

What are . . .

# "Elements of Design"?



Each of these pictures use Elements of Design. Can you explain what ones are used? If not, check out the links at the right.

**Confused about what judges mean when they ask you about the design elements you used in your fair project?**

**A design is a visual plan you can use to create your 4-H project. Everything you see has design. When you describe something you see, you can use words that tell**

**about the lines, shapes, colors, textures, and spaces.**

**Line, Shape, Color, Texture, and Space are the basic elements of design.**

**For an easy to understand definition of each of these terms, along with an explanation of how they apply to your projects, see pages 8 and 9, or check out**

**the awesome color brochure at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/4H313.pdf>. You can also pick up a copy of this from the Extension Office.**



# Questions & Answers on Applying Design Elements in Your Projects

## Q. Why do I need to include design elements and art principles in my home improvement and clothing projects?

A. Recognizing design elements helps you to be more successful with your 4-H projects. When you learn to identify and use these elements, you not only know a piece works well, but you also know why it works well. It is like when you make a cake. It takes ingredients, right? Design elements and art principles are the ingredients for your creation.

## Q. But when will I ever use this information again?

A. You will use it all the time when you someday decorate and landscape your own home. You will also use it whenever selecting clothing. The elements of design are important to everyone who works in textiles and clothing, home interiors, woodworking, photography, landscapes, architecture, foods, graphic design, and the visual arts, so if you choose a career in one of those areas, you will use design elements and principles constantly.

## Q. How many design elements or art principles do I need to include in my write-up?

A. For most home improvement exhibits, you need to include an explanation of how at least two design elements or art principles were used. In most clothing exhibits, you need to explain how they were applied in your exhibit. In a visual art exhibit, you must identify the design element(s) and/or principles used and explain how they were used.

## Q. So, what design elements am I looking for?

A. Design elements include lines, shapes, color, space, and texture. Think of these elements as tools to accomplish a certain "look". They are used to draw attention to a specific area or to move your eye's focus from one point to another.

## Q. What are art principles and what am I looking for?

A. Art principles are simply a combination of design elements that work well together. You will use design elements to create principles like rhythm, proportion, emphasis, balance, and unity.

## Q. How can I tell which ones to write about?

A. Don't make this too hard. Look at your exhibit. What do you see? Pick out a couple of points that really jump out at you. It will probably be color, shape, texture, line or space. Now talk about how you used them to create rhythm, proportion, emphasis, balance, and/or unity.

## Q. Could I have an example, please?

A. Sure. Your visual art exhibit is a piece you created with marble painting. You would explain how you chose the **colors** and how you swirled the colors or moved the paper to create the **lines** in the paint. You sense **movement (rhythm)** as a result of the lines and they draw your eyes around the piece. The **intensity** of color might depend on the type of paint you chose as enamel paints are more intense than other types. (Notice that in that short paragraph, four elements and principles were mentioned.)

# Elements of Design



*A design is a visual plan you can use to create your 4-H project. Everything you see has design. When you describe something you see, you use words that tell about the lines, shapes, colors, textures and spaces. Line, shape, color, texture and space are the basic elements of design.*

*The elements of design are important to 4-H member who work in clothing, home improvement, wood working, photography and visual art. If you understand the design elements, you will be more successful with your 4-H projects.*

## Line:

Lines can be horizontal, vertical, dotted, zigzag, curved, straight, bold or fine. Lines can show direction, lead the eye, outline an object, divide a space or communicate a feeling.

## Proportion:

Connecting lines makes shapes. Circle, square, triangle and freeform are words used to identify shapes. Look at objects around you and describe their basic shape - do you see triangles or free form shapes? After doing this several times, you will begin to understand what shape is. Lines create two dimensional or flat shapes. When shapes are three dimensional, we call them forms. Circles are shapes, ball are a form. Squares are shapes, but cubes are three dimensional and called forms. A sculpture is three- dimensional.

## Color:

Color is described with the words hue, value, and intensity. Hue refers to the name of the color - red or blue for example. Value tells the lightness or darkness of a hue (color). Intensity refers brightness or dullness of a hue. You can use a color wheel and learn how colors work together - ask for 4-H 633 *Color*.

## Texture:

Texture is the surface quality of an item. It is how something feels when it is touched or looks like it would feel if touched. Sandpaper is rough. Velvet is smooth. A drawing of a tree stump could show the rough outer bark and smooth inner surface. Texture adds variety and interest to 4-H projects.

## Space:

Space refers to the area that a shape or form occupies. It also refers to the background against which we see the shape or form. Space can be defined as positive and negative. The positive space of a design is the filled space in the design - often it is the shapes that make up the design. Negative space is the background. The negative space is as important as the positive area.

---

*“Everything you see has design.”*

---



# Principles of Design

*The principles of design will provide some guidelines about why some combinations of the design elements work and others do not work as well.*

## Rhythm:

It allows your eye to move from one part of the design to another part. It can be created by:

- repeating color, line, texture, shape or space when designing
- varying the size of objects, shapes in lines in a sequence (small to large)
- using a progression of colors (light blue to dark blue)
- Shifting from one hue to a neighboring hue (yellow to yellow-orange to orange to red-orange to red).

## Proportion:

Proportion refers to the relationship between one part of a design and another part or to the whole design. It is a comparison of sizes, shapes or amounts.

## Emphasis:

Every design needs a point of interest. Emphasis is the quality that draws your attention to a certain part of the design. Here are several ways to create emphasis:

- use a contrasting color
- use a different or unusual line.
- Make a shape very large or small
- Use a different shape
- use plain background space

## Balance:

Balance gives a feeling of stability or equilibrium to a design. There are 3 types of balance. Symmetrical - an item that is symmetrically balanced is the same on both sides. If you were to cut the design in half, one side would be identical to the other.

Radial - Designs that have a radial balance have a center point. A tire, a pizza and a daisy flower are all examples of design with radial balance.

Asymmetrical balance creates a feeling of equal weight on both sides, even though the sides do not look the same.

## Unity:

When things look right together, you have created unity or harmony. Lines and shapes that repeat each other show unity (curved lines and curved shapes). Colors that have a common hue are harmonious. Textures that have a similar feel add unity.



---

***“The principles of design will provide some guidelines about why some combinations of the design elements work and others do not work as well.”***

---

