

Principles of Design

AP 2-D Art and Design ■ Topic 2

AP 2-D Art and Design



Principles of Design

What we will cover

- 1 Balance
- 2 Emphasis & focal point
- 3 Contrast
- 4 Movement & rhythm
- 5 Pattern & repetition
- 6 Proportion & scale
- 7 Unity & variety
- 8 Composition

1 Balance

Principles of Design

└ Balance

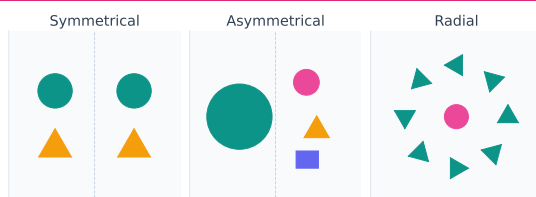
Balance – the distribution of visual weight

The **principles of design** 设计原则 are the rules for **arranging** the elements. The first is **balance** 平衡.

Visual weight 视觉重量 depends on size, colour, value and position – a **small bright** shape can balance a **large dull** one.

Principles of Design
└ Balance

Balance – the distribution of visual weight, in detail



AP Art 2-D · Principles · symmetrical, asymmetrical, radial balance
symmetrical, asymmetrical and radial

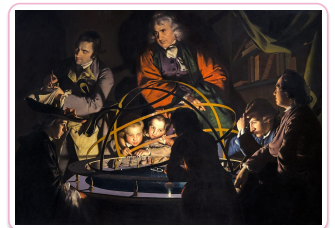
The **principles of design** 设计原则 are the rules for **arranging** the elements – and **balance** 平衡 is the first of them.

Principles of Design
└ Balance

Three kinds of balance

- **Symmetrical** 对称平衡 – mirrors a central axis; **calm and orderly**
- **Asymmetrical** 非对称平衡 – equal **visual weight**; dynamic
- **Radial** 辐射平衡 – arranged around a **central point**

Justify balance through **visual weight**, not just symmetry.



Balance of light, mass and interest across the plane

Balance, and how the eye is carried

Symmetrical (formal) balance	Symmetrical (formal) balance: the halves mirror. Stable, calm, and formal – which is why institutions are drawn this way.
Asymmetrical (informal) balance	Asymmetrical (informal) balance: unlike elements balanced by visual weight – a small dark shape against a large pale one. More dynamic.
Continuity	Continuity: edges and implied lines that carry the eye from one element to the next without a break.
Progressive rhythm	A progressive rhythm repeats an element while changing it a little each time – growing, rotating, fading.

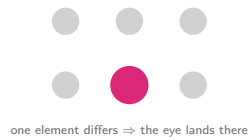
Radial balance is the third kind: elements arranged around a centre, as in a rose window or a mandala.

2 Emphasis & contrast

Emphasis and the focal point

Emphasis 强调 makes one part stand out – the **focal point** 视觉焦点, where the eye is drawn **first**.

- created through **contrast**: size, colour, value, isolation, placement
- leading lines and the rule of thirds place it well
- **subordination** 从属 keeps other areas **quieter** so it leads



Contrast

Contrast 对比 is the **difference** between elements – it creates energy, variety and readability. It can be of value (light/dark), colour (complementary), shape, texture or size.

Strong contrast attracts attention and defines a focal point

Low contrast unifies and calms

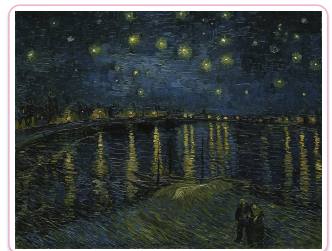
Value and size contrast create a clear **visual hierarchy** 视觉层次 – what the viewer reads first, second, third.

3 Movement & pattern

Movement and rhythm

Movement 动感 leads the eye **through** a work; **rhythm** 节奏 is the repetition that creates a visual **beat**.

Repetition **with variation** keeps rhythm interesting rather than monotonous.



Movement and rhythm lead the eye through the work

Pattern and repetition

Repetition 重复 reuses an element; a **pattern** 图案 arranges it in a **predictable** way.

- repetition of shape, colour or line builds **unity** and rhythm
- a pattern is a repeated **motif** 母题 – regular (a grid) or irregular



Repetition builds pattern and visual rhythm

Too much repetition feels **monotonous** – vary the scale or colour.

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Proportion & unity

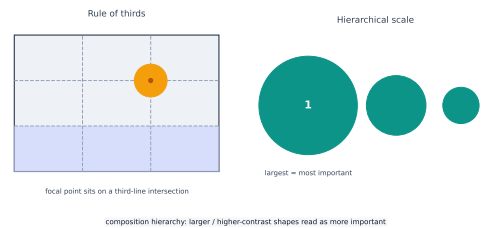
Proportion and scale

Proportion 比例 compares the sizes of **parts within** a work (head to body); **scale** 尺度 is size **relative to** something else.

Hierarchical scale 等级比例 makes the **most important** element the largest.

Exaggerated or distorted proportion can **express emotion**. The **golden ratio** 黄金比例 is a historic guide to pleasing proportions.

The rule of thirds places key elements



The rule of thirds places key elements on the third-lines; hierarchical scale makes the important element largest

Unity with variety

Unity 统一

from repetition, **proximity** 邻近 (grouping), a limited palette

Variety 变化

difference that **prevents monotony**

The best works achieve unity **with** variety – **order that still surprises**.

Harmony 和谐 comes from similar elements. Name the **unifying device** and the **source of interest**.

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Composition

Composition – arranging it all

Composition 构图 is how the elements and principles are arranged within the **picture plane** 画面.

- the **format** 画幅 (portrait, landscape, square) shapes the design
- the **rule of thirds** 三分法 places key elements on the third-lines
- **cropping** 裁剪 decides what is cut – changing emphasis and tension

A strong composition unifies the elements **and** creates a clear focal point – exactly what the 2-D portfolio is judged on.

Worked example – writing about a principle

“Explain the *balance* in this composition.”

*“The large dark shape on the left is balanced by three small bright shapes on the right – this is **asymmetrical balance**, which gives the piece visual weight on both sides while keeping it dynamic rather than static.”*

A full answer names the **principle**, points to **specific evidence** in the work, **and** states the **effect on the viewer**.

Balance



Leonardo's Vitruvian Man: the figure is drawn with near-perfect symmetry about a central vertical axis, and the surrounding circle gives it radial balance too

Exam tips

- For every work, state which **principle** organises it – balance, emphasis, contrast, movement, or unity.
- Justify **balance** through **visual weight**, not just symmetry.
- Ensure one clear **focal point**, and name the **emphasis** technique that creates it.
- Aim for **unity with variety** – name the unifying device and the source of interest.
- Plan **composition** with the **rule of thirds** and thumbnails before committing.

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Recap

Topic 2 – key takeaways

1 Balance

symmetrical, asymmetrical, radial
– argue from visual weight

2 Emphasis

contrast makes one focal point;
subordination keeps the rest quiet

3 Rhythm

repetition with variation; pattern
repeats a motif

4 Unity

unity **WITH** variety; plan with the
rule of thirds

Check yourself

- 1 A small bright shape balances a large dull one. Which balance?
- 2 What keeps non-focal areas quiet?
- 3 What is the difference between proportion and scale?
- 4 Name the composition tool that uses third-lines.

Answers 1. asymmetrical 2. subordination 3. proportion is within the work; scale is relative to something else 4. the rule of thirds