

color and design glossary

Words that describe color

Gradation

transitions of colors in steps or stages

Harmony

agreement between colors; Itten defines color harmony as a set of colors that when mixed result in a grayish neutral color, and refers to these sets as *color chords*

Hue

the identity of a color; in the Color-aid system, hue refers to the purest version of a color

Relativity

the changing appearance of a color based to its proximity to another color

Saturation

purity of color; sometimes called *intensity*

Shade

a mixture of a pure color with black, darkening the color

Temperature

the sensation of a color as warm or cool

Tint

a mixture of a pure color with white, lightening the color

Transparency

seeing through colored materials such as film, thin paper, liquids; sometimes overlapping, resulting in color mixtures

Transparency illusion

the suggestion of seeing through overlapping layers of color, achieved by combining non-transparent materials

Value

generally, the relative importance of one color compared to other colors in close proximity; in the Munsell Color System, value refers to the lightness of a color

The seven color contrasts, defined by Johannes Itten

Contrast of hue

the most basic of all color contrasts, achieved by combining forms composed of different hues in a single composition.

Contrast of light and dark

the difference between black, white, and various grays; also the difference between light and dark versions of a color achieved by adding white or black or by adding the color's complement

Contrast of saturation

the difference between pure and diluted, or intense and dull colors, achieved by adding gray or the color's complement

Complementary contrast

the difference between colors that are opposites on the color wheel, sometime including mixtures of the colors ranging from recognizable variations of each parent color to middle neutral mixtures

Simultaneous contrast

the illusion of multiple contrasts that occurs simultaneously to a single color when viewed against different colors; the illusion of different color afterimages on the same gray ground

Contrast of temperature

the difference between warm and cool colors and the sensations they produce; warm colors generally range from yellow to red, and cool colors from green to blue; however, variations of the same hue can be described as warm or cool

Contrast of extension

the appearance of similarity or difference in a composition, based on the proportional amounts of light and dark colors; in essence, small amounts of bright colors will be balanced by large amounts of dark colors, while even amounts of light and dark colors will result in stronger visual hierarchy

Words that describe design

Abstraction

art and design based on nonrepresentational forms

Anomaly

an irregular form in a design in which regularity exists

Asymmetry

a free, harmonious, and balanced arrangement of unequal elements

Balance

a state of equilibrium; elements in equal opposition or attraction

Collage

a composition of found materials

Composition

an arrangement of visual elements

Contrast

difference between elements in a composition

Curvilinear

form defined by curves

Dynamic

expressing movement and energy

Element

the parts of a composition

Figure

a dominant form in a composition

Figure/ground

the relationship between the dominant forms and background in a composition

Focal point

a place in a composition that commands attention

Form

a shape of definite size and color

Geometric

form or composition based on mathematical measurement, usually created with mechanical tools or computers

Ground

the background or nonfigure parts of a composition

Harmony

agreement between elements of a composition

Hierarchy

the perceived order of importance of elements in a composition, based on contrast

Medium/media

the material or technology used to create a work of art or design

Montage

a combination of several distinct and complete compositions

Nonobjective

nonrepresentational, abstract

Organic

freeform; opposite of geometric

Picture plane

the compositional field; the space within a frame

Proximity

the relative distance between elements in a composition

Rectilinear

a form defined by straight lines

Rhythm

a sense of movement created by the recurrence of similar features

Symbol

an abstract rendering of an object, idea, or experience

Symmetry

form or composition based upon reflection and equality

Unity

oneness; wholeness; the harmony of all parts of a composition

Weight

the perceived lightness or heaviness of a form

Compositional contrasts

Contrast of form

geometric/organic
rectilinear/curvilinear
symmetrical/asymmetrical
simple/complex
abstract/representational

Contrast of size

large/small

Contrast of direction

vertical/horizontal/diagonal

Contrast of position

top/bottom
high/low
left/right

Contrast of space

active/empty
positive/negative
advance/recede
near/far

Contrast of weight

light/heavy

Contrast of texture

fine/coarse
smooth/rough
even/uneven
matte/gloss