



Design Without Computers by Elidh McDowall

Foundation Notes | Graphic Design





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It's a common assumption that 'to do' graphic design requires high spec computers and expensive software - this is not the case! Indeed, Graphic Design existed long before the invention of the Apple Mac.

Exploring the basic principles of what makes good graphic design can be done easily and cheaply with simple materials, and will serve as an essential basis for approaching any design brief.

Session One | An introduction to Composition

You will need:

- White paper or cartridge paper
- Black sugar paper
- Scissors (alternatively edges can be ripped, or creased & torn for straight edges)
- Glue

Composition is the term given when we describe the arrangement of shapes or information. The following exercises will ask you to consider compositional layout on a page. Composition is a fundamental aspect of good design - it is always important to ask yourself WHERE, WHY and WHAT do your choices of layout achieve?

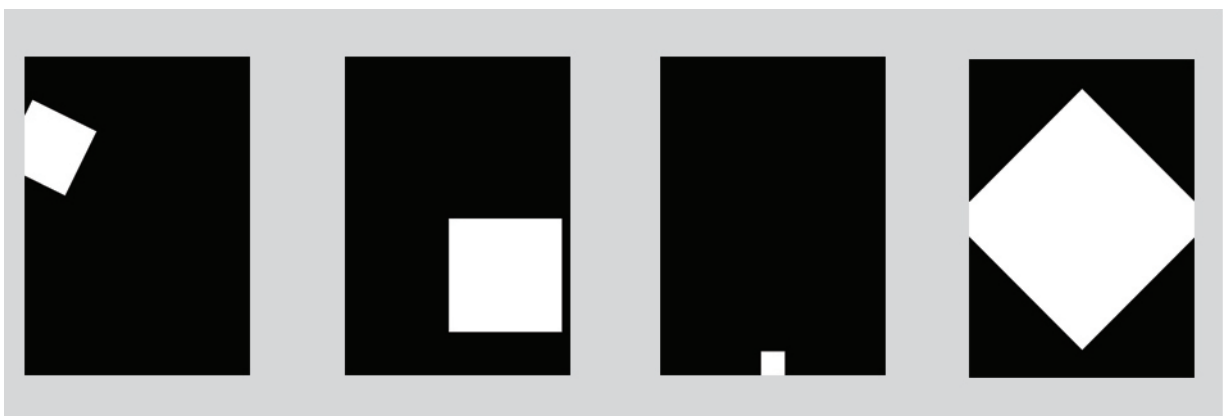
|Exercise 1:

Choose white or black paper. Cut 4 identical rectangles - don't make them too small, around A5 (1/2 of A4) will be a good starting point.

Using the opposite colour paper to your rectangles, cut 4 squares - consider whether you want them to be the same or varying sizes.

On each rectangle, position and stick ONE square. Consider the following words when experimenting with the position of the square on the rectangle:

- Balance/unbalance
- Border/borderless
- Centred/off-centre
- Horizontal/angled
- Distance/overlapped





Now, consider what effects are created from your choices of WHERE you positioned the square?

| Exercise 2:

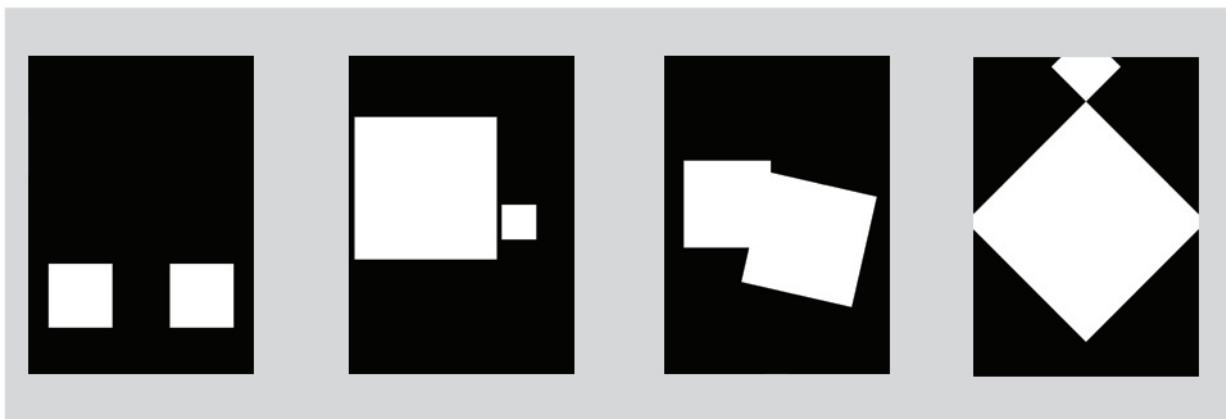
As in exercise 1, choose white or black paper and cut 4 identical rectangles. From the opposite colour to the rectangles, cut 8 squares.

A balanced composition is achieved through two systems;

1. **Symmetry** (formal balance): A mirror image; the results look formal, organised and orderly.
2. **Asymmetry** (informal balance): Meaning without symmetry; the results look dynamic with a sense of random distribution.

On each rectangle, position and stick TWO squares, taking into account symmetrical and asymmetrical balance.

Consider WHY visual interest is created by the position and balance of the squares.



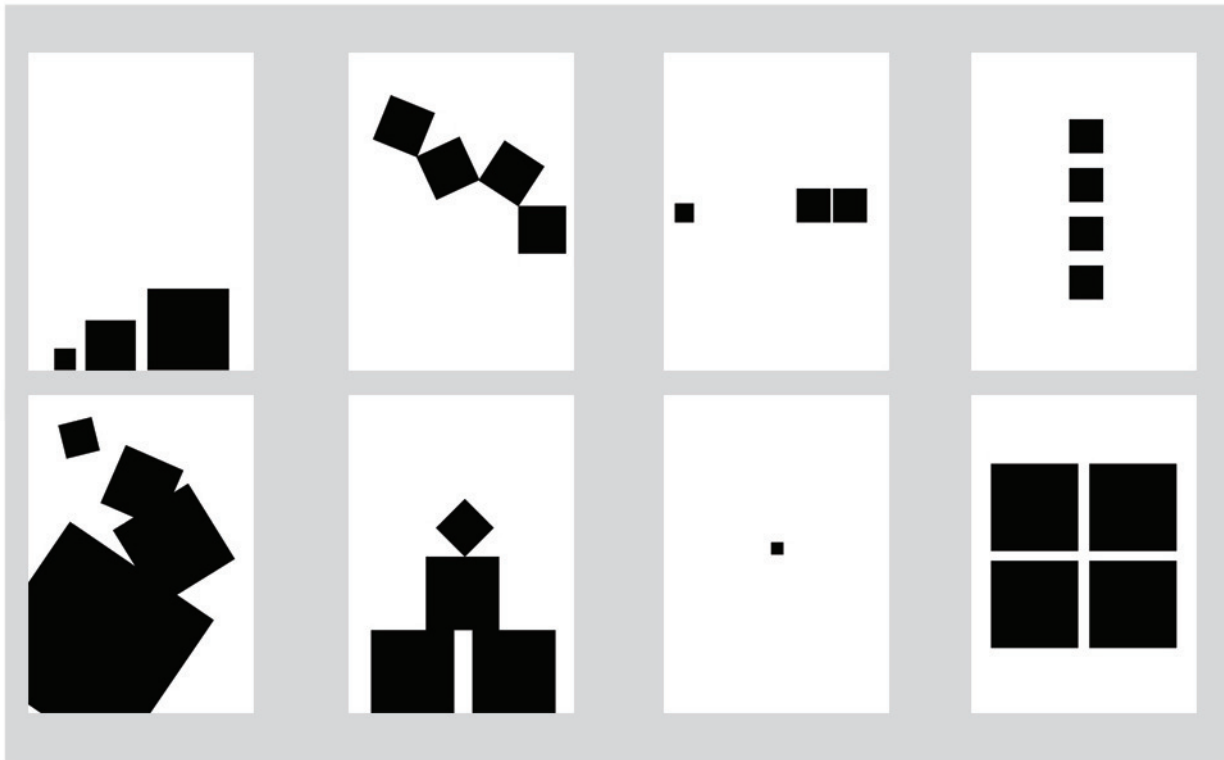
| Exercise 3:

Good design is about achieving effective visual communication. So far exercises 1 & 2 have asked you to consciously decide WHERE and WHY you have positioned the squares in the layout of your composition. Next you need to consider WHAT it is you are trying to communicate.

The task is to explore how, by using a limited graphic vocabulary (i.e. black and white squares only), meaning can be communicated visually through composition.

Create 2 possible solutions for representing each of the following words visually. As before, choose to work on either a black or white background, but this time you may use up to 4 squares of the opposite colour to design each solution.

1. **Increase**
2. **Playful**
3. **Lonely**
4. **Order**



Look at your design solutions. Consider which visual works most effectively for each of the words and why?

Session Two | Setting the Mood

You will need:

- White paper or cartridge paper
- Black sugar paper
- Coloured paper (if available)
- Assorted newspapers/magazines/flyers/photographs/other printed documents
- Mixed media art materials e.g. paint, crayons, pastels, marker pens
- Scissors (alternatively edges can be ripped, or creased & torn for straight edges)
- Glue

The following exercises will ask you to consider how basic elements of design - imagery, text and composition - are used to convey a specific mood or atmosphere.

Look at some examples of advertising in magazines. How is the product being presented - what colours are used, how do they make you feel? What kind of font (typeface) is used e.g. is it gentle and subtle, or is it aggressive and bold? - how does it suit the overall 'style' of the design? What other imagery is there e.g. calming outdoor scenery or bustling city landscapes - how does this set a tone?

Every example of advertising you look at will have been specifically designed to communicate a particular mood.

| Exercise 1:

Music can influence the way we feel - if a song is upbeat we will feel happier, likewise if it slow and sombre our emotions are likely to follow. The task is to design CD covers which visually represent the style of music by considering use of colour, imagery, typeface and composition.

The standard size of a CD cover is 12cm x 12cm, so cut from white paper 4 squares roughly to this scale.

Using materials available to you (magazine images/examples of fonts/paint/crayon etc.), create a collaged CD cover for each of the following musical styles:

1. Jazz
2. Dance
3. Classical
4. Punk

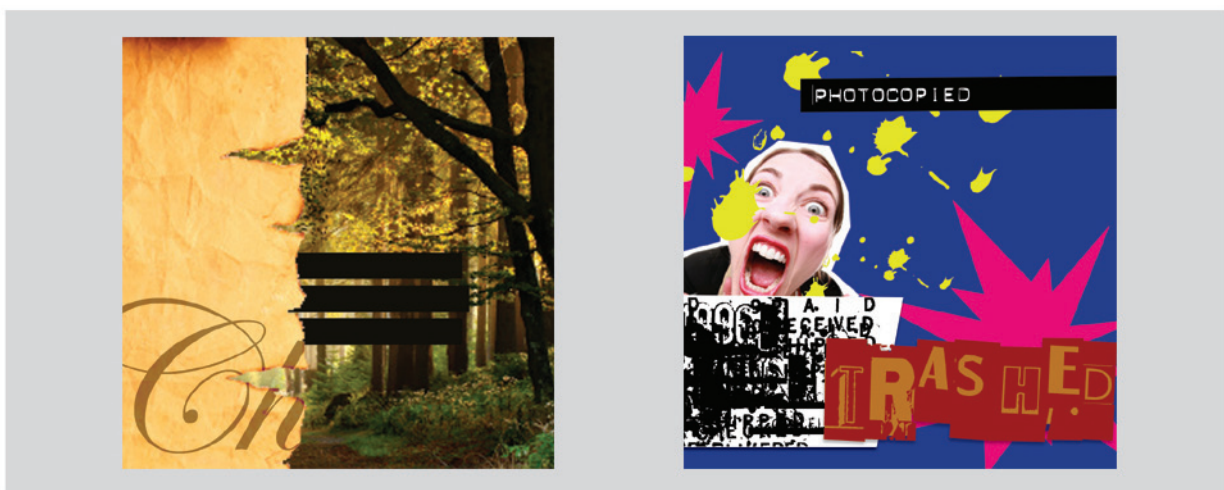
Points to remember:

Colour - Do you chose vivid or muted tones? What colours best set the mood?

Imagery - Select images which give a 'sense' of the style. Don't worry if it's not exactly the picture you visualise, the task is about providing an impression of your ideas!

Font - It's unlikely that you'll find the perfect word in the perfect font to include on your collages. The important factor is your choice of typeface and how it reflects the musical style rather than what it reads. Alternatively why not hand-draw your own personally designed font?

Composition - Don't get carried away with how much visual information you want to include in each collage. The mood generated by some musical styles may reflect a busy layout, others may not.



Extension project:

Got more ideas for more musical styles - why not design more CD covers for more genres?



| Exercise 2:

For this exercise you will consider how atmosphere can be further developed through design and applied to a broad range of commercial industries. Indeed, this basic process forms the basis for designing commercial branding and corporate identity.

Your brief is to design ONE double page magazine spread for each of the following business clients;

1. Yogo Retreat
2. Extreme Sports Centre
3. Travel Agency
4. Horror Movie promotion

Firstly, the most important factor to consider is how each business wants to make people feel about the product they are selling - e.g. will the mood you create reflect a lot of energy and activity, or peace and tranquillity? How will your choice of colours and fonts reflect this? It is a good idea to firstly brainstorm your thoughts and ideas for each individual business by making notes in your visual diary.

Fold a plain sheet of A3 paper in half to use as the base for each of your double-page magazine spreads. Using the materials available to you, create mixed-media collages to reflect each individual business - refer to the 'Points to remember' outlined in Exercise 1 for design tips.





Session Three | Semiotic Devices Part 1

You will need:

- Assorted newspapers/magazines/flyers/photographs/other printed documents
- Mixed media art materials e.g. paint, crayons, pastels, marker pens
- Scissors (alternatively edges can be ripped, or creased & torn for straight edges)
- Glue

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. As graphic designers, we are concerned with finding the most effective way to visually communicate our ideas. Using symbolism is an excellent way to achieve this.

| Exercise 1:

For each of the following words sketch an example of ONE commonly associated object:

1. **Forestry**
2. **Fruit**
3. **Shopping**
4. **Education**

| Exercise 2:

One of the most literal examples of symbolism used in design can be seen on road signs. Here, a message has only a matter of seconds to be seen and understood, and therefore must use the most immediate and practical imagery relating to the situation.



For this task you will design signage solutions to illustrate 4 unrelated subjects. Firstly, in your visual diary collect pictures, sketch or write notes of all the visual imagery you can find/think of which relate to the following:

1. **Global Traveller**
2. **Target Practice**
3. **Jungle Trekking**
4. **Chess Tournament**



Using the information you have collected as a starting point, design 4 possible road sign solutions for each of the subjects - remember; the most effective signs will be clear and practical, so consider how your ideas can be reduced down to their most basic elements and simplest shapes.

