Unraveling the Mystery of Design Elements and Principles in Clothing

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Elements of Design

Color

Color is the hue, value, and intensity that defines parts and sets off one area of design from another. **Hue** is the name of the color (red, blue). **Value** is how light or dark the color is (light blue, navy blue). **Intensity** is how bright or dull it is (4-H green, neon green).

Shape/Form

**Shape** is two-dimensional and appears flat; **form** is three-dimensional with length, width, and depth. (A circle is a shape; a ball is a form.)

Texture

**Texture** is the surface quality of an item. It is how something feels when it is touched or looks like it would feel if touched (rough, smooth, soft, or hard).

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Note for the Project Helper

Not all exhibits in the clothing project area will require identification of elements and principles. If a garment or accessory has been designed and/or constructed to enhance personal appearance, the elements and principles will most likely need to be identified.

Design elements and principles are difficult concepts for younger youth. Beginning to learn about line and color is emphasized for beginning youth. See Adventures in Clothing, 4-H 315a or Discovering Choice, 4-H 317a, pp. 24-25. As youth have more experience, they should begin to learn about other elements and how to use the principles of design in making choices. The principles of design are introduced in Strategies for Clothing, 4-H 315c pp. 4-10.

File: Youth and 4-H

Unraveling the Mystery of Design Elements and Principles in Clothing

By learning and using the elements and principles of design, you will increase your understanding of how and why some things work together and some simply “don’t look right.”

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Elements of Design

The elements of design are **shape/form**, **color**, **texture**, and **line**. These are the tools used by you and clothing manufacturers when a garment is designed and constructed to enhance your appearance.

Shape/Form

**Form** is the shape and structure of an item. **Shape** is two-dimensional and appears flat; **form** is three-dimensional with length, width, and depth. (A circle is a shape; a ball is a form.)

Texture

**Texture** is the surface quality of an item. It is how something feels when it is touched or looks like it would feel if touched (rough, smooth, soft, or hard).
Rhythm leads the eye from one part of a design to another part, creating movement through repetition of pattern or color. Follow the flow of orange waves or white daisies in the examples below.

Proportion refers to the relationship between parts of a design, such as the size of the clovers compared to the size of the shirts. The examples below show good proportion.

Emphasis is the quality that draws your attention to a certain part of the design first (a logo or stripe, for example).

Balance makes the right and left side of a garment appear to be equal, even though they may not be exactly the same. If the two sides are the same, it is symmetrical balance. If the two sides are different in some way but still give the same weight, it is asymmetrical balance.

When things look right together, you have created unity. Unity includes clothing, all accessories, and you. Lines and shapes that repeat each other show unity (curved lines and curved shapes). Colors that have a common hue create unity. Texture also helps create unity (a soft texture with curved lines). Try to create a certain mood or theme—sporty, tailored, dramatic, casual—and keep the clothing and accessories in harmony with your coloring, your build, and your age. Then you’ll have unity.

Unity is a difficult principle to define. It is both a principle in itself as well as the goal for the overall look. What about the pink and green outfit? Is that a good example of unity? Notice the sundress with sandals in the picture. In your opinion, does that create "unity"?

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Principles of Design
The principles of design (rhythm, emphasis, proportion, balance, and unity) are how we use the tools (elements) to create looks (whole outfits, accessories, shoes, etc.) that are different or unique.