
Document design pattern library

in support of ISO 24495: Plain language



June 2025
Development draft 0.6

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About this pattern library

What is a design pattern?

A design pattern consists of two parts: a problem (or challenge) and a typical solution. These problem-solution patterns can be organized as sets, forming a pattern library.

Design patterns are accompanied by examples and notes about their use.

Why do we need design patterns?

When we talk about language, we have names for the different ways in which words combine to make meaning – ‘clause’ or ‘sentence’, for example. We can refer to rules about grammar and guidance about style, and we can talk about rhetorical structures that go back to the ancient Greeks. Many of us learned these writing concepts at school. But we don’t have all this metalanguage with document design.

Design patterns are a response to this problem. They are a way to describe design ideas in terms of their communicative intent and their effect on readers – not just what they look like.

Many of the patterns here are well known and obvious. Take headings, for example. We may think these need no explanation. But by discussing headings as design patterns, we are forced to think carefully about what problem is being solved by a heading. This helps us understand what makes an effective heading.

How does document design relate to plain language?

This pattern library has been written in support of ISO 24495 Plain Language standard, which presents a functional approach to plain language. It doesn’t just give advice about making documents easy to read, but it considers what job those documents are doing for their readers.

As well as ‘Can they understand this?’, it asks ‘What do they need?’ and ‘How easily can they find it?’.

These needs are answered by the way words are arranged on a page or screen, as well as by what they say. ISO 24495 presents a view of readers as active and strategic, so information design is essential to help them move quickly to relevant information and see its structure.

Is the pattern library comprehensive?

This pattern library includes the most common and useful patterns typically used to organise information in factual or functional documents. But it does not claim to cover every document design issue.

- It does not cover the design of illustrations, diagrams or charts.
 - It does not cover documents requiring specialist typesetting, such as mathematics.
 - It does not cover the design of forms.
 - It does not include persuasive patterns, which focus more on influencing purchasing behaviours than on clarifying information.
 - It does not cover the full range of patterns needed for the design of websites and apps. Pattern libraries are widely available in that context, and we cite various resources in the bibliography
-

Extending the pattern library

In almost every context, we anticipate you will find gaps in the pattern library – particular types of content, or reading tasks that are special to your context or content.

We recommend that you create your own custom patterns, using the principles shown here. And by consulting your readers early and often, you can test your customized patterns.

How to use the pattern library

Use it to design documents

Use the pattern library to remind yourself of the range of issues you should be considering, based on your content, and what you know about your readers.

Many documents are based on conventional genres or templates, and it's tempting to simply copy what is normally done. This may seem like a good strategy, because readers will be familiar with your format. But use the pattern library to challenge this assumption.

Unlike the templates bundled with software, such as those found in the Microsoft 365 suite, this pattern library does not view content as an object that gets slotted into a shape or format. Instead, it views content as something we shape based on what readers need. We advocate for visualizing content by design rather than by default. We invite you to take steps to develop your own templates, based on the patterns found here, and those you discover through evaluating your documents with readers.

Use it to comment on design or explain your design to others

The pattern library can suggest ways to critique or explain a document's design. Everything you see in a document should be explainable as part of its content, or as a pattern that helps readers. If it cannot be accounted for in this way, then it may be purely decorative and superfluous. This is not always a problem, but sometimes it is – it may mislead readers, or act as clutter that distracts them from seeing intentional aspects of your design.

The icons

We intend most of the design patterns to apply equally to fixed format and variable format documents.



Fixed format includes paper documents and PDFs. In these documents, every aspect of the format can be controlled by the designer, and layout can show the structure of content. Readers can skim-read for navigation.



Variable format documents are digital documents in which the format is responsive to the device – for example, e-reader, smartphone, tablet or laptop. These documents are more constrained to a linear flow of text, and readers may navigate mostly through menus or search.

The pattern library uses icons to show where a design pattern is intended for just one of these options. Where there is no icon, it applies to all formats.

Section numbering

To mirror the corresponding sections of ISO 24495, the pattern library section numbers start at 5.1.

What we mean by ‘document’: a note on terminology

In the pattern library we use the term ‘document’ to refer to:

- traditional paper documents, which may range from a single page letter to a large book.
 - digital documents in PDF or similar formats.
 - apps, websites, or sets of related pages on a website.
-

About ISO 24495 Plain language

How this pattern library relates to the ISO 24495 plain language standard

ISO 24495-1 – Part 1: Governing principles and guidelines sets out four principles of plain language:

Principle 1: Readers get what they need (**relevant**)

Principle 2: Readers can easily find what they need (**findable**)

Principle 3: Readers can easily understand what they find (**understandable**)

Principle 4: Readers can easily use the information (**usable**)

The other supporting Parts apply these principles to specific areas such as science or legal information. They build on Part 1 but don’t repeat its content.

Part 1 includes broad recommendations about the use of information design alongside plain language. We have developed this pattern library to add more detail and depth.

Ideally, users of this pattern library will be familiar with Part 1 of the standard, which is available from national standards bodies or from the International Standards Organisation (<https://www.iso.org/standard/78907.html>).

A note about Principle 4 (usable)

ISO 24495 takes the view that if Principles 1–3 are followed, a document should be usable. So Principle 4 does not contain further guidance on plain language, but instead discusses how to evaluate that usability has been achieved. For this reason we haven’t included Principle 4 in the pattern library.

We are developing a separate publication which will cover evaluation techniques for document design.

How ISO 24495-1 defines plain language

“Plain language is communication that puts readers first. It considers:

- what readers want and need to know;
- readers’ level of interest, expertise and literacy skills, and
- the context in which readers will use the document.

Plain language ensures readers can find what they need, understand it and use it.” (page v).

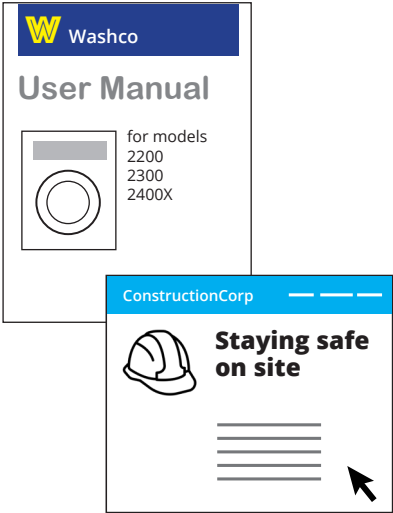
“This document is for anybody who creates or helps create documents. The widest use of plain language is for documents that are intended for the general public.” (page 1).

5.1

Design guidelines for Principle 1:
Readers get what they need (relevant)

5.1.2

Make the document’s purpose clear and allow
readers to easily see who the author or sponsor is



- Informative cover**
- Informative home or landing page**

Challenge	To enable readers to easily identify a document, together with its source (publisher, authors), and in some cases its membership of a series or set.
Typical solution	Use a prominent, informative and legible title. Identify the publisher, the date or version, and if appropriate the author. Illustrations can help identify the topic.
Issues	If the cover is to appear online to show it can be downloaded, the title needs to be legible at a small size. In series of documents with similar titles, give prominence to text that distinguishes them from each other.

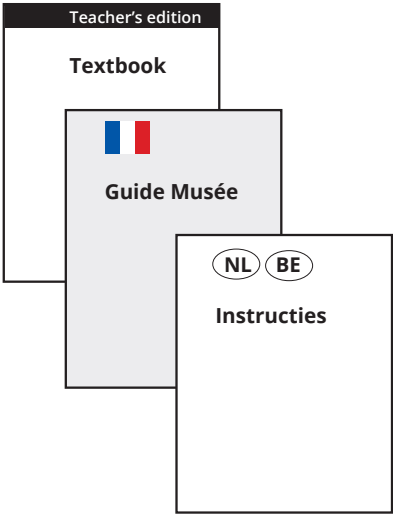


Brand identity

Challenge	To identify the source of the document, and that it is speaking with the authority or brand personality of its publisher.
Typical solution	Most large organisations define their visual identity, through a logo and a distinctive choice of fonts and colours. This tells readers that all the different communications they see are from the same organisation.
Typical scenarios	All types of documents coming from the same source.
Issues	Brand identity is not restricted to marketing documents, but also to transactional or technical information.

5.1.3.

Use visual signals to help readers decide if content is relevant to them



Audience identifier

Challenge	To help readers to easily identify whether they are the intended audience. This might include level of expected expertise, language or occasion of use.
Typical solution	Identify the intended audience explicitly (such as 'for teachers' or 'business edition'). National flags or country codes can be used to indicate versions intended for particular languages or countries.
Typical scenarios	User manual, travel information.
Issues	Flags can be problematic. They require cultural knowledge and colour printing. People with poor colour vision may not see key distinctions (between Ireland and Italy, for example). They can also be politically interpreted, since languages are not confined to their eponymous countries (for example, English, German, Spanish are spoken in countries other than England, Germany or Spain).



Genre markers

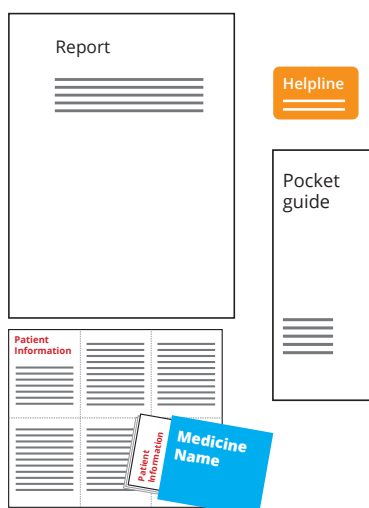
Challenge	To enable readers to see at a glance what type of document they are looking at, to tell its probable purpose, and the kind of response to it that is expected.
Typical solution	Consider using a design style that is typical of similar documents. For example, an official letter may use standard fonts and formal layout, while a typical newsletter will have a more colourful and varied look.
Typical scenarios	A newsletter can be skim-read and thrown away. A contract should be read carefully. An official document might have to be kept safe. A certificate celebrates value or achievement and may be displayed.
Issues	If you depart from conventional styles, make sure you communicate the purpose of the document explicitly. Some conventional documents have poor usability such as justified type or centred headings. Avoid copying these default features without considering them carefully.



Glanceable content

Challenge	Readers like to see key messages on short documents or web pages at first glance.
	Readers like to flick through the pages of long documents to get a general sense of what the content covers.
Typical solution	Use informative and prominent headings. Icons, diagrams and pictures provide landmarks in the text that communicate its focus.
Typical scenarios	Quick start guides for products.
	Financial documents with key numbers made prominent.
Issues	See also <i>Pull-out quotes, Panels, Zones</i>

5.1.4.



Choose a suitable document format

Suitable format

Challenge	To allow readers to use a document in a specific context.
Typical solution	☞ Choose the physical dimensions of a paper document so it can easily be displayed, transported, read and stored. Consider the thickness of the document as well as the dimensions of the page, ☞ Digital documents should work on smartphones and tablets as well as computer screens. Avoid large files that will slow to download by people with slow internet speed or low data access.
Typical scenarios	Pocket guide for travel information.
	Medicine instructions that fold in sensible places to fit the box. Credit card size for reminder carried in pocket or purse.
Issues	If you depart from conventional dimensions, there is a risk that the document won't fit in standard places such as card holders, envelopes, leaflet racks or files.

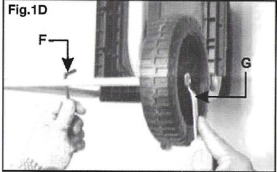
5.1.5.

Make the visual and written content easy to see

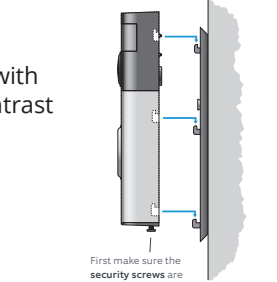
11pt is a legible size suitable for continuous reading from 40cm.

Increase the font size to 16pt for notices to be read on a wall.

Type should only rarely be set in smaller sizes, in small amounts (as in a technical note or footnote).



Blurred



Precise, with good contrast



IMAGE ALT TEXT

people looking at books

Describe your image to improve accessibility and SEO.

Legible text

Challenge	To enable readers to read a text easily.
Typical solution	Legible text is a combination of several factors: type size, typeface, type weight, line space, line length, contrast between text and background.
Typical scenarios	For documents intended for normal reading at a distance of 40 cm, use a font size of 10–12 points or 14 pixels. Keep the column width between 1.5 and 2.5 times the combined width of all the lowercase alphabet (a to z) in the chosen font..
Issues	There are no universal rules that apply to all documents, and suitable type sizes vary among different typefaces.

Legible illustrations

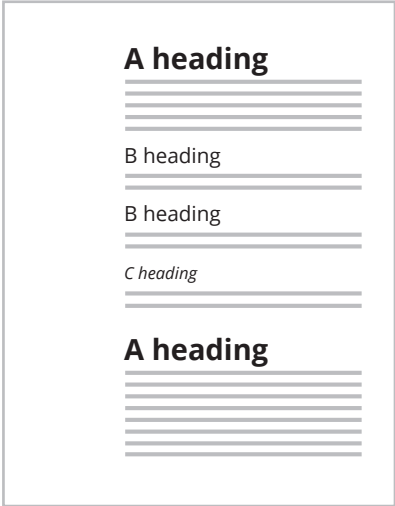
Challenge	To enable readers to interpret an image, it needs to be large enough, high enough resolution, sufficient contrast, and focussed.
Typical solution	Use drawings rather than photos for technical instructions. Use vector images, not pixelated ones, so they work at different scales.
Typical scenarios	Many documents contain illustrations such as icons, pictograms, drawings, or diagrams.

Accessible text and illustrations

Challenge	To enable readers with visual impairment to use screen readers.
Typical solution	Ensure that text is identified by screen readers in the right order. Ensure that all illustrations have an Alt Text description. Enter 'decorative' if it is not essential. Web design applications offer this feature.

5.1.6

Support skimming documents for relevance by making headings prominent



Informative headings

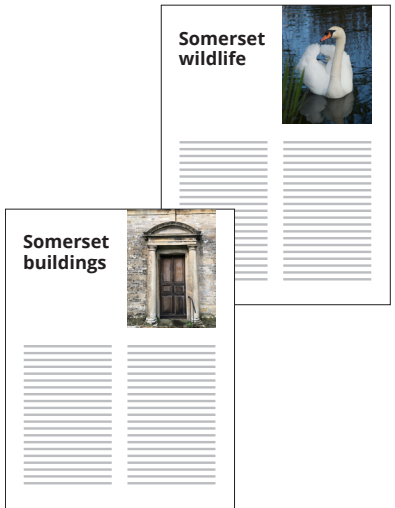
Challenge	To support readers as they skim a text for an overview or to search for a concept.
Typical solution	Provide headings that are informative, describing the content of the text that follows. They should work together as a set, both in the contents list or menu, and for skim-reading.
Issues	Examples of uninformative headings are: • Jokes, puns or whimsy. • Technical terms that have not yet been explained.

Heading hierarchies

Challenge	To show hierarchical relations within the content.
Typical solution	Provide headings with different levels of prominence to show their place in the hierarchy. Top-level headings need to be bold enough to visually dominate a passage of text that includes other, lower-status, headings.
Issues	Heading hierarchies are helpful to writers as well as readers. They signal structure in the document, and can reveal inconsistencies or gaps in the content. They can also be helpful for writers who like to start with a content outline.

5.1.7

Support skimming documents for relevance by including relevant visuals



Relevant visuals

Challenge	To help readers distinguish between different parts of the document, and the topics they cover.
Typical solution	Include visuals (photos, illustrations, diagrams) that illustrate the theme of a section.
Typical scenarios	Landing pages for different parts of a website. Section starts for reports, catalogues or textbooks.
Issues	Visuals should not be used just as decoration. They are fundamental to making a document easy to use.

5.2

Design guidelines for Principle 2:
Readers can easily find what they need
(findable)

5.2.2.

Enable readers to find what they want by providing
multiple ways to access the content

a. To search for specific information

Contents

Section 1

Lilibus int landit et 3
Ditatque volupta 12
Pra nonseque 14
Lautae nobis 16
Volorestiis maio 19

Section 2

Delendis iusa 21
Sequi vitaspicae 23

Contents list

Challenge	To help readers to gain an overview of the document content and structure.
	To help readers to locate a specific section they are searching for.
Typical solution	List of content in page order.
	Consider section headings that organize content into themes. ☒ Provide hyperlinks to website or PDF contents.
Issues	☒ Page numbers should follow on from content titles, rather than be aligned to the right. This avoids mis-reading across long gaps.
	☒ Dropdown menus save space but make it hard for readers to get a single overview of the content. Accordions are preferable if they can be completely opened by the reader.

Search

☒ Search bar

Challenge	To help readers search a document or website using any words they choose.
Typical solution	Place a search bar in a prominent position, visible from every page.
Typical scenarios	Any electronic document or website with more than a few paragraphs.
Issues	Make it possible to define the scope of a search: restricted to the document; within a website; or including a global search engine.

#document
#standard
#iso

Keywords
document
standard
iso

Keywords

Challenge	To help people to search or cross-refer using a controlled set of keywords. Keywords can communicate themes that run across your content.
Typical solution	Keywords may be displayed near the search bar if space allows. They may also appear next to related content, to allow people to read thematically within the document/site content.
Typical scenarios	Technical information, academic texts, abstracts, regulatory and legal information
Issues	Keywords should be labelled. Readers who use social media will understand the # symbol.

Index

Aardvark 67
Albatross 56
Alligator 98, 112
Alpaca 11, 43
Baboon 78, 90
Badger 56, 67
Bandicoot 3
Bat 35, 56, 78
Bear 3
Bison 32
Camel 102
Centipede 60, 93
Chameleon 34
Chimpanzee 92
Dingo 23, 89

Index

Challenge	To help readers find a reference to a specific concept, word, or person.
Typical solution	An alphabetical list of key content (ideas, people, events, etc), with page numbers. By convention an index appears at the end of a document.
Issues	Compiling a thorough and usable index is a skill. Avoid trivial mentions, and anticipate the search terms people may want to use.  Indexes are considered obsolete in electronic documents, which instead offer search.

b. To locate and refer to specific information

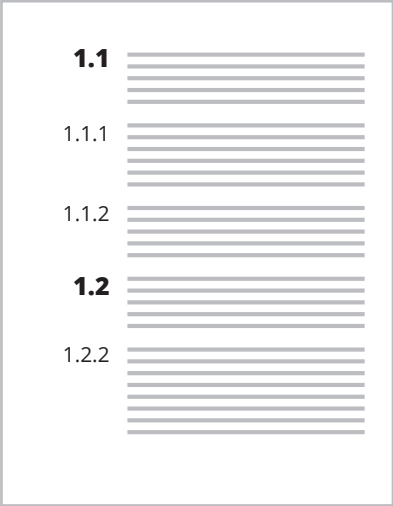
Page numbers

Challenge	To identify each page so it can be located from the contents list or a cross-reference.
Typical solution	Provide a page number at the centre or corner of the page, usually at the foot. Ideally they should be on the outside edge of a document that will be bound. If there is uncertainty about whether the page will be on the right or the left, then they should be placed in the centre.
Issues	All documents that are more than a few pages long should have page numbers.

Section 1: introduction

2023 Annual Report

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Paragraph numbering

Challenge	To help writers and readers to refer to specific parts of the document content.
Typical solution	Provide a paragraph or section numbering system.
Typical scenarios	Reports, technical manuals, project documents, legal documents.
Issues	Avoid over-elaborate systems, and only include numbers at the level you need to refer to. Aim for a maximum of three levels (for example, 3.4.7). Consider only numbering headings rather than every paragraph.

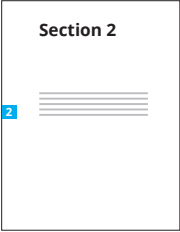
c. To indicate sections and themes



Horizontal tabs

Challenge	To help readers go quickly to the right section without needing to return to the contents list or home page.
Typical solution	Graphic bars, usually at the top of the page, with a section title, section number or icon.
Typical scenarios	Reports, manuals. Websites with multiple themes
Issues	The information appearing in tabs should exactly match the contents page. Horizontal tabs work best when there are few enough sections to fit on one line. ☞ Websites and PDFs may use clickable tabs to move between sections. See also <i>Breadcrumb trails</i> and <i>Progress bars</i>

Contents	
Section 1	1
Lilibus int landit et 3	
Ditatque volupta 12	
Section 2	2
Lautae nobis 16	
Volestis maio 19	
Section 3	3
Delendis iusa 21	
Sequi vitaspicae 23	



Vertical tabs

Challenge To help readers go quickly to the right section.

Typical solution Graphic bars that bleed off the edge of each page, so sections can be seen on the edge of the document.

They should align with the contents list.

Typical scenarios User guides, directories, reference manuals..

Issues Vertical tabs reflect the carved-out tabs once common in dictionaries.

They rely on accurate printing and binding.



Thematic icons

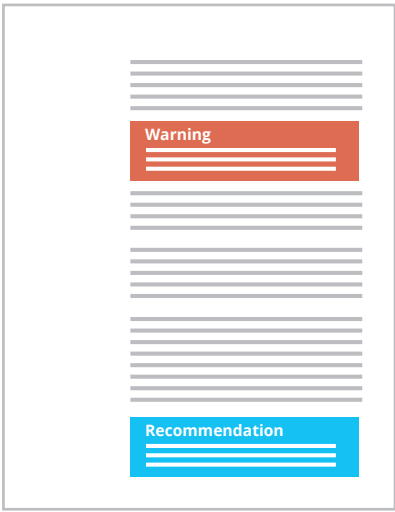
Challenge To help readers spot information that relates to a particular theme, but which is scattered through a document.

Typical solution Create icons that are distinctive and memorable, and place them next to their corresponding themes. It can help if you use a colour-coding system as well.

Typical scenarios A user manual for a car, where some features are only present if a particular specification level has been chosen.
Regulations which only apply to people living in certain states or regions.

Issues A system of icons should not try to be too comprehensive. If there are too many icons, it will be hard to remember the meaning of each as you read a long document.

Can be used together with *Thematic colour coding*

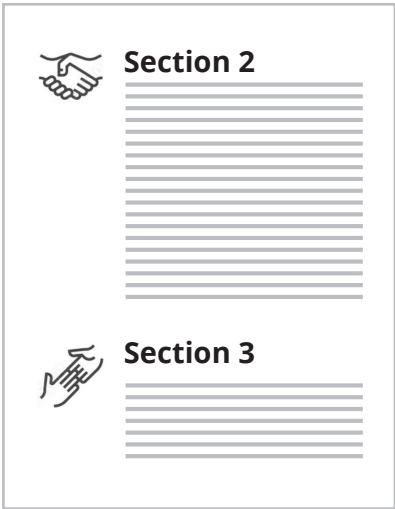


Thematic colour coding

Challenge To help readers spot information that relates to a particular theme or type of information, but which is scattered through a document.

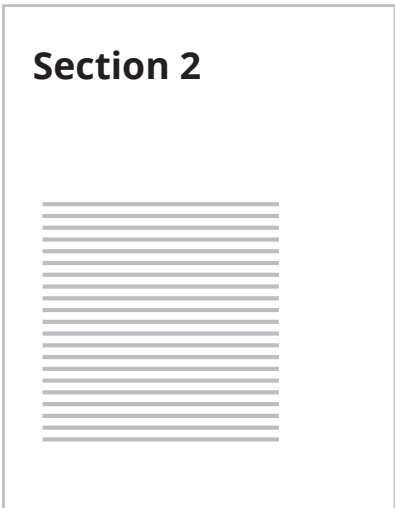
Typical solution Print the headings, icons or other prominent features in colour. Choose colours that are highly distinctive, for which we have names. Use red, blue, orange, etc, rather than subtle hues for which we do not have common names. Colour coding systems rarely work with more than around 9 colours.

Issues Can be used together with *Thematic icons*



Section icons

Challenge	To help readers to go straight to the right section, using visual memory as well as verbal.
Typical solution	Icons can be helpful to highlight section headings, and supply visual landmarks. See also <i>Thematic icons</i>
Typical scenarios	Reports, manuals.
Issues	Do not overuse icons by attempting to find one for every heading – it quickly gets over-complicated and there will be concepts that defy attempts to visualise them.

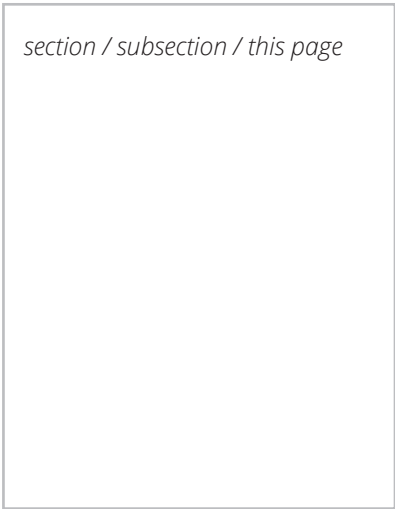


Section start indicators

Challenge	To help readers to quickly find the start of each section, and signal a major change in topic.
Typical solution	Start each major section on a new page, with a prominent heading. Large section numbers, colour and icons can be used to make new sections easy to spot.
Typical scenarios	Reports, manuals.
Issues	Section start pages can have a special layout, perhaps including section summaries or section contents lists. Do not worry about ‘wasting’ space at the end of the previous page.

5.2.4.

Provide a sequence and make it possible to skip and restart



Breadcrumb trails

Challenge	To show readers where they are in the document hierarchy
Typical solution	 On a website, breadcrumbs are links that appear at the top of the page, and display the folder structure within which the current page or document sits.  Breadcrumbs can also be useful in the running heads of fixed format documents. In a PDF they can be tagged as links. The term comes from the children’s story of Hansel and Gretel, who leave a trail of breadcrumbs to help find their way home.
Typical scenarios	Online shopping, technical support.



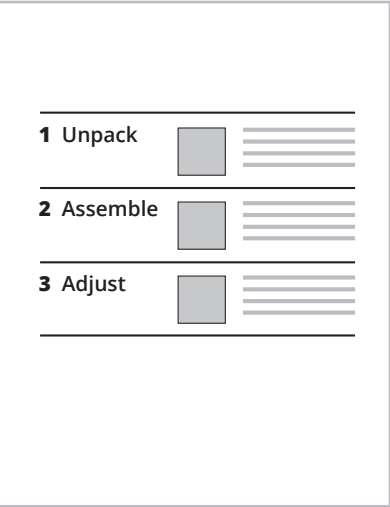
Progress bar

Challenge	To show readers where they are in a sequence or process.
Typical solution	A diagram or list showing the stages of a process. The one you are reading about is highlighted. See also: <i>Horizontal tabs</i>.
Typical scenarios	Project reports, research articles, forms, or insurance documents.
Issues	If using horizontal bars there are spatial limits to the number of steps that fit in a typical page.



Running heads

Challenge	To remind readers what section they are reading.
Typical solution	Chapter or section titles at the top of each page. You can alternate left and right pages so that chapter names are on the right and section names on the left.
Typical scenarios	Any multi-page document.
Issues	Running heads are sometimes called headers. They work together with footers, and content may be distributed between them.



Footers

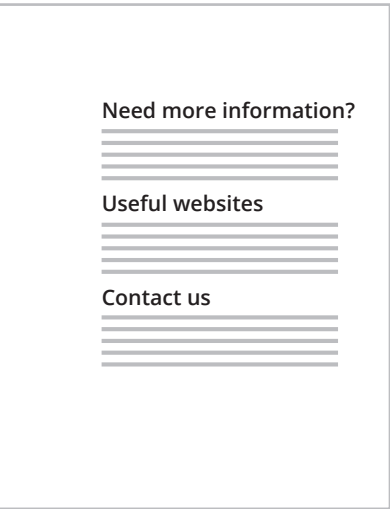
Challenge	To remind readers what document they are reading.
Typical solution	Title of document at the foot of each page. Sometimes a logo or publisher's branding is included.
Typical scenarios	Any multi-page document.
Issues	Footers can work together with running heads, and content may be distributed between them.

Numbered steps

Challenge	To help readers to complete a task that must be done in the right order.
Typical solution	Start each step with a bold number. Readers of procedural documents need to move between the document and the task. Step numbers therefore need to be bold enough to enable them to find their place again on return.
Typical scenarios	Instructions for product assembly or repair. Instructions for health test kit, or medical device. Process for buying or applying for something.

5.2.5.

Provide alternative resources



Alternative information sources

Challenge	If a document does not seem to be relevant, where can readers go next?
Typical solution	Provide links to a website, a phone number, an office. Provide links to other documents that might be relevant, or documents in different languages.
Typical scenarios	People might have downloaded or received the wrong document for their situation.

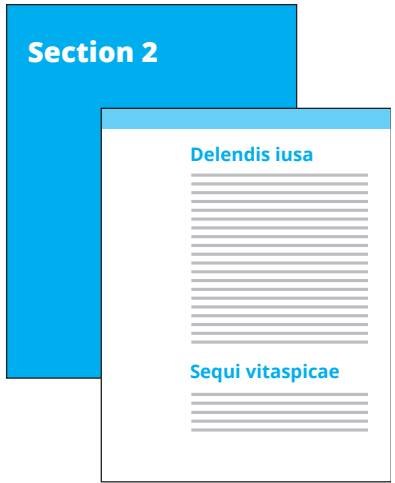
5.3.2.

Use visual signalling to group information



Clustered groups

Challenge	To write a page suitable for a reader who wishes to browse, rather than read in a linear fashion.
Typical solution	Group content in clusters (columns or other arrangements). Lay them out in a consistent way, bearing in mind that: • Aligned items will be read as a sequence. • Items that are close together will be seen as related.
Typical scenarios	Museum guide, a college prospectus, a product catalogue.
Issues	Using layout in this way will inevitably mean leaving white space at the foot of columns or pages. Be wary of filling these spaces to avoid waste – they are active components of your text and are doing the job of visually signalling the groups.



Colour-coded sections

Challenge	To help readers to go straight to the right section, and, as they read, to be aware of which section they are in.
Typical solution	Colour coding can be used to make sections of a document visibly different. It provides the reader with an ambient cue that they are still in the same section. Colour also provides a good search target, similar to icons, when moving from contents lists to content.
Typical scenarios	Longer reports which are divided into sections.
Issues	Colour should not be used on its own to signal a difference, because the document may be copied in black and white. So use it along with another cue such as a heading or icon.



White space

Challenge	To present complex information without overwhelming readers.
Typical solution	Include generous space between items on the page. More white space allows you to create meaningful groups, distinct from each other. Avoid busy pages, as it is likely that people will miss information, or read things in the wrong order. People who struggle with literacy may be discouraged.
Typical scenarios	Leaflets, guides, instructions, regulations.



Bulleted lists

Challenge	To help readers see rhythm and patterns in text.
Typical solution	It helps to turn related ideas into lists. Each item should start with a bullet (•) or dash (–). Bulleted text should not extend over more than a few lines. For longer chunks of text, use headings. Bulleted text may be hierarchical, but it should be used sparingly, with no more than two levels in a hierarchy.
Typical scenarios	Reports, instructions
Issues	Be careful not to over-use lists, as it can make the hierarchy flat, signalling that everything is at the same level of the structure. There must always be enough conventional text to lead your readers through your argument.



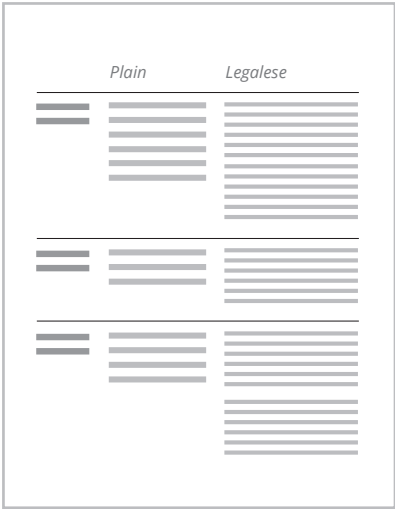
Numbered lists

Challenge	To allow readers to notice that a list is in a sequential order.
Typical solution	Start each item in a list with a number. See also <i>Numbered steps</i>.
Typical scenarios	Reports, instructions.
Issues	When numbered items exceed 10, it's better to try another strategy, such as using subheadings or a tabled format. Avoid complex nesting of numbered or lettered lists: for example 1, 2, 3 followed by i, ii, iii or (a), (b), (c).

5.3.3.

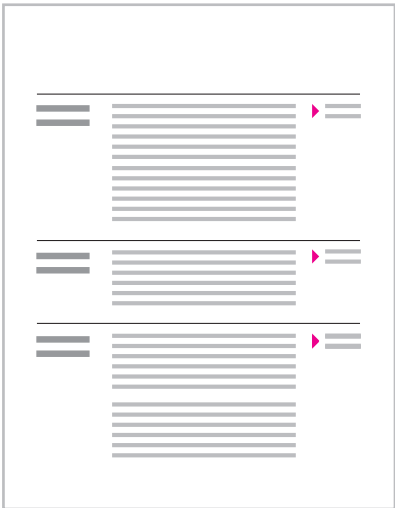
Visually differentiate the status or function of information

Layering



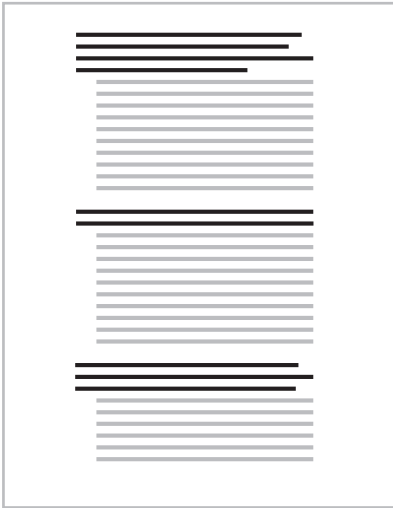
Version layering

Challenge	To help different groups of readers find information tailored to their needs on a single page.
Typical solution	Present the information in parallel, so each version has its own column.
Typical scenarios	Multi-lingual document. Technical or legal document, with a parallel non-technical version.
Issues	There is a limit to the number of layers that are practical, that readers can manage and that writers can use consistently. Two or three layers are most common.



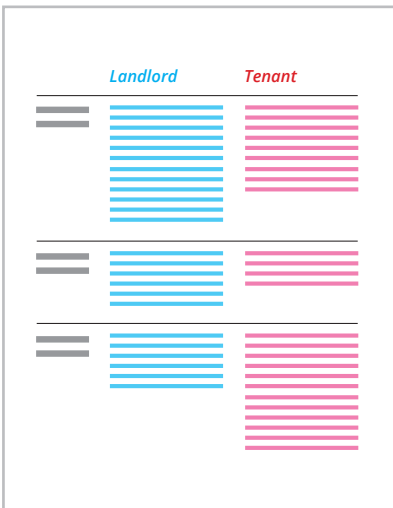
Filtered layering

Challenge	To help readers focus on the information that's most immediately relevant, while still making more detailed information available somewhere else.
Typical solution	Filter the complex or detailed information out, and make it available in  footnotes, or annexes; links to online versions.  pop-up windows, concertinas or links.
Typical scenarios	Project report, consultation report, annual report, articles with definitions or notes, insurance policies with exceptions, pharmaceutical information.



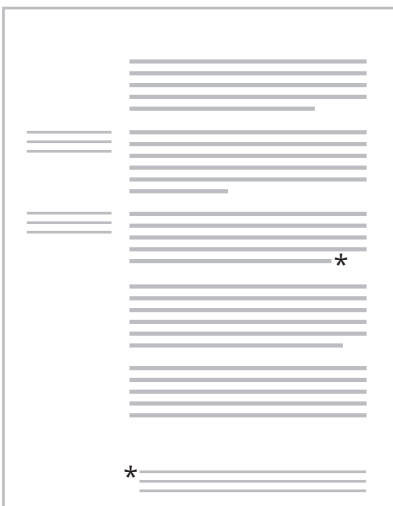
Gist layering

Challenge	To allow readers to get the gist of a text through a quick read, and to dive deeper if they feel the need.
Typical solution	Write short, simple paragraphs that build a coherent narrative without reading the supporting text. The gist layer gives readers the big picture. Signal the gist layer using a distinctive style (for example, bold).
Typical scenarios	Project report, policy document.
Issues	When writing the gist layer, do not assume readers have looked at the details. Make sure the gist layer communicates clearly on its own.



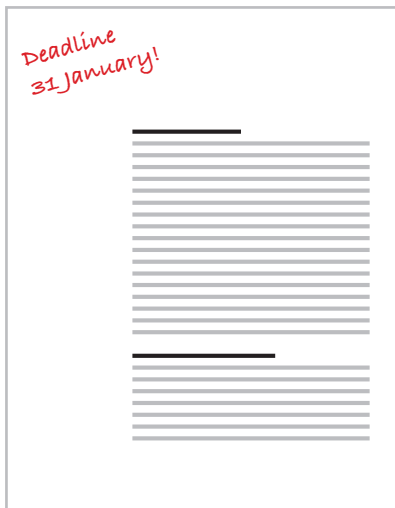
Swim lanes

Challenge	To provide a coherent reading path for distinct groups of users, with parallel content for each of them.
Typical solution	Separate the content into columns, like lanes in a swimming pool. Each lane is aimed at a different audience. This emphasises the conversational or cooperative nature of some document types.
Typical scenarios	This pattern is useful for contracts, where two parties have reciprocal rights and responsibilities. An example might be a tenancy agreement, with swim lanes for the landlord and the tenant.
Issues	Sometimes there can be an imbalance between the lanes. It may be possible to adjust the column widths so the fullest column gets more space.



Notes

Challenge	To present information on different levels. Notes supplement the main document, adding details, elaborations, references, or explanations..
Typical solution	- Footnotes, side notes, endnotes, annexes; links to online versions. - Pop-up windows, links.
Typical scenarios	Longer documents such as reports, books, or manuals.



Multiple voices

Challenge	To enable writers to use more than voice in a document, helping to help engage and support readers. While the voice of the body text can be serious; other parts of the document can convey a different voice, such as a helpful, urgent, or cautionary message.
Typical solution	Use a typeface that contrasts with the body of the text. You can reserve a place within your design for a different voices, such as authors' comments, reminders, cautions, warnings, each designed to focus the reader's attention.
Typical scenarios	Textbook with a teacher's voice for study tips. Consumer investment guide, with the regulator's voice for risk warnings.
Issues	See also <i>Zones</i> , <i>Panels</i> .



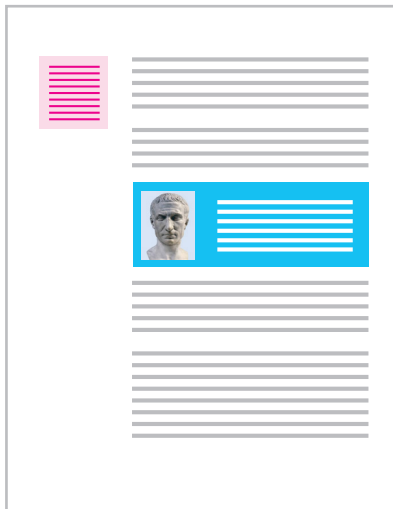
Quotations

Challenge	To show that a passage of text is written by someone other than the author..
Typical solution	Most publishers include the format of quotations in their house style, typically using a smaller type size, often indented.
Typical scenarios	Report, newsletter.



Pull-out quotes

Challenge	To highlight an interesting segment of text in order to engage the reader.
Typical solution	Design an interesting quotation in large type, in the margin or as a panel within the text.
Typical scenarios	Pull-out quotes originated in magazines, but can be helpful to highlight the most salient points from other types of documents.
Issues	Pull-out quotes can be an aspect of Multiple Voices, using the voice of <i>enthusiasm</i> , for example, or <i>authenticity</i> .



Panels

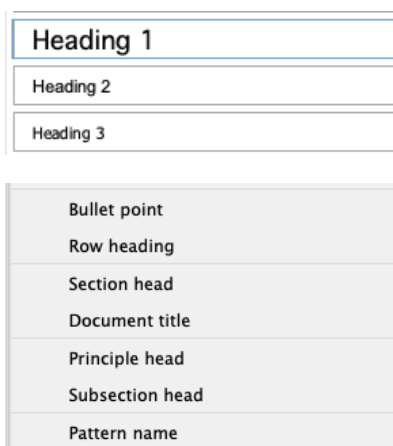
Challenge	To show that a passage of text is outside the main narrative flow of the document.
Typical solution	Place the extra text or visual on a panel, which should be so distinct from the main text that the reader can read around it with interrupting their flow.
Typical scenarios	Panels are used in many document genres – for warnings, technical background, instructions, links, and so on. The panel can be a box, or a tinted area, or can sit in the margin.
Issues	When there are several panels on each page, readers may tune out their importance. Limit panels to essential information. ☐ Panels are not the same as pop-up windows. They are visible to all readers, whereas pop-up windows rely on the reader's choice to view them.



Zones

Challenge	To provide a consistent home for regular text components.
Typical solution	Reserve a space for regular text components, perhaps placed on a panel with a distinctive typographic treatment. Zones often appear on covers or section starts.
Typical scenarios	Zones are often used for the author's biography in a magazine, or for safety information in an instruction manual, or for contact information on a web page.

5.3.4.



Make all visual designs consistent

Consistency

Challenge	Different functions of text (main narrative, footnotes, quotes, captions, etc) vary in length. It is a challenge to make all functions look consistent throughout a document..
Typical solution	Set up style-sheets for the various kinds of text within a document – all word-processing and design software includes this feature.
Typical scenarios	All documents need to be designed using consistent styles.

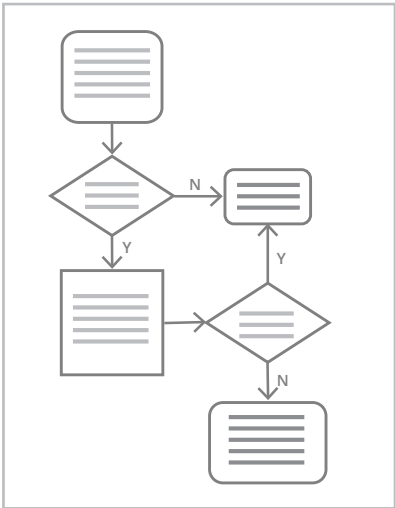
5.3.5.

Consider non-continuous text alternatives



Tables

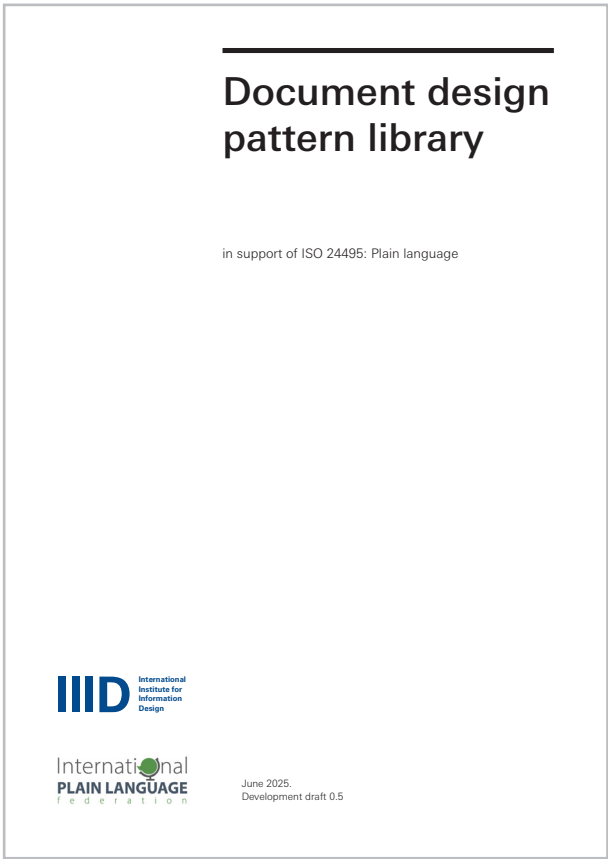
Challenge	To help readers view information in a way that reveals its systematic structure.
Typical solution	Present the information as a table or matrix, so consistent patterns in the content can be seen at a glance. This type of solution also enables rapid retrieval of information.
Typical scenarios	This arrangement is ideal for documents that provide decision support, where different options are being offered. Choosing a laptop involves comparing their features and capabilities. A matrix arrangement makes sure that equivalent information is given about each option.
Issues	The physical format of your document will limit the number of columns you can use.  You may need to run across a double-page spread.  Websites have restricted width but unlimited depth, so consider this when choosing which of your content to place in columns or rows. Tables do not work well in small formats such as when displayed on smartphones.



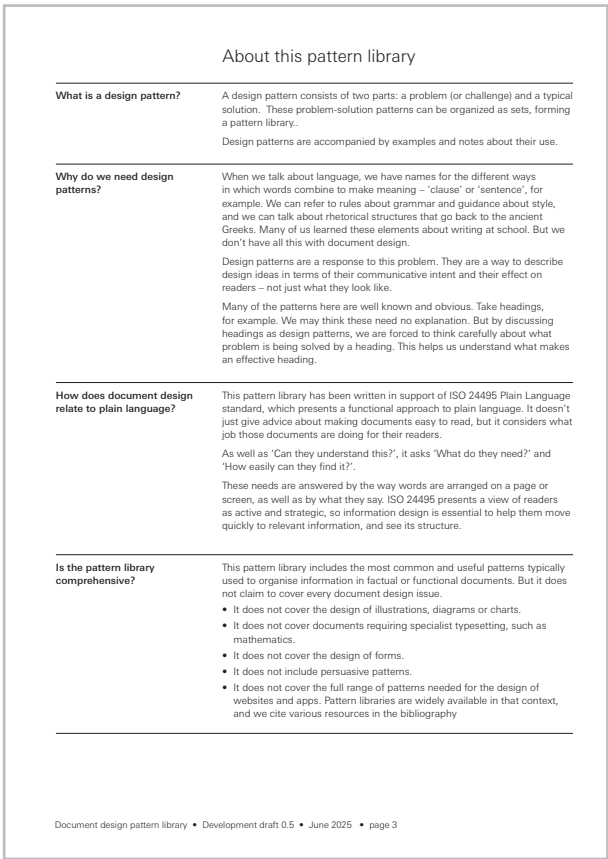
Flowcharts

Challenge	To reduce the cognitive load on readers trying to compare complex options or processes.
Typical solution	Use flow charts to show processes that include alternative routes. Use decision trees (flow charts which ask Yes/No questions to direct readers to an outcome).
Typical scenarios	Regulations, business or legal processes.

Using the design patterns to explain the design of this document 1/1



- ☑ Informative cover: clear bold title
- ☑ Brand identity: IIID and IPLF logos on the cover
- ☑ Genre marker: looks like a report or manual
- ☑ Suitable format: A4 is standard in most countries.



- ☑ Informative headings: they form a skimmable sequence
- ☑ Legible text: type size, line length and ranged left column follow best practice
- ☑ White space: space between the headings allows readers to quickly move between them
- ☑ Bulleted lists
- ☑ Footers
- ☑ Page numbers

Using the design patterns to explain the design of this document 1/2

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☒ Contents list

☒ Section numbering

☒ Search bar (when read as a PDF)

5.3 Design guidelines for Principle 3: Readers can easily understand what they find (understandable)

5.3.2. Use visual signaling to group information

Section 2

Defendit lusa

Sequi vitaspiceae

Clustered groups

Challenge

To write a page suitable for a reader who wishes to browse, rather than read in a linear fashion.

Typical solution

Group content in clusters (columns or other arrangements). Lay them out in a consistent way, bearing in mind that:

- Aligned items will be read as a sequence.
- Items that are close together will be seen as related.

Typical scenarios

Museum guide, a college prospectus, a product catalogue.

Issues

Using layout in this way will inevitably mean leaving white space at the foot of columns or pages. Be wary of filling these spaces to avoid waste – they are active components of your text and are doing the job of visually signaling the groups.

Colour-coded sections

Challenge

To help readers to go straight to the right section, and, as they read, to be aware of which section they are in.

Typical solution

Colour coding can be used to make sections of a document visibly different.
It provides the reader with an ambient cue that they are still in the same section.
Colour also provides a good search target, similar to icons, when moving from contents lists to content.

Typical scenarios

Longer reports which are divided into sections.

Issues

Colour should not be used on its own to signal a difference, because the document may be copied in black and white. So use it along with another cue such as a heading or icon.

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☒ Section start indicators

☒ Glanceable content

☒ Clustered groups: each pattern is laid out in a tight graphic group

☒ Heading hierarchies

☒ Legible illustrations

☒ Consistency: the document was created with style sheets

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Version

0.1	27 May 2025	Development draft for comments
0.2	27 May 2025	Edited to remove repetition of 'How this pattern library relates to ISO 24495'
0.3	29 May 2025	Missing examples added, and various editorial changes.
0.5	2 June 2025	Numerous minor edits following comments
0.6	5 June 2025	New edits and examples following comments

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If you refer to the pattern library, please cite as follows:

Waller, R., van der Waarde, K., Schriver, K. A., Slabbert, C., Cheek, A. and Linsky, R. (2025, June 5). Document design pattern library, version 0.6, International Plain Language Federation. <https://www.iplfederation.org/guidelines-and-references/>