

1.14 Visual Skills

Aim

- To help participants learn the basic techniques of visualisation in order to give their communication greater impact.

Materials Required

- A number of examples to exhibit and explain the points stated in the input.

Input

- A picture is worth a thousand words. Today, more than ever, how you say what you want to say is as important as what you want to say. How then can you present information to your viewers/readers in a way that is visually attractive and eye-catching?
- There are three key elements in any visualisation: Design, Visual Tools and Lettering.

a) Design: Four principles constitute design aesthetics.

- Simplicity:** The fewer elements into which a given space is divided, the more pleasing it is to the eye. Only key details should be mentioned. That which is important must be outlined with a heavy line - other details can be added in thinner lines. However, note that too many lines could confuse your audience.
- Unity:** The design must not be scattered but must show coherence. Devices like arrows, overlapping, etc. can help.
- Emphasis:** Though a theme may be developed in the same space, the basic message must attract attention and interest. Through the use of size, relationships, perspective and such visual tools as colour, space, etc., emphasis can be given to the most important elements.
- Balance:** Your board may be arranged symmetrically (formally) or asymmetrically (informally). The first suggests neatness, order and is static. The second is attractive and dynamic. Lettering arranged symmetrically conveys solemnity while the latter conveys energy and movement.

b) The Eight Principles of Organisation

- Harmony:** This is pulling together of opposing forces by giving them all some common element(s) such as colour, texture, value, and so forth. The repetition or continued introduction of the same device or element reconciles that opposition.
- Variety:** While an artist might bring a work together with harmony, it is with variety that he or she achieves individuality and interest. Interest in this instant refers to the ability to arouse curiosity and to hold a viewer's attention. If an artist achieves complete equality of visual forces, the work usually will be balanced, but it may also be static, lifeless, and unemotional. Visual boredom is an indication of an overly harmonious composition. By adding variation to the visual forces, the artist introduces essential ingredients such as diversion or change for enduring attention.
- Balance:** Most art works are viewed in a vertical orientation. In terms of top, sides, and bottom. Gravity then affects the visual components. For example, a ball placed high in the pictorial field produces a sense of tension between the ball and the baseline of the picture plane. There is the expectation that gravity will cause the ball to drop, and when it does not fall, the tension is created. What we know of the weight of actual objects influences how we judge balance on a picture surface. If we were to replace the objects with non-objective entities, their psychological weight would be created by their shape, value, and/or colour and our view of their balance again would change. Whether objective or non-objective components are used, the potential creation of psychological weight/balance and its compositional adjustment are endless.
- Proportion:** Proportion deals with the ratio of individual parts to one another. In works of art, the relationships of parts are difficult to compare with any accuracy because proportion often becomes a matter of personal judgement. Proportional parts are considered in relation to the whole and, when related, the parts create harmony and balance.
- Dominance:** Any work of art that strives for interest must exhibit differences that emphasise the degrees of importance of its various parts. These differences result

from medium and compositional considerations. If we substitute the word contrast for difference, we can see that the following, among others, can be used to achieve dominance:

- i) Isolation or separation of one part from others.
- ii) Placement - "centre stage" is most often used, but another position can be dominant depending on the surroundings
- iii) Direction - a movement that contrasts with others draws attention
- iv) Scale - larger sizes normally dominate
- v) Character - a significant difference in general appearance is striking.

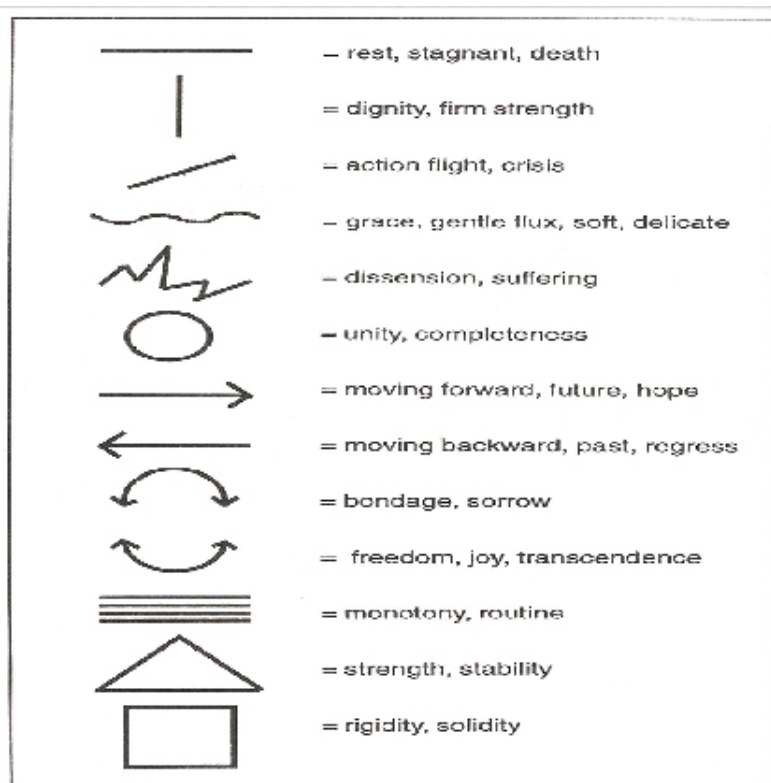
Contrasts in colour, value, and texture also help to produce this attraction.

- 6. Movement: In looking at an art/visual work, audiences are being "taken for a ride" or, more accurately, a tour. The artist makes the eye travel comfortably and informatively by providing roadways and rest stops. The roadways leading to the rest stops have certain speed limits established by the artist, and the rest stops are of a predetermined duration. The lines, shapes (generally lengthy ones) and shape contours are generally pointed at each other in the same general direction. They may be touching but are normally interrupted by gaps over which the eyes skip as they move about. Sometimes "leaps" are necessary, requiring strong directional thrusts and/or potent attractions.
- 7. The optical units that direct us contain vital visual information. In a work such as the Mona Lisa, the figure is such a dominant unit that little eye movement is required (although there is secondary material of considerable interest). In other works, there may be several units of great interest that are widely separated, and it thus becomes critical that the observer's vision be directed to them. There is usually some hierarchy in these units, some calling for more attention than others.
- 8. Economy: Very often, as a work develops, the artist will find that the solutions to various visual problems result in unnecessary complexity. The problem is frequently characterised by the broad and simple aspects of the work deteriorating into fragmentation. The artist can sometimes restore order by returning to significant essentials, eliminating elaborate details, and relating the particulars to the whole. This is a sacrifice not easily made or accepted because, in looking for solutions, interesting discoveries may have been made. But, interesting or not, these effects must often be surrendered for greater legibility and a more direct expression. Economy has no rules but rather must be an outgrowth of the artist's instincts. If something works with respect to the whole, it is kept. If disruptive, it may be reworked or rejected.

c) Visual Tools:

There are five visual tools:

- 1. Lines: These have a power and meaning of their own. Not all create the same psychological effect in the viewer's mind.



The Physical Characteristics of Line

- I. Measure: This refers to the length and width of a line. An infinite number of combinations of long and short, thick and thin lines can, according to their use, divide, balance, or unbalance a pictorial area.
- II. Type: Taking into consideration the characteristic of type as well as measure, we find that long or short, thick



or thin lines can be straight, angular, or curved. The straight line, in its continuity, ultimately becomes repetitious and, depending on its length, either rigid or brittle. The curved line may form an arc, reverse its curve to become wavy, or continue turning within itself to produce a spiral. Alterations of movement become visually entertaining and physically stimulating if they are rhythmic. A curved line is inherently graceful and, to a degree, unstable. The abrupt changes of direction in an angular line create excitement and/or confusion. Our eyes frequently have difficulty adapting to an angular line's unexpected deviations of direction. Hence, the angular line is full of challenging interest.

- III. Location: The control exercised over the measure, type, or direction of a line can be enhanced or diminished by its specific location. According to its placement, a line can serve to unify or divide, balance or unbalance a pictorial area. A diagonal line might be soaring or plunging, depending upon its high or low position relative to the frame. The various attributes of line can act in concert toward one goal or can serve separate roles of expression and design.
- IV. Character: This term is largely related to the medium with which the line is created. Different media can be used in the same work to create greater interest. Monotony could result from the consistent use of lines of the same character unless the unity so gained is balanced by the variation of other physical properties. Varied instruments, such as the brush, burin, stick, and fingers, have distinctive characteristics that can be exploited by the artist.
 2. Shape: This can create interest and express the theme more coherently.
 3. Space: This must be used carefully because too little space creates a crowded feeling while too much space makes the subject look scattered.
 4. Texture: This is a visual element that replaces the sense of touch and can be used in the same way as colour. Shinning surfaces, rough surfaces, flannel paper, all create a certain effect in the mind of the viewer. It is for the one who prepares the notice board to capitalise on these resources if they are readily available.
 5. Colour: This is a very important visual tool. Here are a few rules to consider when using colour in your visuals:
 - The background must be subdued.
 - Details and especially main topics must be bright and attractive.
 - Details that are not very important must neither be too bright as to be confused with the main theme nor too dull as to be lost in the background.
 - Too many colours can cause a mental strain.
 - Colour must be harmonised: different tints of the same colour. E.g. various shades of blue.
 - Harmony of colours which are neighbours on the colour chart is called analogous harmony e.g. blue, violet, and red.
 - When colour contrasts at its maximum, this harmony is called complementary harmony. E.g. colours opposite on the colour chart.
 - Colours create psychological effects. Cool colours such as blue, green, violet, give an effect of distance. Warm colours such as red, orange and yellow invite the viewer. The following are some stereotyped psychological meanings attached to prominent colours:
 - * Red - danger, heat, love, energy
 - * Blue - coldness, boredom, sadness
 - * Purple - royalty, sorrow
 - * Green - freshness, jealousy
 - * Yellow - life, light, flashy
 - * White - purity, integrity, chill, lack of ideas
 - * Black - darkness, evil, sin, creative potency
 - * Grey - boredom, loss, deadness

d) Lettering:

- Lettering may be formal or informal.
- It is better to arrange formal lettering in a formal way keeping in mind the rules of balance and space.
- Mechanical spacing produces an uneven effect. It destroys unity and legibility.
- It is necessary to space the letters by the eye. This is 'optical spacing'.
- Informal lettering can be stylish or expressive.
- Expressive letters can give your work a dramatic effect. Informal lettering must be arranged in the style unique to the lettering.

e) Types of Visuals:

Finally, here is a list and classification of various types of visual communication:

- I. Visuals without words: photographs, drawings and paintings, picture posters, picture-collages, chalk drawings, murals (without words), and mime.
- II. Visuals with words: advertisements, captioned posters, theme charts, diagrams, word-collages, banners, murals (with words)
- III. Visuals using projectors: overhead projector, slide projector, video projectors.
- IV. Visuals using electronics and computers: video players/recorders, television monitors, Microsoft power-point presentations, computer graphics, computer animation.
- V. Visuals with sound: dramatics, dance, TV productions, music and song videos, film.

One of the best ways to develop visual skills is to look at visual art manuals that contain many innovative presentation of professional artists.

Review

1. There are three key elements in any visualisation: Design, Visual Tools and Lettering.
2. The seven principles of organisation are: harmony, variety, balance, proportion, dominance, movement and economy.
3. Visual tools include: lines, shape, space, texture and colour.
4. It is better to arrange formal lettering in a formal way keeping in mind the rules of balance and space.
5. There are several types of visuals: visuals with words, visuals without words, visuals using projectors, visuals using electronics and computers and visuals with sound.
6. One of the best ways to develop visual skills is to look at visual art manuals with innovative presentations of professional artists.

Reflection

1. Interview several artists and find out how they combine the key elements of visualisation as well as the seven principles of organisation in their work. Note with interest how different artists express themselves and how they incorporate these principles in their work.

Relevant Skills

The lecturer can present a computer manual to the class and ask the students how much they remember of the computer features presented in the manual the following day. The manual must have visuals in addition to text.

Resources

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References

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