

## Using Typography and Design Clues

*Good typography and design in a textbook aren't just decorations to make it look pretty. They are devices authors use to make information more accessible to the reader. Typography and design elements visually organize information with a structure that makes the hierarchy of ideas and the relationships among those ideas obvious. As a reader, you can use typographic and design cues to help you accurately gather information from the printed page.*

### Type Size, Style, and Placement of Headings

Although every textbook has its own way of organizing information for the reader, the size, style, and placement of headings and subheadings is always a primary clue. Typically, authors alert the reader to different levels of information with techniques such as varying sizes of type—the more important or broad the idea, the larger the type; styles such as color, bold, italic, and underlining; all capital letters; and different amounts of indentation from the margin—similar to an outlining technique.

Analyze this example, then discover the organization scheme for your textbooks.

#### WHAT DO I DO ONCE I START TO READ?

Did you ever fall asleep while playing tennis or when you were watching your favorite television show? Probably not. How about while you were reading? Probably. What makes the difference? Your active involvement.

Active physical and mental involvement keeps you interested and committed. When you become passive, you rapidly lose interest and drift away. So, to read successfully you must be an active, thinking participant in the process.

#### How Can I Check My Comprehension As I Read?

As an active reader, you use comprehension monitoring, or checking, strategies to make certain that your understanding is satisfactory for your purpose. Comprehension monitoring strategies include:

***Restating ideas in your own words.*** At the end of a sentence or paragraph, rephrase the idea in your own words.

***Forming mental pictures.*** Stop and build a mental picture of what the author is describing.

### Type Styles within the Paragraphs

Authors use different type styles within their text material to make sure you stop and analyze important words and ideas. Boldface and italics are the most common type styles used for emphasis within paragraphs, and you may also see words underlined.

You can be sure, however, that an author will use his or her method of emphasis consistently. So again, your job is to analyze each of your textbooks,

discover their patterns, and use those clues to improve your understanding of the information you need.

*See the below for more typography and design clues.*

## White Space

White space on a page isn't an accident; it always serves a purpose. Authors use white space to help direct the reader's eye and to provide rest stops. For example, authors keep the amount of space between lines and paragraphs on the same idea a consistent amount, but generally increase the amount between differing concepts. Analyze how your text authors' use of white space can help you understand their ideas.

## Graphic Elements

Authors use a variety of graphic elements to cue you to different types of information. From simple single-line boxes around text, to bullets (•) in front of text, to a dingbat (◊) marking the end of a text section, all graphic elements are designed to alert you to a specific kind or level of information. Often authors combine several design elements to more clearly communicate their message. In this example, notice how white space and the graphic dingbat » combine to highlight important information.

Inferring a writer's purpose is not just your opinion or a wild guess. An inference is your best reasoned conclusion based on the information you are given. Valid inferences follow logically from the information the author provides. As semanticist S. I. Hayakawa says in *Language in Thought and Action*, an inference is "A statement about the unknown made on the basis of the known."

Knowing an author's reason for writing will help you understand what the author writes. Four primary purposes for writing prose—writing other than poetry—are:

»*Exposition*: the author wants to explain, set forth, or make clear facts, events, and ideas

»*Description*: the author wants to paint a picture in words

»*Narration*: the author wants to tell a story

»*Persuasion/Argumentation*: the author wants to influence you—by engaging your emotions or by presenting logical arguments—to believe or feel a certain way or take a particular action

But, just as in your own writing, authors often combine two or more purposes to clearly communicate their message. For example, an author may need to tell a story's sequence of events with vivid descriptions (but the primary purpose is still to tell you the story) or perhaps persuade you to take some action by giving you facts about the consequences of inaction (but the primary purpose is still to persuade you to act).

## Other Factors Impacting Comprehension

**Line length:** Although you cannot physically change the length of the lines of type in the books you read, you can try to alleviate potential problems. Long lines of type are difficult to follow and may cause you to lose your place. To keep on track and to keep your eyes moving ahead, try sliding an index card over the line you have just finished. **Capital letters:** The shape of words is a major clue in most reading. Text printed in all capital letters form uniform blockish shapes that are difficult to distinguish from one another. You will probably need to slow down when you have to read all text in all capitals. In fact, in the example on the reverse side, notice how you must slow down to read the subhead that is in all capital letters.