



Vocabulary

The basic tenets of DESIGN can be grouped into three categories: The Practice, The Principles, The Elements

1. **The Practice:** Concept + Composition are ingredients that a designer uses to communicate meaning. The relationship between the Concept (idea) and the Composition (arrangement) produces the Content (meaning).
 - **Concept:** A comprehensive idea or generalization that brings diverse elements into a clear relationship.
 - **Composition:** The formal organization of elements in a composition arranged according to principles that will support the communication of the concept.
 - **Content:** The expression, essential meaning, significance, or aesthetic value derived from the relationship between the concept and the composition. Content refers to the sensory, subjective, psychological, or emotional properties, as opposed to our perception of its formal qualities.
2. **The Principles:** basic assumptions that guide the design practice.
 - **Figure (positive space):** The shape of a form that serves as a subject in a composition.
 - **Ground (negative space):** The space surrounding a positive shape or form; sometimes referred to as ground, empty space, field, or void.
 - **Figure/Ground:** The relationship between positive and negative space.
 - **Obvious (stable):** A figure/ground relationship that exists when a form stands clearly apart from its background.
 - **Reversal:** A figure/ground relationship that occurs when positive and negative elements are equal and alternate.
 - **Ambiguous:** A figure/ground relationship that challenges the viewer to find a point of focus. The figure and ground seem unclear.
 - **Economy:** Using only the elements necessary to communicate an idea, emotion, or formal concept. Less is more.
 - **Unity:** Refers to the cohesive quality that makes a composition feel complete and finished. Unity gives it the feeling that all the elements relate to each other in a compatible way to form a unified whole.
 - **Frame:** This boundary (rectangle, square, circle) is represented by the edges of the paper or the margins drawn within.
 - **Harmony:** Elements in a composition that share visual qualities (value, hue, saturation, size, interval, shape, texture, etc)
 - **Contrast:** Refers to the relative difference between elements, including value, hue, saturation, size, interval, etc. Contrast adds variety to the overall composition and creates unity by directing the viewer's eye with visual hierarchy.
 - **Balance** is the concept of visual equilibrium or equalized tension, used to create harmony, order, and cohesion. While visual elements don't have a physical weight. They do have **visual weight**. Some things that affect [visual weight](#): Size, Color, Density, Value, Whitespace



- **Symmetrical balance** can occur in any orientation as long as the image is the same (weight, form) on either side of the central axis. The result is formal, organized and orderly, but it is easy to over emphasize the center axis. **Symmetry = PASSIVE, FORMAL SPACE**
- **Asymmetrical balance** means balance without symmetry. It is possible to achieve balance without symmetry so that the placement of elements of varying “visual weight” will balance one another around a fulcrum point. Use asymmetry to draw attention and create visual interest. **Asymmetry = ACTIVE, DYNAMIC SPACE**
- **Radial / Rotational Symmetry** is when an object is rotated in a certain direction around a point. It is often used to communicate direction or motion.
- **Bilateral / Reflection Symmetry** is the “mirror” effect, or when one object is reflected across a plane to create another instance of itself.
- **Translational Symmetry**: when an object is relocated to another position while maintaining its general or exact orientation. Used for repeated patterns, to create movement, or to reinforce stability.
- **Alignment**: Methods for adjusting the position of objects or text in relation to each other. These are typically left, right, center, top and bottom.
- **Grid**: A framework and planning system that organizes elements in manageable chunks by order of placement, scale, and similarity to help users understand the information presented; like a visual filing cabinet.
- **Rhythm**: Is a repeated pattern, such as what we hear in music. In different art forms, it can be a very complex interrelationship or a regular, steady beat.
 - **Repetition**: A repeated sequence; occurring more than a few times. In design, repetition can create visual consistency and a sense of unity.
 - **Pattern**: Unbroken repetition, the repeating of an line, object or symbol.
 - **Variety**: Visual rhythm is often punctuated with variations or changes in color, texture, or form. Creating variety is easy. Too much variety can lead to chaos and confusion for the viewer. A designer must effectively use pace and spacing to create rhythm and achieve unity in a composition.
 - **Monotony**: Without variety or change, excessive repetition can lead to boredom and uninteresting compositions
 - **Interval**: The space or pauses between elements or activity.
- **Pacing**: Rate or speed at which data, information, images are being delivered.
- **Proportion**: Relationship between parts of a whole or related units.
 - **Scale**: Associations of size, related to a constant size, unit of measure, relative whole (such as a the human body, or picture plane)
- **Visual Hierarchy**: The expression of visual and conceptual order that communicates degrees of importance of the various parts of a composition. This can be achieved through proximity, contrast, color, size, etc.
- **Emphasis**: The special attention or importance given to one part of a



- composition. Emphasis can be achieved through placement, contrast, size, etc.
- **Focal Point:** The elements or objects on which the viewer's attention is focused.
 - **Dominance:** Elements that command attention and prevail over other elements.
 - **Proximity:** objects close to one another are perceived to be related or grouped together.
 - **Whitespace:** Whitespace provides visual breathing room for the eye and a contrast to the density of elements in a composition.
 - **Picture Plane:** The imaginary plane represented by the physical surface of a two-dimensional image, comparable to the glass through which one sees a view beyond a window. Artists use relative position on the picture plane to create the illusion of space, such as foreground, middleground, background.
3. **The Elements:** basic components used as part of any composition, independent of the medium.
- **Point:** An element that has position (x,y), but no extension or mass. A series of points forms a line, a mass of points becomes a shape.
 - **Line:** An series of points, which has length and direction, but no breadth. It can be the connection between two points, the space between shapes, or the path of a moving point. A closed line creates a shape.
 - **Shape:** Created by line (contour) or a grouping of points, it is an area that is separate from other areas, defined by its perimeter.
 - **Organic shape** is one that resembles the flowing contours of an organism.
 - **Geometric shapes**, such as circles, triangles or squares often have precise, uniform measurements.
 - **Texture:** The surface character of a physical material or the illusion of a physical material.
 - **Value:** Signifies the relative differences of light and dark
 - **Achromatic:** Value with the absence of hue (color) and saturation (intensity).
 - **Chromatic:** Value demonstrated by a given hue.
 - **Grayscale:** The full range of values simplified into a graduated scale.
 - **Low-Key:** When the values of an image are predominately dark
 - **High-Key:** When the values of an image are predominately light
 - **Narrow Range:** When the values congregate around the dark, middle, or light part of the grayscale.
 - **Broad Range:** When the values are spread over the dark, middle, or light part of the grayscale.
 - **Shadow:** Dark area of an object as a result of a disruption of the light source.
 - **Highlight:** Portion of an object that receives the greatest amount of direct light
 - **Color:**
 - **Hue:** Designates the common name of a color, determined by the specific wavelength of a ray of light and/or its position in the spectrum or color wheel.



- **Saturation:** Refers to the relative purity of a color or its inherent light.
- **Prismatic Color:** As pure a hue as possible with pigments/paint.
- **Muted Color:** Colors that lie just outside the prismatic zone, created by adding black, white, gray or a complement of a hue.
- **Chromatic Gray:** Grays that exhibit a subtle, but discernible hue, created by adding larger amounts black, white, gray or a complement of a hue.
- **Luminosity:** Refers to hue's inherent light; lighter colors are more luminous than darker colors, but a lighter color is not necessarily more saturated.
- **Primary Triad:** primary colors, yellow, blue and red, form an equilateral triangle with yellow at the top
- **Secondary Triad:** secondary colors, orange, green and violet, evenly spaced between the primaries are mixed from adjacent hues (example: red + yellow = orange)
- **Intermediate Triad:** intermediate colors, yellow-green, blue-green, red-violet, etc. are mixtures of a primary color with a neighboring secondary color.
- **Analogous:** colors that are adjacent to each other on the color wheel (example: violet, blue-violet, red-violet). They have the shortest interval and the most harmonious relationship because three or four neighboring hues always contain a common color that dominates the group.
- **Complements:** colors opposite on the color wheel. This relationship often produces visual tension, shock, or electricity. This is often the least harmonious color relationship.
- **Near-Complements:** a color and the color adjacent to its complement. This relationship softens the visual tension produced by using straight complements. (example: red and yellow-green)
- **Split-Complements:** based on the triad system, one color plus two colors on either side of its complement. (example: orange and blue-violet & blue-green). This color scheme adds more variety and an opportunity for a specific accent or focus, if used in unequal proportions.
- **Tetrads:** based on a square, this relationship is formed when four colors equally spaced on the color wheel are used (example: green, blue, orange, red). This color relationship is more varied and can easily become un-harmonious without variation in value or saturation.
- **Monochromatic:** color scheme derived from a single base hue, and extended using its shades, tones (saturation), and tints
- **Shade:** progression of a hue produced by the addition of black
- **Tint:** progression of a hue produced by the addition of white
- **Simultaneous Contrast:** When two colors come into contact, the contrast intensifies the difference between them.
- **After Images:** Afterimage is an optical effect that is induced from color combinations. Our brains try to balance the color with it's complement.
- **Optical Mixing:** When a field of color is composed of small, disparate points of color, the mind fuses the colors into a comprehensible whole.



- **RGB Color Model:** An additive color model in which red(R), green(G), and blue(B) light are added together in various ways to reproduce a broad array of colors.
- **CMYK Color Model:** A subtractive color model used in color printing. CMYK refers to the four inks used in some color printing: cyan, magenta, yellow, and key (black).
- **Color Spaces:** Refer to the type and number of colors that originate from the combinations of color components of a color model. Examples include: CIE, HSB, sRGB, Pantone (PMS).