

# Visual Perception

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My expectation of the Design and Color course was that I would learn about hue and how best to apply it to design. I was enthusiastic and looked forward to learning as much as possible in order to become the “ultimate designer.” For our first class, the professor presented the *New York Times Magazine*. We analyzed ads, adding to our knowledge of design. We examined the focal point, tension, full and monochromatic color, high and low contrast value, and what works and does not in the composition of an ad. I was elated with my first session. It was very informative and engaging. I was excited about our next meeting. We were about to explore black and white!

Our first assignment was to draw a black square. I thought that’s interesting, but how hard can it be to draw a square? I went home, drew the square. After several attempts, this proved to be more tedious than I had anticipated. I finally settled on a piece. We presented our work and it was critiqued. During the presentation, attention was drawn to the white space on my pad. I had purchased a large, wrong-sized pad. The focal point, the square, was secondary to the white space around the square.

To create the “perfect” square, the composition of it has to be a specific size and balanced within the negative space. The draftsmanship must be flawless with a high value contrast. With this achieved, the square would create perfect tension. The existence of tension is to draw the observer to the piece displayed, hence the focal point. I was determined to master the square.

After several more attempts at perfecting the square, I made some observations— I needed to use the finest tools, so I changed the brand and points of my markers. I focused more on detail. With every project, my perception sharpened. After three weeks, I finally made it work.

Our next assignment was a 3D project, to give a two-dimensional figure the illusion of being three-dimensional. I was able to execute it in two sessions. I learned that a change, even of the smallest measurement, minus 1/32 of an inch, created an impact. We then went on to a line project. I used a rectangle. The rectangle has a personality of its own. It directs the eye vertically and horizontally. During the next two weeks we examined the inception of pattern and rhythm using squares, rectangles, and circles. Pattern is the repetition of a shape, and rhythm includes a variable within pattern.

Grey tones using gouache was next. We had to show the effortless transition of the eye from a dark tone to a lighter one. The gouache in itself was a challenge. After a few attempts, I was able to simulate the shift of the grey tones. Next was monochromatic and then full color.

For four weeks, I struggled with the gouache. I was extremely frustrated and discouraged, feeling that my draftsmanship for the final pieces did not work. It's a very fast-drying paint, adding too much water produces streaks and unevenness, and the pressure applied with every brush stroke must be consistent. I tried different techniques to no avail. It was a battle of perseverance. It came to the point where I hated the sight of gouache. Another issue was when I managed to paint a "decent" piece, it was ruined by my removal of the artist's tape. But I never conceded. I gradually made adjustments, replacing artist's tape with painter's tape, working on being more graceful and precise with my brush strokes, using as little water as possible, and removing the tape as soon I had done the painting, producing exceptionally clean lines. I decided to take control and made it work. What took me weeks of struggling, I finally did in under twenty minutes.

The most valuable part of the course, and one which continued through the semester, was when Professor Nicolaou went through the ads. We analyzed them in every session. It was informative and inspirational. What stuck with me was the teachings of Bauhaus that "*less is more*" and "*form follows function.*" I was able to apply everything I learned in Design and Color to my other courses. It proved especially useful when I designed spreads for my typography course. I applied pattern, *Form Follows Function* and *Less is More* in my designs. I also realized my level of taste was refined. Ads which I previously thought were great, now looked overworked and busy. Essentially, it does not matter how creative you are. The underlying principles of design are needed to create that perfect piece. This course has by far exceeded my expectations.

Nominating faculty: Professor Stella Nicolaou, Advertising 1100, Department of Communication Design, School of Technology and Design, New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

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