

Book review

Sally Tripp

The Non-Designer's Design & Type Books

by Robin Williams,
published by Peachpit Press

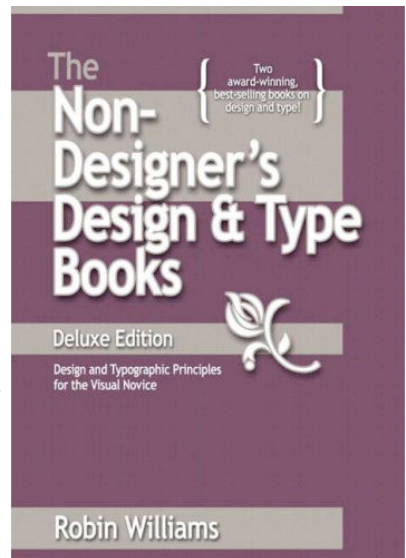
As this title suggests this book is for people with little or no understanding of graphic design and it succeeds in moving people from producing ordinary kinds of documents to something that is attractive and conveys the message to “read me”.

A document that is well designed not only looks good, but it also conveys its message clearly. This principle is at the heart of this book. The temptation of using every feature the computer offers leads to a messy page on which the message is lost or obscured. How often have you played around with fonts, colours, styles and sizes and created a page that leaves others wondering what it is all about?

Robin Williams points out that while we may recognise that one page looks better than another we may not know the reason for this. But this book, which is really two books in one, sets out to explain these subtleties in an interesting and light-hearted way that makes dipping into the book inviting. For it is not really a book to be read from cover to cover like a novel, but for keeping as a handy reference when you want ideas for creating business cards, newsletter, letterheads, flyers, advertisements, web pages and other types of documents.

The starting point of the book is William's four basic principles that undergird a well-designed page. The four points are proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast. She suggests, that the first letter of each word forms an acronym, and although she doesn't say what it is for good reason, it is salient enough to be a good reminder! These principles are followed by an in-depth, but easily understood discussion about colour, the colour wheel, finding the right colour and tints and saving them for later use. The design section of the book is rounded off with a wide range of helpful examples that includes comparisons of the good and bad in design.

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While Williams talks about fonts and provides a list of fonts used in the first book it is the second part of the book that addresses type in detail. Here Williams explains type. It is small word, but there is a lot to know. There is information about the history of type, readability, spacing, using type to good effect in layout, how to choose the best typeface, the difference between serif and san serif fonts and more.

Both sections of the book have their own glossary of terms and detailed indexes. Overall there is a huge amount of really useful information on making the best use of our computers for good looking documents. After urging readers to think carefully about how our work appears, I found the wine colour of the cover quite unappealing. However, this criticism is minor compared to the really useful content found between the covers of this book. I highly commend it.