GDES1003: Creative Digital Imaging

Composition and Layout Techniques
Composition Techniques

Composition

Composition is the placement or arrangement of visual elements or ingredients in a work of art, as distinct from the subject of a work. It can also be thought of as the organization of the elements of art according to the principles of art.

In graphic design and desktop publishing, composition is commonly referred to as page layout.
Composition Techniques

Elements of Design

- Line - the visual path that enables the eye to move within the piece
- Shape - areas defined by edges within the piece, whether geometric or organic
- Color - hues with their various values and intensities
- Texture - surface qualities which translate into tactile illusions
- Form - 3-D length, width, or depth
- Value - Shading used to emphasize form
- Space - the space taken up by (positive) or in between (negative) objects
Composition Techniques

The Rule of Thirds

The rule of thirds is a guideline commonly followed by visual artists. The objective is to stop the subject(s) and or points of interest (such as the horizon) from bisecting the image, by placing them near one of the lines that would divide the image into three equal columns and rows, ideally near the intersection of those lines.
Composition Techniques

Principles of Design

The artist determines what the centre of interest (or focus) of the art work will be, and composes the elements accordingly. The gaze of the viewer will then tend to linger over these points of interest. Elements are arranged with consideration of several factors (known as the principles of design) into a harmonious whole which works together to produce the desired statement — a phenomenon commonly referred to as unity.
In a formal layout, visual elements are distributed equally on both sides of a central vertical axis to express formality. A symmetrical layout nicely suits this classic work of astronomy, originally published in 1910.
In an informal layout, elements are balanced unequally on both sides of the page. This layout expresses dynamism and energy. This soul music CD uses an asymmetrical layout design to express its lively and dynamic musical style.
One of the most important design decisions is what element to make the most prominent. The most important element in a composition is called a **focal point**. Emphasis is achieved by position, rhythm, colour contrast, typeface weights and styles. Secondary emphasis points are called **accents**.
The focal point of this book cover is the negative shape of the running man, which is emphasised by its relative simplicity against the patterned foreground.
The large circle draws the viewer’s eye by its large size, warm colours, level of complexity and implied lines that point to the centre of the shape.
Graphic Design Techniques

Positive and Negative Shapes

Positive shapes advance; they are the foreground elements.

Negative shapes recede; they are the background.

In a successful positive/negative shape relationship, the positive and negative shapes are interdependent, forcing viewers to consider the whole space.
Negative shapes are just as important to the design as are the positive shapes. Notice how the positive shapes divide the negative shapes into large, medium and small areas.
Negative spaces are so important that they are often referred to as negative “shapes”, indicating their equal level of importance with the positive shapes.
Here, positive and negative shapes are emphasised by strong contrast of colours.
Graphic Design Techniques

Grids

A grid is a guide – a modular compositional structure made up of verticals and horizontals that divide the format into columns and formats.

A grid gives a design a unified look
A grid structure creates unity and order for most periodical page layouts. By applying a consistent grid from page to page, the reader gets the correct impression that the various pages belong together as a system.
In this cover design for the *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, some elements align with the grid (for unity), while other elements break the grid (for variety) in order to keep the page unpredictable and exciting.
Unity establishes an integrated whole rather than a group of unrelated parts. Applying consistent colours, illustration or photographic styles and typography unifies a design.

Variety can be established by changing other elements in order to keep the design fresh and new.
Elements of unity (the position of the coloured square, the typeface, logo position etc.) unify the various components of this identity system so that they work together as a system. Elements of variety (the various colours) keep the viewer interested by presenting unpredictable visuals.
Graphic Design Techniques

Rhythm

In music, rhythm is thought of as a “beat”, a sense of movement from one chord to another, a pattern of stresses.

In graphic design, rhythm is a “beat” established by visual elements. It is a pattern created by repeating or varying elements. It establishes a sense of movement from one element to another.
This repeating pattern of visual elements floating around the girl in the centre forms a pattern, which focuses the viewer’s attention on the central image of the ultrasound scan image applied to the girl’s skirt.
Graphic Design Techniques

Contrast

Contrast means difference.

It can be established by varying sizes, colours, weights, levels of complexity, positive shapes vs. surrounding negative spaces etc. It can be one of the most powerfully engaging techniques of design.
Contrast is established by juxtaposing small vs. large type, serif vs. sans serif type and orange vs. purple in this poster for the School of Visual Arts.
Strong size contrast and positive/negative shape relationships form a very successful book cover design.
Graphic Design Techniques

Visual/Verbal Synergy

The cooperative action of words and images used together to create a meaning that is greater than the individual signification of its parts.
Without this image, the headline is incomplete. Without the words, it is merely a portrait of George Bush. The headline blinds the image to a specific meaning.
The indefinite image of gun composed of arrows is given more specific meaning by the headline. Notice how the arrows, stylistically, are specifically the kinds of arrows found on traffic signs and pavement markings.
Graphic Design Techniques

Graphic Resonance

Graphic designers bring a resonance (a term borrowed from music, “to reverberate or echo”) to visual communications through the interaction of colour, typography, imagery, layout and shapes. These visual elements all speak the same graphic “voice” to reinforce a message.
In this example from *Martha Stewart Baby* magazine, graphic resonance is applied to reinforce the concept of a baby magazine by incorporating large, playful type, pastel colours, simplistic images and layout, and a clean white background.
Graphic Design Techniques

Type and Image Integration

A visual comparison between type and specific qualities of an image.

An aspect of unity, type and image integration specifically refers to the display type reflecting the colours, sizes or shapes of an image.
The visual qualities (colour, shape and glossiness) of the strands of licorice in Björk's mouth are unified with similar shapes and letterforms in this CD cover.
The large initial cap “S” is unified with the photograph by reflecting its colours and shapes. Notice the shape at the bottom of the “S” is similar to the raven’s tail feathers.
Graphic Design Techniques

Visual Surprise

The discovery of an unexpected quality or element within a work of visual communication which can build interest and gather attention to it.
A decorative swash mark becomes the smoke rising from the man’s cigarette. The title seems to bleed off the right side of the page to be continued on the left.
The cartoon figure seems to scream so loudly, he sends the “O” flying.
The “05” substitutes neatly for the “os” in Boston.

The text “AIGA 2005” is highlighted in red.
Redesigning/Framing Workshop
Part 1

Following on from your album cover deconstruction, you should have brought with you, 4 photocopies of your chosen cover.

Measure your album cover. On one A3 sheet of layout paper, draw 2 boxes to represent your cover, next to each other.

For your analysis you should have taken apart all the elements of the image. Refer back to this list. Using 2 of your photocopies, cut up the elements again and rearrange them into **TWO** different compositions. You don’t have to use all the elements, if you feel they are not necessary to the composition.

_You must not add any other elements._
Redesigning/Framing Workshop
Part 2

On another A3 sheet of layout paper, draw another 2 boxes next to each other, again, the same size as the album cover.

Using your final 2 photocopies, explore another TWO compositions, but feel free to change the scale of any of the elements, and, this time, add other elements of your choice - images from magazines, type, hand drawn elements, writing etc.
Finally, out of another sheet of layout paper, cut out a frame (window) the same size as your album cover and move it around over your 4 new compositions.

Explore the effects of different crops. When you find crops you are happy with, photocopy them to keep as a record.

Note: Try to apply deconstruction/analysis to imagery and typography throughout the module, with any inspirational items you find and note your findings in your journal.

Examples used in this presentation are taken from the AIGA Design Archives. Available at Aiga Design Archives