

Advanced Higher Graphic Communication

Class 3: Shapes

Lesson 1 – Squares

The square denotes honesty and stability. Squares are familiar, trusted shapes. Because the vast majority of the text we read is set in squares and rectangles, it has become familiar, safe, and comfortable.

Squares and rectangles are probably the most common geometric shapes we encounter. A few books, especially those for kids, may be cut in irregular shapes but adult (i.e. 'serious') correspondence comes in squares -- both the physical shape of the books, magazines, newspapers, and the rectangular columns of set text.

Some designers might equate square with boring. It's true that other, unexpected shapes, can grab attention better than the simple square but don't forget the importance of comfort and familiarity. Imagine how difficult it becomes to file everyday correspondence if letterhead came in a variety of triangles or freeform shapes. Try reading an entire book with all the text set in circles. Squares and rectangles definitely have a place in design.

Some ways you can use squares and rectangles:

- To symbolize honesty, stability, equality, comfort, or familiarity. It could also symbolize rigidity or uniformity.
- Related to the first bullet item, use repeating squares to suggest familiar themes (checkerboard pattern to represent a game board, the checkered flag at the end of a race, a tablecloth).
- To highlight, organize, or set apart information using a solid or outlined box.
- Use a square unexpectedly. Set a block of text in a solid or outlined but tilted box — with or without also tilting the text.

Exercise

Go through your own magazines and try to find as many different examples of square and rectangular shapes. It won't be difficult. Now, look for especially creative use of square shapes. Rectangles are more common than perfect squares. Study logo designs. Look for examples of square shapes that convey the attributes of honesty, stability, equality, comfort, or familiarity. Look for examples of 3-dimensional square shapes too such as software boxes.

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Lesson 2 – Circles

Circles suggest infinity. They are also protective (think of protective encircling arms). They can also denote free movement such as a rolling ball or a more controlled movement such as a spinning globe. The sense of movement is often enhanced through shading or the use of lines (as suggested in Class 2).

Outside of logo designs, circles are less common elements of design which makes them good for grabbing attention, providing emphasis, and breaking up familiar rectangular blocks of text. You could set text in circles or simply use a circle as the background for more traditional blocks of text.

Some ways you can use circles:

- To symbolize infinity and protectiveness. Circles could also suggest something well-rounded or complete. Similar to protectiveness, circles could also imply security.
- Related to the first bullet item, use circles to suggest familiar themes (bullet holes, a stack of cannonballs, a bunch of grapes -- or just about any round fruit or vegetable, a target, the earth).
- To highlight, organize, or set apart information using a solid or outlined circle. Try a freeform circle that looks like it was drawn with a marker or pen to highlight important text.
- Replace the letter O or other 'round' letters in text with a circular shape that suggests that letter. Try an orange in the word Orange or a basketball, baseball, or soccer ball to replace an O or other letter in the nameplate of a sports newsletter.

Exercise

Go through your own magazines and try to find as many different examples of circles as you can. Look for especially creative use of circles. Study logo designs. Look for examples of circles that convey the attributes of infinity or protectiveness or circles that are suggestive of other circular objects such as the earth or a piece of fruit. Find examples of text set in a circular shape and for pieces that have been cut into circular or near circular shapes or that include circular diecuts (cut out shapes).

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Graded Assignment

In the last lesson I asked you to separate your Class Samples into examples of geometric, natural, and abstract shapes.

1. Select an example *other than a square/rectangle* of a geometric shape used in a piece or a logo and write a brief paragraph (2-5 sentences) describing that shape, how it is used, and what emotions, feelings, or ideas it conveys.
2. Select an example of a natural shape used in a piece or a logo (remember these can be shapes from nature or manmade creations). Write a brief paragraph (2-5 sentences) describing that shape, how it is used, and how it relates to the theme or subject matter of the piece.
3. Select an example of an abstract shape used in a piece (symbols, icons, etc.) and briefly describe it in 2-5 sentences. What idea does the abstract shape convey?