

Vocabulary List- Elements and Principles of Design

Visual Elements:

Focus; the areas clearest or sharpest in the photograph compared to areas that are not.

Light; the areas of the photograph that are most highlighted compared to areas of shadow. Does the photograph allow you to guess the time of day? Is there natural or artificial light? Harsh or soft? Reflected or direct?

Line; are there objects in the photograph that act as lines? Are they straight, curvy, thick, thin, continuous, broken, implied or expressive? Do they create direction or pattern within the photo? Do they outline or represent structure? Do they show movement or energy?

Shape; are there organic or geometric shapes? Organic shapes are usually circular or have a curved edge. They remind us of the natural world where shapes are generally irregular, uneven and constantly changing. Geometric shapes are usually rectangular or straight edged. They remind us of the precision of man made or mechanical objects and can be defined by differences in colour, value and texture.

Space; is three dimensional that exists all around us. It is created in an image via techniques such as scale, size, positioning of objects, overlapping and detailing. Colour can also enhance a space as warm colours advance and cool colours appear further away.

Tone/Value is the degree of light or darkness in a colour. It describes objects, shapes and spaces. It can evoke a mood or emotion, gives the impression of form on a 2D surface. It is used to create effects. Is there a range of tones from dark to light? Where is the darkest and lightest value?

Texture; is the tactile quality of a surface. It can be real (e.g. rough smooth, scaly, etc) or implied (e.g. line, dots, scratches, etc). It can be 2D or 3D. It evokes an emotional response relating to our experiences.

Colour; can give a feeling of warm or cold, can be used to express an emotion, can have symbolic meaning, can advance or recede.

Principles

Balance; is created by using elements of design such as shape, colour, texture, line and tone. It can be symmetrical (even distribution of elements within the image, mirrored or illusion) or asymmetrical (uneven distribution of elements within the image, random colours tones or sizes).

Movement; is a path our eye uses to follow a line or arrangement of shapes within the image. It can be kinetic (physical movement, motion blur, etc), apparent (motion perceived by the eye and mind of the viewer, panorama, etc) or suggested (the image may evoke a sense of motion).

Repetition; is an arrangement of elements which have something in common, either regularly or irregularly to create rhythm.

Emphasis; is the focal point of the photograph. It can be expressed via contrasting colour and shape, centre of interest and framing.

Contrast; is the strong visual differences between light and dark, varying textures, sizes and scale.

Harmony/Unity; can describe an agreeable arrangement of the design elements. It creates a pleasant response in the viewer.

Compositional Elements

Composition; the arrangement or structure of the formal elements that make up an image.

Vantage point; the place from which a photographer takes a photograph.

Angle; the vantage point from which the photograph was taken; generally used when discussing a photograph taken from an unusual or exaggerated vantage point.

Central focus; the object(s) which appears most prominently and/or most clearly focused in a photograph.

Contour; the outline of an object or shape.

Setting; actual physical surroundings or scenery whether artificial or real.

Framing; What the photographer has placed within the boundaries of the photograph.

General Terms

Abstract; an image that emphasises formal elements (line, shape, etc) rather than specific, recognisable objects.

Direct approach; confronting a scene in a straight forward manner without using unusual angles or distortion.

Documentary photography; photographs whose main purpose is to record a place, person or events.

Expressive; concerned with communication of emotion.

Intention; reason(s) why the artist made a work of art.

Landscape; an image that portrays the natural environment.

Objective; a point of view free from personal bias, which attempts to consider all available information with equal regard and fairness.

Representational; an image which shows recognisable objects.

Subject; the main object or person(s) in a photograph.

Theme; a unifying or dominant idea in one work of art or in a collection of works.