Ellen Lupton:
Grids

Grid

GOLDEN SECTION

SINGLE-COLUMN GRID

MULTICOLUMN GRID

MODULAR GRID

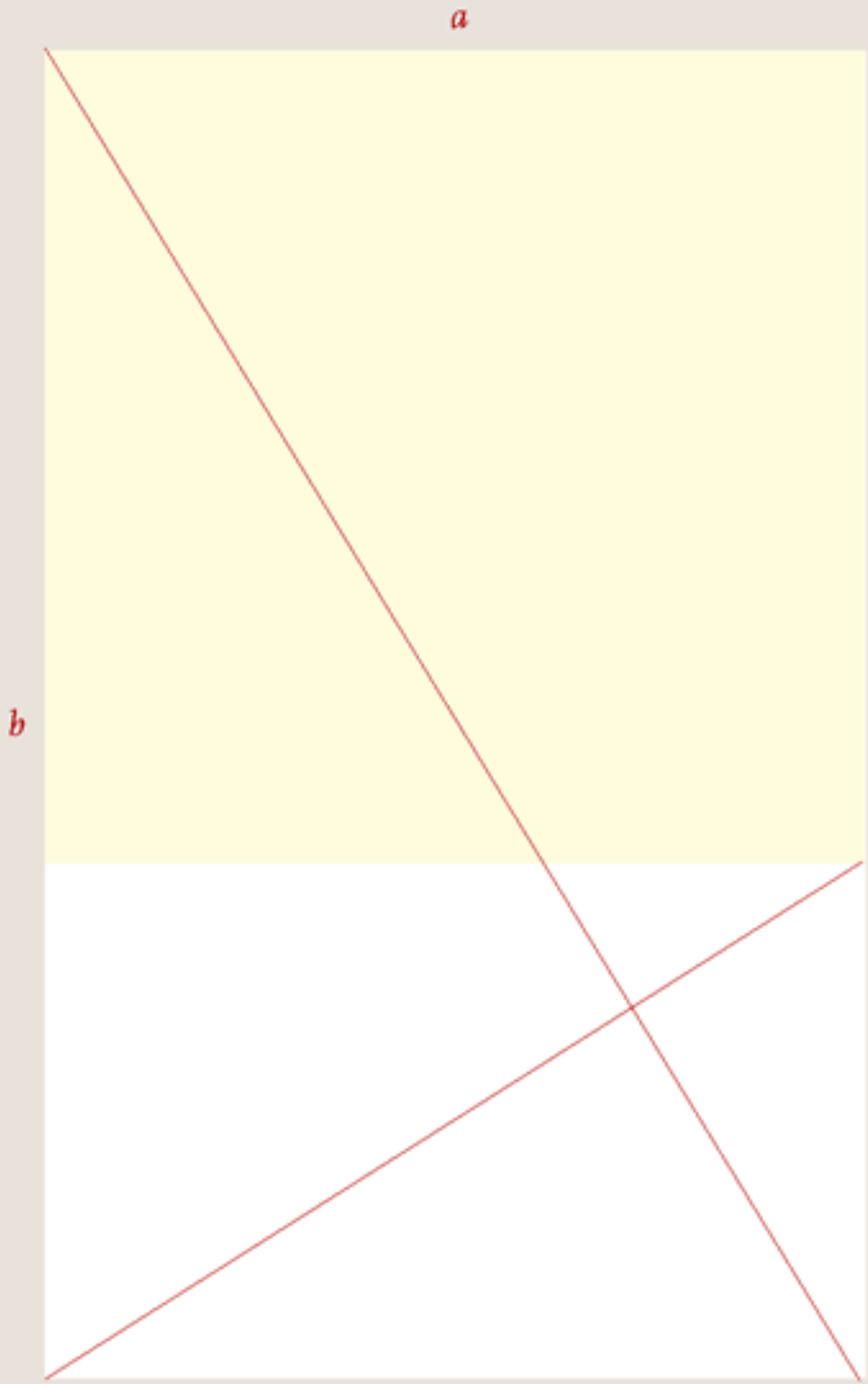
Project: Modular Grid

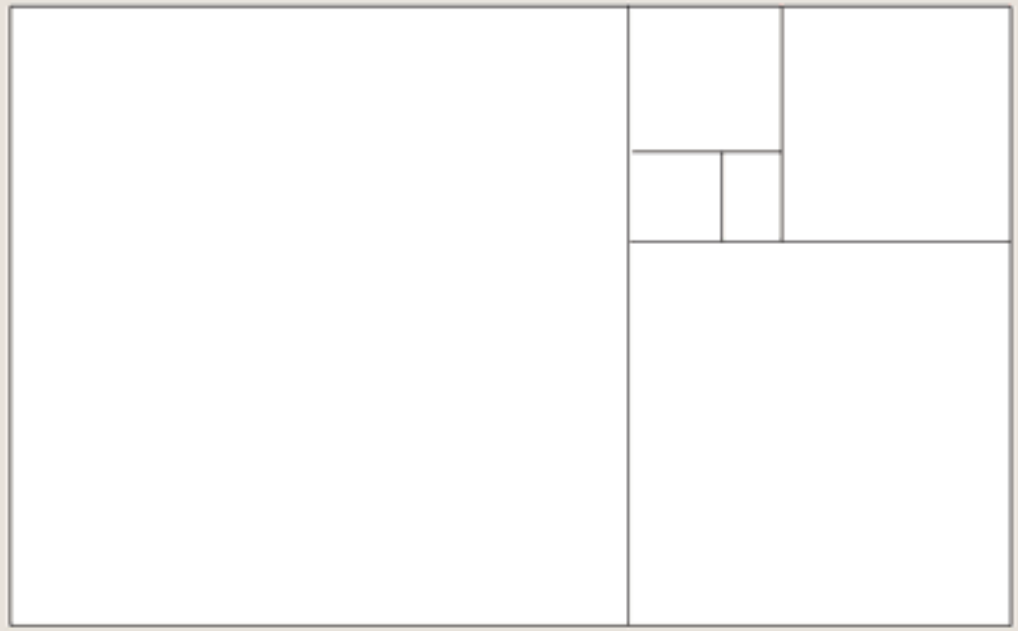
Grid

Golden Section

No book about typography would be complete without a discussion of the *golden section*, a ratio (relationship between two numbers) that has been used in Western art and architecture for more than two thousand years. The formula for the golden section is $a : b = b : (a+b)$. This means that the smaller of two elements (such as the shorter side of a rectangle) relates to the larger element in the same way that the larger element relates to the two parts combined. In other words, side a is to side b as side b is to the sum of both sides. Expressed numerically, the ratio for the golden section is 1 : 1.618.

Some graphic designers are fascinated with the golden section and use it to create various grids and page formats-indeed, entire books have been written on the subject. Other designers believe that the golden section is no more valid as a basis for deriving sizes and proportions than other methods, such as beginning from standard industrial paper sizes, or dividing surfaces into halves or squares, or simply picking whole-number page formats and making logical divisions within them.





The golden section, which appears in nature as well as in art and design, has many surprising properties. For example, when you remove a square from a golden rectangle, the remainder is another golden rectangle, a process that can be infinitely repeated to create a spiral.

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Golden rectangle of text on
8.5 x 11-inch page (U.S. standard)

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Golden rectangle of text on
A4 page (European standard, 210 x 297 mm)

Single-Column Grid

Every time you open a new document in a page layout program, you are prompted to create a grid. The simplest grid consists of a single column of text surounded by margins. By asking for page dimensions and margin widths from the outset, layout programs encourage you to design your page from the *outside in*. (The text column is the space left over when the margins have been subtracted.) Alternatively, you can design your page from the inside out, by setting your margins to zero and then positioning guidelines and text boxes on a blank page. This allows you to experiment with the margins and columns rather than making a commitment as soon as you open a new document. You can add guidelines to a master page after they meet your satisfaction.

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This standard, 8.5 x 11-inch page has even margins all the way around. It is a highly economical, but not very interesting, design.

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This page is an inch shorter than a standard U.S. letter. The text block is a square, leaving margins of varying dimension.

Books and magazines should be designed *as spreads* (facing pages). The two-page spread, rather than the individual page, is the main unit of design. Left and right margins become inside and outside margins. Page layout programs assume that the inside margins are the same on both the left- and right-hand pages, yielding a symmetrical, mirror-image spread. You are free, however, to set your own margins and create an asymmetrical spread.

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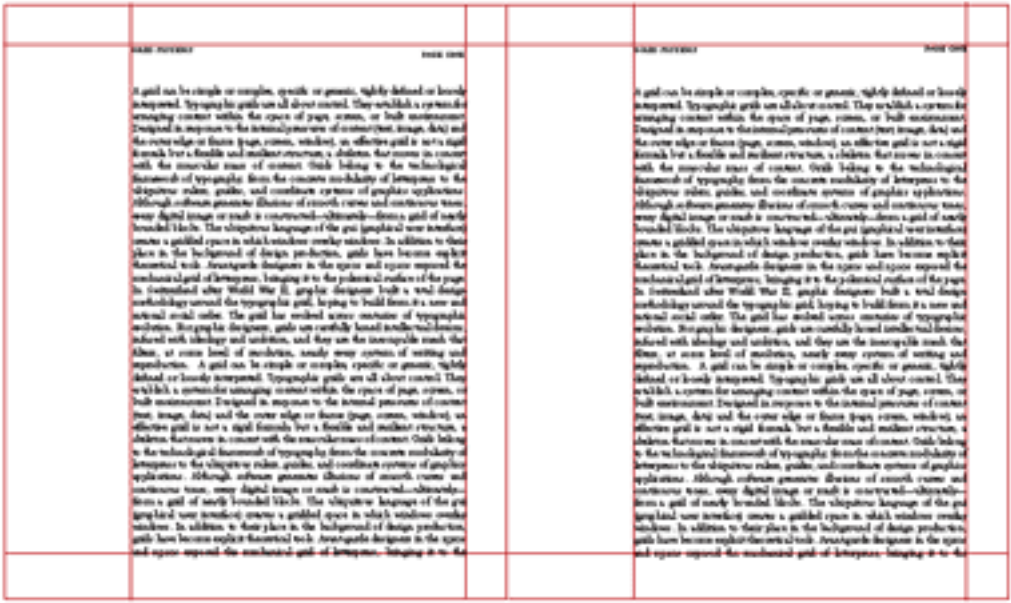
In this symmetrical double-page spread, the inside margins are wider than the outside margins, creating more open space at the spine of the book.

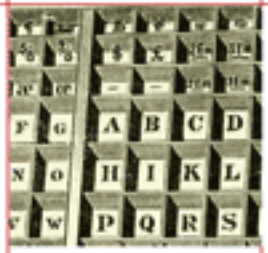


In this asymmetrical layout, the left margin is always wider than the right margin, whether it appears along the inside or outside edge of the page.

Multicolumn Grid

While single-column grids work well for simple documents, multicolumn grids provide flexible formats for publications that have a complex hierarchy or that integrate text and illustrations. The more columns you create, the more flexible your grid becomes. You can use the grid to articulate the hierarchy of the publication by creating zones for different kinds of content. A text or image can occupy a single column or it can span several. Not all the space has to be filled.

Grid systems



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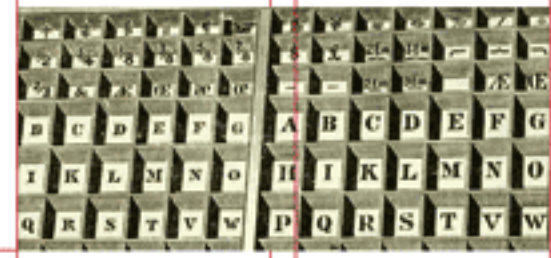

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In this variation, images and text share column space.

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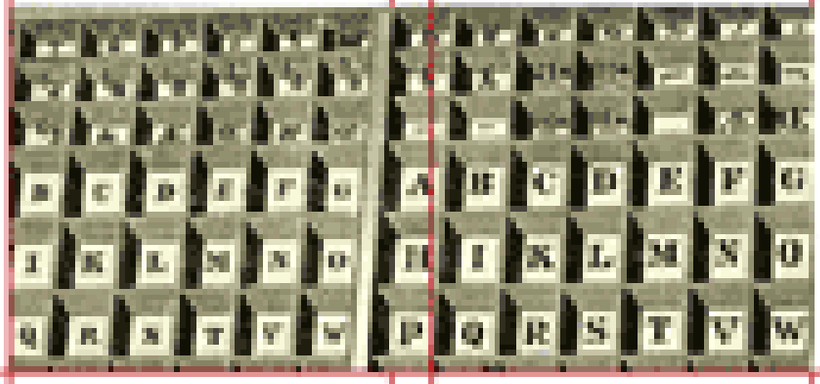

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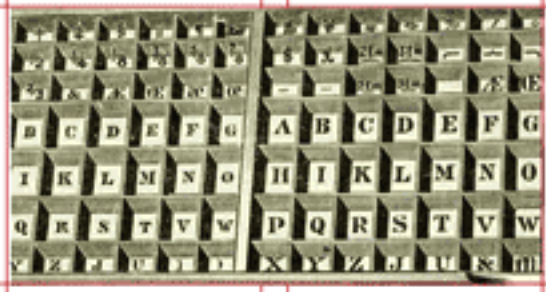
Elements of varying width are staggered within the structure of the grid.

Designing with a Hang Line

In addition to creating vertical zones with the columns of the grid, you can also divide the page horizontally. For example, an area across the top can be reserved for images and captions, and body text can "hang" from a common line. Graphic designers call this a *hang line*. In architecture, a horizontal reference point like this is known as a *datum*.

Grid systems



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A horizontal band divides a text zone from an image zone. Elements gravitate toward this line, which provides an internal structure for the page.

Modular Grid

A *modular grid* has consistent horizontal divisions from top to bottom in addition to vertical divisions from left to right. These modules govern the placement and cropping of pictures as well as text. In the 1950s and 1960s, Swiss graphic designers including Gerstner, Ruder, and Müller-Brockmann devised modular grid systems like the one shown here.

Grid systems

A grid can be simple or complex, specific or generic, tightly defined or loosely interpreted. Typographic grids are all about control. They establish a system for arranging content within the space of page, screen, or built environment. Designed in response to the internal pressures of content (text, image, data) and the outer edge or frame (page, screen, window), an effective grid is not a rigid formula but a flexible and resilient structure, a skeleton that moves in concert with the muscular mass of content. Grids belong to the technological framework of typography, from the concrete modularity of letterpress to the ubiquitous rulers, guides, and coordinate systems of graphics applications. Although software generates illusions of smooth curves and continuous tones, every digital image or mark is constructed—ultimately—from a grid of neatly bounded blocks. The ubiquitous language of the gui (graphical user interface) creates a gridded space in which windows overlay windows. In addition to their place in the background of design production, grids have become explicit theoretical tools. Avant-garde designers in the 1910s and 1920s exposed the grid of letterpress, bringing it to the polemical surface of the page. In Switzerland after World War II, graphic designers built a total design methodology around the typographic grid, hoping to build from it a new and rational social order. The grid has evolved across centuries of typographic evolution. For graphic designers, grids are carefully honed intellectual devices, infused with ideology and ambition, and they are the inescapable mesh that filters, at some level of resolution, nearly every system of writing and

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This modular grid has four columns and four rows. An image or a text block can occupy one or more modules.

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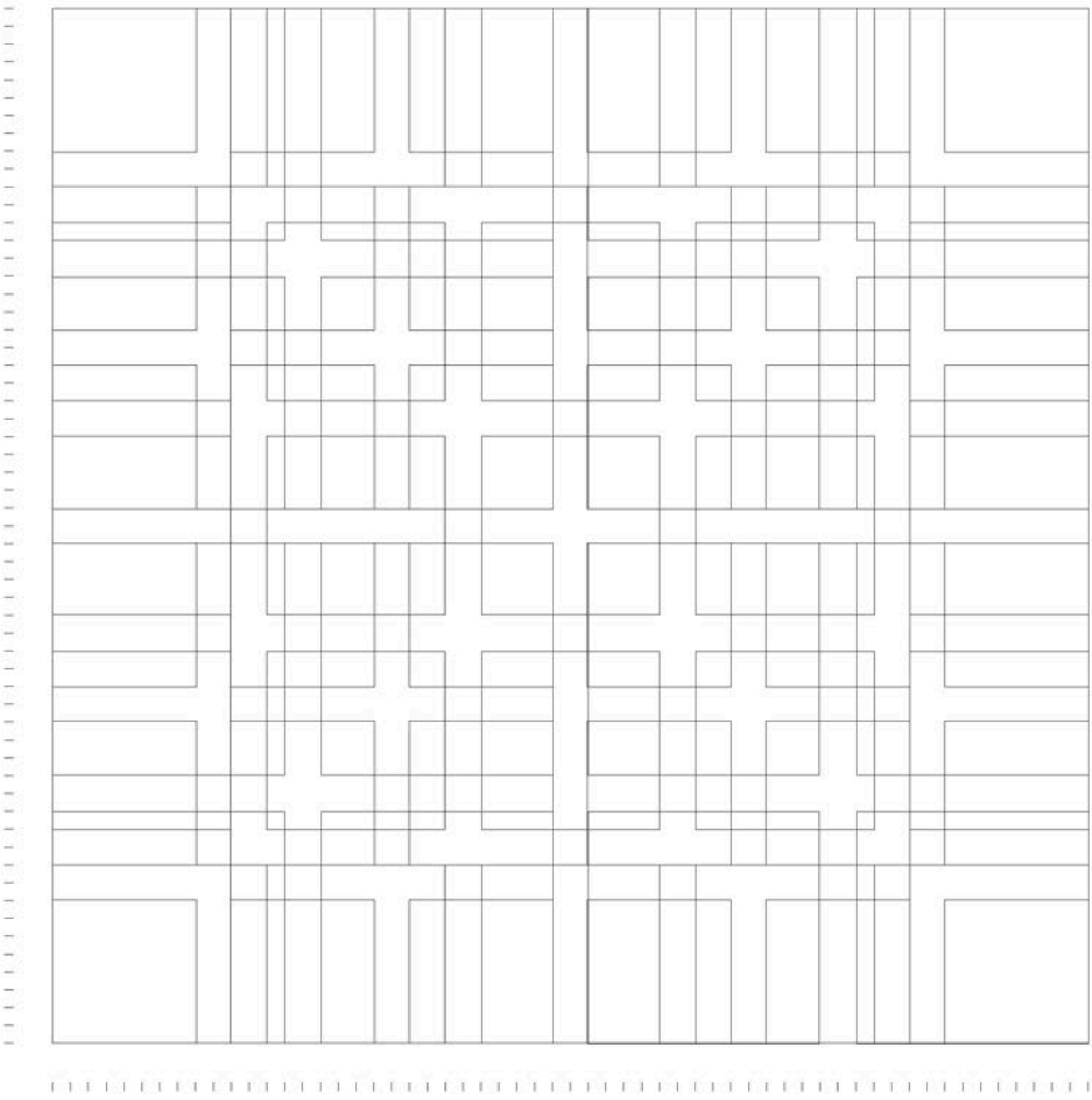
Endless variations are possible.

Modular Grid: Karl Gerstner

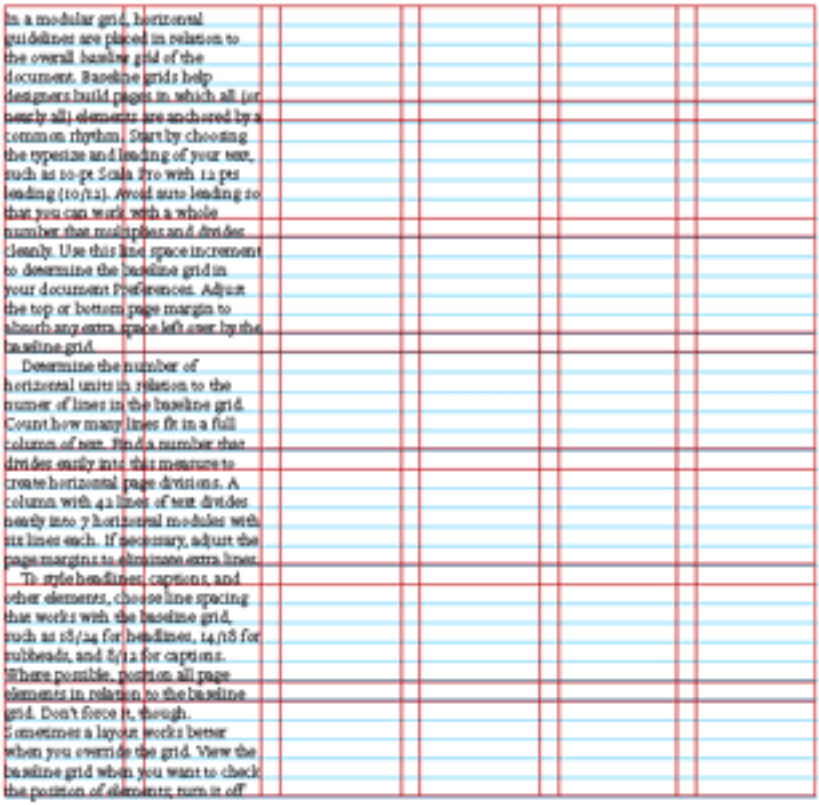


Baseline Grid

Modular grids are created by positioning horizontal guidelines in relation to a *baseline grid* that governs the whole document. Baseline grids serve to anchor all (or nearly all) layout elements to a common rhythm. Create a baseline grid by choosing the typesize and leading of your text, such as 10-pt Scala Pro with 12 pts leading (10/12). Avoid auto leading so that you can work with whole numbers that multiply and divide cleanly. Use this line space increment to set the baseline grid in your document preferences.

Adjust the top or bottom page margin to absorb any space left over by the baseline grid. Determine the number of horizontal page units in relation to the numer of lines in your baseline grid. Count how many lines fit in a full column of text and then choose a number that divides evenly into the line count to create horizontal page divisions. A column with forty-two lines of text divides neatly into seven horizontal modules with six lines each. If your line count is not neatly divisible, adjust the top and/or bottom page margins to absorb the leftover lines.

To style headlines, captions, and other elements, choose line spacing that works with the baseline grid, such as 18/24 for headlines, 14/18 for subheads, and 8/12 for captions. Web designers can choose similar increments (line height in CSS) to create style sheets with neatly coordinated baselines. Where possible, position all page elements in relation to the baseline grid. Don't force it, though. Sometimes a layout works better when you override the grid. View the baseline grid when you want to check the position of elements; turn it off when it's distracting.



BASELINE GRID *In InDesign, set the baseline grid in the Preferences>Grids and Guides window. Create horizontal divisions in Layout>Create Guides. Make the horizontal guides correspond to the baselines of the page's primary text by choosing a number of rows that divides evenly into the number of lines in a full column of text.*

MAIN HEADLINE
32/48 pt Scala Sans Pro Bold

SUBHEAD
18/24 Scala Sans Pro Italic

baseline grids

create a common rhythm

Captions and other details are styled to coordinate with the dominant baseline grid.

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CAPTION
9/12 Scala Sans Pro Italic

PRIMARY TEXT:
10/12 Scala Pro.
This measure determines the baseline grid.

NERD ALERT: Working in InDesign, you can make your text frames automatically align with the baseline grid. Go to Object>Text Frame Options>Baseline Options and choose Leading. If your leading (line spacing) is 12 pts, the first baseline will fall 12 pts from the top of the text frame.

BETTER TEXT FRAMES *The first line of the text starts 12 pts from the top of the text frame. In the default setting, the first line is positioned according to the cap height.*

Project: Modular Grid

Use a modular grid to arrange a text in as many ways as you can. By employing just one size of type and flush left alignment only, you will construct a typographic hierarchy exclusively by means of spatial arrangement. To make the project more complex, begin adding variables such as weight, size, and alignment.

Common typographic disorders

Various forms of dysfunction appear among populations exposed to typography for long periods of time. Listed here are a number of frequently observed afflictions.

typophilia

An excessive attachment to and fascination with the shape of letters, often to the exclusion of other interests and object choices. Typophiliacs usually die penniless and alone.

typophobia

The irrational dislike of letterforms, often marked by a preference for icons, dingbats, and—in fatal cases—bullets and daggers. The fears of the typophobe can often be quieted (but not cured) by steady doses of Helvetica and Times Roman.

typochondria

A persistent anxiety that one has selected the wrong typeface. This condition is often paired with OKD (optical kerning disorder), the need to constantly adjust and readjust the spaces between letters.

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