

Introduction

Typography is not only verbal information but also lines of texture within a composition. These textures create rectangles of tone on the page, and the relationship of the positions of these rectangles is critical to the perception of order and unity within a composition. The duality of the two roles gives the designer responsibility for both communication and composition.

This typography project enables the designer to focus and explore the role of composition within a system and a structure. The structure is a simple three-column by three-row grid system. Although this is a modest system, there is enough flexibility for variation and thorough investigation. The 3 X 3 grid system also corresponds to the law of thirds that suggests when a rectangle or square is divided into thirds vertically and horizontally, the four intersecting points within the composition are the points of optimal focus. The designer uses placement and proximity to determine which of these points is hierarchically the most important.

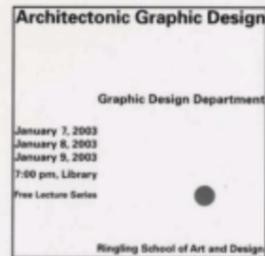
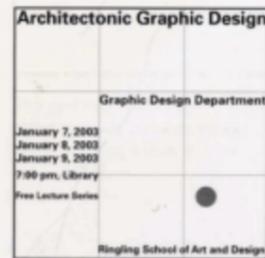
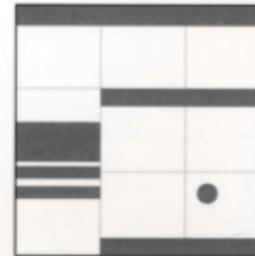
The example at left is a simple composition of six rectangles and a small circle. The elements are in proportion to each other and are grouped and arranged in the grid so that each rectangular element aligns with at least one other element. The interior alignments, proportion of elements, and placement in the format result in a unified and visually satisfying composition. In this example, the gray rectangles have been replaced by lines of text. There is an obvious hierarchy in the content of the message, via text size and placement, and an alignment axis at the left of the format. Analysis of these three samples shows that the compositional principles related to typographic messages are the same in all. An understanding of the compositions abstract elements of texture leads the designer to a deeper understanding of the role of the compositional principles and visual forces of design. This project is a case study of a methodology used to teach these principles and visual forces.

This book, and others in the series, is indebted to my students for all they have taught me and is intended to share with others approaches and methodology that may prove useful. Design education is a fluid process that constantly evolves. Designers and design educators are invited to share the results of their experiences with me for inclusion in later printings of this work.

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Project Elements and Process

A three-column by three-row structure is the format for exploring texture and composition. This simple grid system provides a wide range of variation for exploration within a controlled system of organization. Because the format is a square, visual attention will focus on the interior composition rather than the shape and proportion of the format.

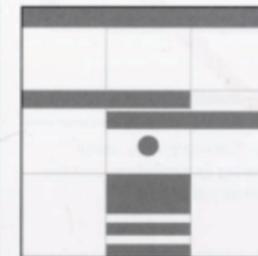
Six gray rectangles, which will later correspond to the type sizes of the visual message, are the compositional elements. A small circle is also used to provide an element for balance, visual control of the composition, and contrast.

The circle is the wild-card element in all of the compositions. Even though it is very small, it has a tremendous amount of visual power. This is true of any circle, any size, in just about any composition. The human eye loves the circle and embraces it. The contrast in form to the rectangular elements provides visual interest, in addition to the inherent visual power of the circle itself. Its position in the composition is less prescribed than the other elements, and it can appear anywhere.

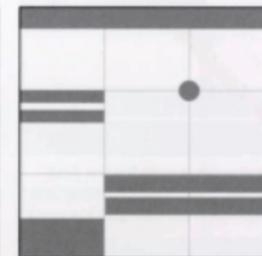
The student explores the visual principles of composition, texture, and interrelationship through a series of exercises that become increasingly complex and dynamic.



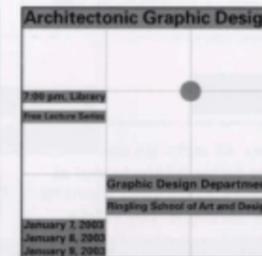
The grid system is three columns wide by three rows deep, yielding a total of nine visual fields.



The compositional elements are six gray rectangles and a small circle.



The compositional elements are arranged within the grid system.



Lines of text replace the gray compositional elements (above) and yield a typographic composition (below).

Architectonic Graphic Design

7:00 pm, Library
Free Lecture Series

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January 7, 2003
January 8, 2003
January 9, 2003

Constraints and Options

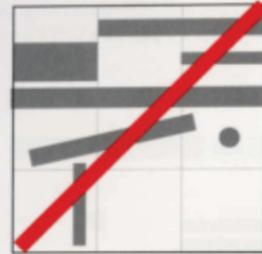
The format, rectangle elements, and a concise series of rules are given to the student:

- In the horizontal series, all rectangle elements must remain on the horizontal. In the horizontal/vertical series, all rectangles must be either horizontal or vertical. In the diagonal series, all rectangles must be on the same or contrasting diagonal.
- All rectangle elements must be used.
- No rectangle element may extend outside the format.
- Rectangle elements may almost touch but not overlap.

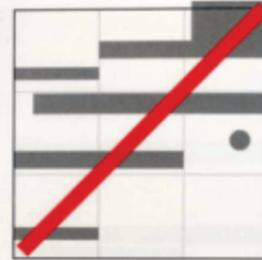
Since this is a formal composition project, the constraints are important rules for creating a cohesive whole. Elements must remain on the horizontal in the first series and will occupy other positions in later series. It is important that all elements are used, as each bar corresponds to a line of text from a message that will later replace the rectangle elements. All elements are sized to fit in either one, two, or three visual fields and must fit, left to right, within the grid columns.



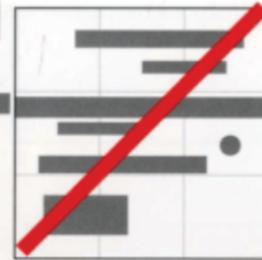
Yes. All rectangle elements are on the horizontal and all elements are used. Elements do not extend beyond the format or overlap. The circle may be placed anywhere in the format but may not overlap other elements.



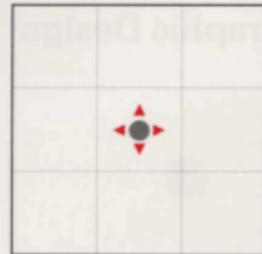
No. Elements must remain on the horizontal for the first series. Later compositions will work with vertical and diagonal elements.



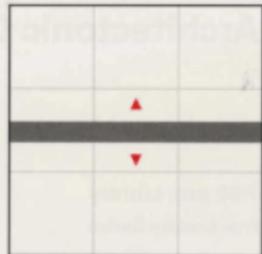
No. Elements may never overlap or extend beyond the format perimeter.



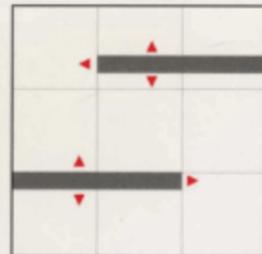
No. Elements must fit within the grid columns.



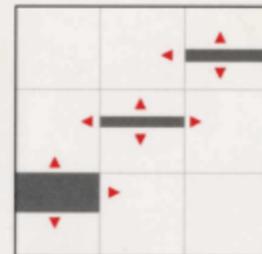
The circle may occupy any position. It is a wild-card element in the composition and need not necessarily correspond to the grid lines.



The largest rectangle must fit within the square format, left to right. It can take any position top to bottom.



The two second largest rectangles must occupy either the two right columns or the two left columns. They can take any position top to bottom.



The three smallest rectangles may occupy any single column. They can take any position top to bottom.

Proportion of Elements

This project is designed to present considerable potential for success. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the student is focused on selected issues throughout the project, and the decision-making process is directed toward these issues. Second, the square format serves to focus the student's attention on the elements and composition rather than on the proportion of a rectangular format. Third, a hierarchy of size exists and this hierarchy is present in the proportion of the elements. Since the

grid is three columns wide, the length of all of the elements are in the proportion of 1:2:3. This proportion is pleasing and logical in a simple compositional structure, and is as important as all of the other visual theories in creating a cohesive composition.

The circle, too, is in proportion to the rectangular elements. It is approximately one-fourth of a unit in diameter and this diameter is roughly equivalent to the width of the longest rectangle.

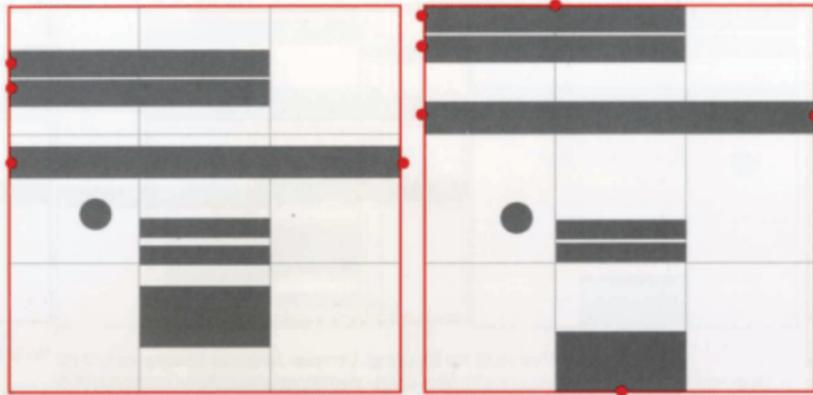
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Perimeter Edge and Axial Relationships

Use of the perimeter edges of the format is critical in creating cohesive compositions. If none of the elements is near the top and bottom edges, as in the Perimeter Edge Relationships example below, the white space squeezes the elements, and the composition is ungrounded. When the elements of a composition move toward the top and bottom perimeter edges of a format, the white space is optimized, and the composition appears larger and more spacious by visual expansion.

Placement of elements within the grid structure creates axial alignments. When an axis occurs in the interior of the composition, strong visual relationships are formed that give the composition a sense of visual order. Axes on the left and right edges help to bring order to the composition but are considerably weaker visually. A single element does not create an axis; two or more elements create an axis, and, in general, the larger the number of aligned elements the stronger the axis.

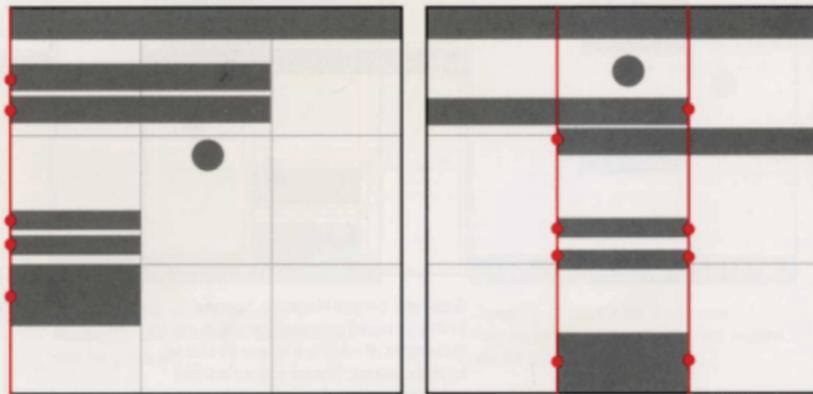
Perimeter Edge Relationships



Weak Perimeter Edge Relationship
Since there are no elements touching the top or bottom edges, bars of inactivated white space squeeze the top and bottom of this composition.

Stronger Perimeter Edge Relationship
By allowing elements to touch all four sides of the format, all spaces are activated and the format expands visually.

Axial Relationships



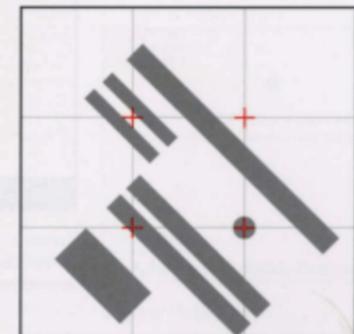
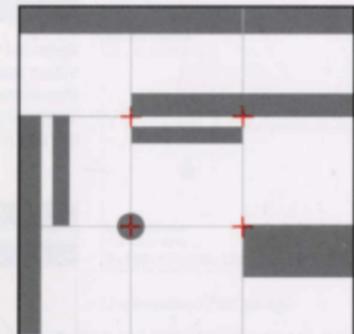
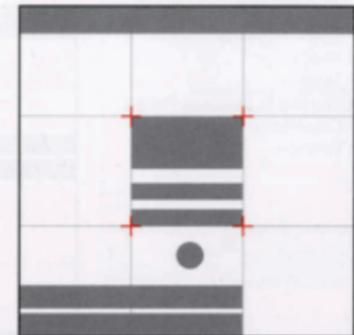
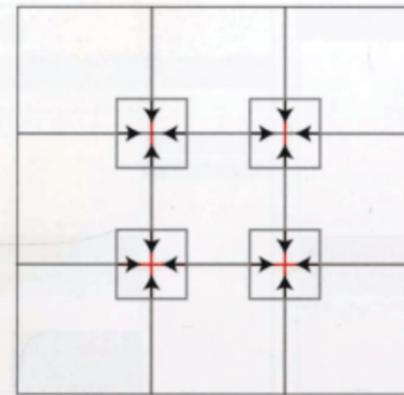
Weak Axial Relationship
The red line indicates the left edge axis in this composition. This relationship is weak because the interior alignments are minimal and the left edge position moves the eye off the page.

Stronger Axial Relationship
The interior axes in the center column are visually stronger because more elements align on each of these axes.

The Law of Thirds

The 3 X 3 grid system corresponds to the rule of thirds that suggests when a rectangle or square is divided into thirds vertically and horizontally, the four intersecting points within the composition are the points of optimal focus. The designer uses placement and proximity to determine which of these points is hierarchically the most important.

An awareness of the law of thirds enables the designer to focus attention where it will most naturally occur and to control the compositional space. Elements do not need to land directly on the intersecting point as close proximity draws attention to them.



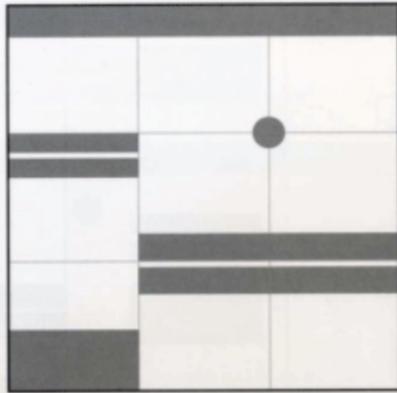
The Circle and Composition

As a wild-card element, the circle can be placed anywhere in the composition. As the circle nears lines of text it draws attention to them and modifies the lines. Placed in between lines of text, it separates and organizes the lines. Placed away from the text elements, it draws the eye and controls the visual flow during viewing, and has a tendency to balance the composition. Each different position changes the way the composition is viewed.

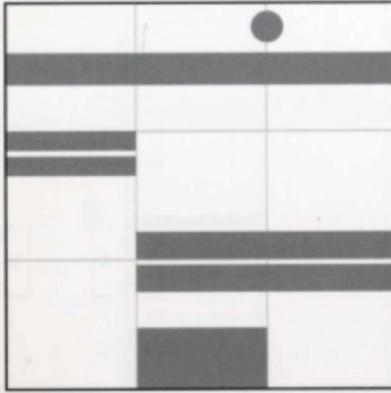
In all compositions the circle becomes an accent and an element that contrasts the rectangles. It can be a pivot point, an element of tension, a starting or stopping point, or it can contribute to visual organization or balance. It is a tool for the designer with which to consciously control the desired visual response.

Potential Circle Functions:

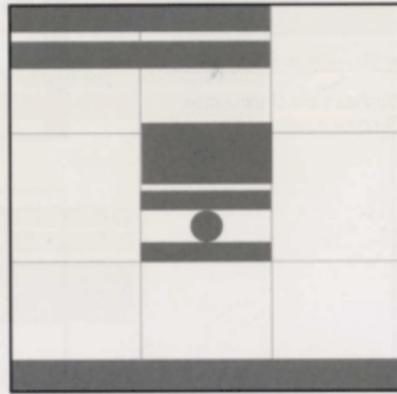
- Space Activator
- Pivot Point
- Tension
- Starting or Stopping Point
- Organization
- Balance



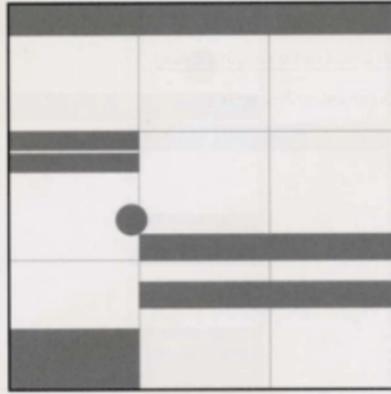
Balance Placement and Pivot Point
When the circle is placed in predictable alignment to the grid, a sense of visual balance is achieved. The circle is also a pivot point as the eye moves around the composition.



Space Activator
When the circle occupies a position within a confined white space, the space becomes activated. A stronger sense of asymmetry is achieved in the composition as well as more visual interest.



Tension
When the circle is placed very close to the other elements a visual tension occurs.

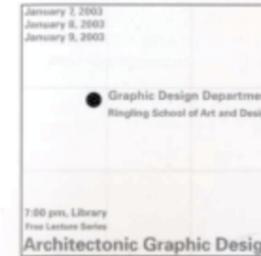


Tension
Placement of the circle near a 90° corner intensifies the contrast of shape and tension.

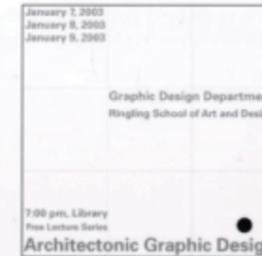
On this page all of the compositions are similar with only the placement of the circle changing. The black color of the circle calls attention to its position because its placement very clearly changes the way in which the viewer's eye moves throughout the composition.

Placement of the circle near text often results in emphasis of that text. This emphasis changes the hierarchy as the circle

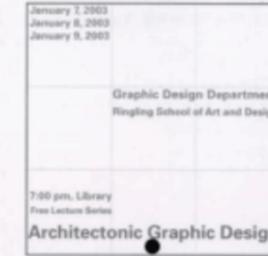
becomes a starting point. Placement of the circle in between lines of text separates the lines and organizes them into individual groups, with a result of additional emphasis given to each line. Placing the circle so that it is surrounded by white space frequently causes the circle to become the pivot point. Trapping the circle tightly in between text and an edge results in both visual tension and an emphasis of the line of text.



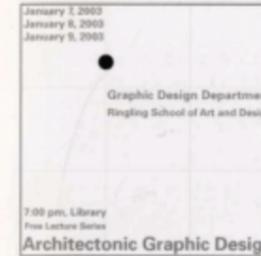
Emphasis Placement and Starting Point



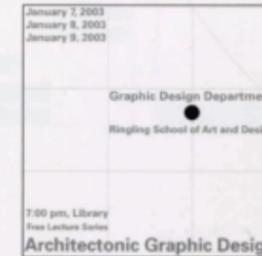
Emphasis Placement and Stopping Point



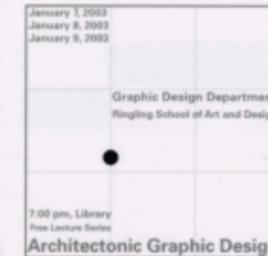
Emphasis and Tension Placement



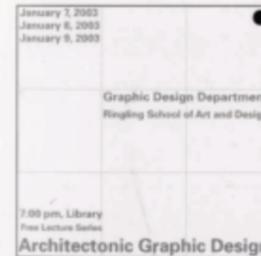
Organization Placement



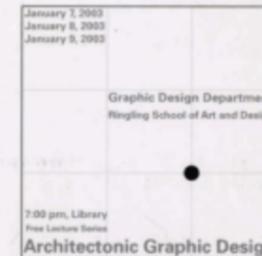
Emphasis and Organization Placement



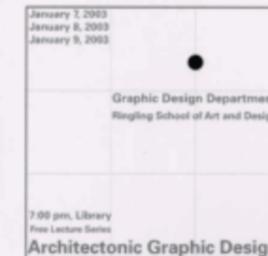
Organization Placement



Balance Placement



Balance Placement and Pivot Point



Balance Placement

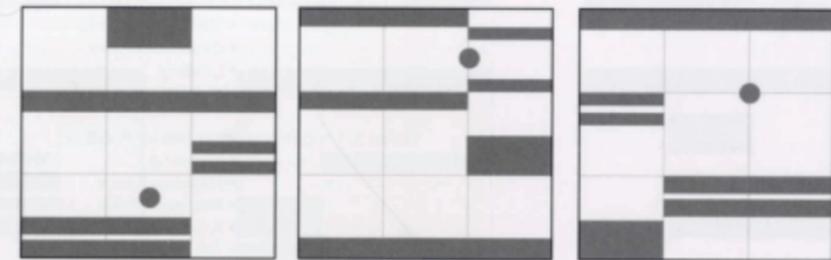
Horizontal Composition

The first in the series of exercises is the most simple—horizontal composition. Compositions are first developed in a series of small thumbnails as the visual principles of grouping, edge relationships, axial alignment, and circle placement are investigated. It is during the thumbnail phase that the visual principles begin to emerge.

A seemingly very simple task becomes more complex as the designer becomes increasingly aware of and sensitive to the nuances of composition. The initial compositions consist of the most obvious choices. Later evolutions of compositions are more interesting in that the designer begins to explore beyond the obvious.

The strongest compositions are refined in large scale, and, finally, lines of text are substituted for the rectangle elements. Those compositions that are the most ordered and compelling in the abstract version are also, invariably, the most interesting in the typographic version.

A visual hierarchy has already been built into this project by the assignment of each line of copy to the rectangles in the given grid structure. Further unity is achieved by employing a single face and weight of type for all lines in the composition. More than any other factor, the position of text and proximity of the circle will determine the hierarchy.



Horizontal Composition

Organizing the Approach to the Project

At the onset of the project, the student is inclined to create thumbnails rapidly and intuitively. This approach has its merits in that the most predictable solutions to visual organization are inevitably explored. However, there is a strong probability that one or more of the three approaches of top, bottom, and interior position of the longest rectangle will be overlooked. By organizing the project from the onset, attention can be knowingly focused on the three major approaches and to the key issues of composition within each approach.

The longest element, the rectangle that spans all three visual fields, controls the composition. Therefore, the three major approaches include: Long Rectangle in Top Position, Long Rectangle in Bottom Position, and Long Rectangle in Interior Position. The thumbnail compositions are divided into these three groups. In addition, each set of thumbnails will focus on specific compositional aspects of the project. The change of focus of each of the first two series provides the student a limited range of visual ideas to master. The third and final series brings all of the compositional aspects together.

Emphasis:

- Grouping
- Negative Space
- Perimeter Edge
- Axial Alignment
- The Law of Thirds
- Circle Placement
- Leading

Horizontal Composition

Series 1, Long Rectangle in Top Position

- Emphasis:
- Grouping
 - Negative Space
 - Perimeter Edge
 - Axial Alignment

The primary focus is on the basic aspects of composition.

Series 2, Long Rectangle in Bottom Position

- Emphasis:
- The Law of Thirds
 - Circle Placement
 - Leading

The primary focus is on compositional control and enhancement.

Series 3, Long Rectangle in Interior Position

- Emphasis:
- Grouping
 - Negative Space
 - Perimeter Edge
 - Axial Alignment
 - The Law of Thirds
 - Circle Placement
 - Leading

This series brings all of the compositional aspects together.

Long Rectangle in Top Position Thumbnails

The Long Rectangle in Top Position series of thumbnail compositions will use the longest rectangle only in the top position, touching the top of the format perimeter, or very near the top. Compositional emphasis is on grouping, negative space, perimeter edge, and axial alignment. Experimentation is encouraged as the student begins to understand which, and why, specific compositions are the most pleasing.

- Grouping
- Negative Space
- Perimeter Edge
- Axial Alignment
- The Law of Thirds
- Circle Placement
- Leading

