

**Hierarchical Organization** One of the major objectives in map making is to “separate meaningful characteristics and to portray likenesses, differences, and interrelationships” (Robinson, et al., 1995, p. 327). The internal graphic structuring of the map (and the page layout more generally) is fundamental to helping people read your map. You can think of a hierarchy as the visual separation of your map into layers of information. Some types of features will be seen as more important than other kinds of features, and some features will seem more important than other features of the same type. Some page elements (e.g., the map) will seem more important than others (e.g., the title or legend). This visual layering of information within the map and on the page helps readers focus on what is important and enables them to identify patterns. Hierarchical organization on reference maps (those that show the location of a variety of physical and cultural features, such as terrain, roads, boundaries, and settlements) works differently than on thematic maps (maps that concentrate on the distribution of a single attribute or the relationship among several attributes). For reference maps, many of the features should be no more important than one another and so, visually, they should lie on essentially the same visual plane. In reference maps, hierarchy is usually more subtle and the map reader brings elements to the forefront by focusing attention on them. For thematic maps, the theme is more important than the base that provides geographic context.