Balance

For most of our reading our eyes and minds are most comfortable with evenly balanced layouts where the graphics don't overpower the text and the page doesn't seem to tilt to one side or the other.

Primarily there are three types of balance in page design: symmetrical, asymmetrical, and radial. Additionally, we'll discuss the rule of thirds, the visual center of a page, and the use of grids as we examine each type of balance and how to achieve it.
**Symmetrical Balance**

- Symmetrical balance is easiest to see in perfectly centered compositions or those with mirror images.
- In a design with only two elements they would be almost identical or have nearly the same visual mass. If one element was replaced by a smaller one, it could throw the page out of symmetry.
- To reclaim perfect symmetrical balance you might need to add or subtract or rearrange the elements so that they evenly divide the page such as a centered alignment or one that divides the page in even segments (halves, quarters, etc.).

![Symmetrical Balance Diagram](image)

- When a design can be centered or evenly divided both vertically and horizontally it has the most complete symmetry possible.
- Symmetrical balance generally lends itself to more formal, orderly layouts. They often convey a sense of tranquility or familiarity or elegance or serious contemplation.
Vertical Symmetry —— Each vertical half (excluding text) of the brochure is a near mirror image of the other, emphasized with the reverse in colors. Even the perfectly centered text picks up the color reversal here. This symmetrically balanced layout is very formal in appearance.
Vertical & Horizontal Symmetry —— This poster design divides the page into four equal sections. Although not mirror images the overall look is very symmetrical and balanced. Each of the line drawings are more or less centered within their section. The graphic (text and image) in the upper center of the page is the focal point tying all the parts together.
Asymmetrical Balance

- Asymmetrical design is typically off-center or created with an odd or mismatched number of disparate elements. You can still have an interesting design without perfect symmetry.
- With asymmetrical balance you are evenly distributing the elements within the format which may mean balancing a large photo with several small graphics.
- Or, you can create tension by intentionally avoiding balance.

Asymmetrical layouts are generally more dynamic and by intentionally ignoring balance the designer can create tension, express movement, or convey a mood such as anger, excitement, joy, or casual amusement.
**Asymmetrical/All Over Balance** —— It can't be neatly sliced in half like a symmetrical design but most of the elements have only small differences in shape and mass. This page achieves an overall balance by use of an underlying grid that spreads the many pieces out over the entire page, more or less evenly.

**Asymmetrical Tension** —— Like a wild, unruly garden, the elements of this brochure cover are barely contained on the page. The plants spring up primarily along the left side but with a few stems escaping and arching across the page. The text, although randomly placed, follows the lines of the plants keeping them anchored to the overall design. The off-balance design creates a sense of freedom and movement.
Radial Balance

- With radial designs the elements radiate from or swirl around in a circular or spiral path.
- Parts of the design must still be arranged so that they are balanced across the width and length of the page unless you're intentionally aiming for a lack of balance.
Radial —— Here we have an example of radial balance in a rectangular space. The year represents the center of the design with the subtle color sections radiating from that center. The calendar month grids and their corresponding astrological symbols are arrayed around the year in a circular fashion.

Radial —— Colors and text radiate out from the apple in the middle of this CD cover design. The effect is almost one of spiralling down into the center of the apple. The apple itself looks nearly symmetrical but the curving text and the outlines edging off the page to the top and right throws it all slightly off-balance.
Rule of Thirds

- The rule of thirds says that most designs can be made more interesting by visually dividing the page into thirds vertically or horizontally and placing our most important elements within those thirds.

Even this unbalanced asymmetrical design uses the rule of thirds with most of the 'action' in the upper 2/3rd of the layout.
**Visual Center**

Placing important elements or the focal point of the design within the visual center of a piece is another design trick. The visual center is slightly to the right of and above the actual center of a page.

Below: In this calendar, the months emanate from the year located front and (visual) center.