Rob Waller

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I am an information designer with a wide experience of practice, research, writing and teaching.

I have been associated with the creation of an institutional framework for the development of information design, founding Information Design Journal in 1979, and co-founding the Information Design Association in 1992. I have also co-organised a series of Information Design Conferences from 1982 to the present day. I am a frequent conference speaker, and have published papers on information design theory and practice.

I am director of the Simplification Centre and President of the International Institute for Information Design.

Background

After training as a typographer (University of Reading, BA 1974, PhD 1988), I was a researcher with the Open University in the 70s and 80s, working in a multidisciplinary team investigating learning from text. In 1989 I started the consultancy Information Design Unit and together with business partner David Lewis grew this into the UK's largest information design agency, selling to WPP in 2001, and subsequently leading the merged information design team as part of Enterprise IG, the global branding agency.

I have developed communications for major organisations in telecommunications, energy, financial services and government. My projects have been as diverse as gas bills, flight information displays, dictionaries, museum signing, lottery tickets, passport forms and board games. My clients have included Vodafone, T-Mobile, Barclays, BNP Paribas, British Gas, AXA, Aegon, and many other well known service brands.

From 2007-2011 I was Professor of Information Design at Reading University, teaching at MA and PhD levels, and launching a new research group, the Simplification Centre. In 2011, the Centre moved out into the voluntary sector, and I combine its leadership with consulting in information and service design.

I am still involved with design education, through the annual Information Design Summer School in Bath, and through invited lectures, workshops and PhD examining. Recent educational visits have included the Royal College of Art, Danube University (Austria), UCA Epsom, Brunel University, Kolding School of Design (Denmark), ASP Katowice (Poland) and Aalto University (Finland). I was Adjunct Professor of Communication Design at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2012-2017.

Research interests

I am particularly concerned with ways to make reading easier for people with poor functional literacy, and with the skills and systems needed by organisations that have to communicate complex information to a wide audience.

My research interests centre around the role of typography and layout in language: enabling writers to extend their means of expression from purely linear to graphically structured language; and supporting readers who engage with text in an active and purposeful way. My earlier academic work developed a genre theory of typographic design, and I have lately been reinterpreting this using the pattern language approach developed by the architect Christopher Alexander. The goal is to articulate what skilled designers do, in order to make their strategies more accessible to anyone who needs to make information clear. I am also involved with the growing movement of legal information design.

Recent publications, many downloadable from Academia.edu

Peer-reviewed journals

Waller, R. (2019) Learning from Vernon's Isotype test: a design history footnote, Information Design Journal, vol 25 no 3, 264-276.

Waller, R. (2018) Simple information: researching, teaching, doing. She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation, vol 4 no 2, 143-156.

Waller, R. and VandenBerg S. (2017) A one-day transformation project for overdose emergency kits, Information Design Journal, vol 23 no 3, 319-333.

Waller, R. (2017) Practice-based perspectives on multimodal documents: corpora vs connoisseurship, Discourse, Context & Media, Vol 20, 175-190.

Waller, R., Waller, J., Haapio, H., Crag, G., and Morrisseau, S. (2016), Cooperation through clarity: designing simplified contracts, Journal of Strategic Contracting and Negotiation, vol 2 no 1/2, 48–68.

Waller, R. (2012) 'Graphic literacies for a digital age: the survival of layout', The Information Society, vol 28 no 4, 236-252.

Waller, R., Delin, J. and Thomas, M. (2012). 'Towards a pattern language approach to document description'. Discours 10 (online journal, accessible at http://discours.revues.org/8673).

Waller R. (2007) 'Comparing typefaces for airport signs', Information Design Journal, 15(1), 1-15.

Waller R. & Delin J. (2003) 'Cooperative brands: the importance of customer information for service brands', Design Management Journal, 2003, 14(4), 63-69.

Book chapters and articles

Waller, R. (in press, scheduled for 2021) Designing contracts for human readers. In Marcelo Corrales, Helena Haapio and Mark Fenwick (eds), Research Handbook on Contract Design. Edward Elgar Publishing

Waller, R. (2016) Transformational information design. In Černe Oven, P, & Požar, C. (eds.), On Information Design. AML Contemporary Publications Series 8, Ljubljana: The Museum of Architecture and Design, 35-52

Waller, R. (2011) 'Places need signs: information design, architecture and making buildings readable', Eye, 80.

Waller, R. (2008) 'Simplification: what is gained and what is lost' In T. Porathe (ed). Applications of Information Design 2008. Eskilstuna: Mälardalen University Press, 219-230. Reprinted 2011 as Technical paper 1, Simplification Centre, University of Reading.

Technical papers downloadable from www.simplificationcentre.org.uk

Waller R. (2015) Layout for legislation. Technical paper 15. The Simplification Centre.

Waller R. (2011) Type size: interpreting the Clear Print standard. Technical paper 10, The Simplification Centre.

Waller, R. (2011) What makes a good document: the criteria we use. Technical paper 2, The Simplification Centre

Waller, R. (2011) Choosing a typeface for reading. Technical paper 9, The Simplification Centre.

Consultancy

Financial services

Aegon
Alliance & Leicester
AXA
Barclays
BBVA
BNP Paribas
Budget Insurance
Canaccord Genuity
Direct Line Insurance

Egg
FBD Insurance (Ireland)
FWD Insurance (Hong Kong)
Henderson Investors
Jordan Ahli Bank
Lloyds Private Banking
NEST
Norwich Union
Police Mutual

PPP healthcare
Sanitas
Skandia
Standard Life
Waverton Investment
    Management
Virgin Direct
XL Catlin

Telecommunications

BT
Cable & Wireless
Eircom

Jersey Telecom
S.W.I.F.T.
T-Mobile

Tele Danmark
Telenor
Vodafone

Energy

British Gas
Eastern Energy
London Electricity
Opus Energy

Nexen Energy
Northern Electric and Gas
Powergen/E.ON
Scottish Hydro Electric

Shell
TXU Energi
Yorkshire Electricity

Public and third sector

Arts Council of England
Benefits Agency
Department of Business,
    Innovation & Skills
Cabinet Office
Companies House
Department of
    Communities and Local
    Government

Department for Work &
    Pensions
Electoral Commission
Help the Aged
Higher Education Funding
    Council for England
HM Revenue & Customs
Natural History Museum

National Offender
    Management Service
NHS Improvement
Office for Students
Passport Agency
Royal Mail
Veterans Agency
World Health Organisation

Others

Accenture
AAA Michigan
Airbus Defence & Space
Argos
Avon Cosmetics
BAA

Bible Society
Camelot
Hasbro Games
Hodder & Stoughton
The Lancet
McKinsey & Company

Oxford University Press
Reed Elsevier
Royal Pharmaceutical
    Society of Great Britain
Thomas Cook
Unilever

Recent presentations

'"I have read and understood": making contracts safe to sign', at The Transparent Trap: Disclosing Information to Consumers, University of Amsterdam, 4-5 July 2019

'Clear design: How document design can support people who struggle with reading' at Adult literacy in Ireland: Challenges and solutions for communicating effectively with the public, National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), Dublin, 7 September 2018.

'Plain language and information design: an essential partnership' keynote presentation at PLAIN's 11th international conference, Graz, Austria, 21-23 September 2017.

'Transparency and prominence: information design, the small print and the Consumer Rights Act 2015' at Public Understanding of Law Symposium, Middlesex University, 5 May 2016.

'Simplifying contracts with language and design: experiences and challenges' at International Conference on Contract Simplification, Zurich, March 2016.

Contract simplification and visualization workshop, International Association for Contract & Commercial Management, Rome, June 2016

'What transformers need to know and do: influences from other disciplines' at Vision Plus 2014, Vienna, 4-5 September 2014

Contract simplification and visualization workshop, International Association for Contract & Commercial Management, Copenhagen, 18 June 2014

'The visual design of text: how does it help readers?' EU workshop on Inclusive Literacy and Accessible Information, Graz, Austria, 27 May 2014

'Layered formats for legal information', Legal Information Design conference, London, 9 April 2014

'Simple actions: Designers and writers coming together to challenge everyday documents that no one seems to care about', Information Design Matters conference, London, 7-8 April 2014

'Layered typographic formats for legislation', International Conference on Multisensory Law, University of Zurich, Switzerland, 27-28 January 2014

'Deep branding: a vision for customer information', Customer Experience Transformation: Financial Services, London, 17 September 2013

'How do people read pages?' Language Consultancy Association, London, 26 February 2013

'Layout in the digital age: do we still need graphic designers?', public lecture at the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 27 March 2013.

'Typographic visualization to simplify complex information', keynote presentation at Aalto goes Accessible, Aalto University , Helsinki, Finland, 10 January 2013.

'Exploring alternative formats for simplified legal documents', International Conference on Multisensory Law, Munich, 29 October 2012.

'Simple questions – who for? who by? why? how?', keynote presentation at Tieto Näkyväksi – Visualizing Knowledge, Helsinki, Finland, 17 September 2012.

'Information design to make reading easier', keynote presentation at 13th International Conference on Computers Helping People with Special Needs, Linz, Austria, July 11-13, 2012.

'Transformational information design', keynote presentation at Information Design 2011, Lahti, Finland, 20 May 2011.

'Reflections on information design', invited presentation at Design of Understanding conference, St Brides Institute, London, 28 January 2011.

'Are we communicating clearly yet?' invited presentation to Financial Services Forum conference Are we Treating Customers Fairly yet?, London, 24 June 2010.

'The graphic dimension of text', invited presentation at COST/European Science Foundation International Workshop on Electronic Textuality, Istanbul, 16 June 2010.

'Graphic literacies for a networked society: the survival of layout' invited presentation at COST Exploratory Workshop Knowledge Management in Contemporary Europe, Brussels, 1 June 2010.

'What do we mean by graphic literacy?', AHRC Information Design Research Network symposium Defining and measuring graphic literacy, Reading, 24 March 2010.

(with Judy Delin) 'Towards a pattern language approach to document description', Multidisciplinary Approaches to Discourse, Moissac, France, 18 March 2010.

'Transformational information design'. Invited presentation for the Architecture Museum of Ljubljana lecture series On Information Design, 23 February 2010.

'The Reading MA in Information Design: teaching wayfinding', Sign 09, Vienna, 10 December 2009

'Beyond plain English: why do they find it so hard to speak to us'. University of Reading Public Lecture series, 8 December 2009.

'Pattern languages for information design', Information Design Conference, London, 2 April 2009.

 'Simplification: what is gained and what is lost', Applications of Information Design, Mälardalen, Sweden, 26 June 2008

'Helping people cope with complexity', Information Design Conference, London, 29 March 2007

'The small print: what's the big deal?', IIID conference on financial communications, Blurring boundaries: focused solutions, Boston, 27 April 2005

Professional memberships and commitments

Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators, and recipient of the Horace Hockley Award 2014.
Editorial Advisory Board, Information Design Journal (1979 to date)
Board of Advisers, Kimble Center for Legal Drafting, Cooley Law School (2020–)
International Advisory Board, MSc Traffic & Transport Design, International Institute for Information Design (2011)
Panel of judges, ClearMark awards, USA (2011).
Panel of judges, Sign Design Society awards (2013)
Good Law Working Group, Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (2013)
Panel of judges, Writemark awards, New Zealand (2014–)
Assessor panel, Clear Contracts Award scheme, International Association of Commercial and Contract Managers
Chair, Information Design Association (2007 to 2012).
Chair, Information Design Conference, London, April 2012
President International Institute for Information Design 2017–
External examiner for recent PhDs at Peninsular School of Medicine, Nottingham Trent University, Coventry University, Portsmouth University, Aarhus University, UAL Central St Martins.