



# The Elements of Design

The elements of design refer to the concepts and fundamentals that make up any painting, drawing, graphic design, etc. An understanding of these design concepts and elements are necessary so that as a designer, **conscious and purposeful choices** are taken as your design choices may change how a brand is perceived, how a document is read, and more. The main elements essential to any design are **line, direction, color, value, texture, shape, scale, and typography.**

## Line

A line can be described **as any two connected points**, linear marks made with a pen or brush, or the edge created when two shapes meet. There are various types of lines including **vertical, horizontal, diagonal, zigzag, and curved** lines. Lines are useful for the following objectives:

- Dividing space
- Creating visual organization
- To lead or draw the eye to a specific location
- To suggest moods or emotion as lines can appear anxious, angry, or calm

## Direction

Direction, an element synonymous with movement, refers to the way elements on a page **intentionally guide the viewer's eyes** from one area of the page to another. Depending on where you place the most important elements on the page or what images you are using, you are establishing a dominant direction. There are three different types of directions, all which suggest different concepts to the viewer:

- **Horizontal:** Suggests calmness, tranquility, and stability
- **Vertical:** Suggests balance
- **Diagonal:** Suggests movement and action

In *Figure 1.1* we can find examples of **line** and **direction** and both work together to make this infographic a success.

**Line:** **Diagonal lines** are used to lead the viewer's eye to the right side of the graphic where there is further information. The diagonal lines are also helping to **visually organize information in the lower portions of the infographic**, creating pockets where information can be placed, adding visual organization to the graphic.

**Direction:** The lines and the reduction of the color yellow in this image create visual movement in the piece. **The**

**diagonal lines and fading of the color yellow** move from left to right and assist in guiding the viewers' eyes in that direction. Remember that diagonal lines suggests movement and action connecting to the purpose of this infographic--the movements of spacecraft.

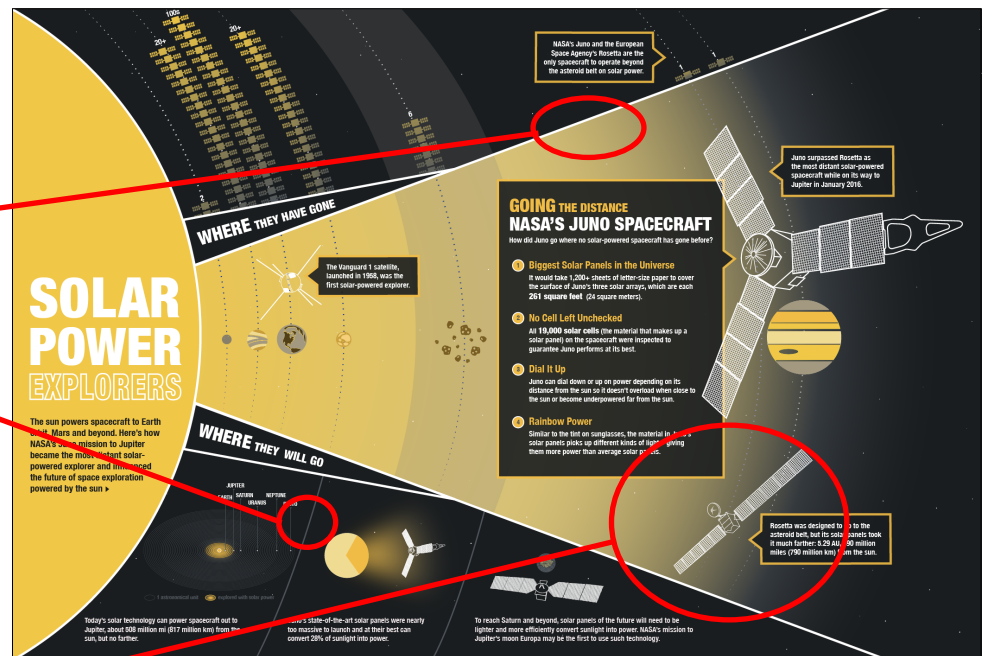


Figure 1.1



# The Elements of Design Cont.

## Color

Color (also called hue) creates a **mood**, an ambiance for the piece and it's typically the **most obvious element** of design. Each color has its own culturally associated meaning (the color red often linked to love or anger), meaning that different cultures create their own meanings and impressions on colors as there is no universal meaning associated to each color. However, the use of color in design can **alter one's impression** of the design or brand. Keep the color wheel and color theory in mind when incorporating more than one color into a design. Use color for the following strategies:

- **Repeating colors:** Suggests connection between elements and offers visual organization.
- **Color as contrast:** against a main color to draw attention to an element
- **Plan:** Chose a color scheme, a color plan right from the beginning of your design phase so that color is consistently present in your design.

Visit our "Using Color" resource on the Lewis Owl for an in depth overview of implementing color: <https://lewisuwritingcenter.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/color-final.pdf>

## Value

Value, also called tone, refers to the **lightness and darkness of a color**. The lighter a color, the higher the value, making white the highest or the lightest value. Use value for the following strategies and keep in mind that the human eye is **drawn to an element that's in contrast** with its background:

- To create a focal point or point attention to an important element
- To create illusion and depth
- To create contrast

In Figure 2.1 you can see different values of the color red. Remember that the darker the color, the lower the value and vice versa. **The top furthest left square** is high in value while **the bottom and furthest left square** is very low in value.

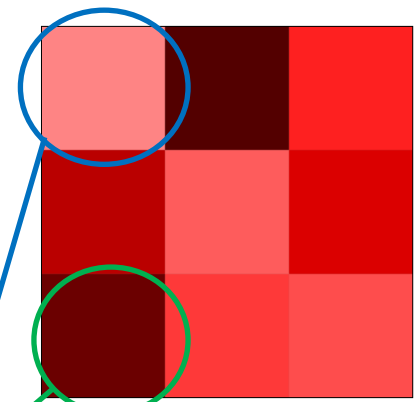


Figure 2.1

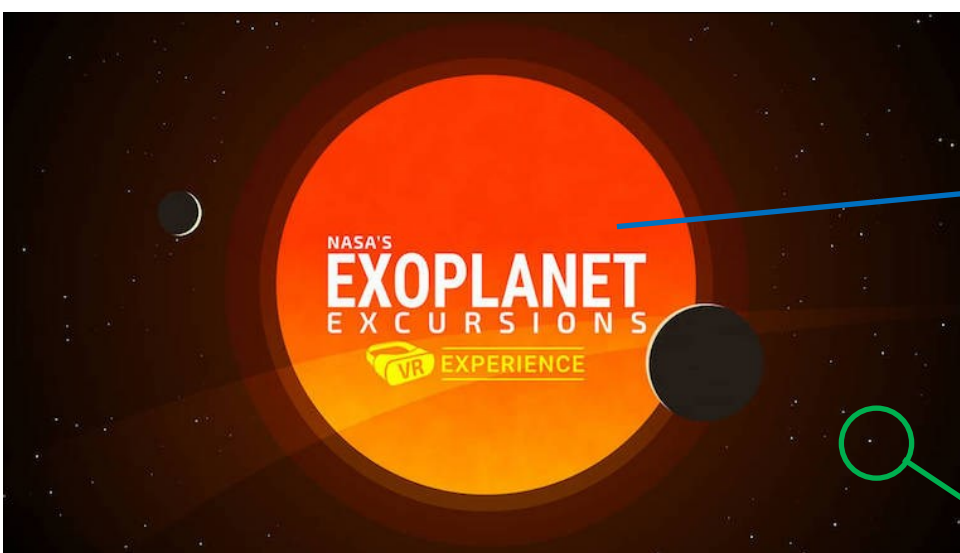


Figure 3.1

In Figure 3.1 we can find examples of both **color** and **value** within the graphic.

**Color:** **The orange circle in the middle** of the graphic creates a center of focus and draws the viewers eyes to the important information inside of the orange circle. The orange circle also emulates the theme of space since it looks like a sun.

**Value:** Color and value work together in this graphic as **the outskirts** of this graphic are darker and lower in value while the middle is higher in value. The contrast created in the vibrancy of

the colors creates a focal point and adds depth (an illusion of visual layers) to the center of the design so all attention is brought to the information at the center.



# The Elements of Design Cont.

## Texture

Texture is more than what you can touch. It's the **surface quality of a shape**. A shape can be smooth, hard, glossy, or striated (striped, streaked). It can provide a **three-dimensional** look to any design and build an immersive and texturized experience. For example, the audience feels more connected to a design, finds more depth, as well as an impression in a business card with a wood-streaked print rather than a typical business card with a white background. There are two types of texture:

- **Actual/Real Texture:** Texture you can physically feel such as the weight of a business card, the gloss of a piece of paper.
- **Visual/Implied Texture:** Texture that is simulated or invented; texture created to look like something it is not.



Figure 4.1

In Figure 4.1, we see great examples of visual or implied texture as the texture within this graphic, found in the **fabric of the flag** as well as the **gloss and shine of the medal** add an **authenticity** to the piece. This **stimulated and invented texture** adds a more official experience and creates depth in this piece.

## Space

Space refers to the **area** within, around, above, or below an object(s). When designing, consider how the elements on the pages are **grouped and arranged in your composition**. Try to give elements room to breathe and don't forget about the white or negative space on the page. **Negative space** refers to the parts of the page that are left blank and assist in creating the overall image. These spaces are usually white but can also be other colors. Space and shape tie together as you can use negative space to create shapes as you would any other element.

## Shape

Shape can be defined as a self-contained defined area of **geometric** (perfect, uniform proportions such as squares and octagons) or **organic form** (less well-defined proportions without rules and do not fit into categories). They are typically defined by boundaries such as line or color. Every element on the page you're designing has a shape and creates invisible shapes in relation to each other. Make sure to always consider the shapes you are intentionally incorporating as well as any shapes naturally formed by **negative space** on the page.



Figure 5.1

In Figure 5.1, **shape** and **space** are utilized for a fluid design. In this graphic there is a blend of geometric and organic form as **leaves are organically used to create the illusion of a geometric circle** around the center text. **Negative space or white space** is also used to create this circular shape around the center text. We also see **how information is arranged and grouped together** with the date, event, and holders of the event grouped altogether in the middle of the graphic.



# The Elements of Design Cont.

## Scale

Scale (also known as size) refers to **the relationship of area** occupied by one shape to that of another. Thus an element can look smaller or large depending on the size, color, and placement of the other elements surrounding it. How you utilize scale will have an impact on how your audience views the composition of your design. Use scale for the following objectives:

- **Creating interest:** A design could lack interest if every element is the same size.
- **Creating contrast:** Making one element smaller or larger than another adds contrast and visual organization to a design.
- **Conveying importance:** The larger an element is, the more important the reader will view the element.

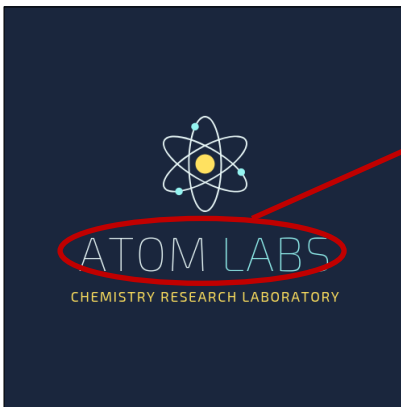


Figure 6.1

In *Figure 7.1*, we see how scale is created in logos. The words “Atom Labs” are **larger** in scale or size **creating contrast** against the smaller element of the logo such as the words “Chemistry Research Laboratory.” The more **important information** or phrase you want the audience to take away from viewing the logo is the lab’s name so this information is made larger in size.

This logo as well as *Figure 5.1* and *8.1* were all created using the online design editor, **Canva**. You can use the website to create all kinds of documents from postcards, to invitations, Facebook ads, logos, posters, and brochures by visiting [canva.com](http://canva.com).

## Typography

Typography, next to color, is one of the most important elements in any design and refers to the **style, weight, and size of the font** used in design. Typography can **enhance or hinder readability** depending on how it’s utilized. It **tells a story to** the viewer and speaks on behalf of a brand by offering a difference between a serious news publication versus a more playful kids menu. There are many different types of fonts such as **script, serif, sans serif, slab serif, decorative**, etc. When working on typography keep the following things in mind:

- **Simplicity is key:** Use fonts that are easy to read for the body text. Using fonts such as “Comics Sans” can hinder readability and give your work a childish appearance. Also, using more than two fonts can interrupt consistency in your design. If you wander into using more than two, do so with purpose.
- **Capitalization:** Avoid using all caps in the body text. All caps translates into yelling for any viewer or reader.
- **Serif Fonts:** “Serifs” refer to the **decorative tails** or feet added to a font.
- **Sans Serif Fonts:** “Sans” is French for **without**, meaning that when a font is sans serif, it is without the decorative feet that is found in serif fonts.
- **Web vs. Print:** You must also consider which medium a document will be read when deciding font. When reading from paper, **from print, a serif font**, a font with the decorative feet, is preferable for the **body text**. When reading in a **digital or virtual space, a sans serif font** is most preferred for the body text.

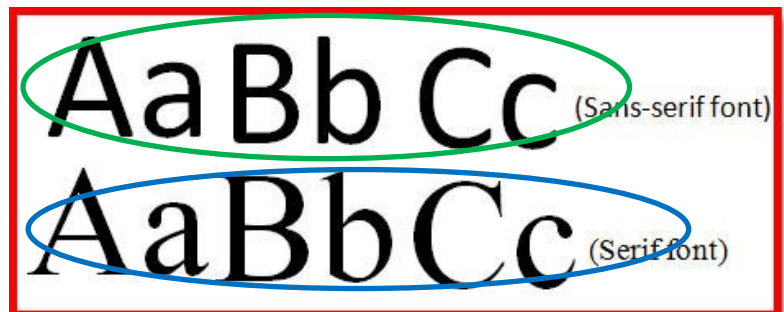


Figure 7.1



# The Elements of Design Cont.



In Figure 8.1 we see a **script font** being used for the header of the document. A script font connotes a **personal, handwritten feeling** when used. Also, the difference in the header font type versus that of the body text, **helps to differentiate** between the header “Happy Holidays” and the body text of the letter. We can also see how a different type of font is used for the **body, a sans serif font**. This helps to create **visual organization** by using a sans serif font instead of a script font for the body text. Script fonts are also especially **difficult to read when excessively used**. The sans serif font here looks fresh and clean with the white background. If the document is being virtually viewed, the sans serif font will be easy on the eyes as in the virtual space, sans serif fonts are the stronger fonts to use in the body text whereas for printed content, serif fonts are the best choice.

Figure 8.1

For more extensive information on typography, visit our **Lewis Owl resource** “Typography”: <https://lewisuwritingcenter.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/typography.pdf>

**Further Assistance:** For more detailed help or if you have questions, visit the Writing Center located in the Lewis University Library or call 815-836-5427.

**Sources Consulted:** Technori.com, John Lovett, Creative Market, Lifewire, Art Foundations, Vanseo Design, gdbasics, and Canva.