

The Basics of Visual Design: A Brief and Broad Overview

Visual design can be a key skill when it comes to designing web pages, and nearly anything that users will be interacting with – which is why it is important to know which designs work and which don't. There are lots of elements that go into visual design, and it's not just "making things look pretty." That doesn't even cover the concept of visual design.

According to Kelly Gordon, there are five principles of visual design when it comes to UX: scale, visual hierarchy, balance, contrast, and gestalt. First, scale refers to the size of an element in relation to its importance – if something is more important or you want the element to stand out to the user, make it bigger! (But not too big that it's overwhelming). The second principle relates to visual hierarchy; If something is more important, its position on the webpage will be "higher up" than other elements. Visual hierarchy is intentional and is intended to guide the user through the layout of the webpage. After that, there is balance. Imagine that there are axes running through your webpage – everything should be evenly distributed on both sides of the axes. If one side has too many elements or not enough that it feels lopsided or too heavy on one side, it can affect the user's experience and on top of that – it is not visually pleasing. No one wants to use a website that looks bad! Next there's contrast. Contrast refers to the visual difference of elements to communicate that they *are* different. This can be done in color, font, etc. There are lots of ways to show that elements are separate from each other. The last concept may be new to most designers, but "gestalt" refers to perceiving one whole element made up of many individual elements.

Visual design can affect the overall feel and even emotion of the overall user experience. All of these principles listed above can affect the usability of an application or webpage, and as a UX designer, of course you want to create a usable interface for users.

Another rule to remember is that simplicity is key, remember that less equals more! If your website is complicated and has too many elements, it is considered crowded and too complex for the user to navigate. If you're struggling to remember this concept, perhaps you'll memorize this: K.I.S.S., keep it simple, stupid! No crazy colors, not too many elements, and you'll have the perfect usable website.