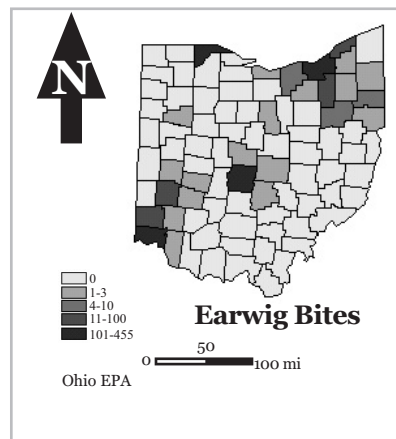# Map Layout

Maps typically include a title, legend, scale, explanatory text, directional indicator, sources and credits, a border, insets, and locator maps. These *map pieces* are systematically arranged around and upon the map.

Consider all the elements you will include on your map, as well as the overall map layout, early in the map-making process. Link decisions on map layout to your goals for your map and the final medium. Together these will shape your choices of map content, scale, and the kind of information you include on and surrounding your map.

Map layout is intuitive and some people are better at it than others. It is relatively easy to experiment and create good map layout, particularly with map-making software. When map layout *succeeds,* map readers will *not* notice: they will focus on the content of the map. When map layout *fails,* the map reader *will* notice: an awkward layout distracts the map reader from the subject and goals of the map.

Poor layout:
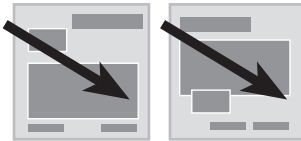

Good layout:
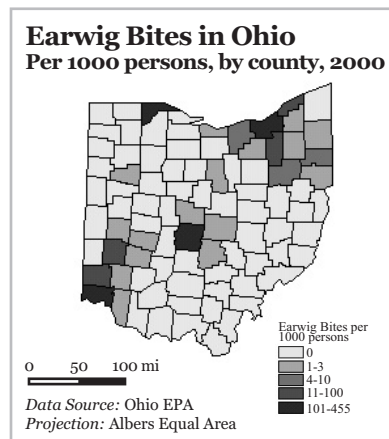
Map layout consists of:

1 **Map pieces:** title, legend, scale, explanatory text, directional indicator, sources, credits, border, insets, and locator maps.
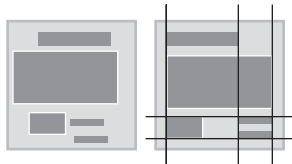
2 **Focus:** How do map readers' eyes scan across a map, and where do they typically focus?

3 **Balance:** How can map elements be balanced to enhance understanding of the map?

4 **The grid:** How can a layout be proportioned into horizontal and vertical spaces to enhance understanding of the map?
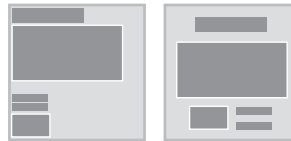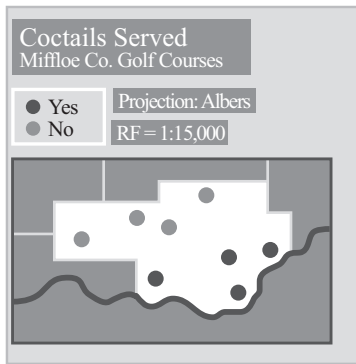
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3 Map layout: balance

Balance refers to the stability of a map layout. When balance is poor, map readers may be distracted. When balance is achieved, map readers will focus on the content of the map. Balance can be symmetrical or asymmetrical.
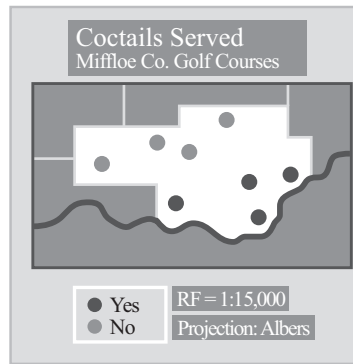
balance

*Balancing map elements is complicated and intuitive. The map elements to balance vary in weight. **Heavier** elements include those that are larger, darker, brightly colored, simpler and more compact in shape, and closer to the map edge (particularly the top). **Lighter** elements include those that are smaller, lighter, dully colored, complex or irregularly shaped, and closer to the map center.*

Poor balance:

Coctails Served
Miffloe Co. Golf Courses

● Yes   Projection: Albers
● No   RF = 1:15,000

Better balance:

Coctails Served
Miffloe Co. Golf Courses

● Yes   RF = 1:15,000
● No   Projection: Albers
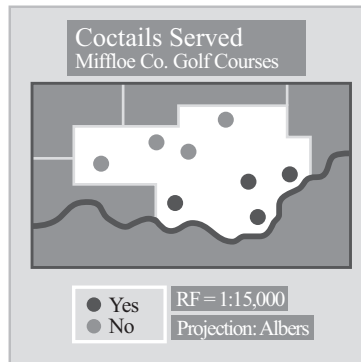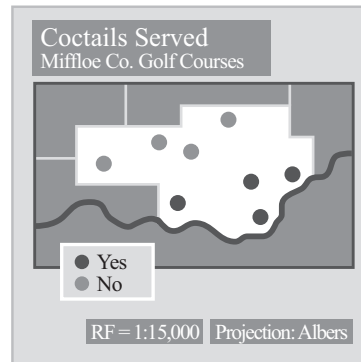
from http://makingmaps.owu.edu

symmetry

Graphic designers trained in the U.S. tend to think about symmetry as having roots in Egyptian and Greek architectural ideals. Balance around a central vertical axis defines symmetrical layout in this way of thinking. Similarly they think about asymmetry as having roots in Oriental, especially Japanese, architectural ideals. Asymmetrical layout depends on off-center weights and balances.

Symmetrical Balance

Coctails Served
Miffloe Co. Golf Courses

- Yes
- No

RF = 1:15,000
Projection: Albers

Asymmetrical Balance

Coctails Served
Miffloe Co. Golf Courses

- Yes
- No

RF = 1:15,000   Projection: Albers

Symmetrical balance implies:

- ✓ tradition
- ✓ conservative look
- ✓ simplicity
- ✓ rule following

Asymmetrical balance implies:

- ✓ modernity
- ✓ progressive look
- ✓ complexity
- ✓ creativity