timeinspace
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DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The basic tenets of design can be grouped into two categories: principles and elements. The principles of design are the overarching truths of the profession. They represent the basic assumptions of the world that guide the design practice, and affect the arrangement of objects within a composition. By comparison, the elements of design are the components of the design themselves, the objects to be arranged.

Balance Balance occurs when all the design elements are equally distributed throughout the design. There are essentially two types of balance: *symmetrical* and *asymmetrical*. Symmetrical elements are arranged equally on both sides of a composition to suggest stability and peacefulness. Asymmetrical elements create a deliberate imbalance to suggest motion and activity. Asymmetrical compositions provide visual tension.

Rhythm Rhythm is a pattern created by repeating elements. Rhythm denotes the movement in the way that elements direct our gaze to scan the message for understanding or information. The term *sequence* is used to refer to the viewing order of the elements and to determine the flow of a multi-page publication such as a magazine or a book.

Unity Unity is achieved when all elements in a layout look like they belong together. The concept of unity describes the relationship between the individual parts and the whole of a composition. It investigates the aspects of a given design that are necessary to tie the composition together, to give it a sense of wholeness, or to break it apart and give it a sense of variety. Unity in design is a concept that stems from some of the Gestalt theories of visual perception and psychology, specifically those dealing with how the human brain organizes visual information into categories, or groups.

Contrast Contrast stresses the visual differences in size, shape, and color between the elements to enhance the perception of a message. Contrast also draws and directs the viewer's attention to specific areas of information.

Emphasis Emphasis indicates the most important element on the page based on the message. It is the element that stands out and gets noticed first. The most emphasized visual element in a design is called a *focal point* because it attracts the viewer's attention first. Emphasis can be created by taking an element and making it bigger, bolder or brighter, by putting it in a contrasting color, or by surrounding it with white space.