

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

WEEK 2

Design Elements and Principles

Learning Outcomes



At end of this week lesson the students should be able to:

1. Show an understanding of Elements and Principles of art and design
2. Explain how Elements and Principles work in the creation of visual imaging
3. Apply these principles and elements in publication and digital designs

Introduction

Art and design rely on a set of fundamental elements and principles to create visually appealing and meaningful compositions. There is a lot of overlap between art and design, however, there are also differences. Design is a creative skill which can be taught but fine art tends to be more of a talent than a skill. Art provokes thoughts and emotions, while design is a process towards a functional outcome. A great design has art in it because of aesthetics involved. These elements and principles serve as guidelines for artists and designers to effectively communicate ideas, emotions, and concepts.

Elements of Art and design:

Visual elements of art and design vary from author to author mainly due to their application. The field of art and design is very wide, careers in art and design, including animation, fashion, graphic design, interior design, photography, product, theater and film, among many others. Many art and design careers also include a business component, such as marketing or sales. According to the Mayfield City Schools (2024), the elements of art are the "building blocks" of art. The following is an overview of elements and principles of art and design:

1. **Line:** The basic element, used to define shapes, contours, and outlines. Lines can vary in thickness, length, direction, and style, influencing the overall mood and composition. There are real lines and implied lines. Please watch the class video for more illustration.

A line is a path created by a moving point, mark or object. It is a dot that takes a walk. A line can be straight, swirly, wavy, jagged, dotted, dashed, broken, thick, thin, zig zag, diagonal, vertical, horizontal, curved, bold, parallel or perpendicular (Mayfield City Schools, 2024).

2. **Shape:** A shape is an enclosed space defined by geometric or organic (natural) or abstract lines. Shapes can be flat or three-dimensional. The three basic types of shapes are

geometric, natural, and abstract. Geometric shapes are structured, often symmetrical shapes. These include squares, circles, and triangles but also octagons, hexagons, and cones. A shape in art is a flat two-dimensional area of color that has an identifiable edge or outline.

Natural shapes are found in nature or they can be manmade shapes. Leaves are an example of a natural shape. An ink blob is a natural shape. Natural shapes are often irregular and fluid.

Abstract shapes are stylized or simplified versions of natural shapes. A symbol found on signs, such as the stylized wheelchair shape for handicapped access, is one example (Raybould, 2021).

3. **Form:** Refers to the three-dimensional aspect of an object, having length, width, and depth. Forms can be geometric or organic and are often created using techniques like shading and perspective.

A Form is a three-dimensional shape, but it is often used to describe the illusion on a two-dimensional surface of a three-dimensional form. As with shapes in art, forms can be geometric or organic. (Raybould, 2021).

4. **Color:** Derived from reflected light, color includes hue (the name of a color), value (lightness or darkness), and intensity (brightness or dullness). Color choices evoke emotions and set the tone of an artwork. According to Esaak (2019), color is the element of art that is produced when light, striking an object, is reflected back to the eye: that's the objective definition. But in art design, color has a slew of attributes which are primarily subjective.

Take Note



Please take note that color is a very wide subject and as such, shall be treated as a separate lecture.

5. **Texture:** Refers to the surface quality of an object, either tactile (actual texture) or visual (implied texture). Texture adds depth and interest to design and artworks. According to Mayfield City Schools (2024), texture is how something feels or looks like it would feel if you could touch it. There are two kinds of texture: Real (how something actually feels, such as a sculpture) and Implied (when an artist paints or draws a texture but it is artificial).
6. **Space:** The area around, between, and within elements in a composition. Artists manipulate space to create depth, perspective, and hierarchy. Space refers to the distances or areas

around, between, and within components of a piece. Space can be positive or negative, open or closed, shallow or deep, and two-dimensional or three-dimensional. Sometimes space isn't explicitly presented within a piece, but the illusion of it is used (Esaak, 2019).

7. **Value:** The degree of lightness or darkness within an artwork. Values create contrast and define the form of objects. According to Castillo (2008), value is one of the seven elements of art, next to line, shape, space, form, texture, and color, the value in art is a quality or a value of light and dark of a certain shade or tone. This art element is best understood if visualized as a scale or a gradient.

Principles of Design:

According to Marder (2019), the principles of art represent how the artist uses the elements of art to create an effect and to help convey the artist's intent. The principles of art and design are balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm, and unity/variety. The use of these principles can help determine whether a painting is successful, and whether or not the painting is finished. The following are the principles:

1. **Balance:** The distribution of visual weight in a composition, achieved through symmetry, asymmetry, or radial balance. Balance creates stability and harmony in artworks. Imbalance causes a feeling of discomfort in the viewer.

Balance can be achieved in 3 different ways:

Symmetry, in which both sides of a composition have the same elements in the same position, as in a mirror-image, or the two sides of a face.

Asymmetry, in which the composition is balanced due to the contrast of any of the elements of art. For example, a large circle on one side of a composition might be balanced by a small square on the other side

Radial symmetry, in which elements are equally spaced around a central point, as in the spokes coming out of the hub of a bicycle tire (Marder, 2019).

2. **Emphasis:** The focal point or area of interest in an artwork, which draws the viewer's attention. Artists use various techniques such as contrast, size, color, and placement to create emphasis. According to Indeed Career Guide (2024), emphasis in art refers to the principle of creating a focal point to make a certain element stand out. Artists use many techniques to create emphasis, and some artists become famous for the specific methods they use. For example, people often associate Andy Warhol with repetition and bright colors. You can choose what to emphasize in your art by considering the goal of the piece and what you want viewers to recognize as the main idea of the work.
3. **Contrast:** The difference between elements in a composition, such as light and dark values, complementary colors, or textures. Contrast adds visual interest and emphasizes important elements. According to Silka (2019), contrast is the juxtaposition of difference, used to intensify the properties within the work, the contrast in art is closely related to the variety. Exploring the arrangement of contrasting parts, such as light and dark, opposite hues of the

color wheel, texture, and size, contrast is employed to create the rhythm, or to strengthen the focus of the artwork.

4. **Unity:** The sense of wholeness or cohesion in an artwork, achieved through the harmonious arrangement of elements. Unity creates a sense of completeness and coherence. According to Collingwood (2011), unity is a quality of wholeness and oneness that is achieved by the proper use of art elements and principles. Understood as a complete opposite to the notion of variety in art, unity is both an idea of calmness, simplicity, or repetition of the same
5. **Rhythm:** The repetition or alternation of elements in a composition, creating a sense of movement or flow. Rhythm can be regular, irregular, or progressive. According to Deguzman (2023), rhythm in art is the visual or auditory pattern created by repeated shapes, elements, colors, sounds, and movements. It is used to create a sense of flow and connection within a work of art, as well as draw attention to certain areas of the composition. Rhythm can be achieved through repetition and variation, contrast, gradation and echo. By combining these techniques, an artist can create rhythm that helps to guide viewers through their artwork.
6. **Proportion:** The relationship between different parts of an object or composition in terms of size, quantity, or scale. Deguzman (2022), Proportion ensures visual harmony and balance. In art, proportion refers to the relationship between the different sized components within one whole composition. Proportion can be used to make a composition appear more realistic or more stylized depending on the type of proportion used. Proportion does not refer to the overall size of a composition (scale), but rather the size of elements within the composition in relation to each other.
7. **Pattern:** The repetition of visual elements in a predictable sequence. Patterns can be simple or complex and are often used to create visual interest and structure. According to Heckmann (2022), repetition in art have to do with icons, indices, and symbols motifs. Repetition in art doesn't have to revolve around character archetypes or semiotics. It can also revolve around something as simple as repeating patterns. Artists like Andy Warhol rose to fame with repeating pattern prints.

Take Note



Please take note that understanding and effectively utilizing these elements and principles allow artists and designers to create compelling and impactful visual experiences across various mediums and disciplines. Watch class videos for more information.

How Elements and Principles work in the creation of visual imaging

According to Lovett (2012), the elements of design can be thought of as the things that make up a painting, drawing, design etc. Good or bad - all paintings will contain most of if not all, the seven elements of design. The Principles of design can be thought of as what we do to the elements of design. How we apply the Principles of design determines how successful we are in creating a work of art.

Lovett (2012), further argues that the elements and principles of design are not a recipe for creating a perfect piece of visual communication, but a knowledge and understanding of these tools opens the doors to a myriad of options and opportunities that may have otherwise remained hidden. Fine artists, graphic artists, web and game designers, architects, landscape designers, town planners, florists, fashion designers, sign writers, industrial designers – the list goes on and on.

Lovett (2012), concludes by stating that our interaction with the world is heavily weighted towards visual stimulus. When we are involved in creating objects or images to be viewed by others we need to understand the effect of what we create on those viewers. An understanding of the elements and principles of design is a vital step to making sense of what we see and create.

According to Lester (2021) he argues that for many millennia visual communicators have used the four visual cues, color, form, depth, and movement in their work, whether it has appeared on cave walls or on computer screens. An important lesson for image producers who want to make memorable messages is to understand that brain cells are complex “difference detectors.” They are stimulated more by the relative differences between visual elements than by the intensity of each one. Consequently, a gaudy, colorful presentation may lose much of its impact if all its graphic elements have the same intensity.

In summary, the kind of project a designer is undertaking will determine the choice of principles and elements to be used. The elements and principles serve as guidelines for creating visually appealing and effective designs. The exact number and naming of these elements and principles can vary, as design is a field subject to interpretation and evolving trends.

Application of the elements and principles in publication and digital designs

Applying elements and principles of design in desktop publishing is essential for creating visually appealing and effective printed materials, such as flyers, brochures, newsletters, and magazines. According to Darstaru (2024), The connection between the elements and principles of design is a fundamental aspect of creating visually appealing and effective designs across different mediums. Design elements are the essential building blocks designers use to create their work. Meanwhile, design principles serve as guidelines for organizing and arranging these elements to achieve the desired outcome. Designers must understand how these elements and principles interact with each other to effectively communicate their message and evoke specific emotions or responses from their audience. The following are some of the ways on how you can apply principles of design in digital desktop publishing:

Elements Support Principles: Design elements—such as line, shape, color, texture, space, and form—provide the raw materials designers manipulate to convey their message. These elements serve as the foundation upon which design principles are applied (Darstaru, 2024).

Principles Guide Element Arrangement: The principles of design—such as balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, proportion, rhythm, and unity—act as guidelines for organizing and arranging the elements within a design, helping to create visual interest. Designers use principles like balance to distribute elements evenly or emphasis to draw attention to specific areas (Darstaru, 2024).

Synergy and Harmony: When elements and principles work harmoniously, they create visually pleasing and cohesive designs. For instance, using complementary colors (an element) to create contrast (a principle) can enhance the overall impact of a design, thus creating visual interest (Darstaru, 2024).. For Color:

- Select a harmonious color palette that reinforces the message and branding of the publication.
- Use color strategically to create contrast, highlight important information, and guide the reader's eye through the layout.
- Consider the psychological impact of different colors and their associations when designing for a specific audience or purpose.

Balance and Unity: Elements and principles often work together to achieve balance and unity within a design. Balance ensures that elements are visually distributed throughout the composition, while unity ties all elements together to create a cohesive whole, captivating the viewer's attention and creating visual interest (Darstaru, 2024). For Unity and Consistency:

- Establish a cohesive visual identity by applying consistent design elements, such as colors, fonts, and graphic styles, throughout the publication.
- Use repetition of elements to reinforce key themes and create a sense of unity.
- Ensure consistency across pages to provide a seamless reading experience.
- Create visual balance by distributing elements evenly throughout the layout.
- Use proportionate scaling to maintain harmony between different elements.
- Experiment with asymmetrical layouts to create dynamic compositions while maintaining balance.

Emphasis and Contrast: Elements like color, size, or typography can create emphasis within a design, while principles like contrast help highlight this. By strategically contrasting elements, designers can direct the viewer's attention to specific focal points, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the design and generating visual interest (Darstaru, 2024). For Images and Graphics:

- Choose high-quality images and graphics that complement the content and reinforce the message.

- Ensure consistency in style and tone across all visual elements.
- Use white space effectively to frame images and improve visual clarity.
- Use contrast, color, size, and placement to create focal points and draw attention to key elements within your layout.
- Highlight important information or calls to action to guide the viewer's eye and reinforce the hierarchy of content.
- Incorporate contrast in your design by juxtaposing elements with different characteristics, such as light and dark colors, thick and thin lines, or large and small text.
- Contrast helps create visual interest, enhance readability, and establish hierarchy within the layout.

Movement and Rhythm: Elements like line and shape can be arranged to create a sense of movement within a design, while principles like rhythm help to establish patterns and repetition that guide the viewer's eye through the composition. This relationship adds visual interest and flow to the design, making it more engaging and dynamic (Darstaru, 2024). For great composition employ the following:

1. **Layout and Composition:**

- Use grids and guides to establish a balanced layout and hierarchy of elements.
- Apply the rule of thirds or other compositional techniques to create visual interest and focal points.
- Ensure proper alignment and spacing between elements to create a cohesive and organized design.

2. **Typography:**

- Choose appropriate fonts that reflect the tone and purpose of the publication.
- Establish a hierarchy of text using variations in font size, weight, and style (such as bold, italic, or underline).
- Ensure readability by using sufficient leading (line spacing) and kerning (letter spacing), especially for body text.

3. **Rhythm:**

- Establish a visual rhythm or flow within your layout by repeating and varying elements in a consistent pattern.
- Consider the pacing and arrangement of content to create a sense of movement and guide the viewer's eye smoothly through the design.

4. **Functionality and User Experience:**

- Consider the practicality and usability of the design, especially for interactive publications or digital formats.

- Optimize the layout for readability and ease of navigation, particularly for longer documents or multi-page publications.
- Test the design across different devices and screen sizes to ensure compatibility and accessibility.

5. **Proportion:**

- Maintain proportion and scale relationships between elements to create a balanced and harmonious composition.
- Pay attention to the size and placement of images, text blocks, and other design elements to ensure visual coherence and readability.

6. **Pattern:**

- Integrate patterns or repeated motifs into your design to add visual interest and structure to the layout.
- Experiment with different types of patterns, such as geometric, organic, or decorative, to enhance the overall aesthetic of the publication.

In summary, the relationship between design elements and principles is symbiotic. Elements provide the building blocks, and principles offer guidelines for organizing and arranging those elements. By understanding and leveraging this relationship, designers can create visually compelling and impactful designs across various mediums (Darstaru, 2024). By applying these elements of art and design in desktop publishing, you can create visually compelling layouts that effectively communicate your message and engage your audience. Experiment with different techniques and elements to find the right balance and achieve your desired aesthetic.

Summary



Desktop publishing is the process of laying out and designing pages with your desktop computer. With software programs such as InDesign and Quark Xpress, you can assemble anything from a one-page document to a full-length book. The following are some of the elements and principles of design used in digital desktop publishing design:

Elements of Art:

1. **Line:** The basic element used to define shapes, contours, and outlines.
2. **Shape:** Enclosed space defined by lines, such as geometric or organic shapes.
3. **Form:** Three-dimensional aspect of an object, having length, width, and depth.

4. **Color:** Derived from reflected light, includes hue, value, and intensity.
5. **Texture:** Surface quality of an object, either tactile or visual.
6. **Space:** Area around, between, and within elements in a composition.
7. **Value:** Degree of lightness or darkness within an artwork.

Principles of Design:

1. **Balance:** Distribution of visual weight in a composition.
2. **Emphasis:** Focal point or area of interest in an artwork.
3. **Contrast:** Difference between elements, such as light and dark values.
4. **Unity:** Sense of wholeness or cohesion in an artwork.
5. **Rhythm:** Repetition or alternation of elements to create a sense of movement or flow.
6. **Proportion:** Relationship between different parts of an object or composition.
7. **Pattern:** Repetition of visual elements in a predictable sequence.

These elements and principles serve as guidelines for artists and designers to effectively communicate ideas, emotions, and concepts through their work. They can be applied across various mediums and disciplines to create compelling and impactful visual compositions. Experiment with different techniques and elements to achieve the desired visual impact while maintaining functionality and readability.

Question



Hands-On Exercise I

Look at ads, magazines, brochures, logos, and other printed projects and try to find as many different types of elements of art and design as possible including line, shape,

space, form, texture, value and color, Create your composition using various types of elements.

Hands-On Exercise II

Look at ads, magazines, brochures, logos, and other printed projects and try to find different applications of principles of art and design as possible including

1. Balance
2. Contrast
3. Emphasis
4. Movement
5. Proportion/Scale
6. Repetition/Rhythm
7. Unity/Harmony

Create your composition using various types of Principles.

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