elements and principles of graphic design

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Enhance your work with the elements of design.

LINE

a mark made by a moving point that has length and direction. It often defines a space, and may create an outline or contour; define a silhouette; create patterns, movement, and the illusion of mass or volume. It may be two-dimensional (as with pencil and paper), three-dimensional (as with wire) or implied (the edge of a shape or form).

- Organize information.
- Crete a sense of motion.
- Connect pieces of information.
- Outline elements and photos.
- Create the grid structure of a page.
- Create a chart or graph.
- Create a pattern or rhythm.
- Direct the reader's eye.

Shape

an enclosed space, the boundaries of which are defined by other elements. Shapes are limited to two dimensions: length and width. ■●▲

- Crop a photo in an interesting way.
- Symbolize an idea.
- Make a block of text more interesting.
- Create a new format.
- Highlight information.

FORM

a 3-D object having volume and thickness or a 2-D artwork that appears to be 3-D. The illusion of form (volume and thickness) can be implied with light and shade. True 3-D form can be viewed from multiple angles, as an object in physical space.

- Best accentuated by side lighting.
- Casts soft elegant shadows.
- Difference between light and shadows gives an illusion of the depth.
- Amplifies the sensual understanding of an objects meaning and message.

Texture

Texture is the surface quality or "feel" of an object, its smoothness, roughness, softness, etc. Textures may be actual or implied. Actual or tactile texture is the way a surface feels. Visual or optical texture is the way it looks as if it would feel.

- Give a design a mood or personality.
- Add a feeling of richness and dimension.
- Create contrast for interest.
- Fool the eye.
- Provoke emotions.

s p a c e

is the distance or area between, around, above, below, or within things. Space is an essential element in your layout.

- Creates a rest for the eye.
- Visually organizes what's on the page.
- Creates spatial relationships and focal points, which are centers of interest.
- Provides structure for the page layout.

COLOR

is produced by light of various wavelengths, and when light strikes an object and reflects back to the eyes.

- Highlight important elements such as headlines and subheads.
- Attract the eye.
- Provoke an emotion or a mood.
- Tie a layout together.
- Organize information.

Value

sometimes called 'tone', is the lightness or darkness of a color. Often described visually by a scale with varying shades of gray arranged between black and white.

- Defines form and creates spatial illusions.
- Provide a 3-D impression on a 2-D surface.
- Contrast of value separates objects in space.
- Gradation of value suggests mass and contour of a contiguous surface.

Combine design elements utilizing the
Principles of Design to enhance your work.

Balance:
the way in which the elements in visual arts are arranged to create a feeling of equilibrium in a work of art. If a design is out of balance, the individual elements of the design will dominate the overall design. A well-balanced design has a clear, single, unified message.

Types of Balance:

Symmetrical: where the page elements are centered or create mirror images.

Asymmetrical: where there are an odd number of elements or the elements are off-center.

Contrast:
a visible difference between two or more lines, colors, values, shapes & forms, or patterns & textures.

Use contrast to add emphasis or grab a readers attention.

The key to working with contrast in design is to make sure the contrast is obvious and has a purpose.

Emphasis:
special stress given to an element to make it stand out.

Many times emphasis is achieved through the use of the other principles such as:

- Emphasizing an element by making it dominant.
- Emphasizing an element through contrast.

Pattern:
a two-dimensional decorative effect achieved through the repetition of colors, lines, shapes, and/or textures. Patterns occur in nature and in art. Pattern increases visual interest by enriching surface appeal.

✔ Patterns assist with organizing page elements to create a feeling of equilibrium in a work of art.

✔ Patterns can reflect the underlying structure of a design by organizing the surfaces or objects in the composition.

Rhythm:
is a feeling of structured movement created by the repetition of elements.

⚲ Rhythm helps move the viewer's eye through a layout, directly or subtly.
⚲ Sometimes created by repeating and possibly changing the element slightly.
⚲ Rhythm helps control the viewer's eye movement.
⚲ It can also add "life" and interaction to an otherwise inanimate page layout.

Variety:
is the use of several elements of design to hold the viewer's attention and to guide the viewer's eye through and around the work of art. acts to counter unity.

⪼ Variety provides diversity.
⪼ The sameness of too much unity is boring, and the diversity of uncontrolled variety is chaotic, but a balance between unity and variety creates life.
⪼ Repeating a similar shape while changing the size can also provide variety.

Unity
In design, unity describes the feeling that all the elements in a work belong together and make up a coherent and harmonious whole.

▫ Provides the cohesive quality that makes an artwork feel complete and finished.

▫ When all the elements in a work look as though they belong together, the artist has achieved unity.