

## Visual Aspects of the Public Document

Look through Chapter 19 (pgs 603–635) in *Call to Write* for additional ideas and discussion about visual design

### A Brief Explanation (or refresher) of Visuals

Visual choices shape the messages and meanings implied/transmitted through the way something “looks.” We can “read” visual elements in much the same way we read written words. Each rhetorical situation will require the use of appropriate visuals to convey your message to your audience. You should be able to identify the purpose for choosing specific visual elements in the construction of your composition.

### Visual Choices in Written Composition

In English 106 we create documents and compositions primarily formed around written text. We should, however, be aware of the visual elements included in the completion of our projects. For traditional written composition, making rhetorical choices about visuals includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- **Font/Type**—Computers allow for us to compose in any number of different fonts. Ask yourself why you would present a finished piece in any of the fonts available. This question would also include the decision to use different colors and/or sizes of fonts. What ideas does the font conjure or what might be connoted/denoted from this font (I think of the circus when I see this font, I think of school)? Is it easily read? Is it appropriate for my format?
- **Layout/Format**—These usually refer to the way the information is presented “on the page.” In what direction (horizontal/vertical) should the document be seen? How should the paragraphs be arranged (spaces between? Right aligned? Justified? Centered)? Where should illustrations and graphics appear? Why?
- **Size and shape of the “document”**— We are used to seeing many written documents in the shape of 8 1/2” x 11” rectangles. Is this always necessary? What might/can be conveyed by presenting the document in another shape and or size? If the document is appearing on the web, how much of the screen does it cover? Why?
- **Graphics**—These can include icons, bullets, charts, graphs, tables, logos, etc. The use of graphics is primarily to organize information, to establish an identity, or to draw attention to key points. Why these

graphics? How big or noticeable should they be in relation to the written text? Why?

- Images—We usually think of images only as photographs but drawings, maps, diagrams, etc. may also serve as images. Images can change/enhance the meaning of written text by acting as illustrations to clarify a point or by contributing information that cannot be conveyed through the written text (or can better be conveyed as a visual). How will adding an image to your piece serve to illustrate my point? Will adding an image detract from the message I intend to convey? Can I express something in an image that I cannot express in written words (and vice-versa)?
- Illustrations—We see illustrations everywhere, especially in textbooks and academic/professional writing. Usually, illustrations are used to add to or to re-tell a message already included in the written text. They serve to reconceptualize information or to help us think about ideas in different ways but should not present new information.
- Other—we may also include in our considerations of appropriate visually rhetorical choices: the color and kind of paper the document is printed on, the design/layout of a web-based text, the context where the document will appear (in print next to an advertisement? On a bulletin board next to announcements?), etc.

## Thinking about the Public Document

A public document will require the use of visual rhetoric that is different from the way a profile, for example, may use visual rhetoric. After you produce a draft of your public document, ask yourself the following questions:

- What choices seem appropriate for the visual presentation of our document to a public audience? Why?
- What are our purposes for including these visual elements?
- What is inherent in the public-ness of this document which might restrict/extend the choices we make in the visual presentation of our document? How? Why?
- What is the best way to present our document visually to a public audience? What font will we use? Why? What layout, etc. Why (for each decision)?
- How will we create the visuals for our document to reflect the choices we have made (Photoshop, cut and paste, Microsoft Word, etc)? Why?