

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF READABILITY: CRAP

Despite the unfortunate acronym, CRAP is familiar to any graphic designer, and it should be familiar to writers as well. It originated with the influential designer and writer Robin Williams; she now regrets the acronym but not the ideas behind it.

I. C IS FOR CONTRAST: USE DIFFERENCE TO DRAW READERS' EYES TO AND THROUGH YOUR TEXT OR PUBLICATION

You can see evidence of the most basic aspects of contrast in any Web page or magazine. The headline text is always different from the body text. It's often bigger and bolder; it can also be in a different typeface. Headlines make it easy to skip from one story to the next and get a cursory understanding of the news; news writers make it easy for people to read *only* the headlines in a newspaper or Web site.

Applying strong contrasting elements to your text is important because the human eye is drawn to *difference*, not necessarily size. When everything looks the same, it's difficult to focus on anything. When things are different, they are more noticeable.



Figure 10: What stands out here? Don't make your reader play a tough game just to get something out of your document. "Where's Wally World Record (where you there?)" by William Murphy is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0



Figure 11: Not as hard as Where's Waldo?, but that's the point. "Cadets" by skeeze is in the Public Domain, CCO

When a document has few or no contrasting elements, nothing stands out. The document isn't easy to scan, and it doesn't invite the reader to jump in and read. It's harder to parse, and

therefore it's difficult for readers to glean information from the text easily and quickly, if that is their aim.

Figure 12: What stands out on this resume?

Tarr Nation

123 Fake Street

Beaverton, OR 97007

(123) 456-7890

tarrnation@fake.com
Objective: The position of Front Desk Receptionist at Global Warranty Group
Skills and Abilities: Computer skills. Skilled with general applications like Internet Explorer, and Microsoft's Office Suite,

and also with less-ubiquitous applications like Intuit QuickBooks and Sage Timeslips. Can learn to use

new programs quickly. Maintain hardware, for example printers and scanners.

Communication skills. Write numerous emails and letters to clients, insurers, and other Attorneys.

Comfortable making and receiving phone calls.

Education:

Portland Community College, Portland, OR

AA in General Studies

Grad: June 2013

Related Course Work:

Writing 121, 122, and 227

Employment History:

September 2009-present

Fake Law Office, LLC, Beaverton, OR

Legal Assistant, Secretary, Office Manager, and Paralegal

November 2012-February2012

Fake Faker Fakest & Imaginary LLP, Portland, OR

Freelance Billing Assistant

Summer 2009 (June-August)

Camp Freedom, Cody, WY

Camp Councilor, Windsurfing Instructor

References:

Available upon request.

Some documents, like business letters or academic papers, have fewer contrasting elements, but even line spacing and paragraph breaks help indicate where a related chunk of information begins and ends.

Contrast helps draw the reader's eyes to certain elements in your text, and it also helps the reader follow the flow of the information and assess which items are most important and require immediate attention. Contrast creates readability, so you must pay attention to contrast in your documents. The following elements of a text can help you create a friendly, appealing sense of contrast:

CONTRAST ELEMENT I: SIZE

Your eye moves toward things because they're *different*, not because they're large or small. Your eye is impressed by novelty more than sheer size or color or any other visual characteristic.

There are all sorts of scientific theories about why this is so, but in short, it's not so much that making something bigger makes it more noticeable. A person's height, for example, isn't so noticeable until the principle of contrast comes into effect.



Figure 13: The Fierce Five, the US gold medalists in team artistic gymnastics at the 2012 London Olympics, meet President Obama at the White House. They look fierce, but not so small. Starting third from left: Aly Raisman, Gabby Douglas, McKayla Maroney, Kyla Ross, and Jordyn Wieber. "P111512PS-0165" by Obama White House is in the Public Domain



Figure 14: "Barack Obama with artistic gymnastic McKayla Maroney 2" by Pete Souza is in the Public Domain Both are fierce, but one is dramatically smaller. The contrast in size provides the visual drama, and pictures like these are favorite memes online.

There is such a thing as *too much size* contrast: think of those web sites with huge type or an overly enthusiastic use of the CAPS LOCK key. Less is more, but some size contrast is essential to draw the reader's eye.

CONTRAST II: FONT SIZE/STYLE/WEIGHT

A *typeface* is a collection of fonts. The distinction between the terms *typeface* and *font* stretches back to the days of typesetting: hand-placing individual letters made of wood or metal, inking them, and rolling paper over them. In the digital age, most people use the words *typeface* and *font* interchangeably, though the distinction still matters to experts like designers and typographers.

What's important to most people is that we all have a huge variety of *typefaces*, or *font families*, to choose from: Times New Roman, Arial, Bookman, Georgia, and Garamond are familiar to many of us. It's important to choose a font (a particular size, style, and weight within a typeface) that fits our purpose. Some, like script and handwriting typefaces, are too hard to read and so aren't appropriate for body text, for example. Some typefaces work well as headlines: Franklin Gothic Condensed and Caslon are two typefaces often used for newspaper headlines. The "font" chosen (size, weight, style—italic, bold, etc.) will be the designer's choice.

It's also important to distinguish between serif and sans-serif fonts. Sans serif fonts, like Helvetica or Futura, are simple and smooth; the letters don't display the "feet" and ornamentation (serifs) that serif fonts do. Sans serif fonts are often used for headlines, but serif fonts are more likely to be used for body text. Many typographers think serif fonts (also called Roman fonts) make large blocks of body text easier to read. Some of the preference is really just about tradition.

The image displays three common sans-serif typefaces stacked vertically. The first is 'Gill Sans' in a bold, slightly condensed font. The second is 'Helvetica' in a clean, standard weight. The third is 'Futura' in a tall, condensed, and slightly futuristic style. All three are in black on a white background.

Figure 15: Three common sans serif

typefaces (font families). Image Credit: [Roger Koslowski](#), [Typefaces-sansserif](#), CC BY-SA 3.0

The Quick Brown
Fox Jumps Over
The Lazy Dog. g
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789&?

Figure 16: Baskerville, a nice serif typeface. (Public Domain image)

Helvetica 35 Thin
Helvetica 45 Light
Helvetica 55 Romain
Helvetica 65 Medium
Helvetica 75 Bold
Helvetica 85 Heavy
Helvetica 95 Black

Figure 17: Each typeface family (like Helvetica) contains many sizes and many styles—light, regular, bold, italic, condensed, lower case letters, upper case letters, small caps, schoolbook, old style, and so on. (Public Domain image)

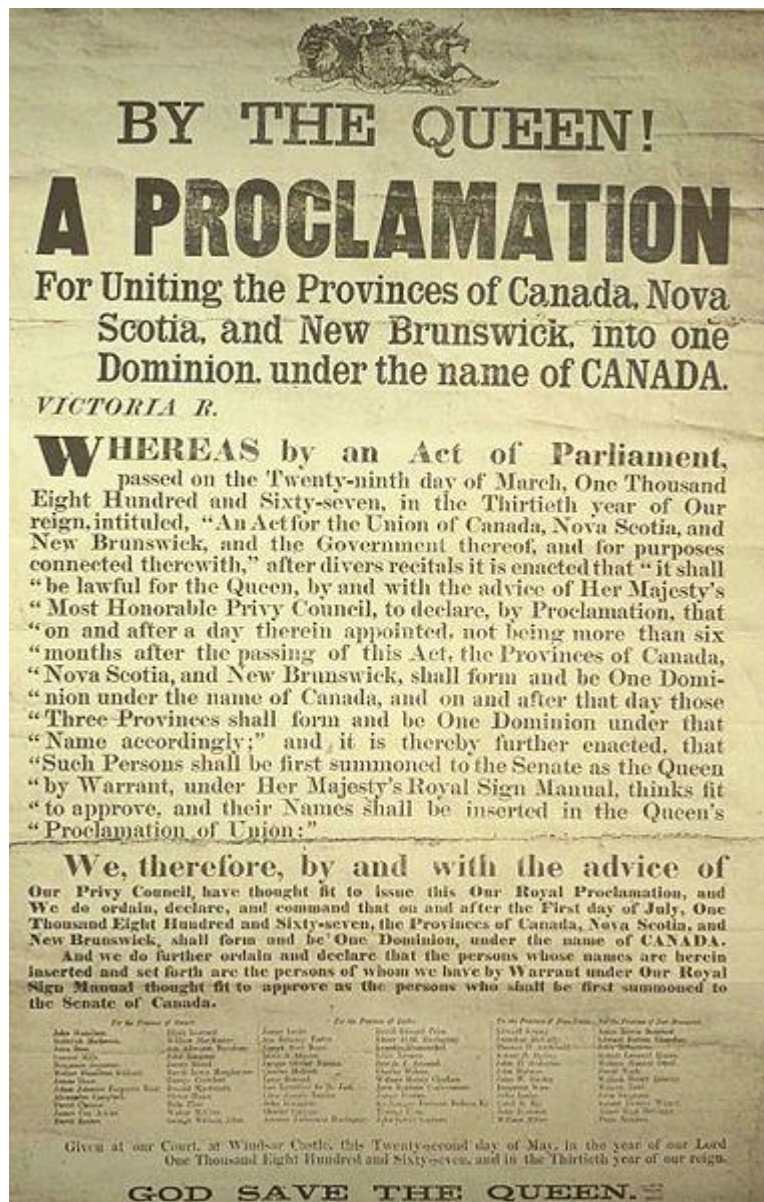


Figure 18: Canada is born! Note the large

sans serif headlines and smaller serif fonts used as body text. "Proclamation of Canadian Confederation" is in the Public Domain

CONTRAST III: DIRECTION (VERTICAL, HORIZONTAL, CIRCULAR, ETC.) OR POSITION (TOP, BOTTOM, SIDE)

Changing the direction or orientation of text, graphic elements like lines, banners, or screens (smaller transparent or opaque boxes, often in a color that contrasts with the background)

THE "WITCH" SPOON

(Registered Trade-Mark.)

From the old Witch Town of Salem.

An interesting mania, yet one having its useful side as well, is the collecting of odd silver spoons. The idea is to get them from as many different localities as possible, but particularly from places having some special historical interest.

One of the presents received by Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes on his eighty-first birthday was a gold-lined silver spoon,* the handle of which bears a witch on a broomstick, the word Salem, and the emblematic witch-paint crossed.

It came from a lady as a token of Dr. Holmes's latest poem, the "Hocusnick Train."—*Boston Evening Transcript*

* This was an orange spoon, No. 1.

This pattern is made only in sterling silver and of heavy weight. The design on the handle is raised.

(Exact size.)

Orange Spoon, No. 1.	Coffee Spoon.	\$1.25
	Coffee Spoon, gold bowl.	1.50
	Tea Spoon.	2.00
	Tea Spoon, gold bowl.	2.50
Orange Spoon, No. 1.		2.25
Orange Spoon, No. 1, gold bowl.		2.50
Dessert Spoons, Sugar Spoons, Almond Scoops, &c.		


We send them on receipt of price, prepaid to any address, subject to return if they prove in any way unsatisfactory or disappointing.

Estab. 1867. **DANIEL LOW, Silversmith,**
First Church Building, SALEM, MASS.



Figure 19: Use interesting

orientations to attract your readers' attention. "Advertisement from 1891 for the first "Witch Spoon"" is in the Public Domain



The TUCKER Torpedo

THE MOST TALKED ABOUT AUTOMOBILE IN THE WORLD TODAY

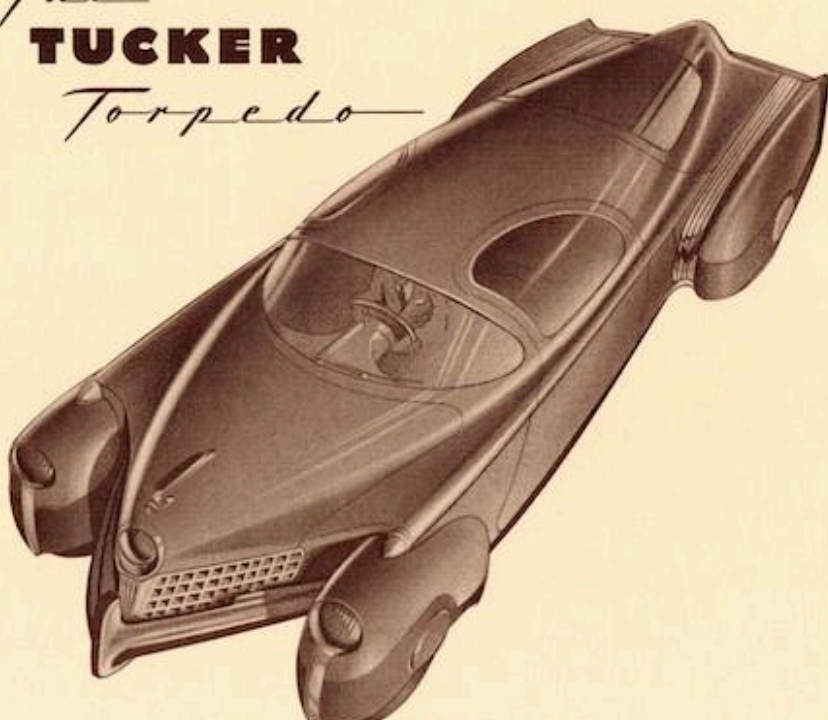


Figure 20: Note the image oriented on the diagonal and the opaque screen against which the text and logo are set.

Sharp! "Tucker Torpedo Brochure" by Alden Jewell is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0



Figure 21: Templates for flyers, newsletters, web pages, and

PowerPoint slides can help you provide visual interest if you're short on ideas. Image Credit: [October Newsletter](#)

[Template](#), [Word Draw](#), CC BY-2.0

CONTRAST IV: ALIGNMENT (CENTER, LEFT, RIGHT, JUSTIFIED)

Most students are familiar with how to align type. MLA and APA style, for example, mandate left-aligned body text and a centered headline. MLA Works Cited pages call for a hanging indent of ½ inch. A change in alignment can create visual interest. For example, headlines are often centered to make them noticeable.

Images are often placed in a particular location on a page (or slide) to draw readers' attention in one direction or another. Consistent alignment with slight variations to provide interest is particularly important in PowerPoint presentations. You will be flipping from one slide to another, and if the text blocks and headlines are not aligned identically, your text and headlines will appear to “jump around” the screen in a distracting way.



Figure 22: Templates for Publisher, PowerPoint, or other software packages help you keep track of every element of your publication. (Public Domain image)

CONTRAST V: GRAPHIC ELEMENTS LIKE PHOTOS, BANNERS/BANDS, PULL QUOTES, OR LOGOS

Remember, we're trying to create contrast, or difference—breaking up huge blocks of text with a variety of graphic elements can really add visual appeal and interest.

Just remember—as with the examples below, less is more. Think of all the publications and web sites you've seen whose designers thought it was awesome to make text bold AND underlined AND multicolored AND flashing. With a bright yellow background. And too many animated GIFs. It repels readers rather than attracting them. I know you know what I mean.



Figure 23: Striking images and pull quotes contrast with less-distinctive elements, like text and background. "Fashion Magazine Layout" by Aamir Raza is licensed under CC BY 2.0

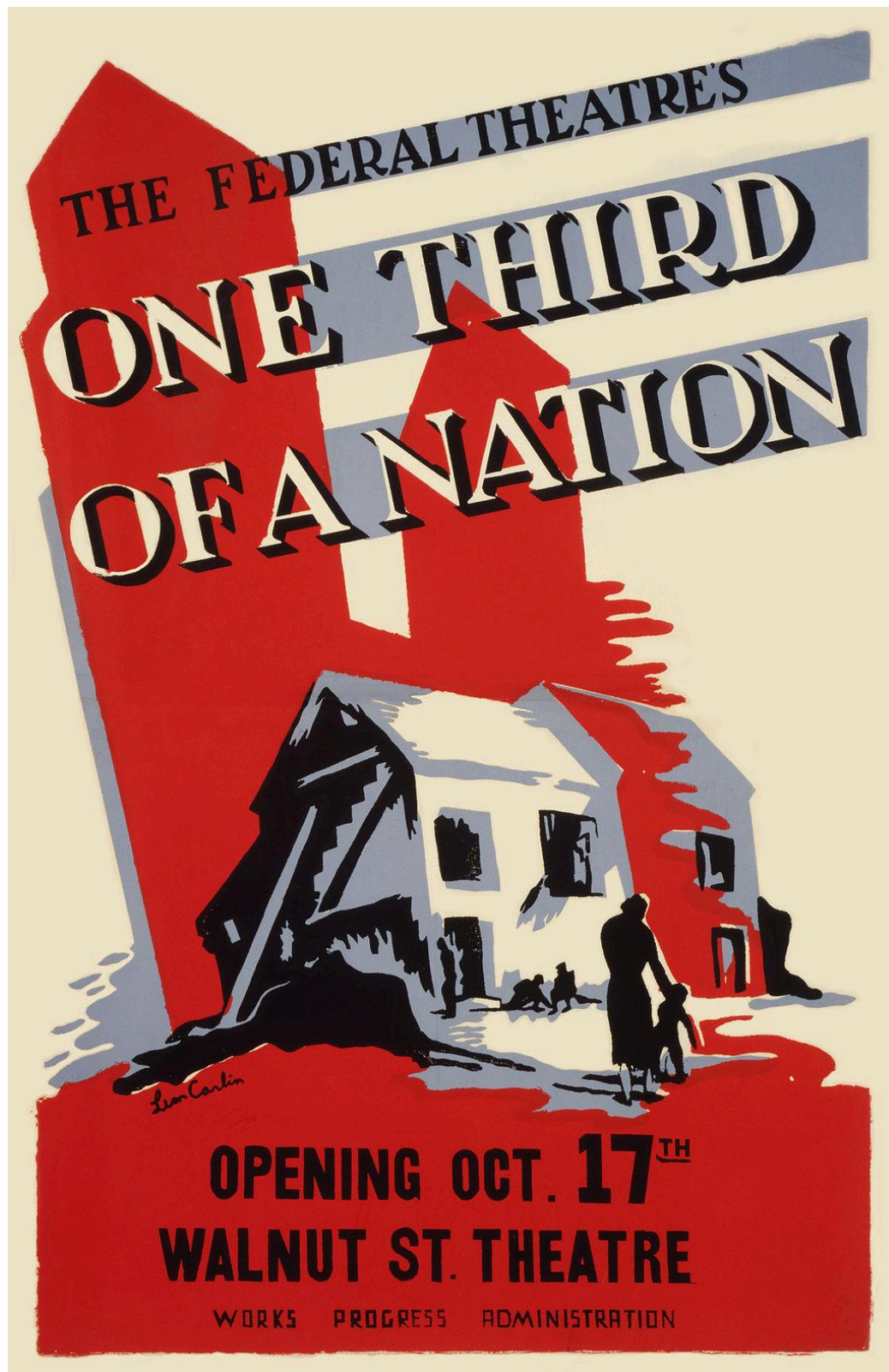


Figure 24: This

poster uses contrasting alignment, contrast in text, and simple color contrast to create a dramatic effect. Less really can be more. "One-Third of a Nation, a Living Newspaper play by the Federal Theatre Project" by <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:One-Third-of-a-Nation-Poster-2.jpg> is in the Public Domain

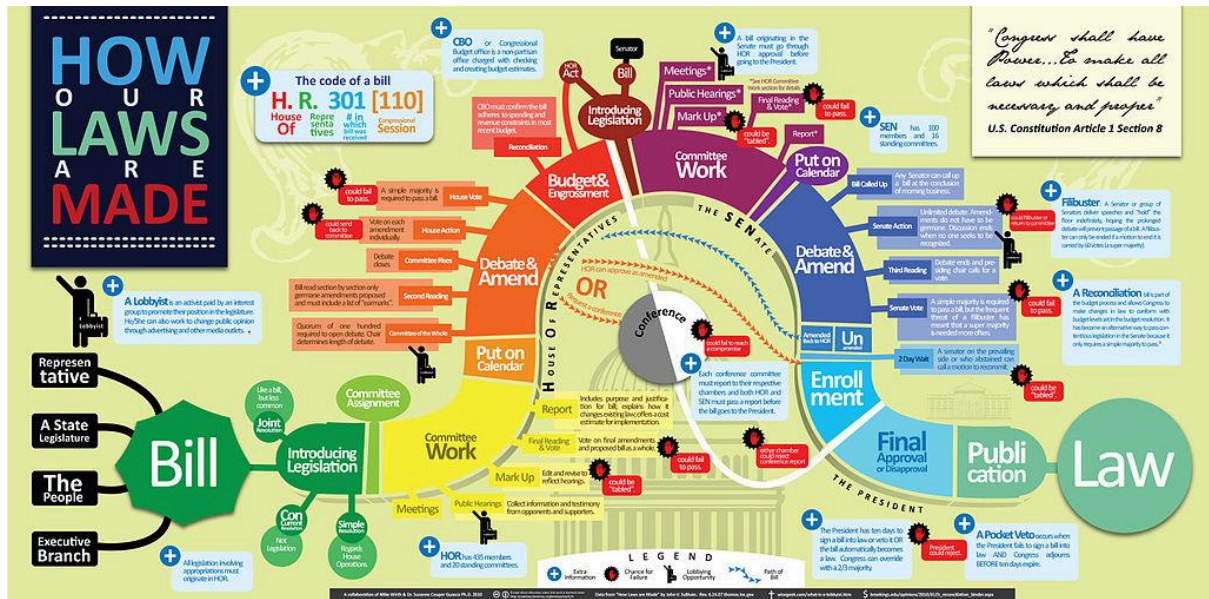


Figure 25: Complicated issues are sometimes hard to express visually. "How Our Laws Are Made" by Mike Wirth and Dr. Suzanne Cooper-Guasco is licensed under CC BY 3.0

CONTRAST VI: COLOR (OF BACKGROUND, TEXT, GRAPHIC ELEMENTS, ETC.)

Use color to make certain elements stand out. Create a sense of drama when you contrast one color with another. Make sure you don't use too many colors and your color combinations are easy to read.

CREDIT CARD DEBT IN THE UNITED STATES



\$972 BILLION

HOW MUCH CREDIT CARD DEBT THE US IS IN (2008)

IN 2006 THERE WERE AN ESTIMATED **1.5 BILLION** CREDIT CARDS IN THE US. STACKED UP, THESE WOULD REACH 70 MILES INTO SPACE.

26.5 BILLION CREDIT CARD TRANSACTIONS (08)

\$2.1 TRILLION WAS SPENT IN TOTAL



78%
OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE
AT LEAST 1 CREDIT CARD



51%
OF THE POPULATION HAVE
AT LEAST 2 CREDIT CARDS



14%
OF THE POPULATION HAVE
MORE THAN 10 CREDIT CARDS



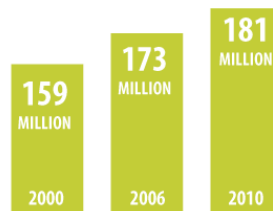
46.1%
OF US FAMILIES HAD SOME
CREDIT CARD DEBT IN 2007



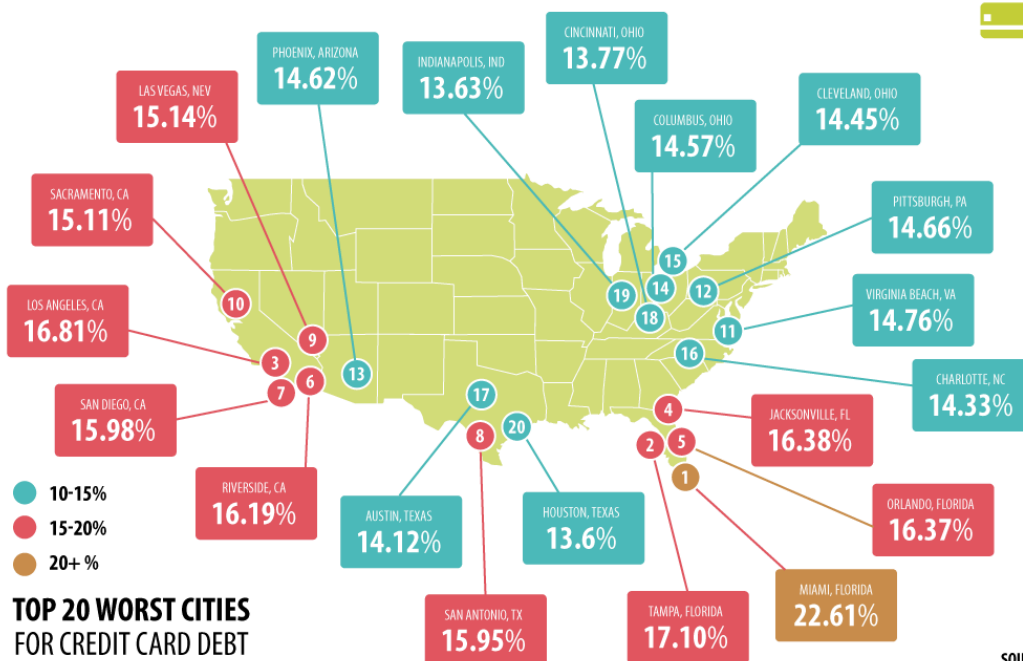
\$3,173
AVERAGE UNDERGRADUATE
CREDIT CARD DEBT (2008)



IN 2007 **14.7%** OF FAMILIES HAD DEBT **EXCEEDING 40% OF THEIR INCOME**



NUMBER OF CREDIT CARDHOLDERS IN THE US



**TOP 20 WORST CITIES
FOR CREDIT CARD DEBT**
% OF INCOME OWED TO CREDIT CARD COMPANIES

SOURCES:
FORBES.COM

[HTTP://WWW.CREDITCARDS.COM/CREDIT-CARD-NEWS/CREDIT-CARD-INDUSTRY-FACTS-PERSONAL-DEBT-STATISTICS-1276.PHP](http://www.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/credit-card-industry-facts-personal-debt-statistics-1276.php)

Figure

26: Contrasting color in text, images, and design elements. Image Credit: "Credit Card Debt in the US" by GDS

Infographics is licensed under CC BY 2.0

CONTRAST VII: USE OF NEGATIVE OR “WHITE” SPACE

Sometimes, the best way to attract a reader’s attention to a contrast is to “go negative.” The absence of content provides air and space and draws the reader’s attention to the content itself. Negative space, or white space, is the space around text, images, and other elements in a document. It makes documents of all kinds (digital and print) more readable, more restful-looking, more inviting to the reader, simpler, and more elegant. It is associated with that “high-end” restaurant or salon menu look.

THE FRENCH LAUNDRY

TASTING OF VEGETABLES

DECEMBER 4, 2005

"GRATIN" OF JACOBSEN'S FARM CARDOONS,
AND PÉRIGORD TRUFFLES WITH PARMIGIANO REGGIANO "MOUSSE"

SALAD OF CITRUS GLAZED HAAS AVOCADOS,
BLOOD ORANGE "SUPRÊMES", HEARTS OF PALM "RIBBONS"
AND SICILIAN PISTACHIO "VINAIGRETTE"

GLOBE ARTICHOKES "À LA BARIGOULE",
SWEET CARROT "BUTTONS", MARINATED PEARL ONIONS,
TAGGIASCHE OLIVE "RAVIOLINI" AND "CONSOMMÉ DE BARIGOULE"

OVEN BAKED BABY HEIRLOOM BEETS,
CARAMELIZED BELGIAN ENDIVE, SIERRA BEAUTY APPLES,
CANDIED WALNUTS AND FRISÉE

BUTTER BRAISED PRINCESS LA RATTE POTATOES,
ROASTED ROMAINE LETTUCE, GARDEN RADISHES
AND "VINAIGRETTE AUX TRUFFES NOIRES"

"POT PIE"
"RAGOÛT" OF CELERY ROOT, GLAZED CHESTNUTS
AND GOLDEN CHANTERELLE MUSHROOMS "EN CROÛTE DE PÂTE FEUILLETÉE"

"ANDANTE DAIRY ACAPELLA"
FENNEL BULB "RELISH", FENNEL POLLEN "LAVOSH"
AND BANYULS VINEGAR REDUCTION

SPICED "PRUNEAUX D'AGEN" SORBET
WITH PUMPKIN SEED "GRANOLA", PUMPKIN "ROYALE"
AND CRANBERRY "COULIS"

OVEN BAKED MANJARI CHOCOLATE "MOUSSE",
RED WINE POACHED MICHIGAN SOUR CHERRIES,
"CRÈME FRAÎCHE ET RÉDUCTION DE CUISSON DES CERISES"

"MIGNARDISES"

PRIX FIXE 175.00

A 19% SERVICE CHARGE IS ADDED TO EACH CHECK

6640 WASHINGTON STREET, YOUNTVILLE CA 94599 707.944.2380

Figure 27: Case in point. High-end. "French laundry carte" by EncMstr is in the Public Domain



Figure 28:

Not so high-end, but probably still delicious. Image Credit: [Laika ac, Laika ac Pizza Restaurant Menu \(7953649854\)](#), CC BY-SA 2.0

CHAPTER ATTRIBUTION INFORMATION

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