



CHAPTER
25



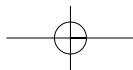
Visual Rhetoric Strategies



Zoom In Key Concepts and Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- 25.1** Identify basic visual elements to understand how images work.
- 25.2** Use visual strategies to analyze and compose with the basic elements of images.
- 25.3** Understand how images provide information.
- 25.4** Understand visual strategies in conjunction with larger rhetorical concerns.



Visual reading and composing skills are more crucial than ever in a networked world. The Internet, for instance, makes little distinction between text or image files—both can be easily transmitted and displayed for readers. And people are taking advantage of these opportunities. In early 2009, the photo sharing site flickr.com had more than 35 million members and hosted more than 3.5 billion photos. Even documents created with a word processor can now be easily modified to include images, charts, and graphs. Whether you are building a Web page, locating a folder on your desktop, browsing through a magazine, taking in an exhibit, or shopping, situations continuously call for you to use and be aware of visual reading and writing strategies.

KEY TERMS

Dots: points in a visual composition. Dots convey meaning based on their placement or their combinations with other visual elements.

Lines: visual elements that create connections and provide a sense of movement. The direction and orientation of lines expresses different messages.

Shapes: two- or three-dimensional forms in visual compositions. Shapes include circles, squares, etc., as well as asymmetrical forms in a visual space.

Scale: The relative size of elements in visual compositions. Scale can suggest the importance of elements and convey relationships.

Tonal value: The relative intensity of a color. Values range from low, dark, and heavy tones to high, light tones.

Lighting: The effects developed by varying uses of light in a visual composition. Lighting can alter the mood of an image, create areas of emphasis, and also create shading in an image.

Textures: The qualities of the surfaces of visual elements. Textures can range from smooth to rough.

Arrangement: The placement of elements in a visual composition. Arrangements can create patterns, contrasts, balance, and emphasis.

Proximity: The relative distances involved in the placement of objects in a visual composition. Proximity can be both close (with objects near one another) or distant.

Patterns: Repetitions in visual compositions. Patterns can suggest motifs, create motion, and emphasize elements.



Balance: A state achieved through similarities in visual compositions. Balance can be achieved through the use of visual elements, such as shape, scale, colors, tonal values, and arrangement.

Contrast: A state achieved through differences in visual compositions. Contrasts can be developed using visual elements and strategies like shapes, colors, scale, arrangement, and emphasis.

Framing: The bounding of elements in a visual image. Framing can be achieved through the cropping of the image itself, or by bounding elements within an image such as lines, colors, or shapes.

Emphasis: A strategy for highlighting an aspect of a visual image. Sometimes emphasis is achieved by highlighting a particular element of an image—a focal point. Emphasis can also be achieved by creating a dominant impression through the use of elements and strategies like lines, shapes, scale, lighting, and contrast.

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VIDEO
Visual Elements

Thinking Conceptually About Visual Communication

A good way to understand visual communication is to start at a fundamental level that considers basics like shapes, lines, and colors. You might not think that something as elemental as a dot could have meaning, but consider the different messages that can be pulled out of Figure 25.1.

You can see from Figure 25.1 that even basic visual elements like dots and framing boxes can deliver messages. A dot by itself means very little. Combine that dot with many others or strategically place that dot somewhere and you have created a message. The same holds true for basic concepts like lines, shapes, and scale (relative size), as seen in Figure 25.2.

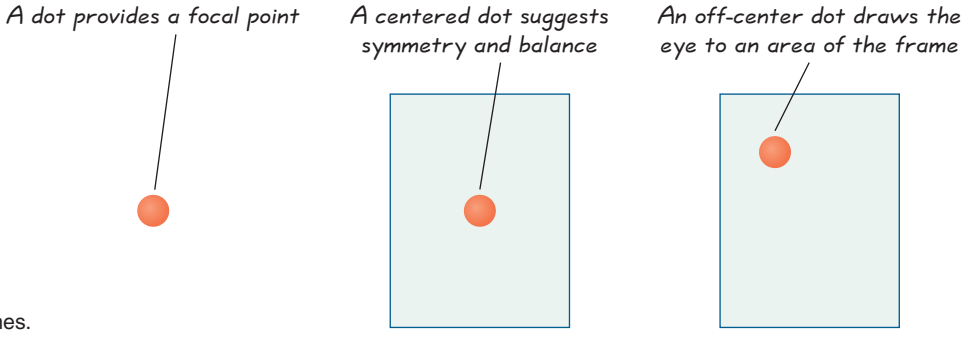
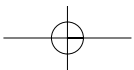


FIGURE 25.1
Focal points and frames.



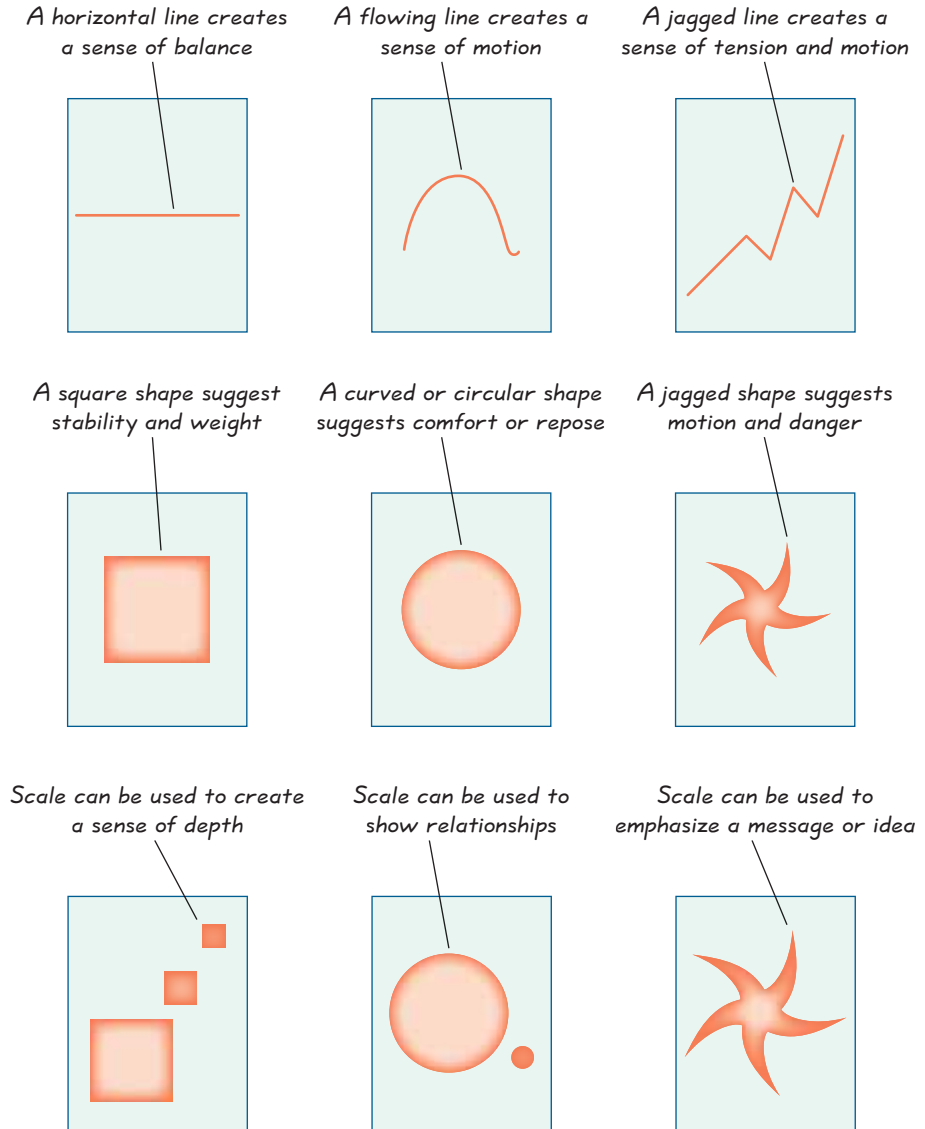


FIGURE 25.2
Lines, shapes, and scale.

You can see how understanding something about basic visual elements could help you make sense of the composition of Figure 25.3. The varied horizontal line created by the landscape suggests a soft sense of motion across the frame as a whole. The diminishing scale of the telephone poles creates a sense of depth. The two points of light created by the headlights draw the eye into the distance.

You should also consider basic concerns associated with texture, colors, and tonal value, as seen in Figure 25.4.

**FIGURE 25.3**

A photograph that emphasizes basic visual elements.

Textures such as those in Figure 25.4 create different impressions on viewers—the smooth skin of the tomatoes versus the thorny leaves of the artichoke versus the mottled peel of the avocado. Colors similarly affect the emotions of viewers. Traditionally, colors have been divided into two categories, warm and cool. Colors trending toward red are seen as warm—the tomatoes—while colors closer to blue are seen as cool—the purple base of the artichokes. Tonal value designates the relative amount or weight of a color. Darker and heavier areas are said to have a low value while brighter areas have a higher value. Think of the differences that result when you draw with crayon; grind the crayon into the paper for a dark, heavy, low value and gently brush the crayon atop the page for a light, bright, and high value.

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VIDEO
Visual Strategies

**FIGURE 25.4**

Textures, colors, and tonal value.

Visual Strategies

You can discuss elements such as dots, lines, shapes, and color to zoom in on the characteristics of visual messages. Eventually, though, you will want to zoom out to draw broader conclusions. You can build on your understanding of the basics as you do so. Figure 25.5 demonstrates how looking at visual elements like shapes and colors can lead to conclusions about broader rhetorical strategies.

An initial reading of Figure 25.5 might prompt you to comment on the presence of the two colors—blue-green and red—in the uniforms of the two cashiers. A sketch of the shapes in the image would highlight the rectangular signboards or the horizontal block shapes of the cash registers. But progressing to a more extensive reading, you would look at the way these elements lend themselves to broader rhetorical strategies. The first step might be to think about the arrangement of these elements. Note the symmetry created by centering both cashiers in the frame. There is also a sense of balance created through the patterns that are established by the shapes—burger boards and cash registers arranged symmetrically. These elements are also placed in close proximity, highlighting their relationship. In addition, the cool blue-green color of one woman's uniform differs from the warm red of the other, creating a sense of contrast or relationship. The next step is to think about arrangement, patterns, proximity, and balance as you draw conclusions about representations of McDonald's in India or about the relationship between the Maharaja Mac (a chicken or lamb burger) and the vegetable burger.

In Figure 25.6, the arrangement of shapes and use of colors, light, and values create a sense of contrast between the strawberry soda bottle and the rest of the image. The vertical arrangement of the bottle atop the flat plane of the car hood



FIGURE 25.5
Arrangement, patterns,
proximity, and balance in
visuals.



FIGURE 25.6
Framing, contrast,
and emphasis in a
photograph (William
Eggleston).

creates a sense of juxtaposition. The bright red color and its placement in the sunlight draw the viewer's eye to the bottle. The use of framing (most of the car cropped out of the picture) further focuses our attention on the bottle in the center of the image. All of these strategies combine to create a sense of emphasis.

A reading of Figure 25.6 would likely start by considering the soda bottle and its placement atop the car hood. You might then ask questions: Who drinks strawberry soda? Why might someone place the bottle on the car? Why have details about the setting or the human actors in the image been left out? As with most reading and writing, you will need to zoom in and out to make sense of these kinds of questions. Learn to focus on basic visual elements (dots, lines, shapes, colors, light, value). Identify visual strategies (arrangement, proximity, patterns, balance, contrast, framing, emphasis). And zoom out to ask broader questions and to connect what you discover with larger cultural concerns.

Using Visuals to Provide Information

**The Importance of Using Mobile Connections
to Stay in Touch Easily with Other People**

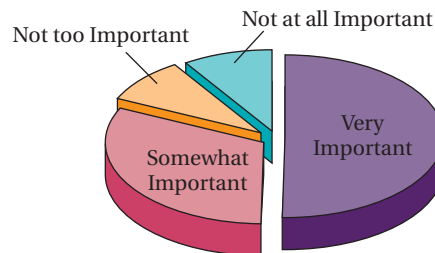


FIGURE 25.7
A pie chart listing the
importance of using mobile
devices to stay in touch
with people.

One of the primary ways in which visuals work within broader communication situations is by providing information. Informational graphics include pie charts, bar graphs, line graphs, tables, and charts. Again, you can think about basic elements of visual communication as you consider informational graphics. Consider the pie chart shown in Figure 25.7. delete stray mark

The pie chart is based on a recent study conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project. The study looks at people who regularly use Twitter or a status update Web site. As you think about some of the information in the chart, recall how the basic elements of lines, shapes, scale, and color can communicate meaning. Color is used to differentiate between categories. Scale is used to demonstrate relative amounts—here we can see that more than half of people who use mobile devices cited staying in touch with friends as very important.

Because lines, scale, shape, and color can be so suggestive, it's crucial that readers of informational graphics understand the data that visuals represent. Consider the two graphs representing change in Figure 25.8.

The number of Twitter users more than doubled from February to March 2009. The bar graph on the left more accurately represents that growth because it is presented on a scale that is appropriate for the data. The chart on the right uses a scale that is so large it tends to distort the presentation of the data. The growth figures are actually the same in both graphs, but their significance is diminished in the graph on the right by the contextual framework of the visual. As a reader you will need to pay attention to visuals to ensure that they accurately represent data. As an author, you will need to operate in good faith, using visuals to help readers make sense of your information, but not distorting facts through visual manipulation.

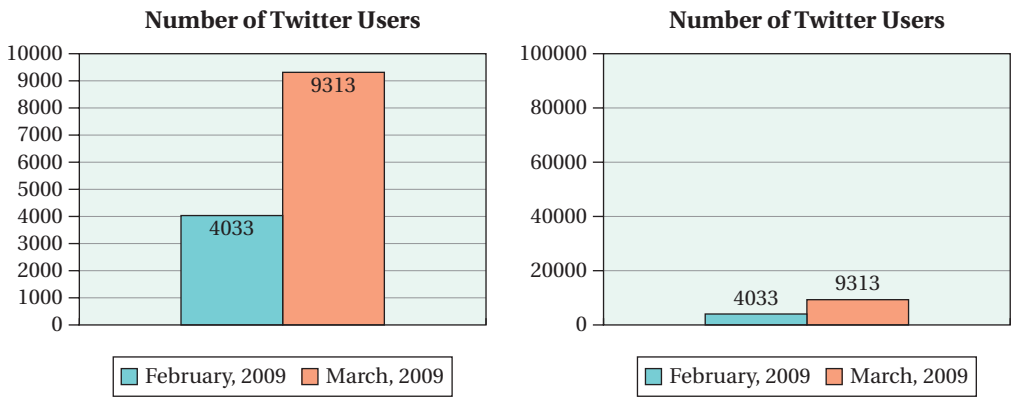


FIGURE 25.8
Two graphs demonstrating the growth of Twitter users (Comscore Media).

Flow charts and other visual maps work well to demonstrate relationships among items. Figure 25.9 shows a flow chart developed to help explain the publishing process of an online journal.

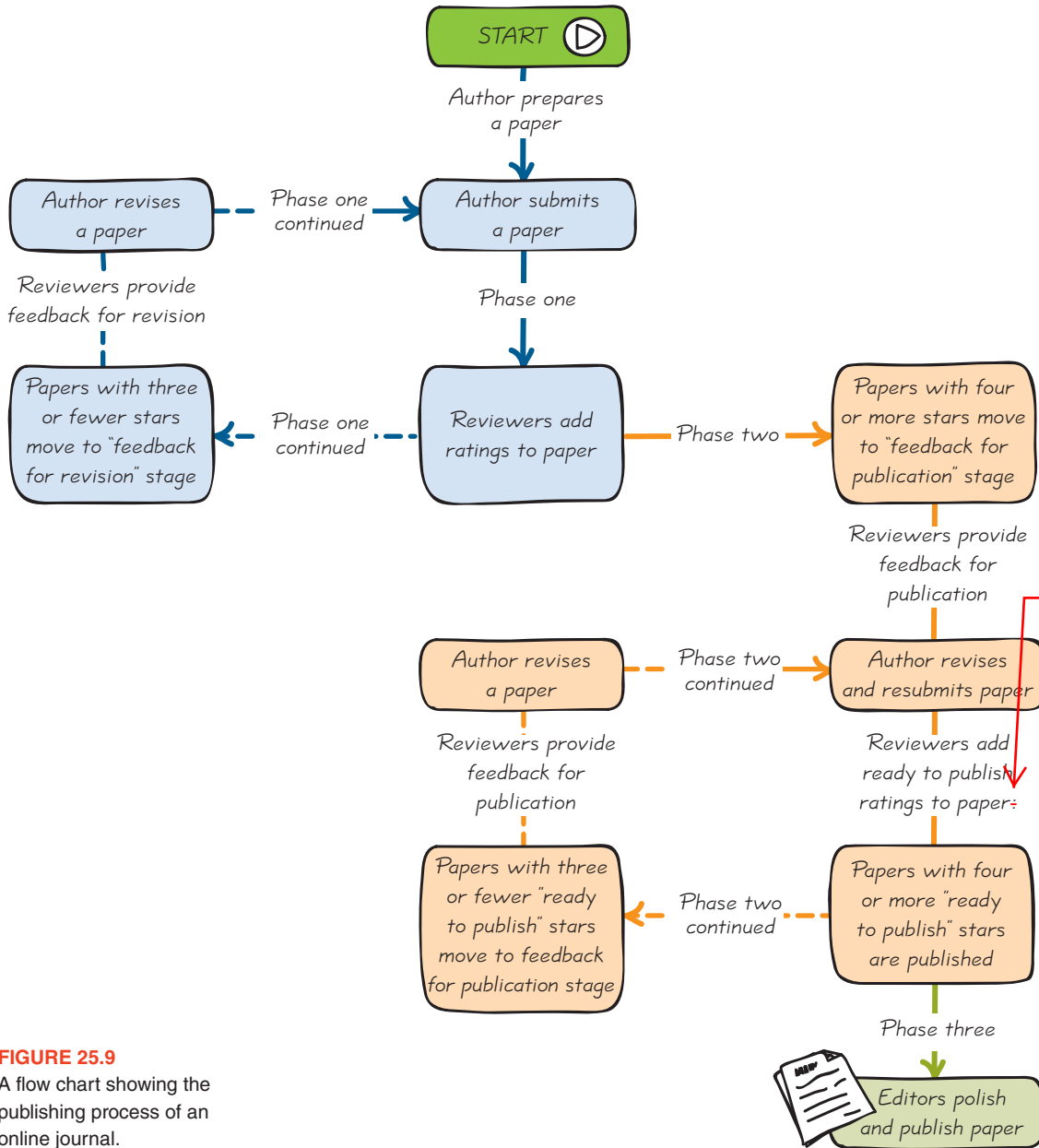


FIGURE 25.9 A flow chart showing the publishing process of an online journal.

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Visuals and
Rhetorical
Situations

The flow chart visually represents the process that plays out when authors submit papers to the online journal. The chart demonstrates the activities of authors, reviewers, and editors. It also shows how the papers can move through various stages of the publishing process. Flow charts and diagrams can be helpful for explaining complex processes. You can also use the act of developing charts like the one in Figure 25.9 to brainstorm about organizational schemes or processes.

Connecting Visuals to Other Writing Strategies

As you become adept at reading and creating visual forms of communication, you will discover connections with other writing strategies. Just as you should remain flexible as you consider how writing strategies complement one another, you should be ready to recognize the ways in which visual images can offer descriptions, narrate events, create comparisons, or persuade viewers (to name some possibilities). Consider the painting *Christina's World* by Andrew Wyeth shown in Figure 25.10.

You could begin examining *Christina's World* by zooming in to think about visual elements. What can be said about the texture of the field or about the shapes of the buildings in the distance? How does the arrangement of the elements affect a viewer? Or you could zoom out to begin your engagement with the image. What can you say about the figure in the image? In what way does the painting provide a description of the girl or of her life? What kind of story might the image be telling? These questions might lead you back into the image—perhaps to discuss the proximity (here a distant proximity) of the girl with the buildings.



FIGURE 25.10
Christina's World, by
Andrew Wyeth (Museum
of Modern Art).



CONNECT IT Visual Rhetoric Strategies in Multiple Genres

As you compose with other genres, you will have a number of opportunities to use visual rhetoric strategies. Learn about the basic visual elements and to use strategies like arrangement, emphasis, balance, etc., and then make decisions about visuals depending on your situation.

- **Memoirs:** Use photographs to demonstrate stages in a memoir subject's life or people, places, and things of importance (see Chapter 5).
- **Profiles:** Use photographs to help discuss the identity of your profile subject or to demonstrate people, places, and things (see Chapter 6).
- **Rhetorical analyses:** Include visuals that reproduce items under analysis; be sure to discuss the images you include (see Chapter 7).
- **Position arguments:** Use images to create visual appeals that complement the logic of your argument; use informational images to provide evidence for your points (see Chapter 8).
- **Proposals:** Use informational images to demonstrate the extent of a problem or the feasibility of a solution (see Chapter 9).
- **Explanatory research essays:** Include informational graphics to help readers make sense of the topic (see Chapter 10).
- **Book, music, or film reviews:** Use screen shots to create still images from key scenes in films; include images that illuminate people or ideas related to music or books (see Chapter 11).
- **Photographic essays:** Call on visual elements and strategies to discuss the images included in your projects (see Chapter 13).
- **Oral presentations:** Use informational images to support points; use images for analysis and discussion (see Chapter E1).
- **Composition portfolios:** Take screen shots of writing projects to show their development or to represent online work in a portfolio (see Chapter E2).
- **Brochures and flyers:** Use images to create flow and emphasis within the brochure and to provide visual examples as needed (see Chapter E7).

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Visual Rhetoric Strategies in Multiple Mediums

Videos. The area of film studies has some specific terminology for talking about the look of what goes into a movie frame, but generally, you can read elements in a video much as you would those in a photograph or other image. You can discuss rhetorical strategies like framing, balance, contrast, arrangement, and patterns. You can also consider the ways in which objects

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