

KK16 — Design principles that influence the appearance and functionality of the user interface(s)

Analysis & Design · Comprehensive exam study guide

STUDY DESIGN — YOU MUST KNOW

- alignment
- balance
- contrast
- space
- text formatting
- usability
- navigation

Design principles shape how an interface looks and works. Know each principle and how applying it improves the UI — you may be asked to evaluate or improve a given screen.

The seven principles

Principle	Meaning	Good practice
Alignment	Lining up elements to a grid.	Aligned fields/labels look ordered and are easier to scan.
Balance	Even visual weight across the layout.	Avoid one side feeling crowded/empty.
Contrast	Difference between elements (colour, size).	Make important items stand out; ensure readable text.
Space	Use of empty (white) space.	Reduces clutter; groups related items.
Text formatting	Fonts, sizes, weights, headings.	Consistent, legible type; clear hierarchy.
Usability	Ease of use.	Logical flow, feedback, error prevention.
Navigation	How users move through the interface.	Clear menus, consistent placement, obvious paths.

Applying & evaluating

EXAM TIP

In an 'improve this UI' question, name the principle, say what's wrong, and state the specific change — e.g. 'Increase contrast: the grey text on white is hard to read, use darker text.'

Key definitions to memorise

Alignment	Arranging elements along common lines/edges for visual order.
Contrast	Using difference (colour, size, weight) to distinguish and emphasise elements.
Navigation	The means by which users move through and between parts of an interface.

Exam technique

EXAM TIP

- When evaluating a UI, pair each principle with a concrete observation and fix.
- Distinguish design principles (appearance/structure) from UX characteristics (the user's experience).

COMMON MISTAKES

- Listing principles with no link to the given interface.
- Confusing contrast (difference) with balance (even visual weight).

Quick revision checklist

- I can define the seven UI design principles.
- I can evaluate a screen against them and suggest specific improvements.

Exam practice — questions & model answers

Q1. Define contrast as a design principle and explain one benefit.

Define/Explain · 2 marks

Model answer

- Contrast is using difference (e.g. colour/size) between elements (1),
- which makes important items stand out and improves readability (1).

Q2. A screen has all text the same size and colour, with no clear menu. Identify two design principles being breached and a fix for each.

Identify/Apply · 4 marks

Model answer

- Text formatting/contrast — add headings and vary size/weight so hierarchy is clear (2).
- Navigation — add a consistent, clearly labelled menu so users can move around easily (2).