

Chapter 6

In a Nutshell

Design is the integration of words and visuals in ways that help readers achieve their goals for using the document. The key idea is to establish a *visual logic*—the same kind of information always looks the same way and appears in the same place (page numbers are italicized in the upper-right corner, for instance).

Visual logic establishes your credibility, because you demonstrate that you know enough about the topic and about communicating to be consistent. Visual logic helps your audience to see the “big picture” of your topic, and as a result they grasp your point more quickly. Both visual and textual features establish visual logic. Two key visual features are *heads* and *chunks*.

Heads tell the content of the next section. Heads should inform and attract attention—use a phrase or ask a question; avoid cryptic, one-word heads.

Heads have levels—one or two are most common. The levels should look different and make their contents helpful for readers.

Chunks are any pieces of text surrounded by white space. Typically, readers find a topic presented

in several smaller chunks easier to grasp than one longer chunk.

A key textual feature is *highlighting*—changing the look of the text to draw attention, for instance, by using boldface or italics. In addition, *standardization* and *consistency* are effective ways to orchestrate textual design. Standardization means that each feature, such as boldface, has a purpose. For instance, in instructions for using software, boldfaced words could indicate which menu to access. Consistency means that all items with a similar purpose have a similar design; for instance, all level-one heads in the document have the same look (e.g., Arial 12 point boldfaced).

A *style sheet* and *template* are effective methods to plan design. A style sheet lists the specifications of the design (e.g., “All level-one heads appear in all caps, Arial 12 pt., flush left”). A template is a representative page that indicates the correct look of each item of design.