

# The Elements of Design

There are seven elements of graphic design that are the starting point of your design ideas: Line, Shape, Texture, Space, Size, Value and Color. Each of these elements is a building block to a good layout.

You are probably familiar with most of these elements from everyday life so there is nothing mysterious about them. Each one of these elements can be used to design different layouts depending on how you use them.

When using the elements of design, it is important to know which elements are necessary and which are not. Knowing this will keep your layouts clutterless and help strengthen your design.

We will explore each of these elements in this section. There are three examples to each element discussed. Begin this section with line.

## Line

The first element of design is line. Lines can be used in a variety of ways in a layout: They help to organize information; They can direct your readers' eye as to the organization of the layout; They can create a mood; And, they can give rhythm and movement.

For example, lines can organize information on your page. A line can define the boundaries of your page. Vertical or horizontal lines can also be used to direct your readers from one piece of information to another. To create a mood, use a wavy line to give the piece a feeling of movement.

Lines in your piece can:

- Convey a mood or an emotion.
- Organize the design.
- Establish columns of text.
- Create a texture.
- Create movement.
- Define shape.
- Call attention to a word.
- Connect pieces of information in your layout.
- Frame an image or a word.

## Shape

The next element of good design is shape. Shape is any element that you use to give or determine form. Shapes also communicate ideas. For example, an international company may use a circle in their logo that could suggest the earth. Unusual shapes attract attention. Because people are used to seeing images, regular shapes such as a rectangle, using a shape such a star would call attention to that image. Another example would be arranging type in a shape rather than in vertical columns.

There are three ways that shape enhances your layout.

1. Shape helps to sustain reader interest. Shapes can be used to break up a page that uses a lot of text.
2. Shape is used to organize and separate. A part of the text can be placed in a shape with a colorful background and will add variety to the page.
3. Shape can be used as a conceptual tool. You can use shape to lead your reader's eye through the design. In layouts, the eye looks for a place to begin and will follow through the design to the end. Shape can help you keep your reader's attention.

There three different types of shapes:

- Geometric
- Natural
- Abstract.

Geometric shapes are:

- Triangles
- Squares
- Rectangles
- Circles

Geometric shapes are regular and structured, and make excellent building blocks for design.

Natural shapes are:

- Plants
- Animals or humans

They are irregular and fluid. For example, instead of using a rectangular shape to frame part of a page, you could use ivy if it is appropriate, to give the page a light, airy feeling.

Abstracted shapes are:

- Simplified versions of natural shapes. An example of an abstracted shape is the symbol for handicap access by using a figure in a wheelchair.

Some examples of how to use shape in your piece:

1. Frame a photograph using irregular shapes.
2. Symbolize an idea.
3. Connect pieces of information.
4. Make a part of the body copy more interesting.
5. Highlight information using a box with a shade of a color.
6. Imply letterforms by using a triangle to represent the letter "A" or a circle to represent the letter "O."
7. Tie together all the elements on a layout.

## **Texture**

The third element is texture, which gives the design piece a look or feel, or a surface. Think about the different textures that we encounter everyday. Texture can help you create a particular mood for a layout or be used in individual shapes. Texture can be used in your layout to add dimension and richness.

There are two types of texture.

1. Tactile texture, can be felt. For example, think about the different pieces of paper you have handled.
2. Visual texture, is used to create the illusion of texture on a printed piece. Wallpaper is a good example of visual texture.

Blocks of type can be used as texture by alternating the patterns of light and dark that are created by the shapes of the letterforms as well the spaces between them. A pattern is a type of visual texture. When an image or line of type is repeated many times, the patterns of lights and darks add dimension to a surface. Wrapping paper is a good example of pattern. Patterns can make excellent backgrounds and borders in layouts.

To use texture in your piece:

1. Use an image and relate it to its background.
2. Use a paper stock that will enhance the piece's a mood or personality.
3. Create contrast for interest.
4. Fool the eye by using type as image to achieve a wrapping paper effect.
5. Use appropriate imagery to provoke a particular emotion.
6. Create a feeling of richness and depth.
7. Add liveliness and activity.

## Space

The fourth element is space, which is an essential element in your layout. Space is defined as the distance or area between or around things. When you are designing a layout, think about where you are going to place your type and imagery as well as where they will be on the page in relation to each other. You must think about how much space you want around and between each element.

Things to think about:

- How much space you have
- How the type and images will work together
- How it all looks.

When you have many elements in a piece, you must leave some areas free from type and imagery. This is called **white space**, and it creates a rest for the eye, and visually organizes what's on the page. The placement and the value of the shapes on the page create spatial relationships and focal points, which are **centers of interest**.

To use space in your piece:

1. Give the eye a visual rest by using white space.
2. Use a small amount of space to create ties between elements.
3. Form positive and negative shapes with the use of color and shape.
4. Give a layout depth by overlapping one element with another.
5. Use a lot of white space around an element to highlight it.
6. Use large margins to help make a layout easy to follow.
7. Use unequal spacing between elements to make a page dynamic.
8. Use letterspacing to help make type very legible.

## Size

The fifth element is size, which is how big or small something is. In design, size can function, size can attract or size can organize.

When you are designing a piece, size plays an important role in making a layout functional, attractive and organized.

The following factors play an important role in your design:

1. The first factor you need to consider is function-what will be the printed size of the piece. Think about how the piece will ultimately be used and whether the use will end up limiting the size. For example, if you are designing a brochure, will it need to fit in a #10 envelope?
2. The second factor is using size to attract your audience. You can contrast large and small elements or make a image larger and crop it in an interesting way.
3. The third factor is using size to organize your piece. To attract your viewers attention, make the most important element the largest and the least important element the smallest. Headlines are usually the largest type element on the page, while subheadlines, and body text is smaller. Larger objects appear to be closer on the page than smaller ones, and that can be used to reinforce importance and create artificial spacial relationships.

To use size in your piece:

1. Make the most important element the largest.
2. Bring elements forward or make elements recede on the page.
3. Give the reader a sense of scale of a photograph by using a related image.
4. To make all elements easy to see by using larger type or pictures.
5. Contrast two elements to add interest by adding a small amount of type to large image.
6. Make elements fit together properly in a piece by keeping repeating elements such as headlines, subheadlines and body copy the same size.

## Value

The sixth element is value, which is the darkness or lightness of something. Value helps to gives shape and texture to everything around us. In design, every element has value. When laying out pages, an element's value will be affected by its background and other elements that are around it. For example, if you use a lot of text in a small area, it will make the paper look like it has turned gray.

Value is also an important tool for expressing the theme or mood of your design. If you use values of black, white and gray in a design, you add power or change the mood of the design. A good example of this the album cover for the Beatles' "White Album." The cover is a stark white with the words "Beatles" set in small type. The restrained use of value created a visually impactful piece.

Value helps to establish contrast by subtly blending shades of color or black and white. Value also helps to create movement and direction. If you place a single black dot on a white background, there is great contrast between the foreground (the dot) and the background (the white background). If you then add a second dot below the first, both dots will have equal importance, unlike the first example, which only has

one element on the page. Furthermore, if you make the second dot a 50% shade, the value of the second dot has created movement and direction.

To use value in your piece:

1. Use large type with lots of leading (space between lines of type), which is a dark value, and small type with small amounts of leading, which is a light value.
2. Use black and white to create a checkerboard background pattern.
3. Use light values to create a subtle look to your piece.
4. Contrast black against white.
5. Make one element light and the rest dark.
6. Make one element dark to make recede into the page's background.

## Color

The final element in good design is color, which is the ultimate tool for symbolic communication. The decisions you make about color should be made with great care to ensure the success of your design piece.

In your piece, you should think about the mood you want to convey. Like value, color can evoke moods and emotion. It can also help to identify an important element in your layout as well as relay the message of your communication. For example, you could use a colored frame around a group of images to let your reader know that all of those images belong together. You could also use red to convey an important piece of textual information.

Although color can make a layout more dynamic, it is important to consider why you want to use color and what you would like the color to achieve. Think about what colors are most appropriate to your message and your audience.

To use color in your piece:

1. Make important text a different color than the rest of the copy.
2. Use a bright color to tell the reader where to look first.
3. Use bright colors together to help create a feeling of excitement.
4. Repeat a color from an image and use it with corresponding type or as a background to help unify the layout.
5. Color code a document (such as a training manual) with large amounts of text to help organize the piece.
6. Use an appropriate color to help differentiate parts of a chart or graph.
7. Use colors such as pastels to create a soothing mood, or more bright colors to create excitement.