

The Elements of Design

When creating a new layout, you should begin with the basic elements of design: line, shape, texture, space, size, value, and color. The elements of design are the building blocks of all designs, chosen to convey the message - beyond the actual words or photos used. These basic elements can produce many different layouts depending on how they're used.

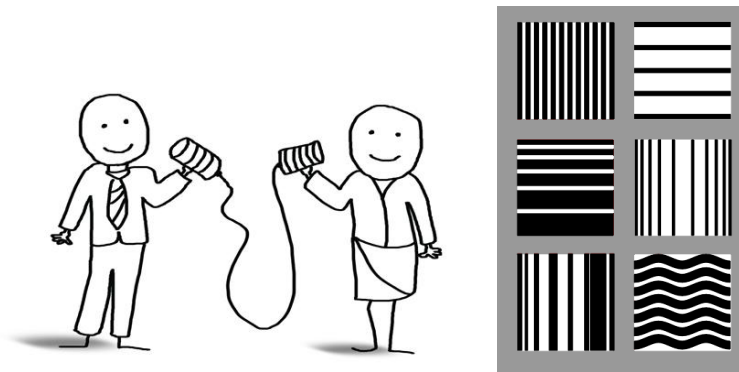
Line

Line is any mark connecting two points. Many different types of lines appear everywhere. Lines can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. They create patterns. Lines in graphic design can be solid, dashed, thick, thin, or of variable width.

Sometimes a designer uses a line alone to divide or unite elements on a page. Lines can denote direction of movement (as in diagonal lines and arrows) or provide an anchor to hold elements on a page (such as lines at the top, bottom, or sides of a page).

Lines can be used to:

- Organize information.
- Highlight or stress words.
- Connect pieces of information.
- Outline a photo or set it off from other elements.
- Create a grid. (A grid is the underlying structure of a page.)
- Create a chart or graph.
- Create a pattern or rhythm by drawing many lines.
- Direct the reader's eye or create a sense of motion. (Create a sense of action by using a diagonal line.)
- Suggest an emotion.



Shape / Form

Anything that has height and width has shape. Unusual shapes can be used to attract attention. There are basically three types of shapes. Geometric shapes, such as triangles, squares, rectangles, and circles, are regular and structured. These shapes work very well as building blocks for graphic design. Natural shapes, such as animals, plants, and humans, are irregular and fluid. Abstracted shapes, such as icons, stylized figures, and graphic illustrations, are simplified versions of natural shapes. Shape and form define objects in space. Shapes have two dimensions—height and width—and are usually defined by lines. Forms exist in three dimensions, with height, width, and depth.

With shape you can:

- Crop a photo in an interesting way, such as in an oval.
- Symbolize an idea.
- Make a block of text more interesting by setting the text into a shape.
- Create a new format.
- Highlight information. You could add a screened or tinted shape to highlight important information.



Value and Color

Value is the lightness or darkness of an area. Think in terms of the spectrum from black to white and the many shades of gray in between. Each shade on this spectrum has a value, from the very lightest to the very darkest. Value separates, suggests mood, adds drama, and creates the illusion of depth.

Value can be used to:

- Lead the eye across a page, such as running a dark to light graded area in a background.
- Create a pattern.
- Give the illusion of volume and depth by adding shading to an area.
- Create an image of lightness or darkness.
- Make a layout dramatic with large areas of dark or light shading.
- Emphasize an element.
- Make objects appear to be in front of or behind each other.

Color in layouts can convey moods, create images, attract attention, and identify objects. When selecting colors for a publication or a web page, think about what you want the color to do and what is appropriate for your purpose.

Color can be used to:

- Highlight important elements such as headlines and subheads.
- Attract the eye.
- Signal the reader where to look first.
- Create an image or a mood.

- Tie a layout together.
- Organize.
- Group elements together or isolate them.
- Provoke emotion.



Space

Space is the distance or area between or around things. Space separates or unifies, highlights, and gives the eye a visual rest.

Space can be used to:

- Give the eye a visual rest.
- Create ties between elements.
- Highlight an element.
- Put a lot of white space around something important to call attention to it.
- Make a layout easy to follow.
- Make type as legible as possible.

TIP: White space (the absence of text and graphics) is vital to graphic design. The key is to add just enough white space so the eye knows where to go and can rest a bit when it gets there.

You can control white space in the following location: margins, paragraph spacing, spacing between lines of text, gutters (the space between columns), and surrounding text and graphics.



Texture

Texture is the look or feel of a surface. You can add richness and dimension to your layouts with texture. Visual/implied texture creates an illusion of texture on a printed publication or web page. Patterns, such as the images printed on wrapping paper, are a type of visual texture. Tactile texture can actually be felt. Printed publications can be printed on textured paper that readers can feel.

Texture can be used to:

- Give a printed publication, presentation, or web page a mood or personality.
- Create contrast for interest.
- Fool the eye.
- Provoke emotions.
- Create a feeling of richness and depth.

