

Principles and Elements of Design Handout

PRINCIPLES of DESIGN
quick reference poster

CONTRAST

Unique elements in a design should stand apart from one another. One way to do this is to use contrast. Good contrast in a design - which can be achieved using elements like color, tone, size, and more - allows the viewer's eye to flow naturally.

To the left, you can see 4 ways to create contrast in your design.

COLOR
TONE/VALUE
SIZE/SHAPE
DIRECTION

ALIGNMENT

Proper alignment in a design means that every element in it is visually connected to another element. Alignment allows for cohesiveness; nothing feels out of place or disconnected when alignment has been handled well.

REPETITION

Repetition breeds cohesiveness in a design. Once a design pattern has been established - for example, a dotted border or a specific typographic styling - repeat this pattern to establish consistency.

The short version?
Establish a style for each element in a design and use it on similar elements.

PROXIMITY

Proximity allows for visual unity in a design. If two elements are related to each other, they should be placed in close proximity to one another. Doing so minimizes visual clutter, emphasizes organization, and increases viewer comprehension.

Imagine how ridiculous it would be if the proximity icons on this graphic were located on the other side of this document.

a handy *paper leaf* resource

Image 1 source (free) Paper Leaf Design <http://paper-leaf.com/blog/2012/10/principles-of-design-quick-reference-poster/>

LINE



A line is a mark between two points. There are various types of lines, from straight to squiggly to curved and more. Lines can be used for a wide range of purposes: stressing a word or phrase, connecting content to one another, creating patterns and much more.

SHAPE



Height + width = shape. We all learned basic shapes in grade school – triangles, squares, circles and rectangles. Odd or lesser seen shapes can be used to attract attention.

There are three basic types of shape: geometric (triangles, squares, circles etc), natural (leaves, animals, trees, people), and abstracted (icons, stylizations, graphic representations etc).

VALUE



Value is how light or how dark an area looks. A gradient, shown above, is a great way to visualize value – everything from dark to white, all the shades in-between, has a value. Use value to create depth and light; to create a pattern; to lead the eye; or to emphasize.



COLOR

Color is used to generate emotions, define importance, create visual interest and more. CMYK (cyan/magenta/yellow/black) is subtractive; RGB (red/green/blue) is additive.

Some colors are warm and active (orange, red); some are cool and passive (blue, purple).

There are various color types (primary to analogous) and relationships (monochromatic to triad) worth learning more about as well.

TEXTURE



Texture relates to the surface of an object; the look or feel of it. Concrete has a rough texture; drywall has a smooth and subtle texture. Using texture in design is a great way to add depth and visual interest. Printed material has actual, textile texture while screen material has implied texture.

SIZE



Size is how small or large something is: a small shirt vs. an extra large shirt, for example. Use size to define importance, create visual interest in a design (via contrasting sizes), attract attention and more.

SPACE



Space is the area around or between elements in a design. It can be used to separate or group information. Use it effectively to: give the eye a rest; define importance; lead the eye through a design and more.



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