

Design Fundamentals

by Steven Bradley

Elements,
Attributes, &
Principles

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Boulder, Colorado
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Version 1.0

Contents

- 1 Introduction

- 9 Chapter 1:
Visual Grammar
 - Objects
 - Structures
 - Activities
 - Relations

- 30 Chapter 2:
Elements
 - Space
 - Points and Dots
 - Lines
 - Forms: Surfaces and Planes
 - Volume and Mass

89	Chapter 3: Attributes Structures: Patterns and Textures Size, Scale, and Proportion Color Direction and Movement Visual Weight and Visual Direction
155	Chapter 4: Principles Gestalt Principles of Perception Unity Similarity and Contrast Dominance and Focal Points Visual Hierarchy Compositional Flow Compositional Balance
229	Conclusion
231	Additional Resources
236	References
242	About the Author

Direction and Movement

Two related attributes of design elements are direction and movement. Direction implies movement and movement implies direction. Both help lead the eye from one part of a design to another.

Direction

Direction in a design can provide mood and atmosphere and can lead to the illusion of movement within a design. There are 3 basic directions that can be present.

- **Horizontal direction** — suggests calmness, stability and tranquillity
- **Vertical direction** — suggests balance, formality and alertness
- **Diagonal direction** — suggests movement and action

These may all sound familiar as we previously talked about each when discussing lines and line like objects.

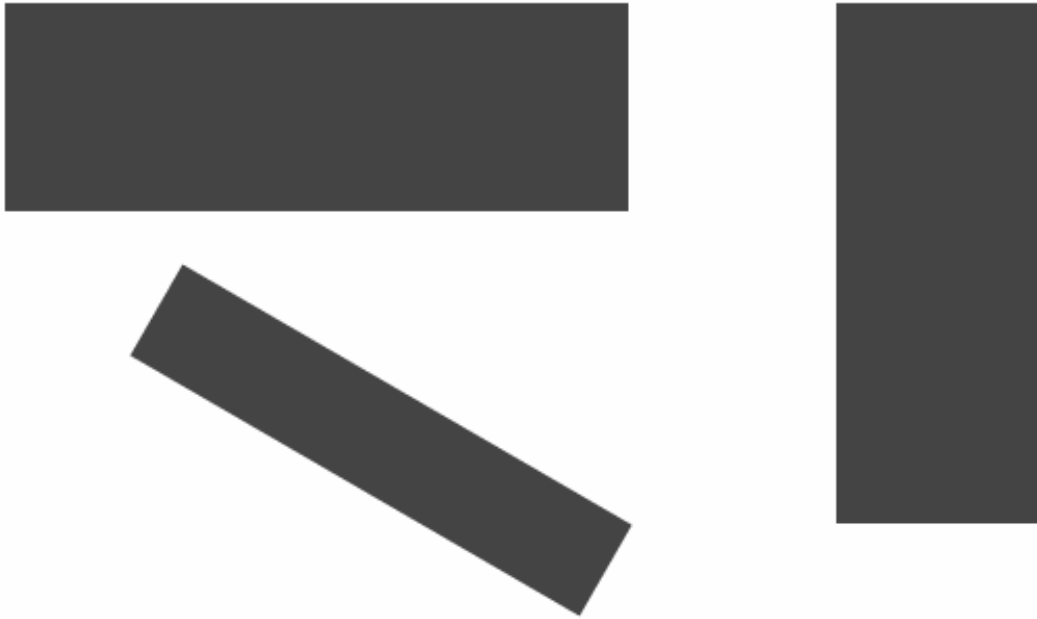


Figure 10-1: 3 shapes indicating horizontal, vertical, and diagonal directions

Lines are not the only way to show direction. Direction exists:

- Where people in images look
- Where figures and objects in images appear to move
- Through the orientation and shape of elements
- Through scale that creates perspective
- Through arrows and other pointing devices

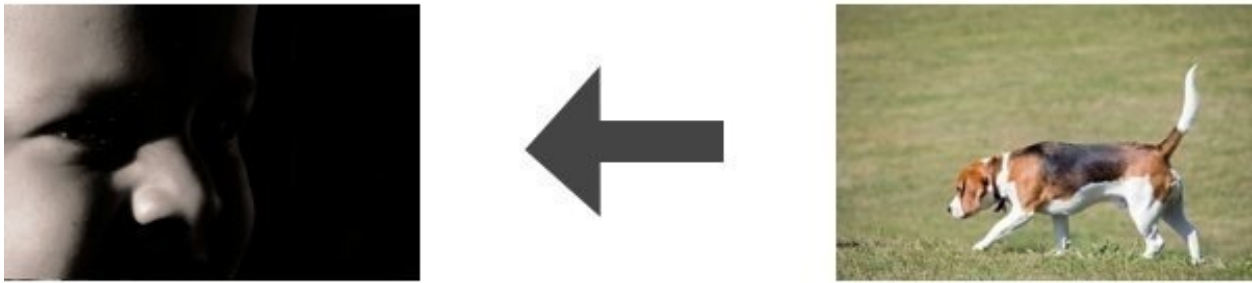


Figure 10-2: Direction indicated by eye gaze, an arrow, and movement

A composition will usually have a dominant direction based on the direction of the majority of its elements. The direction of elements could come from the shape of the elements or the direction of a person's gaze in an image or some kind of perceived motion in a given direction.

The dominant direction can help set the general atmosphere of a composition. For example if the dominant direction is horizontal the atmosphere will be stable and earth bound, based on the associations we make with horizontal elements.



Figure 10-3: Composition with horizontal direction (top left), vertical direction (top right), diagonal direction (bottom left) and a mix of horizontal and vertical direction (bottom right)

It's possible for a composition to have no dominant direction. The direction of different elements might be mixed and balance each other out. When this occurs the viewer is able to impose his or her own dominant direction on the composition.

Direction is important because the eye will impose a direction on a composition and follow it. You generally want your viewer to notice key elements and information in your design and your composition should direct them to this information.

We'll talk more about direction and see how it contributes to a design when we talk about compositional flow in the chapter on design principles.

Movement

Disregarding animation and the ability to resize a browser and watch elements rearrange themselves on the screen, the elements in our designs don't actually move. Instead we imply movement.

Through the use of lines, colors, values, textures, forms, and space you can direct the eye from one part of a composition to another. This is considered movement or the illusion of movement in a design.

Direction leads to implied movement. Your eye follows the direction of a line or the gaze of a figure and it moves to see where the lines lead or where the gaze is looking.



Figure 10-4: Where my eye moves through Edward Hopper's Lighthouse at Two Lights

Movement is the path the eye follows when looking at a composition. How the eye travels through a composition can help create unity in the composition and it helps tie the composition together through the relationship of various components.

There are several ways in which we can show movement in a design.

- Repetition of elements
- Rhythm

- Implied action
- Diagonal lines
- Gestural lines
- Directional lines
- Perspective
- Subject matter of elements
- Gradation

Movement in a composition can be of one of two types

- Literal or physical
- Compositional

Literal or physical movement occurs when some physical activity is present in the subject. People walking, for example, or objects such as cars seemingly in motion. Aerodynamic forms like planes suggest not only motion, but speed.

These objects exist for movement and so they convey a sense of movement when we see them. They aren't actually moving on the screen, but we know it's their function and perceive the movement they imply.



Figure 10-5: Representing physical movement

Compositional movement occurs when the elements in a composition move the viewer's eye through the composition. This can occur by following a repetition of colors or patterns through the composition. Here you aren't concerned with imagery that appears to be moving, but rather the direction elements are leading your eye.

Compositional movement can be either static or dynamic.

Static movement occurs when the eyes jumps from one separate part of a composition to another. In static movement the eye will observe a color or shape in one part of the composition and jump to another part of the composition that includes a similar color or shape. Repetition of colors or isolated shapes are characteristic of static movement.



Figure 10-6: Repetition of color, shape, and gradation give this composition a sense of vertical movement

Dynamic movement flows more smoothly through a composition. With dynamic movement the eye is guided through a composition by continuous lines, forms, or gradations. Open shapes closely related to adjacent shapes are characteristic of dynamic movement.

The eye will always move through a composition in some way. If you haven't planned for movement it will follow one of several natural patterns or their variations. Every composition has an optical center slightly above the geometric center. A viewer's eye naturally moves through this optical center as it moves from top to bottom in the composition.

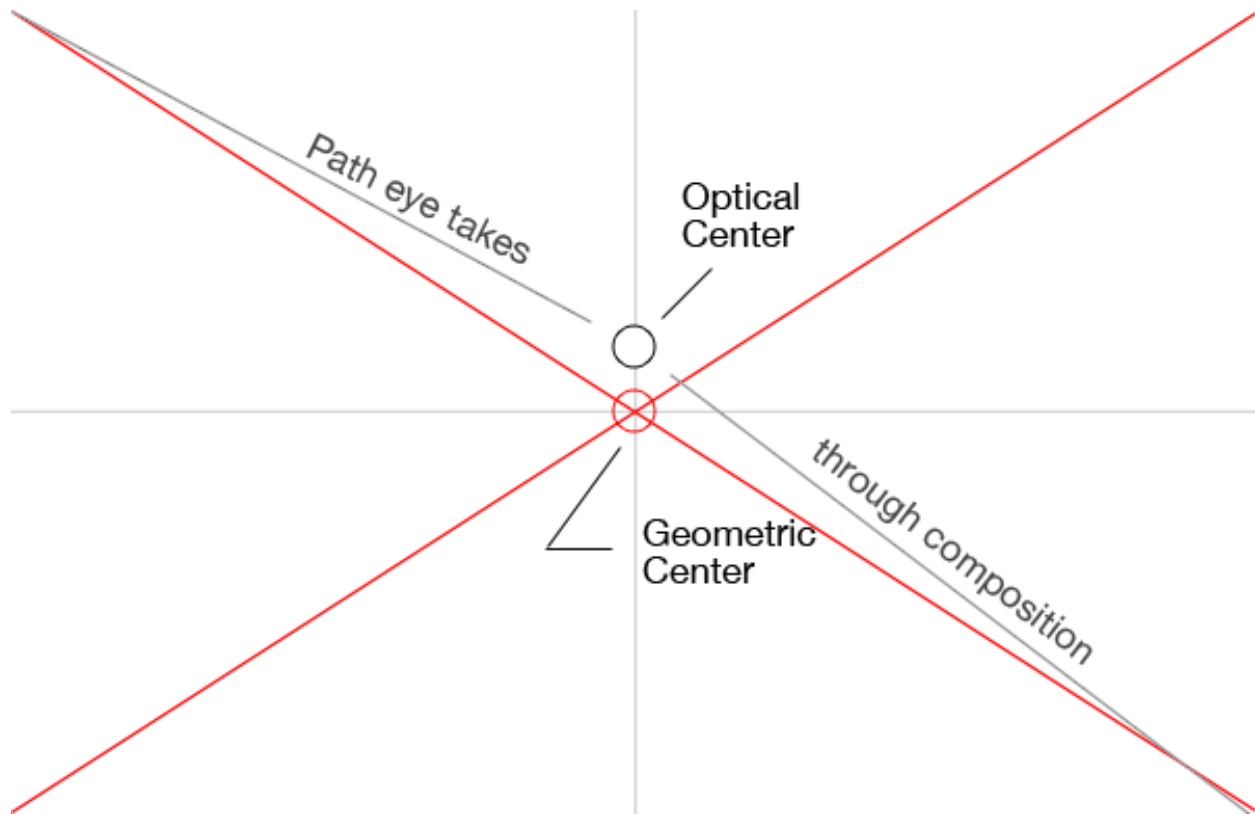


Figure 10-7: The optical center

There are some additional patterns based on this simple passing through the optical center.

- **The Gutenberg Diagram** — The eye generally sweeps from the top/left to the bottom/right paying less attention to the other 2 corners.
- **The F-Pattern Layout** — The eye starts in the top/left and moves across the page to the right before moving down a little and repeating the movement across the page. The general pattern follows the shape of the letter F.
- **The Z-Pattern Layout** — The eye starts in the top/left and follows a z-pattern until it reaches the bottom/right

The above patterns all start in the top/left in countries where reading is

left to right. In languages read right to left, the pattern would be reversed.

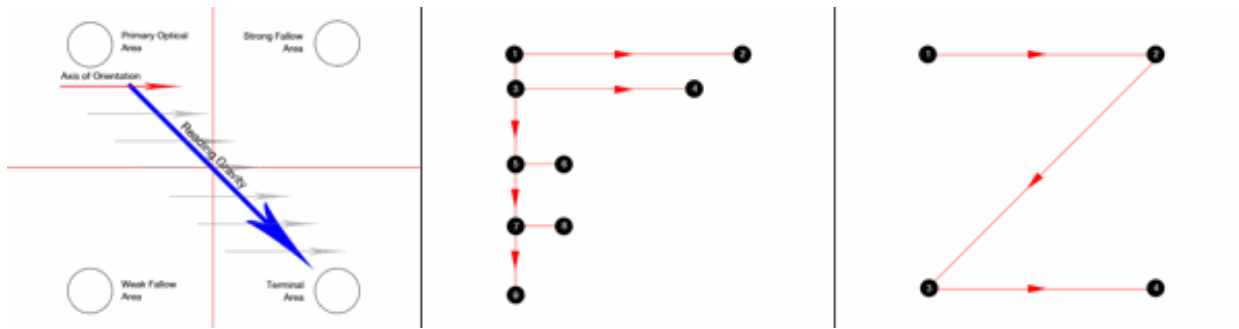


Figure 10-7: The Gutenberg Diagram, the F-Pattern layout, and the Z-pattern layout

Designing a sense of movement into an composition will always override these generic patterns. These natural patterns exist mostly in text heavy documents with an absence of design.

I'll talk more about each of these natural patterns when we discuss compositional flow later in the book.

About the Author

Steven Bradley is a designer and front end developer who specialized in building WordPress driven websites for small and micro business. In addition to creating websites he's an avid writer and blogger.

Born in Brooklyn and raised on Long Island, he now lives at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in Boulder, Colorado, where he hikes, bikes, plays softball, and enjoys beautiful weather nearly year round.

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Other sites he's written for include:

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As a small business owner he reaches out to other small business owners at his forum <http://www.small-business-forum.net>

He wishes to thank any and all who read through this, his first, book and looks forward to bringing you more books about design and development in the future.

I hope you enjoyed this sample from
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