

Elements and Principles of Design

TO WORK IN FASHION, you must understand and use the elements and principles of design. These are the basic resources for all designers. Whether you are thinking about a career in fashion design or want to do a better job of choosing your own wardrobe, you'll need to become very familiar with the elements and principles of design. The elements are line, form, space, texture, and color. The principles are balance, proportion and scale, emphasis, rhythm, and harmony).



Objective:



Summarize the elements and principles of design.

Key Terms:



asymmetrical balance	harmony	scale
balance	horizontal line	secondary colors
color	hue	silhouette
color wheel	line	space
curved line	mass	symmetrical balance
design	opposition	tactile texture
diagonal line	primary colors	tertiary colors
elements of design	principles of design	texture
emphasis	proportion	transition
form	radiation	vertical line
Golden Mean	realistic form	visual texture
Golden Ratio	repetition	volume
gradation	rhythm	

Design Standards: Elements and Principles

A **design** is the creation of a plan or drawing to show how an object will look. Designers arrange lines, shapes, colors, etc. for the construction of the object before it is made. Design can be quick—a sketch—or can be a long-term multi-step process. In fashion, learning to use the elements and principles of design can help you to enhance your assets and hide any perceived figure flaws. [NOTE: Each art form has its own special terms for the elements and principles of design. In this unit you will use those most closely related to fashion and textiles.]

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

The **elements of design** are used to create all objects and are the basic visual symbols of: line, form, space, texture, and color. These five elements provide a starting point for anyone beginning to work with design.

Line

Line is a moving path that a dot follows and has one dimension: length. Designers use line as a path for the eye to follow. There are four major lines used in design: curved, diagonal, horizontal, and vertical. Each line provides a different effect on the design. By learning the effects these lines provide, the designer has the ability to produce a certain “look.” A line can be used to make the model appear taller, shorter, thinner, or heavier or can make a room feel taller, wider, cozier, or airier. Placing emphasis on one’s best features or hiding one’s flaws, is an effect a line produces. A **silhouette** is the outline of a garment. Lines are used to guide the eyes across a design, the way the eye moves depends upon the line type.

- ◆ A **curved line** is a bent, arched, bowed, curled, or coiled design element. Curved lines give a softer more relaxed feel to a design and a soft feel to a garment. Circles and ovals are drawn with a curved line. A curved line gives a design a feeling of calm and rest.
- ◆ A **diagonal line** is a slanting, sloping, or crosswise design element. Diagonal lines add a feeling of excitement and interest to a design and a garment. A diagonal line on a garment can make the design appear to move forward, which makes the person wearing the design appear larger and more impressive.



FIGURE 1. Diagonal lines add interest and excitement to this top.

- ◆ A **horizontal line** runs parallel to the ground or the horizon and goes left-to-right. Horizontal lines move the eye across a design providing width. Horizontal lines can be used to make a smaller person appear larger and would also make a larger person appear smaller. Again, lines can enhance attributes and hide flaws.
- ◆ A **vertical line** goes straight up and down (perpendicular to the horizon). Vertical lines move the eye up and down a design and add height to a design or garment. Vertical lines can give a design a feeling of strength. They also give the illusion of someone wearing the design appearing taller and thinner.

Form

Form is the shape of an object. It is the outline of an object that can express volume and mass. **Volume** is the amount of space an object occupies. **Mass** is the weight or feeling of weight of an object. A form is a shape that often appears to be an illusion achieved through abstract, free, geometric, and realistic form.

- ◆ **ABSTRACT**: Abstract form rearranges a recognizable object, so it may have traits that look real but have been altered. Abstract form is often thought to be contemporary. Abstract forms frequently give a more blurred or stylized form.
- ◆ **FREE FORM**: Free form is a sense of randomness. Nature is a good example of free form. Many textiles use unfamiliar, free form patterns.
- ◆ **GEOMETRIC**: Geometric form is the use of circles, spheres, squares, rectangles, cones, and triangles to create shapes.
- ◆ **REALISTIC**: Realistic form is the true representation of materials. When an item can be recognized for what it is, it is realistic.

Space

Space is the empty areas between, around, above, below, or within objects in a design. Space can pause a design and become the focal point or can become a bit of ‘relief’ from a busy design. Think of the different effect a buffalo check versus a gingham check has on a ladies shirt. Small spaces between repeated designs give a different look than large spaces between repeated designs.

Texture

Texture is the surface characteristics one can see and/or feel in a garment or textile. Textures can be furry, shiny, smooth, rough, hard, soft, bumpy, etc. Texture can be casual or tactile and can be the way a garment or textile feels or the way it appears to feel. **Tactile texture** is the way a surface feels when touched.

- ◆ Fabrics that are soft, rough, stiff, or bumpy give texture to a design. Different people react differently to texture, some like a lot of texture with a wide mix of different surfaces while others like to keep it simple using only one texture.

◆ **Visual texture** is the appearance of and the way the viewer perceives the textile, paint, tile, etc. Fabric patterns often create different visual textures than the textile’s actual “feel.” This difference is created through the use of colors, patterns, and depth in the fabric and the design. Texture adds to the visual appeal of the design.



FIGURE 2. These blouses appear to have lots of texture.

◆ Too few textures in a design or outfit can make the look appear to be monotonous and displeasing. In contrast, the use of too many textures can make the garment or textile appear displeasing. Finding a balance in the mix of textures is important. Textures can make an outfit appear to be warm and cozy or sleek and modern and creates variety in an outfit.

◆ Texture choices are used to enhance body parts. A thick fabric can add thickness to the person wearing the garment. In contrast, other fabrics can reduce body bulk. A good use of texture can draw attention to the body parts that a person would like to enhance.

Color

Color is all possible combinations of the hues on the color wheel. **Hue** is each color’s name: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, black, and white. Color is one of the most important elements of design and the result of reflected light. The **color wheel** is a circle with 12 triangles that represents

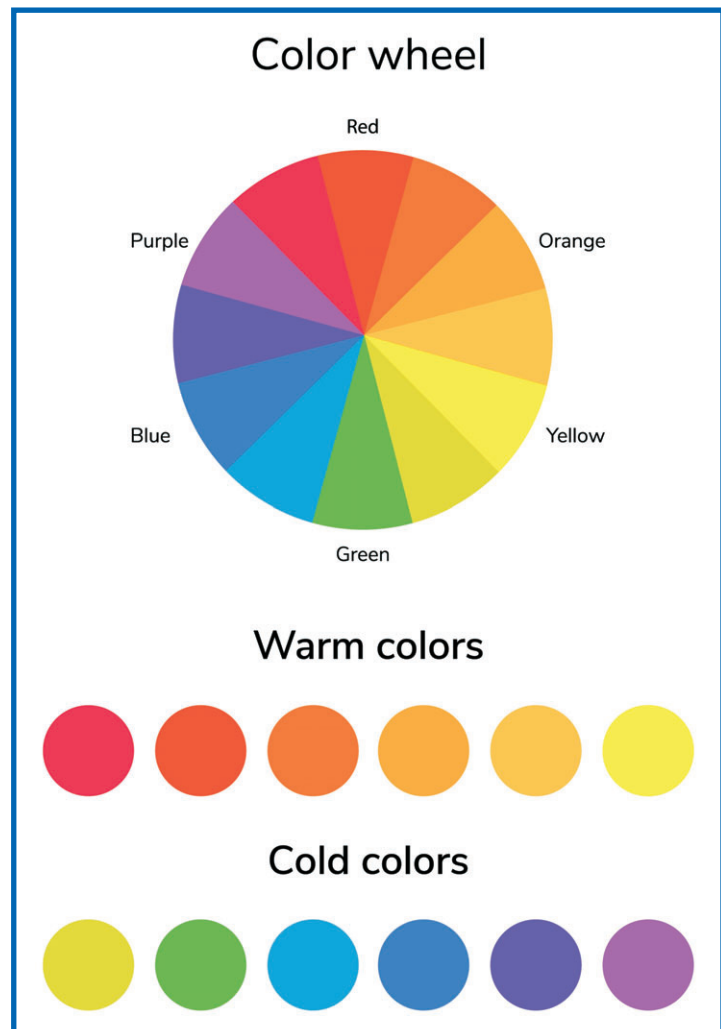


FIGURE 3. Color wheels typically show primary, secondary, and tertiary colors. In this image, the warm and cold colors are also highlighted.

the color spectrum and shows the relationship between colors. Color wheels typically show primary, secondary, and tertiary colors. It is a basic tool of design: a visual representation of how colors relate to each other. A color wheel illustrates primary, secondary, and tertiary colors.

- ◆ **Primary colors** are red, blue, and yellow. They are placed equal distance apart on the color wheel.
- ◆ **Secondary colors** are violet, green, and orange. They are placed equal distance between two primary colors.
- ◆ **Tertiary colors** are blue-green, red-violet, yellow-orange, yellow-green, red-orange, and blue-violet. Mixing one primary and one secondary color creates tertiary colors.

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

The **principles of design** are rules that govern how the elements of design are organized. The principles of design include balance, proportion and scale, emphasis, rhythm, and harmony. Design principles form the basis of any good product and help individuals and teams with decision-making

Balance

Balance is the way the use of the elements of design (line, shape, color, texture, etc.) to create equilibrium among all parts of the design. Balance helps convey a feeling of weight and can be symmetrical or asymmetrical. Different personalities find they are drawn to one over the other when it comes to balance in their designs.

- ◆ **Symmetrical balance** is another name for formal balance: one side of a design is a mirror reflection of the other. Symmetrical balance divides a garment or room horizontally or vertically and the two halves will be the same. For example, a buttoned down



FIGURE 4. These two necklines represent formal (symmetrical) and informal (asymmetrical) balance. How does formal balance make you “feel”? How does asymmetrical balance make you feel?

shirt that has a pocket placed on each side of the center buttons is an example of symmetrical balance. Symmetrically balanced designs can appear formal, traditional, and professional. It is often used in designs for dress clothes and business garments.

- ◆ **Asymmetrical balance** is another name for informal balance: the two sides of a garment or outfit are different in size, form, texture, or color. A buttoned down shirt with a small pocket high on one side and a large pocket lower on the right side is an example of asymmetrical balance. Asymmetrical designs give a garment or textile a relaxed feeling. It is often used in the design of formal gowns to add drama and excitement to the clothing.

Proportion and Scale

Proportion is the relative size and scale of the elements of design: the relationship of one part to another part to the whole. **Scale** is the relative size of an object as it relates to all other objects in the design. When used effectively, proportion is one of the most important design principles. For example, in designing the parts to a garment it is essential that the collar, sleeves, and placket be in true proportion to each other and to the entire garment. Proportion choices can give an illusion that changes a physical trait. For example, a tucked-in shirt can make one's legs appear longer while a shirt hanging out appears to shorten the legs.

The **Golden Ratio** is a unique number—1.61803398—often called the divine ratio. For example flower petals are arranged in a special sequence and buildings are designed to meet the Golden Ratio. The **Golden Mean** is finding the midway point between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$ of a garments length. Let's take a dress for example: The bodice counts as 1 and the skirt that is 2 times the chest size = achievement of $\frac{1}{3}$. This ratio is always pleasing to the eye.



FIGURE 5. The proportion of the top of this dress to the skirt is very pleasing to the eye.

Emphasis

Emphasis is the point of interest in a design, the focus. By design, it is what the eye travels to first when looking at an object. An example of emphasis is a flag or a palm tree on a shirt.

Rhythm

Rhythm is the feeling of movement that leads the eye around a garment or outfit or room design. Repeating one or more designs creates movement that allows the eye to move through the design. Rhythm can be accomplished by repeating colors, shapes, or points of interest. It can be integrated into a design by gradation, repetition, radiation, opposition, or transition.

- ◆ **Gradation** is rhythm created when a design element is gradually increased or decreased. An example of gradation is the use of circles on a dress in which the circles increase and decrease in size throughout.
- ◆ **Repetition** is rhythm created with the repeated use of objects, shapes, space, light,



FIGURE 6. Repetition of a design helps send the message of movement or rhythm.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Research 60's and 70's Fashion

Compare the use of the elements and principles of design from the late 1960's to the early 1970's to fashion of today. Throughout history different periods of fashion have been influenced by a different use of the elements and principles. Some periods are known for their curved lines and symmetrical balance while other periods show more angular lines and very formal balance.

Research some garments online from these three time periods. Print out 4 outfits from the 1960's and 1970's and then print out 4 outfits you like today. Compare the use of the elements and principles of designs between today and earlier periods. How are the elements and principles of design similar, how are they different?



Fashion in the 60's.

and/or color. Repetition is used when you see A formal dress with pleats has pleats in front, back, and sides and each pleat is a ‘repeat’ of the one before. This type of repetition rhythm causes the eye to travels from one pleat to another.

- ◆ **Radiation** is rhythm created by arranging all lines to radiate from a center point in the design such as the way the petals of a flower all begin in the center of the flower.
- ◆ **Opposition** is rhythm created at the intersection of two right-angle lines such as a corner of a room or picture.
- ◆ **Transition** is rhythm is created using curved lines that carry the eye from one area to another such as a spiral staircase.

Harmony and Unity

Harmony is creating unity among all parts of a design to deliver one message. All the parts of the design belong together. This does not mean that all things match, it means that all parts are pleasing to the whole. When grouping pieces one needs to consider style, shape, color, and size. Variety is important and works best when all parts have something in common (style, shape, color, size). [TIP: When looking for examples of poor harmony check out the “don’ts” in fashion magazines.]

Summary:



The elements and principles of design have survived the test of time and are a great resource to send you on your design path. The elements of design are line, shape/form, space, texture, and color. The principles of design are balance, proportion/scale, emphasis, rhythm, and harmony.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. List the primary, secondary, and tertiary colors.
2. Why is harmony such an important part of design?
3. List three ways to achieve repetition in a design.
4. How can texture be used to hide body image flaws?
5. How can space be a focal point?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Ask your instructor to borrow a fashion magazine or bring one in on your own. Find three outfits that are very modern and not something that you would buy or wear; designer and runway dresses or menswear are great for this. Evaluate the garments by deciding which elements and principles you can find in each garment.

Web Links:



The Colour Wheel: A Basic Guide to Clothing Colour Matching

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/fashion/style/colour-wheel-basic-guide-clothing-colour-matching/>

How to Draw the Fashion Figure Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vc1obyRD3Wc>

How Texture Dramatically Improved the World of Fashion!

<https://color911.com/texture-dramatically-improved-world-fashion/>

Line in Fashion

<https://www.pinterest.com/ialtamore/line-in-fashion/?lp=true>

The Rhythm of Fashion: Prezi

<https://prezi.com/vsf1ce8wszzf/rhythm-and-repetition-in-fashion/>