When we hear the word "writing," we picture words. Writing brings to mind images of books filled with page after page of written words. Books with many pictures we think of as "picture books," and we expect to find them in the children’s and visual arts sections of bookstores. Yet our daily experience with written words tells us something different. On the one hand, stories are often illustrated with drawings; newspaper articles include photos; Web sites are full of written words, images, and sounds. On the other hand, television, which we think of as a visual medium, now includes many written words, from bulleted information on news shows to the sports scores that run across the bottom of the screen.

All of these verbal and visual texts have a third important component: design. If you look up the word design in a dictionary, you’ll find it means to plan, or create, or “plot out.” By design means “on purpose.” And indeed we can now design everything we write, choosing typefaces and fonts, using color, adding images, creating charts and graphs. Computers even allow us to write in genres that used to be the domain of professionals, as word-processing software enables us to compose a brochure almost as easily as a letter.

Design is an important element in communicating our message. How we design a text will determine the response of the reader. The more we understand how texts work, the better we can design our words, images, and graphics to achieve our goals. Sometimes words work best; other times, images; sometimes, both. See, for example, how you might describe a museum with words alone, or with a combination of words and images. Following are three such descriptions of museums on the National Mall between the Capitol and the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C.

A verbal description—one using words alone—might simply describe the museums; it might look something like this:
National Museum of American History
Experience the history of the United States in this huge museum. Exhibits range from the flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the “Star-Spangled Banner” to Julia Child’s kitchen. One popular exhibit is of the First Ladies’ inaugural gowns. <www.americanhistory.si.edu>

National Museum of Natural History
Learn about the history of Earth and the creatures that have lived on it. Exhibits include dinosaur skeletons, a life-size model of a blue whale, the famous Hope Diamond, and an insect zoo. Children love the hands-on Discovery Room. <www.mnh.si.edu>

National Air and Space Museum
See historic aircraft—including the Wright Brothers’ 1903 flying machine, Charles Lindbergh’s Spirit of St. Louis, and the Apollo 11 command module—and a lunar rock that visitors can touch. The museum includes an IMAX theater with four screens and the Albert Einstein Planetarium. <www.nasm.edu>

National Gallery of Art
View one of the world’s greatest collections of European and American art, dating from the Middle Ages to the present. A new sculpture garden becomes a popular skating rink in winter. <www.nga.gov>

National Museum of African Art
Housed in this mostly underground building is the only American museum dedicated to art from sub-Saharan Africa, an important resource for the study of African art and culture. <www.nmafa.si.edu>

These verbal descriptions give us a general idea about what is in each museum, but they are not very helpful if we want to know where the museums are located in relation to one another and in what sequence they might best be visited. This information could be conveyed with words alone, but a map provides a much simpler explanation.
The National Park Service Map of the National Mall on the left shows where the museums are located, but it does not help us to see them, or to know what is in their collections. Better than either of the preceding examples is the MapEasy's Guidemap to Washington D.C., shown on the right, which calls itself "a location map and guidebook in one," and combines a map, verbal information, and sketches of important buildings all in the same text. Using this Guidemap, we see where each museum is, what it looks like, and some details about what's inside.

The MapEasy's Guidemap is the work of a professional artist, but computers allow all of us to combine verbal and visual texts when we need to. The question now is not if but when we should use images and when we should use words. An even more important question is how to use each effectively. This chapter tackles those questions and introduces some key words and concepts for working with visual and verbal texts.
We use many of the same terms to talk about verbal and visual texts. Description, comparison, point of view, emphasis; all are concepts that apply to both words and images. These concepts refer to basic decisions we make about how to represent the world. No matter how factual we try to make our words or how faithfully we attempt to take a picture that represents reality, we still must make decisions—ones that affect how and what our text communicates. Very simply, if we point the camera in one direction, we don’t point it in another. Likewise, there are many different approaches to writing about a subject. Take jet planes; we can discuss how they fly, describe them from the point of view of a passenger, analyze the economics or the history of air transportation, and so on. And, there are many ways we can represent an airplane visually. We can photograph it taking off in a blur to show its speed, or show its interior as a wide-angle photo with an NBA star stretched out in a seat to show its generous leg room. We can create a bar graph to show that it’s more punctual than other airlines—or ads like the ones here seen in a busy subway station showing that even its Web site saves time.

Whether we’re working with words or images, there are some key concepts that help us work with text. A brief discussion of some of these concepts follows. The concepts are arranged alphabetically: balance, classification, comparison and contrast, description, emphasis, metaphor, narration, pattern, point of view, proportion, and unity.
Balance

The notion of balance brings to mind a scale with equal weight on each side. Such balance is called symmetry. Symmetrical sentences tend to be graceful and easy to follow, as we see in John F. Kennedy’s famous words: “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” At another level, balance in writing means presenting more than one point of view in an argument.

People generally expect balance; indeed, many of us unconsciously rearrange objects to achieve balance. Putting the fork on one side of the plate and the knife on the other seems natural to most people. The Walker Evans photo is an example of symmetry, with the two houses on either side of the image. But balance can be achieved in ways other than the symmetrical placement of objects. Color, contrast, texture, space, line, and movement are also used to achieve visual balance. In an image you might balance a small dark object on one side with a large pale object on the other. The Levi’s SILVERTAB® ad visually balances two boots—one facing left and up, the other, right and down—as well as the Levi’s logo on the right with the SILVERTAB® logo on the left.

When a text or an image lacks symmetrical balance, it tends to create a tension that we might find disturbing. But such tension can be visually engaging. The image of the girl looking through the fence, for example, has a deliberate contrast between adult and child. (His hand down, hers up), directing our eyes up-down-up-down. This image is balanced, but asymmetically balanced.

△ Houses, Atlanta. Photo by Walker Evans, 1936. A perfectly balanced symmetrical background of two houses is tied together by the two movie posters in the foreground.
Chicago. Photo by Yasuhiro Ishimoto, 1951/52. This image uses asymmetrical balance: the large man on the left with his hand pointing down is balanced by the small child in the center whose arm reaches up. Her strong gaze from the center of the image locks directly at the camera—and thus at us, anchoring our focus on the image.

Levi's SILVERTAB® ad. The two boots are balanced visually, one foot up, one down, and the SILVERTAB® logo on the left balances the Levi's® logo on the right.
Classification is one means of organizing and analyzing a topic. When we classify, we group things into categories according to their similarities. If we were writing about Greek architecture, for example, we might classify various buildings as Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian. We could do this both verbally and visually.

Often, visual cues are critical for classifying different kinds of animals — for example, the difference between a sockeye and coho salmon — yet we still require names to identify the categories. Many classifications depend entirely on words. The classifications of crimes into felonies and misdemeanors or college courses into lower-division, upper-division, and graduate would be impossible without words.

Greek architecture can be classified as Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian, according to the shapes at the tops of columns.
Apples classified according to variety.

Our table of contents uses typography to classify parts of the book—one font for chapter titles, another smaller font for headings.
In both writing and design, we regularly use comparison to explain or demonstrate an idea. Recognizing similarities and differences is basic to thinking and essential to learning. Animals in the same family, for example, have basic similarities (ibises all have long curved bills), but different species also have differences (white-faced ibises have reddish faces surrounded by a white border; glossy ibises have dark faces).

Comparison is a frequent strategy for organizing units of writing. We often can explain something unfamiliar by comparing it to something more familiar, especially when similarities and differences are noted.

Comparison is also a good way of underlining a point. Advertising often uses strong comparisons in this way. Juxtaposing images side by side that either relate to each other or are the opposite of each other is a strategy used regularly in the visual arts. Many elements are used to create contrast in design, including color, focus, scale, texture, and shape. Comparisons are often made with charts and graphs. The performance of an individual stock, for example, is often represented on a graph with the relevant benchmark index, such as the S&P 500 index.

These images are signs for men's and women's restrooms. They compare the ways men and women use a toilet to differentiate one restroom from the other. No words are needed.
At the Time of the Louisville Flood. Photo by Margaret Bourke-White, 1937. The juxtaposition of the poster proclaiming prosperity and the long line of unemployed workers contrasts the American dream with the reality these workers were experiencing.
The familiar saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words" is often used to claim the superiority of images for description. But although images can show us quickly and often very accurately what something looks like, they cannot tell us what it smells, sounds, or feels like the way that words can. Of course, words and images can work together, with words describing details we may not be able to see.

Close observation of details is the key to successful description, whether verbal or visual. Beginning in the 1600s, microscopes allowed scientists to see things that are too small for the naked eye, but the scientists could describe these details only with drawings. Today, researchers depend on accurate and thorough photographic descriptions made with microscopes, telescopes, and other imaging technologies. Photographic description also has become an important part of daily life, as we are reminded whenever we cash a check or board an airplane.

Engraving of a bug. This engraving by Francesco Stelluti (1577–1652) is the earliest known illustration drawn from a microscope.

General Store, Moundville, Alabama. Photo by Walker Evans, 1936. Many words would be required to describe everything that is shown in this photograph.

This Land Rover ad uses a photo to show an amusing situation—and to describe the kind of drivers who choose Land Rovers.
General Store,
Moundville, Alabama.
Photo by Walker Evans,
1938. Many words
would be required to
describe everything
that is shown in this
photograph.
Emphasis

The volume of words and images we encounter daily is overwhelming, leaving us no choice but to look at them selectively. Writers and designers all want first to attract our attention and then to direct us to what they consider important. One way they focus our attention is by giving emphasis to certain material.

Writers have many tools for creating emphasis, including headings, boxes, callouts, typesizes, boldfacing, italics, and sentence structure. The placement of elements matters. Whatever comes at the beginning or end—whether it be of a book, a chapter, a paragraph, or a sentence—is most likely to be remembered.

In most images, emphasis can be created by composition, by choosing and arranging elements in order to direct the viewers' eyes to whatever the designer wants them to notice. The photograph of a Georgia convict on his day of release does not show his face but instead places his hands at the center, letting them suggest his nervousness. Size and color can also be critical, as the example from World Tour magazine illustrates.

Pages from World Tour Magazine. These pages show emphasis in different ways—with type so large it almost doesn't fit on the page, with headings that are sized differently in a way that affects their meaning, and with a single line on a black page.
John, Day of Release, Georgia. Photo by Michael Stipe. This picture emphasizes the inmate's hands, focusing our attention on his nervousness on the day of his release from prison.
“Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears,” begins the famous speech from *Julius Caesar*. When we hear these familiar words, we do not think about their literal meaning unless we pause to consider that Mark Antony was not asking the crowd to remove their ears and pass them to him.

When you tell a friend “your barber is a butcher,” you do not mean that the barber carves up animals on the side. Instead, you likely are teasing him or her about a bad haircut. A meaning associated with the word “butcher” is carried over to “barber.” These are examples of metaphor, language that paints a picture in our minds, allowing us to “see” a comparison or analogy and thus to better understand it.

Metaphors can be made with images as well as with words. Often, visual metaphors use a familiar image in an unexpected way as a way of making a point—turning a cigarette into a smoking gun, for example, to show how dangerous smoking is. The fresher the metaphor, the more impact it is likely to have. Overly familiar metaphors lose impact over time until they become clichés.

Metaphors always bring additional associations to the literal meaning. The spoof Marlboro ad is metaphorical precisely because it isn’t just an image of a Chinese man smoking.

American Cancer Society ad. This ad against smoking uses a simple but effective metaphor: a cigarette as a smoking gun.
Narrative writing tells a story, “what happened.” Language is well suited for narration. Children can tell about what they did at the playground because language, like events in time, flows in sequence. Although we often think of narratives as stories and novels, many other kinds of writing depend on narration. Histories and travel accounts are obviously narratives, but other common genres, such as instructions, lab reports, and minutes of meetings, also follow narrative patterns.

By contrast, images portray a specific moment in time and don’t lend themselves as readily to narrative. Nevertheless, images can tell stories. We know something terrible has happened in this photograph of Mannheim, and the caption tells us that the city has been bombed. We do not have to see the planes overhead to understand the horror shown by an unknown photographer in Germany.

The invention of motion pictures made it possible to use many more images to tell a story. Yet, as with still images, movie and television narratives depend on our ability to fill in gaps, to follow abrupt cuts between scenes and to understand flashbacks. Similarly, we can look at a series of still images and create a story—imagining the action and events by connecting the frames.

Street scene following the bombing of Mannheim, Germany, World War II. We understand instantly the story this photo tells, starting with the woman’s face looking straight at us in shock and pain.

Guernica, by Pablo Picasso, 1937. This painting depicts the bombing of Guernica, Spain, during the Spanish Civil War. It shows a scene very similar to that in the Mannheim photo, even down to the architectural background, but renders it in a different manner. By overlapping multiple views of people and animals, Picasso creates a dynamic composition of twisted movement that echoes the anguish of his subjects.
"Guernica," by Pablo Picasso, 1937. This painting depicts the bombing of Guernica, Spain, during the Spanish Civil War. It shows a scene very similar to that in the Mannheim photo, even down to the architectural background, but renders it in a different manner. By overlapping multiple views of people and animals, Picasso creates a dynamic composition of twisted movement that echoes the anguish of his subjects.

Stills from an early motion picture, 1902.
Writers use patterns to make meaning. We recognize certain kinds of writing by the patterns they follow. For example, we depend on certain patterns to read a newspaper: the comics, the classified ads, the stock market report, the box score of a baseball game, and the kinds of headings that announce them.

One important design pattern is notan, a Japanese word that means dark and light. The idea of notan is expressed in the ancient Chinese symbol of Yin and Yang, in which light and dark revolve in equilibrium around a center. Often there is a clever reversal of foreground and background in a notan pattern as in the legs image on the facing page: focus on the dark and you see men’s legs; focus on the light and you see women’s legs.

But notan is not just an optical pattern; it is one way we see the world. We see it simultaneously as parts and as a whole. Think, for example, of how we see the individual trees in a forest. Do we see the trees, the light between them, or both? We can read the fashion photo here in a similar way—when we look at the white, we see gloves; when we look at the dark part of the image, we see something else. Our eyes move back and forth, between the white and the black: neither is foreground or background. The creators of the Wrangler ad have done this by actually cutting a pair of pants out of the white billboard, allowing the actual trees in the background to show through. When we look at the trees, we see pants; when we look at the white banner, we also see the shape of pants.

We rely on patterns both to communicate and to understand. Patterns lead us to read texts in certain ways. We expect cartoons to be funny and when they’re not, we wonder why. The same is true of visual patterns.

Left: Wrangler ad, 1988. This ad literally reverses background and foreground by cutting a hole in a billboard in the shape of pants. The background (the trees) becomes the foreground as a pattern that we see on the pants.

This image uses a black-and-white notan pattern—focus on the dark, and you will see men’s legs; change focus to the light, and you’ll see women’s legs.
This fashion photo uses a light-dark pattern to direct our attention as our eyes dance from foreground to background and back again.
Point of View

Point of view refers to perspective. Writing can be in the first person singular “I” ("I have a dream") or the third person singular “he” or “she” ("Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself"). Ads frequently use the second person “you” ("You'll love what we have in store for you!"). It's also possible to write in the first person plural "we," as we often do in this book.

In images, point of view refers to the vantage point the designer provides. For example, a painter might show a person facing us or in profile, from above or below, close or distant. Writers, too, describe things from various vantage points—giving a close-up or distant point of view, moving from left to right, top to bottom, and so on.

We use our knowledge of perspective to understand space and depth in an image. We know that objects in the foreground tend to be larger than those in the background and that things in the front overlap things behind them. Colors fade with distance, disappearing into the haze of the atmosphere. Writers also foreground subjects, by describing them in detail while giving little mention to other possible subjects, causing them to fade into the background. With writing as with images, a subject becomes more or less prominent depending on how closely it is examined.

Designers sometimes exaggerate perspective to grab attention, as in the psychiatrist's ad on this page in which the shoes in the foreground are gigantic. We should be aware of point of view because it affects meaning. Advertisers use the second person to imply that there's something you need to have: the psychiatrist ad puts the reader in the shoes of someone who clearly needs to visit a psychiatrist.

At left, ad intended to show an advertising agency's ability to design attention-getting ads. The extreme camera angle and point of view result in an image that grabs our attention.
Afghanistan. Photo by James Nachtwey, 1996. The vantage point of the photo accentuates the incongruity of two Afghan boys sitting on a cannon as if it were a teeter-totter and the nearby city that was presumably destroyed by such weapons.

At left, ad intended to show an advertising agency's ability to design attention-getting ads. The extreme camera angle and point of view result in an image that grabs our attention.
Proportion refers to the relationship of parts. The term is used much more in design than in writing, yet when we pick up a book printed in the nineteenth century and find a paragraph that runs for several pages, our modern sense of proportion tells us that the paragraph is too long. Likewise, when a writer makes a strong claim about a particular issue, we expect to find sufficient evidence and reasons to support the claim.

Proportion also refers to the relationship of one element to another within a whole piece. Since we tend to see the world in relation to ourselves, the scale of something in relation to the size of a human is generally used as the reference point in our minds. Scale that seems to be out of proportion usually grabs our attention, such as the girl who evidently has outgrown her playhouse. Frank Horvat’s image of Paris manipulates size for striking effect, a technique commonly used in advertising.

Proportionally, the child becomes a third column holding up the house.
Paris. Photo by Frank Horvat, 1974. The proportion of the shoes in relation to the people and buildings in the distance focuses our eye on the shoes, the most important part of this fashion photo.

Katherine in the Playhouse. Photo by Margaret Sartor, 1969. Proportionally, the child becomes a third column holding up the house.
Unity

All texts include various discrete parts: sentences, paragraphs, lists, headings, illustrations, colors, and so on. It’s important for us as writers to create unity, a clear focus on a main idea or on some dominant impression. In writing, unity is achieved by consistency in subject matter and organization, including headings and titles. Topic sentences, consistent use of terms, and clear transitions from one point to another also help to articulate the point we are trying to make.

In art and design, the unifying structure may be apparent or it may be invisible. Methods to establish unity include the use of repetition or of an overall pattern. Unity is achieved in the photo below in several ways: the girls are dressed alike, are of similar age, and are facing each other. The viewer’s eye is drawn to the center of the photo as we follow their gaze. In the Link photo, there’s a unity of subject matter, forms of transportation: a field of cars, an airplane on the movie screen, a train roaring by.

Magazine designers rely on an invisible grid that underlies the headings, words, photos, and other elements and that creates unity between two facing pages. If the grid is simple, the variations are few. If the grid is complex—three or more columns, for instance—the variations are numerous. The grid provides a unity to the text by creating an underlying pattern the eye can recognize.

*From Other Pictures*, by Thomas Walther. The hair ribbons create a physical unity, as does the way the girls are all looking at one another, leading viewers to follow their gaze.
Hot Shot Eastbound, at the Jaeger Drive-In.
Photo by D. Winston Link, 1955. Three modes of transportation and the strange cinematic lighting unify this photograph.
Images and graphics are especially common in certain kinds of writing. Even information that is easy to follow with words alone sometimes becomes much easier to understand with graphics. Take, for example, a set of facts about the composition of Earth's atmosphere. We can write that our atmosphere contains 78 percent nitrogen, 21 percent oxygen, and minor amounts of argon, neon, methane, ozone, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and sulfur dioxide that total 1 percent. But see how much easier this information is to understand when presented visually. The fact that nitrogen is the predominant gas in our atmosphere is immediately visible in the pie chart—and therefore it is much easier to remember.

Some concepts are so difficult to understand through words alone that they almost demand a visual explanation. Our understanding of our planet as a complex, evolving system depends on the visualization of key concepts, even if they are presented in words. The examples in this section are from Stephen Marshak's *Earth: Portrait of a Planet*, an introductory geology textbook. Early in the book, Marshak explains the concept of air pressure.

The density of the atmosphere at a given elevation reflects the pressure caused by the weight of the overlying column of air; this overlying air decreases with increasing altitude, so pressure also decreases with increasing altitude. By definition, pressure is the "push" acting on a material (pressure = force per unit area); in this case, it squeezes molecules in the air closer together. At sea level, air pressure on average is 1 atmosphere (atm; 1 atm = 1.03 kilograms per square centimeter = 14.7 pounds per square inch; and 1 atm = 1.01 bars, another unit of pressure); at an elevation of 5.6 km, air pressure is 0.5 atm (50 percent of the air lies below 5.6 km); while at the peak of Mt. Everest, 8.85 km high, air pressure is only 0.3 atm.
The statistics that Marshak describes are in a continuous relationship. Such relationships can be visually depicted as a graph, such as the one above displaying the variation in air pressure according to altitude. The atmospheric pressure 30 kilometers above sea level is only 1 percent of the pressure at sea level. The image of the jet plane flying at 10 kilometers above Earth and the peak of Mt. Everest at 8.85 kilometers provides visual indicators of altitude.

Visual presentations do more than simply convey information; they can illustrate powerful analogies. The reason why the atmosphere is denser near sea level is because the weight of the upper atmosphere presses down on the molecules in the lower atmosphere. That's easy enough to say with words, but see how much easier it is to comprehend when shown visually.
This principle can also be illustrated with the visual analogy of a spring, showing how the weight of gravity in the upper portion of the spring squeezes together the coils on the lower part. Again, the visual explanation is easier to understand than the verbal explanation.

Readers often need words to interpret an image—as the captions here demonstrate. Some images require other images. See the photo here of an island surrounded by a lagoon and a coral reef. Stephen Marshak explains what constitutes a lagoon and reef:

In shallow-marine settings where relatively little clastic sediment (sand and mud) enters the water, and where the water is fairly warm, clear, and full of nutrients, most sediment is made up of the shells of organisms. . . . Beaches collect sand composed of shell fragments, lagoons (quiet water) are sites where lime mud accumulates, and reefs consist of coral and coral debris.

The photo helps us see what the words say. But a more effective way of explaining how a lagoon and reef form around an island is with a drawing and words. The drawing shows how they build up over time; the words label the key elements of the image. Together, photo and drawing—and captions—help us understand how lagoons and coral reefs are formed.
(a) A coral reef and adjacent lagoon surrounding an island in the South Pacific. (b) The different carbonate environments associated with a reef. The photo and drawing show two different points of view, aerial and underwater, the process and the result.
Some visual texts require no explanation—we can tell just by looking at them what they are or what they say. Some visuals, however, need to be explained with words. Sometimes parts of a visual might be labeled with words, as some of the charts in the preceding section are. But usually images or charts that need to be explained are accompanied by captions. Whatever else they do, captions affect and even direct what we see. We see the photo of the dog shown here one way with a caption telling us that his name is Finny—but we would see him differently if the caption told us he had recently bitten a child, or that he was in need of a new home.

Captions generally identify the visual and give any necessary information about the visual—title, author, date, any source information if it's taken from another source. In addition, they might include any information necessary to explain the visual—what it demonstrates, why it's important, and so on.

Finny surveys winter in New York from the warmth of John’s overcoat. Photo by Michael Ian. This caption focuses our attention on the dog. But imagine the same photograph used in a fashion magazine in an article about winter coats. The caption might then tell us that the coat is a wool-cashmere blend, is made by Canali, and can be found at Saks Fifth Avenue. In each case, the caption directs the way we read the photo.
WHAT WE SEE WHEN LOOKING AT A TEXT

What we see when looking at a text affects the way we understand it. The process of seeing a visual text is different from reading words. Words can be highlighted, boldfaced, capitalized, or italicized to draw a reader’s attention or to add emphasis where desired. And readers typically follow a predictable path, starting at the beginning and reading to the end. With visual texts, a reader’s eye is more free to go where it will. The reader of a visual text will read the many details of the entire image simultaneously in an instant. Then almost immediately, the eyes begin to wander around the image, caught and directed by the details that attract them.

The word “seeing” brings to mind the way we use our eyes to perceive patterns of light and dark and shapes and such. But seeing is as much about memory and experience as it is about perception. We imagine that we see things as they “are”—that a photo of a person on the beach with a deep suntan might strike us as healthy, but a dermatologist might see the same person as having damaged skin and at risk of cancer.

Seeing is learned. It is as much about making sense of what we see as it is about using our eyes to recognize patterns. As children, we learn to perceive light and shadow as light and shadow and not as tangible forms because when we reach out to touch them we cannot physically feel them. We also learn to perceive distance so that when we see a tiny figure in the distance, we recognize it as such and not as a miniature man within arm’s reach. As we develop, we incorporate more and more of our own personal experiences and knowledge into our understanding of what we see. When we walk alongside a railroad track, it does not become narrower the farther we walk even though we might see it that way initially due to perspective. When we use visuals as a form of communication, we count on broader cultural and historical contexts—we know, for example, that a red octagon means stop in the United States sometimes even without the word “STOP” on it.
This book cover design uses a disturbing image—of a cadaver—to grab our attention and to tell us what the book is about. Together, the title and the design make the book noticeable and memorable. Design by Keenan; photo by Marc Atkins/Panoptika, 2003.

The covers on the right use soft focus and unusual cropping to convey meaning in a simple and direct way.

Image conscious

The images on this page are cropped in a way that leaves out certain details. What is the effect of this cropping—how does it affect the statement each book cover makes? Examine some of the other photos in this chapter to see what is left out of each image, and how that affects the "meaning" of the image.
What we see depends on what gets our attention, on what details we observe, and on our own experience and memory. Usually the more important, extreme, unexpected, or disturbing something is, the quicker it catches our eye and also the more memorable it is. But often we do not see well, for many different reasons—we’re distracted, or not looking carefully; or personal biases cause us to see something a certain way—or not to see it at all. If we don’t understand what we are looking at, we may not even recognize that it exists. If we don’t understand the concept of “mockery,” for instance, we cannot recognize a mocking expression on someone’s face nor can we fully understand what it means.

**snapshot**

A snapshot is a photo casually taken, generally by an amateur. Snapshots are glued into family photo albums or carried around to show off kids or new babies or emailed to friends and family. Unlike photos in newspapers or magazines, snapshots don’t routinely include captions. Or do they? When Dad shows off a family photo, he generally tells us about it. Photo albums usually say when and where photos were taken—Cancun, Grandma’s sixty-fifth birthday party, and so on. Emailed photos are rarely sent all alone; they come embedded in a message made up of words. Whatever form the words take, they function much like captions.

Find a snapshot you’ve taken or received and write a caption for it. You’ll need to have a particular audience in mind and a purpose—to tell someone about a friend or family member, to record an important event as a keepsake in a photo album, or even just to write about a photo for your writing teacher.

The goal of this brief assignment is to think about what you can do with words and images. What can you communicate with a photo alone? with words alone? What can you do with a caption—What kind of information is appropriate? What’s not appropriate? Write a short paragraph exploring these questions.