

# The Elements & Principles of Design

ART 236 Experience Mapping  
Cutler-Lake

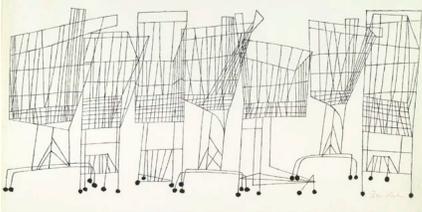
## COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENTS

(Adapted from *Guide to Graphic Design* by Scott W. Santoro)

**Compositional elements are the building blocks of a good visual composition.**

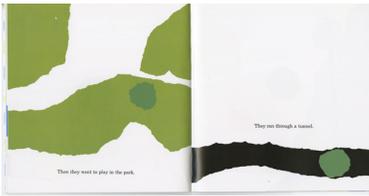
### LINE

*Line* is one-dimensional, having length, but no height or depth. It is the basic element used to describe a shape, and can be actual or implied, vertical or horizontal, diagonal, or contoured. Line has the power to activate its surrounding area. A thick, bold line conveys a feeling of strength. Line can define form, divide space, create the illusion of depth, suggest movement or energy, or anything else the artist or designer needs it to do.



### SHAPE

*Shape* is a two-dimensional space, created by joining the two ends of a line. Shape can be a predominant element in a design, from a random ink blob to a geometric circle, triangle, or square. But shape can also be created from other elements, such as color and texture.



### PATTERN & TEXTURE

Visual *pattern* is the repeat of an element whose total effect is more than the individual parts. The repetition of lines or shapes of a pattern can bring visual energy and motion to a composition. Pattern can be used to create *texture*, a two- or three-dimensional tactile quality, either real or perceived, that causes an emotion or sensation in the viewer.



### SPACE

The area between elements on the page is called either *white space* (although it is not necessarily white in color) or *negative space*. It is formed by the space between and around shapes and by the background of the page. White space activates a composition by creating contrast and tension. It can also improve a design's legibility, giving the eyes resting points. It gives a design a chance to breathe.



### COLOR

*Color* is the most active visual component in design. For example, yellow expands outward and forward to us, while blue recedes, drawing us in. Color, alone or in combination with other colors or other principles and elements, can bring contrast and unity. Colors can vibrate and move, create unity or discord. Artists and designers can manipulate color with the rationality of a scientist or with irrationality based on emotion. Colors can express different temperatures. Some people give a lot of weight to the psychological effects and associations of color, while others prefer to use color based solely on the visual impact.



e i bambini giocarono fino all'ora di cena.

TOP TO BOTTOM: BEN SHAHN; LEO LIONNI; MARIMEKKO; SAUL BASS; LEO LIONNI

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## COMPOSITIONAL PRINCIPLES

(Adapted from *Guide to Graphic Design* by Scott W. Santoro)

**Compositional principles are broad aesthetic concepts that organize elements into pleasing visuals. All the elements must work together in the complex process of making a compelling composition.**

### BALANCE

*Balance* is the distribution of items in a composition to achieve equality either symmetrically or asymmetrically. *Symmetrical* balance uses the same characteristics ("weight") on either side of the line. An *asymmetrical* composition uses different but equally weighted features. One of the advancements explored in twentieth-century design is the premise that a design could be freed by moving type and imagery away from a centered axis to one that is not centered. It might seem common to us now, but it was considered quite daring at the time.

### CONTRAST

*Contrast* occurs when juxtaposed forms, treatments, and ideas create visual or intellectual tension. The result is an enhanced perception or differences between paired or grouped elements. Contrast is often achieved via the arrangement of opposite elements such as light vs. dark, rough vs. smooth, small vs. large (scale), etc. Tension, visual strain based on an imbalanced relationship of contrasting elements, creates energy which, in turn, can create power and impact on the page as well as in the mind.

### DIRECTION (sometimes referred to as MOVEMENT)

When we refer to the compositional principle of *direction*, we're really describing the orientation of elements within a design. When we consider direction, we're thinking about how to give a composition vigor and life. A composition's elements seem to move because the eye moves to follow them. It can create the illusion of action. Without *movement*, a composition can seem static or dull.

### DOMINANCE (sometimes referred to as EMPHASIS)

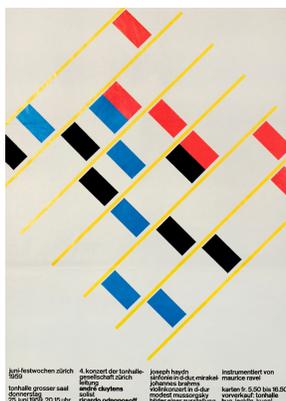
Think of *dominance* as the hierarchy of a composition in terms of what is emphasized first. A single dominant element has the power to grab attention. Once you've got your viewer's attention, you can lead his or her eyes to other details within the composition. This *emphasis* creates a center of interest that is sometimes referred to as the focal point.

### RHYTHM

In design, *rhythm* is basically a pattern that relies on repetition—the recurrence of a shape, word, or thing—to create unity and energy in a composition. As in music, variety is essential: a consistent, predictable rhythm may be less interesting than one that contains the occasional break or space.

### UNITY

Any given design composition might include words, images, colors, and shapes to tell a complete story. The *unity* of the whole—the ability to work as one thing or idea—offers a greater impact than the individual parts.



TOP TO BOTTOM: JAN TSCHICHOLD; JOSEPH MÜLLER-BROCKMANN; WASSILY KANDINSKY; MÜLLER-BROCKMANN