

Clothing and TEXTILES

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PROGRAMMING

Principles of Design



Balance



Proportion/Scale



Emphasis



Rhythm

Introduction

The principles of design are essential to the development and production of clothing used by individuals and families around the world. Each principle has a specific role in creating an aesthetically pleasing garment or ensemble. The principles of design consist of: balance, proportion (also referred to as scale), emphasis, and rhythm. When a garment or ensemble uses the elements and principles of design to create a visual unity, harmony is achieved. Garments often integrate more than one principle, while drawing from the elements of design to create a cohesive look. The following discussion will present background information on each of the principles of design and applications to clothing design and construction.

Balance

According to Wolfe (2011) balance implies that there is an equilibrium or uniformity among the parts of a design (p. 205). To achieve balance, a garment or ensemble should have equal visual weight throughout the design. The use of structural features, added embellishments, or decorations to a garment contribute to the appearance of a garment or ensemble being balanced or not. A clothing designer can utilize surface designs on fabric to construct a garment creating visual balance. Further, color, line, and texture can impact the balance of a design. For example, cool and light colors have less visual weight than dark, warm colors. If an individual is wearing a small amount of a dark, warm color it can be balanced out with a larger amount of cool, light colors.



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Balance used in clothing design can be categorized into two groups: Formal and Informal Balance. When a garment or ensemble has equal visual weight on either side, or is symmetrical, formal balanced is achieved. The presence of identical details placed equal distance from the center, such as pockets, seams, pleats, or tucks are good examples of how formal balance is used in uniforms, blazers, blue jeans, and other common garments. Formal balance is the most common and inexpensive application of the principles of design (Wolfe, 2011).



To achieve informal balance, a garment is created using asymmetrical features such as line, color, shapes, and textures. The most common use of informal balance is when a garment is constructed using fabric that has a diagonal line design or closures that are off-centered such as a zipper or neckline. Accessories used in an ensemble can create informal balance that brings interest to a solid color garment.



Proportion/Scale

Proportion is defined by Wolfe (2011) as the spatial, or size relationship of all parts of a design to each other and the whole garment or ensemble (p. 206). The design of clothing for the human body requires unequal parts or garments to be used. A good illustration of this is a dress. The bodice of a dress can be smaller than the portion of the dress that goes from the waist to the knee, calf, or ankle. In order for clothing to have visual appeal on the human body, it is recommended that it flatter the natural shape of the body of the wearer.



The design details found in clothing can contribute to the overall proportion of an ensemble. Details such as yokes, collars, pockets, accessories, buttons, and trimmings should be in proportion to the overall size of a garment. The picture to the left shows a woman in sunglasses. When the size of the sunglasses is relative to the face of the wearer, proportion is achieved. Some trends encourage the use of oversized sunglasses which makes the face appear to be visually smaller. Overall, when all of the parts of a garment or outfit work well together the result is a well proportioned look.



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Emphasis

Emphasis is used to create interest in a garment or to draw attention to a certain part of an ensemble. When emphasis is used by an individual or a designer, one feature of the ensemble is visually more prominent in a design than others. For example, a bright necktie that is contrasting to the color of a men's dress shirt draws the eye to the tie rather than the shirt. Therefore, the eye is drawn to an item of emphasis first rather than other features in the garment or outfit. Examples of items used to create emphasis are: a bow, appliqué, a monogram, accessories, belts, scarves, neckties, jewelry, decorative trimmings, tucks, gathers, ruffles, and buttons. Color, line, and texture can also be used to draw attention to parts of the body such as the waist, chest, arms, one shoulder, etc. (Wolfe, 2011).



Rhythm

Rhythm creates a sense of movement in a design. The eye moves from one feature on the body to another with the use of this principle. Further, a pattern or texture is created with the application of rhythm to the surface design of fabrics used in the construction of clothing items or products. Specific applications of rhythm are classified in the following categories: *Gradation*, *Opposition*, *Radical Arrangement*, *Repetition*, and *Transition*.

Gradation refers to a design pattern that gradually increases or decreases in size, shape, or color. An example is when designers use a gradient-dyeing technique called *ombre* that uses a gradual change in color from light to dark across the textile. *Opposition* is rhythm that is created with multiple lines converging to form a right angle. One of the most common uses of this form of rhythm is found in a plaid shirt or other plaid or check pattern (Wolfe, 2011). *Radial Arrangement* is created when a pattern has a central starting point. Wolfe (2011) suggests that this form of rhythm can be created with the use of tucks, seams, darts, flowing lines, or colors that fan out from a central area (p. 210). *Tie Dye* is an example of creating a radial arrangement design on fabric using color. *Repetition* is when a specific pattern, line, shape, color, or texture is repeated in a garment. *Transition* is a technique used to move the eye between different parts of a design at a more gradual pace rather than an abrupt change in direction (Wolfe, 2011, p. 209). An example of this would be a continuous line created by a scarf, ruffles, or gathers.



Opposition Rhythm

Rhythm in a garment or ensemble is distorted when a surface design, such as a plaid, is not matched accurately at the seams. When this occurs, the movement of a garment stops at each seam confusing the rhythm of the look and the overall harmony of the design.



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Harmony

Harmony occurs when the overall design, garment, or ensemble achieves visual unity. Wolfe (2011) asserted that when the elements of design (color, shape, line, and texture) are used effectively within the parameters of the principles of design (balance, proportion, emphasis, and rhythm) harmony is created. Another consideration of the designer or individual when creating or choosing clothing is the shape and form of the body. Harmony cannot be achieved unless the clothing or dress complements the wearer. All parts of the ensemble need to work together to achieve the desired look. Whether an ensemble is harmonious or not depends upon the subjective opinion of the observer.

Conclusion

The principles of design serve as guidelines for applying the elements of design to a design-related task. Clothing and fabric designers utilize these guidelines in order to achieve a visually pleasing or harmonious design that the consumers will integrate into their personal wardrobes. Whether designing clothing or mixing and matching clothing in a personal wardrobe, the principles of design can be a useful tool to simplify the process of looking one's best.

References

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