# **Application of Design Elements in the Real World**

## **Applying the Elements of Design**

Imagine that you wanted to write a great novel that explored the experiences of your generation, captured their struggles, and postulated on their place in society. Now imagine that you were a newspaper columnist, and you only had 1,000 words in which to do it. Drop the esoteric allusions, the metaphors, and the flowery language, and get down to business. You still want the finished piece to be thought provoking, beautiful, and meaningful, but you've got to be much more economical with space and time.

What columnists are to literature, graphic designers are to fine art. Graphic designers have to be economical in their compositions, which begins with a realistic approach to the **elements of design**. Elements found in any art form are the basic building blocks, or the ingredients you use to start the recipe. Graphic designers utilize the same elements of art that fine painters do; they just have to do it in a way that anyone can understand. It's like the Sistine Chapel, but user friendly.

## **Audience-Focused Art**

Before we get into the actual elements of art, we need to talk about why they matter. In order to create something that is appealing, designers must understand how to make truly great art. However, their job is to compress that into something that can be instantly understood and appreciated. People aren't going to spend an hour to try and decipher the meaning of an ad, and they certainly won't put more than a few minutes of effort into understanding the layout of a website.

Graphic design is unique because it's a truly audience-focused art. It's art that has function, utility, and a clear purpose. A graphic designer's job is to sell a product, make an appealing website, or design business cards to help someone be more professional. So, the elements of graphic design are not just a matter of aesthetics, but of functionality. As you begin applying these elements in your own designs, ask yourself some questions.

1: Who is the **target audience**? What's their background? Where are they coming from? Are you creating for children, adults, singles, couples, etc.? There's also a literal aspect to these questions. Literally, from what perspective will the audience be viewing your work? Will they be looking up at a billboard, down at a magazine, or straight at a screen? Will they see it from up close or from far away? The perspective determines how you'll use the elements of art to attract the eye and convey a message.

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2: Is it **user friendly**? Now, more than ever, people demand designs that can be instantly understood and used. This is especially true in website design, where some of the most artistically perfect websites have failed because they were too complex to navigate easily. Remember, design is an art form intended for use. Make sure people can use it.

## **Elements of Design**

There are six elements that make up the foundations of graphic design, and each will play an important role in the success of your composition.

The first is **line**. Lines can be thick or thin, physical or implied, straight or curved. Lines direct the eye and separate the overall image into sections, both of which are very useful when organizing information that you want people to see. What do you want the audience to see first, and what information needs to be separated from the rest? Lines have a huge impact on design.

The second element is **shape**, which can refer to the physical shape of a business card or magazine cover as well as the shapes within the design. Do you want more angles, or softer curves? Which shapes help communicate the feeling you want to convey? This is an important question in design because we often deal with **text**, and each typeface will emphasize different shapes.

The third element is **form**, which in graphic design often refers to the overall shapes created within the image and the way the entire space is filled. Specifically, designers often talk about form as an element of typography. While shape describes the dimensions and characteristics of each letter, form describes the impact of these letters put together in a block of text.

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Speaking of **space**, that's our fourth element. Space is defined by the differentiation between positive and negative—areas within objects/images and those without. Negative space is not always prominent in fine art, but in design, it's crucial. Negative space helps organize other elements and maintains usability. A website with negative space between important links is easier to use than one with graphics everywhere.

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Our fifth element is **color**, which includes the actual hue, its intensity, and its value (brightness or darkness). Colors are important in graphic design and are used to catch the reader's eye and organize information. As with all other elements, it's important to remember that your design will exist in the real world, so consider if your colors will clash, compliment, or blend into their surroundings.Finally, we get to **texture**. Textures can be real, such as raised ink, or implied, like a photograph of satin. Textures can help people understand how a product is meant to be used, and create a desire to do so. Just look at a picture of a fluffy dog, and you'll know what we mean.