

Interdisciplinary Design Studies Program

ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

Elements of Design	
	Line is the path of a moving dot, where a dot is extended in some manner to determine a line. Line is used to symbolize direction, imply movement, outline norms, suggest mood, and determine boundaries of shapes. The quality of line can vary according to the tool and method used, the amount of pressure used, and the way a line relates to other elements. Some examples of words to use to describe line are jagged/smooth, thick/thin, weak/strong, curved, straight, implied, wavy, and diagonal.
Shape	Shape describes a two-dimensional area that is defined in some way. Shapes may be open or closed, positive or negative, and free form or geometric. Some examples of words to use to describe shape are solid, organic, repeated, symbolic, and proportional.
Form	Form occurs when a three-dimensional quality has been achieved in a shape. Form may be implied by the use of tone and/or shadow, or form may be actually three dimensional. Some examples of words to use to describe form are rounded, squared, angular, textural, volume, and mass.
Texture	Texture refers to surface quality. Texture can be real or simulated. Actual texture can be both seen and touched. Simulated texture cannot be interpreted by touching; it must be seen. Some examples of words to use to describe texture are shiny, smooth, rough, coarse, gritty, and granular.
Colour	Colour (another name for hue) refers to the naming words we use to identify specific wave lengths of light such as red, yellow, orange, and so forth. A colour wheel can explain the origins and relationships that hues possess (specific descriptions of colour vocabulary may be found in the glossary). Colour may be descriptive, decorative, and symbolic. Colour has both tone and intensity. Some words to use to describe colour are bright, pastel, warm, cool, in harmony, and discordant.
Tone or Value	Tone or value refers to the degree of light and dark in colour. An image, however, can exist without colour (i.e. in tone only). Some examples of words to use to describe tone are dark, dull, gloomy, pure, stark, strong, and weak.
Intensity	Intensity describes the degree of brightness a colour has. Some examples of words to use to describe intensity are bright, vivid, strong, weak, radiant, and dull.
Principles of Design	
Balance	Balance refers to the equilibrium of various elements and involves a sense of order. Order may be achieved in a variety of ways. Order may be symmetrical or asymmetrical, formal or informal, or rigid or random. Imbalance can create a feeling of awkwardness or discomfort. It can also be used to create an exciting visual response.
Contrast	Contrast involves opposition and results from the juxtaposition of qualities that are unlike one another. High contrast can be used to emphasize, dramatize, add variety, and surprise. Low contrast can be used to soothe, settle, harmonize, and comfort.
Emphasis	Emphasis refers to the focal point or center of interest in an image. Emphasis implies both dominance and subordination and can be used to call attention to specific areas within a work.
Movement	Movement is achieved by manipulating the elements to imply motion, to move the viewer's eye in a decided direction as he or she looks at an image. Movement may be implied through abstract, non-representational marks such as diagonal lines, broken edges, and gradation of tones.
Pattern	Pattern involves the repetition of similar motifs on a surface, which creates rhythm. Pattern can be used to organize or unify a object and/or to create visual enrichment. Pattern can be created in an organized way or be created in random fashion.
Unity	Unity describes a sense of oneness within an image where all qualities work together in a cohesive relationship. Unity can be used to produce feelings of harmony, completeness, and order. Depending on the purpose of the image, lack of unity can be used to imply disharmony, incompleteness, disorder, and dissonance.