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## **UNIT 10 PRESENTING THE PRODUCT**

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### **10.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- explain visual merchandising from a buyer's perspective;
- discuss communicating ideal presentation standards;
- explain methods of presentation;
- describe space efficiency;
- explain lay-out and adjacencies.

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### **10.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the last unit you have learnt the important steps involved in range planning. You are now aware that buying team takes all the effort in ensuring that the range meets all the important criteria for range planning so as to ensure that sales targets are met fully. In the process of range planning, there is likelihood that the buyer may miss out on the presentation need of the range in order to receive the desired response from the consumers. Thus, it is also important for the buying and merchandising team to give proper thought to the issues involved in range presentation. This facilitates the team to take effective steps in planning and execution of the same. In this unit you will also learn about the meaning and importance of the visual merchandising in a departmental store. You will also learn about the presentation standards and different categories of the products. You will be further familiarised with the lay-out and adjacencies and the utility of involving buying and merchandising team in it.

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## 10.2 VISUAL MERCHANDISING FROM A BUYER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Visual merchandising is the most important element in store presentation. The consumer before entering the showroom/store generally takes an overall view of the store lay-out and visual presentation of the items in the store. The first impression the consumer gets from the overall presentation of the products within the store sets the positive or negative tone in the mind of the consumer. The positive tone ensures that the consumer will be willing to spend more time in the store to look for the products of interest to him/her.

Therefore, it is of vital importance for the retail store management to take all due care in the overall lay-out of their stores including visual presentation of the items within the store. The buying and merchandising team naturally will be required to be part of the overall range display plan. This involvement may ensure that items/products are displayed in the manner in which they had originally conceived at the time of finalizing the range. The involvement of the buying team depends on the structure of the retail organization. In many retail organizations, the buying team as part of the merchandising team has direct involvement in the store lay-out and display plan. In smaller retail organizations, the involvement of the buyer is more direct as compared to large format stores. The buying team may ask for visual merchandising display photographs from departmental managers to check if the display is in line with their drawings and plans.

The biggest advantage of involving the buyer in the visual merchandise and lay-out plan is that the vision with which the range was conceived and developed is carried out as per the buyer's vision. For example the buying and merchandising team of international brand GAP, plans the display of jeans, shirts, sweaters and other sportswear as part of the casual wear range. The team may display these items on one floor itself and do not have separate sections/departments for display of jeans, shirts etc. The newest items are usually placed near the store's entrance, which are then replaced with next new items after a certain display time is allowed for each new item. This gives easy view to passers-by as well as visitors to the store about the latest arrivals. Strategic inputs such as these makes the selling effort a joint effort without giving way for passing the buck.

Buyer's involvement in visual merchandising also has the benefit of making him/her aware about the retail environment and display facilities available at each of the store. For example, a men's shirt may look good in box packing but if the retail store is not in a position to display all the shirt merchandise on shelves due to lack of shelf space then the merchandise loses on the proper range presentation and thereby on selection of the styles. The retail store in such a case may open the boxes and keep the shirt on hangers in a display browser. This may spoil the overall presentation of the shirt collection as well as losing on the box packaging cost which were incurred from the perspective for making an effective presentation to the consumers.

Similarly, planning of window display needs to project the newer merchandise in proper co-ordination with the overall theme of the range. For example, if the collection has been planned for the festive occasion then the festive look to the show window is necessary along with the display of such merchandise. During Diwali season, the collection should have display of fashion and party-wear collection and not that of sportswear or casual wear range. Similarly, care has to be taken of proper co-ordination of items with each other. For example, during Christmas season display of more dresses and skirts is required to suit target customers for the occasion. Co-ordination of skirts with proper designs and colours of tops like Tee-shirts or shirts or

blouse combination, will improve the skirt sales. This will also induce the consumers to go for the complete set of skirt and the co-ordinated top.

Hence, buyer's involvement brings proper direction to the display as per the vision or theme plan of the buying and merchandising team. This enhances the chance of improved sales for the season.

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### 10.3 COMMUNICATING IDEAL PRESENTATION STANDARDS

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Communication of visual merchandising plan correctly to the store staff is of vital importance. The store represents the store brand or the product brand. Hence, there cannot be any laxity in ensuring that the display represents the brand's identity in the most appropriate manner. The display may be in consonance with the consumers' image about the brand. Any kind of dissonance of visual display of the products with that of store's or brand's image will affect the conversion of consumer walk-ins into real sales or may affect amount of sales. Thus, it is always the effort of the buying and merchandising team to ensure that their communications with regard to display standards are carried out appropriately. In small retail organizations, due to lesser number of stores involved, the buyer is able to communicate over the phone or make personal visit to the stores for communicating and affecting the visual merchandising plan.

In case of bigger retail organizations, the buying and merchandising team may arrange to forward detailed lay-out and display plan. The detailed plan can cover the following details for the store visual merchandising department to act upon:

- I. It shows the actual positioning of different merchandise. The specific item-wise (in case of apparel company – style-wise display is shown) vis-à-vis various display fixtures, shelves and browsers. These displays are planned for every month of the season so as to ensure that all the items planned for the season are well displayed. The display takes into account the standard fixtures or browsers or shelves. The buying and merchandising team ensure that all the stores have standard display materials for creating similar displays in all stores. Stores where standard display materials are not available or there is change in the shape of merchandise display area may plan the display separately.
- II. The buying and merchandising team may also create standard guidelines on putting price tags and other swing tags on the products in a certain manner. In some merchandise display like furnishings, the team may provide specific instructions on positioning the information and price tags at certain location and height. This ensures easy visibility to customers even from as distant location. Similarly for bed-spreads, the information tag or small show-card stand will have to be positioned at a specific location for providing details without affecting the elegance of the display.
- Ø In case where there are different categories and sub-categories, the instructions will have to cover which categories will take the prominent positions. Further Which categories will occupy the mid positions and which ones will have to be at the back-end. According to P. K. Sinha and D. P. Uniyal (Category Management) "The merchandising team provides very specific instructions on the display of different categories of merchandise based on the classification of merchandise viz. Destination Categories, Preferred Categories, Convenience Categories or Seasonal categories." Let us now learn these classifications in detail.

- Ø **Destination categories:** This is the most important category in the overall trading basket of a retailer, because the concerned store or the chain is a primary seller of such a category. The retailers' prime concern is to deliver value through the products in this category. The retailers may build a distinct position for its store or chain in the minds of the consumer. The store is well known for selling of this category due to the best collection available at the best prices. For example, many consumers would first like to check the products and prices of air conditioners and Refrigerators at Chroma, the TATA specialty chain of stores for electronic goods, or in earlier days, Towels of Bombay Dyeing. Items belonging to this category are generally displayed at the back-end of the store. This is done because the customers would come looking for them and would make effort to locate them. About 10 to 20 per cent of the merchandise may account for destination category.
- Ø **Preferred categories:** These categories are there in the store to build sales and volume for the store. These categories are based on the sheer strength of quality, range, price, and image for giving value for money. Almost 55 to 60 per cent of the categories would account for this role. Generally store would make efforts in promoting sales of these categories. The store depends on these categories for profit, cash flow and returns on investment. In case of Raymond's Fabric Stores, you can identify its high priced Terry Wool collection as the destination category. Its other categories like terry wool light weight collection and other trouser materials like polyester-cottons, polyester viscose collection, etc. can be very well considered as preferred collection. Items belonging to this category normally occupy front to mid position in the store and takes maximum space of display within the store.
- Ø **Convenience categories:** These categories are more to add value to the convenience shopping. The consumer may not like to go shopping separately for his/her peripheral requirements. Hence store which helps him/her to overcome this obstacle is preferred over the other chains, even if the consumer has to spend a little extra on such items. Thus in a way these categories turn out to be better profitable than some of the categories. For example, in some of the Raymond's store one would find socks or wallets or pack of Handkerchiefs, leather belts made available for convenience sake. Similarly many garment sellers keep inner-wears for sale, for the sake of convenience. These categories would account for 15 to 20% of the overall categories. Generally the items belonging to this category are kept close to the exit/entrance or near the billing counter. These items are kept in the convenient place so that casual look at these items may remind the consumer about their requirement. Hence, they may make an immediate purchase decision of these items.
- Ø **Occasional/ Seasonal categories:** These categories as the name suggests are occasional and are not available in the store throughout the year. They either appear during the particular season like summers and winters (as is the case with sweaters and jackets during the winter season) or during festivals (like some special ethnic collections during the Navratri festival for enjoying 'garbas'). These items occupy the central location for their special position during the concerned season. These items are specifically put on display for alerting the consumers about availability of such items. These items may account for about 10 to 15 per cent of the total merchandise.

Thus, by providing proper guidelines to the front staff at the store, the merchandising team can give effect to their ideas in a proper manner. Besides providing written guidelines and manual, the team representatives should also call for a common

meeting at different locations. These meetings may be organised for group of stores close to the location for proper briefing on display standards and theme of the season. Many companies also organize competition among their stores for the best display as per the guidelines or norms. This may inculcate a sense of creativity and competitive spirit among the front end staff for executing the merchandising team's idea in the right manner. The winning entries are given wide publicity among the front end store staff for instilling the merchandise display ideas.

**Check Your Progress A**

1. What do you mean by visual merchandising?  
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2. What is the advantage of involving buyer in visual merchandising?  
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3. How should window display be planned?  
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4. List various categories of the products.  
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5. What is meant by seasonal category?  
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**10.4 METHODS OF PRESENTATION**

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You have already learnt about the visual merchandising from a buyer's perspective and communicating ideal presentation standards. Let us now learn about the methods of presentation, space efficiency, lay-out and adjacencies.

The method of presenting the product is important from the perspective of the strategic importance given to the merchandise display by the store. The merchandise display should be able to reflect the company’s vision and attitude towards its customer in the most appropriate way. For example, in ‘Arrow’ showrooms selling American shirt brand at a premium price, each shirt is displayed in a wooden stand specially prepared for display of folded shirts. Only one piece representing the style and colour is put in display while all the stocks pertaining to different sizes is kept in closed racks below the display shelf. Thus the overall look given to the showroom is that of a corporate look, with all the shelves made in well-polished wooden material. The display is kept completely uncluttered, making easy for the customer to make selection.

It is important for the buyer to understand the display facilities available with the showrooms and plan the packaging accordingly for the range. This will facilitate the display of the products in the right way. Many retail chains and stores generally do not make changes to their display facilities from season to season. Therefore it is the buyer’s responsibility to ensure that the available facilities are kept in consideration while developing the range and packaging for the range.

Methods of merchandising products:

Look at Table 10.1 which shows different methods of display with the corresponding products that use these display methods.

**Figure 10.1: Methods of Merchandise Display**

Method	Used for
Shelves – can be adjusted for height	Tins, vases, folded trousers or jeans
Railings	All types of apparels that can be hanged on hangers. Even fabrics can be displayed on hanger railings.
Racks	Newspapers, rugs. Other small accessories and articles
Free standing gondola units – this can be two sided or four sided	These are shelved units that are appropriate for kids wear, ladies and gents apparels
Pedestals	For display of individual larger products like TVs, Desk-tops, Glass-wares
Room sets – creating a room like setting	Furniture set or furnishing displays
Top-of Counter Fixtures	These are normally placed on top of the counters (at 3 feet height) which are mainly used to display small items like jewellery, hair clips, small accessories, scents, etc.

Source: Elliot Fiona and Rider Janet, Retail Buying Techniques

The types and variety of fixtures available today are very much in contrast to the ones available to fashion retailers in the past. In the past, the importance was given to the functionality of the merchandise. In today’s scenario, the style and punk is the main thing along with functionality.

The designing of store fixtures needs to match with both the functionality and the image and style the retailer wants to project. Thus, a store focused on delivering value to customers like the Target or Big-bazaar who retail fashion garments would like to promote *self-selection* as the selling technique. Hence, open counters with

racks or shelves become necessary. As against this, a fashion boutique and salons will like to sell the merchandise as part of the personal selling. Therefore they would keep the merchandise in closed glass counters. This is the case with jewellery and other precious items too, where security of items is of prime importance. Many fashion retailers make use of combination of fixtures, so that they can make use of self-selection and personalized selling techniques.

In addition to serving retailers requirement of storage and selling methods, the merchandise fixtures also play an important role of visually merchandising in the fashion collection. When a consumer enters a store, the fixtures should be able to direct the consumers' attention to the merchandise the retailer wants the consumer to focus on. For example, the Ralph Lauren store makes use of antique cupboards and tables and other special fixtures to display Ralph Lauren signature merchandise.

Some other fixtures being used by the fashion retailers are as follows:

- Custom high quality wood and laminate fixtures
- Frameless glass showcases
- Classic antique fixtures
- Specialty wood and metal fixtures
- Modular system
- High-end fixtures
- Themed environments

Another important area which needs to be given attention by retailers is to lighting fixtures. This is an important and exciting area in store designing. In the past, the retailer would use mainly fluorescent lighting for overall illumination and incandescent lighting for emphasis on certain products. Now the lighting designer has a host of different products to choose from. Today's technology has made energy efficient lighting available to even the most cost oriented retailers. By making a right choice of lighting fixtures, with the help of lighting designer, it is possible to have an attractively lit environment at considerably lower cost than that in the past.

It is important that even small retailers need to give proper attention to their interior designing and fixturing for best presentation of their merchandise. The inexperienced retailer may decide to go on its own instead of hiring a professional designer for the job, due to the high fees involved of the professional designer. The initial one time fees may be managed to make up for the cost involved due to errors of inappropriate design. No matter how small the store is, it is important for every retailer to use services of a professional assistance for planning their retail environment in terms of store interiors and fixturing.

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## 10.5 SPACE EFFICIENCY

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Space efficiency in today's environment has become the most used jargon due to the cost of purchasing new properties or even renting of properties have gone very high. Thus, retailers are constantly on the watch of the store's space efficiency. The efficiency may ensure that the return on space is in tune with the cost of space. To check the efficiency of the space, the retailer has to constantly keep track of the sales earned per square foot by each type or category of merchandise. In order to calculate the sales per square foot, the retailer will have to divide the whole sales floor area into square feet. Then each product or category area. Such as the concerned product/category department, is entered on the sales floor area plan. The

total space/area occupied by a particular category is then calculated. The total sales of the concerned department for a particular period is then calculated and then divided by the total floor area (in square feet) to calculate the sales per square foot. Let us look at the following example to understand the working.

**Example 10.1: Calculating Sales Efficiency**

A departmental store is using 1000 square feet of its area for selling different men’s apparels. It has divided this area into three segments viz. Formal, Casual and Party-wear. The merchandising team was keen to know how efficiently each of the three departments is working. Thus, it calculated the area utilised by each department and their respective sales as follows:

Department	Area in square feet	Sales per month
Formal wear	400	200000
Casual	300	160000
Party-wear	300	140000
Total	1000	500000

So which department is contributing most to the sales area in terms of sales efficiency.

**Solution**

Let us calculate the sales per square foot by using the following formula for each of the department:

$$\text{Sales per square foot} = \text{Total sales for the month} \div \text{sales area in square feet}$$

Department	Sales per square foot in Rs.
Formal wear	500
Casual	533.33 ~ 533
Party-wear	466.66 ~ 467
Average	500

From the information above, we can conclude that presently casual wear is giving a better sales per square foot efficiency as compared to that for other products.

As you have learnt that calculating sales to space efficiency provides us a clear idea about which product or category is best in the overall division. This exercise can be further drilled down to the level of design, fittings, price range or styling. For example, if the shirt styling is an important product feature in formal shirts, then the retailer or merchandising team can find the area utilised for the display of each of the styles (like Formal collar, Buttoned down collar or Chinese collar). Thus, the retailer may calculate the space efficiency for each of the styles.

Using the above calculation, the merchandising team can rank all the products sold in a division. They can look carefully at each product and its space efficiency to find out the reasons for low or good performance in terms of its ranking. Such an analysis opens the minds of the team members to new ideas for improving sales of the low performing products. Sometime just looking at sales to space efficiency may not provide the right answers. Like for example sales per square feet of cheaper products in a range will always be higher. Then will it be the right decision for the team to further increase the selling space of this category? The answer will be no, because many a times the retailer or the merchandising team has to keep the lower



priced items in the range. This is kept as a matter of its pricing strategy of providing low price entry point for the customers. This may induce him for investigating into other items in other price ranges too. Here the team will also have to look into another factor that is of mark-up earned on each of the products. This may help in deciding on the true efficiency of the space utilised by each of the products in the store. To understand this concept of calculating mark-up and the final efficiency in terms of earning, let us take the above example.

### Example 10.2 Calculating Earning per Square Foot

In the above example, if we add one more column to indicate the maintained mark-up per cent then what is the earning efficiency of each of the departments?

Department	Area in square feet	Sales per month	Maintained mark-up
Formal wear	400	200000	40%
Casual	300	160000	30%
Party-wear	300	140000	50%
Total	1000	500000	

### Solution

Let us calculate the earnings of each department in terms of maintained mark-up as per the following formula:

Earning of the department = Sales per square foot × maintained mark-up per cent

Department	Area in square feet	Sales per month	Maintained mark-up	Earnings per square foot
Formal wear	400	200000	40%	200
Casual	300	160000	30%	159.9~ 160
Party-wear	300	140000	50%	233.5~ 234
Total	1000	500000		

From the Table 10.2 given above, you can clearly see that though in our earlier working party-wear was the lowest in terms of ranking as the sales to space efficiency was lowest at Rs 467. When we calculated the earnings to space efficiency we found that party-wear turned out to be the top ranking product. Thus, it is important for the team to calculate not only space efficiency in terms of sales. The team should also calculate the earnings efficiency of each of the products to better understand the space utilisation concept. The merchandising team has to use this space efficiency measure as a matter of guiding tool in its policy of dividing space among various products and product categories. They are able to provide completeness to the range keeping in mind the consumer needs. This also helps in converting so as to him/her into a satisfied consumer after he/she has walked-into the store.

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## 10.6 LAY-OUT AND ADJACENCIES

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Though some buying and merchandising teams do not get involved with store lay-out plan, as the team thinks it is the responsibility of the store interior designing team. It is useful to have the buying and merchandising team involved in the lay-out plan of the store along with interior designer. The merchandising team knows which product

will come next to the other. This understanding comes through both the experience and logical positions of the product within the store. For example, ladies lingerie section is normally kept at the back side of the store in a ladies department, while the front is given to the ladies outerwear. The idea is that ladies should not feel awkward at the time of browsing the lingerie in the presence of other male consumers who may be accompanying the ladies customers. Similarly, the male apparels need to be kept in a separate location where the males are able to have free movement among various departments within the apparel department. Most of the stores keep the formal apparel section separate but adjacent to the party wear and casual sections within the male apparel department. The team should also understand the logical flow of the customers from one product to another.

The team also has to take into account the consumer flow right from the entrance to the billing counter. Many large format stores try to maintain their billing counter in such a manner so that consumer is able to move through many product counters before he reaches the billing counter or the exit counter.

Let us take an example of the kitchen wares. The logical flow and adjacencies for different kitchen products should be as follows:

The kitchen products or the sections for different kitchen products should be planned in a manner so that customer moves from chopping board to knives and then to mixing bowls to kitchen textiles to table linen to serving dishes. However, if the flow is different than the above like the consumer moved from serving bowls to kitchen knives and to kitchen towels to chopping board, it will only create confusion in the minds of the consumer. This will probably cut down on his purchase of kitchen items which otherwise the consumer would have been induced to buy.

Many departmental stores try to create a good customer flow so that the customer is directed around the entire store with very little deviation. This is done with a proper store lay-out that lead the customers through proper openings and subtle barriers that take the customer through the route the store wants him/her to take.

The sales floor has to be changed at least three to four times in a year. This helps to regenerate interest in customers as well as helps the store to create some special attraction spots during promotions of certain items. The changes in floor plan also help in breaking the boredom which sets in regular loyal customers who visit the store quite often. Due to familiarity with the route to their regular purchase counters the customer tends to ignore other products on the route and goes straight to the intended counter. Thereby the store loses on attracting attention of such loyal customers to other new products in the route. Changes in floor plan forces the regular customers to look around for locating their usual product counter. In the process also forces the customer to check out on other interesting products which may be at the back of his mind for later purchases. Some stores also create certain hot spots that offer special promotions or special price offers on one or the other products. Thereby making the regular visitors to the store to find out about such hot spots and check out about any interesting offers. Such hot spots can be changed so as to move it around the entire store thereby forcing the customers to check out on other products too in the route.

**Check Your Progress B**

1. What do you mean by 'Method of Presentation'?

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2. Where should the following be displayed?

- i) Shirts;
- ii) Newspapers;
- iii) Kids wear;
- iv) TV set;
- v) Jewellery

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3. Explain the meaning of space efficiency.

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4. Explain the logical flow and adjacencies for the kitchen products.

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5. Which of the following statements are True or False?

- i) Visual presentation of the products in a retail store plays vital role in their sale.
- ii) The buying and merchandising team does not have any role in displaying the products.
- iii) The shirts should preferably be displayed on racks.
- iv) The fashion boutique normally displays the merchandise in closed glass counters.
- v) Large format stores keep the billing counter at such a place so that the consumer is able to move through many product counters before reaching there.

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## 10.7 LET US SUM UP

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Visual merchandising is the most important element in store presentation. The consumer before entering the showroom/store generally takes an overall view of the store lay-out and visual presentation of the items in the store.

The first impression the consumer gets from the overall presentation of the products within the store before setting the positive or negative tone in the mind of the consumer.

The positive tone ensures that the consumer will be willing to spend more time in the store to look for the products of interest to him/her.

The buying and merchandising team naturally will be required to be part of the overall range display plan to ensure that items/products are displayed in the manner in which they had originally conceived at the time of finalizing the range. The biggest advantage of involving the buyer in the visual merchandise and lay-out plan is that the vision with which the range was conceived and developed is carried out in the display.

Planning of the window display needs to project the newer merchandise in proper co-ordination with the overall theme of the range. Communication of the visual merchandising plan correctly to the store staff is of vital importance.

The store represents the store brand or the product brand. Hence, there cannot be any laxity in ensuring that the display represents the brand's identity in the most appropriate manner which will be in consonance with the consumer's impression about the brand.

The method of presenting the product is important from the perspective of the strategic importance given to the merchandise display by the store. The merchandise display should be able to reflect the company's vision and attitude towards its customer in the most appropriate way.

Another important area which needs to be given attention by the retailers is to lighting fixtures.

Space efficiency in today's environment has become the most used jargon due to the cost of purchasing new properties or even renting of the properties has gone very high. Though some buying and merchandising teams do not get involved with store lay-out plan, as the team thinks it is the responsibility of the store interior designing team. It is useful to have the buying and merchandising team involved in the lay-out plan of the store along with the interior designer. The merchandising team knows which product will come next to the other.

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## 10.8 KEY WORDS

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<b>Adjacencies</b>	: A thing that is adjacent.
<b>Instilling</b>	: To introduce by gradual, persistent efforts.
<b>Kitchen Wares</b>	: Utensils and appliances for use in a kitchen.
<b>Lay-Out</b>	: An arrangement or plan, especially the schematic arrangement of parts or areas.
<b>Logical</b>	: Based on earlier or otherwise known statements, events, or conditions; reasonable.
<b>Prime Concern</b>	: Of first importance

<b>Range</b>	: Extent of perception, knowledge, experience or ability.
<b>Retail Environment</b>	: The environment in which things are sold on a commercial level.
<b>Sense of Creativity</b>	: Productive; creating
<b>Strategic Inputs</b>	: Important or essential in relation to a plan of action.
<b>Visual Merchandising</b>	: It is the art of implementing effective design ideas to increase store traffic and sales volume.
<b>Window Display</b>	: A window of a store facing onto the street; used to display merchandise for sale in the store.

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## 10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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B5: i) True; ii) False; iii) False; iv) True; v) True.

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## 10.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. Describe the importance of the visual merchandising in a retail store. Why should buyer's team be involved in it?
2. Discuss ideal presentation standards in the retail store giving suitable examples.
3. How does one classify the categories for better presentation in the store? Explain briefly each category.
4. What do you mean by space efficiency? Explain its method of calculation.
5. What is adjacency plan? Giving suitable examples explain how is it followed for displaying different products.

### Activity

Visit a departmental store and study its display plan. Do you agree with it or would you like to give suggestions to improve it.