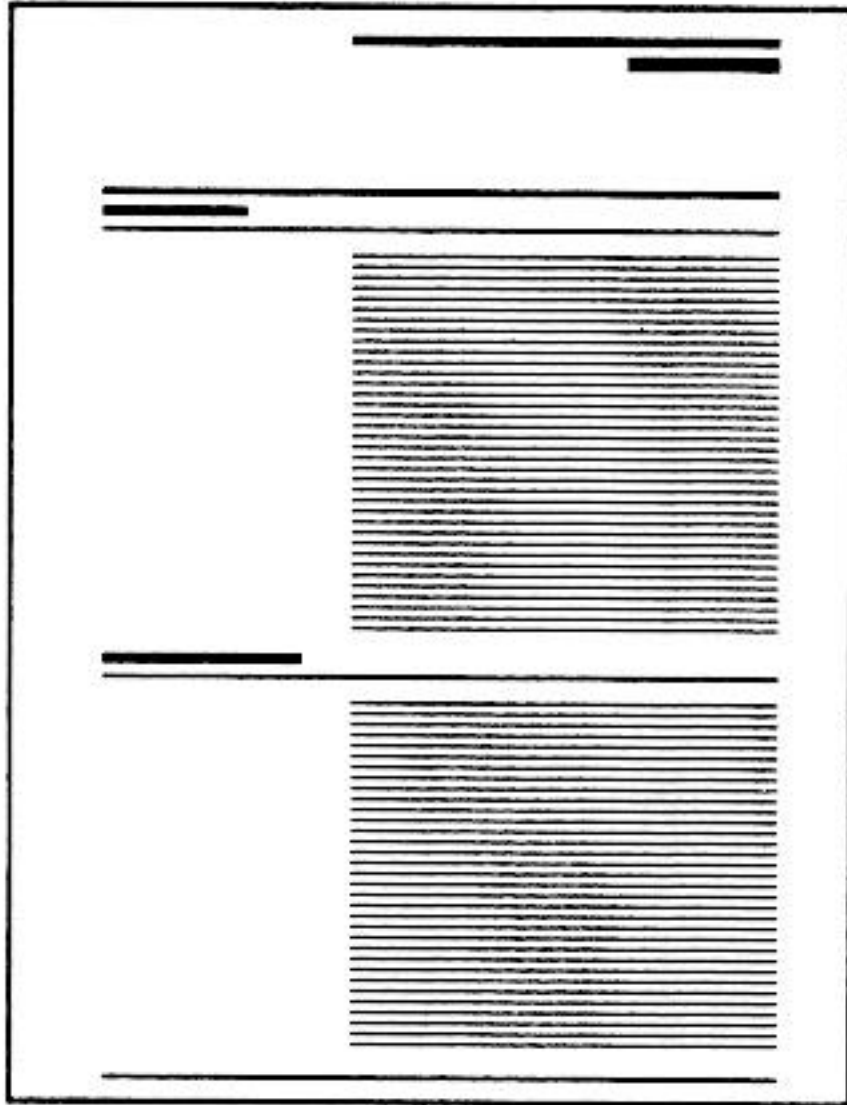
The amount of material and empty or white space must also be balanced. If there is too much material, the page will appear busy; if there is too much white space, the page will appear empty. In general, it is better to err on the side of too much white space. White space also helps in differentiating the different elements on a page. If two different elements are to look distinct, there must be adequate white space between them; if an element needs to be highlighted, increase the amount of white space around it. In particular, there must be adequate white space in the margins of the page; to do otherwise makes the elements "slide off" the page.

A page layout can be made more effective by incorporating structure into the layout. This will create a sense of visual consistency when viewing the document. A structured layout is a consistent layout, with identical headers, footers, page numbers, and column widths. Graphics will be located similarly in different pages, and will be of approximately the same visual prominence.

Consider the page layout that is recommended by the Xerox Corporation for technical documents ([Sample 1](#)); alternative ways of using this layout are also illustrated ([Sample 2](#), [Sample 3](#), [Sample 4](#), [Sample 5](#), and [Sample 6](#)). I find this to be a very attractive and easy-to-read layout. This layout uses only one text column about two-thirds as wide as the space in between the vertical margins: the space to the side of it is called the scanning column, and is a good location for titles, key phrases, and small illustrations. (In Pagemaker, the scanning column is just blank space; it is not a text column.) Large graphics may require that the text column be broken, and the graphic inserted; use horizontal lines to keep the graphic and the text separate. Multiple columns are more appropriate to newsletters than technical documents, except in documents oriented in the landscape direction.

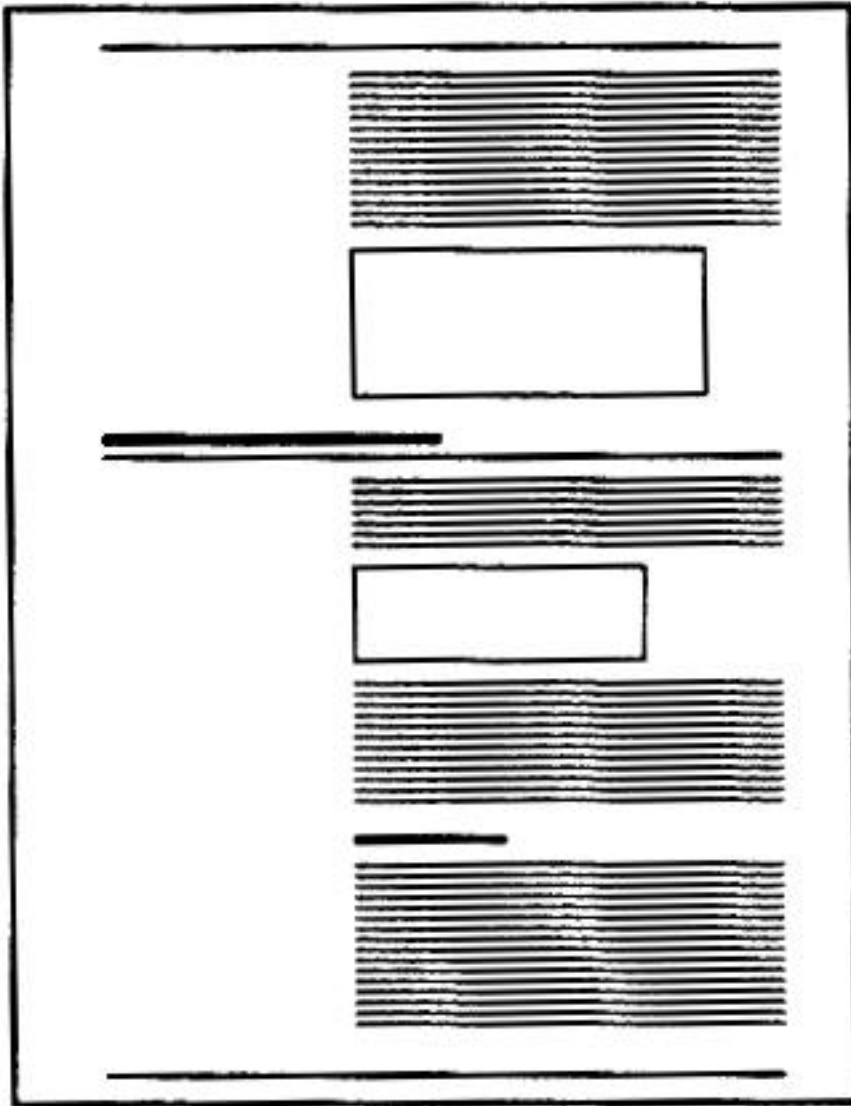
Page Layout Sample

Source: The Xerox Corporation



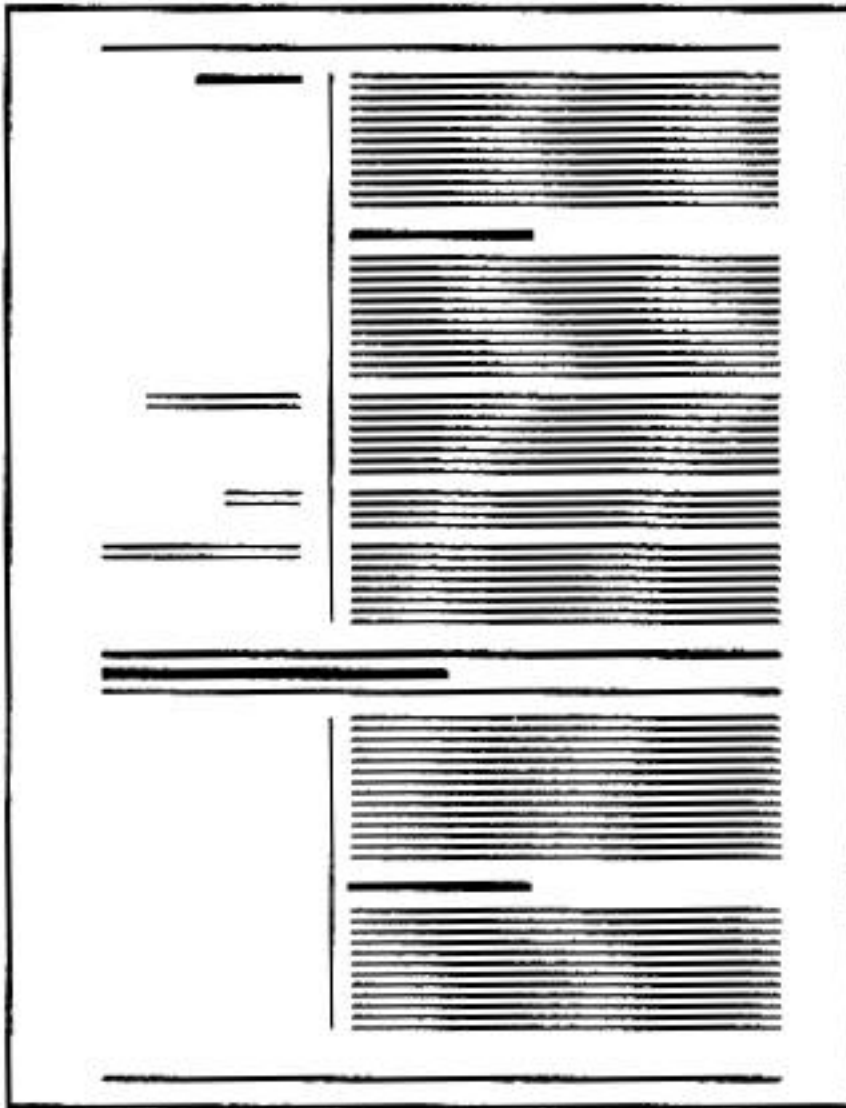
Page Layout Sample

Source: The Xerox Corporation



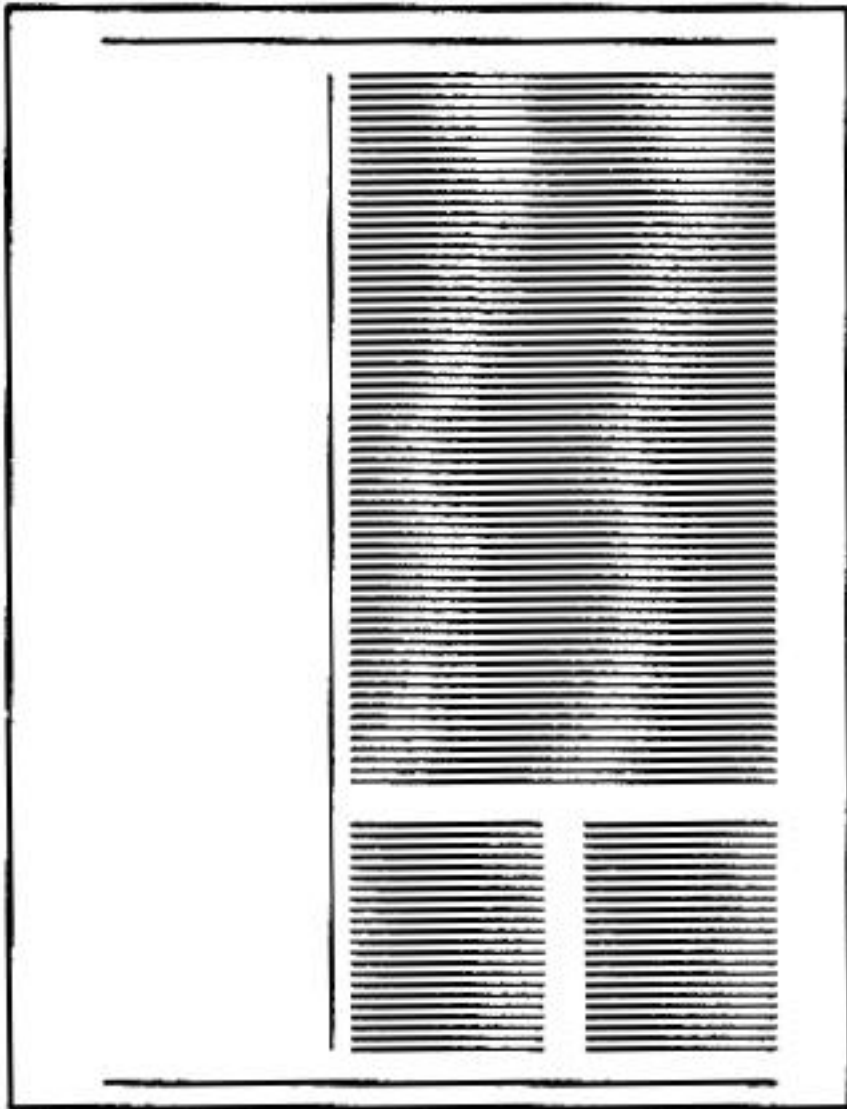
Page Layout Sample

Source: The Xerox Corporation



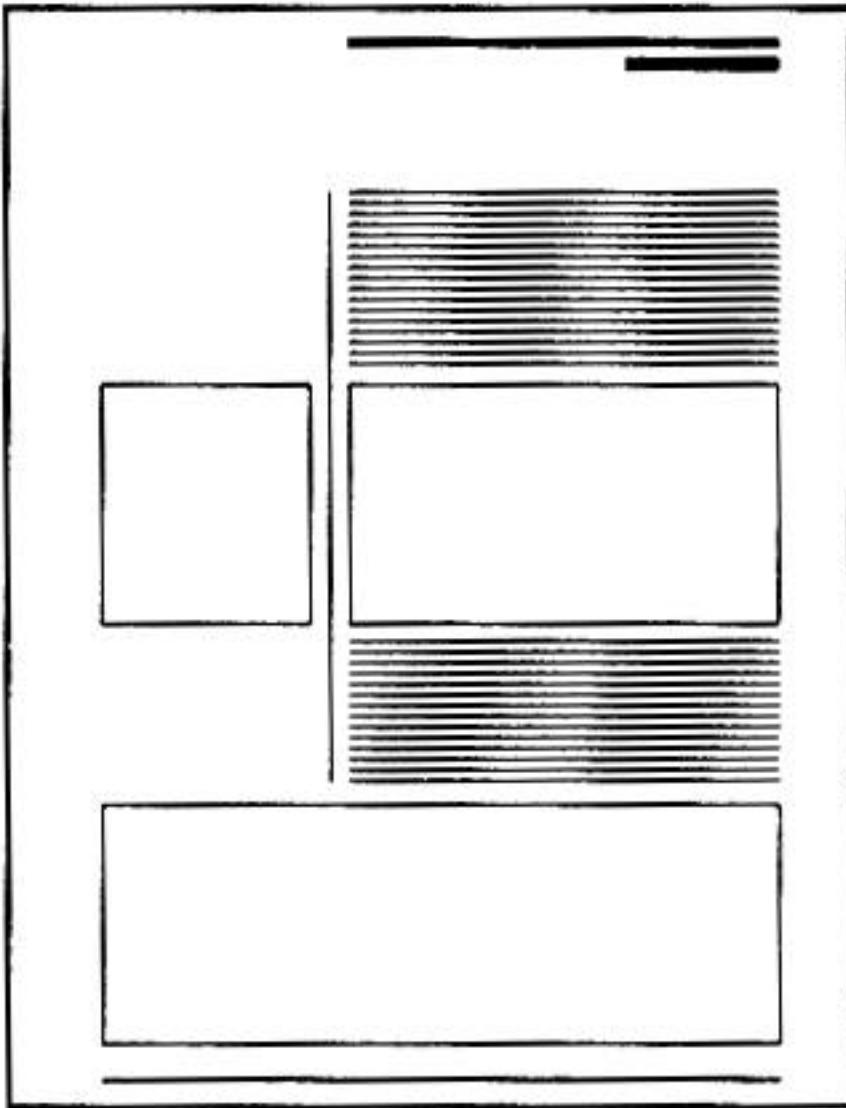
Page Layout Sample

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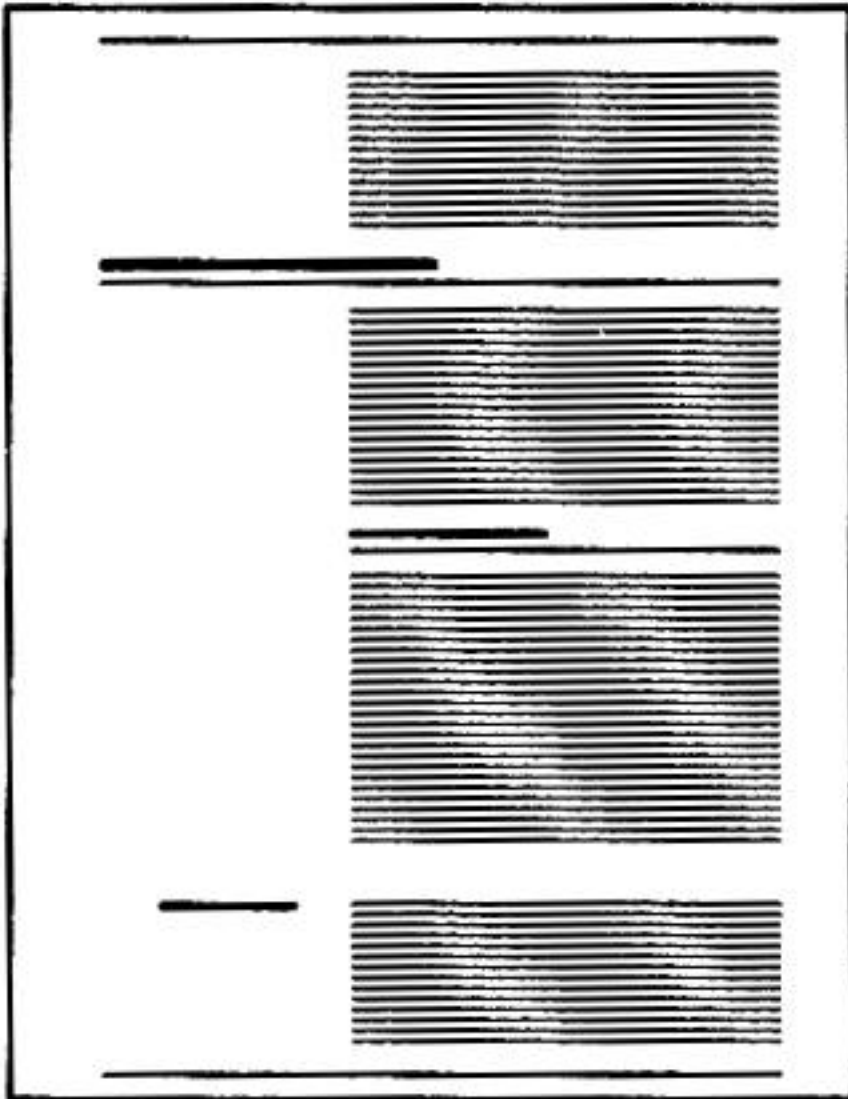
Page Layout Sample

Source: The Xerox Corporation



Page Layout Sample

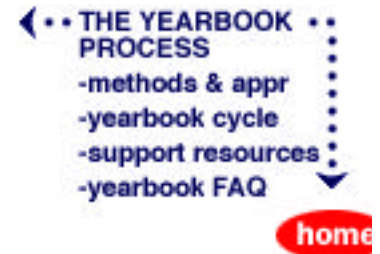
Source: The Xerox Corporation



Taylor Publishing Company

THE YEARBOOK PROCESS

Support Resources: Layout and Design Tips



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Yearbook designs are getting simpler, with a greater emphasis on effective use of typography and white space. Here's a sampling of design trends:

Cleaner, magazine-influenced designs

Fewer elements are being presented per spread, with simplicity and a clean approach.

Dominant "elements."

Copy or strong visual graphics are now being used as the dominant element on yearbook spreads in lieu of photos, reflecting magazines' design influence.

Isolation

White space is being used to separate or showcase elements. Avoid a "trapped" look by creating the white space with an obvious purpose. Other good uses of white space include space at the top and bottom of plus columns, and as 4-6 pica "rails" to frame a group of design elements.

Unified or "whole" yearbooks

The move is toward a yearbook's sections working well together rather than competing against each other. Be sure, however, to avoid making the book visually redundant--don't use variations of the same spread over and over.

"Garage" and "grunge" fonts

Shorter copy blocks and longer copy broken up to make it easier to read.

Descriptive captions

Longer, more descriptive captions (addressing the five W's) are supplementing shorter body copy.

Lowercase headlines

All lowercase headlines and display type.



Undefined screens

Undefined screened areas (no lines around screen) for sidebars.

Multiple reader entry points

Multiple reader entry points for stories or spreads. Initial caps, breaks between paragraphs, multiple subheads or pull quotes all serve as natural entry points.

Web influence







Web publishing is beginning to affect print design. Evidence is showing up in magazines in the form of unstructured page designs, "garage" fonts and more color.





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