

GARETH WRIGHT DESIGN

# TALKING SHOP



A Practical Guide  
to Understanding  
Basic Graphic Design  
Language

A Practical Handbook for  
Business Owners, Marketers & Creatives

# Introduction

You're sitting across from your graphic designer.

They're nodding enthusiastically.

You're nodding back.

They mention kerning, vector files, CMYK output, and hierarchy adjustments.

You smile.

Inside, you're thinking:

"I have absolutely no idea what that means."

If that sounds familiar, this book is for you.

**Talking Shop** is a practical, plain-English guide to the language of graphic design. Whether you're a business owner, marketing manager, startup founder, or someone working closely with creative professionals, this handbook will help you:

- Understand essential design terminology
- Communicate clearly with designers and printers
- Avoid costly mistakes
- Make informed decisions
- Feel confident in creative conversations

Design is not just about aesthetics, it's about clarity, communication, and strategic presentation. The more fluent you are in its language, the more powerful your brand becomes.

Let's begin.

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# Typography

## The Foundation of Visual Communication

Typography is often the first thing designers discuss because it shapes how your message feels before it is even read.

## Serif vs Sans Serif

### Serif

A serif is the small stroke or decorative line at the ends of letters. Think of it as the “feet” of the letter. Serif fonts are traditionally associated with:

- Professionalism
- Authority
- Tradition
- Print publications

They are commonly used in books, newspapers, and formal branding because the small strokes help guide the reader’s eye across printed text.

### Sans Serif

“Sans” means “without.”

A sans serif font does not include the extra strokes at the ends of letters. Sans serif fonts are often associated with:

- Modernity
- Clean design
- Minimalism
- Digital interfaces

They are widely used on websites and apps because they tend to read clearly on screens.

### Practical Tip:

If your brand wants to feel traditional and established, serif may work well. If you want modern and approachable, sans serif may be more appropriate.

Example

# TIMES NEW ROMAN



SERIF

Example

# GILL SANS



SANS SERIF

# Script Fonts

Script typefaces are inspired by handwriting, either historical or modern.

They can convey:

- Elegance
- Creativity
- Personality
- Sophistication

However, script fonts must be used carefully. Overuse can reduce legibility, especially in body text.

**Best practice:**

Use script for headings, logos, or accent elements not for large blocks of text.

## Example

*Ballerick*

# Kerning and Leading

Design is often about adjustments that most people don't consciously notice but definitely feel.

## Kerning

Kerning refers to the space between two specific letters.

Some letter pairs (like A and V) naturally create awkward gaps. Adjusting kerning improves readability and visual balance.

Poor kerning can make a brand look unprofessional.

Good kerning goes unnoticed which is exactly the point.

### Tight

Kerning

### Loose

Kerning

### Normal

Kerning

## Leading

Leading refers to the space between lines of text.

Too little leading:

- Feels cramped
- Is hard to read
- Looks amateur

Too much leading:

- Feels disconnected
- Breaks visual flow

Good leading ensures comfortable readability and professional polish.

### Tight

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean commodo ligula eget dolor. Aenean massa. Cum sociis natoque penatibus

### Loose

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean commodo ligula eget

### Normal

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean commodo ligula eget dolor. Aenean massa. Cum sociis natoque penatibus

# Hierarchy

Hierarchy is how design directs attention.

When someone looks at your brochure, website, or flyer, where do their eyes go first?

Hierarchy determines:

What is seen first

What is seen second

What is most important

Designers use:

- Size
- Weight (boldness)
- Colour
- Placement
- Contrast

...to control hierarchy.

If everything is important, nothing is important.

Strong hierarchy = clear communication.

# Screen vs Print

Colour behaves differently depending on where it appears. Understanding this can prevent expensive printing errors.

## RGB - For Screens

RGB stands for:

- Red
- Green
- Blue

This colour model is used for:

- Websites
- Social media
- Digital ads
- Screens of all kinds

RGB colours are created by light.

When red, green, and blue light combine at full intensity, they create white.

If you design something in RGB and send it straight to print without conversion, the colours may look dull or inaccurate.

## CMYK - For Print

CMYK stands for:

- Cyan
- Magenta
- Yellow
- Black (Key)

This model is used in printing.

Unlike RGB (light-based), CMYK uses ink. When all colours combine, they produce a dark tone.

### Important Rule:

Always confirm your print files are in CMYK format.  
Failing to do so may result in colour shifts.

# Gradients and Opacity

## Gradient

A gradient is a gradual transition between colours.

There are two main types:

- Linear (straight transition)
- Radial (circular transition)

Gradients can add depth and visual interest when used thoughtfully.

### Linear



### Radial

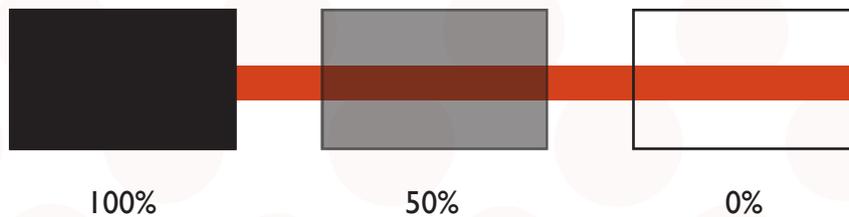


## Opacity

Opacity controls transparency.

- 100% opacity **solid**
- 50% opacity **semi-transparent**
- 0% opacity **invisible**

Opacity can create layering effects, subtle overlays, and depth.



# Image Quality and Resolution

## Resolution

Resolution determines image clarity.

High resolution **sharp and crisp**

Low resolution **pixelated and blurry**

High Resolution (Hi-Res)

300+ DPI (dots per inch)

Used for:

- Printing
- Professional marketing materials
- Large-format prints

Low Resolution (Lo-Res)

72 DPI (dots per inch)

Used for:

- Web
- Email
- Social media

Low resolution keeps file sizes small for faster loading.

# Pixels, Raster, and Vector

## Pixel

A pixel is the smallest unit of colour on a screen.  
Digital images are made of thousands (or millions) of pixels.

## Raster Images

Raster images are made from a fixed grid of pixels.  
If you enlarge them too much:

- They become blurry
- They lose clarity

Common raster formats:

- JPG
- PNG
- GIF
- TIF

## Vector Images

Vector images are made using mathematical paths.

They:

- Scale infinitely
- Never lose quality
- Stay crisp at any size

**Important Rule:**  
Logos should always be created as vector files.  
If someone asks for a “vector version of your logo,”  
this is why.

# File Formats Explained

## JPG (Joint Photographic Experts Group)

- Lossy compression
- No transparency
- Good for web, email, and print
- Smaller file size
- Varied resolution

Best for photography.

## PNG (Portable Network Graphic)

- Lossless compression
- Usually low resolution (72 DPI)
- Transparent backgrounds supported
- Ideal for web

Best when you need transparency.

## PDF (Portable Document Format)

- Works across all systems
- Varied resolution
- Supports transparency
- Ideal for print and digital distribution

Professional printers often request high-quality PDFs.

## TIF / TIFF (Tagged Image File Format)

- Very high quality
- Industry standard for commercial printing
- Large file size
- Supports transparency

Used in professional environments where maximum image quality is required.

## GIF (Graphics Interchange Format)

- Low resolution
- Supports transparency
- Small file size
- Common for web and email

Often used for simple animations.

# Understanding Paper Formats

Using the correct size avoids costly resizing and reprinting.  
Below are standard international sizes:

Size	Width (mm)	Height (mm)	Common Use
A0	841	1189	Signage
A1	594	841	Posters
A2	420	594	Large Displays
A3	297	420	Presentations
A4	210	297	Letterheads
A5	148	210	Flyers
A6	105	149	Postcards
A7	74	105	Labels
A8	52	74	Business Cards

A4 is the most common business document size.

A6 is the international postcard size.

Understanding these formats ensures your design is created correctly from the beginning.

# Social Media Graphics

Social media is a visual medium. Your graphics are often the first impression your brand makes online. Understanding the nuances of designing for social platforms is crucial for engagement and brand consistency.

In 2026, creating social media graphics that look crisp and professional across platforms means staying up-to-date with recommended dimensions and flexible design practices.

For **Instagram**, the ideal sizes remain 1080 x 1080 px for square posts, 1080 x 1350 px for portrait posts, and 1080 x 1920 px for Stories and Reels covers; using an aspect ratio of 4:5 or 9:16 ensures full-screen display without cropping.

On **TikTok**, vertical videos and graphics should be 1080x1920 px with key text and logos kept within a safe zone (centre 1080 x 1420 px) to avoid UI overlap.

For **Facebook**, 1200 x 630 px works well for link images, while high-quality cover photos benefit from 820 x 312 px (desktop) and 640 x 360 px (mobile) considerations.

**LinkedIn** favours 1200 x 1200 px for square content and 1200 x 628 px for articles and ads, while **Twitter** (now X) performs best with 1600 x 900 px landscape graphics.

Across all platforms in 2026, designers should use 2x (retina) resolution assets for sharpness on high-PPI screens, keep critical design elements within safe margins to account for UI overlays and cropping on different devices, and export in formats like PNG for quality graphics and MP4/WebM for animated content to optimise loading and engagement.

Always check platform updates periodically, as social media apps continue refining display rules and adding new formats throughout the year.

# Readability

Readability in graphic design refers to how easily a viewer can read and understand text within a visual composition. It goes beyond choosing an attractive font; it involves thoughtful decisions about typography, spacing, contrast, alignment, and layout. When text is readable, the audience can quickly grasp the message without strain or confusion. Poor readability, on the other hand, forces viewers to work harder, which can lead to frustration or loss of interest.

Key factors that influence readability include selecting clear, appropriate typefaces, maintaining sufficient contrast between text and background, and using proper spacing such as leading and margins. Visual hierarchy also plays an important role; headings, subheadings, and body text should be organized in a way that naturally guides the reader's eye. Ultimately, effective readability ensures that design supports communication, allowing the message to be understood clearly and efficiently.

# Confidence Through Understanding

You don't need to become a designer.  
But you do need to understand the language of design.

When you understand:

- The difference between RGB and CMYK
- Why vector logos matter
- What kerning and leading affect
- How hierarchy influences attention
- Why resolution determines quality

...you stop nodding politely and start contributing meaningfully.

Design is collaboration.

Communication improves collaboration.

And understanding the language of design gives you confidence in every creative conversation.

# Quick Look Up

## SERIF

A serif is the little stroke or curve at the ends of letters.

## SANS SERIF

Sans means “without”, and a sans serif font does not include the extra stroke at the ends of the letters.

## SCRIPT

Script typefaces are fonts or type based upon historical or modern handwriting styles.

## HIERARCHY

The Hierarchy of a design is the navigation throughout the piece and the sequence in which your eye follows the content.

## KERNING

Kerning refers to the space between two specific letters (or other characters: numbers, punctuation, etc.) and the process of adjusting that space improves legibility.

## LEADING

Leading refers to the spacing between the lines. Leading is used when content that has multiple lines of readable text and ensures the distance from the bottom of the words above to the top of the words below has appropriate spacing to make them legible.

## RGB

RGB is a colour model in which Red, Green, and Blue are added together in various ways to reproduce a broad array of colours. RGB tends to be used for on-screen purposes.

## CMYK

CMYK is a colour model that is used in the print process. CMYK colours are Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black (Key)

## GRADIENT

A gradient is a gradual change from one colour to another or a colour fading into transparency. There are two main types of gradients: linear and radial.

## OPACITY

Opacity is the making of an object transparent. The lower the opacity, the more transparent an element is. For example, 100% opacity means an object is solid.

## RESOLUTION

The resolution of an image determines the quality. The higher the resolution, the higher the quality. A high-resolution image will be clear and crisp whereas a low-resolution image will feel a little pixelated and blurry.

## SCALE

A graphic element can appear larger or smaller depending on the size, placement, and colour of the elements around it.

## PIXEL

A pixel is a minuscule area of a screen. Pixels are the smallest basic unit of programmable colour on a computer and images are made up of many individual pixels.

## RASTER

Raster images are made up of a set grid of pixels. This means when you change the size of stretch a raster image it can get a little blurry and lose some clarity.

## VECTOR

Vector images are non destructive images that can scale in size without losing any quality. Unlike rasters, vectors won't get blurry when scaled.

HIGH RESOLUTION (Hi-Res)      300+ DPI (Dots per Inch) image.

LOW RESOLUTION (Lo-Res)  
72 DPI (Dots per inch) image.      Used for Web because of low file size.

## JPG

A JPG is a commonly used method of lossy compression for digital images, particularly for those images produced by digital photography. The degree of compression can be adjusted, allowing a selectable tradeoff between storage size and image quality.

NO TRANSPARENCY      VARIED RESOLUTION      PRINT, WEB, EMAIL

## PNG

Portable Network Graphics is a raster-graphics file format that supports lossless data compression. PNG was developed as an improved, non-patented replacement for Graphics Interchange.

TRANSPARENCY      LOW RESOLUTION      WEB

## PDF

Portable Document Format, used to display documents in an electronic form independent of the software, hardware or operating system they are viewed on.

TRANSPARENCY      VARIED RESOLUTION      PRINT

## TIF

The TIF/TIFF file format is most commonly used for storing images, photography, or art. TIF files are most commonly used in professional environments and commercial printing. The TIF format is the most widely supported format across all platforms. It is the standard format for high quality images.

TRANSPARENCY      HIGH FILE SIZE      PRINT

## GIF

GIF files are low resolution files most commonly used for web and email purposes. GIF files can be created with a transparent background.

TRANSPARENCY      LOW RESOLUTION      WEB

# Gareth Wright Design

Based in Tameside, Greater Manchester, Gareth Wright Design has delivered high-quality design solutions for over 10 years. We specialise to small businesses, offering a comprehensive range of services from logos, flyers, posters, and banners to brochures, magazines, newspapers, and menus. Please explore our site to see how we can help enhance your brand.

[www.garethwrightdesign.co.uk](http://www.garethwrightdesign.co.uk)

