Taking Up Space

Symmetry vs. asymmetry

One of the hidden keys to good layout is whether a page has symmetry or not. In other words, should the layout be centered (symmetric) or off-center (asymmetric)? Choices made at this time can profoundly affect the feeling the reader gets from the page. New designers can build up their skills and achieve some very interesting results with asymmetric layout.

Simply put, a symmetric page will likely produce a more relaxing, static page while an off-center look will suggest a lively and dynamic page. The choice is yours depending on the desired impact for your readers.

Centered layout has a very static look. It's easy to make. It's pleasantly innocuous. It's boring. If you are designing a long novel where you expect the reader to be sitting in a comfortable armchair reading the magnificent prose, then use symmetry. Here there won't be a need for many of the signposts that is, headlines, pictures, and so on that would normally be part of a livelier asymmetric page.

How about mixing symmetry and asymmetry? This is not usually desired because it can result mixed signals to the reader and look uncomfortable. Complicated material like long reports are especially easier to handle if you make a conscious choice. For example, if you have done a long report that is asymmetric for example, three columns with text only in the centre and right hand column, do not introduce a symmetric title page. Use the asymmetric sense to produce a lively and attractive title page. This will set the tone for a lively document to follow.

What is the role of white space combined with choices regarding symmetry? One of the great advantages of the asymmetric page is that it allows for very creative use of white space as well as pictures, charts, and other graphic elements to design interesting headlines. Try using the space dramatically. If there is a lot of white space, don't feel obliged to fill it up. White space is a great graphic tool and can be a dramatic part of your page design.