

Design Elements and Principles

Butterflies are very good at seeing purple but reds are usually invisible to them.

(Victoria Finlay, *Colour: Travels through the paintbox*, 2002)

Overview

This chapter looks at the use of the design elements and principles and the ways they assist in producing visual communications. Design elements and principles can be used as starting points for exploration of ideas and can assist in developing and generating solutions for design problems. They can be specifically mentioned in a design brief from a client or purposefully selected by a designer to fulfill a stated purpose. In your own design work look at the design elements and principles as a working toolbox of tricks to assist in broadening your ideas or as a means of keeping your design work on track.

This chapter will cover:

- design elements including point, line, shape, form, tone, texture, colour and type
- design principles including figure-ground, balance, contrast, cropping, hierarchy, scale, proportion and pattern (repetition and alternation)
- aesthetic and functional considerations when selecting and applying design elements and principles
- drawing methods to visualise ideas and concepts
- suitability of different manual and/or digital methods, media and materials for exploring and applying design elements and design principles
- presentation drawing methods for the purpose of refining conceptual designs using manual and/or digital methods.

(VCAA 2012)

The Design Elements

The design elements include point, line, shape, form, tone, texture, colour and letterform. They can be seen as different ways to make marks on your paper.

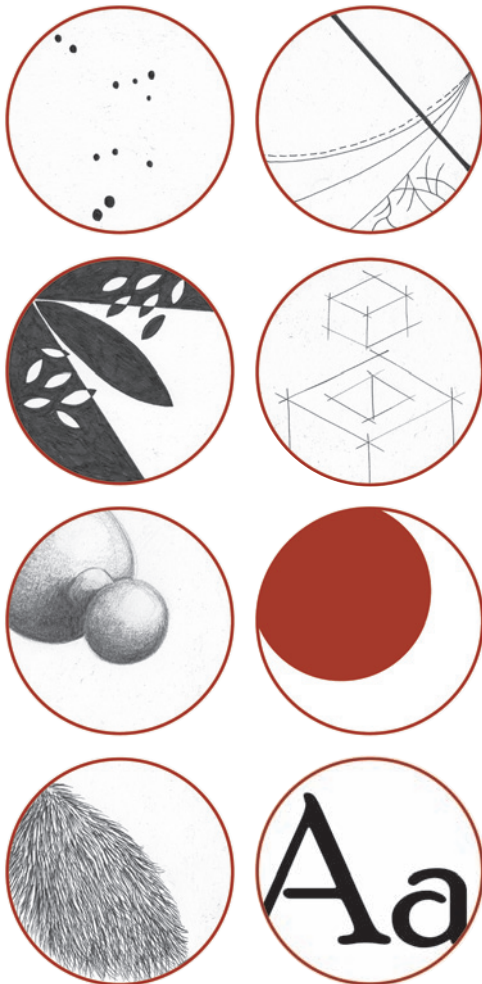


Figure 2.1 The design elements (L to R, top to bottom): point, line, shape, form, tone, colour, texture and type

Point

Point – it's more than a dot!

Point can be used as a reference mark to show the location or position of something on a map or diagram. It may be shown as a dot, small shape or symbol to represent an object or indicate an identity. It can be cleverly used in a visual communication to draw our eyes to important

information. Point can be used to create a pattern or an image and is used to create tone in dot rendering or stippling techniques.

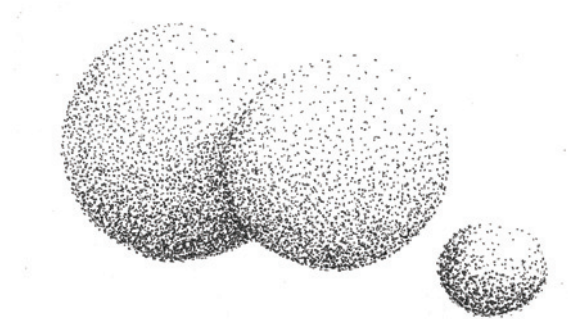


Figure 2.2 Using point to create tone, a rendering technique referred to as dot rendering or stippling



Figure 2.3 A postcard marketing the pt4me2 campaign for catching public transport. The postcard incorporates point as a decorative means leading the eye horizontally through the composition.
(Metropolitan Transport Forum)



Figure 2.4 Point can be used to link information in a diagram



Figure 2.5
Point is used to show locations on a map

Point can be:

- used to create tone
- a pattern
- decorative
- a symbol
- directive
- a point of reference.

Line

Line is a continuous mark made on a surface. Line can vary in appearance (curved, straight, irregular) and in thickness, weight and style. Line may be continuous, broken, roughly created or finely drafted. In design it is often incorporated with other elements (for example, to outline a shape or to produce a contour drawing, which is an outline drawing) and it can be used to create a shape, tone, form or texture. The creator can change the line produced depending on the tool they use to make their mark.

Line weights and styles are used to communicate or represent different information in architectural and engineering drawings. For example, in three-dimensional drawing a system of visible and hidden lines is used to assist in showing where changes in an object are located. Thick continuous lines are used to show visible parts of an object whilst thin dashes are used to represent hidden details.

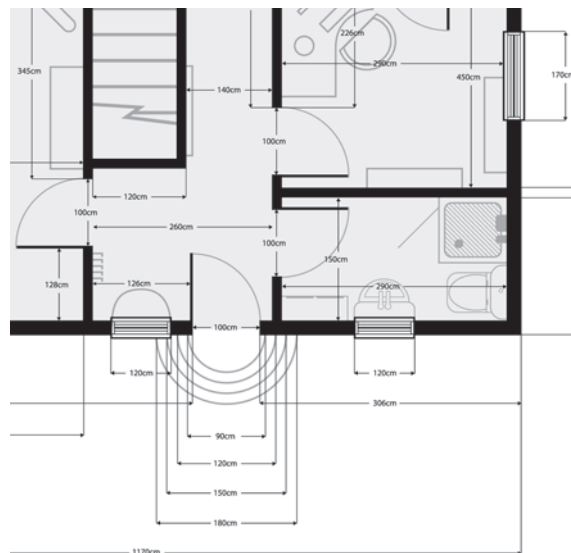


Figure 2.6 An architectural drawing that incorporates different line weights and styles. These different line weights and styles are used according to Australian Standards and represent wall thickness, dimension and object lines.

Bold, heavy or coloured lines can lead the eye through a visual communication or highlight/emphasise important text in a document. In freehand drawing, soft lines may be used to emphasise an organic subject matter, and

rendering techniques such as crosshatching or contour hatching use line to show the form and/or tone of an object.

Line can create texture and pattern and is used extensively at the beginning of the design process to generate quick freehand sketches, as seen in

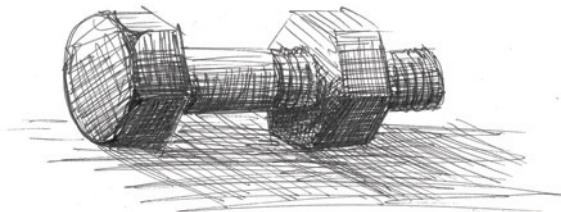


Figure 2.7 A thumbnail sketch created solely with line

Figure 2.7. Thumbnail sketches often focus on the use of line as a quick and efficient method to express ideas. Figure 2.8 is an illustration using scraper board and the technique used in this example relies on line to create tone and texture. The line style is soft, gentle, flowing and organic.

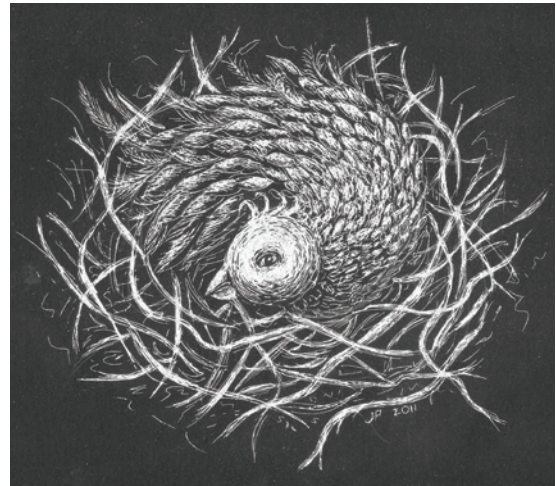


Figure 2.8 The use of line in this artwork creates tone and form



Figure 2.9

The whimsical and fluid style of lines used in this illustration are affiliated with designer/illustrator Kat Chadwick. This artwork was produced for her client *The Age* (*M Magazine*), published by Fairfax. It is a detail from the Melbourne Cup cover illustration.

Line can be:

- organic
- geometric
- curly
- fine or thick
- solid
- broken
- irregular
- vertical or horizontal
- burred
- freehand.

Discover

Further Research

Look at the work of illustrator Charley Harper and illustrator Kat Chadwick (www.cambridge.edu.au/viscommweblinks).



Shape

Shape is two dimensional and created by a closed outline. It can be organic or geometric, **symmetrical** or **asymmetrical**. Used with other elements, such as tone, it can create form. Shape plays a part in the relationship between figure and ground. Shape may be the dominant figure placed on a ground creating a second shape. This relationship may also be referred to as positive and negative space. Shape may work on its own as a figure such as a pictograph symbol or a simple logo. Shapes that you find in nature tend to be more organic and may be free flowing, soft and random. Think of flowers, sea shells and the shapes of patterns on insects. We can look towards architecture and manufactured items to see geometric shapes such as circles, squares, rectangles and diamonds.

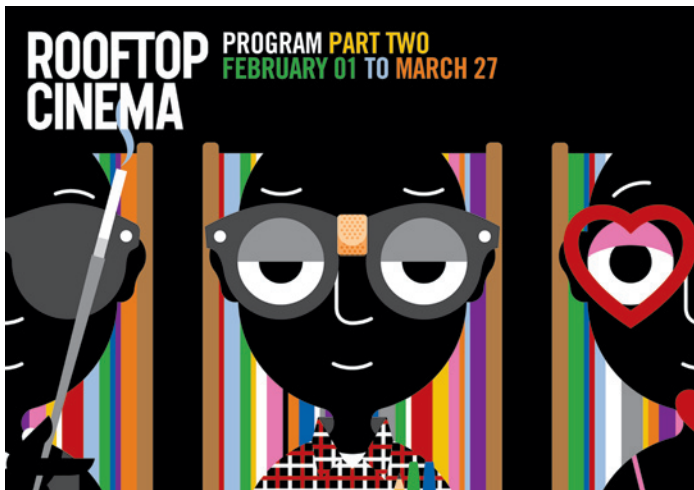


Figure 2.10 Geometric shape. This is a postcard for the Rooftop Cinema. Its design incorporates geometric shapes that assist in representing a modern approach in cinema experiences.



Figure 2.11

Organic shape. This is the image used for The Big Laugh Out Festival, a component of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival. The design incorporates organic shapes that assist in representing the comic nature of the character.

symmetrical

parts or proportions are mirrored along an axis creating a centred and equal composition

asymmetrical

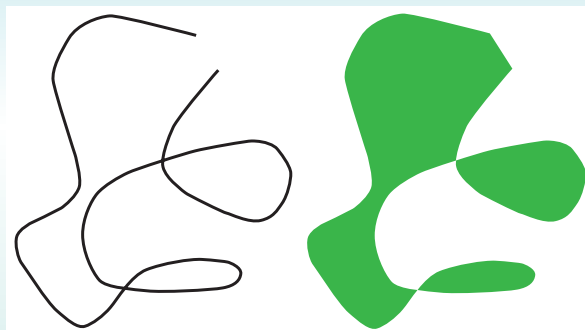
unequal parts or proportions; cannot be divided equally

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Shape: It's Two Dimensional!

Draw a line that crosses itself or intersects with another line enclosing a space and creating another shape. Look at your shapes; they have height and width but no depth – they are two dimensional.

Figure 2.12 Examples of shapes



Pictographs and Symbols

pictograph
a simplified
drawing that
conveys meaning
through pictorial
resemblance/
appearance

Pictographs are simplified pictures of an object. They are usually two dimensional, produced in black on a coloured background. Their meaning is instantly recognisable, even from a distance and used worldwide. Pictographs are commonly used to depict things like toilets, airports,



Figure 2.13 Pictographs are used to represent a range of universally recognised symbols

public telephones, hospitals and warning signs, just to name a few. Refer to Figure 2.13 for some examples. These ubiquitous, instantly recognisable generic symbols rely on the successful combination of shape, line and colour.



Figure 2.14

This is the front cover of an information booklet for the VCE Season of Excellence 2011 program. The imagery is created from bright silhouette shapes of objects relevant to the exhibitions. These shapes are then in turn contained within the large shape of a hand. This example shows how a simple shape can be used to create something quite spectacular.

(VCE Season of Excellence, 2011)

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Task: The Study of a Logo

Figure 2.15 is a collection of logo designs.

As a class discuss the differences between the logos including their potential purposes, contexts, use of design elements and principles.



Figure 2.15 Logo designs