Visual Design Elements and Principles

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“Consensus” Visual Design Process

Elements → Principles → Product

Elements:
1. Space
2. Color
3. Contrast
4. Line
5. Shape
6. Texture

Principles:
1. Balance
2. Emphasis
3. Pattern
4. Variety
5. Movement
6. Proportion
Elements: Space

• Space is the dimension and the shape of the: Window or Frame
  Canvas, Support, or Ground

• It has an aspect ratio and resolution

• It has an orientation

• It has a point of view
Composing a space
The Fibonacci Series, Phi, & the Golden Mean

• 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13...
• Values increase at a ratio of 1 to 1.61 (Phi)
• Like the ratio of 3.14 (Pi) this ratio is common in natural forms
• This ratio yields a shape called the Golden Rectangle
The Golden Rectangle
The Rule Of Thirds

Four points of interest in a rectangle. Typically the ratio is:
1 : 1.5 - close to the golden mean.
(3 X 2 is the ratio of 35mm film.)

The rule of thirds helps designers provide focus and balance to their compositions.
Examples of the rule of thirds

Above, Adobe Lightroom now has an option to crop photos based on the rule of thirds.
Screen Prominence

For Western cultures that read left to right, the upper left corner of the screen is the most prominent part of the screen, followed by the upper right, and the two lower corners. The center of the screen actually has the least prominence (it’s the gutter of the book).
Portrait & Landscape Orientation

**Portrait:**
Vertical, Arresting, Alerting, Commanding Attention

**Landscape:**
Horizontal, Calm, Pastoral, Contemplative
Viewpoint

The position of the viewer is a crucial aspect of how a visual story is told.
Figure/Ground – Positive/Negative Space

M.C. Escher’s “Sky and Water” provides a good illustration of Tufte’s “1 + 1 = 3” rule
Examples of Figure/Ground Relationships

Formula 1

FedEx Express

[Image of a bridge with a ship sailing through clouds]

[Image of a ship sailing in the ocean]
Elements: Color & The Visible Spectrum

- Cool colors have a higher frequency and a shorter wavelength.
- Warm colors have a lower frequency and a longer wavelength.
Color models

Additive:
Emitted Light
Light Primaries
The primaries at full strength = white light

Subtractive:
Reflected Light
Pigment Primaries
(Black is added in 4 color printing)
Color Properties

Colors have three properties

- **Hue**: simply what the color is, related to the primary, secondary, and tertiary colors

- **Saturation**: the difference between the color and neutral gray (greater difference = greater saturation)

- **Lightness** (sometimes also called Brightness or Value): the level of illumination, or how bright the color is
Complementary Colors

The complementary color of any hue is the mix of the two other primary or secondary colors.
Atmospheric Distortion & The Blue Shift

Warmer, more saturated colors move forward; and cooler, less saturated colors recede
Color Psychology: Warmer Colors

• Red
  – Rare in the natural world
  – Associated with fire, blood, danger
  – Commands attention

• Orange and Yellow
  – Color of the sun
  – Motivator, makes people happy and decide rapidly

• Green
  – Pastoral
  – Puts people at ease
Color Psychology: Cooler Colors

• **Blue**
  – Most common color in the natural world
  – Color of the sky and the ocean
  – Light blue conveys access and assistance
  – Dark blue conveys authority

• **Violet**
  – Infrequent color in nature
  – It’s unusual and exceptional
  – The color of royalty, intrigue and mystery
Color Psychology: Neutral Colors

• Brown
  – Color of the earth
  – Dependable and full of promise

• Black
  – Color of night
  – Formality (and fear)
  – Judicial
  – Funerals in western cultures

• White
  – Color of clouds
  – Purity
  – Weddings in western cultures
Elements: Contrast

Color contrast

Value contrast
Elements: Diagonal Lines

Diagonal lines are very powerful compositional elements. They provide drama and a feeling of motion, space, and time.
Curved Lines

The use of curves in compositions is vital for conveying movement.
Principles: Balance
Symmetrical Balance

Symmetry evokes stasis. It suggests timelessness; it’s iconic and monumental.

Radial symmetry is a special instance. Iterative patterns suggest infinity.
Asymmetrical Balance

In asymmetric balance the relationships seem more temporal, which creates more tension and interest.
Principles: Emphasis
Principles: Pattern
Principles: Variety
Principles: Movement

Note the strong “S” curve that unifies the composition and sets the elements in motion.
Principles: Proportion