Elements and Principles of Design:  
Contrast and Balance

Contrast refers to opposites in values, colors, textures, shapes, and other elements. Contrasts create visual excitement, and add interest to the work. If all the art elements - value, for example - are the same, the result is monotonous and unexciting.

- **Pattern contrast**: intricate pattern vs. no pattern
- **Edge contrast**: hard edge vs. soft edges
- **Value contrast**: dark, middle and light values
- **Intensity contrast**: pure colors vs. muted colors
- **Temperature contrast**: cool colors vs. warm colors
- **Texture contrast**: textured vs. smooth
- **Shape contrast**: organic shapes vs. geometric shapes
- **Size contrast**: large shapes vs. small shapes
**Balance** is the concept of visual equilibrium, and relates to our physical sense of balance. It is a reconciliation of opposing forces in a composition that results in visual stability. Most successful compositions achieve balance in one of two ways: **symmetrically** or **asymmetrically**. Balance in a three dimensional object is easy to understand; if balance isn't achieved, the object tips over. To understand balance in a two dimensional composition, we must use our imaginations to carry this three dimensional analogy forward to the flat surface.

**Symmetrical balance** can be described as having equal "weight" on equal sides of a centrally placed fulcrum. It may also be referred to as **formal balance**. When the elements are arranged equally on either side of a central axis, the result is **Bilateral** symmetry. This axis may be horizontal or vertical. It is also possible to build formal balance by arranging elements equally around a central **point**, resulting in **radial** symmetry.

**Asymmetrical balance**, also called **informal balance**, is more complex and difficult to envisage. It involves placement of objects in a way that will allow objects of varying visual weight to balance one another around a fulcrum point. This can be best imagined by envisioning a literal balance scale that can represent the visual "weights" that can be imagined in a two dimensional composition. For example, it is possible to balance a heavy weight with a cluster of lighter weights on equal sides of a fulcrum; in a picture, this might be a cluster of small objects balanced by a large object.