

COMPOSITION AND THE MAKING OF AN IMAGE

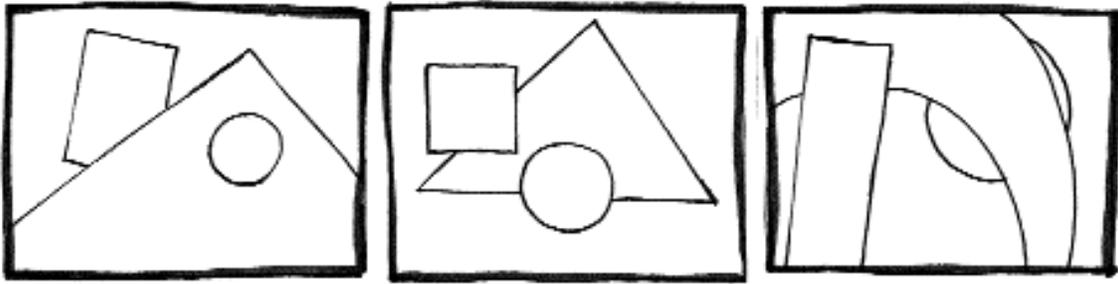
This week we will be talking about composition and design. We'll be talking about **PUTTING YOUR PICTURE TOGETHER**. The best way to do this is the same as anything else: **SIMPLIFY!** Simple designs read best. Some good questions to ask yourself when you're beginning to design anything would be the following:



- 1/ Can you quickly tell what the first read of the second image is meant to be? Can you tell what the second read is? The third?
- 2/ Is the composition balanced? Or does the image feel “off” in some way?
- 3/ Is the image presented in the most interesting or compelling manner possible?

WHAT IS GOOD COMPOSITION?

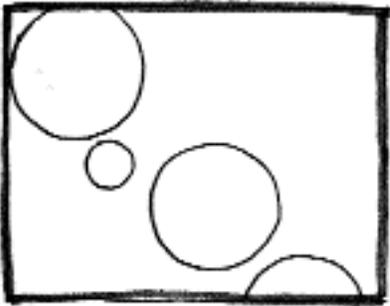
An artist can be the most amazing renderer in the world, with the perfect pitch for value and utilize an elegant line, and **STILL** compose a horrible picture. Why? It's because design hasn't got anything to do with rendering. Design is about creating something that is pleasing to the eye, and yet manages the movement of the eye through the image. If one does this well, one can achieve the desired read of the image. That is, the original intention or message of the image is clear and easily understood. In advertising, a quick first read is absolutely essential, as people tend to skim over images quickly. Until you can communicate your image in a short space of time, in a matter of seconds sometimes, then your image can often go overlooked or misread. This is why a **FIRST READ** is so essential. A **FIRST READ** is the first thing you notice in an image. It's as simple as that.



In the above images, which object is the first read? If it is hard to say, then the design can be improved.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO MAKE A GOOD FIRST READ?

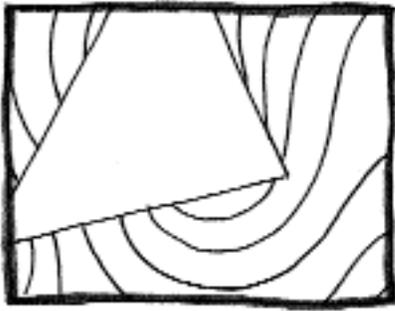
One of the best ways to create a good first read is to use the idea of **CONTRAST**.



CONTRAST OF SIZE: One way to get an object to read first is to keep its size smaller or larger than other objects. In the image on the left, the smallest circle reads first because its size is so different than the other objects.



CONTRAST OF VALUE: An object whose value is different than those surrounding it will also quickly read first.

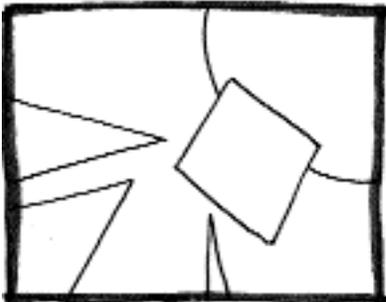


CONTRAST OF SHAPE: An object whose shape is different than those surrounding it will quickly read first.

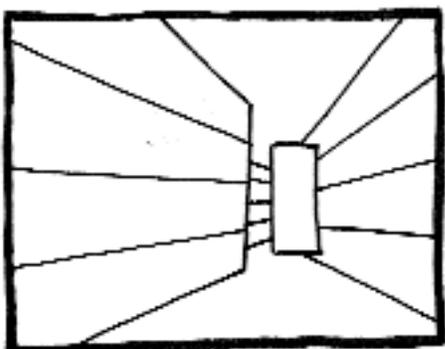
All of these rules of contrast can be used alone and in conjunction with each other to maximize first read. There are many different variations of the rules of contrast, but these are three very commonly used.

Another way to get an object to read first is by using **DIRECTIONAL LINES**. Directional lines are simply purposeful lines in your composition that point towards your first read.

In this image, many lines point towards the diamond in the composition, making it the first read.



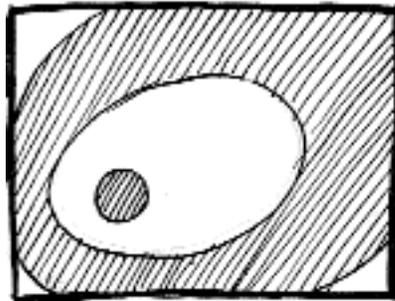
PERSPECTIVE LINES can be used as directional lines to point towards a first read.



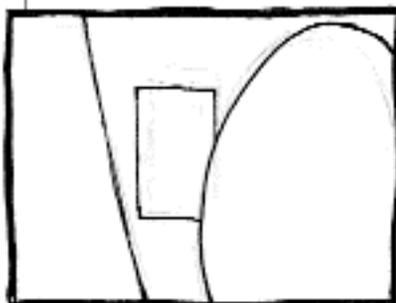
An easy way to tell what you think the first read of an object is, is to squint down at an image. By squinting, you should be able to see quickly what was meant to be the first read. You can do this also to make sure your own images work.

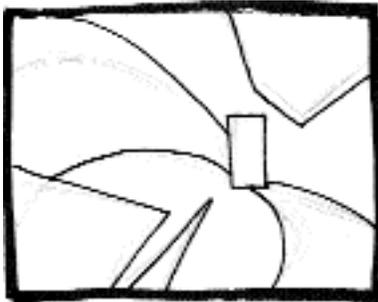
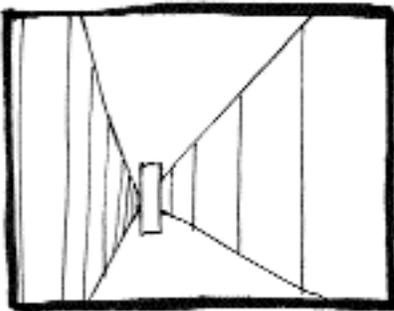
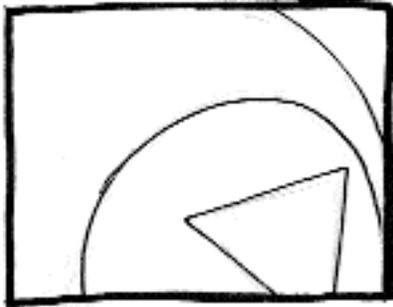
FROM SIMPLE SHAPES TO PRACTICAL DESIGN

As previously mentioned, it's always best to keep designs and compositions simple. Using basic shapes, like squares, circles, triangles, and so forth, is an easy way to begin composing. Once you've established the basic design of the image, rendering the true objects becomes much easier without having to be concerned about whether the design works. This is why making thumbnails is so essential in designing an image -- the more work you've thought out ahead of time, the more successful your final image will be. Thumbnails can be as simple as just shapes to begin with.

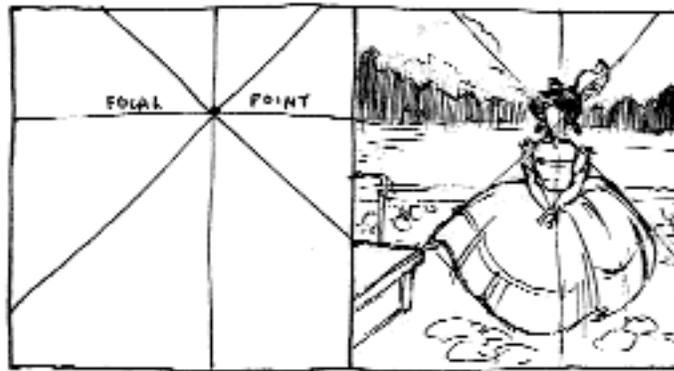


Here's a sample of the simple design on the left, using CONTRAST of SIZE, applied to a thumbnail illustration.





A first read is also sometimes called a common junction of lines. Any line junction creates a focal point.



In the above image, the focal point is created by using the horizon line and an X design through the head, supplemented by directional lines of the dress, clouds, and bench.



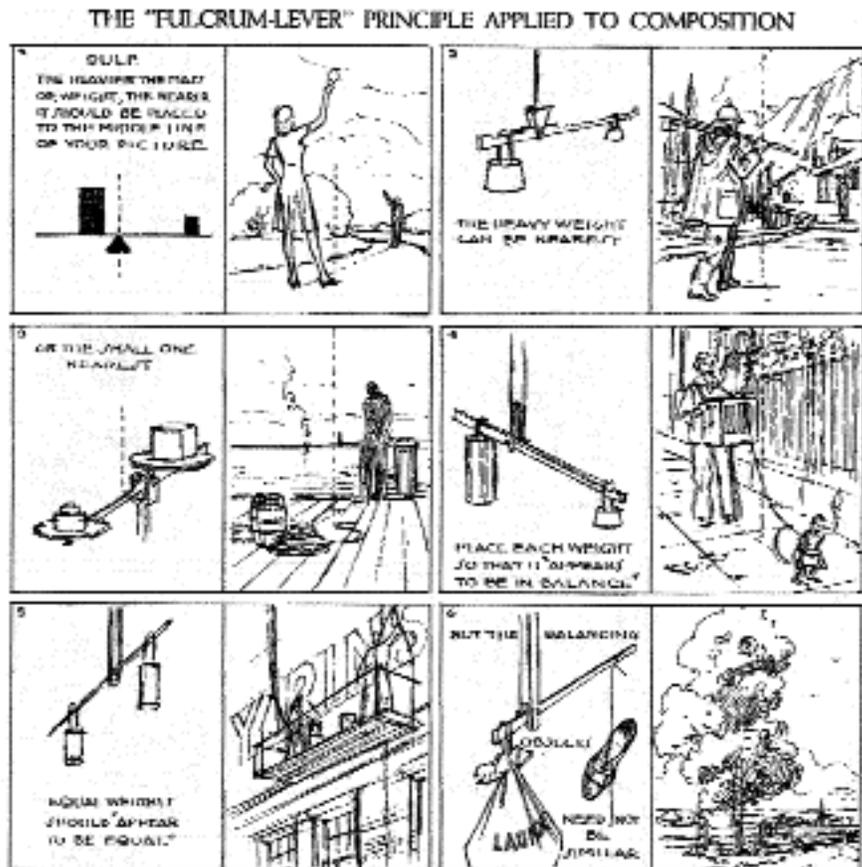
Here's an example of how you can use spiral lines to create a focal point.

ACHIEVING BALANCE IN COMPOSITION

In formal design, an image needs a sense of balance normally to feel pleasing.. You shouldn't feel a sense of uncomfortableness when looking at a picture by getting a sense that somehow the image is "off". This is sometimes created when elements of the composition seem not properly distributed.

Andrew Loomis developed a principle in regards to balance that he called the FULCRUM LEVER principle. "If two forms are equal, let one overlap the other so as to change the contour. Variety is the spice of composition."

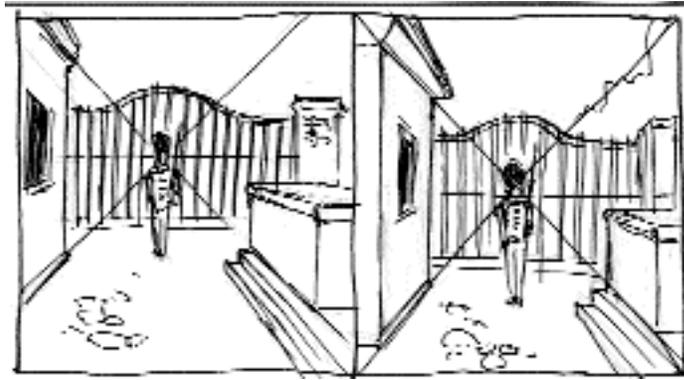
To illustrate his point, he used a fulcrum, which is the middle point of balance. If you achieve a sense of equilibrium with the fulcrum, you achieve balance in the image. Basically, heavier objects should be closed close to the center of the image, and smaller objects further away, so that an equilibrium in weight is felt among them. The images on the left illustrate this. It's a bit of an advanced principle, but the effect can be quite nice.



THINGS TO AVOID IN INFORMAL COMPOSITION

An image can appear to be due to several reasons. Sometimes they are easily recognized, and sometimes it is just the image. You can keep an eye out for a few common mistakes, though.

Avoid symmetry in informal design. You should try to let one shape overtake another. Also, avoid making the focal point the exact center of your image. It tends to make the image boring this way.

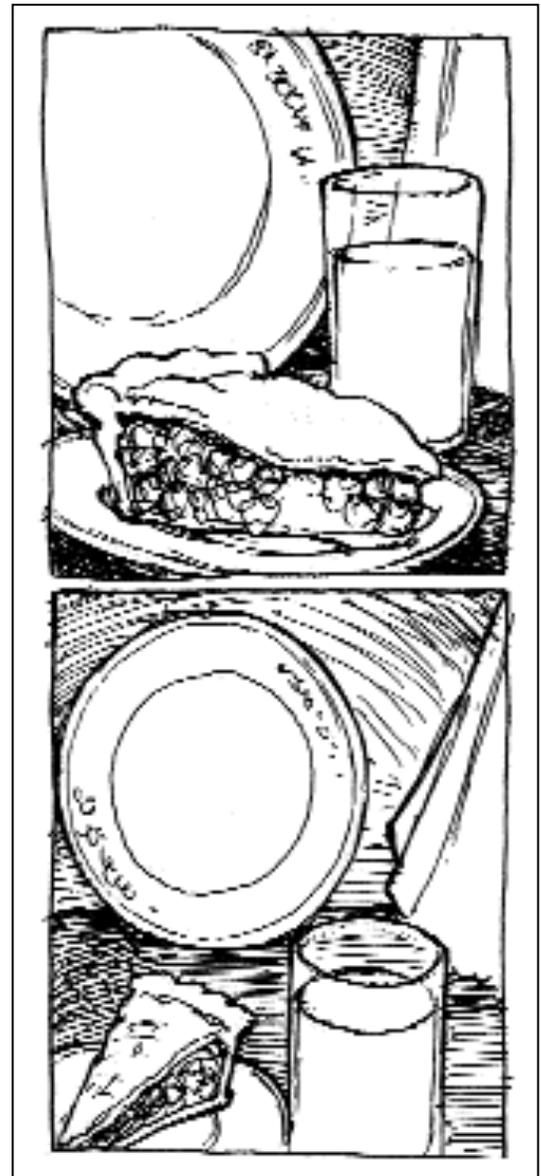


Looking at the images above, the first image has the figure directly in the center of the image, with directional lines pointing out to the corners. The image on the right has the figure skewed more to the side, giving it a slightly greater depth and dimension.

Avoid tangents when cropping. A tangent is when a line or object touches another object and produces a series of directional lines. In the top image on the left, the plate is placed in the image such that the edge of the plate is exactly against the edge of the image, creating an uncomfortable balance there. On the bottom image, half the plate is cropped out, creating a directional line with the plate edge that is present.

Avoid directional lines running exactly through the corners of the image. The top image shows the pie pointing to the corner, and the contour of the curtain running to the top right corner. This points the eye out of the composition, without letting it rest inside the image long enough. In the bottom image, the curtain is pulled to the left, and the pie is turned in.

Keep in mind the path that you want the eye to follow. When necessary, use objects or light and shadow to keep the eye focused on the image. The longer you have the audience's attention, the more successful your piece will be.



Bear in mind that all these rules of composition are simply tried and true techniques. It doesn't mean that each rule has to be adhered to at all time. Some of the best designs have gone directly against some of the principles set here. However, it's always good to know what the rules are before bending them.