

The Principles of Design

LEVEL 1

What are the principles of design?

- They are basic rules/guidelines that help an artist communicate a message more effectively to a viewer.
- In short, they are shortcuts to more effective visual communication.
- These principles can be broken down into seven areas of focus:
 1. Unity
 2. Contrast
 3. Balance
 4. Emphasis
 5. Proportion
 6. Rhythm
 7. Movement

Basic Composition

In order to understand the Principles we need to make sure we understand the key parts that make for strong design

Basic Composition Terms to Know

Composition: The arrangement of "stuff" within a work of art, Like the elements of art.

Visual Message: the "Big Idea" the artist wants people to "read" in their artwork

Focal Point: The main area of interest in a work of art; when used effectively it acts like an opening paragraph or "thesis statement". It should be the "Big Idea" behind the visual message.

Picture Plane: the area the artwork is occupying. Ex: edge to edge of the paper or canvas the image is on, or the area a sculpture is occupying.

Magic Diamond: a tool artist use to help with strong Focal Point placement and avoid weak placement.

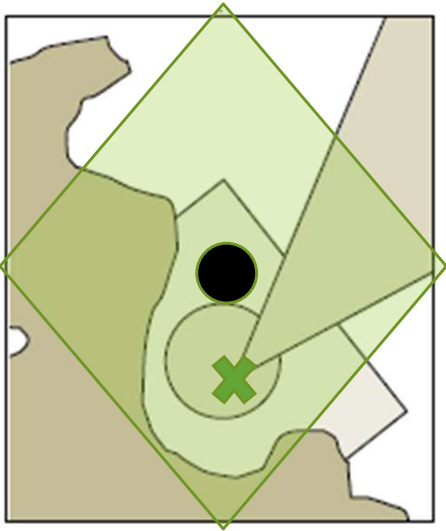
Rule of Thirds: a tool artists use to help check for Variety (increase visual interest) in a work of art- it helps

Strong Composition: more effectively and efficiently communicates the artists visual message and intent and actively engages and holds the audience's attention.

Weak Composition: artwork less engaging to the audience, message may be mixed, confused, or lacking all together. It's not bad but not as effective as it could be- (see avoiding the Nevers' for mor info).

Basic Composition continued...

THE MAGIC DIMOND



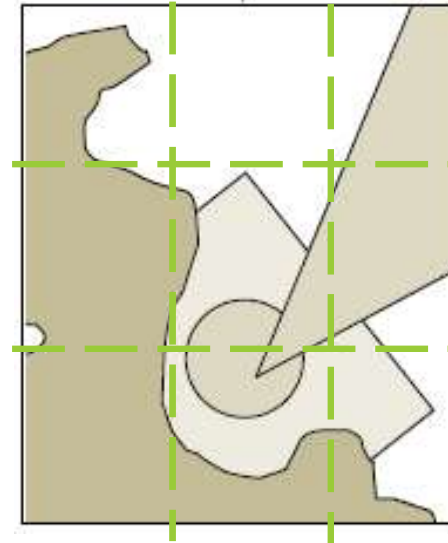
Helps with *focal point placement*. Basically anywhere in the orange is strong placement.

Weak compositions have focal points in the center or corners. They're not bad exactly they just communicate very specific ideas. Those specific ideas are very difficult to go beyond.

For example if you put the focal point in the center, viewers tend to get stuck and don't see the rest of the artwork. It gives a feeling of confrontation- the "in-your-face-factor".

Basically be mindful of your focal point placement!

THE RULE OF 3RDS



Helps with *checking for variety*.

For a dynamic composition each square should have different amounts of "activity". Some square may be blank; others may have lots of different content. Basically you don't want everything to be the same or similar.

How it works:

In your mind divide the picture plain into thirds vertically and horizontally.

The amount of visual activity (aka stuff = shape colors, lines ect), should be different between the square in the Rule of 3rd's Grid, avoid them being similar.

Example: some square have all white; all dark gray; some of all colors; some of the triangle, some the circle, square, and organic shape; but non of them have the same balance of all those parts.

Basic Composition

“The Never’s”

These are more like rules: sure there may be exceptions or even a time and a place to break them. However, it takes a lot of work to understand what those exceptions are and even when you break them for a good reason you still might end up in jail or in the case of making art- have a weaker composition.

Avoid the “obvious”:

- ◊ Why? You will get board fast, usually most simple and common idea instead of your best, and all your work will start to look the same- it’s not bad but gets boring.
- ◊ Quick fixes: invest a little more time and effort in the beginning before starting your project- force your self to find a more unique and personally engaging response, try out 6+ more compositions with thumbnail sketches.

Avoid the “Sticker Effect”

- ◊ Why? Shows lack of Unity in Design, No direction for viewer
- ◊ Quick Fix: Add stuff to visually connect stuff together (have stuff overlap or run off the edge).

Don’t Crowd Stuff (especially the Focal Point and Picture Plane Edges)

- ◊ Also includes never line stuff up around the edges of the Picture Plane.
- ◊ Why ?it shows lack of planning because everything looks and feels cramped, it cuts out important information when artwork is matted and framed, It’s an obvious beginner bad habit.
- ◊ Quick Fixes: Be more Mindful for the start about “Working on the Page” and the placement of everything in your composition, block in main shapes for all stuff in your composition before adding details, Start blocking with your Focal Point in mind first and make sure your other stuff is re-enforcing it instead of obscuring it.

Never Ever Bullseye Stuff (placing stuff too close to the middle of your picture plane)

- ◊ Why? It’s another beginner mistake: it creates too much balance and usually communicates a feeling of being “confrontational” with your audience, Eliminates any movement for your composition because your eye get stuck in the middle. Anything too centralized will become your focal Point –even if that wasn’t your intent, it’s just what happens.

P.O.D: Unity

Unity

What you need to know about unity...

-Unity in art describes how all the parts of a work of artwork together as a whole.

-When all elements agree, a design is considered "unified".

-Harmony is a synonym for Unity.

-Another way of understanding it is by asking an important question:

- How well do these things relate to each other in a work of art:
 - Elements of Art
 - Visual Message (aka "Big Idea", "Visual Story")
 - The Composition
 - Other Principles of Design
 - Media
 - Art Style
 - Cultural and Historical Influences

Granted artists don't always present or think about those things all the time or maybe not even all at once. However the more you are actively thinking of how those things impact your design is the sign of a more accomplished artist. It's what sets the beginners from advanced students. Everyone will be at different places from each other. Don't feel like you must know all those things all at once.

Short Cuts to Creating Unity

1. Focus on aligning 2 things: *the Elements of Art* and your *Visual Message*
 - Your visual message is the anchor that all your other design choices (elements of art) hook into.
2. Start thinking about Unity at the beginning, *BEFORE* you start creating your work of art!
 - Why? It's hard to fix later in the process. Making art is like building a house, if you try to put up walls before you build the foundation they might not fit- sure you might be able to fix it but it will take a lot longer and it probably won't ever be as strong if you had just sucked it up and spent a little more time planning.
3. Be mindful of Variety!
 - Variety adds some visual interest and when done well can even add some interesting layers to your "Big Message"

Short Cut to Unity #1

Example of Elements of Art and Message Alignment
using Van Gogh's "Starry Night"

1. *His Visual Message* aka "Big Idea":
 - What the *experience* of looking at the night sky is really like" at least to him
2. *His Anchor Element choices*:
 - **Color**: Blue and Orange because those are the most common colors you will see in the dark, they also contrast nicely literally and is also another way to show the contrast between the sky and the ground. Those were also colors he liked to use in a lot of his work in general.
 - **Texture**: use texture to express the idea of the wind and how it flows as well as the effect of looking at the Milky Way (keep in mind when he painted it there wasn't as much light or air pollution and could easily see it- look up NASA photos for what it looks like in remote places today).



Short Cut #2 Start thinking about Unity from the beginning (Design Thinking)

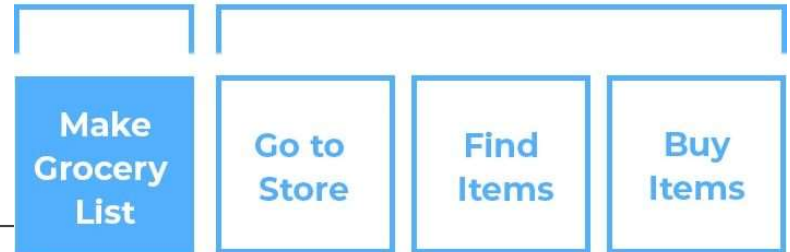
The Grocery List Example

Creating a list for groceries is a simple task – You find the recipes you want to make for the week, then write down all the ingredients you need to buy.

At first glance, you might think there is nothing wrong with this list. It serves its purpose in communicating the ingredients you need to buy. However, let's take a look at it from a design perspective and spot the issue.

Planning

Grocery Shopping



Groceries

Eggs
Bread
Green Peppers
Cheese
Bacon
Buns
Milk
Cucumbers
Hot Dogs
Mustard
Romaine

A Closer Look

Groceries

Eggs
Bread
Green Peppers
Cheese
Bacon
Buns
Milk
Cucumbers
Hot Dogs
Mustard
Romaine

Unity is a *measure of how well* each element of your design works together.

That means a design can be

- very unified
- somewhat unified
- or not unified at all

Our grocery list example above is somewhat unified. It gets the job done, but it's still not the most effective design.

Despite having all the Principles in Design demonstrated in our grocery list, the end result is a poor design because we didn't consider "The Big Picture" first.

Starting with “The Big Picture”



Groceries

Vegetables

Green Peppers
Cucumbers
Romaine

Carbs

Bread
Buns

Proteins

Eggs
Bacon
Hot Dogs

Dairy

Cheese
Milk

Before we head out to buy our groceries, we might stop and ask ourselves a few questions:

- What role does this grocery list play in my overall shopping experience?
- What kind of shopping experience would I like to have?
- How can I better communicate this information to myself?

By thinking in these broader terms, we're able to achieve unity from the very beginning. You're no longer designing a simple grocery list, you're using design to improve your entire shopping experience.

From the big picture perspective, you can consider the store's layout, which isles you'll need to visit, and the order those isles appear. With this new information, you can redesign your grocery list to look something like this...

The result is a greater sense of unity and an improved shopping experience. By taking a little bit more of time and effort to "design" your grocery list, you save much more time and effort in the end as you get in and out of the grocery store more efficiently.

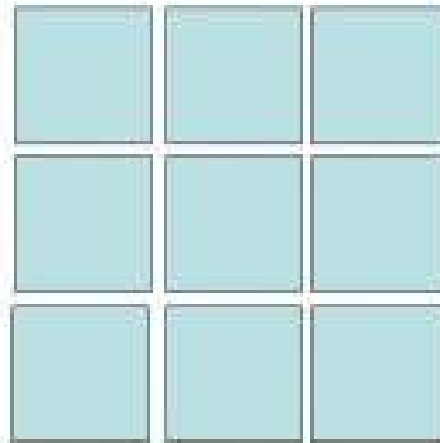
Big picture thinking is where good design begins.

Short Cut #3

Be Mindful of Variety

Having uniformity through out the design is good but can be boring. That's were Variety comes in. Adding a little variety is good but too much will break up the unity. The trick is to create a balance between them

- Same shape, size, tone and texture



- Same shape, tone, texture. interest created by varying size and position

