UNIT 2 / WEEK 2 Visual Perception & Graphic Form
Lesson 4: Gestalt Principles of Perception
(formerly "Balance")

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OBJECTIVE
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
- **Explain** what Gestalt is and why it is critical to the practice of design.
- **Understand** how figure-ground relationships work, and how to manipulate them to achieve a desired effect.
- **Use** the principles of proximity, uniform connectedness, and good continuation to create effective designs for web and user interfaces.

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ASSESSMENT
Create a series of wireframe compositions that express proximity, uniform connectedness, and good continuation, using only lines and basic shapes to represent page elements and control the figure-ground relationships.

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CONNECTION TO A LONG TERM LEARNING GOAL
A basic understanding of Gestalt theories of perception provides a critical knowledge base for a visual designer. This lesson will provide a foundation in the Gestalt principles of perception and apply them to the organization of multifaceted information as applied to the web.

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BEFORE CLASS (Pre-work)
20-30 min

Read Design Principles: Visual Perception And The Principles Of Gestalt by Steven Bradley
http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2014/03/28/design-principles-visual-perception-and-the-principles-of-gestalt/

Read Design Principles: Space And The Figure-Ground Relationship by Steven Bradley
http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2014/05/16/design-principles-space-figure-ground-relationship/

Read Gestalt Principles of Perception - 3: Proximity, Uniform Connectedness, and Good Continuation by Andy Rutledge: http://www.andyrutledge.com/gestalt-principles-3.php

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS TO ANSWER:
What are the three types of figure-ground relationships?
Stable, reversible, ambiguous

What is the Law of Prägnanz?
The fundamental principle of gestalt. Humans prefer things that are simple, clear and ordered. Instinctually these things are safer. They take less time for us to process and present less

dangerous surprises. When confronted with complex shapes, we tend to reorganize them into simpler components or into a simpler whole.

What is the only principle of perception more powerful than proximity? What are two ways to utilize that principle?
Uniform Connectedness. Draw a box around a group of elements and you've indicated that they're related. Alternately, you can draw connecting lines (or arrows or some other tangible connecting reference) from one element to the next for the same effect.

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OPENING FRAMING
10 min

In this example, how many triangles are there? How many circles?
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/55/Kanizsa_triangle.svg/2000px-Kanizsa_triangle.svg.png

It looks like there's 3 circles and two triangles, but actually, there's just 3 pac-man shapes and three V shapes. Your brain automatically connects the broken lines and fills in the "missing" pieces to create a unified composition. That's the basis of the Law of Prägnanz, which is the fundamental principle of Gestalt.

Gestalt is a German word, meaning the "qualities of a structure as a whole that cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts." In design, the Gestalt principles of perception define how humans perceive visual objects and arrangements of visual objects.

An understanding of Gestalt principles will give you greater control over your designs, create more harmonious designs, and increase the likelihood that your message is communicated to your audience — in short, developing this understanding will make you a better designer.

This lesson focuses on developing familiarity with with the Gestalt principles of perception and direct practice in applying them to web design.

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I DO (Introduction of new material)
10-15min

- Explain how figure-ground relationships affect design via examples from web and app design.
- Explain each of the the Gestalt principles of perception via examples from web and app design.
- Multiple examples should be shown that clearly demonstrate each of proximity, uniform connectedness, and good continuation.

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YOU DO (Students' independent practice)
60 min

Demonstrate an understanding of proximity, uniform connectedness, and good continuation by sketching a series of page designs that organize different types of information harmoniously on the same page.

Using the content provided sketch 2 different wireframe sketches that organize content for an "About Us" page:

- using only black, white and 50% grey
- using only shapes (circles, rectangles, triangles, etc.) and lines to represent content and content groupings
- that illustrate each of the gestalt principles of relatedness: proximity, uniform connectedness, and good continuation.
- Don't worry too much about what the rest of the page looks like, your goal is to design structures that organize and represent ONLY the provided content
- Work using only lines and shapes: represent type by using rectangles to indicate the space the copy would occupy.

Set up 2 artboards in Illustrator at 1280x2000px to create your wireframes. Work quickly: use basic shapes and your understanding of figure-ground relationships to represent the content. Focus on the formal relationships between elements, not the elements themselves.

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CLOSING FRAMING
30 min
Review work completed in class in small groups.

Group critique: were each of the principles of gestalt reflected in the compositions? Which compositions were the most successful, why? What worked and what didn't? Which compositions manipulated the figure-ground relationship to the best effect?

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PRACTICE / HOMEWORK

Begin organizing the content for your final project by designing the layout wireframe for the landing page.

Represent each element that will appear on the page using only shapes (circles, rectangles, triangles, etc.) and lines to represent content and content groupings.

Consider the content in an abstract way. How much space will you need for copy? For images? For navigational elements? Don't worry about what those things will look like just yet — for now, you just need to focus on representing them in such a way that take the full page composition into consideration. Strive to create good contrast and harmony on the page using the Gestalt principles of perception.

For the next class, bring your completed wireframe as an Adobe Illustrator file, plus any sketches you made along the way. Be prepared to speak to how and why you made your design decisions.

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POST-LESSON (bonus / extra / fun)

Create a pinboard that collects examples of design that demonstrate successful or inventive manipulation of figure-ground and that demonstrate the Gestalt principles of perception. Again, seek out both art historical references as well as examples from contemporary app and web design.

Read Andy Rutledge's complete series on Gestalt theory:
http://www.andyrutledge.com/gestalt-principles-1-figure-ground-relationship.php
http://www.andyrutledge.com/gestalt-principles-2-similarity.php
http://www.andyrutledge.com/gestalt-principles-3.php
http://www.andyrutledge.com/common-fate.php
http://www.andyrutledge.com/closure.php

Read "Universal Principles of Design" by William Lidwell, Kritina Holden, and Jill Butler:
http://www.amazon.com/Universal-Principles-Design-Revised-Updated/dp/1592535879/

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TO-DOs & CONTENT TO BE CREATED

Source web/app examples that demonstrate use of figure/ground + each of the principles of gestalt

Create example wireframe

Content should be provided for an "about us" page that contains three different sections. This should be provided in a copy deck format, not as a wireframe. The students will need to how to organize the content as part of the exercise. Content should include:
- **The first section is 4-6 team bios with 3 levels of hierarchy: name (headline) + job title (sub-head) + bio (short paragraph)**
- **The second section is a two-tiered list of offerings / capabilities with 6-8 items at the top level, each with 4-10 items listed beneath them, i.e. a series of lists with varying amounts of content.**
- **The third section is a "contact" section that lists contact info for 3 different office locations, with the office name as the header + address / phone / email for each location.**