

BEST PRACTICES IN MESSAGE DESIGN

FOR SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATORS



IN THE CHAT

1. Name
2. College / University
3. ONE sustainability message you wish people on your campus noticed.

Who can see your messages?

To: Meeting group chat

|Message UMACS Strat Comm Meeting Room

T 😊 GIF 📎 📎



TODAY'S PLAN

- 1 MESSAGE REFRESH
- 2 MINI ART SCHOOL
- 3 LAYOUT THAT WORKS EVERY TIME
- 4 DESIGN CHALLENGE



MESSAGE REFRESH

CONNECTIONS FROM OUR
LAST COLAB DISCUSSION



POLL

WHERE DO MOST OF YOUR MESSAGES LIVE?

- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Email and newsletters
- ☐ Digital signage and screens
- ☐ Bins, posters and tabletops
- ☐ Printed reports
- ☐ Website



ASK FOR A BEHAVIOR, NOT AN ATTITUDE

INSTEAD OF...	TRY...
"Be sustainable!"	"Bring your mug to [Café]. Refills are [\$__] off."
"Save energy over break."	"Unplug your mini-fridge before you leave Friday."
"Recycle right!"	"Empty it. Rinse it. Blue bin."
"Go green on your commute."	"Ride Route [__] free with your ID this week."



MAKE IT EASY, ATTRACTIVE, SOCIAL, TIMELY

E

EASY

Put the bin where the waste is made. Cut every extra step.

A

ATTRACTIVE

One focal point, one bold color. Name the reward.

S

SOCIAL

Show peers doing it; real halls, teams, faces.

T

TIMELY

Reach them at the decision — move-out, the first cold snap.

POLL

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS COLAB · PART 2

umacs

WHICH BIN MESSAGE WINS?



[A]

Help save the planet! Please recycle.

[B]

Students keep putting the wrong things in recycling. Stop contaminating our bins!

[C]

Most of [Hall] sorts it right.
Cups → Landfill
Sleeve → Recycling

MINI-ART SCHOOL

FOR SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATORS



ELEMENTS

SPACE

Filled and empty space work as partners

LINE

Axes the eye follows and copy hangs on

SHAPE

Geometric or organic contours

SIZE

It can shout or whisper

PATTERN

Repetition builds order and familiarity

TEXTURE

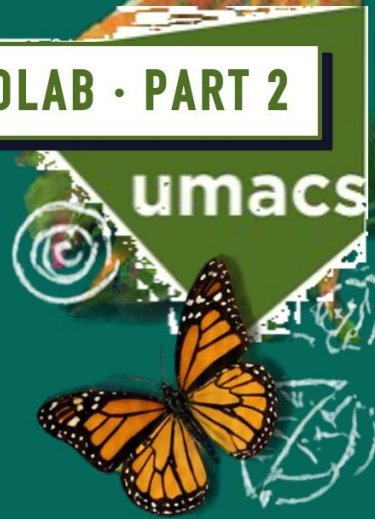
Adds dimension, as light and shadow do.

VALUE

How light, how dark contrast

COLOR

Hue, tint, shade, saturation



PRINCIPLES

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS COLAB · PART 2



FOCAL POINT The eye's point of entry, most important detail

1



2

Unplug before you go.

3

Mini-fridge, TV, chargers. Friday by 5 p.m.

[Campus] Sustainability · [url]

BIG → small

Color → gray

Unusual → usual

Dark → light

Bright → muted

And we look at the top, center and left of a page first.

PRINCIPLES

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS COLAB · PART 2



FOCAL POINT The eye's point of entry, most important detail

CONTRAST White space emphasizes something else, never itself

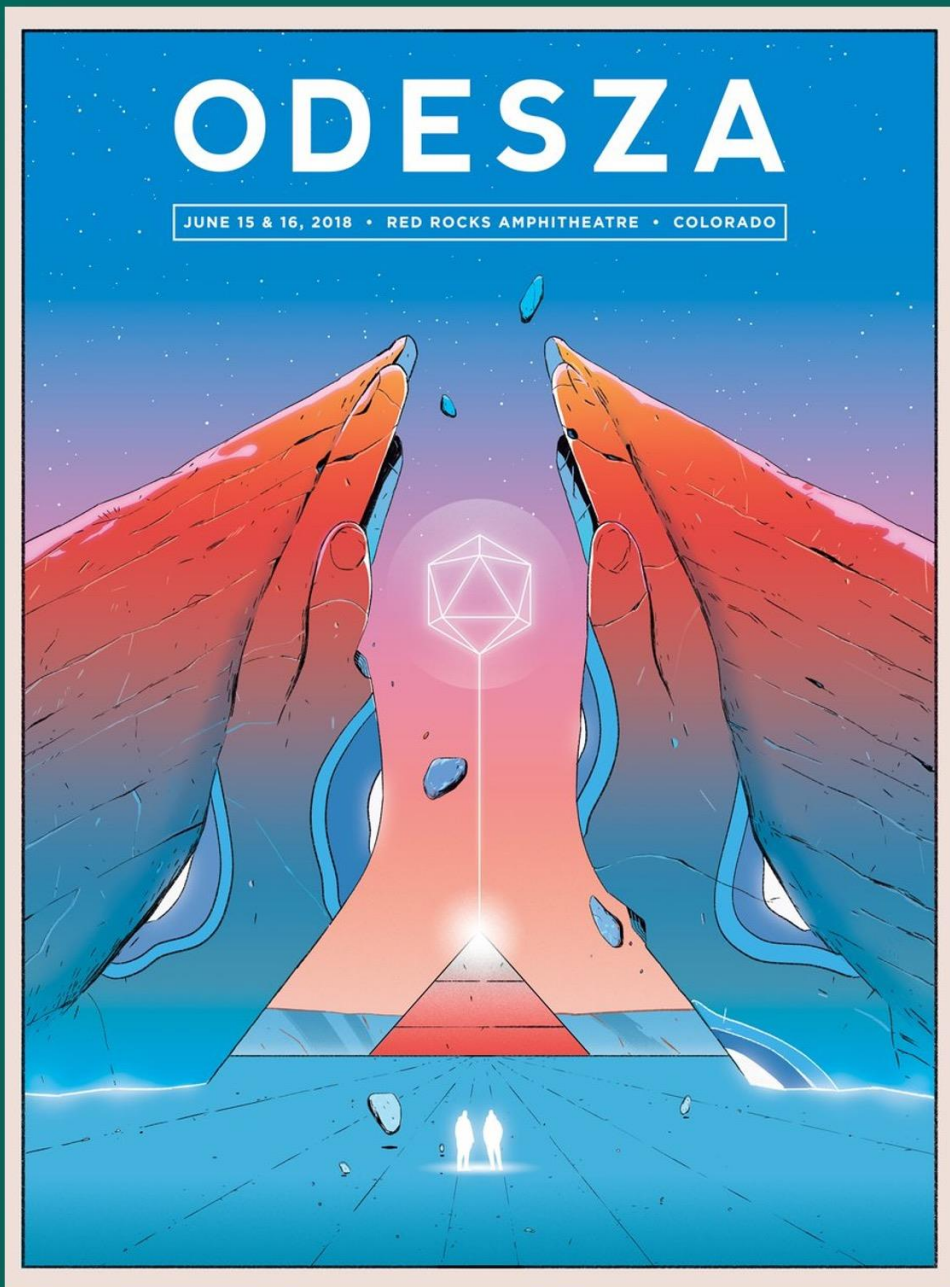
BALANCE Symmetric feels formal; Asymmetric feels relaxed.

MOVEMENT The path the eye travels through the layout.

RHYTHM Proportion & repetition, thirds and 2:3 ratios

PERSPECTIVE How things look relative to one another, depth

UNITY Headline, type and graphics match and share a pattern



IN THE CHAT

What design
ELEMENTS and
PRINCIPLES can you
identify in this design?



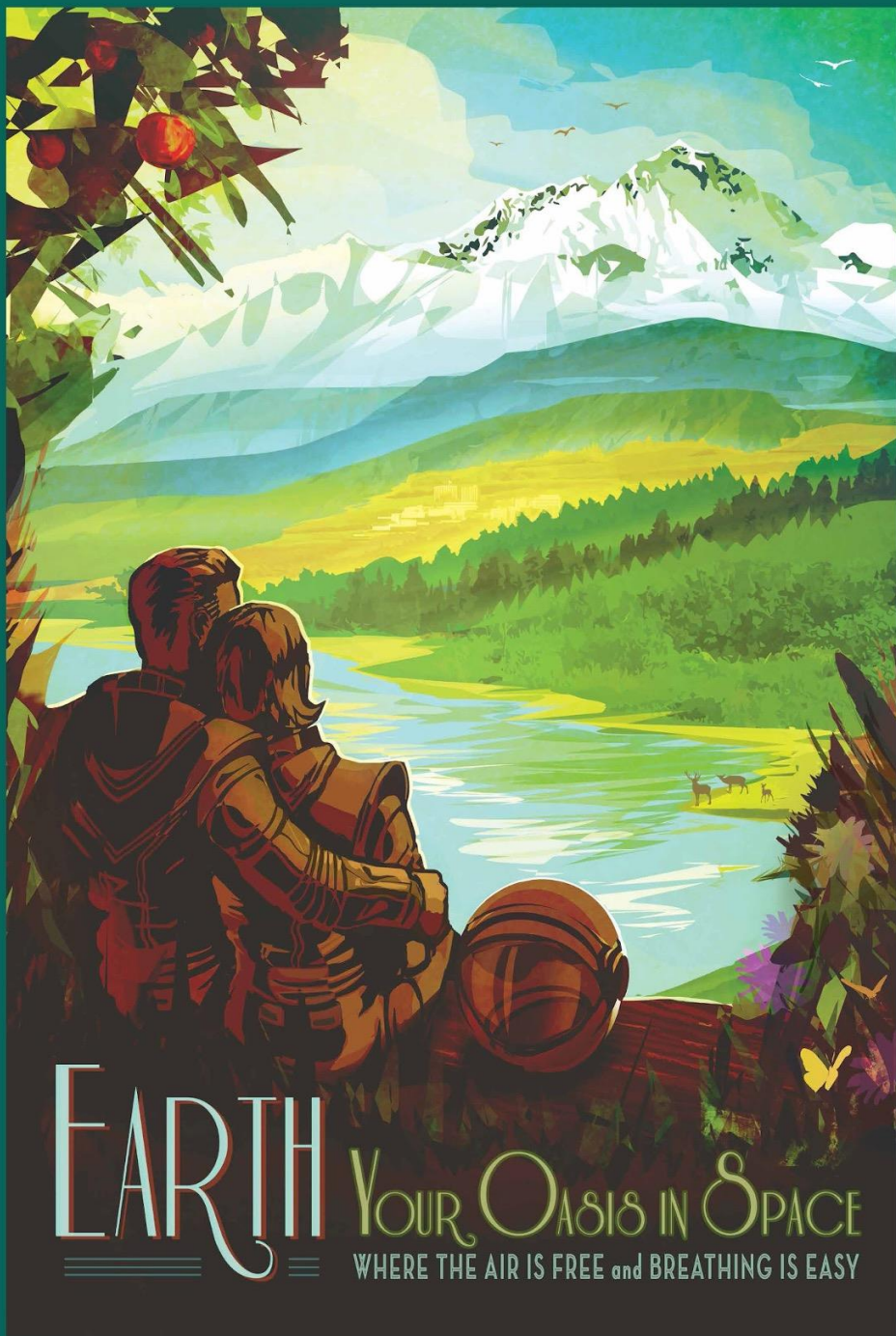
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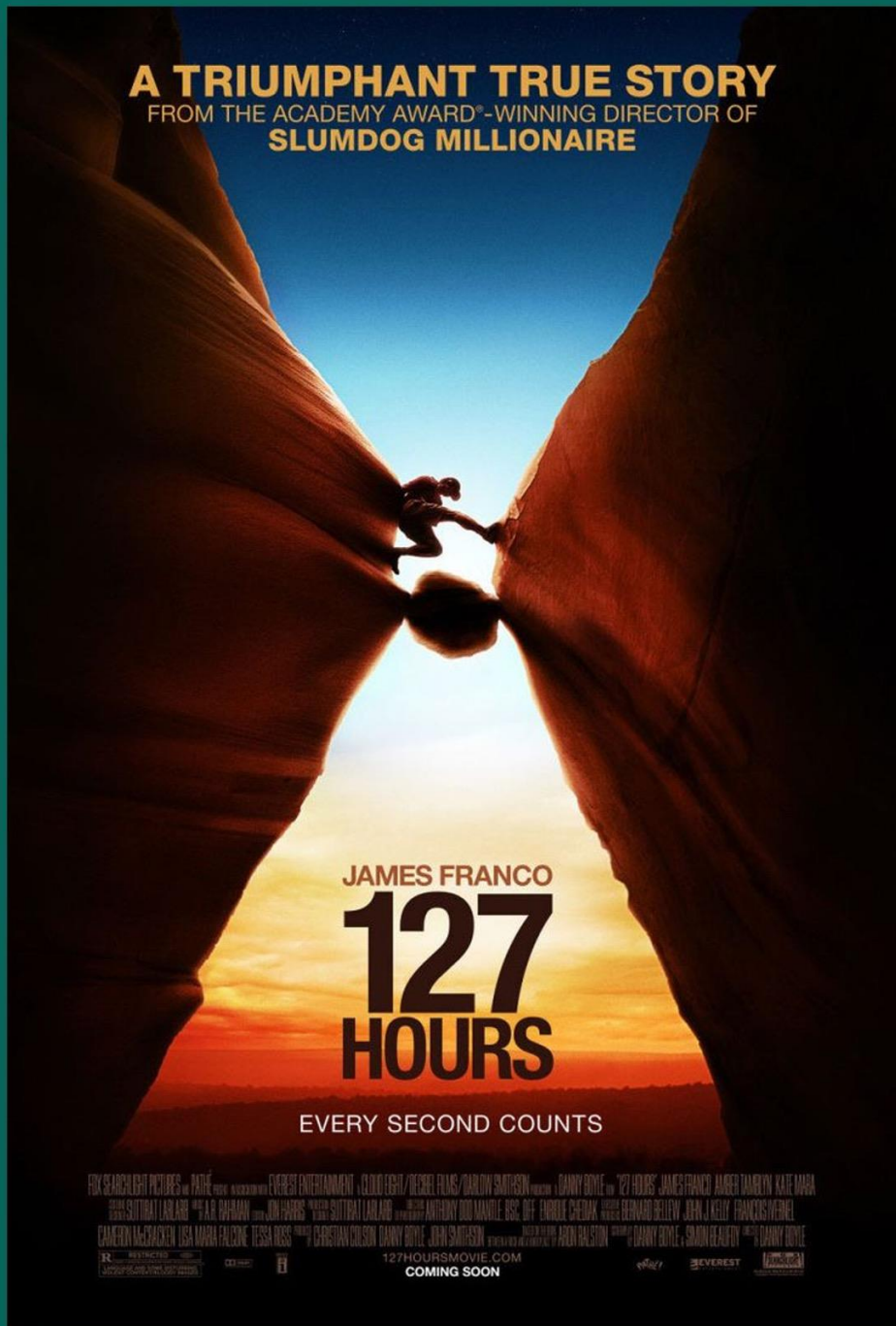
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DRAWDOWN

100 SOLUTIONS TO REVERSE GLOBAL WARMING BY 2050

RANKED BY IMPACT

drawdown.org



IN THE CHAT

What design
ELEMENTS and
PRINCIPLES can you
identify in this design?

LAYOUT TRAPS TO AVOID

Blinking features

Warped photos

Bulky borders

Cheated margins

Centering everything

4 corners & clutter

Trapped negative space

Busy backgrounds

Tacky type emphasis

Bad bullets

Widows & orphans

Justified blocks



Ugly design isn't
just bad taste.

It's poor
communication.

Horrible clip-art snatched from web

Title too small and in awful font

Afternoon Tea Concert

by Total Voice Contemporary Choir

Come to a concert of rock and pop songs performed by the Total Voice Contemporary Choir of Milford on Sea

All text centred

All welcome. Afternoon tea included.

14th of April at 2.30pm at the Shorefield Country Park in Milford on Sea

Tickets £5 from Food Week ticket office

Mix of clashing typefaces

Renowned local choir Total Voice will perform contemporary music in a relaxed and friendly setting!

Image interferes with text

Too much space at the bottom, not enough at the top



!!! ATTENTION !!!

Recycling Awareness Week

Did you know that recycling is REALLY IMPORTANT for the environment and for our future and for the planet??? Please learn more about recycling and how YOU can help! There are **MANY EVENTS** this week!!

Questions? Email blah@xyu.edu or call 867-5309 or visit our website or stop by the office



IN THE CHAT

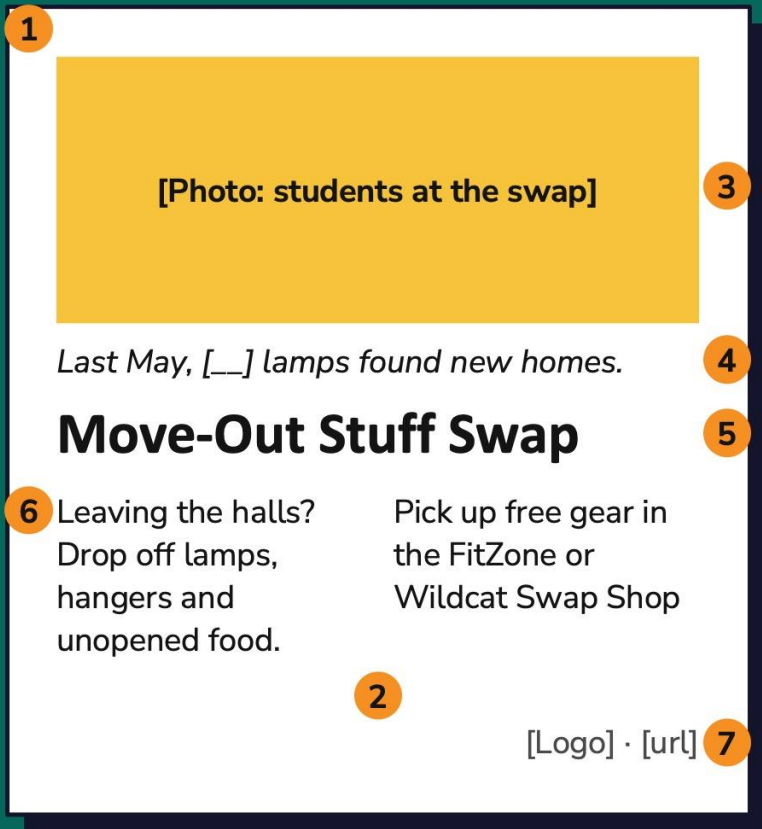
What are the problems here?

LAYOUT THAT WORKS

EVERY SINGLE TIME



THE WORKS-EVERY-TIME LAYOUT



1 MARGINS

Generous on all four sides, half an inch or more

2 COLUMNS

Two for small pieces; keep the alley between them even

3 VISUAL

Put your best visual at the top

4 CUTLINE

Flush left, directly under the photo, in the text font

5 HEADLINE

Big, on one line if you can; second font is OK here

6 COPY

Flows straight from the headline; short paragraphs, never justified – always LEFT aligned

7 TAGS

Logo, URL, slogan: lower right corner, small but legible

TYPE & COLOR

FEWER CHOICES, BETTER RESULTS

Unplug.

Mini-fridge, TV, chargers. Friday by 5 p.m.

Two fonts: headline + body text

Build contrast with size & weight

Left-align. Never justify.

No all-caps or script paragraphs

Light on White

Fails contrast

DARK ON LIGHT

Passes contrast

Start with your campus brand palette

Add one accent for the focal point

Body text needs 4.5 : 1 contrast (web content accessibility guidelines – WCAG)

SELECTING IMAGES

SHOW PEOPLE DOING “THE THING”

AVOID

Hands cradling a globe

Melting ice & stranded polar bears

Generic stock-photo smiles

Clip-art recycling arrows



USE



Your students, staff & buildings

The behavior in action

One strong photo, not a collage

Illustration (if no photo)

MEDIUM MATTERS

EACH PLATFORM HAS A DIFFERENT JOB



PLATFORM	ITS JOB	DESIGN MOVE
Social media	Stop the scroll	One image, a few words on it, details in caption
Email & newsletters	Explain and link	Headline, one image, one button
Digital signage	Read in a glance	Headline & visual only, readable from distance
Bins & signs at decision point	Guide the choice	Pictures of real items, words with icons, no paragraphs
Website & reports	Tell the full story	Scannable headings, one takeaway per chart
Tabling & print	Start a conversation	Big headline, QR code to the details

DESIGN CHALLENGE

YOUR HOMEWORK
DUE NOVEMBER 6



DESIGN CHALLENGE

CHOOSE YOUR SCENARIO & SOFTWARE

Make one social media post or flyer for one campus audience



MUST INCLUDE

- ☐ Headline (under 8 words)
- ☐ One action: verb + place + time
- ☐ One focal visual
- ☐ A social norm or benefit line
- ☐ Two fonts (max)
- ☐ Three theme colors
- ☐ Tags in lower right

FIVE-SECOND TEST:

CHECK YOUR OWN WORK – DOES IT PASS?

- ❑ One action: verb + place + time
- ❑ One focal point
- ❑ Two fonts, three theme colors
- ❑ Contrast that passes 4.5:1
- ❑ Designed for the medium/platform
- ❑ A norm or benefit, not a scold
- ❑ Real people, real places



THANK YOU!

Jes Thompson
jessitho@nmu.edu

