

## Notes on (re)design

Composing a manuscript has evolved from the labor of monks, through the revolution of casts on a typesetter's composing stick, to deliciously clacking typewriters, and into WYSIWYG software. Sometimes, the point is just to get words on a page for posterity or communication, but we know that documents are typically *formatted*. A critical checklist will be spaced, clean, and scannable. An old-timey letterpress menu in a faux-faded historical typeface evokes a 19th century inn. A ransom note's cut-and-paste letters allude to the frazzled criminal mind, and the ubiquitous chalk craft beer menu wants to entice you into chewing through a vile local guava milk stout. Respectfully, landlord, I'll have the pilsner.

When submitting to this or about any other journal, the convention is 12-point-Times-New-Roman-double-spaced-one-inch-margins. Easy, standardized, accessible. So why don't we just stay with that for publication? After all, we sanctimoniously muse, it is the integrity of "the science" that wins the day, so surely fussing about columns and fonts and headers is garnish in the greater scheme (and isn't that what they mean by "article processing" when they're asking for \$3000 for open access)? These submission default settings are geared toward easy review, and harken back to typewriter settings, when the real-world page would be double-spaced to allow for copyediting annotations and text revisions. They are not geared towards readability or usability. The 100-character line length makes tracking subsequent lines just a bit more challenging (about 60 characters is best — when was the last time you read a novel on 8.5x11" paper?) and the surfeit of pages makes scanning and searching very difficult, while blowing up the cost of printing. It also just doesn't look great; it lacks in aesthetics and in the imprimatur of professionalism we expect from a document that has run the gauntlet of peer review and publication.

Welcome to the revised layout for *CUAJ*! The page you are looking at looks very different from last month's issue, and every issue of the past 15 years. In December 2020, we introduced a new

cover, with stronger titles and blown-up images. Within, though, remained the same page-packing columns, gradient headers that hid title text and a body font with subtly uneven weighting that felt past its best-before date. Not ugly, not unwieldy to the reader, just a bit busy, a bit heavy, and a bit dusty. I'll explain some details of the decisions behind these changes, but it begs a short riff on design (which to me means visual identity, usability, and aesthetics), how it makes the reader's experience better, and may mean better knowledge translation from these pages.

It's easy to think of design and aesthetic appeal as synonymous, but elegance or attractiveness are just a subset of overall design. We want things to be visually appealing, but we're not making movie posters, so usability must remain at the fore. Aesthetics are also very personal. The same consciously designed page or artifact's beauty is in the eye of the beholder. A teapot must have a handle and a spout, but a sleek matte Japanese kettle has a different audience than an ornate Victorian ceramic one, and a calligraphic scroll is very different from your toaster's instruction manual, though both serve reading. Your walls may feature prints of geometric muted colour blocks, pastoral photography, or cursive "Live, Laugh, Love" prints. I'm pretty sure your kitchen says "Gather" on the wall over the table, doesn't it? Bless. To this end, we've cleaned up the pages of *CUAJ* with less ornate headers, a few blocks of color for visual interest, and a new (to us) typeface. We chose Gill Sans, a 1920s British design still prominent today. It feels modern and clean despite its age and familiarity, with a uniform width and slightly shorter "x-height" (the size of the body of lower case) that are smart and legible. We experimented with left-justified text in the columns, in the service of maximizing white space, but felt the blocks of full-justified text were much more pleasant to look at.

While attractiveness opens up its world of tweaks and choices, pages achieve aesthetic satisfaction *and* usefulness via some universal principles. Usability of text means the ability to navigate easily, read without strain, and differentiate ele-

Michael  
Leveridge

Editor-in-Chief

Cite as: Leveridge M.  
Notes on (re)design.  
*Can Urol Assoc J*  
2023;17(2):7-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5489/cuaj.8270>

ments of the manuscript instantly. A helpful articulation of these principles comes from designer and author Robin Williams.<sup>1</sup> To avoid crappy design, think CRAP: contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity. Contrast in our case means differentiating titles, subheadings, and larger elements like author names and abstracts, and adding subtle backgrounds within tables to showcase different parts of the paper. Repetition means unity between like elements, here most obviously section headings and subheadings to ease scanning. Alignment speaks to the full justification of the text, as well as keeping titles and callouts aligned with other elements to avoid visual disquiet. Proximity means subtle separation of the last line of a section from the header and first line of the next section, as well as the bundling of all the separate elements (similar to contrast). For all designers, these are fundamental choices whose combination gives the overall feel and flow unique to each journal or imprint.

Using these principles, in addition to the aesthetic choices of color and typeface, makes for more readable, usable papers. Readers can move more quickly to the elements of the paper they wish to access and move about the paper without the extraneous load of cluttered, misaligned, or ambiguous formatting. Choosing narrower columns and a lighter type also increases white space, which is both visually less cluttered than the prior design and gives you space for your thumbs when you're poring over paper after paper (as we all do). Overall, we think we've achieved a handsome,

modern, and more useful design to freshen *CUAJ*. Hot take perhaps, but I think formatted, static documents will remain users' preference despite software and screens' ability to enrich with multimedia, annotation, and selective disclosure of information. Having *all* of the information in front of you risks bafflement, but with these described design choices and principles, navigation is easy, and comprehensiveness becomes a boon rather than a hassle.

Like any good paper, we must highlight limitations (in this case concessions). Surely, 20-point text would be more legible for all accessibility levels, but only at the per-word level. We strike a balance between words-per-line and text size that allows flow when reading. Uniform contrast levels might avoid jarring effects to some eyes. Designing every element from an accessibility-only perspective would yield a Voltron much less usable for the huge majority of readers, and an aesthetic imbroglio akin to *The Homer*, which sank Powell Motors in 1991.

Welcome to this new chapter for *CUAJ*. We hope you like the look and feel, and perhaps some new insight into how they arise.

## REFERENCE

1. Robin Williams. *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, 4th Ed. (Berkeley, California: Peachpit Press, 2014).

---

CORRESPONDENCE: Dr. Michael Leveridge, Department of Urology, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada; Michael.Leveridge@kingstonhsc.ca