

USE OF HIERARCHY IN INFORMATION DESIGN

QlikView Technical Brief

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Introduction

Hierarchy in design enables quick and easy comprehension of information, helps in orienting the user and identifying the most important or relevant information from a sea of information, also improves legibility and hence enhances usability. In spite of so many benefits, designs sometimes lack to display information in a hierarchical manner. In this technical brief, we will see how applying principles of hierarchy and organizing information in the correct sequence can make a large difference in perceiving the story more effectively.

Hierarchy in Dashboard Design

People these days scan information more than reading it. An orderly design enables information to be organized in a way that can be quickly scanned and most relevant pieces can be picked out quickly and easily. Simply put that when a design lacks hierarchy, one doesn't know where to start from and where to end. It may result in confusions, misinterpretation and in turn poor communication.

Your audience will appreciate the most if they understand the gist of the story in a short time rather than spending time in trying to understand every little details of the story. An orderly design can aid in giving out the highlights first and then giving an ability to view details if needed.

In the dashboard below, image 1, due to the hierarchy which is created by using bigger images, greater negative space between the top and bottom, it is much easy to scan information at a glance. However, in the image 2 it is hard to select a starting point to scan the information.

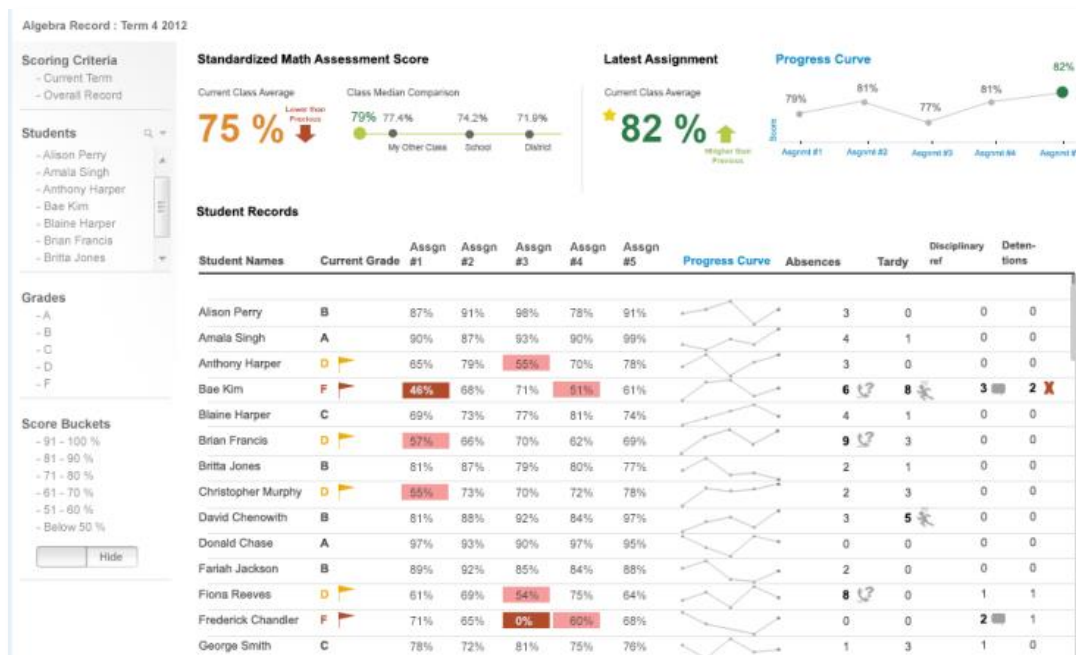


Image 1

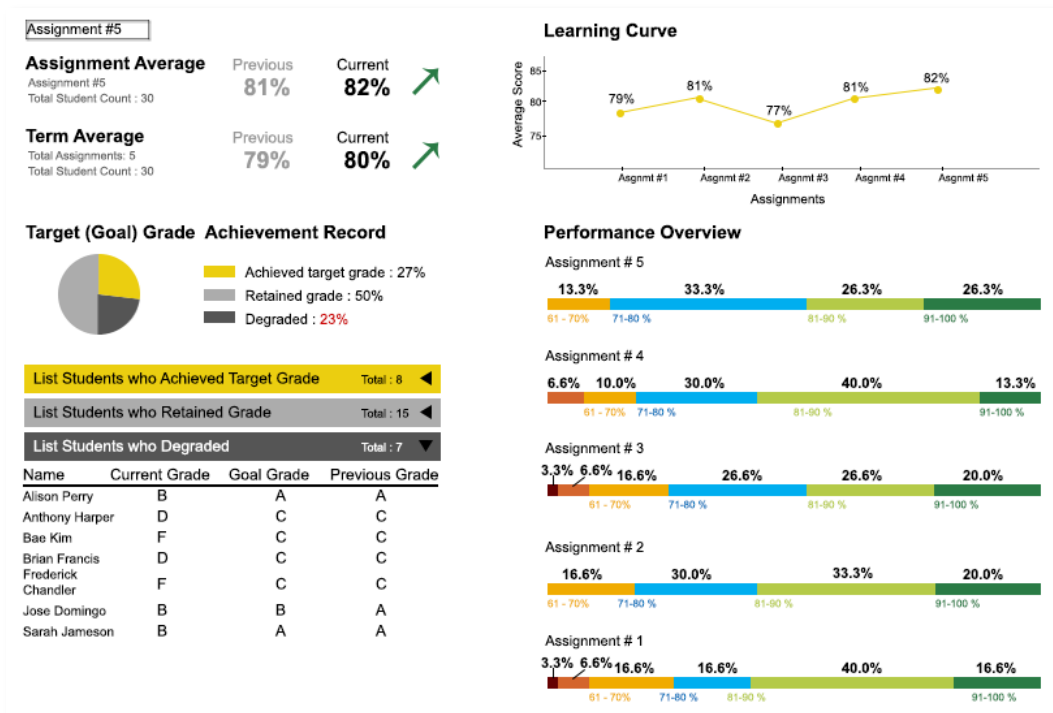


Image 2

In the Image 1 example above, visual hierarchy is created by using bigger text size, white space etc. which are all visual elements used to create hierarchy, but Visual hierarchy is not the only way to achieve effective communication, organizing information and content in a top to bottom method is an equally important part of the process.

In QlikView applications, we are encouraged to follow the D-A-R concept (Dashboard Analysis Reporting) which is a classic example of setting a hierarchical order to your concepts. Laying out the QlikView application in the D-A-R fashion helps the user to get an overview of the situation, then flow into details required for analysis and then, if needed, gets into the greater details of reporting.

This systematic method enables the user to flow smoothly into the application from start to finish. When users understand the basic gist, it also gives them the feeling of being in control and this feeling is very important to give a good user experience.

Elements that create Hierarchy in Visual Design

Size, Alignment, Color and contrast, spacing including negative space, Position, typography, grid, grouping, density and weight, indentation, bullets, rules are the various elements that can be used to create a good visual and contextual order to designs. These elements help in defining the primary, secondary and supporting features on a page.

Contrast

Contrast not only in color but also in font size can create a distinction between the important highlights and the secondary details.

Repetition

Repetition helps in communicating that the repeated elements are at the same level in design.

Alignment

Alignment, like contrast helps in differentiating between information which is at 2 different levels and also helps in breaking the content in chunks to enable easy detection.

Size

Size plays a big role in defining the topics which need to be highlighted like the heading of the page, an important image and so on.

Color

Different colors carry different weights. For instance, darker colors like deep red, bright orange or yellow carry more weight than off white or sky blue. So, darker colors are used to highlight content which needs to grab attention while lighter colors are used for backgrounds and bigger areas.

Proximity and white space

This is one of the most important elements to create hierarchy. Less proximity and greater white space helps in defining 2 separate areas of the content.

These are some of the elements that can be used to create a good visual hierarchy between content. Though very basic and simple to understand, hierarchy in design carries a lot of weight and should be consciously taken into account to do the best to enhance usability and user experience of a design.

References

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