

Our sense of balance affects everything we see

equilib- rium

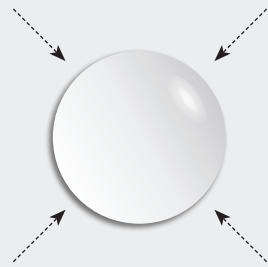


Are there rules for design? Early last century, psychologists in Austria and Germany developed a school of psychology called Gestalt, which attempts to explain human behavior in terms of pattern seeking. Gestalt theory explains how the eye organizes visual experiences and how the brain interprets them. Gestalt is not design, but knowing the visual principles of Gestalt will give you a valuable design toolbox.

**By Bob Dahlquist with the
Before & After staff**

Find equilibrium in nature

Consciously or not, our sense of balance deeply influences our visual judgments. The Gestalt principle of *equilibrium* addresses the stability we seek in everything we see.



In nature, an object tends towards a stable, resting state, as seen in a water droplet: Splashed water beads up—draws inward—and comes to rest in a circle. This is a stable state.

Equilibrium is everywhere! (Below) Notice how our eye is pulled to the center. Our eye is most comfortable at the center, the point of greatest equilibrium.



Plant seed



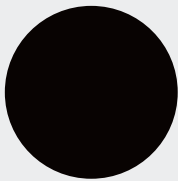
Lime wedge



Pumpkin

Create equilibrium in objects

A water droplet, in its simplest form, is a dot that pulls your eye to the center. This similar concept has been applied to famous logos and trademarks.



Mimicking nature, we create equilibrium when we draw a plain dot. Like the droplet, a dot is a shape at rest, under no tension. This shape displays equilibrium.

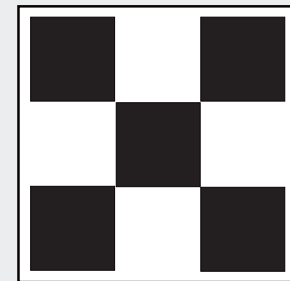
Look at me! (Below) Equilibrium gives these logos rest, stability and permanence. Each one commands your extreme attention, because your eye is drawn towards the center.



CBS
by William Golden



Woolmark
by Francesco Saroglia



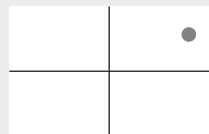
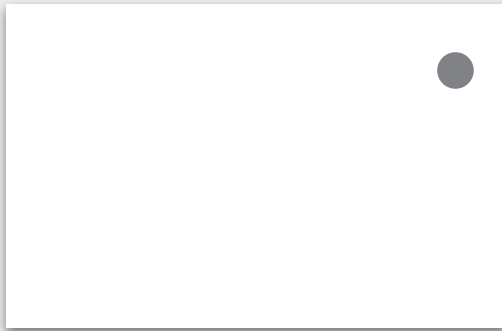
Ralston Purina
by William Danforth



Equilibrium in placement

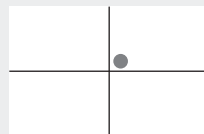
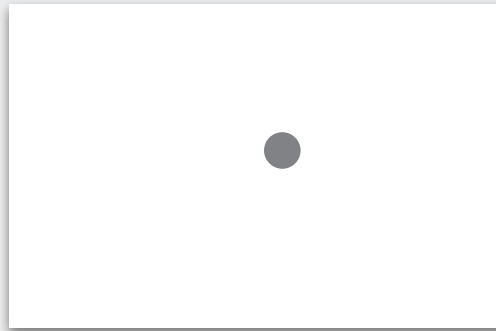
Our eye is naturally drawn to the center of a field. An object placed elsewhere draws our eye away and toward the object and edge, which creates tension.

Tension



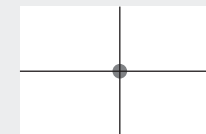
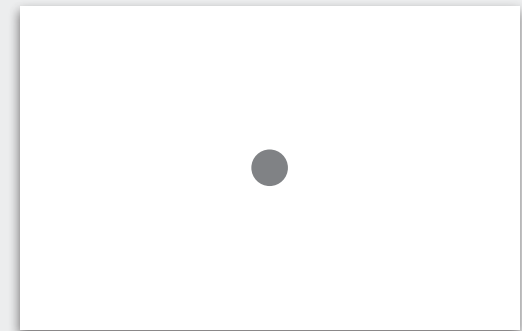
The dot far off center results in tension from three elements tugging at your eye—the center, the dot and the edge.

Ambiguity



Neither centered nor clearly off center, our eye struggles with this ambiguity.

Equilibrium

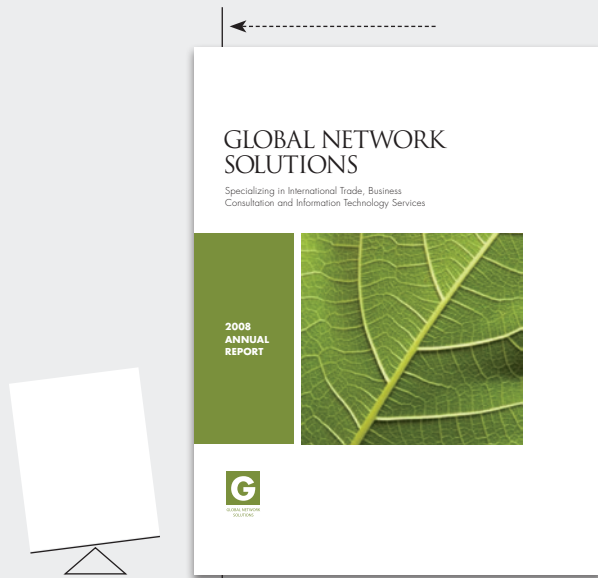


Equilibrium at work. Our eye recognizes that the dot is in the center. Tension ceases. The composition comes to rest.

(Often-overlooked fact: The paper is not a passive carrier but an active part of any composition.)

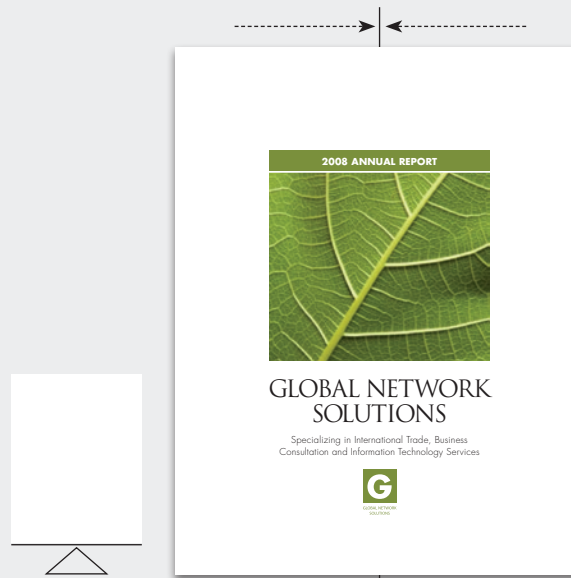
Create equilibrium in your layout

Every element has shape, direction and value. Create equilibrium by arranging elements and adjusting values so the primary visual weight is in the center. For interest, you can then create tension within the equilibrium.



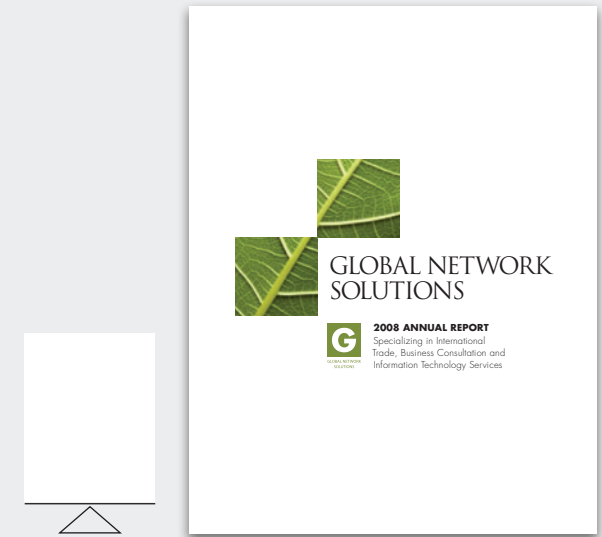
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Elements gathered all the way to the left yield an unbalanced, active page.



Equilibrium

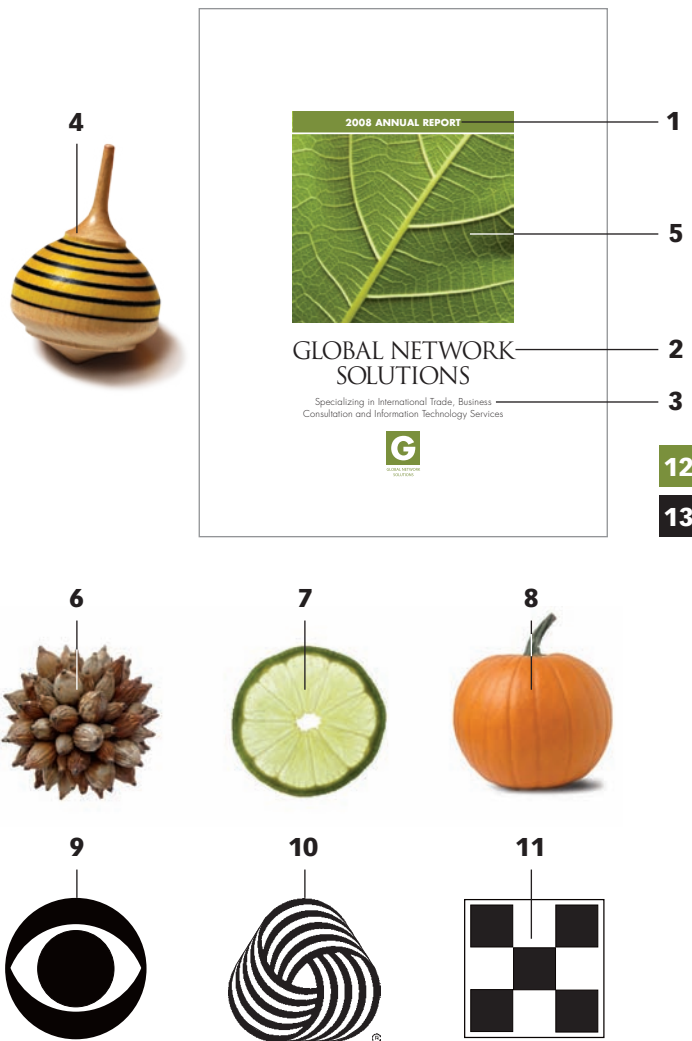
The centered layout is balanced, stable, in repose.



Equilibrium with tension

The visual weight is in the center. The center itself is asymmetrical and active.

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- 2 [Trajan](#) | 35/38 pt
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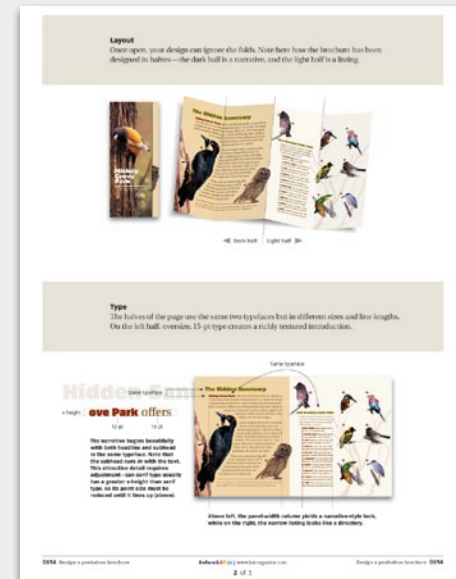


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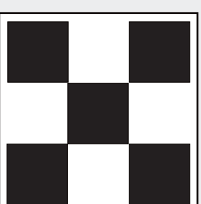
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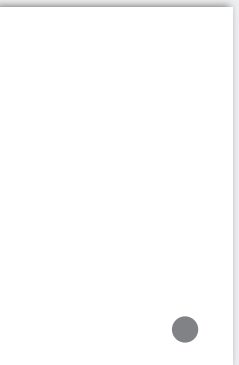


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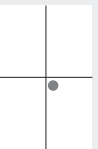
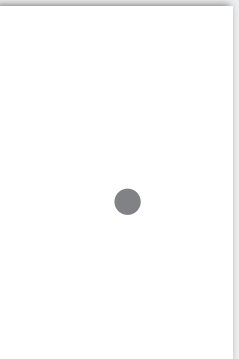
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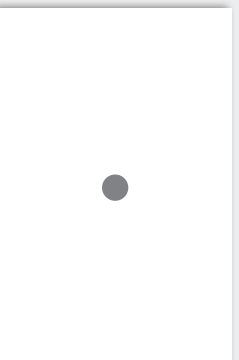
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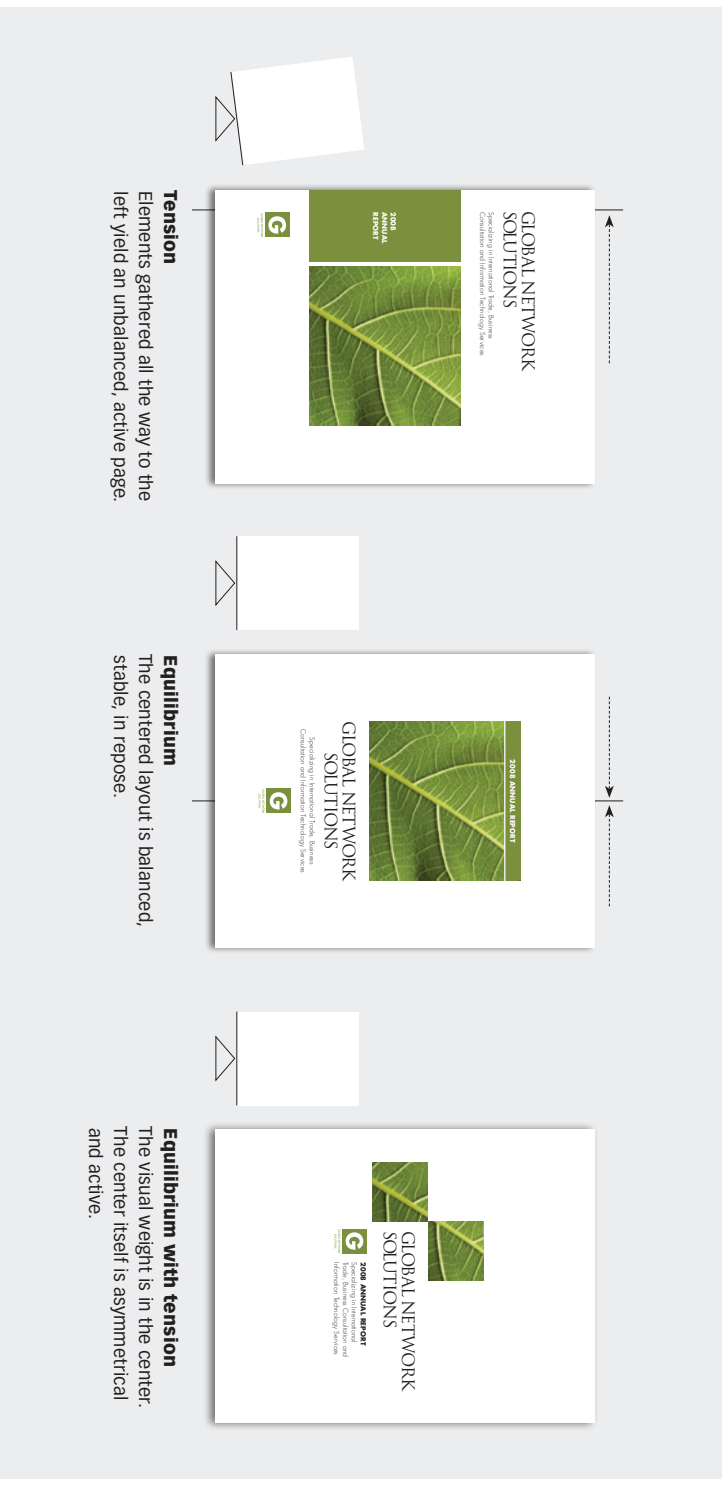
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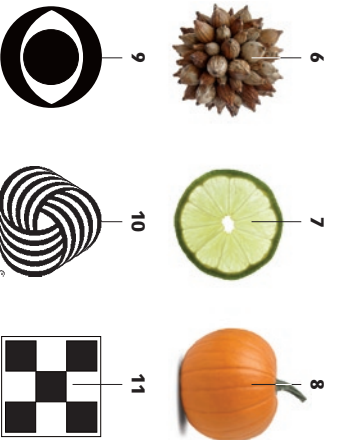


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