

Design and Visual Communications (Graphics) Glossary

Glossary of design terms

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General terms

Aesthetic principles	Relate to the way an object looks, it's appearance, style etc.
Developing a design idea	Involves initiating, exploring and refining design ideas, informed by research, which leads to the communication of an outcome in response to a brief.
Exploring a design idea	Is the divergent aspect of idea generation and the development of an idea to create a wide group of possibilities.
Form	Refers to an object's shape and surface qualities giving a 3 dimensional aspect to the object. Examples of surface qualities relate to the materiality; colour, texture and finish of the object.
Functional/Function principles	Relate to the operation, construction of the object ie what makes it work.
Graphics practice	Involves expressing a visual literacy through the development of a design idea by applying design and visual communication techniques and knowledge.
Refining a design idea	Is the convergent aspect of developing an idea or ideas where the detail of the design solution is investigated in order to come up with a solution that has potential to work and meet the design brief.
Rendering techniques	May include but are not limited to:-

	Highlights, reflections and shadow used to enhance the tonal change and 3 dimensional nature of the object.
Shape	Refers to an object's two-dimensional qualities.
Visual literacy	Refers to the visual modes (eg drawing, model-making, digital modelling) used as tools for aiding design thinking.

Graphics design terms

Alignment	The placement of images and components of the presentation so that they line up along an axis, border or common centre.
Composite image	A composite image is a graphic image (or photograph), made up of a combination of images.
Contour	The outline of an object.
Contrast	Contrast of colour, shape, size, space, scale creates visual attraction, different shapes can be used to provide contrast in a composition. Similar shapes may not be as visually appealing.
Emphasis <i>also known as</i> Dominance	Exists where an element or elements within a composition contain a hierarchy of visual importance.
Focal point	Is the visual point /centre of interest in a composition. Visual elements and principles are used to direct the viewer's eye to this point.
Kerning	Adjusting the lateral (horizontal) space between letters.
Leading	The vertical spacing (measured in points) between lines of text.
Line	Any mark connecting any two separate points. It can organise, direct, separate or suggest emotion in a design.
Negative and positive space	Images appearing on the page surface are positive, whilst anything appearing further back in space is negative. Can be referred to as white space ie the space between objects in a composition.
Opacity	The density of a colour or tonal value. The opacity of an image or object can range from transparent (0% opacity) to opaque (100% opacity). The ability to edit the opacity of individual objects allows the designer to

	create images that seem to flow into and through one another.
Proximity	The placement of elements in relation to each other in a composition. Elements that are close together are perceived to be more related than those are more widely spaced apart.
Repetition	Repetition of shapes, colour, texture, size etc in a composition which can be used to strengthen the presentation, develop the organisation of the image and make the presentation more unified.
Saturation	Is the colour intensity of an image. A colour with high saturation will appear brighter and more vibrant than the same colour with low saturation. Colours in grayscale images have no saturations (white, grays and black).
Shape	Anything that has height and width. Shapes define objects, attract attention, communicate ideas and add excitement.
Similarity	Condition of elements within the composition being visually grouped according to features, contours or symmetries.
Space	The distance or area between or around things. Separates or unifies highlights and gives the eye a visual rest.
Texture	The look and feel of a surface, adds richness and dimension, emphasises and suggests mood or feeling.
Tone/ Value	The darkness or lightness of an area. Value separates, suggests mood, adds drama and creates the illusion of depth.

Architectural Terms

Buttress	Reinforced, projecting wall, usually on the exterior of a building, supporting it at a point of stress. A flying buttress transmits the thrust of a vault to an outer support; see vault construction.
Cantilever	A beam supported or fixed at one end carrying a load at the other.
Eave	Lower edge of a roof, overhanging a wall.
Elevation	1 the face or side of a structure. 2 drawing or plan of the side of a building.

Facade	Face of a building, usually the main face.
Finial	The ornamental termination of part of a building such as a spire or pediment.
Gable	Triangular part of a wall at the end of the roof ridge.
Gable End	Gable-shaped canopy over a door or window, or a gable-topped wall.
Lintel	Horizontal beam above a door or window.
Ridgepole	The horizontal timber at the ridge of a roof where the rafters are fastened.

Principles of design: definitions

The two main design principles:

Aesthetics	The set of principles concerned with the qualities of appearance, visual appeal, good taste, and beauty and the rules that determine how beautiful or pleasing to the eye something is. Design elements within this principle include shape, form, colour, texture, finish, environment, point, line, plane, proportion, contrast, pattern, movement, balance, harmony, style, and rhythm.
Function	How a product, system, or environment works or performs for its intended use or user; how something carries out its purpose. Key elements include strength, durability, efficiency, safety, stability, reliability, ergonomic fit, construction (and its cost), optimisation, user-friendliness, and fitness for purpose.

Aesthetics: associated principles

Balance	<p>There are three main kinds of visual balance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • radial, where the design elements radiate out from a centre, as in the petals of a daisy or the face of a clock; • formal (or symmetrical), where the design on one side of a centre line is identical to the other side, as in the front view of an animal or a chair; • informal (or asymmetrical), where the elements of a design are distributed unequally, as in the side view of a teapot.
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Emphasis	<p>What stands out the most gets noticed first, emphasis influences choices of colour, value, size shape etc.</p>
Harmony and Contrast	<p>A harmonious design is one in which its different elements are in unity with each other for example, its colours may blend together well. A harmonious design might be considered appropriate for the furnishings of a relaxing environment, such as a bedroom.</p> <p>Contrast, the opposite quality to harmony, involves the use of opposing elements, such as clashing colours and shapes, in the same design. Contrast in a design may be more appropriate for a stimulating environment or when impact is wanted, such as in many advertising layouts.</p>
Movement	<p>An object with strong "visual movement" tends to be shaped in a way that draws the eye in a certain direction. Its shape or shapes may be asymmetrical, flowing, or dynamic. Objects with less visual movement tend to have more static and symmetrical shapes.</p>
Pattern and Rhythm	<p>A pattern is a repeated design element. Patterns are found on many plants and animals, in nature (for example, leaves and tabby cats) as well as on manufactured products, such as fabrics and wall and floor coverings.</p> <p>Rhythm is related to pattern in that it uses repeating elements, but they may have a stronger quality of movement and be in the form of sequences or series.</p>
Proportion	<p>Proportion has to do with the relationship between different parts of an object or its component pieces (or between those parts and the object as a whole). The proportions of an object made to be used, such as a teapot or a jug, may have a functional as well as an aesthetic purpose.</p> <p>Many shapes in nature have the proportions of the golden section, a ratio identified by the Greeks and used in their buildings. Throughout history, harmonious proportion in architecture, painting, and sculpture has often been arrived at using the golden section, which works on the principle that an object's proportions are most pleasing when they are based on the ratio of 1 to 1.618.</p>

Style	Style is most often related to aesthetics rather than function. Style is ever-changing and is often subjective. What may be considered ugly or gauche one year may be the height of fashion the next. Whereas it's possible to make objective judgments on the success of a functional design, judgments on style are much more subjective and reliant on individuals' personal responses.
Unity	All the elements look like they belong together. This helps determine how many elements you use and how you use them.

Function: associated principles

Efficiency	Technically, efficiency is the ratio of useful work achieved to the amount of energy expended. But the term is more often used in relation to a situation where work is productive, with minimum wasted effort or expense.
Ergonomic Fit	<p>Ergonomics is the study of the relationship between people and their working environment, especially in connection with the things they use. To achieve the best possible ergonomic fit, designers have to ensure that equipment and work environments match the capacities and limitations of their users. For example, the height of a table or the size and shape of a toothbrush are decided using ergonomic principles.</p> <p>Ergonomics relates to the whole working environment, but an important focus is often the size and shape of objects. Designing objects that take account of people's size and shape requires the use of sets of standardised body measurements called anthropometric data, which can vary from country to country. These measurements are incorporated into the design of objects that will be used by many people, such as spectacles, cups, and public seating.</p>
Fitness for Purpose	Fitness for purpose describes how well a product works in the situation it was designed for and how well it meets the needs of its intended end-users. In order to ensure that a product is fit for its purpose, its designer has to find the right balance between technical factors and the needs of those who will be using the product. For example, a simple 'no frills' video player may better meet the needs of many users who

	<p>would be overwhelmed by a sophisticated player with many additional features.</p> <p>Fitness for purpose depends on accurate design specifications; if the specifications aren't right, then even if the product meets them completely, it still won't be fit for its purpose. Given accurate specifications, the designer then has to make appropriate choices in materials, assembly methods, and so on in order to ensure that the final product meets or surpasses the specifications. In developing solutions, designers need to continually evaluate their design decisions against their brief and specifications.</p>
Reliability	<p>Reliability is the likelihood that a product or system will continue to do its job. The design of a product and the components used in it influence its reliability. Reliability is a much more critical consideration for some products than for others, particularly when safety is at stake. For example, it is much more important that there are no breakdowns in an aeroplane engine than in a lawnmower motor.</p>
Safety and Stability	<p>Products, systems, and environments must be designed so that they are as safe as is practically possible to use. In many instances, designs have been adapted to make them safer for particular users (for example, rounded scissors for young children) or to prevent certain people from using them (for example, modern medicine bottles with safety caps).</p>
Strength and Durability	<p>The strength of an object or product is determined by its ability to withstand pressures or forces. Such forces can derive from nature (for example, from strong winds or earthquakes), from users (for example, a builder using a hammer or a woman wearing stilettos), or from within the object or system itself (for example, inside the cylinders of a combustion engine). The development of materials such as fibreglass and carbon fibre has allowed designers to make lightweight, streamlined products that are still extremely strong.</p> <p>Durability is the ability of a product or material to last in a given environment and to stand up to wear. Durability is a relative concept; our expectations of a product's durability depend on a variety of social, economic, and legal factors, such as how and</p>

	<p>where it is used, how much we pay for it, and the kind of guarantee it comes with. For some objects or materials, their durability will depend on their strength; for others, flexibility or fitness for purpose will be the key factor.</p>
User-friendliness	<p>The user-friendliness of a product, environment, or system is the degree to which it is easy to use. The relative importance of user-friendliness in the design of a product, environment, or system depends on how widely it will be used. For example, if a product is intended for brief use by a wide variety of people, then user-friendliness will be a more critical consideration than if it is to be used for long periods by a small number of specialists.</p>