**Elements of Design & Principles of Composition**

**Teacher Copy**

This information from J. Michael Gillette’s *Theatrical Design and Production* pgs 78-85

**Elements of Design**

**Line:** a mark that connects two points. The characteristics of a line are determined by

* **Dimension**—the length and width of a line
* **Quality**—the line’s shape, value (how light/dark it is), and its contrast with surrounding objects. Ex-lines can be straight, curvilinear, angled, jagged, serpentine, or any combination of these characteristics
* **Character**—the lines’ emotionally evocative characteristics (ex- long lines more noticeable than short, lines that contrast strongly with surroundings/backgrounds draw more attention than those that don’t, etc…)

**Shape:** Any line that encloses a space creates a shape

* In set design, shapes create walls, platforms & defines outlines of windows, doors, furniture, etc…

**Mass:** the three-dimensional manifestation of shape. Creates an awareness of depth and spatial arrangements

**Position:** the relative location of adjacent shapes or masses. (both the distance between objects and their placement to other forms around them.

**Texture:** the visual or tactile surface characteristics or appearance of an object (ex-rough, soft, fuzzy, slick/metallic). Provides clues to the play’s psychological environment (ex-smooth surfaces could suggest a finished, orderly type of environment vs. rough textures which could suggest a less polished, harsher atmosphere)

**Principles of Composition**

**Unity:** creating a stylistic plan that all elements fit into. (Ex-Production concept) Each part of the design fits/connects with the production concept.

**Harmony**: the blending and unity that happens when all elements of a design fit together. The combination of design elements seem to naturally blend or flow together, avoids discordant/incompatible contrasts.

**Contrast:** the juxtaposition of dissimilar design elements. Effective contrast works in opposition to the major or dominant visual theme in a composition, it is balanced. Too much contrast can destroy a visual theme, but too little contrast (to much harmony) will be monotonous.

**Variation:** Variation of monotonous elements can create visual interest (ex-using a simple repeated floor pattern can be boring, but varying the shape of every second or third object can create visual interest that highlights the whole design. Line, shape, texture can all be varied.

**Balance:** achieved by arranging design elements to give a sense of restfulness or equilibrium to the design. The two types of balance are

* **Symmetrical Balance**: if the design were folded in half both sides would mirror each other perfectly
* **Asymmetrical Balance:** balance created through juxtaposition of dissimilar design elements (line, form, mass, value, color)

**Emphasis**: directing the audience’s attention to a specific place. (ex-in scenic design the focal points would be areas of the stage which specific scenes or moments are played in). Can be created in different ways (ex-converging lines or changing textures can direct audience’s attention to specific locations in a set)