Visual Communication and Design

Unit 1: Visual communication

AREA OF STUDY 3

Design elements and design principles
This area of study focuses on the experimentation, exploration and application of design elements and principles through manual freehand drawing, the use of information and communications technology and, where appropriate, other methods of electronic image generation such as photography and photocopying. Design elements, including colour, shape, line, tone, texture, form, letterform and point, and principles, including balance, contrast, cropping, hierarchy, figure-ground, scale, proportion and pattern, are used to produce visual communications that satisfy a stated purpose. Experimentation and exploration occur throughout the development of ideas in the testing and reviewing of the relationship between applied elements and principles and the requirements specified in the stated purpose. In this area of study, the term ‘purpose’ can be understood as one or more purposes.

Outcome 3
On completion of this unit you should be able to explore and apply design elements and principles to satisfy a stated purpose.

To achieve this outcome you will:

• use a range of design elements and principles in the development of manual freehand drawings;
• use design elements and principles to produce visual communications that satisfy a stated purpose;
• generate and develop design alternatives using a range of design elements and principles;
• select and refine a design solution to suit a stated purpose;
• use information and communications technology to explore design elements and principles.

To satisfy the requirements of Outcome 3 you will use design elements and principles to complete a folio of drawings that offers solutions to given design problems.

Assessment criteria for Unit 1 Outcome 3

• Ability to use design elements correctly and creatively to satisfy a stated purpose
• Ability to use design principles correctly and creatively to satisfy a stated purpose
• Ability to collect and use worthwhile research material
• Ability to explore a range of design alternatives using design elements and principles
• Ability to develop and refine a design solution using design elements and principles
• Level of proficiency using information and communications technology
TASK No. 1: VISUAL BRAINSTORMING

Choose one of the following subjects and, using manual freehand drawing, visually interpret it at least 16 times using each of the design elements and principles: tomato, insect, shoe, nose, pie, tree, telephone, pencil, boat, or paper bag.

Below are examples of how one designer interpreted the word ‘apple’ using design elements and principles. Notice how cleverly comical, abstract or bizarre these ideas are.
**TASK No. 2: ROAD SIGN PROBLEM**

Immediate, practical communication is the primary function of a road sign. With this in mind, make a road sign of one of the following subjects: cricket pitch, snake farm, chocolate factory, aboriginal settlement, archery field or sewerage plant.

You will need to do the following things:

1. Collect research material of your subject to help give you ideas of what you could draw. Collect at least three pieces of research material.
2. Produce six different design concepts of your subject. Your designs should not be too detailed but they must contain enough visual information to be easily recognizable. Each design should measure 8 x 8 cm.
3. Use a selection of design elements and principles to produce your design concepts. Colour must be used in all your design concepts.
4. Annotate the design elements and principles you use in your design concepts.
5. Use colour materials and/or media to help develop and refine your best design solution. This drawing should measure 20 x 20 cm.
6. Use Adobe Illustrator to produce a final presentation measuring 20 x 20 cm.

All your designs should use black figure on yellow ground – just like a real road sign. However, another colour can be used sparingly/selectively if your designs require it.

All design concepts must be produced using manual freehand drawing. However, instrumental drawing can also be used when developing and refining your best design solution.

Shown overleaf are different examples a designer did for different road signs. These examples are called symbols. Symbols are simplistic representations of objects or things – they usually use basic shapes and/or silhouettes to help simplify visual information. Symbols can be quite abstract, which is fine, provided they still have meaning and that what they are representing is still recognizable in some way. You will need to devise equally simplistic and imaginative design concepts for your chosen subject.
Overleaf are four sheets that provide a basic explanation of each of the eight design elements and eight design principles. This information was taken directly from the Visual Communication and Design Study Design. You will need to familiarize yourself with all 16 design elements and principles. These design elements and principles are an integral part of not only Unit 1 outcome 3 but of subsequent outcomes throughout Units 2, 3 and 4.
Design elements and design principles
The list of design elements and principles included in this study design have to be studied. However, others may be incorporated as appropriate.

Design elements
Design elements could be considered as the marks we make on the surface or page. In this study design they are considered to be: point, line, shape, form, tone, texture, colour, letterform.

Point
This is a mark which may indicate position and location. It can represent a point of measure or be used in a purely decorative way. Examples worth considering are computer pixels, film grain, pointillism, map indicators, a bulleted list and dot rendering.

Line
Essentially, line represents a single dimension, length. It can be straight, curved or irregular and combine with other elements. It can create shape, tone, form and texture. The weight and quality of the line may vary depending on its intended use. Examples worth considering are pencil grades, cross hatching and etchings.

Shape
Shape is the space contained within lines. Shapes can be organic or geometric and can be used in conjunction with other elements to create form. Shape is two-dimensional. Examples worth considering are geodesic domes, Stonehenge, The Bauhaus and Marc Newson.

Form
Form may be created by the joining of two or more shapes. It may be enhanced by tone, texture and colour. Form is considered three-dimensional. It can be illustrated or constructed. Examples worth considering are the pyramids, the architecture of Frank O’Gehry and three-dimensional computer modelling.
Texture
Texture may be achieved by the combination of elements such as point and line. It may be applied in a realistic or abstract style to create an arbitrary pattern or to simulate the finish of a material. Examples worth considering are frottage, mixed media, tapestry weaves.

Colour
Colour should be considered in conjunction with the other elements. If used well it can add interest and excitement to a piece of visual communication. Colour may be used to specify areas, distinguish form, and highlight compositional aspects such as hierarchy. Examples worth considering are Fauvism, stained glass windows, RGB monitors.

Letterform
Letterform can be an abstract physical representation of the spoken word and can be manipulated to have an impact on the quality of the visual message. Letterform can be used to express a word visually and to creatively reinforce the meaning of a word or act solely as a decorative device. Examples worth considering are film credits, corporate logos, book titles.
Design principles

Design principles are simply ways of arranging or organising design elements. In this study design they are considered to be: figure–ground, balance, contrast, cropping, hierarchy, scale, proportion and pattern (repetition and alternation).

**Figure–ground**

Figure and ground work together within images to establish the importance of visual information within a picture plane. ‘Figure’ refers to images that are more visually dominant than the ground on which they are placed within a composition. Figure may also be known as ‘positive space’ or ‘form’. Ground can be known as ‘background’, ‘negative space’ or ‘counter form’. Examples worth considering are optical art, interior design, Man Ray’s photography, Henri Matisse, Alexander Calder’s mobiles and typography.

**Balance**

This may be ‘symmetrical’ where elements are mirrored on opposite sides of a visual axis to create a stable and formal composition, or ‘asymmetrical’ where balanced elements, not mirrored on opposite sides of a visual axis, create a dynamic informal composition. Examples worth considering are Brunelleschi’s architecture, magazine layouts and furniture designs.

**Contrast**

All effective combinations of forms are based on qualitative contrasts. Contrast should always be thought of in terms of creating tension between opposites: large–small, light–dark, soft–hard, etc. Examples worth considering are serif and sans serif type, transparency and opacity, matt or gloss surfaces.

**Cropping**

An image can be modified by selecting an area of interest to emphasise, create dominance or simply to clarify information. Examples worth considering are viewfinders and Pop Art.
Hierarchy
Visual information can be arranged in order of importance. Factors determining the hierarchy may be the size, colour or placement of the visual components and/or the arrangement of the information. For example, the focal point of a composition draws attention to specific information. Examples worth considering are letterheads, newspapers and magazines.

Scale
Scale generally refers to the size of the figure on the ground. Its relative size and scale will determine the hierarchy of visual components within the presentation. Examples worth considering are Andy Goldsworthy’s sculpture, Ladislav Sutnar and Piet Mondrian’s paintings.

Proportion
This is the comparative relationship between the size of components or parts of components within a visual presentation. Examples worth considering are the Golden Section, Palladio’s architecture and ergonomics.

Pattern
Pattern is the repetition or alternation of one or more components to create a visual unit. Any visual element can be used to create a pattern. Repetition can be very powerful in creating a sense of order in a piece. Alternation can create more complex patterns than those created by repetition alone. Examples worth considering are textile design, aerial photography, camouflage and the Seagram Building.