

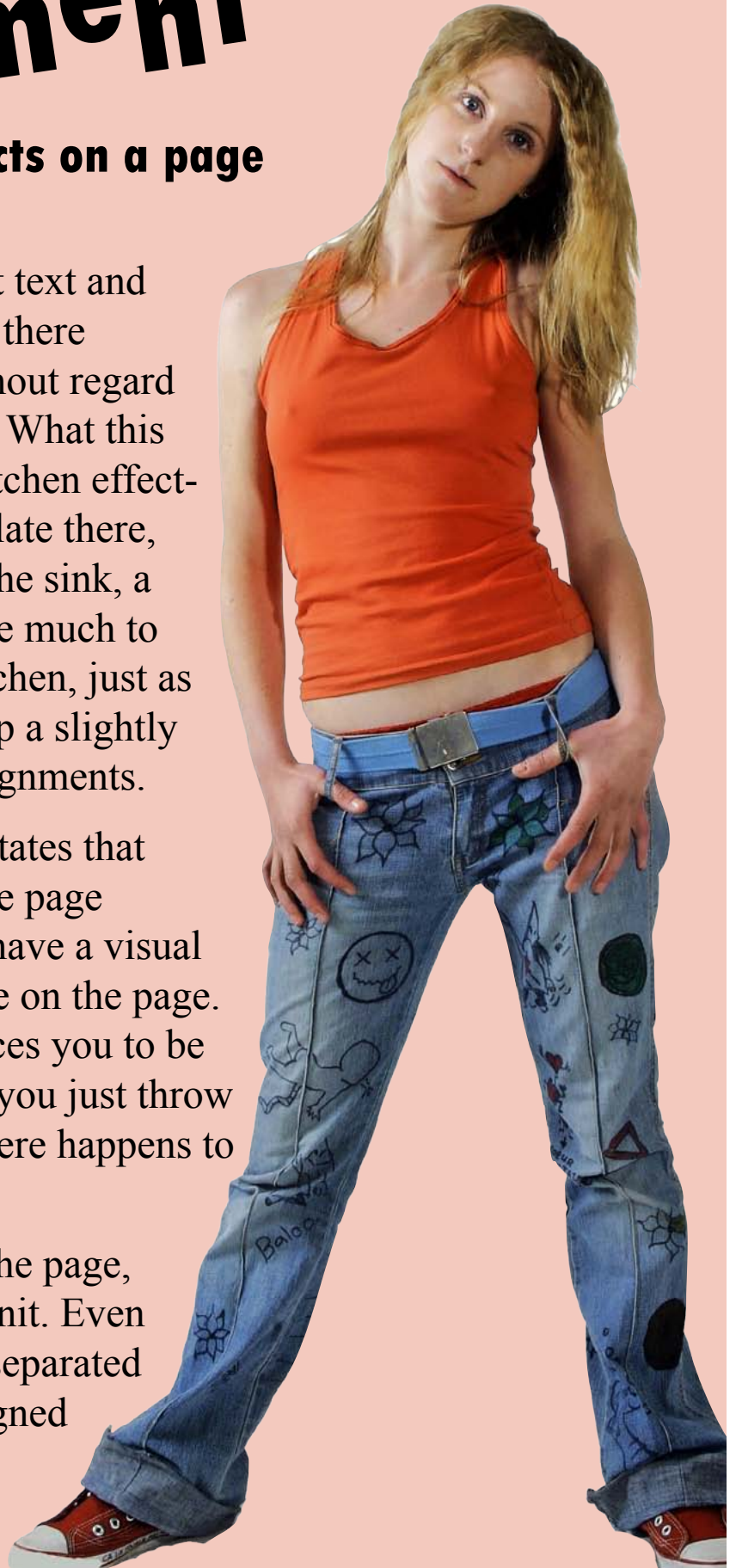
Alignment

Placing objects on a page

Design beginners tend to put text and graphics on the page wherever there happens to be space, often without regard to any other items on the page. What this creates is the slightly messy kitchen effect—you know, with a cup here, a plate there, a napkin on the floor, a pot in the sink, a spill on the floor. It doesn't take much to clean up the slightly messy kitchen, just as it doesn't take much to clean up a slightly messy design that has weak alignments.

The principle of alignment states that nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily. Every Item should have a visual connection with something else on the page. The principle of alignment forces you to be more conscious—no longer can you just throw things on the page wherever there happens to be room.

When items are aligned on the page, it creates a stronger cohesive unit. Even when elements are physically separated from each other, if they are aligned there is an invisible line that connects them,



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both in your eye and in your mind. Although you might have separated certain elements to indicate their relationships (following the principle of proximity), the principle of alignment is what tells the reader that even though these items are not close, they belong to the same piece.

Do you tend to automatically center everything? A centered alignment is the most common alignment that beginners use—it's very safe, it feels comfortable. A centered alignment creates a more formal look, a more sedate look, a more ordinary and oftentimes downright dull look. Take notice of the designs you like. I guarantee that most designs that have a sophisticated look are not centered. I know it's difficult, as a beginner, to break away from a centered alignment; you'll have to force yourself to do it at first. But combine a strong flush right or left alignment with good use of proximity and you will be amazed at the change in your work.

I'm not suggesting that you never center anything! Just be conscious the effect a centered alignment has—is that really the look you want portray? Sometimes it is; for instance, most weddings are rather sedate formal affairs, so if you want to center your wedding announcement, do so consciously and joyfully.

Sometimes you can add a bit of a twist on the centered arrangement such as centering the type, but setting the block of type itself off centre. Or set the type high on the page to create more tension. Or set a very casual, fun typeface in a very formal, centred arrangement.

You're accustomed to working with text alignments. Until you have more training stick to the guideline of using one text alignment on

the page: either all text is flush left, flush right or centred.

Occasionally you can get away with using both flush left and flush right text on the same page, but make sure you align them in some way!

When you place other items on the page, make sure each one has some visual alignment with another item on the page. If lines of text are across from each other horizontally, align their baselines. If there are several separate blocks of text, align their left or right edges. If there are graphic elements, align their edges with other edges on the page. Nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily!

Lack of alignment is probably the biggest cause of unpleasant-looking documents: Our eyes like to see order; it creates a calm, secure feeling.

In any well-designed piece, you will be able to draw lines to the aligned objects, even if the overall presentation of material is a wild collection of odd things and has lots of energy.

A problem with many non-designers' publications is a subtle lack of alignment, such as centered headlines and subheads over indented paragraphs.

Never center headlines over flush left body copy or text that has an indent. If the text does not have a clear left and right edge, you can't tell the headline is actually centered. It looks like it's just hanging around.

All these unaligned spots create a messy page: wide indents, ragged right edge of text, centered heads with open space on both sides, centered

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photo.

All those minor misalignments add up to create a visually messy page. Find a strong line and stick to it. Even though it may be subtle and your boss couldn't say what made the difference between this example and the one before it, the more sophisticated look comes through clearly.

Find a strong alignment and stick to it. If the text is flush left, set the heads and subheads flush left. First paragraphs are traditionally not indented. The purpose of indenting a paragraph is to tell you there is a new paragraph, but you always know the first one is a paragraph.

On a typewriter; you indented five spaces. With proportional type such as you are using on your

computer; the standard typographic indent is one em (an em is as wide as the point size of your type), which is more like two spaces.

Be conscious of the ragged edge of your type. Adjust the lines so your right edge is as smooth as possible.

If there are photographs or illustrations, align them with an edge and/or a baseline.

Even in a piece that has a good start on a nice design, the subtle lack of alignment is often the missing key to a more professional look. Can you see all the places where items could be aligned, but aren't?

Check for illustrations that hang out over the edge just a bit, or captions that are centered under photos, or headlines that are not aligned with the text, or a combination of centered text and flush

left text.

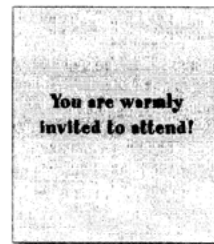
I want to repeat: find a strong line and use it. If you have a photo or a graphic with a strong flush side, align the flush side of the text along the straight edge of the photo.

If your alignments are strong, then you can break through the alignments consciously and it will look intentional. What a concept! ‘

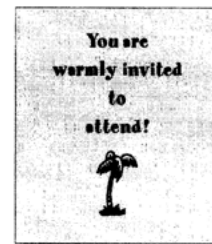
It is possible to sometimes break completely free of any alignment, if you do it consciously.

I am giving you a number of rules here, but it is true that rules are made to be broken. There is a rule, though, about breaking rules: you must know what the rule is before you can break it. ■

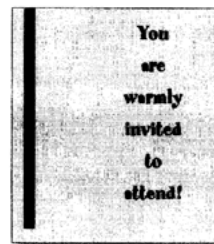
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Centered. Really rather dull.



If you're going to center text, then at least make it obvious!



Experiment with uncentering the block of centered type.



If you're going to center the text, experiment with making it more dramatic in some other way.