

Shape Studies demonstrating the Principles of Design and Cropping Formats

Shape can be as simple as a spot or dot. A spot can take on other characteristics such as a geometric shape or an organic shape. A shape can also be solid or outlined. A shape has intrinsic interest when it is placed on a surface with aesthetic value. Variation of shapes will create many possibilities and interest within a composition. Such variations will demonstrate many visual elements and/or principles of design, such as directional line, movement, balance, emphasis & subordination, unity & variety, rhythm, etc.

Figure is the part of the composition we pay attention to, (the positive shape). In a simple composition there may be one positive shape. In a complex composition there will be several noticeable shapes. Recognizable objects are easy to see as figure. In compositions without recognizable subject matter, what we see as figure will depend on the abstract relationship between visual elements. The most interesting at any moment is the figure.

Ground is everything else that is not figure or shape, (negative space). As attention shifts from figure to ground the ground also shifts so that an object can go from figure to ground and back. Ground is sometimes thought of as background, but this is not always true. In a flat composition there is nothing behind the figure (if there was there would be an illusion of depth). The shapes are side by side. When the figure is surrounded by space in the composition the ground looks like a shape with a hole in it for the shape of the figure. In this case the ground looks like a background for the figure and there is a shallow space which develops. If the figure touches the edges or another figure the shapes of the ground seems to surround the figure and a series of ground shapes are made. These are called negative shapes and no longer appear as a background. The shapes stay flat.

Format is the area that a composition takes place in. The format is defined by its size and shape. The format's edges are generally indicated by a border or the edge of the background color. The default format is the size and shape of the page or canvas that the composition takes place on - unless the space is reformatted with a new design area indicated.

Choosing an appropriate format means choosing a shape and size for the ground.

Principles of Design

1. **Emphasis** - creating a focal point; draws a viewer's eye to something first, then to the background or other parts of the composition.
2. **Unity & Variety** - one unit or wholeness with variations or differences.
3. **Balance** - visual weight.
 - Symmetrical balance** - evenly weighted side to side, top to bottom, diagonally, biaxial or triaxial.
 - Asymmetrical balance** - not equally weighted, yet still balanced. Turn and view from different sides to see where a viewer's eye goes and how well the composition is balanced.
4. **Rhythm** = repetition. It creates a visual beat in a work of art. It is what keeps the viewer's eye moving within the composition. Rhythm can be regular, as in exactly the same, be alternating in color, shape, line or be eccentric - variation of color, line, shape.
5. **Scale & Proportion** - refers to size.
 - Distortion of Scale** - what may be enlarged or shrunken from a standard or normal size.
 - Hierarchical Scaling** - something is enlarged within a group to show more importance than other objects.
 - Proportion** - parts of a whole unit in various sizes or ratios.

Assignment – Cropping Formats and Shape Studies

Part 1 – Cropping Formats

1. Select a well-known 2D work of art (drawing, painting, print or photograph). Make at least 3 copies of it (black & white copies are fine).
2. Cut two L-shape pieces 2" wide – called "moving Ls" from your white paper.
3. Crop your selected work of art 3 different ways using the moving Ls and outline your new cropped compositions with graphite, then, cut to the new cropped size.
4. Think about the Principles of Design when cropping the selected work. How might it still be an interesting composition within the original? Is the work of art still recognizable from that newly cropped portion?

Part 2 – Shapes Studies demonstrating the Principles of Design

1. With precision, draw and cut-out the following geometric shapes in various sizes, such as small, medium & large.
3-4 circles 2-3 rings 3-4 squares 4-5 triangles 2-3 rectangles 1 of your own choice – geometric or organic
2. Arrange 6 shapes together as possible combinations. Do not repeat the same size of a shape or have more than 2 of any shape. You may need to cut the same shape more than once as you decide on which six shapes work the best together. Think about various sizes of shapes and how the 6 shapes occupy the 5"X5" format. Glue at least 4 possible combinations of shapes on 5"x5" squares and label as prep work.
3. On seven separate 5"x5" squares using the same 6 shapes in all squares arrange and demonstrate an understanding of the following Principles of Design:
 - Emphasis
 - Unity & Variety
 - Rhythm
 - Balance (pair) – Symmetrical with same order for Asymmetrical, yet rearranged differently.
 - Scale (distortion or hierarchical)
 - Proportion
4. All compositions in either black shapes on white ground or white shapes on black ground.
5. Can be an open or closed composition, as long as the shapes are still recognizable. Don't crop too much.
6. Shapes can touch on edges of other shapes, but aim not to overlap too much.
7. This assignment will demonstrate your understanding of the Principles of Design and will show yourself how well you organize shapes within a format to create pleasing compositions which specifically and clearly demonstrate these principles.

Keep all the squares separate for the class critique. You may add a separate black or white margin to each square.

After the critique you could glue onto one background. These will be good examples for your Design Portfolio.

Seven 5" squares with Principles of Design – Due Wednesday, September 20th

Grading criteria for this assignment:

1. **Risk taking and creativity:** your willingness to experiment and develop ideas, as well as unique visual solutions. (25%)
2. **Process and concept:** sketches, preparatory work; how well the piece works to embody these principles. (25%)
3. **Technique and execution:** your attention to craftsmanship and execution down to the last detail. (25%)
4. **Professionalism:** your work ethic, effort, following directions and time management. (25%)

Supplies: multi-media paper or white construction paper, black construction paper, graph paper, graphite pencils, scissors, ruler, eraser, glue stick or double-sided tape.