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Composing Digital Media

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Visual Argument Reflection

With all of the classes I am taking, as well as the weight of a global pandemic, I have been dealing with a lot of stress lately. This has been the inspiration for the visual argument, which seeks to shine a light on the many factors in our daily lives that potentially induce stress. Because this is an issue that many people face, I wanted to gear my message towards a general audience.

The focus of my piece is the word “stress”-written in bold, red letters. To contrast it with its surrounding contents and words, I made the font significantly larger. I also added effects to the word “stress” to make it a “visual pun”. Specifically, I added a gradient to make the bottom of the word fade away, almost as if the “stress” were taking a physical toll on it. Additionally, I distorted the word so that it would be longer, as if it were stretched out too thin from all the stress.

In the “preview” version of this project, I had the word “stress” in the center of the piece. That seemed like the default thing to do for the highlight of my image. However, experimenting with my design choices, I ended up moving the text near the bottom right corner, implementing Kawasaki’s concepts of the “Rule of Thirds”, as well as asymmetry. Initially, I was concerned that this would detract some of the focus away from the main part of the piece. Ultimately though, the choice to move the word “stress” off center ended up working out well, giving the image a more interesting layout. Now that the word “stress” was near the bottom, it looked like it was being overburdened, almost crushed, by the collage of words and icons surrounding it, further highlighting the consequences of excessive stress.

When working with these ancillary contents, I also needed to consider which design choices would best enhance the overall piece. For example, I chose to make most of the surrounding words in the collage “warm” colors-either red, yellow or orange. This complements the red color of the word “stress”, while also emphasizing the feelings of tension and frustration that often accompany stress. The only exceptions to this are the three blue words pertaining to mental health-“depression”, “anxiety”, and “loneliness”-as well as the green words on the bottom, which represent things we are sacrificing at the expense of stress. These green words are faded out, and not obvious upon first looking at the piece. I intentionally added this effect to illustrate how in the busyness of our everyday lives, we can sometimes be so stressed out that we forget to focus on things such as our happiness or sleep schedule.

When creating the “collage” portion of my argument, I intentionally deviated from Kawasaki’s design principles of utilizing a high signal-to-noise ratio, as well as empty space. The myriad of words and icons I used in my argument certainly did not simplify the contents of the image. On the contrary, it presented the viewer with an abundance of information, prompting them to constantly shift their attention around the image to see what is going on. To Kawasaki, these elements are unnecessary. I would actually agree with him. The point of including this barrage of content was not only to induce a chaotic feel, but also to challenge the viewer to reconsider their priorities in life.

There certainly are times for many when stress feels inevitable, but especially in the digital age, it feels like at least some of this stress is the result of a need to constantly feel like we are doing something. We fill our lives with content on the internet and social media, working long hours to make money and afford luxuries, under the guise that this will ultimately make us more satisfied. However, as Kawasaki notes, simplicity is key when designing a piece. By “decluttering” our life, therefore, we can also get rid of some of the stresses as well.