

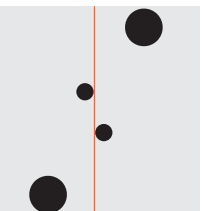
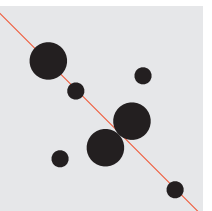
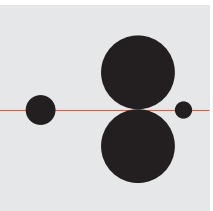
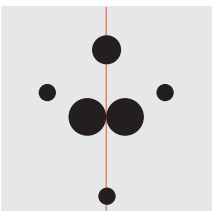
Syntax

Compositional Arrangement

Symmetry / Of the many types of arrangement that are possible, most fall into two categories of governing rationale (or logic, for short). The first of these is symmetry, which is about mirroring forms and their relative positions across an axis. Symmetry imposes a strict order on arrangement: it almost demands a single starting position at which to begin reading forms, and then a specific direction in which to read them; further, form elements that don't participate in that order tend to disconnect and seem out of place. Symmetrical arrangements present content very simply and directly, but they are best approached with caution because they're inherently static. They may also be associated with classical, historical or traditional ideas.

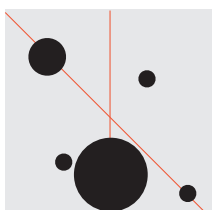
What are forms doing when they come together? A first consideration is how forms will occupy their given space—whether they fill that space to some degree or appear contained within it. Regardless of form identities, positive and negative may be arranged so that they're perceived as interacting with differing levels of “energy”: Their dialogue can be made to seem dynamic (alive, noisy, vigorous,

in motion); or their interaction can quiet down or become still, or static (devoid of energy or vitality, or restful). Further, how they are arranged becomes a kind of architecture that helps hold them together as a totality, helps viewers navigate among them, and also may convey ideas in support of an intended narrative.

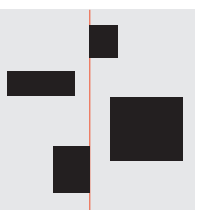
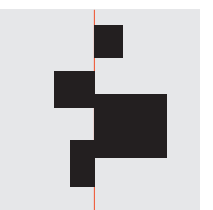
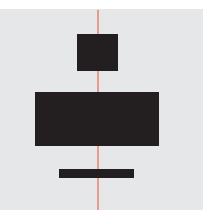


Within a symmetrical composition, elements may respond to a format's vertical (A), horizontal (B), or diagonal axis (C). This kind of symmetry, in which form elements' centers align with the axis (straddling or mirroring each other across the axis,) is described as bilateral symmetry.

In rotational symmetry, elements invert in their orientation relative to the axis (D).



Arranging forms symmetrically around two axes creates greater complexity.



Symmetrical forms may respond to their axis in a number of ways: by straddling or mirroring across it (A); alternating in position across it (B); and/or by explicitly hugging the axis or straying from it, referring to it by implication (C).

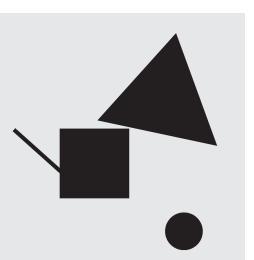
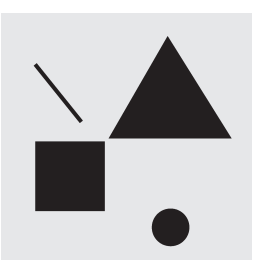
Asymmetry / The second, general type of organizational logic is one in which the relationships among forms do not respond to a single axis—the opposite of symmetry, or asymmetry. This means, generally, that no set of spaces, nor the contours of any forms, will correspond with each other in a direct, one-to-one repetition. It's often argued that, because information is organic in nature (whether it's pure form, imagery, or type), asymmetry is fundamentally better suited to organizing it: Asymmetry allows for the content to do what it needs to do in the most effective way possible, whereas symmetrical organization forces it into predetermined relationships.



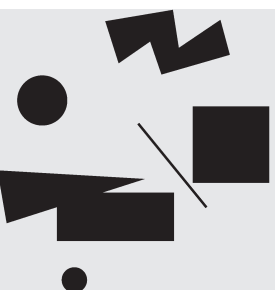
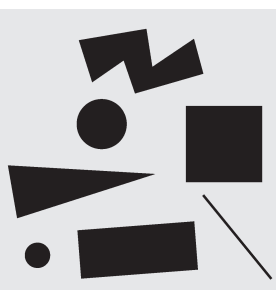
Broken Symmetry / A third, general type of arrangement strategy in which symmetry is dominant, but in which asymmetrical elements are present—or interfere with the overall symmetry. This is one way of integrating the two basic kinds of governing logic. Another way is sort of the reverse, what might be called “embedded” symmetry (but this is not a recognized term): Overall organizing material asymmetrically, but having specific elements (or groups of elements) that are themselves organized symmetrically.



Geometric vs. Organic Arrangement / Just as forms themselves may be geometric or organic in nature, the way they're arranged within a given space may exhibit similar qualities. It doesn't matter whether the forms themselves are geometric or organic. Geometric arrangement means regularity and mathematical relationships: repeated spatial intervals and alignments of edges and axes, especially ones that restate or emphasize basic structural attributes of the format. Conversely, just as organic forms are highly irregular, so too is organic arrangement: intervals change in measure and proportion; their negative space shapes are more differentiated; and there's a notable absence of alignments between contours and axes.





An arrangement of geometric forms in geometric, or mathematical, spatial relationships (A) is contrasted by the irregular, organic quality of their arrangement in irregular relationships (B).





Multiple forms situated around similar spatial intervals create static interaction. The composition above seems restful, comfortable, and quiet, and exhibits a kind of stasis, despite the irregularity and rotation of the forms.

Altering the intervals between form elements, or between elements and format edges (bottom), creates a dynamic composition. The movement of the eye is enhanced as these intervals exhibit more contrast with each other.

Mathematical Spatial Division / One may also compose elements such that they break a format's space into major intervals based on fractions of the format's proportions. There are a number of proportional systems to which designers in various cultures have turned throughout history; many of them are mathematical and appear most often in architecture, but in painting and sculpture as well. Because a spatial proportioning system is dependent on the specific format, and the specific forms for a particular project, it's a good idea to work from the relationships one can discover by intuitively testing layout variations with the actual material in question.



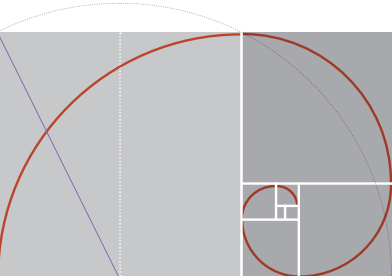
The Law of Thirds
A simplified mathematical approach divides any format into thirds (left to right or top to bottom) under the assumption that the intersection of these axes will be points of visual focus.



Any numeric progression or fractional relationship can be a starting point for creating spatial divisions—perhaps a system of halves (1:2;4:8:16), as shown at far left.

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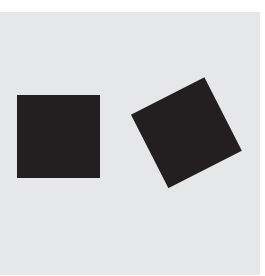
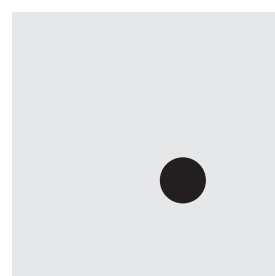
Another possibility is grid-based, or modular, relationships—where divisions are based on combinations of a specific geometric shape, like a square, as shown near left.



The Golden Section
First implemented in a design context by ancient African architects and sculptors (later used and named by Classical Greek architects), the Golden Section focuses on the relationship of a square and the rectangle that will be defined from it by using a line drawn from the square's corner to the midpoint of its bottom edge. Dividing this new rectangular area by the width



of its short side creates a new square and rectangle in the same proportions as the originals; and this division may be repeated over and over again in decreasing size. By connecting the corners of the squares with circular arcs, the spiral that is present in the formation of nautilus shells is magically revealed.

Movement / Like illusory depth, the perception of illusory movement imparts the sense that form elements are active, alive, or vital, and encourages viewers' engagement. We perceive a sensation of movement from three primary aspects of forms in space: the axial directions of form elements' contours, creating paths the eye will travel; the overall arrangement of forms whose superstructure also creates a directional path for the eye to follow as it jumps from one to the next; and the spatial intervals between form elements themselves, which generates the appearance of push and pull between the forms. The specific kinetic quality we appreciate in a composition contributes to our understanding of its content.



Even shifting a single element off center will cause it to be perceived as having moved.

Any element that is rotated away from orthogonal (90° horizontal/vertical) orientation will be perceived as moving, or kinetic, especially if it can be compared to any orthogonally oriented forms.



Forms that bleed the format, or overlap each other, are usually perceived as moving.

The sense of a sequence of animation occurs when forms change size, proportion, value, and/or orientation, either alternating between states or progressing from one state to another—especially along a consistent axis.


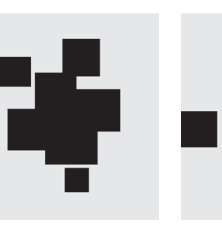
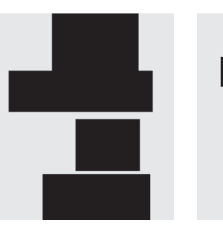



Structure / Arranging forms in space builds a skeleton of visual interconnections—a sturdy gestural framework of parts that together, create a totality called structure. Viewers recognize structure through the organization of forms' contours and axes as an underlying framework across space. Both within forms, as well as between forms, the contours and axes may be aligned or grouped in a limitless number of ways.

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Viewers will first appreciate a primary superstructure that binds everything together and dominates the visual field or format as a whole. Individual elements may be arranged in secondary structures that restate relationships in the superstructure, add to or evolve them, or contradict them entirely. Structures may be very rigid and repetitive or very fluid and irregular.

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Because viewers can easily relate visual structures to physical ones they encounter in the real world (plants, buildings, and so on), a particular structure's qualities will likely impart extremely different associations that influence a viewer's overall perception of content and, therefore, of its meaning.



Aligning



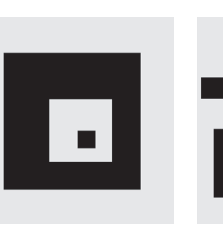
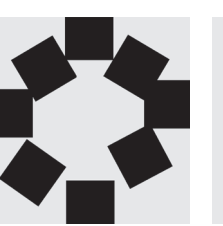
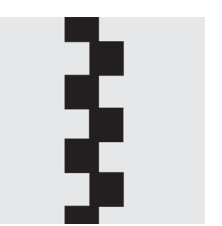
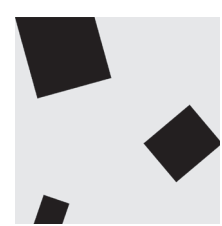
Staggering

Stepping

Stacking

Clustering

Mirroring



Rotational



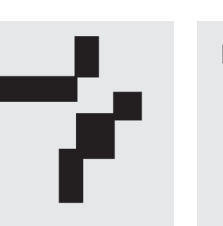
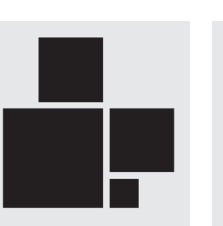
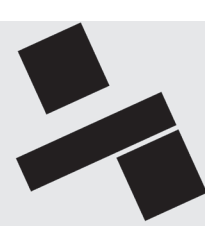

Chaining

Radial

Concentric

Spiraling

Waving



Orthogonal


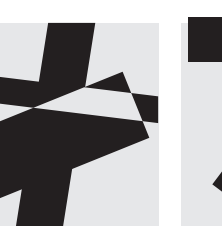
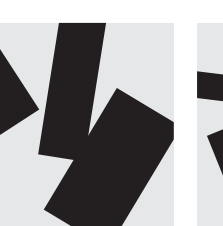

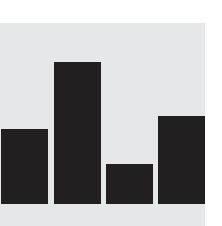

Diagonal

Grid-based

Branching

Constellational

Networked



Hanging

Resting (Baselined)

Parallel

Divergent

Intersecting

ZigZagging