



Positive and Negative Space



Positive & Negative

- Form is the positive element, a solid thing or object
- Space is known as the negative—not in a bad way, but as the absence, or opposite of the positive element.
- Space is the “ground” in which form becomes a “figure”.



Positive & Negative

- The relationship between space and form becomes dependent on one another.
- When you alter one it also alters the other.
- How the form sits in the space defines the visual activity, movement and sense of dimension perceived by the viewer.



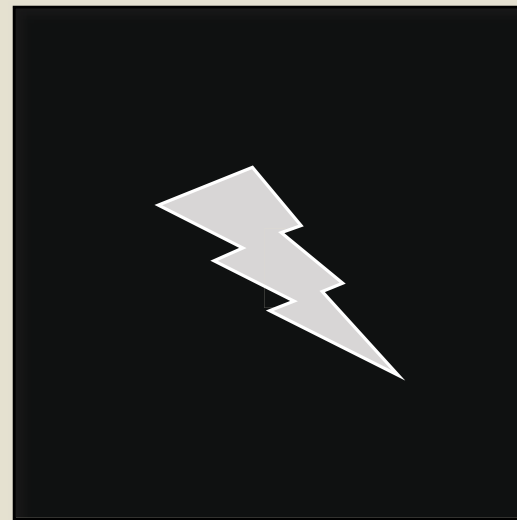
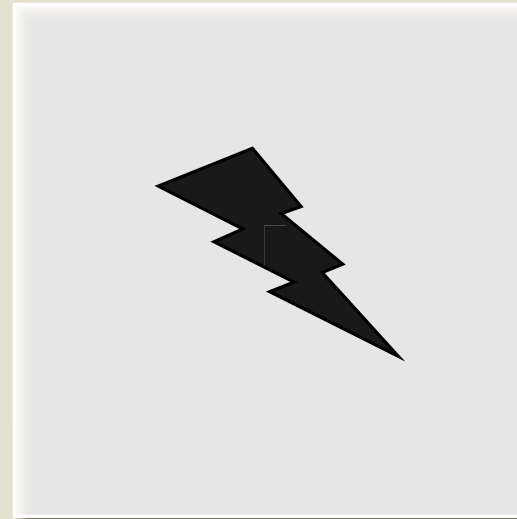
Positive & Negative

- Establishing a solid relationship between the form and space is imperative to ensure that the viewer can grasp the intended message found in the images and text presented.
- Organizing the positive elements in relation to the negative space is therefore one of the most important visual aspects of design.
- It affects so many other aspects, from general emotional response to informational hierarchy.



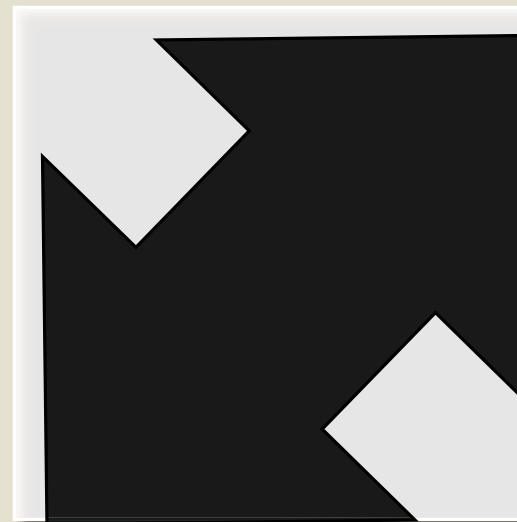
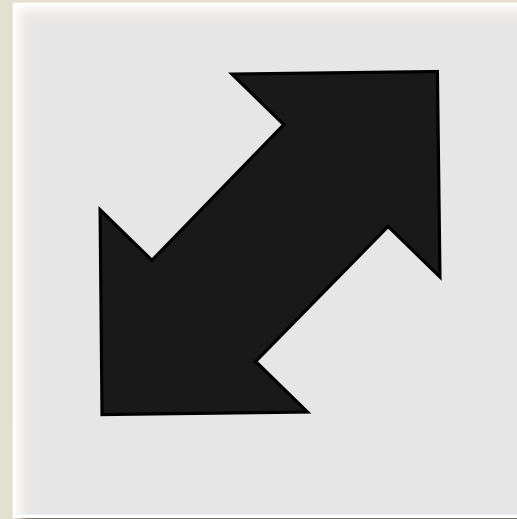
Positive & Negative

- A positive (black) form on a negative space (white) ground, and the reverse, retains its identity as positive if there is no other form or spatial break to define it as anything else.
- Note how the white form on the black background appears larger than its same-sized black counterpart on the white field.



Positive & Negative

- As a black (positive) form becomes larger within a negative (white) field, the leftover negative spaces become small and eventually, might appear to be positive (white forms) in the context of a black field.



Positive & Negative

- The positive/negative relationship must be understandable and present some kind of logic to the viewer.
- It must also be composed in such a way that the feeling this composition, or visual logic generates the intended message the designer was trying to convey.



Positive & Negative



- The logic of composition—the visual order and relationships of the figure (positive/form) and ground (negative/space)—is entirely abstract.
- It depends greatly on how the brain interprets the information that the viewer sees.

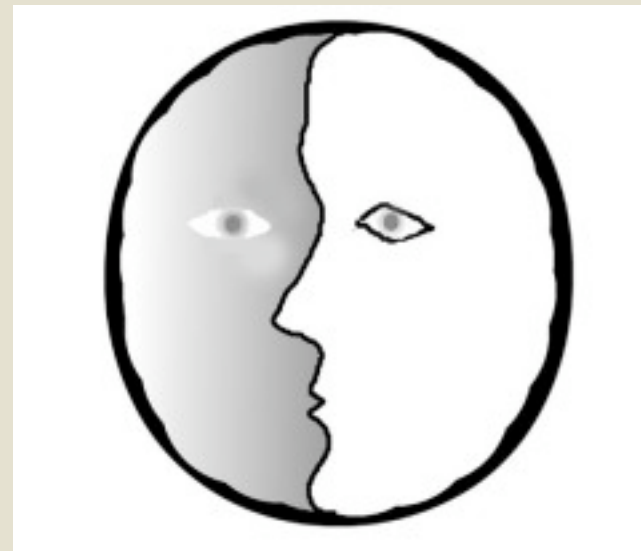
Positive & Negative

- Using more dynamic, angular and heavy lines and shapes creates an extremely active relationship between positive and negative, it may be appropriate when you want to convey energy, growth, and aggression.
- Using lighter, softer lines and shapes creates a more subtle relationship which might be used to communicate messages such as quietness, dependability, quality, steadfastness.



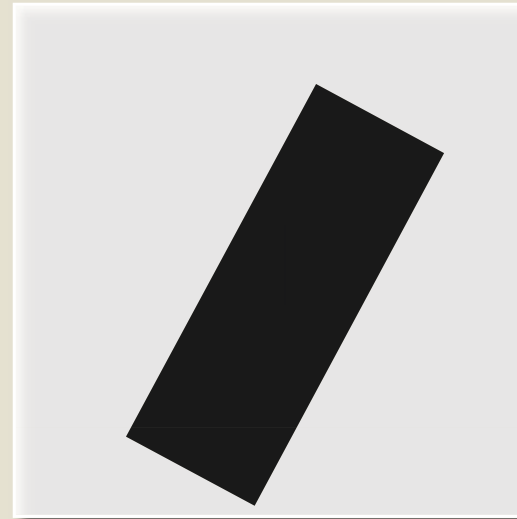
Positive & Negative

- The degree of activity in a design will depend on many things;
 - how many forms are interacting in a given space
 - the size of the forms relative to the space
 - how intricate the alternation between positive and negative appears to be
- A composition might have relatively simple structural qualities—meaning only one or two forms in a relatively restrained interaction—but unusual relationships that appear make it more active or more complex, despite the compositions apparent simplicity.



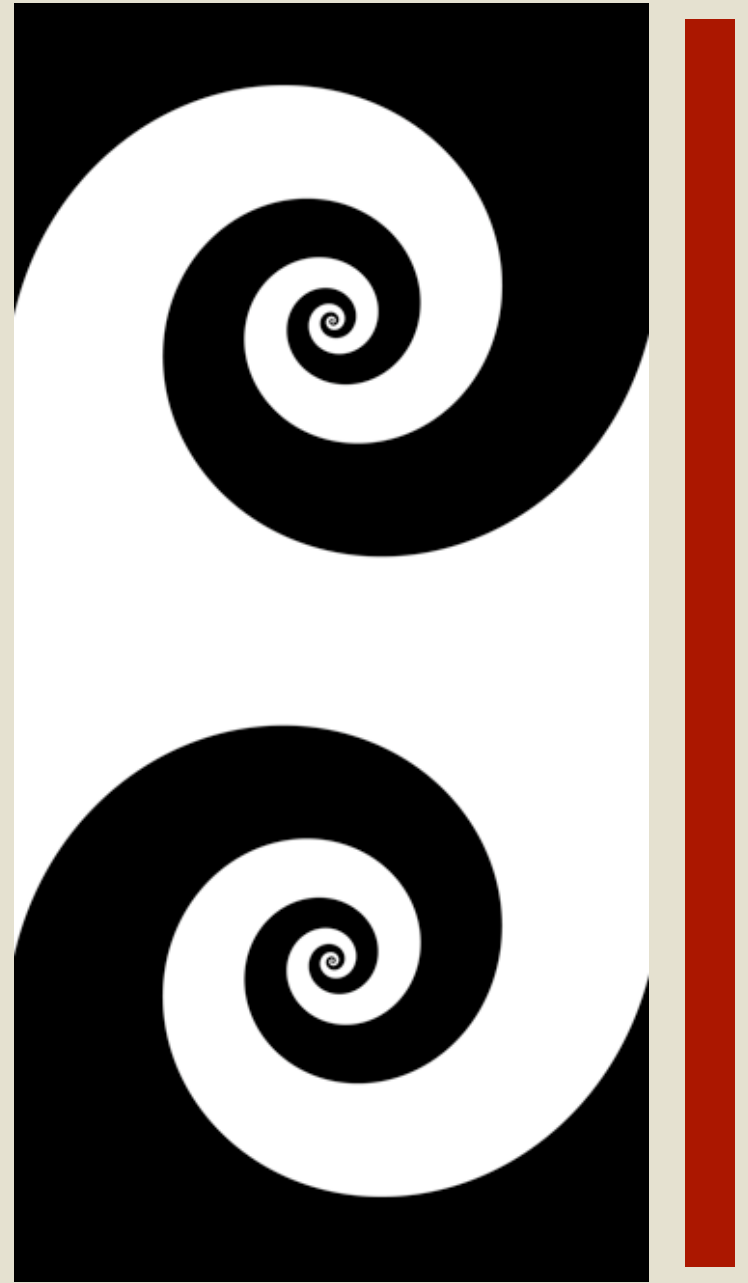
Positive & Negative

- Compare the active figure/ground relationship (top right) with the inactive figure/ground (bottom right).
- Note how the potential meaning of each simple abstract environment is conveyed.
- Compare these pairs of simple, opposing ideas between the two examples: loud/quiet, aggressive/passive, nervous/sedate, living/dead, and energetic/weak.



Positive & Negative

- In some composition's the positive/negative (figure/ground) relationship can be quite complex, to the extent that each might appear optically to be the other at the same time.
- This effect, in which what appears positive one minute appears negative next, this is called figure/ground reversal or positive/negative reversal.
- This visual experience is very intriguing for the brain, as a result the viewer is enticed to stay a while and discover new optical surprises.



Figure/ground reversal



Figure/ground reversal

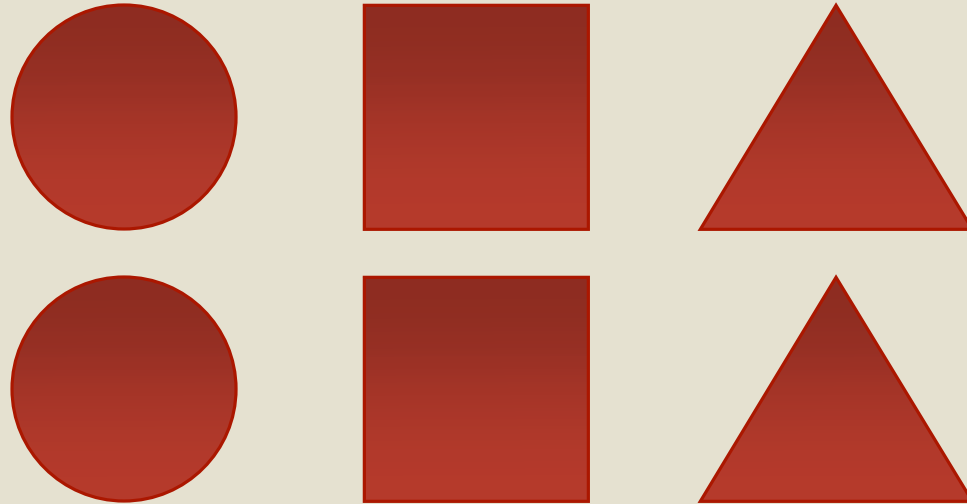


It is what is appears to be.

Make decisions about forms based on how they appear rather than on intended effect or, worse, measurements.

Form creates an optical illusion, so it must be chosen based on how it looks, since this is what the viewer will go on as well—their perception of the forms and message.

It is what is appears to be.

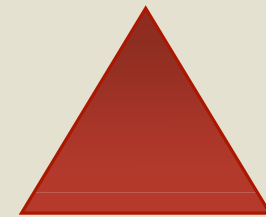
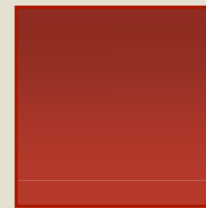
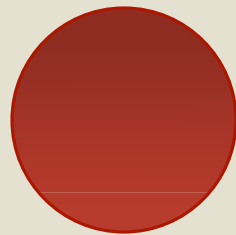
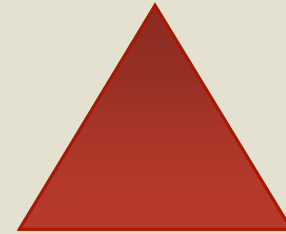
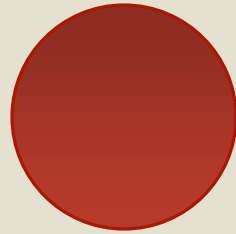


In this example, we have 3 basic shapes, all the same height.

Note the square appears larger than both the circle and the triangle.

So, for all intents and purposes, it is. This is optical illusion is a function of how our brains interpret rounded, angular, and square images relative to each other.

It is what is appears to be.



If the goal here was to make the three shapes appear all the same size, the circle and triangle would need to be adjusted.

Only when all the three shapes appear to be the same size are they really the same size—as far as the viewer is concerned.

Consider each element



- In a design you must ask your self essential organizational questions:
- Which form will be descending?
- Which form will be most in the background?
- Which form will descend from right to left?
- Which form counteracts that movement?
- Which form will move from top to bottom?
- Which angles align and which do not?
- What effect does texture appear to have on the depth or flatness of the background colour?
- Being able to describe what the forms appear to be doing is crucial to understanding how they do it—and how to make them do it when you want to?



Break time

Please be back in 10 minutes

Clarity and Decisiveness

- Resolved and refined compositions create clear visual messages.
- This means the composition has a understanding of what kind of message is being carried by a given form, what it does in space, and what effect the combination of these aspects has on the viewer.



Clarity and Decisiveness

- “Resolved” means that the reasons for where everything is, how big the things are, and what they are doing with each other in and around space.
- The visual logic is clear.
- All parts seem considered relative to each other.



Clarity and Decisiveness

- “Refined” is a term to describe form or composition.
- It means that the form and composition has been made to be more like itself—more clearly, more simply, communicating one specific kind of quality.



Clarity and Decisiveness

- Like the term “beautiful”, the quality of “refinement” can apply to rough, organic, and aggressive forms, as well as sensuous, elegant, and clean ones.
- It is not a term of value so much as an indicator of whether the form is as clear as possible.



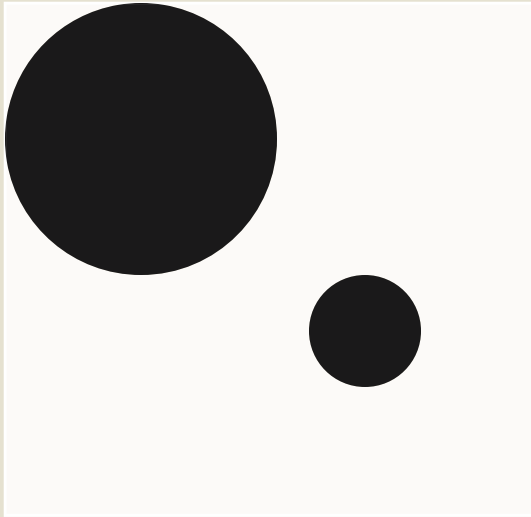
Clarity and Decisiveness

- Clarity means whether a composition and the forms within it are readily understandable.
- Clarity depends on whether there is refinement of the forms.
- Clarity also depends on the resolution of the relationships between form and space and whether these are “decisive”, appear to have a purpose and make sense.
- A form or spatial relationship can be called decisive if it is clearly one thing and not the other.

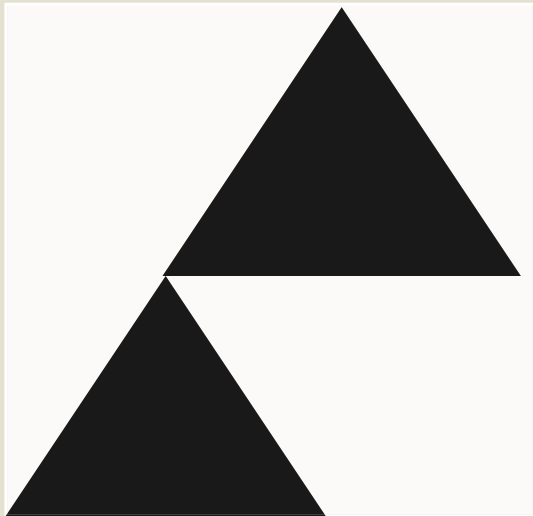


Clarity and Decisiveness

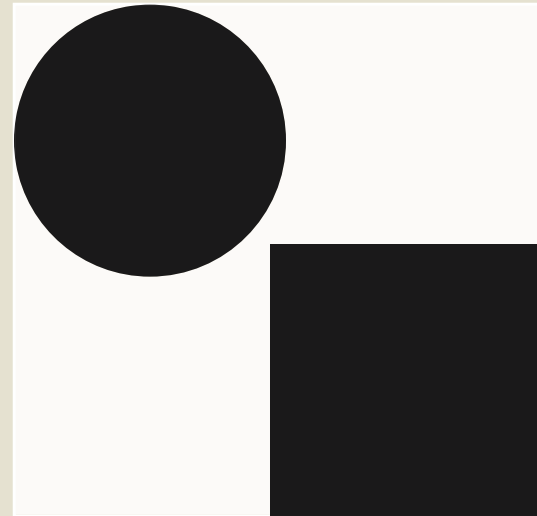
decisive



- For example if we ask; is one form larger or smaller than the one next to it, or are they both the same size?
- If this question can be answered quickly with no argument—then the formal or spatial relationship is decisive.
- Which examples are decisive and which are not?



indecisive



Clarity and Decisiveness

- Being decisive with the visual qualities of a layout is important in design because the credibility of the message being conveyed relies on the confidence with which the forms and composition has been resolved.
- A weak composition, is an indecisive one.
- It will evoke uneasiness in the viewer, not just boredom.
- Uneasiness is not a good place to start when you are trying to establish a good platform on which to build a complicated message that might involve persuasion.





Home work check

Please get your work out and be prepared to discuss your process.