



Handout 1 - Elements and Principles of Art

This vocabulary handout is from Oberlin College and Conservatory.

VOCABULARY

ELEMENTS OF ART: The visual components of color, form, line, shape, space, texture, and value.

Line	An element of art defined by a point moving in space. Line may be two-or three-dimensional, descriptive, implied, or abstract.
Shape	An element of art that is two-dimensional, flat, or limited to height and width.
Form	An element of art that is three-dimensional and encloses volume; includes height, width AND depth (as in a cube, a sphere, a pyramid, or a cylinder). Form may also be free flowing.
Value	The lightness or darkness of tones or colors. White is the lightest value; black is the darkest. The value halfway between these extremes is called middle gray.
Space	An element of art by which positive and negative areas are defined or a sense of depth achieved in a work of art .
Color	An element of art made up of three properties: hue, value, and intensity. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hue: name of color• Value: hue's lightness and darkness (a color's value changes when white or black is added)• Intensity: quality of brightness and purity (high intensity= color is strong and bright; low intensity= color is faint and dull)
Texture	An element of art that refers to the way things feel, or look as if they might feel if touched.



PRINCIPLES OF ART: Balance, emphasis, movement, proportion, rhythm, unity, and variety; the means an artist uses to organize elements within a work of art.

Rhythm	A principle of design that indicates movement, created by the careful placement of repeated elements in a work of art to cause a visual tempo or beat.
Balance	A way of combining elements to add a feeling of equilibrium or stability to a work of art. Major types are <i>symmetrical and asymmetrical</i> .
Emphasis (contrast)	A way of combining elements to stress the differences between those elements.
Proportion	A principle of design that refers to the relationship of certain elements to the whole and to each other.
Gradation	A way of combining elements by using a series of gradual changes in those elements. (large shapes to small shapes, dark hue to light hue, etc)
Harmony	A way of combining similar elements in an artwork to accent their similarities (achieved through use of repetitions and subtle gradual changes)
Variety	A principle of design concerned with diversity or contrast. Variety is achieved by using different shapes, sizes, and/or colors in a work of art.
Movement	A principle of design used to create the look and feeling of action and to guide the viewer's eye throughout the work of art.