## Basic Elements of Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Line</strong></td>
<td>Expressive, Calligraphic, Mechanical, Thick and Thin, Implied, Cross-Hatching, Angled, Curved, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shape</strong></td>
<td>Circle, Square, Rectangle, Triangle; Organic vs. Geometric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form</strong></td>
<td>Sphere, Cube, Pyramid, etc. Implied 3-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Space</strong></td>
<td>Positive and Negative, Shallow and Deep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Texture</strong></td>
<td>Dense, Smooth, Rough, High/Low Contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value</strong></td>
<td>Light, Medium, Dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Color</strong></td>
<td>Described in terms of Hue, Value, Chroma (saturation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Semiotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Central</td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donut Hole</td>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Spot</td>
<td>Dominates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulls-eye</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bi-Lateral Symmetry</td>
<td>Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Balance</td>
<td>Equal but Separate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirror</td>
<td>Nothing Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bi-Lateral Symmetry</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unequal Balance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Asymmetrical</td>
<td>Creates Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With focus Point</td>
<td>Dominant Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within a Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Figure Dominant</td>
<td>Imperfect Dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(not Central or Donut Hole)</td>
<td>Natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ground Dominant</td>
<td>Changing Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Negative Space Becomes</td>
<td>Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Important</td>
<td>Opposite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse Expectation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Regular Order</td>
<td>Rigidity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repeat Pattern</td>
<td>Loss of Individualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Ambiguous</td>
<td>Not focussed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nothing Dominates</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Radial</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomorphic</td>
<td>Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Spiral</td>
<td>Vortex</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expanding, Contracting</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
DESIGN VOCABULARY

BASIC TERMS

Aesthetic: Having to do with pleasure and beauty rather than with usefulness.

Content (vs. Subject Matter): The essential meaning, significance, or aesthetic value of an art form; the content of a work of art involves interpretation, considerations of artistic intent, historical context, as well as subject matter, form, and media. See Art Speak.

Craftsmanship: Aptitude, skill, or manual dexterity in the use of tools and materials.

Form: The arbitrary organization (or inventive arrangement) of visual elements, such as shape, size, structure, scale, composition, color, etc., which contribute to the organic unity of a work of art.

Media (plural); Medium (singular): The physical constituents (materials and tools) used by an artist, such as oil on canvas, acrylic, bronze, marble, found objects, computer generated imagery.

Optical Perception: The natural function of the eye/mind as a receptor of physical sensation leading to form recognition.

Style: The artistic character and dominant forms specifically associated with art movements and art history; also a term used to characterize an artist's particular expressive use of media. See Art Speak.

Subject Matter (vs. Content): In representational art, subject matter refers to persons, objects, or scenes depicted by the artist; also, may refer to the artist's experiences which serve as inspiration. In abstract and non-objective art works, it merely refers to the basic character of the visual signs used by the artist; it often has little to do with anything experienced in the natural, physical world.

Narrative: A single image or series of images which "tell a story" or represent events taking place over time. See Art Speak.

Technique: The manner and skill with which an artist employs tools and materials to achieve a predetermined effect. The use of media can effect the aesthetic quality and total concept of a work of art.

Classical: Of or relating to the culture of ancient Greece and Rome which may be characterized by an emphasis on ideal form and proportion, clarity of structure, simplicity, and restrained emotion. An adherence to traditional standards. European musical form from the late 18th Century. Compare Hellenistic, Renaissance, Mannerist, Baroque, Rococo, Modern, Post-Modern, etc.


Non-Objective: Without reference to an actual object in the physical world.

Art and Technology Movement: The pairing of artists and scientists to research and develop new, non-traditional forms and expressions usually involving a pre-determined set of artistic and scientific param-
FORM

Balance: A feeling of equality in visual weight, attraction, or attention within the pictorial field to achieve visual unity.

Symmetrical Balance (bi-symmetrical): A form of balance achieved by the use of identical compositional units placed equi-distanced on either side of a vertical axis of a pictorial space.

Asymmetrical Balance: A form of balance achieved when visual units situated on either side of a vertical axis are not identical in visual weight, but are placed in positions within the pictorial field creating a feeling of equilibrium.

Approximate Symmetry: A set of similar, but unidentical forms placed on either side of a vertical axis which imply an equally balanced relationship, but which in fact are varied sufficiently to prevent visual monotony.

Elements of Art Structure: The combination of basic elements of Line, Shape, Value, Texture, and Color represent the visual language of the artist; the basic visual signs combined into optical units to communicate or express aesthetic ideas.

Dominance: A principle of visual organization which implies hierarchy and therefore gives unity to a composition by emphasizing one main feature over others.

Harmony: The unity of all visual elements of a composition achieved by repeating the same or similar characteristics.

Motif: A visual element (or combination of elements) which achieves importance through repetition, potentially becoming a dominant feature of an artist’s expression.

Pattern: A coherent visual structure, usually created by repetition of similar design patterns.

Picture Plane: The flat surface on which an artist executes a pictorial image. In some cases it acts merely as a transparent plane of reference to establish and imply the illusion of forms existing in a three-dimensional space.

Picture Frame: The limits of two-dimensional images, defined by the outermost boundaries of canvases, photographs, etc.

Positive Shapes: Enclosed areas which suggest recognizable objects or intentional non-representational shapes. This term is not a value judgment; Positive shapes are neither good nor bad.

Negative Areas (space): Unoccupied (empty) space which remain in a composition and complement positive shapes; these negative areas have boundaries and also function a shapes in the total pictorial structure. This term is not a value judgment; Negative shapes are neither good nor bad.
Repetition: The use of the same visual element several times in the same composition to accomplish a dominance of one visual idea, a feeling of harmonious relationship, or an obviously planned pattern.

Rhythm: A continuous flow or sense of movement achieved through repetition of regulated visual units.

Unity (compare Gestalt): The whole or total effect of a work of art achieved through a successful, dynamic, or pleasing combination of all visual components.

LINE

Line: The path of a moving point made by a tool or instrument when drawn across a surface. A line becomes visible when it contrasts in value with the surface on which it is drawn.

Contour: A line defining a boundary or separating forms in space from a surrounding background.

Mass: A three-dimensional form or body which contrasts with is surrounding space or environment through differences in color, value, or texture.

Calligraphy: Refers to the use of flowing, rhythmical lines similar to those found in handwriting.

Plastic: Referring to a quality or characteristic which emphasizes the three-dimensional nature of shape or mass. On a two-dimensional surface, “plasticity” refers to an illusion created by the use of visual elements. compare, Materiality.

Decorative: Referring to a quality or characteristic which emphasizes the two-dimensional nature of any of the visual elements. Decoration enriches a surface without denying the essential flatness of that surface.

SHAPE

Shape: An area which stands out from its surrounding space; shape is usually defined by a boundary, or line, or differs from the surrounding space in value, color, or texture.

Decorative Shapes: Shapes which appear two-dimensional in nature and seem to lie flat on the surface of the picture plane.

Plane: An essentially two-dimensional shape which may give the illusion of a third-dimension when viewed in relationship to other shapes; compare Surface.

Volume: A three-dimensional shape or form which exists in space; however, when referring to a flat (two-dimensional) surface, volume potentially may be implied or be illusionary.

Geometric Shapes: Usually referring to simple shapes created by the exact mathematical laws of geometry -- triangles, rectangles, circles, ellipses, rhombuses, tetrahedrons, polyhedrons, etc.

Organic Shapes: Referring to living matter; shapes derived from nature; imply growth.
**Rectilinear Shapes:** Shapes whose boundaries usually consist entirely of straight lines.

**Linear Perspective:** A mechanical system for creating the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface; in painting or drawing, parallel lines seem to converge so as to give the illusion of depth and distance. Compare, One-Point Perspective; Two-Point Perspective; see Vanishing Point.

**Atmospheric Perspective:** A means by which three-dimensional depth is represented on a two-dimensional surface; it refers to the natural blurring of distance forms which become increasingly indistinct or misty in direct relationship to their increasing distance.

**VALUE**

**Value:** The relative degree of lightness or darkness given a surface by the amount of light reflected from it.

**Value Pattern:** The total effect of the relationship of light and dark given to areas within a pictorial field.

**Decorative Value:** Refers to two-dimensional value pattern; usually areas of light and dark confined within definite boundaries rather than ones characterized by gradual blending of tones.

**Highlight:** The area of represented shape which receives the greatest amount of direct light.

**Shadow:** The dark area created on a surface when another form blocks light from falling on that surface.

**Shade, Shading:** The darker value on the surface of a form giving the illusion that it is turned away from the imagined source of light; compare the darker side of a cube represented in strong backlight.

**TEXTURE**

**Tactile:** Referring to the sense of touch; in addition to visual qualities, some art works (or portions thereof) may be characterized by an implied or actual surface quality which appeals to the sense of touch.

**Texture:** The actual or the illusionary tactile quality of a surface; texture may be created by nature, or by mankind through manipulation of visual elements.

**Illusionism:** The imitation of visual reality represented on a flat, two-dimensional surface; illusionism often is achieved through the use of perspective, light-and-dark shading, etc.

**Trompe l'Oeil:** Literary meaning “to deceive the eye”, a painting technique which creates an illusion of photographic reality; the exact copying of nature which results in the mistaken identification of painted forms for the actual objects they depict.

**Invented Texture:** Two-Dimensional patterns created by the repetition of lines or shapes on a small scale; these patterns or motifs be adaptations from those found in nature, but may be used in a more regular or planned manner.
**SPACE**

**Space:** The actual or implied distance between pre-established points or locations.

**Two-Dimensional Space:** Measurable points or locations on a surface which show length and breath, but which lack any illusion of thickness or depth.

**Three-Dimensional Space:** The illusion of space on a two-dimensional surface which implies thickness and depth as well as length and breath.

**Infinite Space:** A pictorial concept in which the illusion of space seems endless, like the quality of space observed in the natural environment. The picture frame may seem to function as a “window” through which one may observe the endless recessions of forms into space.

**Shallow Space:** Also referred to as “Limited Depth” since no point or form on the picture plane is so remote that it does not take its place in the overall pattern or organization of the picture surface.

**Intuitive Space:** Relationships between locations and forms on the picture plane which imply a feeling of three-dimensionality without actually rendering a true illusion of solidity and depth.

**Four-Dimensional Space:** A highly imaginative treatment of forms which gives a sense of motion or time on the picture surface. See, Futurism

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**Fig. 201. Optical Illusions.**

**Fig. 202. Stability of Letters.**
INTRO TO ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN
[Not Strict Rules, But Conventional Starting Points]

Gestalt:

The viewer tends to group objects that are close to each other into a larger unit -- Proximity.

Negative (or empty) spaces defined by grouped objects tend to appear unified.

Visual units which are similar in shape (circles, squares, etc.) tend to relate or be viewed as a group.

Patterns created by similar shapes also tend to produce unified negative spaces; the spaces between these similar shapes tend to close and therefore make negative spaces more defined.

Ways to Achieve Unity:

Proximity -- grouping units together.

Repetition -- multiple inclusion of similar colors, shapes, units, textures, directions, or angles.

Continuation -- a line, contour or edge, or sense of direction which flows from one form to another.

Unity with Variety -- a harmonious pattern or order established among various visual elements. A checkerboard is visually unified, but perhaps may be characterized as monotonous; however, the irregular grid patterns painted by Mondrian is more varied and potentially more interesting.

Emphasis on Unity -- exaggeration of unifying design principles, such as exaggerated repetition, proximity, and continuation.

Emphasis on Variety -- exaggeration of the unexpected, the chaotic, the uncontrolled, the eccentric, or fragmentation. A traditional viewpoint is that without some variety, an image becomes dull and uninteresting; however, confusing imagery may be too confusing.
**Focal Point** -- an area or point of emphasis in a composition which invites the viewer to look further. In general, it may be characterized by an obvious interruption of overall feeling or pattern.

**Emphasis by Contrast** -- using radically differing visual elements in juxtaposition to draw attention to a focal point.

**Ways to Achieve Emphasis:**

**Emphasis by Isolation** -- using contrast of color and/or placement to separate one visual unit (or small group) from a larger whole.

**Emphasis by Placement** -- when numerous visual elements seem to point toward another element in a composition; cf. a radial design.

**Degree of Emphasis** -- exaggerated emphasis vs. subtle emphasis; a dark irregular organic shape juxtaposed over a grid design composed of rectangular, lighter valued forms.

**The Absence of Focal Point** -- ambiguity of emphasis; cf. Andy Warhol's 100 Cans [Campbell's Soup], 1962, o/c, 72” x 52”.

**Balance:**

**Balance** -- refers to the distribution of visual weight organized on either side of an implied central vertical axis within a composition. Without some sense of equilibrium, a vague uneasiness or dissatisfaction potentially results.

**Vertical Axis** -- may be compared to a fulcrum.

**Horizontal Axis** -- often corresponds to the horizon line.

**Symmetrical (or Formal) Balance** -- one side of a design mirrors the other. In architecture, symmetry may imply stability, strength, permanence, clarity, and order; characterized by Classical (Greek and Roman) buildings. Symmetrical balance rarely occurs in painting; however, this balance seems to occur more often in early Renaissance and Medieval altar pieces.

**Asymmetrical Balance** -- dissimilar visual elements which appear to have equal visual weight on either side of a central vertical axis.

**Informal Balance** -- an asymmetrically balanced composition which seems natural, not forced, not immediately obvious.
**Balance by Value and Color** -- dissimilar visual elements which differ in value and/or color which appear to have the same visual weight.

**Balance by Shape and Texture** -- visual elements (possibly similar in value and/or color) which differ in shape and texture may also appear to have the same visual weight.

**Balance by Position and Eye Direction** -- a large visual unit placed close to the center of the composition may be balanced by a smaller one placed toward the outer edge. A single small element may be as important as several larger ones if the small element becomes the focal point.

**Radial Balance** -- a composition characterized by visual elements which radiate or circle out from a common central point.

Excerpted from *Design Basics* by David A. Lauer, third edition.
Definition of Design:
To plan and fashion artistically or skillfully -- design a building (architectural design); design clothes (fashion design); or design the visual communication of an idea (graphic design).

Design Process:

• Thinking (Form and Content):
  Define your concept and continually check to see that your design supports your concept

• Research (Sources):
  Look for many sources for inspiration.

• Doing (the work).

Levels of Visual Communication

- Represetational
  - Naturalistic
  - Realistic

  abstract

  symbolic

DOG
dog
dog

type - both visual and symbolic

Unity / Fragmentation

Unity by Continuation

Unity by Repetition

Emphasis / Focal Point

By Contrast

By Isolation

By Placement

Scale / Proportion

Balance

Symmetrical Balance

Asymmetrical Balance
Rhythm

Line

Shape/Volume

Positive and Negative Space

Texture/Pattern

Illusion of Space/Depth through overlapping and changing scale.

Illusion of Motion

Value

Color

Hue (name of color), Value (lightness/darkness), Chroma (intensity, saturation)