

DESIGN *Exploring the Elements and Principles*

Elements of Design

A design is a visual plan you can use to create your 4-H project. Everything you can see has a design. When you describe something you see, you use words that tell about the lines, shapes, colors, textures, and spaces. Line, shape, color, texture, and space are the basic elements of design.

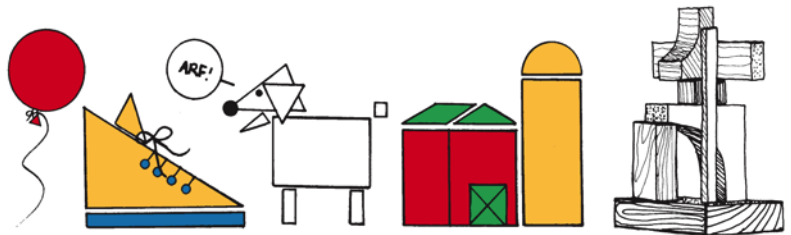
Line

Lines can be horizontal, vertical, dotted, zig-zag, curved, straight, diagonal, bold, or fine. Lines can show direction, lead the eye, outline an object, divide a space, and communicate a feeling or emotion.



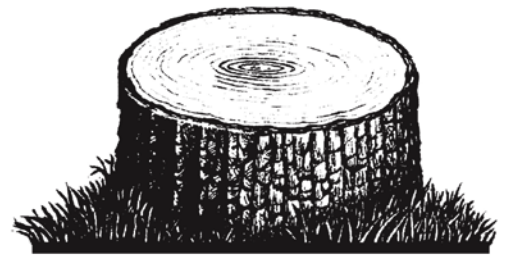
Shape

Shapes are made by connecting lines. Circle, square, triangle, and free-form are words used to identify shapes. Look at the objects around you and describe their basic shapes. Are they one shape, or are they a combination of many shapes? After doing this several times, you will begin to understand what a shape really is. Line creates two dimensional or flat shapes. When shapes are three dimensional, we call them forms. A circle is a shape; a ball is a form. A square is a shape; a cube is a form. A drawing is a flat shape; a sculpture is a three-dimensional form.



Texture

Texture is the surface quality of an item; it's how something feels when touched or looks like it would feel if touched. Sandpaper is rough. Velvet is smooth. A drawing of a tree stump could show rough outer bark and a smooth inner surface. Search for ways to add texture to your projects. Texture adds variety and interest.



Color

Color is described with the words hue, value, and intensity. Hue refers to the name of the color—red or blue, for example. Value tells the lightness or darkness of a hue. Intensity refers to the brightness or dullness of a hue. You can use a color wheel and learn how colors work together.

Space

Space refers to the area that a shape or form occupies. It also refers to the background against which we see the shape or form. Space can be defined as positive and negative. The positive space of a design is the filled space in the design—often it is the shapes that make up the design. Negative space is the background. The negative space in design is as important as the positive area.



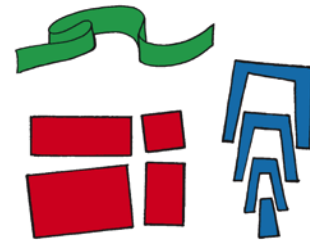
Principles of Design

Some combinations of design elements (line, shape, color, texture, and space) work better than others. Here are some guidelines to help you understand why. These guidelines—rhythm, proportion, emphasis, balance, and unity—are the principles of design.

Rhythm

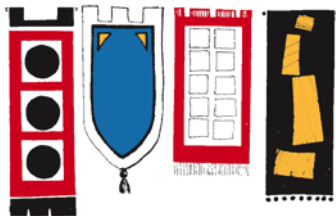
You have felt rhythm in music. Rhythm also allows the eye to move from one part of a design to another part. Rhythm can be created by:

- Repeating a color, shape, texture, line, or space.
- Varying the size of objects, shapes, or lines in sequence.
- Using a progression of colors from tints to shades.
- Shifting from one hue to a neighboring hue (yellow to yellow-orange).



Proportion

Proportion refers to the relationship between one part of a design and another part or to the whole design. It is a comparison of sizes, shapes, and quantities. For example, the relationship between the vertical and horizontal measurements of a wall hanging may be pleasing because the unequal lengths produce an interesting contrast.



Emphasis

Every design needs an accent—a point of interest. Emphasis is the quality that draws your attention to a certain part of a design first. There are several ways to create emphasis:

- Use a contrasting color.
- Use a different or unusual line.
- Make a shape very large or very small.
- Use a different shape.
- Use plain background space.



Balance

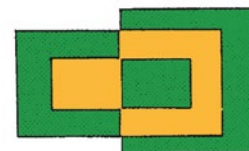
Balance gives a feeling of stability. There are three types of balance. **Symmetrical**, or formal balance, is the simplest kind.

An item that is symmetrically balanced is the same on both sides. Our bodies are an example of formal balance. If you draw an imaginary line from your head to your toes dividing your body in half, you will be pretty much the same on both sides. Designs that have a **radial**



balance have a center point. A tire, pizza, and a daisy flower are all examples of design with radial balance. **Asymmetrical balance** creates a feeling of equal weight

on both sides, even though the sides do not look the same. Asymmetrical designs also are called informal designs because they suggest movement and spontaneity. Asymmetrical balance is the hardest type of balance to achieve and often takes experimenting to achieve.



Unity

When things look right together, you have created unity or harmony. Lines and shapes that repeat each other show unity (curved lines with curved shapes). Colors that have a common hue are harmonious. Textures that have a similar feel add to unity. But too much uniformity sometimes can be boring. At the same time, too much variety destroys unity.

Written in 2000 by JaneAnn Stout, ISU Extension Art and Design Specialist. Edited by Carol Ouverson, Communication Specialist. Revised in 2019 by Bonnie Dalager, ISU Extension and Outreach Youth Program Specialist and Heather Schantz, ISU Extension and Outreach Youth Program Specialist.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach does not discriminate on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, pregnancy, race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or status as a U.S. veteran, or other protected classes. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies may be directed to the Diversity Advisor, 2150 Beardshear Hall, 515 Morrill Road, Ames, Iowa 50011, 515-294-1482, extdiversity@iastate.edu. All other inquiries may be directed to 800-262-3804.

4H 0634 February 2019