



## Course Learning Outcomes for Unit IV

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Examine the characteristics of works of art, including the purpose and structure of the work.
  - 2.1 Identify formal, contextual, and expressive approaches used in art criticism.
  - 2.2 Explain censorship as a type of evaluation based on political, moral, or religious values.
3. Interpret artworks using the elements of design.
  - 3.1 Identify methods used to create symmetrical, asymmetrical, and radial balance in a composition.
  - 3.2 Examine the ability of certain design principles to direct the viewer's attention to details in a work of art.

## Reading Assignment

### Chapter 4:

The Principles of Design

### Chapter 5:

Evaluating Art

In Units III and IV, you will watch a video on visual elements.

Click [here](#) to access the segment for Unit IV.

Mouton, M. (2013). *Visual literacy elements and principles* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqdA9YnxyoM&feature=youtu.be>

Click [here](#) to access the video transcript.

## Unit Lesson

### Chapter 4: The Principles of Design

Artists employ a number of design elements or design principles to their works of art. You already see the principles of design when you view a certain artwork, but we will break the design principles down into categories and investigate them in depth. In art, there are no rules—only principles. When we look at these different areas of design, they are not exclusive. Most of the principles of design go hand in hand with one another.

**Unity and variety:** *Unity* and *variety* are complementary terms. Unity is the appearance or condition of oneness in a work of art (Frank, 2014b). When all of the design elements work together to produce a harmonious whole in a work of art, we experience unity (Frank, 2014b). Variety, however, provides diversity because too much unity could be a bit boring. On the other hand, too much variety is chaotic and can be unsettling. Using a pattern, or a repetitive ordering of design elements, artists can create variety that is also unified. As humans, we like to look at things that are interesting yet easy to view. If an artist can strike a balance between the two, the produced artwork will have interesting results. For example, if you wanted to decorate your living room, you might start by painting the walls. If you wanted a room with a relaxed feel, you would pick a neutral color or wallpaper without a bold pattern. Then, you can add pictures or shelves with

objects to create variety. However, if you want a bold and energetic room, you might choose a bright color or wallpaper with a loud pattern.

**Balance:** Have you ever hung a group of framed pictures on a wall, stood back to look at your work, and then noticed that some or all are unbalanced? It might look like the pictures are leaning or crooked; balance is the same in art. Balance is achieved when acting influences are held in check (Frank, 2014b). For example, if your picture is crooked, you tilt it the opposite direction until it is level again. As in life and in art, if we lack balance we may lack peace. Symmetrical balance is the near or exact matching of left and right sides of a 3-D form or 2-D composition (Frank, 2014b). It is much easier to comprehend at a distance than asymmetrical balance, which is when the sides are not exactly the same. Architects like to employ symmetrical balance when designing large buildings because they are nice to view from a distance and do not seem too busy. Although asymmetrical balance is not the same on both sides, it does not mean that the artwork will look like it is tilting. Artists employ a few principles to help achieve balance—even if they do not want the artwork to be the exact same on both sides. Forms or objects in a composition hold weight because they take up space in the picture plane. Some objects in a picture will appear heavier than other objects or forms. Artists can use the placements of these forms or objects to balance a composition (Frank, 2014b). If you are ever wondering if a certain object is being used to balance another in a composition, cover the particular object up with your finger or hand. Is the composition still balanced, or does it look like it may tilt if you hung it on a wall? Artists also use color to balance a composition.

In the previous unit, we talked about color being used in atmospheric perspective; colors can also be used to hold weight in a painting. We do not usually recognize it, but blue appears lighter to us than most colors—probably because we associate the color with the sky. The same goes for most other cool colors. The opposite is true of warm colors; we tend to think that warm colors are heavier than cool colors. The intensity or brightness of a color plays an important role in weight, as well. Just as in atmospheric perspective, when we view brighter colors, we assume they are close to use, so those bright colors would hold more weight than the colors that are dull, which we assume are farther away.

**Emphasis and subordination:** Artists use emphasis and subordination to draw your attention to or from a particular area. Most artists have something in the composition that they feel is most important; this is what they want you to look at the most. How can this be achieved? By making the focal point very interesting. For example, when children draw a picture of their family, usually the members of the family are the focal point. The family members' clothes will often be patterned or bright, and the family will be very detailed. The background might show the yard and house, which might also be a little detailed but less so than the family. They are emphasizing the family through detailing and probably do not realize they are doing so. If we were to look at the rest of this hypothetical picture, we might see a sky, some grass, and a sun, but these items will not be as detailed as the house or family because the child is not focused on that. The child's focal point, or most important part of the composition, will always be in the strongest location in any visual field. The child is using subordination to make the areas that are not the focal point less important to keep us from being distracted from the areas of emphasis.

**Directional forces:** Directional forces are another way that the artist guides our eye to the most important part of the work, or the objects they feel are extremely important to the work. Directional forces are paths for our eye to follow, which may be provided by actual or implied lines (Frank, 2014b). Previously, we discussed lines and how they are a basic element in art, but a line will also be used to direct a path of action for our eyes. Have you ever noticed when looking at an artwork that your eye may make the same loop a number of times? The artist is using lines to guide your eye around the artwork. As with balance, our feelings come into play when we notice actual or implied lines. In the prior unit, we discussed how vertical lines seem still, horizontal lines imply rest, and slanted lines show movement. Artists use these feelings about lines to create a feeling or mood in us when we view the artwork. Francisco Goya's *Bullfight: The Agility and Daring of Juanito Apinani* (as seen below and on page 77 of your textbook) is a perfect example of how we view lines in art. Our eyes tend to stay where the action is: on the bull and bullfighter. It seems that Goya has captured a still moment in what is a very action-packed scene. We know the bullfighter is poised and still from the vertical line, but we also see the angle of the bullfighter's and bull's bodies, so we know that the action is not over. The background is subordinated, so our eyes keep looking from the bull to the bullfighter.



Francisco Goya. *Bullfight: The Agility and Daring of Juanito Apinani*, plate 20. c.1815. Etching with aquatint. 9-1/2" x 14". Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, England, UK. [Fig. 4-12]

(Frank, 2014a, slide 38)

**Contrast:** *Contrast* goes hand in hand with variety and is the juxtaposition of strongly dissimilar elements (Frank, 2014b). This can have a dramatic effect visually. However, if we did not have some contrast, visual experience would be monotonous. Contrast is employed in a variety of places—not just art. Sports teams, brand logos, and billboards all use contrasting colors to catch your attention. In art, contrasting colors can make an artwork look like it is pulsating with energy.

**Repetition and rhythm:** Just as in music, repetition and rhythm can be used in art. Artists use both terms to create a beat or speed in the artwork. Your eye can follow patterns and cues in the composition; normally repetition and rhythm of any kind will have a start and stop that keeps going. Think of a metronome's tick; it can be fast or slow, and this ticking gives you a feeling of calm or speed and excitement. Rhythm and repetition in an artwork are created through the regular recurrence of elements with related variations (Frank, 2014b). For example, Ogata Korin's *Cranes* (as shown below and on page 80 of your textbook) has repeating elements.



(Frank, 2014a, slide 49)

The cranes look very similar and are repeated, but there are variations among the cranes. The repetition created from the cranes makes it seem like one or all of the cranes are walking across the folding screens. The cranes seem to be going somewhere or moving. Interestingly, if we were to cover up the first screen that is blank, the cranes stop; there is nowhere for the cranes to go, so we assume that they are standing still.

A great example of rhythm is Lyubov Popova's *The Pianist* (shown below and on page 80 of your textbook).



(Frank, 2014a, slide 48)

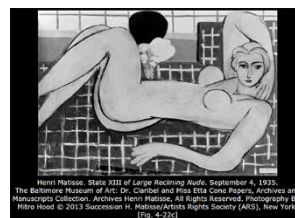
In *The Pianist*, a man is playing the piano, but the artist has created many stops and starts as obstacles for our eyes. While our eyes move around the canvas, we get a sense of rhythm and ticking: Could this be the

speed and rhythm of the piano player's music? In a sense, we can almost hear the beat of the music because of the rhythm of shapes.

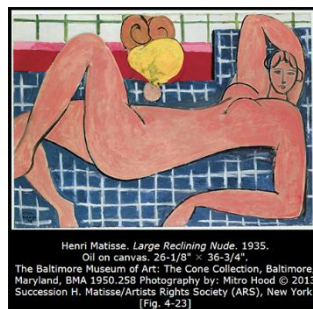
**Scale and proportion:** *Scale* is the size relation of one object to another and is one of the first decisions that an artist makes (Frank, 2014b). The first detail we notice about an artwork is its scale or size. Depending on the scale, or how big the object is, you will want to move in closer to see details or move further away to see the whole artwork. Most art in the textbook is smaller than actual size, so the impact is not the same as seeing it in person. Be sure to look underneath the artwork in the book at the dimensions and the supplies used to make the artwork. Use the size stated in the textbook to compare the artwork to your surroundings. Would the painting or sculpture fit in the room, or could it fit in your hand?

Proportion is the size relationship of an object's parts to its whole (Frank, 2014b). We see jokes about a tyrannosaurus rex's arms because the arms do not seem appropriate to the rest of the body. They seem out of proportion. If *scale* is the overall size of the artwork, then *proportion* is how the objects within the artwork relate in size to one another. Michelangelo's *Pieta* (located on page 82 of your textbook) is five feet, eight and one half inches in scale, and that does not include the pedestal under the artwork. The piece is massive! Upon further viewing the artwork, Mary looks extremely large in proportion to Jesus. If she were to stand up, she would dwarf him, but the impact of this odd proportion is very emotional. Mary is almost cradling Jesus in her lap, wanting to take care of him. He is her child, and she wants to make him feel better, but she cannot. The feeling of deep care and sorrow would have been hard for Michelangelo to achieve without exaggerating her proportion. Mary safely tucks Jesus into her lap without worry of him falling out.

**Design summary:** An artist does not complete a masterpiece in one sitting. First, the artist will do several sketches and might even start the artwork while making major changes. The textbook gives a great example of the design process using Henri Matisse's *Large Reclining Nude*. We see the artist start with a sketch that he likes but wants to change further. The photo shows the following state, but he is still not happy with the feeling it gives him. The third photo shows Matisse making major changes to the size of the head and further changes to the background. Finally, we have a finished product that encompasses the earlier stages. The first



(Frank, 2014a, slides 61, 63, and 64)



(Frank, 2014a, slide 66)

idea an artist has is not always the greatest, so an artist will constantly make changes to an artwork until they feel that the artwork is exactly what they want. Below, you can see the progression of the artwork, which is also displayed on pages 84-85 of the textbook.

## Chapter 5: Evaluating Art

What makes art good? Is it that you like the way it looks? Do you like the way it makes you feel? Was it interesting to look at? As we go through the textbook, you will stumble upon art that make you think, "I could do that. Why is it in the textbook and so important?" or you might flat out not like the artwork. Who decides if art is good or bad? To become a masterpiece an artwork needs to have some degree of innovation, important

cultural meaning, and a recognizable personal statement. Professional art critics follow three theories when making discriminating judgments about art. They use these theories to find a place for the art or decide how important it is. The three theories of art also give us three standards of quality by which to judge art.

The formal theory asks how the piece is organized or made and compares the art to other art pieces (Frank, 2014b). Critics using the formal theory will ask: How does the art relate to historical and contemporary art? Does the artist look like they know what they are doing? Is the artist doing something new and groundbreaking? Is it technically good? The formal theory's main concern is the art itself and how it is presented.

The contextual theory asks how the artwork is important to society and culture. When looking at art, we should always think about when the art was made and what was going on at the time (Frank, 2014b). This can help us better understand the artist's intention.

Expressive theory focuses on how art makes us feel or how the artist might have felt when making the work. The feeling, or what the artwork expresses, is most important in this theory (Frank, 2014b).

The study of art criticism theories will continue in Unit V with a video listed under the Required Reading. This information will also be used as part of your Unit V Assignment.

### References

Frank, P. (2014a). *Chapter 4: The principles of design* [PowerPoint slides]. Boston, MA: Pearson

Frank, P. (2014b). *Prebles' artforms: An introduction to the visual arts* (11th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

### Suggested Reading

If you would like to study the content from the required reading further, consider reviewing the below PowerPoint presentations. The presentations include images of the artwork discussed in the chapter and explanations:

Click [here](#) to access the Chapter 4 PowerPoint Presentation. Click [here](#) for a PDF version of the presentation.

Click [here](#) to access the Chapter 5 PowerPoint Presentation. Click [here](#) for a PDF version of the presentation.