Professor Clark’s Visual Design Conventions

These are conventions, not laws. They tell you when you are being unconventional.

Contrast (color, shape, size, location, direction, content …)
● Positioning distinctly different elements side by side provides interest and clarity.
● Elements with like attributes are perceived as belonging together.
● Proximity: positioning elements close together makes them seem to be related.

Harmony / Unity / Balance
● Unity: one should get the essence of a design without distraction from individual elements.
● Balance: the elements of a design should be perceived as being in equilibrium.
● Repeating an element over and over provides cohesion.

Flow
● Attention tends to move from top-left to bottom-right and we perceive images before text.
● Align elements that belong together along a common edge (horizontal/vertical/diagonal)
● A design does not have to be symmetrical.
● Follow the rule of thirds: imagine a 3x3 grid and position key elements where the lines intersect.

Clarity / Simplicity / Focus
● Emphasis: a design should have a primary center of interest.
● Use white (empty / negative) space to frame a design and focus attention.
● Minimize density and clutter; cut out anything you don’t need.
● Limit the amount of text and the size of the color palette.

Color
● Contrast light with dark; put very different (not clashing) shades next to each other.
● Color schemes - use the color wheel to balance them.
● Color associations are tied to cultures; be aware of them.

Typography
● Case – all-caps is harder to read.
● Centering - you don’t have to use it (even for titles).
● With multiple lines (blocks) of text, don’t use all caps, centering, or decorative fonts.
● Use a maximum of two typefaces of different styles (serif, sans serif, script).

Readability recommendations for an 11x17” poster
● Your poster should be comprehensible from 30” away (1.5 x the diagonal).
● Text should be at least .25” or 18pt (distance in feet / 10 = size in inches).
● Put a maximum of 70 characters in a line of text.