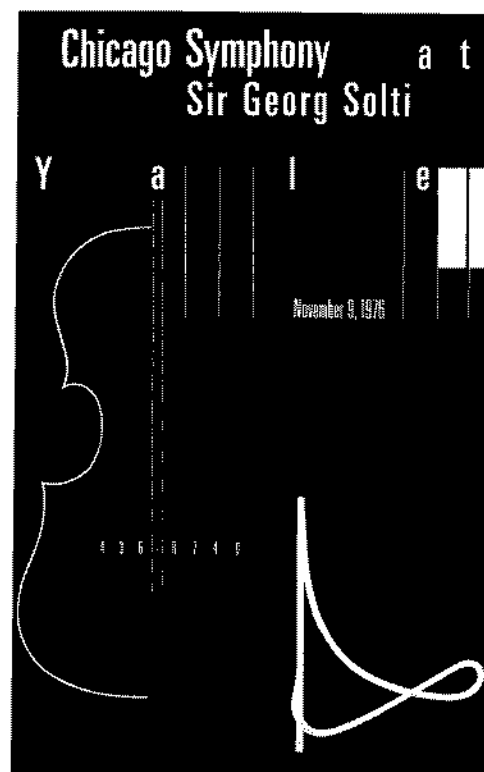


## Chapter 2

# The Elements of Design



In order to make anything, you have to start with the basic materials. You need bricks and mortar to create a building. You need flour, eggs, butter, and other ingredients to make a cake.

The ingredients for making a good layout are the elements of design: line, shape, texture, space, size, value and color. There is nothing mysterious about any of these; in fact, you're already familiar with most of them from your everyday life. Just as the same ingredients can be used to create different dishes, the elements of design can produce different layouts depending on how they're used.

When you understand what it is that each ingredient adds to a recipe, you can make up your own recipes. If you make the

This chapter introduces the ingredients for a good layout—the elements of design.

These are line, shape, texture, space, size, value and color.

right choices about what to put in your new recipe, you will succeed in making a good dish. The same is true of using these ingredients of design. Once you understand what the elements of design are and how they work, you can make the right choices to create your own good layouts.

# Line:

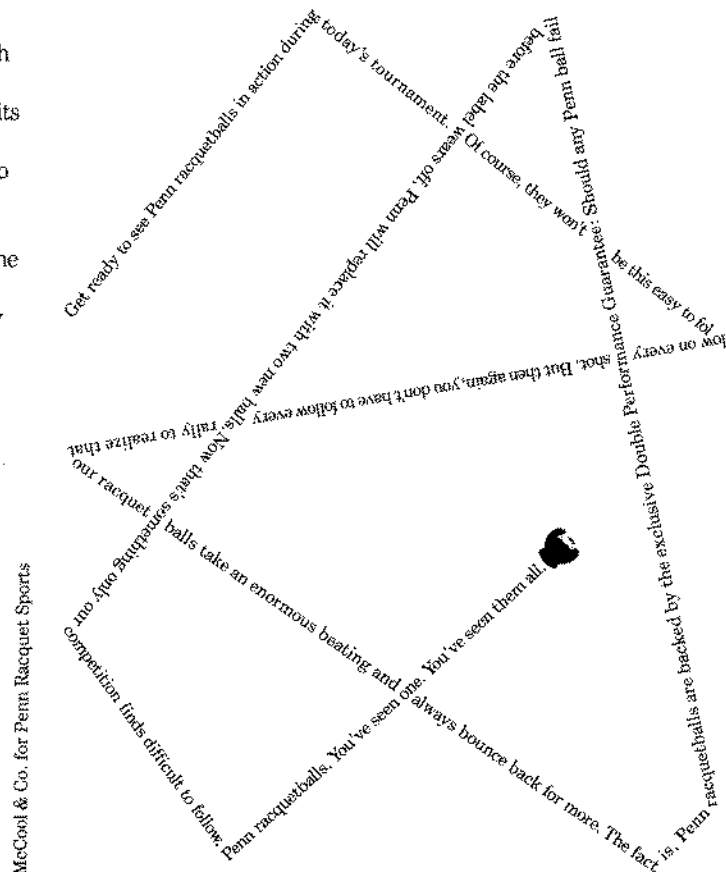
Any mark connecting any two points.

Lines are everywhere. Look around you. They're straight (a pretzel stick), curved (the neck of a swan or a crescent moon), or squiggly (a snake wiggling through the grass). Lines can also be fat, thin, or dotted (as in "Just sign on the dotted line.").

Lines can be used for different things. They organize (show where to color in a coloring book), direct ("Follow the yellow brick road."), separate (the lane lines on a highway), suggest an emotion (a jagged line of lightning can look violent), or create a rhythm (a picket fence).

You can use lines to do the same things in your layouts. A *rule* is a line that separates one part of your layout from another. Vertical rules can be used to separate columns. You can use dotted or dashed lines to connect information: Food items on a menu are often linked to their prices this way. You could use curved lines to suggest a stringed instrument and convey elegance and beauty (like a swan) in a symphony poster.

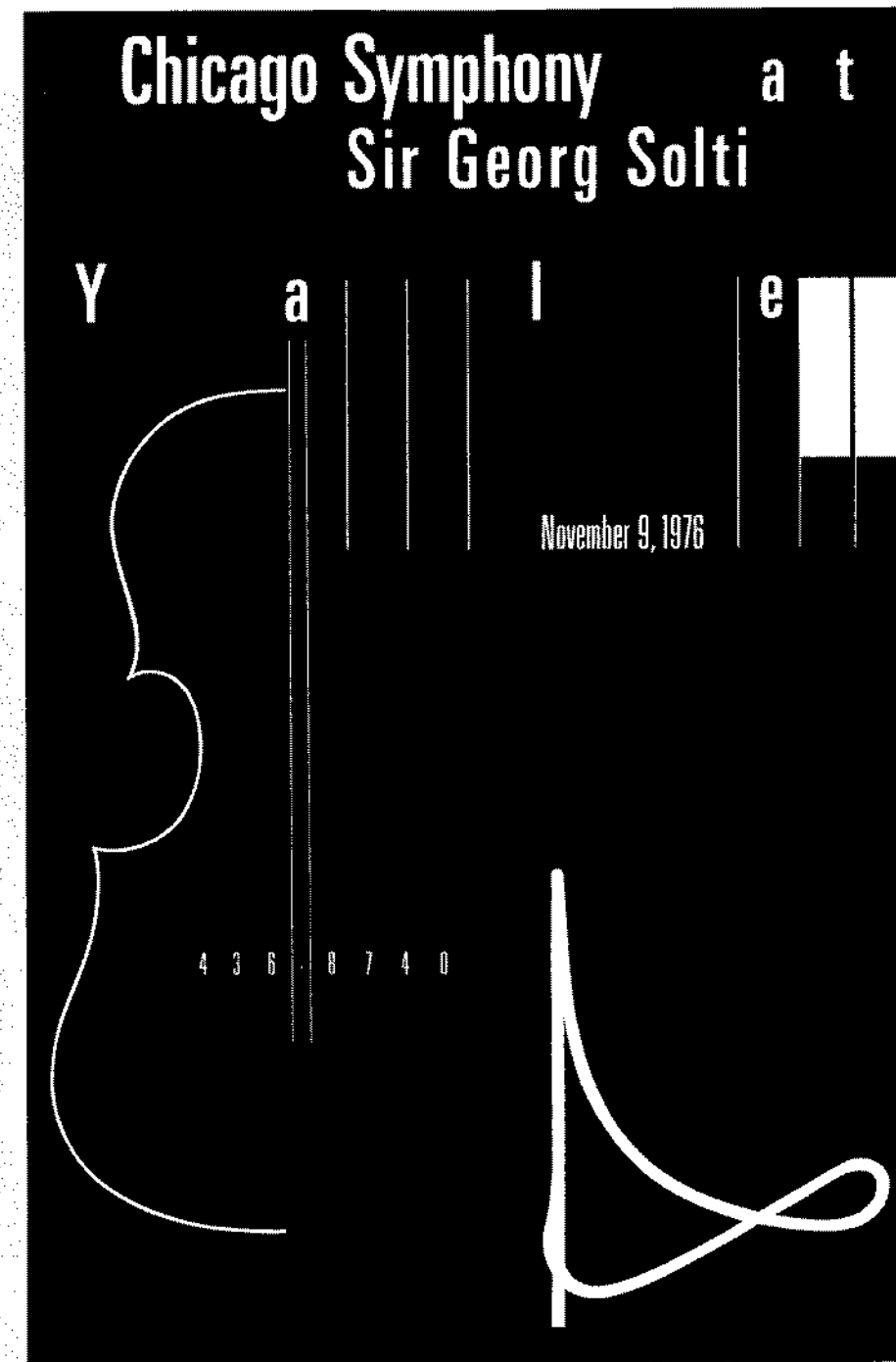
The type follows the path of an imaginary ball that changes direction as it hits the edges of the piece. The type leads viewers to the visual of the product to reinforce the connection between the two. The strong baseline pulls the eye so readers will follow the copy.



McCool & Co. for Penn Racquet Sports

## Exercise

In this exercise, you'll create a variety of lines that evoke different moods or feelings to discover what effects you can achieve. Draw a row of thin, straight lines with a sharp pencil on a piece of paper. On another piece of paper, draw a row of loose, curvy lines with something that will make a broad, soft line—lipstick, paintbrush, or crayon. Don't make your row neat and tidy like the pencil lines. On a third sheet of paper, use a marker with a fairly fine point to draw several jagged lines across the sheet. Compare the three sketches. Do the pencil lines look stiffer and more formal? Mechanical or hard-edged? Neater and better organized than the other two? Do the curvy lines look softer and more delicate? Do they suggest quiet and calm, or activity? How about the jagged lines? Do they look sharp and angry? Do they suggest motion or action?



Mike Zender for The Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Lines serve three purposes in this piece. They create a sense of *motion*. The line in the lower right mimics the movements of a conductor's baton. Lines suggest the *shape* of a stringed instrument and piano keys. The arrangement of the "piano keys" and the type create a pleasing *rhythm* paralleled by the arrangement across the top of the piece. The result is a symphony poster that captures the elegance of a concert and the rhythm of music.

With line(s) you can:

- Organize information. (Place lines between the columns of numbers in a financial report.)
- Highlight or stress words. (Set off a headline with a rule.)
- Connect bits of information. (Link a caption to the photo it is describing with a line.)
- Define a shape. (Arrange a line of type in the outline of a Christmas tree.)
- Outline a photo to set it off from other elements. (Run a thick line around a photo as a border.)
- Create a grid. (Separate items into columns for a catalog.)
- Create a graph. (Draw a line across a grid to show profit and loss over time.)
- Create a pattern or rhythm by drawing many lines. (Vary thick and thin lines and the spaces between them.)
- Direct the reader's eye or create a sense of motion. (A diagonal line looks more active than a horizontal one does.)
- Suggest an emotion. (Use a curved line in a ballet poster to suggest elegance.)

# Shape: Anything that has height and width.

Everything has a shape. Children learn to identify objects by learning their shapes. They learn that one shape is a pear and that another shape is an apple. They draw simple geometric shapes to illustrate the world: A circle can be the sun. When they begin to read, they discover that letters have different shapes: This shape is *a* but that shape is *w*.

In design, shapes still define objects but they also communicate ideas. In a logo for an international company, a circle could suggest the earth.

Unusual shapes attract attention. People are so accustomed to seeing rectangular photos that photos set in unexpected shapes such as stars catch the reader's attention. Arranging type in a shape other than a vertical column (a rectangle of type) can also add interest.

There are three different kinds of shapes. *Geometric* shapes—triangles, squares, rectangles, circles—are regular and structured. This makes them great building blocks for design. *Natural* shapes—animal, plant, human—are irregular and fluid. Borders that look as if they're made of ivy vines have an airy, open feeling. *Abstracted* shapes are simplified versions of natural shapes. The symbol denoting facilities for the handicapped (a stylized figure in a wheelchair) is an abstracted shape.

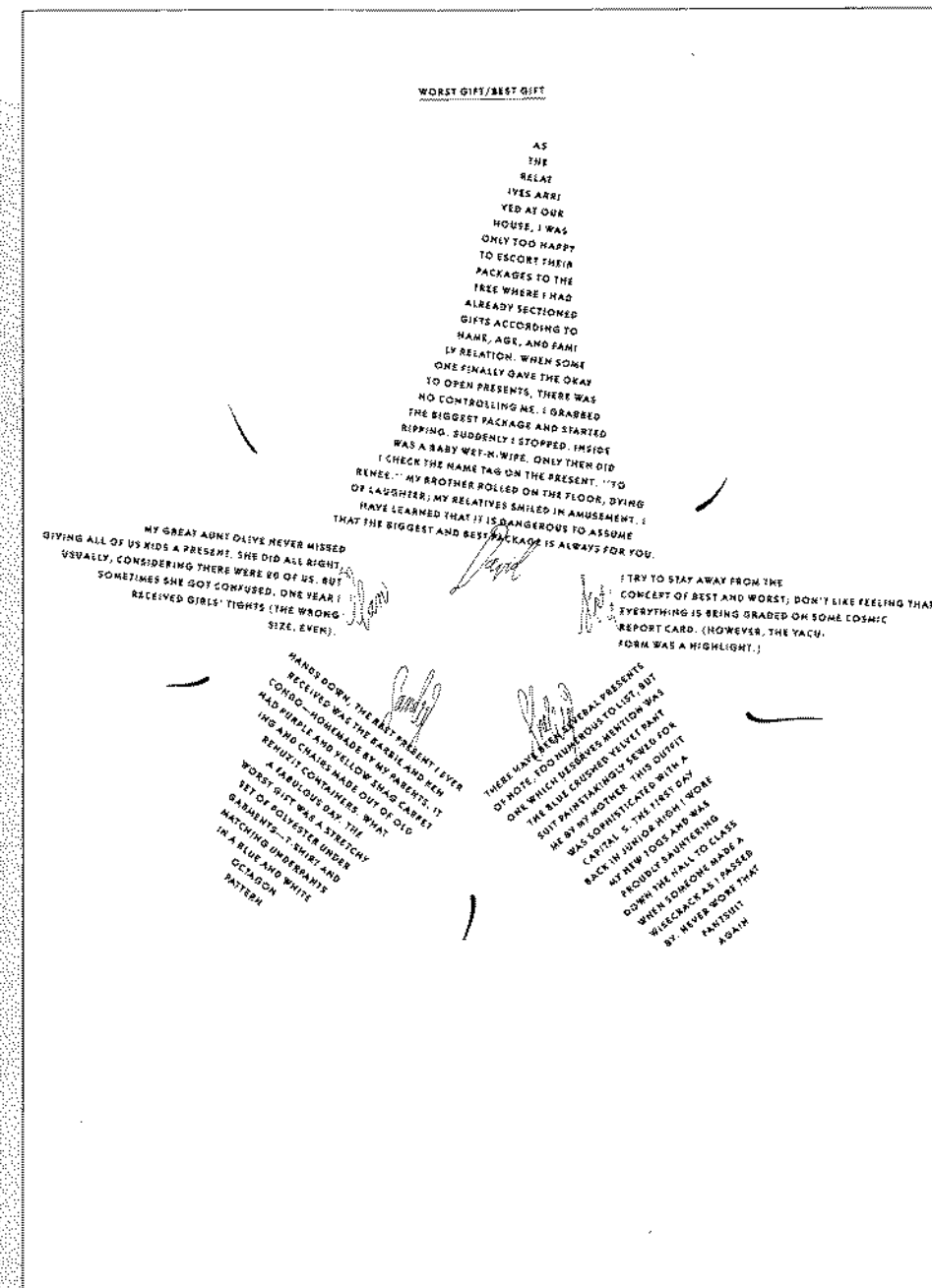


Wages Design for First Union Bank, Atlanta, Georgia

Shapes can add fun and excitement to any piece. Many of the photos on this cover have been outlined to show off their interesting shapes, and the Atlanta skyline is enhanced by a ripple effect. The repetition of the triangles as letterforms in the word *ATLANTA* provides a steady rhythm to pull the piece together.

## Exercise:

The shapes you'll work with in layouts will actually be blocks of copy or visuals. But they're still basically shapes, so for this exercise we'll work with solid shapes. Cut six rectangles in the following sizes out of a single sheet of colored paper: 4 1/4" x 1 1/2" (12cm x 4cm), 1 3/4" x 1 1/2" (4.5cm x 4cm), 3 1/4" x 2 1/2" (8.5cm x 6.5cm), 2 1/2" x 1 1/2" (6.5cm x 4cm), 2 3/4" x 1 3/4" (6.5cm x 4.5cm), and 1 1/2" x 3 3/4" (4cm x 8.5cm). Use them to create different arrangements of shapes on an 8 1/2" x 11" (size A4) sheet of white paper, looking for pleasing combinations. After you complete each layout, make a quick sketch of it so you can compare them later. When you've made as many layouts as you want (but more than one) study them all. Ask yourself which layouts you like best and why you like them. How would you change those you don't?



Barsuhn Design's 1990 Christmas card features the Christmas memories of the five people who make up their staff. The type for each page of memories has been arranged in a different shape—star, present, Christmas tree and ornament. To add playfulness to this typographic illustration, the designers allowed a little irregularity to occur, but you still can see the shape is a star.

With shape you can:

- Crop a photo in an interesting way. (Drop it into an oval.)
- Symbolize an idea. (A heart symbolizes love.)
- Make a block of copy more interesting. (Set the copy for a Fourth of July ad in the shape of a star.)
- Create a new format. (Make the whole brochure the shape of a triangle.)
- Highlight information. (Run a screened or tinted shape behind important copy.)
- Imply letterforms. (Use a triangle to represent the letter *a*.)
- Tie the piece to the subject matter. (Use geometric shapes on an architect's brochure and natural, curvy shapes on a zoo brochure.)
- Tie together all the elements on a layout. (Use square bullets and square copy blocks and crop photos square.)

# Texture

The look or feel of a surface.

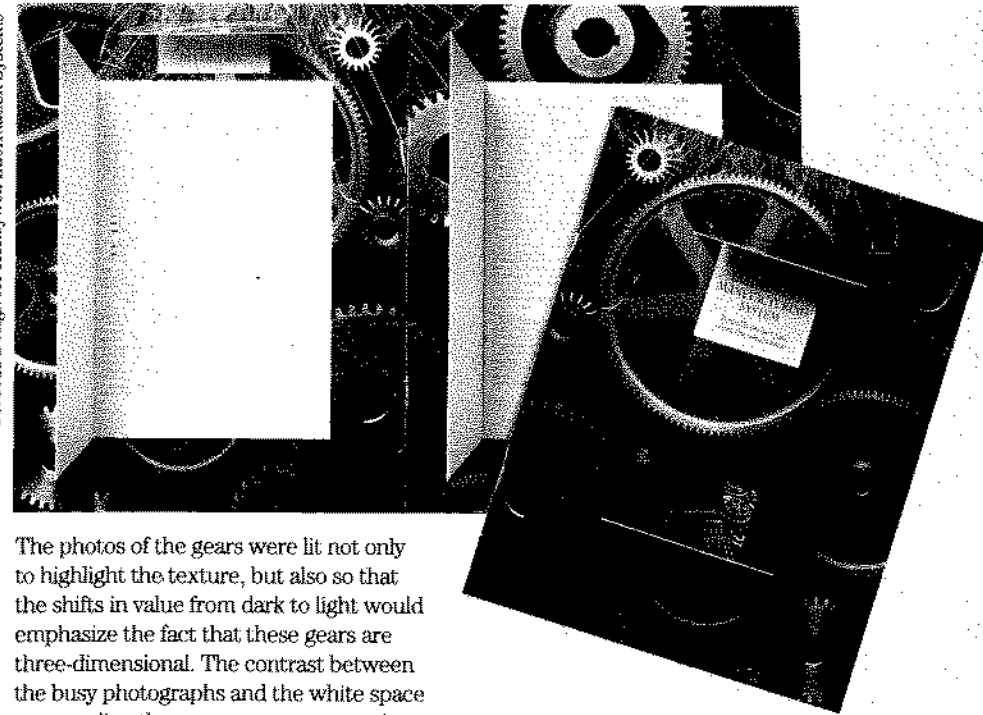
The world would be very dull without texture. Imagine a tree without its rough bark or a leopard without its fur.

You can use texture to add richness and dimension to your layouts, too. *Tactile texture* can actually be felt. If you print a piece on uncoated, rough paper or use *embossed* type (printed to create a raised surface), you'll give it tactile texture. *Visual texture* creates the *illusion* of texture on the printed piece. Wallpaper is often printed so it appears to be made of a fabric such as linen. Even blocks of type have visual texture from the patterns of light and dark created by the letters and the spaces between them.

*Pattern* is actually a kind of visual texture. When an image or a line of type is repeated over and over—on wrapping paper, for example—the rhythm of the lights and darks adds dimension to a surface. That's why patterns make wonderful backgrounds or borders in layouts.

Communicate on an extra level—through a real or imagined sense of touch. A repeated pattern of roses creates a feeling of elegance. Printing on a softly textured paper with light pastel colors suggests delicacy. You can also use texture for emphasis. Heavy black type against a soft pattern or texture reinforces the impact of the type.

Cordella Design for Honeywell Information Systems



The photos of the gears were lit not only to highlight the texture, but also so that the shifts in value from dark to light would emphasize the fact that these gears are three-dimensional. The contrast between the busy photographs and the white space surrounding the copy, accentuates rather than detracts from the copy.

## Exercise

Collect different materials that have a visual texture—pieces of patterned wrapping paper or wallpaper, blocks of type, pieces of shiny paper, photos of subjects such as leaves, trees or grass (anything with texture), etc. You'll also need pieces of colored paper without much texture. Create several collages to explore which textures look good together and which textured pieces worked well with the colored papers. Which collage do you like best? Why? Do some parts of one collage look better than others? Try to decide why. Maybe some parts have too many textures, maybe some don't have enough variety, or maybe some of the sections worked well separately but don't look good when you study the layout as a whole. If you find that you like some particular combinations of textures or combinations of textures and colors, start a file of these to use when you're making layouts.



The designer turned the type on this poster for the Boston AIGA into a textural statement by repeating the same letterforms in the same sequence for a wrapping paper effect. The nontraditional letterforms combine with the negative leading and wide letterspacing to create a feeling of exciting and vigorous rhythm and movement.

Stoltze Design for the Boston AIGA

You can use texture to:

- Relate an image to its background. (Run a floral pattern around a photo of an elegant, floral picture frame.)
- Give the piece a mood or a personality. (A piece done on soft, textured paper stock gives a feeling of warmth.)
- Create contrast for interest. (Run a solid color around a very textural photo or illustration, or around a block of type.)
- Fool the eye. (Create a wrapping paper pattern by repeating type to add dimension and visual texture.)
- Provoke a particular emotion. (A piece with pictures of trees and flannel shirts produces a different reaction than a piece with pictures of chrome and glass objects.)
- Create a feeling of richness and depth.
- Add liveliness and activity. (Foil stamp a word or two on a letterhead.)



# Space:

The distance or area between or around things.

When designing a layout you need to consider not only where you'll place each line and shape, but also where they'll be relative to each other. You must think about how much space you want around and between each element. It's similar to arranging furniture. You have to consider how much space you have. ("Can I get everything in here and leave room for people to walk around?") You have to think about how the type and images will work together. ("Should the couch face the fireplace or the television?") And finally, you have to consider how it all looks. ("Does it look funny having the tall bookcase next to the couch?")

Even when you have a lot of elements in a piece, you still must have some blank areas free of images and text (*white space*). This open space provides rest for the eye and visually organizes what's on the page. The white space between columns of type on the pages of books provides boundaries to help the reader move through text easily.

The placement and the value of the shapes on the page create spatial relationships and *focal points* (centers of interest). If you surround a big word with a lot of white space, the reader's eye will be drawn directly to that word, even if there are a lot of words elsewhere on the page.

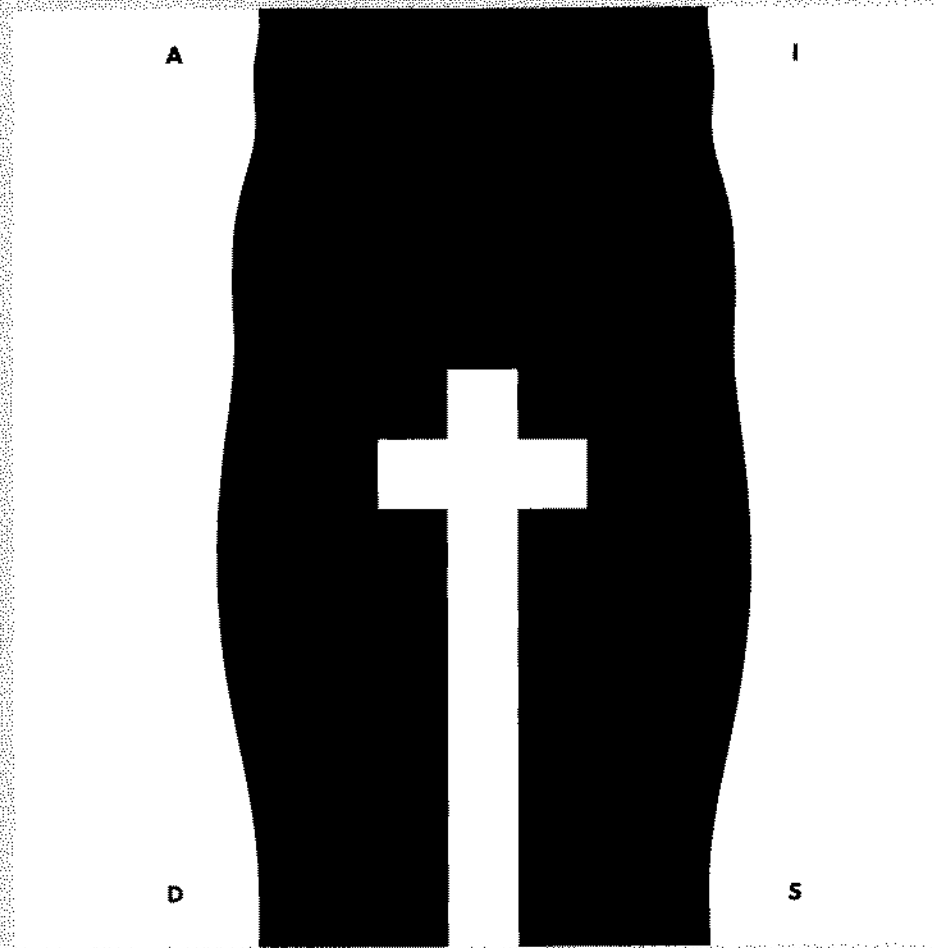


This ad has a very striking dimensional quality. The large figure that bleeds off the page appears to leap into the viewer's space, an effect that is enhanced by overlapping that figure onto two others to bring it farther forward. Contrasting the largest figure with the smallest makes the smaller look farther back in the piece, adding to its dimensional quality. White space has been used quite effectively to create a sense of motion. Having the largest area of white space located at the left-hand side reinforces the illusion that the runner is moving off the page.

## Exercise

Effective use of space helps make your layouts attractive, organized, and functional. Cut several ads that are roughly the same size from a magazine or newspaper. Study the white space in each. How much white space does each ad have? How has it been used? Does it separate elements from one another or tie them together? Does it set off an important element, or create a border inside the piece? Is there enough white space or too little? Now compare the ads. Which are most effective in terms of white space? Why?

Space is also important in working with type. Collect samples of type that look different—dark, light, big, small, many words or few words. Which samples are easier to read than others? Why? As a general rule, you'll find that the samples you found easier to read are those that have the right amount of space around the type to make clear what goes together and what doesn't (although the spacing around type is sometimes deliberately made extremely large or small to achieve a special effect).



This dramatic poster effectively creates negative shapes with space to deliver its message about AIDS and safe sex. The white spaces that border the piece create the illusion that the black space is a figure. The cross created by the white space inside the black area symbolizes both the genitals and death—the major cause and consequence of AIDS.

You can use space to:

- Give the eye a visual rest. (Leave plenty of white space on a spread otherwise filled with copy.)
- Create ties between elements. (Put less space between elements to make them look related.)
- Form positive and negative shapes.
- Give a layout a three-dimensional quality. (An element that is overlapped by another looks as if it's farther back.)
- Highlight an element. (Put a lot of empty space around something important.)
- Make a layout easy to follow. (Put ample margins around a piece.)
- Create tension between two elements. (Place two photos so they are almost touching each other.)
- Make a page dynamic. (Have unequal spacing between elements.)
- Make type as legible as possible. (Allow comfortable spacing between letters, words and lines of type.)

# Size:

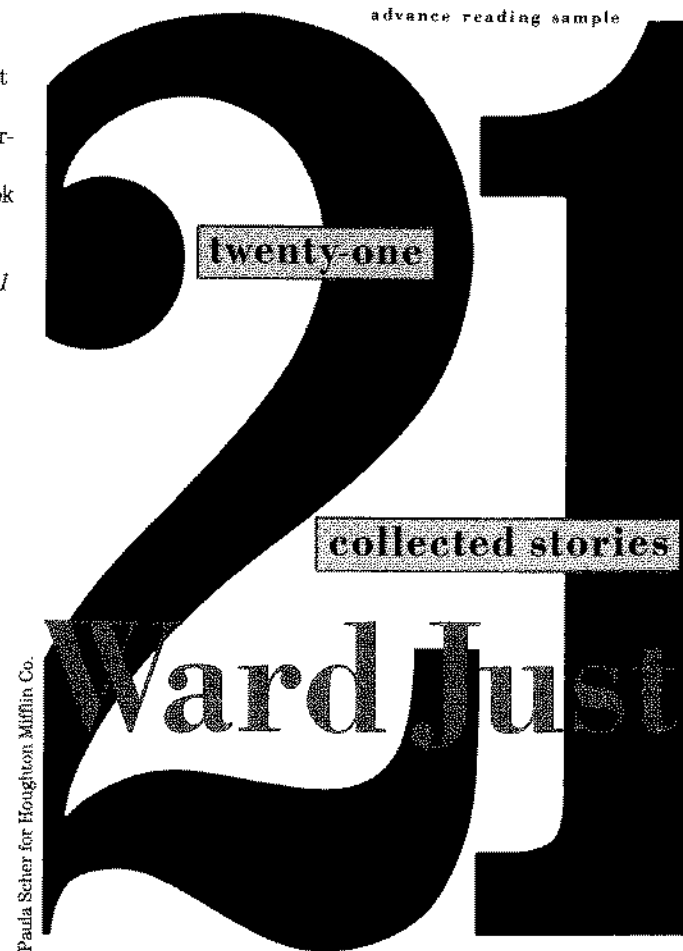
How big or small something is.

Size can function: We buy a car that fits the size of our family. Size can attract: We are in awe of huge skyscrapers and tiny babies. Size can organize: We line up kids shortest to tallest for a procession.

Size plays an important role in making a layout functional, attractive and organized. You have to consider the size of the piece itself. Will its use limit its size—must it fit into a #10 envelope? Or does attractiveness come first—should it be oversized so it catches the eye when it's received?

To make a layout functional, select type sizes and images that are easy for the intended viewer to see and read from the intended viewing distance. In a brochure for a retirement home that is targeted to potential residents, make sure the type is large enough for an older person to read. Use size to attract by contrasting large and small elements or take a photo of a very small object and blow it up so it *bleeds* off (extends beyond the trimmed edge of) the page. To help organize your layout, make the first thing you want the viewer to see the largest, and the least important element the smallest. Headlines are usually larger than the text that follows them. (Large objects appear closer than small ones, so you can reinforce importance by using size to create artificial spatial relationships.)

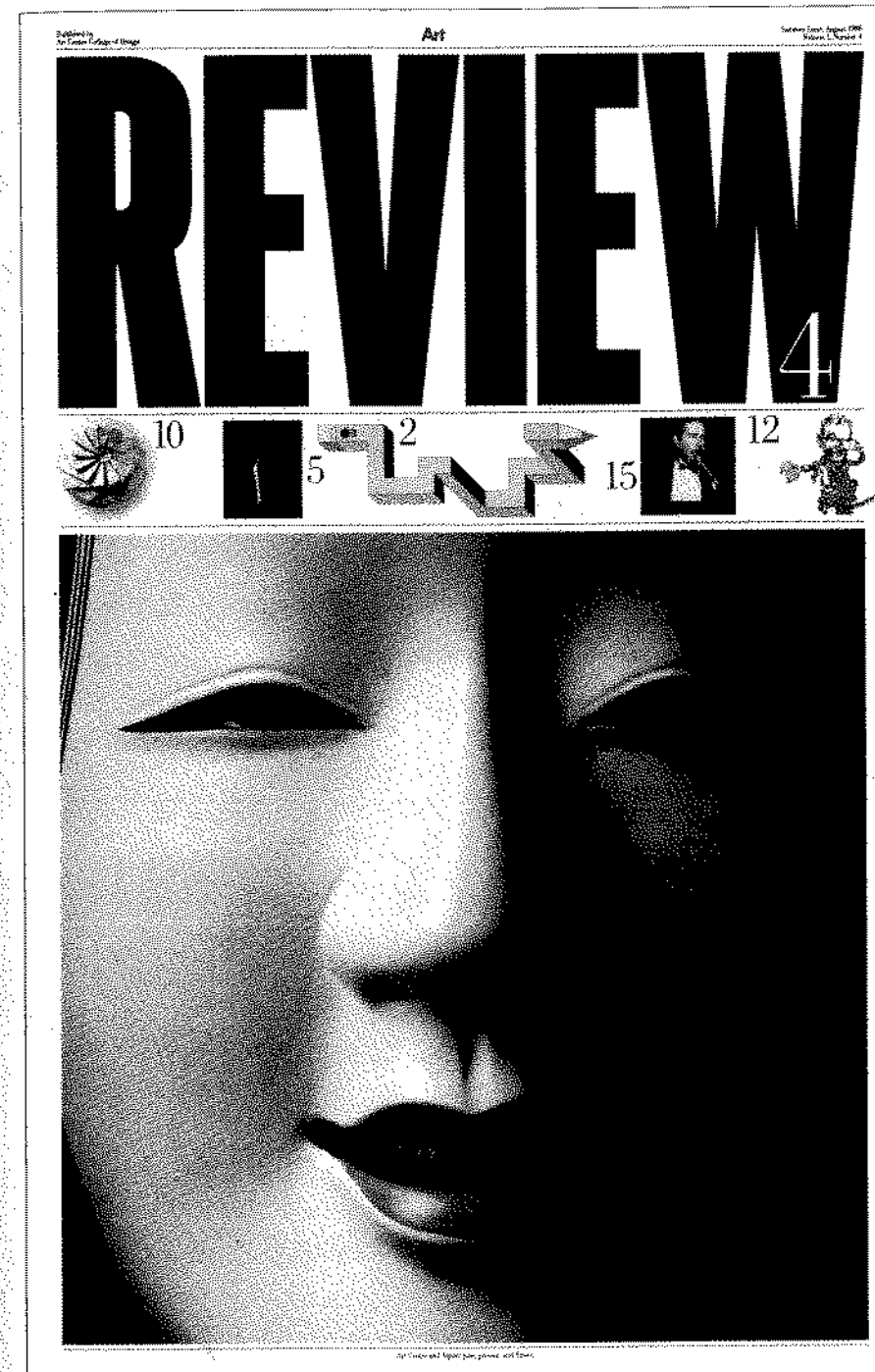
Here the designer has turned numbers into a visual to attract readers. The oversized numbers that bleed off the page surprise the eye and then lead to the author's name and the book title. Although it's more usual to emphasize the most important word in a title, the large 21 will definitely make the piece stand out in its environment.



## Exercise

In this exercise, you'll see the effect of size on a layout. Cut ten 1" (2.5 cm) squares from a piece of colored paper and ten 3" (7.5cm) squares from another sheet of the same color. First, try out different arrangements of only the small squares on an 8½"x11" (size A4) sheet of white paper. Make a sketch of each layout so you can compare them later. Select the ones you feel are the most attractive and set them aside. Repeat the exercise using only the large squares. Let some overlap each other or bleed off the page. (You don't have to use them all.) Finally, repeat the exercise using some small and some large squares.

Compare the most attractive of the small-only, large-only, and large-small layouts to each other. Which have elements that stand out? Which are more attractive?



Size contrasts add interest to this cover. The bottom photo has been enlarged and cropped so it looks larger than life. Contrasted with it are the small photos and illustrations right above it. The proportions of this piece are also attractive. The size of the piece (tabloid) lets the designer work with a big visual with lots of impact. The big photo occupies roughly two-thirds of the cover, but it's balanced by the activity of the type and pictures in the other third.

With size you can:

- Show which element is most important by making it the biggest.
- Make elements come forward or recede on the page. (Larger ones tend to come forward.)
- Give the reader a sense of scale. (In a photo, show a hand with an object for comparison of size.)
- Make all elements easy to see. (Use bigger type and pictures on a poster that will hang on a wall.)
- Get a piece noticed. (If you mail it in an envelope that's larger or smaller than a #10—regular business letter size—it will attract more attention.)
- Contrast two elements to add interest. (Put a large photo beside a tiny line of type.)
- Break up space in an interesting way.
- Make elements fit together properly in the piece. (Set type in a small size to make room for more pictures.)
- Establish a consistent look throughout a brochure or newsletter. (Make all heads the same size.)



# Value: The darkness or lightness of an area.

Value gives shape and texture to everything around us. Although colors have value (a *dark* red dress with a *light* red jacket), it's often easier to visualize values in terms of black and white. If you take a black-and-white photo of a street, shadowed areas will appear black, light-colored houses will appear white, and other areas will be shades of gray between those two extremes. The way that tree trunks are shaded with grays from the lightest to the darkest parts tells us they are round. Also, the dark and light patterns created by the uneven surface of the trunk tells us it has texture.

Every element in a layout has value. Because value is relative, an element's value can be affected by its background and other elements around it. Setting a lot of type in a small area of white paper will make the paper look as if it has turned gray.

Value is an important tool for expressing your theme. You can use *slight* variations from light to dark (*low contrast value*) to create a calm, quiet mood. Soft, grainy photos set against a pastel background create such a mood. Using a *great* variation from light to dark (*high contrast value*) conveys a feeling of drama or excitement. A yellow and black striped background could communicate excitement.

Here, the different values of type help organize the piece. The reader follows the dark type and then the lighter type. The contrasts between the dark and the light type and the dark type and the white background will attract attention to the piece.

Frankenberry, Loughlin & Constable, Inc. for Racine Literary Council

## IFREADINGTH

*One in five Americans can't read.*

## ISISHARDIM

*They often can't find work. When they do, they earn about 42% less than*

## AGINENOTRE

*high school graduates. If you know someone struggling with this problem,*

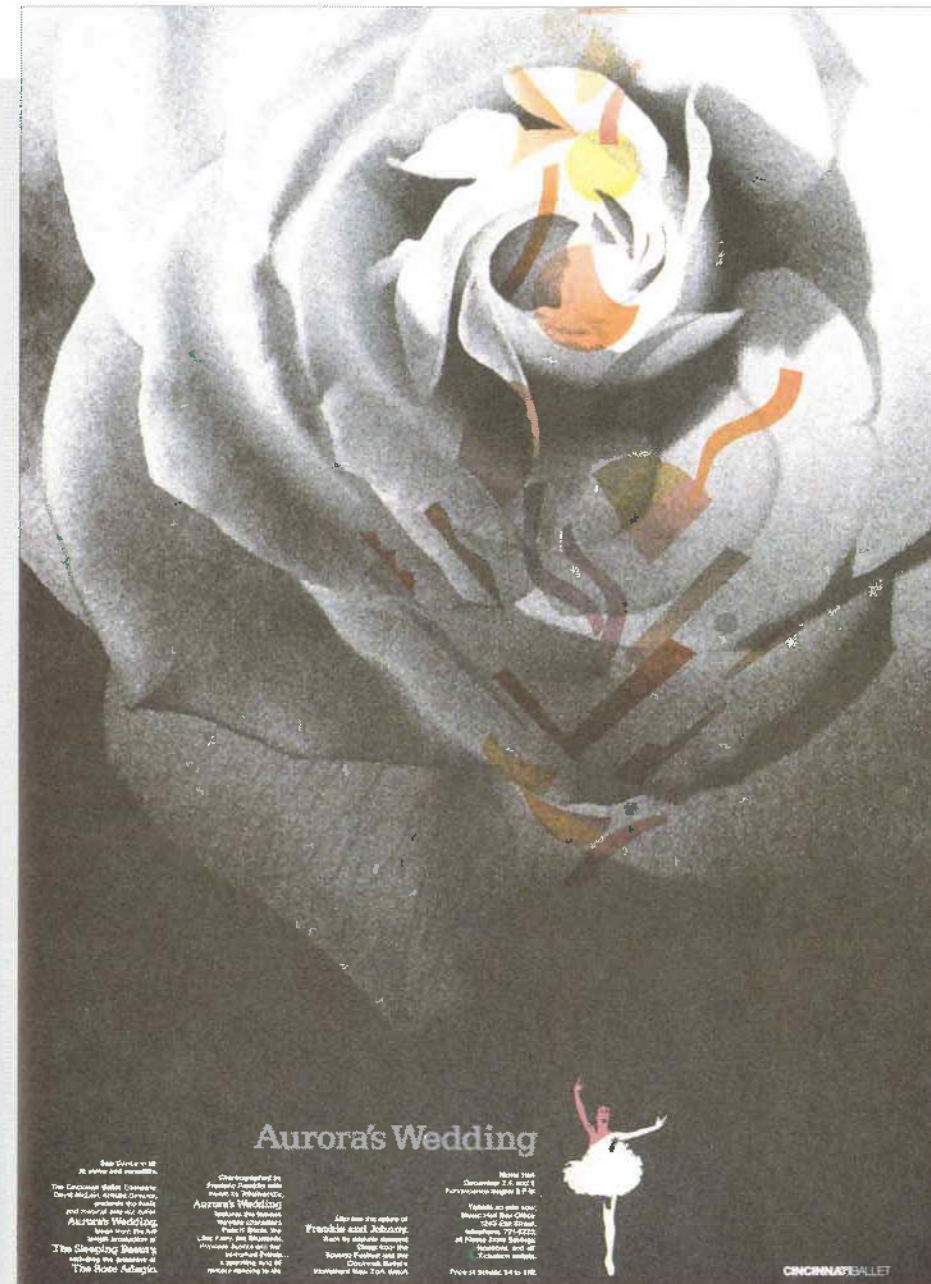
## ADINGATALL.

*call 652-9495. We'll help sort things out.*



### Exercise

To begin working with values, create a value scale. Get some black and some white acrylic paint. Draw a row of twenty 3" (7.5cm) squares on white paper. Paint a white square. Then add a little black paint to the next one. Keep painting squares, adding more black each time, until you get an almost black one. (You may need more than twenty squares.) Then paint a black square. Cut out the squares and lay them next to each other until you find ten that go from black to white with each square looking about the same amount darker than the one before it. Now use your value scale to create some collages. Create three collages by tearing pieces from magazines—one where the pieces have values that match the lightest four squares, one where they match the darkest four squares and one that uses pieces that match both the four lightest and the four darkest squares. Compare your collages. What mood does each create? Calm? Somber? Peaceful? Dramatic?



The value contrast between the type and its background, and the accent provided by the little figure of the dancer, which is the second lightest element in the piece, draw the eye through the poster to the type. Value also contributes to the piece's mood. Having the lighter area at the top and the darker area at the bottom gives the piece a light, airy quality, but the value changes are kept gradual to create a soft, quiet feeling.

With value you can:

- Visually separate different kinds of copy. (Use large type and heavy leading for body copy—lighter value—and tightly packed, smaller type for sidebars—darker value.)
- Lead the eye across the page. (Run a dark to a light graded tone or tint in the background.)
- Create a pattern, such as a checkerboard effect.
- Give the illusion of volume and depth. (Shade a shape to make it look three-dimensional.)
- Give a piece an understated, subtle feeling. (Use only light values.)
- Make a layout dramatic. (Use areas of black against areas of stark white.)
- Emphasize an element. (Make the most important element very light and all the others dark.)
- Make objects appear to be in front of or in back of each other. (Dark areas recede in space.)



# Color: The ultimate tool for symbolic communication.

Color does many things in our lives. It helps us identify objects: Apples are red. It helps us understand things: Green means go. And it helps us communicate feelings and moods: We say we feel blue when we're sad.

In your layouts color will convey moods, identify objects, and relay messages. For example, using soft pastels in an ad can suggest a quiet or romantic mood. Putting a colored box behind a group of photos says they all belong together. An important warning might be printed in bright red type.

Color adds a lot to a layout. But when selecting colors, think carefully about what you want the color to do. What color is most appropriate? Will green or gold better suggest wealth in a piece for a bank? What color appears on pieces for similar companies? Should this piece look like the others or be very different?

How you use color makes a difference in the final result. Pick up a color from a photo for a background color in the piece, and you get a certain look. If you have a photo of a sunset and repeat those colors in the background, you'll have a piece with a gentle, soft feeling. Use a contrasting color with the same photo, and you'll get a different look. Surround a photo of a sunset with lots of black, and you'll have action and drama instead.

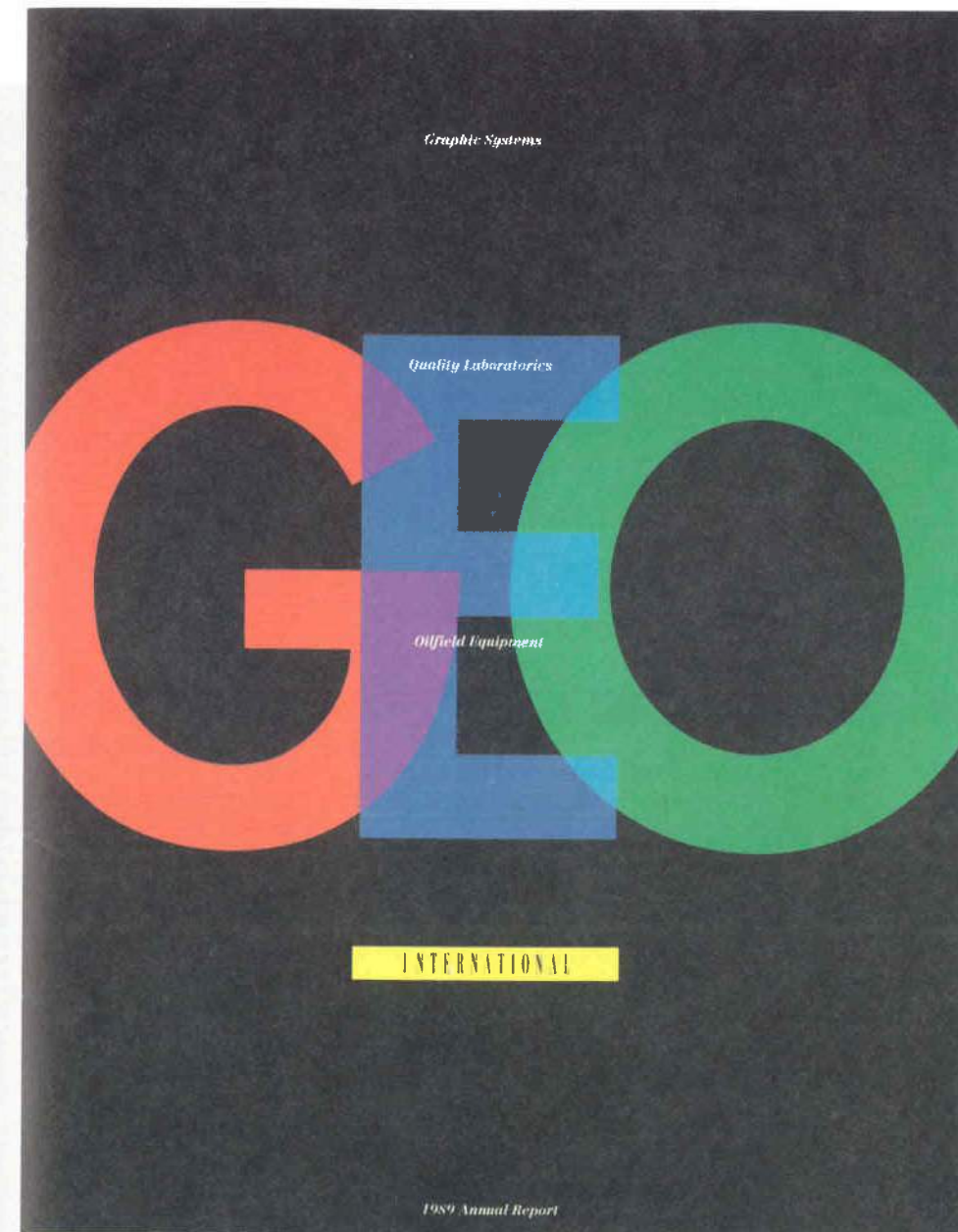
Printing all the photos in soft, subtle shades of blue reinforces the headline "Am I Blue?" in a very direct way. This monochromatic piece would stand out in any magazine environment. Having color would set it off from heavy text or black-and-white pieces while using only one color will set it off from multicolored pieces.



Dreantel Doyle Partners for InFashion magazine

## Exercise

You can create dramatically different effects by using color. Tear several sheets of different shades of blue paper and a sheet of orange paper into pieces. Create a collage on a sheet of 8½"x11" (size A4) white paper using only the blue pieces. Then make a collage that combines the blue and the orange pieces on another sheet. What impression or feeling does each create? Which is more peaceful? Which is more exciting? Now, lay a black-and-white photo (any photo) on top of each. Does the photo stand out better on one? Does one layout look confusing? Repeat the exercise creating one collage from pastel colored papers and one from bright colored papers. How do these differ? Lay a black-and-white photo against each. Which works best?



Weisz, Yang, Dunkelberger Design for GEO International Corporation

Color gives life to a simple layout. Showing three colors blended together reflects the company's three divisions that are combined into one corporation. The overlapping effect is created by changing the color on different parts of the E. The contrast between the black background and the colors on the cover makes those colors really pop.

You can use color to:

- Highlight important copy. (Run all subheads in red so they'll stand out.)
- Attract the eye.
- Tell the reader where to look first. (Copy in a red circle will be read first.)
- Make elements appear to vibrate, creating a feeling of excitement. (Try purple and green together, or orange with blue.)
- Tie a layout together. (Repeat a color from a photo or an illustration for the background, or as colored type.)
- Organize. (Color code parts of a manual or training document.)
- Set off different parts of a chart or graph.
- Create a mood. (Bright colors convey excitement while pastels soothe.)
- Group elements together or isolate them. (Set off an important block of copy by putting it on a tint, or wrap a tint around several pictures.)
- Provoke an emotional response.



# Conclusion:

The elements of design are the ingredients for making a good layout. Which elements you choose and how you combine them will depend upon the type of project and the message or feeling you want to communicate. Let's review the elements of design and how they can work; understanding this information is the key to making the right choices for a layout.

- **Line:** Any mark connecting any two points. It can organize, direct, separate, or suggest emotion in a layout.
- **Shape:** Anything that has height and width. Shapes define objects, attract attention, communicate ideas and add excitement.
- **Texture:** The look or feel of a surface. Texture adds richness and dimension, emphasizes, and suggests mood or feeling.

- **Space:** The distance or area between or around things. Space separates or unifies, highlights, and gives the eye a visual rest.
- **Size:** How big or small something is. Size shows what's most important, attracts attention, and helps you fit your layout together.
- **Value:** The darkness or lightness of an area. Value separates, suggests mood, adds drama, and creates the illusion of depth.
- **Color:** The ultimate tool for symbolic communication. Color conveys moods, attracts, highlights important copy, and organizes.

The next time you find yourself staring at a blank piece of paper or a mound of type and pictures, review the role of each element. Decide whether it is an appropriate ingredient and how it might be combined with others to make a good layout.