

Elements of Design



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.



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.



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.



Value is the range from white to black or light to dark. Highlights and shadows add value to a piece of art.

Principles of Design



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.



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.



Pattern is the repeating of an object or symbol all over the artwork.



Rhythm is created when one or more elements of design are used repeatedly to create a feeling of organized movement. Variety is essential to keep rhythm exciting and active, and moving the viewer around the artwork. Rhythm creates a mood like music or dancing.



Contrast is juxtaposing apposing elements like light and dark, smooth and rough, straight and zigzag, or complimentary colors, next to each other in a composition for dramatic affect.



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