

Composition

Composition is a very broad but important term in design. Design is a visual form of music and you are the composer. Composition in design is essentially the arrangement of visual elements using various principles and techniques. A well composed visual will intrigue and draw in the viewer.

Basic Guidelines

1. Focal Point

What is your eye drawn to in the composition?

2. Simplification

Is there too much going on? Simplify. Too much visual congestion makes it difficult to identify the focal point.

3. Rule of Odds

An odd number of elements is sometime more interesting than an even number.

4. Rule of thirds

Divide your composition into thirds. Often it is visually interesting to have elements positioned at points where the thirds intersect.

5. Movement

Create movement in your compositions, so that the eye can dance around the image and not become stagnant.

6. Don't cut in two

Avoid bisecting your composition. Splitting an image in half visually can be uninteresting.

7. Triangles

Triangular compositions are thought to be more aesthetically pleasing. Look for triangular relationships between objects in a composition.

The Elements of Art

Line: The marks made by pointed tools. The visual path that enables the eye to move within the piece.

Shape: Areas defined by edges within the piece, whether geometric or organic.

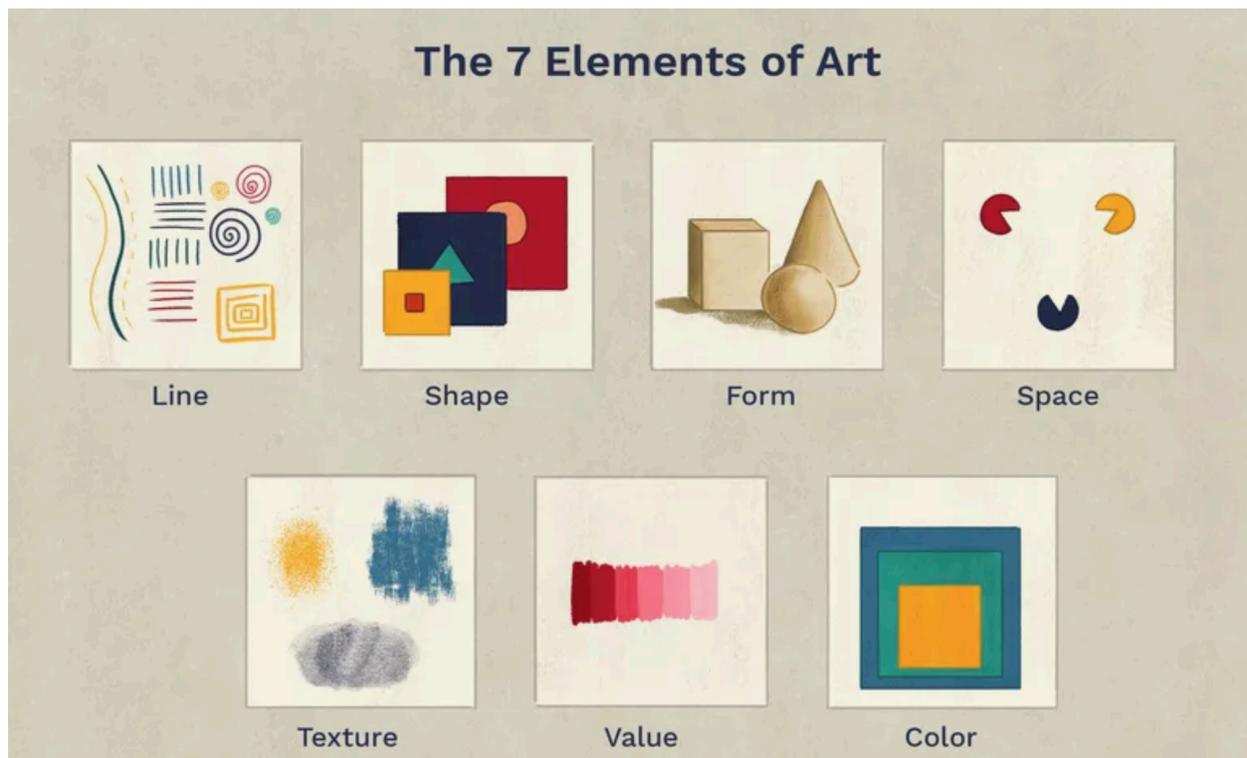
Color: One of the most dominant elements. It has three properties Hue (color name given to a specific wavelength of light), Value (shades) and Intensity (brightness).

Texture: Surface qualities which translate into tactile illusions.

Value: Value is essentially the relative lightness or darkness of a color.

Space: Space can be two dimensional or three dimensional. It can be used to create the illusion of depth. Space can also be taken up by objects (positive) or in between (negative) objects.

Form: Objects that are three dimensional, perceived to take up space and volume.



Let's take a few of the basic composition guidelines and go into more depth using examples:

2. Simplification

Simplification is one of the most important skills you can learn as an artist. The master painter's used simplification to reduce the clutter in their artworks and enhance the focal points.

You can simplify your composition in many ways, such as:

- Use a limited palette (color range)
- Reduce detail of unimportant areas
- Use a limited value range (the range between your darkest dark and lightest light)
- Use larger paint brushes to simplify the detail in your painting
- Remove unnecessary subjects from your painting

Simplification is most effective when combined with targeted complexity. This can be a powerful combination which you can use to really emphasize areas in your design.

3. Rule of odds

The "rule of odds" suggests that an odd number of subjects in an image is more interesting than an even number. An even number of subjects produces symmetries in the image, which can appear overly formal and unnatural.



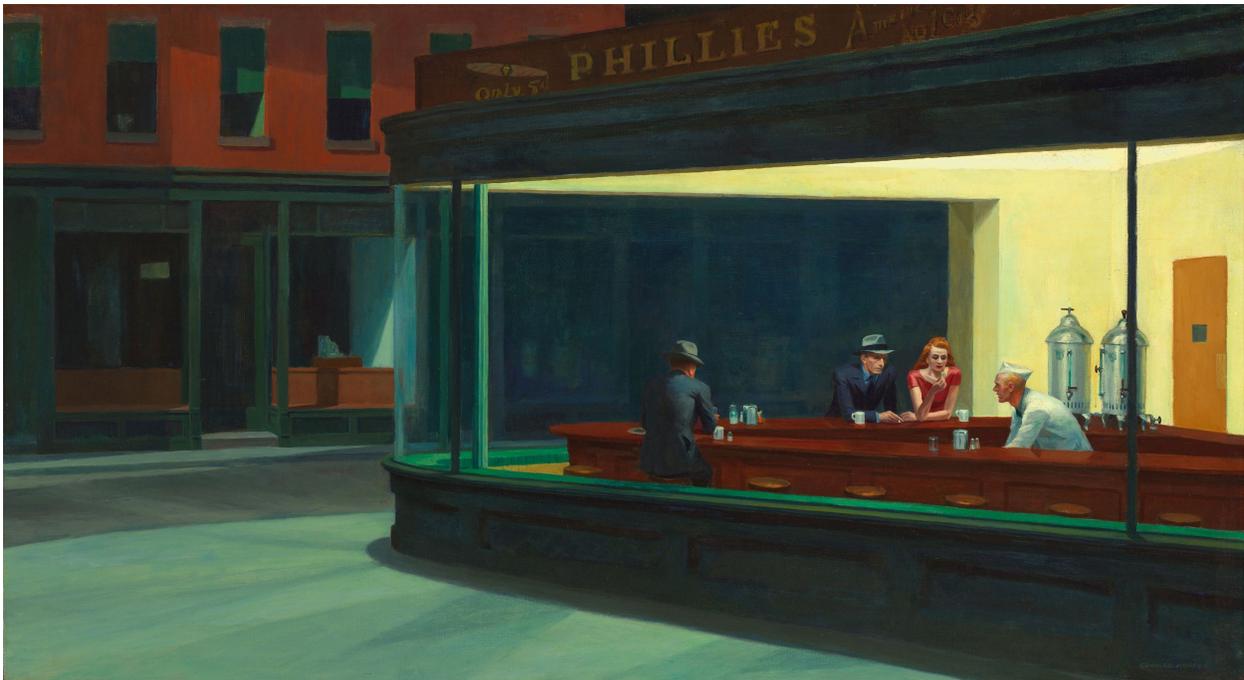
John Sargent, A Dinner Table at Night, 1884

Let's analyze 'A Dinner Table at Night' in terms of simplicity and the rule of odds.

4. Rule of thirds

The rule of thirds is a technique used to ensure the focal point of your painting is not directly in the center and that your painting is not overly symmetrical. What it entails is cutting the scene into thirds both ways. You will end up with nine sections. The aim is to place your focal point at one of the intersections and to ensure none of your sections are the same. In general, a focal point which is directly in the center of the painting is not visually appealing for the viewer as it bisects the painting and appears unnatural.

The rule of thirds is thought to be a simplification of the golden mean. The golden mean is a ratio that has been used by visual artists for centuries as an aid to composition. When two things are in the proportion of approximately 3 to 5 they are said to be in the golden mean.



Edward Hopper, Nighthawks, 1942

Let's analyze 'Nighthawks' in terms of the Rule of Thirds and Focal Point.

7. Triangles (Geometry and Symmetry)

Related to the rule of odds is the observation that triangles are an aesthetically pleasing implied shape within an image. In a canonically attractive face, the mouth and eyes fall within the corners of the area of an equilateral triangle. Degas successfully used triangles in most of his compositions. A triangular format creates a sense of stability and strength.



Edgar Degas, The Dance Foyer at the Opera on the Rue Peletier, 1872

Let's analyze 'The Dance Foyer' in terms of triangles and geometry.

Remember! Rules Exist To Be Broken

You should think of these rules as rough guidelines or suggestions to aid your decision making process. For every 'rule' there are many brilliant artists and designers who have broken it.