



tipsheet

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Document Design Part I

Document design makes up a critical piece of any written communication. Writers can tailor their documents for specific audiences and meet standards or expectations of a particular situation or context. The attractiveness and navigational ease of any written document helps determine the amount of time a busy individual will spend reviewing it. Consider this approach in the context of resume design. When looking through a large number of resumes, a reviewer may discard a poorly designed and visually unattractive resume before even considering the information it contains. The first impression created by an unattractive document usually includes a sense that the creator may be unorganized or unprofessional. Consequently, writers should package information in an attractive and accessible way as a first step to effective communication.

Consider this document as an example of many of the suggestions below.

Guidelines for overall document layout

- **Headings and organizational structure:** Business document format should allow a reader to briefly scan the document and quickly discover what it contains. Include well-organized section headings with descriptive titles that intuitively flow through the document. Set the differing sections of the document apart in a way that easily communicates they are separate ideas. Make sure to use consistent spacing and indentation structure throughout the document.
- **Use of white space:** White space can help or hinder your message. Use white space to emphasize and draw appropriate attention to your ideas. Lack of white space leads to visual and mental fatigue for a reader, and too much white space makes the document appear inconsequential.
- **Modular / Block design:** Document layout helps communicate an intended theme or style. Consider a modular or block design (accomplished by the use of tables in Word) for organizing thoughts in a visually appealing way. Remember that not every document should be in a standard Microsoft Word report form.
- **Horizontal lines:** Including a horizontal line in the header or footer, or in section headings can add character to your document, direct the reader's eye, and aid you to attractively structure your white space.
- **Margins:** Margin sizing contributes significantly to correct white space usage. A 1" margin works well, but experiment with this when you design your sections and headings placement. A block style document may dictate the need to decrease your left margin heading. Business writing almost never uses dual justification where both left and right margins are a straight line. Use left justification as the standard.
- **Headers / footers:** Headers and footers contribute a sense of consistency and professionalism and aid a reader in navigation. They will not be appropriate in every case but are well suited for many technical and business communications.
- **Use of page numbers:** Longer documents should include page numbers. As a general rule, place page numbers in a header or footer, or alone at the bottom right or center of a report.

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