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DESIGN
PRINCIPLES
for the
SCRAPBOOK
PAGE

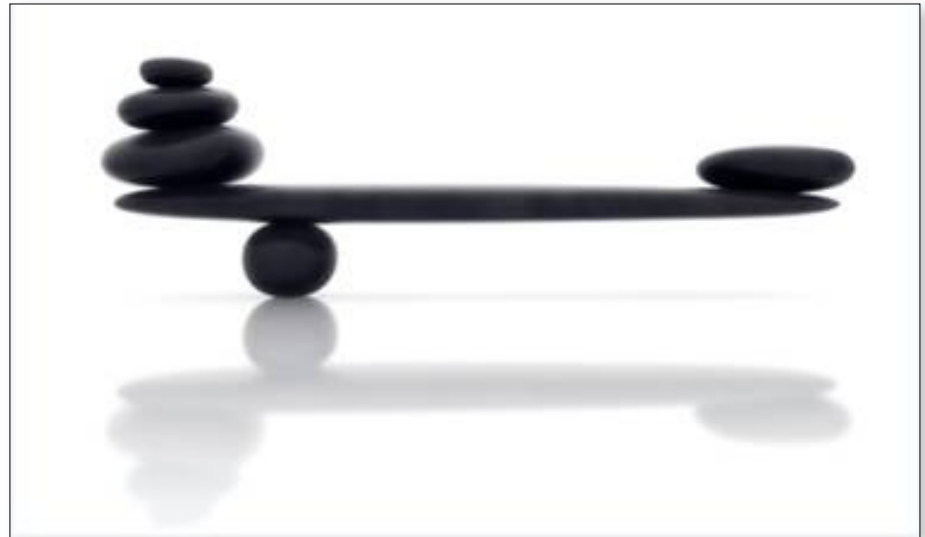
{LESSON SIX} Design Principle of Balance

What are the balancing acts in your life right now?

Are you trying to get enough exercise to feel good about that big ice cream cone you had last night? Maybe you're balancing saving and spending money. Perhaps you're getting up a little earlier so that you'll be done with work in time to spend time with family or friends.

Balance is about mixing and matching, giving and taking. It's about placing three small stones on one side of the scale to balance the single large stone.

When the different parts of your life are in balance with one another, your days are easier to navigate. When the parts of a scrapbook page are in balance with one another, you've got a page that's pleasing to look at and that tells your story well.



balance on scrapbook pages

Physical balance in our surroundings is something we're used to. We understand that if all the kids sit at one end of a narrow bench, it's going to tip, whereas distributing the weight means everything will be stable. Achieving balance on a scrapbook page isn't quite as clear cut: there isn't any actual physical weight to work with.

Successfully incorporating balance into a scrapbook page design is actually creating an illusion of balance. While you might not always be sure that you've been successful, what you can be sure about is when you have NOT been successful. You'll sense it.

Refining your ability to "see" visual weights and how they play off one another will help you design well-balanced pages.

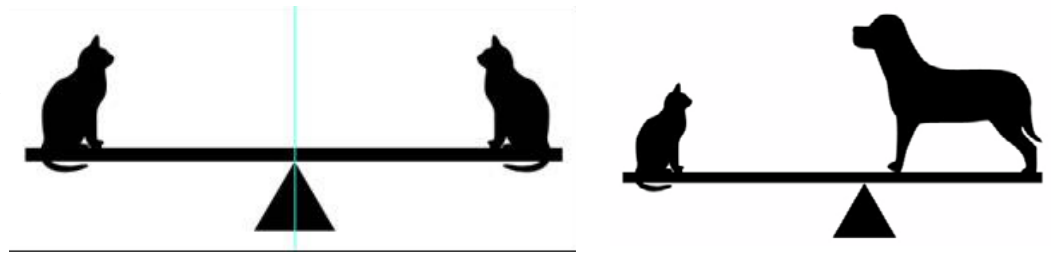
Read on to understand how it is that the smaller cluster at top right can balance the larger four-block grid on "Greet the New Year."



simple machines and balance

There's a formula you might have learned about in science class that uses weights and distances from a fulcrum for figuring out how to get balance. I'm going to simplify it with a couple of cats and a dog.

If two cats of the same weight were sitting on a board with a fulcrum smack dab in the middle, the board would balance.



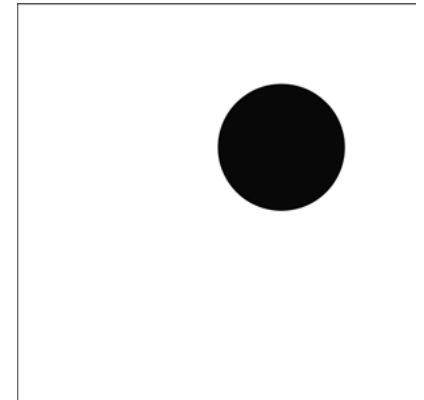
However . . . if there were a dog a lot bigger than the cat on one side of the board, we'd need to move the dog closer to the fulcrum in order to get that board to balance. The point you should take from this is that balance takes into account a fulcrum (or in page design this could be thought of as an axis) and weights.

visual forces and balance

So how do we “weigh” things in a visual design? Psychological concepts about how humans perceive things can be applied to art. The canvas and the elements on it work together, affecting perceived visual weights and balance and even causing a viewer to perceive visual “pull” or perceptual forces.

I placed a black circle on a white square. But you do not see the circle and the square separately. You see them as a whole: you see the circle as being off-center within the square. There's more, though: there is something restless about the circle. It looks as though it was at the center and wishes to return--or as though it wants to move away even farther away from center.

Objects in an image have weight and directional pull. How that object sits on its ground (or the canvas) can create balance or imbalance. What's more, how it sits in relationship to other elements causes balance or imbalance.



These ideas about perceived forces are from work by Rudolf Arnheim who brought psychological concepts about perception to the visual arts

visual weight

Use these general rules about psychological perception of elements on a ground to get a sense of how elements on your page take on visual weight.

Most scrapbook pages that achieve good visual balance do it either through symmetrical balance or asymmetrical balance.

Dark colors have more weight than lighter colors.

Bright colors have more weight than neutrals—in fact some colors just are weightier than others. Red tends to be heavy, and yellow tends to be light.

Warm colors tend to expand (and, thus, thus, have more weight) than cooler colors.

Regular (and known) shapes (rectangles, circles, triangles) are weightier than irregular shapes.

Larger elements are heavier than smaller ones.

As an element moves away from the center of your page, it gains weight.

An interesting element has more weight than a less-interesting one.

An element on the right side of your layout has more weight than the very same element on the left side.

Elements on the top seem to have more weight than those on the bottom.

The weight of an element increases with its degree of isolation.

Large flat areas without much detail can be balanced by smaller irregularly shaped objects since the eye is led towards the more intricate shape.

Filled space has more weight than empty (or white) space.

Elements on the right side of the layout have more weight than the very same elements on the left side.

Elements at the top of your layout have more weight than the very same elements on the bottom.

Elements surrounded (or isolated) by white space take on weight.

Interesting elements (this could be due to many things including interesting texture, image, dimension, color, or shape) have more weight than less interesting elements.

symmetry | symmetrical balance

Most scrapbook pages that achieve good visual balance do it either through symmetrical balance or asymmetrical balance.

To get symmetrical balance, place items of equal visual weight on either side of a centrally placed fulcrum. On “Set A Course” items are mirrored on either side of a vertical axis.

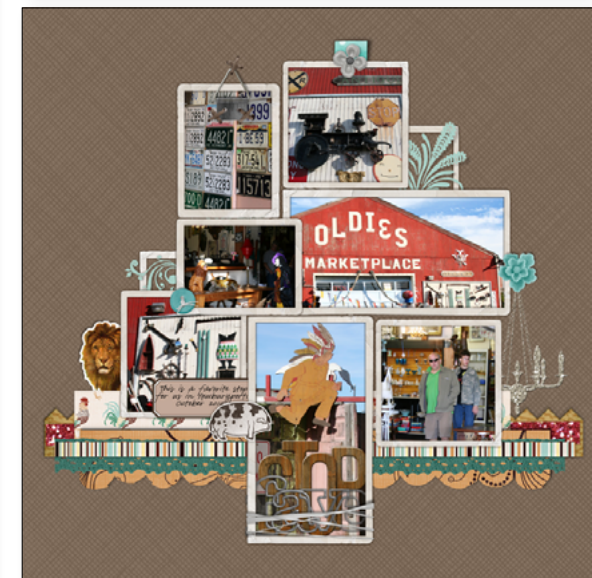
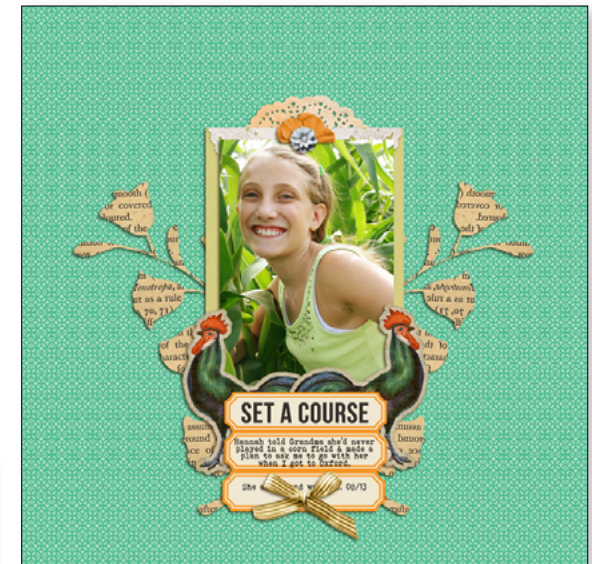
You don't have to have such close symmetry though in elements for this balance to occur. On “Favorite Stop” this mirroring doesn't occur, and, yet, the weights on either side of a central fulcrum are generally equal.

“Without Spiders” is a page with approximate symmetry around both horizontal and vertical axes. Imagine folding the page in half either way and how the sides would mostly match up.

More Reading

[Scrapbook Page Design: Asymmetrical Balance](#)

[Scrapbooking with Symmetry | This Formal Composition Yields Pages with Appeal](#)



symmetry | asymmetrical balance

Asymmetry in scrapbook page design means that none of your page elements are mirrored on the opposite side. Equal weights are not balanced around a central fulcrum. Rather, the fulcrum is moved off center and unequal visual weights are placed to create a sense of visual balance.

Thanksgiving menu is split down the middle, divided into two columns but the elements on either side are quite different. More space is filled on the left side with a band of photos, while the right has one photo, title and journaling.

How does the right side balance the left? Items on the right take on more visual weight, as do items that are higher up and isolated by white space. This grouping meets all that criteria--and it's more interesting because this is where the story is being told.

On "Greet the New Year," the photo and journaling at top right balance against the grid of four blocks at bottom left. The cluster at top right gets extra weight from: placement high up, placement on the right side, and charm. It gets enough weight to balance against the two-by-two grouping across and below.

testing balance

Ask yourself where your eye goes when you look at the page. Is it moving around the page more or less evenly (thus having balance)? Or does it always return to an area that is not your intended focal-point? If so, you should rethink your design. If not, you are good to go.



summary

Objects in an image have weight and directional pull. How they sit on the canvas and in relation to one another can create balance or imbalance.

There are general rules of psychological perception that tells us how an item in a visual design takes on weight that we can use to create a balanced scrapbook page. The most common ways to create visual balance on a scrapbook page are symmetrically or asymmetrically.