**The Visual Elements**

A Reference Sheet

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER when creating or analyzing visuals:**

* Will adding elements of controversy and disturbance appeal to or offend audience?
* Will the audience need any specific background knowledge to understand the visual?
* How does the layout of information and elements enhance readability and understanding?
* What mood or feelings does the visual evoke in the viewer?
* Do the elements provide clarity to the overall message of the image?

When utilizing the elements below, consider your:

1) Audience, 2) Purpose, 3) Central Idea, 4) Form, and 5) Context.

\*Also consider the tone you wish to write with, and the mood you want to create.

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| **Category** | **Technique** | **Description/Example** |
| **Colouring** | Emotive Quality | The emotions the colour evokes |
| Symbolic Quality | The idea, concept, or event the colour represents |
| Contrast | Colours that are opposite one another |
| Harmony | Colours that complement one another |
| Shade | The lightness or darkness of a colour |
| **Composition & Layout** | Line | Any mark connecting or dividing two points  \*Curves tend to represent femininity, comfort, safety, fun  \*Edges tend to represent masculinity, finality, harshness, sophistication  \*Thick lines tend to represent finality or emphasis  \*Thin lines tend to represent indecision or weakness |
| Shape | Physical properties, like mass, volume, proportion, and distortion |
| Space | The amount of empty space between elements |
| Size | The size of each element, relative to the others within the visual |
| Focal Point | Which element(s) first draw the viewer’s eye |
| Balance | Distribution of elements in the visual; can be symmetrical or asymmetrical |
| Rhythm | Repetition of certain elements to create a pattern |
| Unity/Contrast | Elements that work/belong together vs. elements that don’t |
| Foreground/Background | Which elements appear in the front (fore) or back (back) of the visual |
| Framing | Highlighting a specific visual element by surrounding it by lines |
| Texture | Look and feel of a surface – typically, rough vs. smooth |
| **Typography** | Type Anatomy | Anatomical quality of letters (height, width, curvature) |
| Type Classifications | Serif, sans-serif, script, decorative |
| Type Weight | Thickness or thinness |
| Justification | Left, right, or central alignment of text |
| <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~hamiltr/Mundi/main.swf> OR  <http://www.designconsolidated.com.au/graphic-design-principles/presentation.htm> OR  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTk6QeccFmU | | |

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| **Category** | **Technique** | **Description/Example** |
| **Detail** | Amount of Detail | * Is there much or little? * Is this intentional or unintentional? |
| Who (people, animals) | * What do they look like (facial and physical features, race, class, gender, dress, age) * What are they doing? * How are they feeling (facial expression, posture, body poses, interaction with others)? * Where are they looking? Is this significant? Are they aware of the camera/audience? |
| What (objects, places) | * What do they look like (colour, shape, size, etc.) * How are they interacting with people or other objects in the image? |
| Where (place) | * What city/country/continent? * Rural or urban? * Indoors or outdoors? * Home, work, or leisure environment? * Is it calming or disorienting? * Everyday or unusual? |
| When (time) | * What time of day (morning/evening/night)? * What time of year (season)? * What year, decade, century, or period? |
| http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/assets/photography.pdf | | |