

ELEMENT 9

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WHAT SPACE TELLS US ABOUT MATERIALS DESIGN

Objective

To identify space as positive and negative.

Negative and Positive Space

Usually when teachers start designing their own material for their courses, they may not know how to start. The white piece of paper or blank computer screen can feel intimidating. The blank paper or screen is called **negative space**. The opposite is **positive space**, and it is represented by pictures, charts, letters, graphs, and all other elements that teachers use to fill the white paper to accomplish the objective of designing and developing materials for their students.

Sometimes, teachers feel that they need to fill out every single space on the sheet of paper by creating more exercises for students to develop. This leaves little room for the eye to move freely throughout the paper. Students process and assimilate content much better when the information is well organized on the page. Teachers, as material developers and designers, have to keep a balance between the space used and white space to let the eyes travel and explore the content easily and comfortably. White space is also needed for the reader or student to better assimilate the information.

Designers need to use objects, images, lines, figures, and colors to transmit a clear message. However, they also need space for organization in any design he or she decides to use. All pages in a worksheet need to be thought in terms of organization. By leaving white space in the page design, there are more chances for students to perceive the material as attractive and engaging. Often, students complain that they do not have enough room in a textbook or workbook to answer the questions. Consequently, students limit their answers on the page, write them somewhere else, or jot down simple ideas. Foreign language teachers often look for well-structured answers to check students understanding, but if space is not provided, the chances of having detailed answers are low.

The accurate use of space in design comes from the **Gestalt theory** or **Gestalt principles**. It is a psychological theory about how humans tend to perceive elements distributed in space. The Gestalt theory addresses the terms proximity, similarity, closure, and continuity, which creates a relationship among elements. Gestalt principles provide an extensive list of items, but we can focus on the following ideas for material design. In Gestalt theory, visual composition is seen as single components, but all parts are seen as whole. According to Oviedo (2004), the word Gestalt comes from the German language, and it means form or shape. In sum, Gestalt theory has to do with perceiving all parts in a composition as a whole instead of unique elements, as stated by Guberman (2015).

1. Based on the information above, select if the following statements are TRUE, FALSE or It doesn't say (IDS).

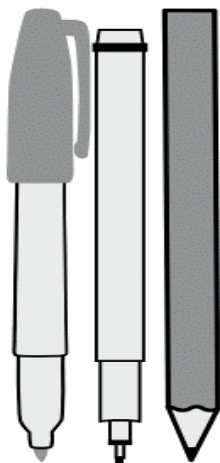
		True	False	I D S
A	Gestalt theory originated in Sweden.			
B	Negative space refers to an unorganized page layout.			
C	Worksheets need to be thought out in terms of organization.			

2. Read and answer the following questions according to the information about Negative and Positive Space.

2.1 Why is it important to keep balance between positive and negative space?

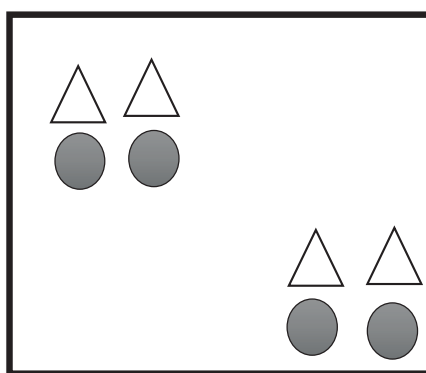
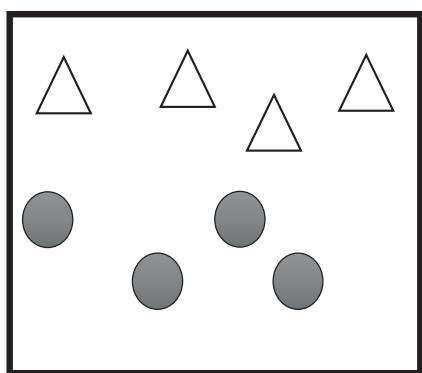
2.2 Where was Gestalt Theory created?

3. Use the following lines to write about the way you understand the use of space when designing material.

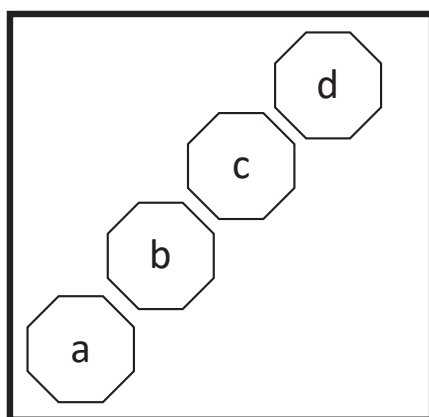
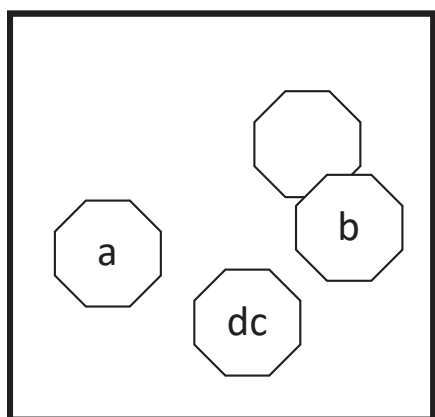


Gestalt Principles

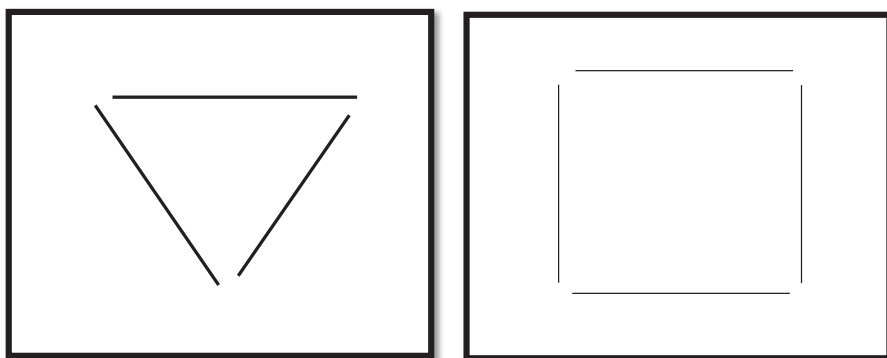
Proximity has to do with the organization of elements to establish a relationship among them. Elements that are close are identified as having a connection. Those elements could be letters, words, pictures, lines, drawings, and any other figure. If the elements of the group are close together, our vision tends to associate them as a group. Look at the two following charts and pay attention to how the shapes are organized.



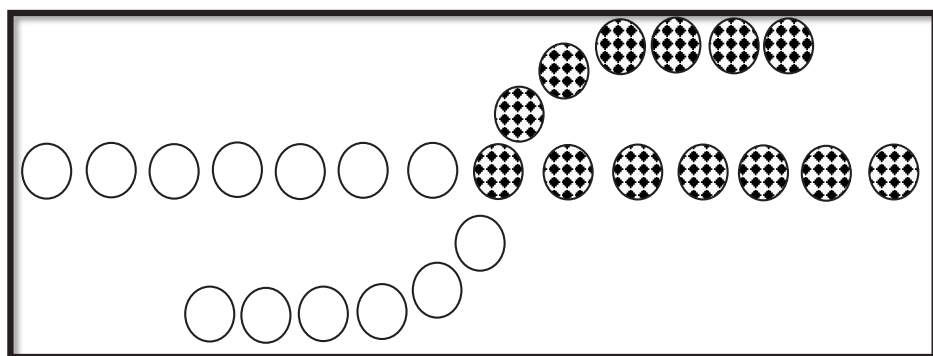
Similarity represents how the elements in the design share some characteristics. These characteristics could be shapes, figures, and colors to name a few. They do not need to be exactly the same, but there is at least one common pattern that unites the elements. Check the following examples.



Closure occurs when our vision tends to complete a shape or figure, even when the elements are not fully connected. If a line does not connect with another one, the human vision tends to join them. Observe the following lines. They are not connected, but the human brain continues the trajectory to form a triangle and a square.



Continuity indicates that human vision tends to follow lines, even when they are interrupted. This happens because the brain sticks to a path. In the following figure, there is a horizontal line which starts with empty circles. Then, in the middle of the line, the circles are filled, but the lines are continuous. Human vision prefers to continue the line instead of stopping and thinking that the line was interrupted.



4. Develop the following exercises and share your answers with two classmates.

A

?

Which Gestalt Principles were used to organize the elements in rectangle A?

Challenge

Use five lines to draw a shape using the concept of Closure in rectangle B.

B

C

Challenge

Draw your own example for Continuity in rectangle C.