

Interactive Design 1

10 Principles of Good Design by Dieter Rams

Dieter Rams, one of the most influential industrial designers of the last 50 years, has had a truly remarkable impact on the design industry and the overall concept of product design as we know it today.

Rams held a firm belief that **good design can only come from understanding people. He urged everyone – not just designers – to take responsibility for the state of the world around them.**

In the 1980's, Rams set out to create an overview of what defines good design. The beauty of these principles lies partly in the **uniqueness of their composition**, but also in the fact that **they apply just as much to digital design as they do to industrial design.**

1. Good design is **innovative**

“The possibilities for innovation are not, by any means, exhausted. Technological development is always offering new opportunities for innovative design. But innovative design always develops in tandem with innovative technology, and can never be an end in itself.”

The takeaway:

This means that there is simply **no excuse to not innovate**. As digital and product designers we have **constant access to developing technology**. We need to use that technology to solve real-world problems, not just create gadgetry.

2. Good design **makes a product useful**

“A product is bought to be used. It has to satisfy certain criteria, not only functional, but also psychological and aesthetic. Good design emphasizes the usefulness of a product whilst disregarding anything that could possibly detract from it.”

The takeaway:

A product should have a function, and a specific function. And that function includes **objective and subjective outcomes** (such as aesthetic and psychological satisfaction.) Anything that doesn't directly or indirectly aid a user in attaining their goals through that functionality should be eliminated.

3. Good design is **aesthetic**

“The aesthetic quality of a product is integral to its usefulness because products we use every day affect our person and our well-being. But only well-executed objects can be beautiful.”

The takeaway:

Let's not kid ourselves: **looks matter**. Form should always follow function, but it shouldn't be forgotten – it should follow. We should be concerned with **the impact that aesthetics have on a user** and delight them with the visual effect of your product.

4. Good design **makes a product understandable**

“It clarifies the product’s structure. Better still, it can make the product talk. At best, it is self-explanatory.”

The takeaway:

This is paramount in product design. It is acceptable that there are products that are going to require documentation or at least basic explanatory content to use due to inherent complexity, but **if a product requires inordinate instruction to be usable, something's wrong.**

5. Good design is **unobtrusive**

“Products fulfilling a purpose are like tools. They are neither decorative objects nor works of art. Their design should therefore be both neutral and restrained, to leave room for the user’s self-expression.”

The takeaway:

Don't design a product around yourself. Further, **don't design your product around a projection of what you expect or even want your user to be.** Create a product that gets out of the way of the user and **allows them to do what they want to do**, while guiding them into a productive, and delightful method of doing it.

6. Good design is **honest**

“It does not make a product more innovative, powerful or valuable than it really is. It does not attempt to manipulate the consumer with promises that cannot be kept.”

The takeaway:

The takeaway here is simple. We should **be honest with our users about what we're delivering to them**. However we make a promise, whether that promise is presented through a visual affordance, iconography, or even through marketing, **we need to make sure we follow through on it**.

7. Good design is **long-lasting**

“It avoids being fashionable and therefore never appears antiquated. Unlike fashionable design, it lasts many years – even in today’s throwaway society.”

The takeaway:

Designing for the sake of fashion is a dangerous and generally unhelpful thing. **What is fashionable today will at best be unfashionable tomorrow**, and at worst, a piece of comedy in ten years.

8. Good design is **thorough down to the last detail**

“Nothing must be arbitrary or left to chance. Care and accuracy in the design process show respect towards the user.”

The takeaway:

This is where good designers are separated from excellent designers. **Every input, every image and block of text, every workflow should be thoroughly thought out** to aid the user in their endeavors.

9. Good design is **environmentally friendly**

“Design makes an important contribution to the preservation of the environment. It conserves resources and minimizes physical and visual pollution throughout the lifecycle of the product.”

The takeaway:

In the digital realm, we don't have quite as much effect upon our physical environment as some other industries might. However, **we still should be sensitive to our digital and logical environment.** Ensuring that your product works with right-to-left languages, for instance, is often important for international products.

9. Good design is **as little design as possible**

“Less, but better – because it concentrates on the essential aspects, and the products are not burdened with non-essentials.”

The takeaway:

This sums up a lot of design principles into one. **Design should always be intentional, never just filigree.** Anything that doesn't serve the user should be eliminated. (Again, however, design can serve a user either directly or indirectly – visual design can indirectly serve the user just as much as an excellent feature set can directly serve a user.)

Conclusion:

1. Be helpful

Good design is useful, innovative, honest, long-lasting, and conscious of its environment. We should serve a greater purpose than just designing products.

2. Be thoughtful

Good design is aesthetic, understandable, unobtrusive, thorough, and as little design as possible. We should be concerned with more than just raw features and specifications; aesthetic and psychological attributes are critical as well.