



RADIANT AGILITY TECHNOLOGY

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Gestalt Design Principles

Understanding How Users Perceive Your Digital Products

What is Gestalt Thinking?

Gestalt principles explain how the human brain perceives visual elements as unified wholes rather than individual parts. For agile teams, understanding these principles is crucial for creating intuitive user experiences that feel natural and reduce cognitive load.

Key Insight: "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts" - users don't see individual UI elements, they see complete experiences and workflows.

1

Proximity

Elements that are close together are perceived as related or belonging to the same group.



Practical Applications:

- ✓ Group related form fields together with whitespace
- ✓ Place action buttons near the content they affect
- ✓ Use spacing to create visual hierarchy in navigation menus
- ✓ Cluster related dashboard widgets

Agile Team Application:

When designing user stories, consider how UI elements will be grouped. Related functionality should be visually proximate to reduce user confusion and support intuitive workflows.

2

Similarity

Elements that share visual characteristics (color, shape, size) are perceived as related or part of the same category.

● ■ ● ■ ● Users group circles together and squares together

💡 Practical Applications:

- ✓ Use consistent colors for similar actions (all delete buttons red)
- ✓ Apply uniform styling to elements of the same type
- ✓ Create visual patterns for different content categories
- ✓ Maintain consistent iconography across the application

🚀 Agile Team Application:

Establish design system patterns early in development. Similar user actions should look and behave consistently across all features to build user mental models.

3

Closure

The mind fills in missing information to create complete, recognizable shapes and patterns.



You see a complete circle, even though it's not fully drawn

Practical Applications:

- ✓ Use subtle borders or backgrounds to define content areas
- ✓ Create implied connections between related elements
- ✓ Design progress indicators that suggest completion
- ✓ Use partial visual cues to guide user attention

Agile Team Application:

Users will mentally complete workflows even when steps aren't explicitly shown. Design clear user journeys that leverage this natural tendency to reduce interface complexity.

4

Continuity

The eye follows lines, curves, and paths, preferring continuous, smooth connections over abrupt changes.

Visual flow guides users through interfaces naturally

↓ ↘ → ↗ ↑ (Eye follows the path)



Practical Applications:

- ✓ Design clear visual flow through forms and processes
- ✓ Use alignment to create invisible lines that guide the eye
- ✓ Create smooth transitions between interface states
- ✓ Design navigation that follows logical, continuous paths



Agile Team Application:

Map user journeys to ensure smooth, continuous experiences. Each sprint should build upon previous work to maintain flow continuity across feature development.

5

Figure/Ground

The mind separates visual elements into foreground (figure) and background (ground), focusing attention on the most important elements.

Important content stands out from the background

FIGURE

background ground background



Practical Applications:

- ✓ Use contrast to make important elements stand out
- ✓ Create clear visual hierarchy with size and color
- ✓ Design modal dialogs that clearly separate from background
- ✓ Use whitespace to make content the clear focus



Agile Team Application:

Prioritize features and content based on user goals. Primary actions should be the clear "figure" while secondary options remain in the "ground" to avoid decision paralysis.

6

Common Fate

Elements that move or change together are perceived as related and belonging to the same group.

Elements that animate together are seen as connected



Synchronized animations create relationships



Practical Applications:

- ✓ Animate related elements together during transitions
- ✓ Use synchronized loading states for related content
- ✓ Group form validation messages with their fields
- ✓ Create cohesive micro-interactions for related actions



Agile Team Application:

When planning features, consider how related functionality should behave together. Coordinated interactions help users understand system relationships and build confidence.



Quick Reference Guide

Proximity

Group related elements with whitespace

Similarity

Use consistent styling for similar functions

Closure

Let users mentally complete patterns

Continuity

Create smooth visual flow paths

Figure/Ground

Make important content stand out

Common Fate

Animate related elements together



Applying Gestalt in Agile Development

- **Sprint Planning:** Consider how new features will fit into existing visual patterns
- **User Story Writing:** Include Gestalt considerations in acceptance criteria
- **Design Reviews:** Evaluate designs against these principles before development
- **Testing:** Validate that users perceive intended relationships and hierarchies
- **Retrospectives:** Discuss how well the team applied Gestalt thinking

Gestalt Design Principles Cheatsheet - Part of the Gestalt Toolkit by Radiant Agility Technology

Need help applying Gestalt principles to your agile projects? Contact us at
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