

# Academic BRASS

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## **How to Stop Worrying and Start Designing: Four Books for the Novice Designer**

Libraries communicate information and provide services in multiple formats, including web sites and print publications (signs, newsletters, brochures, cards, etc.). Although designs and formats will vary according to the purpose and circumstances, the final products should have at least two goals: (1) ensuring that the viewer understands an intended message and remembers it afterwards; and (2) allowing customers to access resources and services as easily, and as quickly, as possible.

Librarians often volunteer (or are “volunteered”) to lead working groups or committees to design, or re-design, web pages and publications. However, they may not have the confidence or experience to create effective and well-designed products to achieve the two goals listed above. This article will focus on four books that explain basic design principles that anyone can apply to a design-related assignment. The authors listed below explain design concepts simply and clearly, and they provide multiple examples to demonstrate their points (often with good humor!).

Note: Books are listed in order of importance.

Williams, R. (2015). *The non-designer's design book: Design and typographic principles for the visual novice* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Peachpit Press.  
ISBN: 9780133966152.

Robin Williams bases her teaching on four design principles: (1) Consistency; (2) Repetition; (3) Alignment; and (4) Proximity. (Williams apologizes for the acronym). As Williams clearly explains each principle, she also shows how to improve the design of a sample document. She also introduces a new technique in this edition (“Train Your Designer Eye”) for each principle. Throughout the book, she emphasizes two points about designing a document: (1) Make intentional decisions about the design of your work; and (2) Don't be a wimp. Other sections explain how different elements affect design, including color. She also shows how to design specific types of documents, such as newsletters, flyers and brochures. This book also has several introductory chapters on typography and the uses of type in design, and Williams has extensive experience in this area.

Krug, S. (2014). *Don't make me think, revisited: A common sense approach to web and mobile usability* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Peachpit/New Riders. ISBN: 9780321965516.

Steve Krug has many years of experience designing web sites, conducting interviews, and running usability studies. Based on his experiences, he discusses what people usually expect from a web site and how they use (or try to use) a web page. In clearly-illustrated examples and with good humor, Krug shows how web site users react to well-designed and poorly-designed pages. He also shows how to improve a poorly-designed web site.

Web sites are organized by hierarchy charts, and Krug shows how users arrive at the correct (or unintended) destination. Krug also emphasizes that web sites must be tested, and he discusses how to conduct usability testing, including: (1) how frequently the testing should occur; (2) the number of people involved in the testing; (3) how to select the right participants for the testing; (4) where the testing should take place; and (5) which tasks that people will perform during the testing. Krug also suggests that people who design web sites should take the "trunk test" themselves, in which they imagine themselves in the middle of a web site and must ask a list of questions to get their bearings.

McWade, J. (2010). *Before & after: How to design cool stuff*. San Francisco, CA: Peachpit Press. ISBN: 9780321580122.

One of the most important sections covers designing brochures. John McWade discusses how graphics, layout, headlines, folding positions and photographs will help an organization convey information, or tell a story, more effectively in a brochure. Also, the book shows how design principles will vary between a "regular" brochure and a pocket brochure.

In addition to brochures, this book also discusses general design principles that can be applied to other media. The first section focuses on general concepts, including shape; color; orientation and visual center; margins; type; contrast; and cropping pictures and illustrations. In particular, librarians will benefit from (1) the sections on designing publication covers, as well as designing the page that will follow the cover (the "second page"); (2) the most effective ways to place captions on a picture; (3) designing cards; and (4) how to make pictures convey powerful messages in presentations.

McWade, J. (2005). *Before & after: Graphics for business*. San Francisco, CA: Peachpit Press. ISBN: 9780321334152.

One of the most important sections of this book covers designing newsletters. McWade discusses (1) layout; (2) type/font; (3) designing nameplates and logos; (4) grouping related articles; (5) color; and (6) spacing. He demonstrates design principles by showing how newsletters can evolve from basic and satisfactory to communicating news (as well as the mission of an organization) more effectively. Other topics that could apply to libraries include designing stationery and catalogs. Interestingly, McWade also discusses designing ads for the Yellow Pages, which is similar to designing signage. Although this book was published more than 10 years ago, McWade's principles are still current. He states in the foreword that "good design meets three criteria: beauty, simplicity and clarity" (p. vii).