Principles of Visual Communication

Communication Model

All communication models have several things in common: a sender, a receiver, a message, a channel, and the context (or setting).

Words are only one of the types of communication sent across the channel; up to 93% of communication is non-verbal.

We use symbols every time we communicate. Words can be symbols but a tilt of your head or tapping your foot can be a symbol as well.

Noise is anything that disrupts the flow of communication across the channel. There are three types of noise:

1. External noise - comes from the environment around you.
2. Internal noise - distractions within your own mind or body.
3. Semantic noise - your reactions to the words you hear.

The context of your visual can add to or distract from your message.

Visual Communication Model
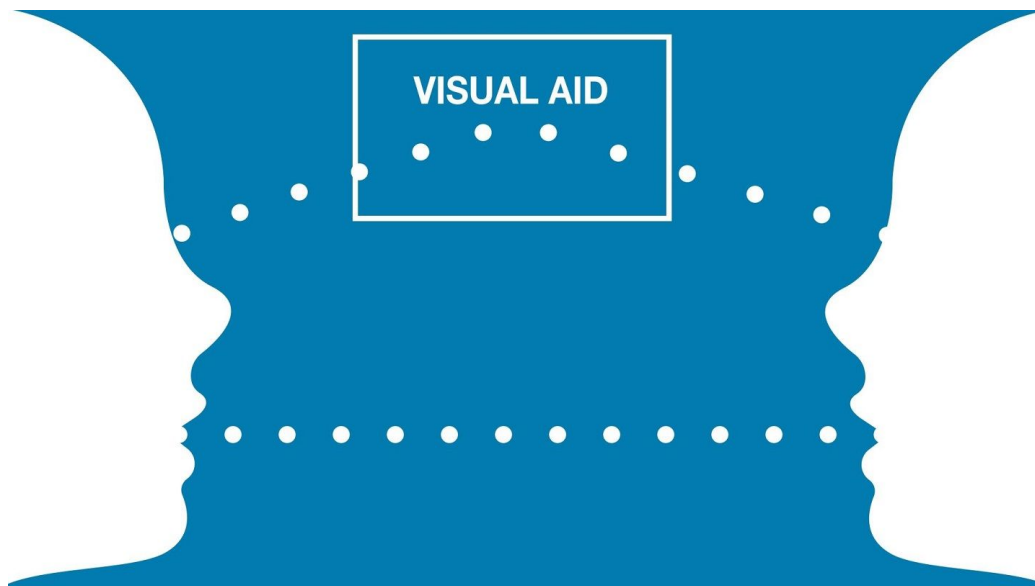
In the visual communication model, the message is carried via the visual which is a more focused set of elements that convey the message. Successful visual communication is created using compositional elements.

Basic Composition

Five Important Elements

Visual composition is how the visual elements of a message are arranged. The five basic elements of visual composition are: **point, line, shape, color, and texture**.

Points, **lines**, and **shapes** are the basic elements that make up any visual. In addition to the basic shapes, color and texture can be added to visuals to energize and add depth. We can see over seven million colors so choosing the right color combination for your visuals is important.
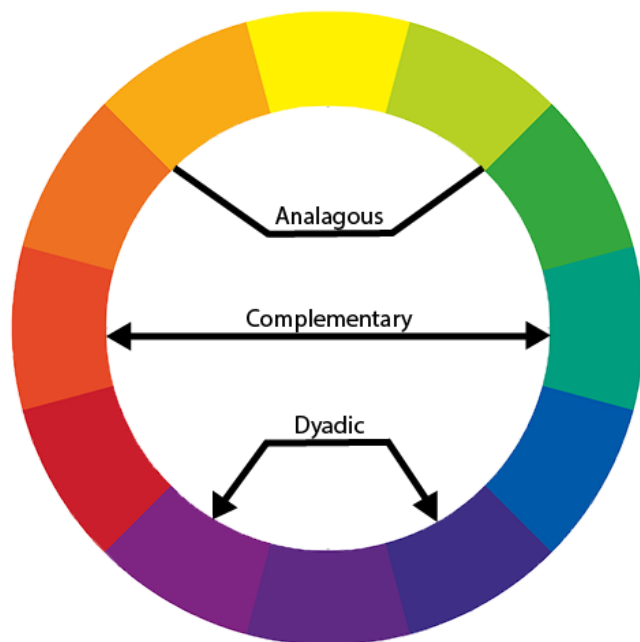
Colors are either primary

- red
- yellow
- blue

secondary

- orange
- green
- purple

or tertiary

- red-orange, yellow-orange
- yellow-green, blue-green
- blue-violet, and red-violet

Color schemes are used to create harmonious color combinations based on the color wheel. Three common color schemes are:

1. complementary - colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel (e.g. blue and orange)

2. dyadic - two colors that are separated by one color on the color wheel (e.g. green and yellow are separated by yellow-green)

3. analogous - series of three colors that are next to each other on the color wheel (e.g. red, red-orange, and orange)

The illusion of **texture** can be achieved in visuals by using points, lines, and shapes.

Visual Communication Theory

Semiotics

Semiotics is the formal study of signs and sign systems. Cultures assign meanings to signs and symbols. Two models for early semiotics:

1. Ferdinand de Saussure - a sign contain two elements: a signifier (the physical appearance of the object) and a signified (the mental concept of the object).

2. Charles Sanders Peirce - believed that the interpretation of the sign was a mental concept that varied by individual. He developed a taxonomy that includes an icon, an index, and a symbol.

Gestalt

Gestalt is used in the modern German to mean the way a thing has been placed or put together. Gestalt theory has six design principles:

1. Proximity - objects grouped together to appear as a unified whole.
2. Similarity - objects grouped together based on similar characteristics (shape, size, or color).
3. Continuation - objects can be grouped to form a flow or a path.
4. Closure - we can see a group of figures as a unified whole.
5. Order - we see objects that are symmetrical as a unified whole or group.
6. Figure-Group - we can discern between a figure in a visual and its background.

Supplemental Materials

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- McIntyre, Catherine. *Visual Alchemy: The Fine Art of Digital Montage*. New York: Focal Press, 2014.

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