



Grids

Mark Leeds, Associate Art director, The Guardian

Recommended reading
“The Elements of Typographic Style”, Robert Bringhurst, H&M publishers
“The Typographic Grid”, Hans Rudolf Bosshard, Niggli

Column measure and typography actual size

What is a grid?

A page grid is like the framework of a building. It defines its overall size, the spaces inside and out, and its relationship to the furniture within it.

A grid reflects its purpose
Hospitals, restaurants, stadiums etc. all have different frameworks to meet their unique needs. A page grid acts in exactly the same way.
It’s a series of guides that divide the page into units (modules)
These are visible to the designer but do not print – they help provide structure to the page and simplify some design decisions. The Guardian uses blue guides to represent each module and text column, and pink guides to show the text baseline.
“It is a default plan for presenting content, as yet unknown” – Karl Gerstner

Why use a grid?

“Grids are used in situations where unpredictable graphic elements must be combined in a rapid and orderly way”
Robert Bringhurst

Grids exist to deliver content
Their design should be a bespoke response to the needs of the project (a book’s grid will be very different from a newspaper’s).
The grid should make life easier: for the *user* to read or view information; for the *designers* to create visual solutions without designing from scratch.
Grids create energy, harmony and beauty
Imposing structure, as in music, gives each publication its own rhythm. There is a natural pace, but it can be made faster or slower, louder or quieter. The proportional relationship between objects and the grid brings unity to the whole. An “agreement of all the parts” occurs when the elements (white space, text, pictures, etc.) are in scale and concord with the grid.
Grids help build a visual language
Information displayed consistently, every time, is good communication. Readers learn to navigate, distinguish between types of content and understand the logic of the design. This allows evolution, experimentation and more complex ideas to be expressed without confusion.

Creating a grid

“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler”
Albert Einstein

The combination of the elements below makes a grid
What takes priority is determined by the publication’s aims. For example, a train timetable’s grid might be determined by format whereas a book’s might be determined by column width. The Guardian grid is made up of 16½ modules and five columns. Each module is composed of 8 lines (8 x 9.5pt).

Format/ page size
Overall trimmed page dimension
Text block
Total area the text occupies
Column measure (width)
Width of one column of body text
The Guardian: 153pt (a very readable 6-8 words)
Gutter
The space between columns of body text
Line depth/ leading
Distance from one baseline to the next
The Guardian: 9.5pt
Module
Either a proportion of the page (i.e. a quarter/ eighth etc.) or a factor of line depth, or both
The Guardian: 76pt (8 lines = 1 module)
Margins
Space between the trimmed page and the text block
Outside edge, inside, top and bottom

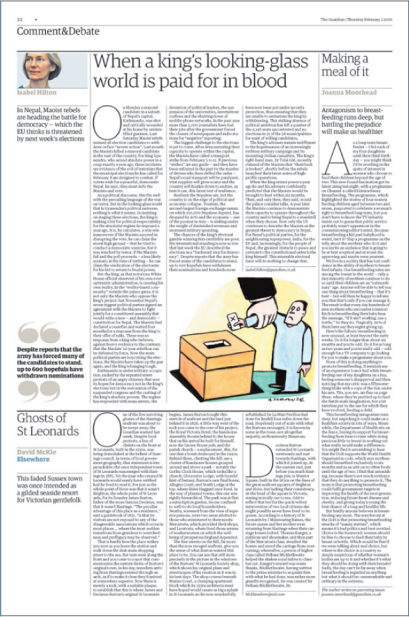
The grid in practice

The Guardian uses the grid to clearly define the placement of stories, to integrate advertising into the page and to vary its tone of voice. We use a tool kit of elements, scaled in proportion to the grid, to give pages energy, variety and cohesion.

News packages
Stories are grouped under a coloured strap (½ module) that defines the whole page; colour is used to signal the kind of article (news, feature, special report). In this example two decks of headline and the space below occupy 1½ mods. The standfirst and space occupy 1 mod. We look, where possible, to “hang” the page furniture from a grid line. The picture here is 5 modules by 4 columns and is “hung” halfway between modules. The picture caption (1 mod) is hung off a grid line. The main article occupies approximately 10 modules, leaving 5 for the other two stories, a ratio of 2:1. Inserting a *gizmo* (1 mod, bottom left) into the text column enriches the page without competing with other elements.



Working with advertising
Developing the grid in tandem with advertising means that the ad sizes fall into register with the grid. It has the advantage of keeping editorial elements in scale and led to the development of what we call *mods* (which are in fact 3 modules deep). These are self-contained 100-word stories which grouped together work with ads to put a faster pace into the news run and to provide contrast to longer articles.



The Guardian typography

Type sizes scale up and down in relation to line depth and modules using an approximation of the Fibonacci sequence.

Body text	Crossshejk	Standijk	Labjk	Hjk	Hjk	Hj	
Body text	Crosshead	Standfirst	Label	Hed	Hed	He	H
1/8 module			1/4 module		1/2 module		1 module
8pt/9.5pt 1 line	10.375/11.875pt 1 1/4 lines	12.75/14.25pt 1 1/2 lines	17.5/19pt 2 lines	22.25/23.75pt 2 1/2 lines	36.5/38pt 4 lines	46/47.5pt 6 lines	74.5/76pt 8 lines