

Elements & Principles of Design

A design is an arrangement, a way of organizing something.

Elements of Design

Visual appearance (that is what our eye sees and our brain decodes) can be reduced to six **elements of design**. They are line, shape, form, tone, color, and texture. They are what we organize. They are the tools.



Line is a mark with greater length than width. Lines can be horizontal, vertical or diagonal, straight or curved, thick or thin.



Shape is a closed line. Shapes can be geometric, like squares and circles; or organic, like free formed shapes or natural shapes. Shapes are flat and can express length and width.



Forms are three-dimensional shapes, expressing length, width, and depth. Balls, cylinders, boxes and triangles are forms.



Color is light reflected off objects. Color has three main characteristics: hue or its name (red, green, blue, etc.), value (how light or dark it is), and intensity (how bright or dull it is).



Texture is the surface quality that can be seen and felt. Textures can be rough or smooth, soft or hard. Textures do not always feel the way they look; for example, a drawing of a porcupine may look prickly, but if you touch the drawing, the paper is still smooth.

Principles of Design

The principles of design are how we organize or use the tools. The principles of design are alignment, balance, contrast, dominance (emphasis), movement, pattern, proportion, proximity, repetition, unity, and white space.



Alignment is the setting of text flow or image placement relative to a page



Balance is the distribution of the visual weight of objects, colors, texture, and space. If the design was a scale these elements should be balanced to make a design feel stable. In symmetrical balance, the elements used on one side of the design are similar to those on the other side; in asymmetrical balance, the sides are different but still look balanced. In radial balance, the elements are arranged around a central point and may be similar.

Contrast is to set in opposition in order to show or emphasize differences



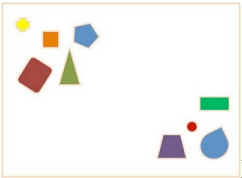
Dominance (Emphasis) is the part of the design that catches the viewer's attention. Usually the artist will make one area stand out by contrasting it with other areas. The area will be different in size, color, texture, shape, etc.



Movement is the path the viewer's eye takes through the artwork, often to focal areas. Such movement can be directed along lines, edges, shape and color within the artwork.



Proportion is the feeling of unity created when all parts (sizes, amounts, or number) relate well with each other. When drawing the human figure, proportion can refer to the size of the head compared to the rest of the body.



Proximity is nearness in place, time, order, occurrence, or relation.



Repetition works with pattern to make the artwork seem active. The repetition of elements of design creates unity within the artwork.



Space is the area between and around objects. The space around objects is often called negative space; negative space has shape. Space can also refer to the feeling of depth. Real space is three-dimensional; in visual art when we can create the feeling or illusion of depth we call it space.



Variety is the use of several elements of design to hold the viewer's attention and to guide the viewer's eye through the artwork.



Unity is the feeling of harmony between all parts of the artwork creating a sense of completeness.