

Fundamentals of Composition

Graphic Design





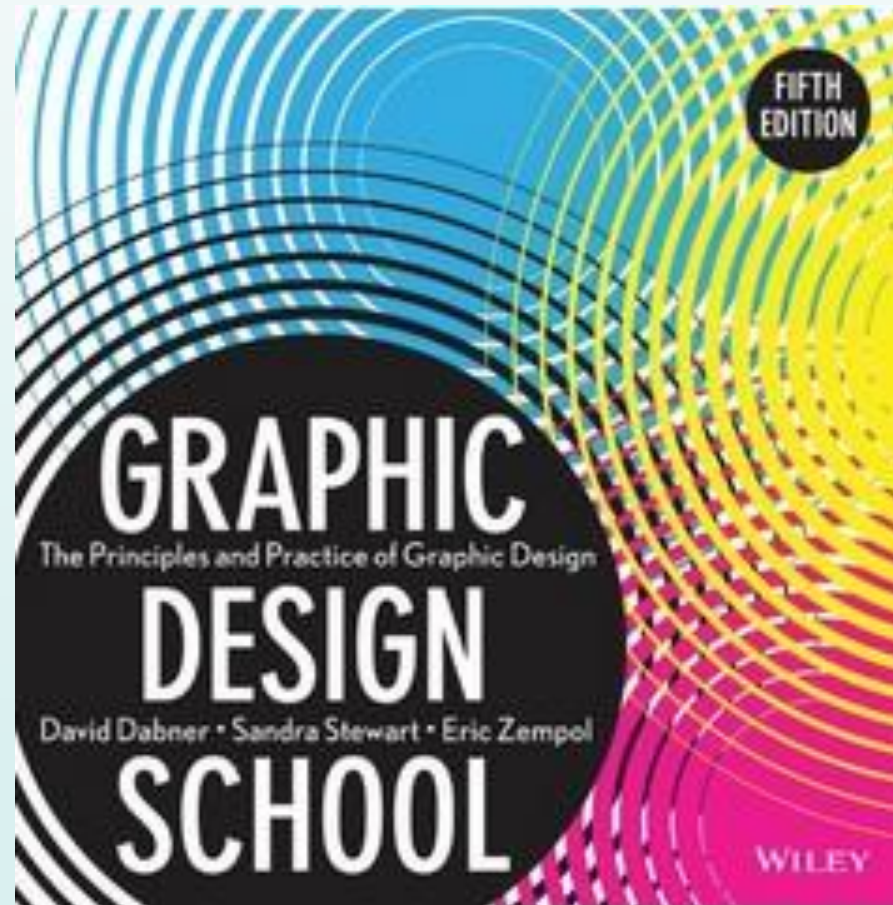
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Textbook





Course Outline

1. Basics of composition
2. Form and space
3. Symmetry/asymmetry
4. Basic principles of design layout
5. Styles of layout
6. Pace and contrast
7. Size and format
8. Identity and extended systems
9. Photography and illustration

1. Basics of composition



1. Basics of composition



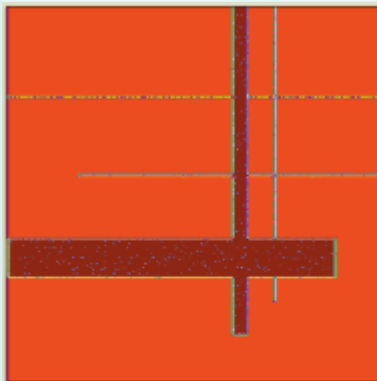
Good composition is an essential element of all art forms, graphic or otherwise, and should be considered the foundation of visual communication



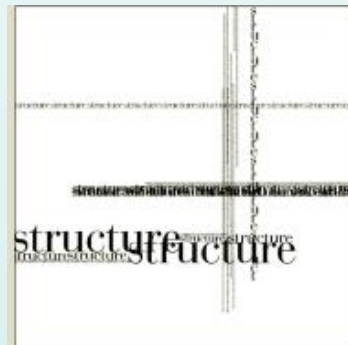
1. Basics of composition

Composition refers to the visual structure and organization of elements within a design

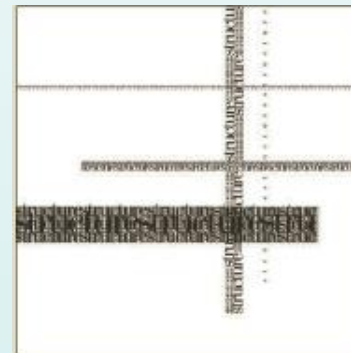
Buliding of composition



Carefully placed vertical lines of varying weights show a gradually imposed order as they begin to form a grid.



The substitution of typography for lines, using the word "structure," reinforces the concept and identifies the relationship between typographic point sizes and line weights.



The structure of the series continues to build with layers of typographic lines working in concert to suggest heavier masses of line.



The final composition adds closely locked forms of typographic lines to create an architectural composition where each weighted area is visually supported.



1. Basics of composition

Form and space

Positive space is a form or object that, to the eye, **appears to exist**





1. Basics of composition

Letters, dots, and lines



Strong horizontal lines suggest blinds on a window when they are used as interruptions in this strong typographic treatment. The two black dots-the only circular forms on the page-placed asymmetrically in the composition draw the eye and suggest binoculars peering through the blinds.

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1. Basics of composition

Letters, dots, and lines



Make it new Simple shapes, lines, and circles suggest machines that defined an industrial society in this graphic illustration about the Modernist movement in arts and culture.

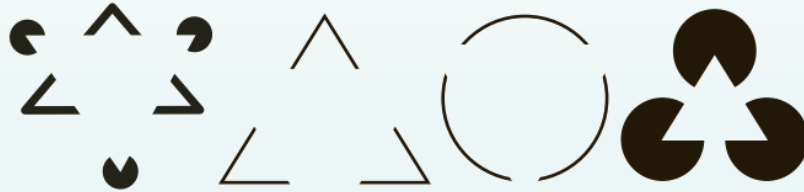
2. Form and Space



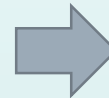
2. Form and space

Good design thinking requires an understanding of how the relationship between visual elements affects the way we perceive them, as well as an understanding of how to control and exploit them.

2. Form and space



Thirds Beautifully placed, simple geometrics and lines send a message of music in this dynamic example of the rule of thirds. The composition divides horizontally and vertically, with the placement of the most critical imagery right in the center. Accent color in the upper and lower thirds keeps the viewer moving between the two spots, lengthening the observation time.



3. Symmetry/Asymmetry



3. Symmetry/Asymmetry

Symmetry in design refers to a spatial relationship between elements, and specifically to a situation where the elements in a layout are centered, having equal space to the left and right or above and below them, a mirror image on either side.



3. Symmetry/Asymmetry

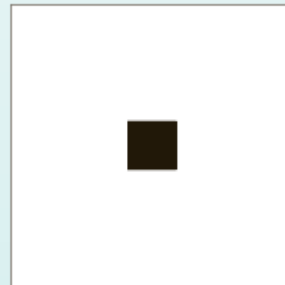
The second meaning of symmetry is more general, and refers to a sense of harmony, or balance, **which in turn is seen to reflect beauty.** Symmetry carries associations of perfection, tradition, order, and rationality and peace.

3. Symmetry/Asymmetry



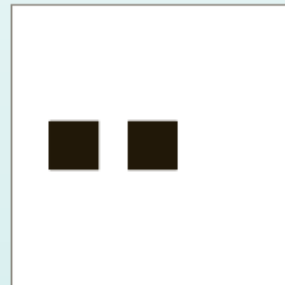
Testing the theory

In these examples, various effects are achieved by simple variation of the position of the square within a stable frame.



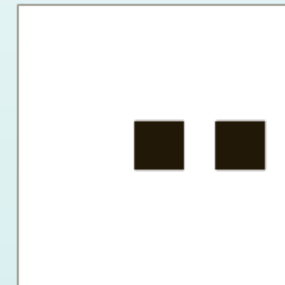
1 Balance

The centered square is stable or static, as the space around the square is equal on all sides.



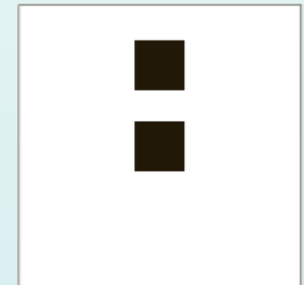
2 Movement to the left

When a second square is introduced, visual forces develop. There is a sense that the squares are moving left.



3 Movement to the right

Changing the position of the two squares suggests movement to the right.



4 Upward movement

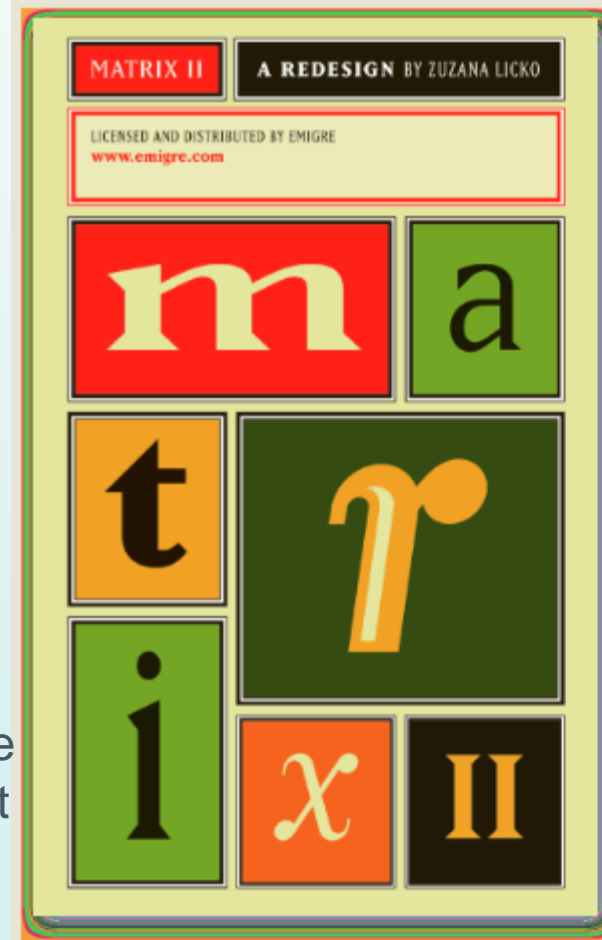
The position of the two squares hints at movement upward.



3. Symmetry/Asymmetry



Equal weight is represented on opposite sides of this clean publication design composition. Both are aligned to the far edge of their respective sides, and the primary information on either side occupies about the same amount of space.



← Symmetry in asymmetry

Perfectly centered letterforms create symmetry within an active asymmetrical composition. The contrasts in placement and color create visual rhythm in this dynamic composition.

4. Basic principles of design layout



4. Basic principles of design layout

0 PART 1 PRINCIPLES • UNIT 2 FUNDAMENTALS OF COMPOSITION

PART 1	PRINCIPLES
UNIT 2	FUNDAMENTALS OF COMPOSITION
MODULE 4	Basic principles of design layout

Divide and conquer Organizing information on a page meaningfully is critical to the information transfer, especially when handling large amounts of text. There are many ways to divide the page and the choice should be a consideration of the type of design work, the viewing platform, and the amount of information to be presented on each page or sub-division.

The term "layout" refers to the organization of disparate material that makes up the content of a design. Well-designed visual communications present information in a logical, coherent way, and make the important elements stand out. Basic principles of good composition are of the upmost importance in the process, and a thoughtful approach to the delivery of the material is, as always, the designer's first consideration.

The use of a grid system and consistently styled design elements helps the reader to absorb information in a visually pleasing way, and enhances the communication of the content. Good composition in layout design is dependent on the grid, and there are many configurations to choose from.

Practical factors
There are three basic stages in beginning any graphic design project. First, the designer receives a brief from the client, usually establishing what material should be included and the format for the project. This involves a combination of text, or copy (main text, display copy [headings], boxes or sidebars, captions) and images (photographs, illustrations, maps, diagrams). The brief should also indicate the desired look or "feel" of the work, which in turn will depend on the target audience. Should the layout look authoritative? Should it be densely packed with information? Does the message warrant a lean and structured design, with lots of white space? If the brief is vague, schedule time with your client to ask the right questions and help define the goals of the design. Should it shock the viewer, relax them, or make them smile?

Second, you will need to consider the format and budget. If there are many pictures and extensive copy for a small space, this will affect the look of the layout. Agreement should be reached on hierarchies within the copy; an editor may already have labeled their headings "A," "B," "C," and so on, to indicate their relative importance. Such elements can be indicated typographically for emphasis, through differences in type size, weight, form, and choice of color. Determine how many colors will be used. Beautiful design work can be created with a limited palette or with a full range of inks and effects. The number of colors used will affect a print production budget, so find out before you begin to conceptualize a project for press. If the project is hosted online, your palette is free, but certain colors are easier to read on screen than others. For website design, see pages 142–185.

Grids
The third stage involves organization. In print-based work and web design this means developing a grid system, in which various elements can be placed within a ready-made structure that underpins the entire design. The grid enables the layout of columns, margins, and areas for text and image. A well-designed grid allows for some flexibility of placement on individual pages while providing an underlying system that gives visual coherence across a series of pages. This is obviously crucial in any kind of editorial work, including books and magazines, but certainly applies to well-designed website pages, where some elements stay the same and others change. Of course, working within a structured format will also offer many excellent opportunities to break the rules, but it's best to learn them first.

Individual units of equal size, separated by equal margins top and bottom, form a system perfect for compositions with many images. The units can be combined in any number for larger images or columns of text.

Three columns works well for mid-range amounts of text. The designer can use any given column in any system for added white space and can divide the page asymmetrically with text and image in this three-column system.

A four-column system begins to add more flexibility for variation in placement. The symmetrical division will add order, if desired, and added control in the overall system.



4. Basic principles of design layout

The term “layout” refers to the organization of disparate material that makes up the content of a design.

MODULE 4: BASIC PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN LAYOUT 41

CHECKLIST FOR BEGINNING A LAYOUT

- Who is the target audience for the design?
- What different kinds of text will be included?
- Will there be photographs, illustrations, diagrams, or a combination of all three?
- How many colors can be used (the budget will affect this in print-based work)?
- What is the format and final size of the job (also related to budget)?
- What parts of the text need emphasizing?
- Is the client looking for a particular style?

Flexibility Many variations of the layout can be explored as thumbnail sketches, before committing. Here, you can see the kind of flexibility a simple grid provides, giving indications of structure without limiting creativity.

The top of the x-height of text blocks. No text (except for running heads/page numbers) would normally appear above this line.

Master grid Margins, columns, and non-changing typographic elements such as page numbers and running heads can all be placed on the master grid, which provides the design template. The grids have been printed over this module to show how they structure the design.

The baseline grid is based on the size of type and leading value of the main text used (the body text), and ensures that all text starts and ends at the same horizontal point.

Here you can set the number of columns per page and the space (gutter) between each.



4. Basic principles of design layout



Natural order This tight, **modular grid system shows the expressive freedom that comes with control**. A wonderful range of shapes and sizes is available to showcase photography and text with this six-column format, and you can sustain the viewer's interest in larger publications.



4. Basic principles of design layout





4. Basic principles of design layout





4. Basic principles of design layout



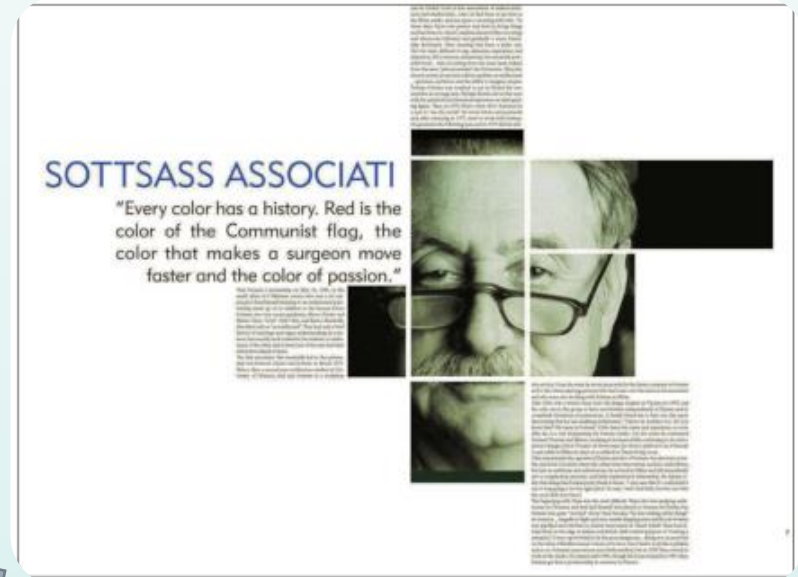
Form and function

Consider the format style and the user experience when you select a grid system. If the content information can be neatly divided into components, it may suggest the use of a particular fold that will help to display the information in a logical sequence.

5. Style Layout

5. Styles of layout

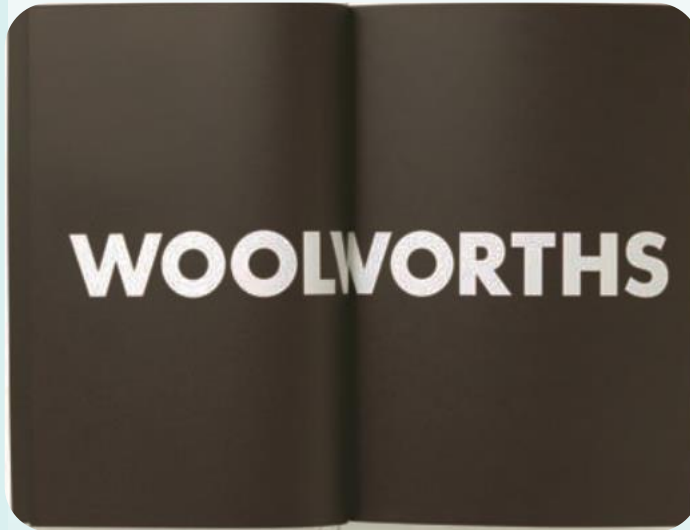
In simple terms, page design, or layout, can be divided into two basic styles: **symmetrical** and **asymmetrical**. In broad terms, symmetrical style is a traditional approach in which design is structured around a central axis.



Asymmetrical page design Justified blocks of text are important design elements of the modular grid system in this asymmetrical page design. The unusual division of the photographic image elevates the grid system itself to a central design element and, as the margins become lines, shows the influence of the Constructivist movement.



5. Styles of layout



Balance The symmetrical design system of these pages allows large display typography in different styles, both sans serif and serif, to divide the pages and play a central part as design elements in the compositions.

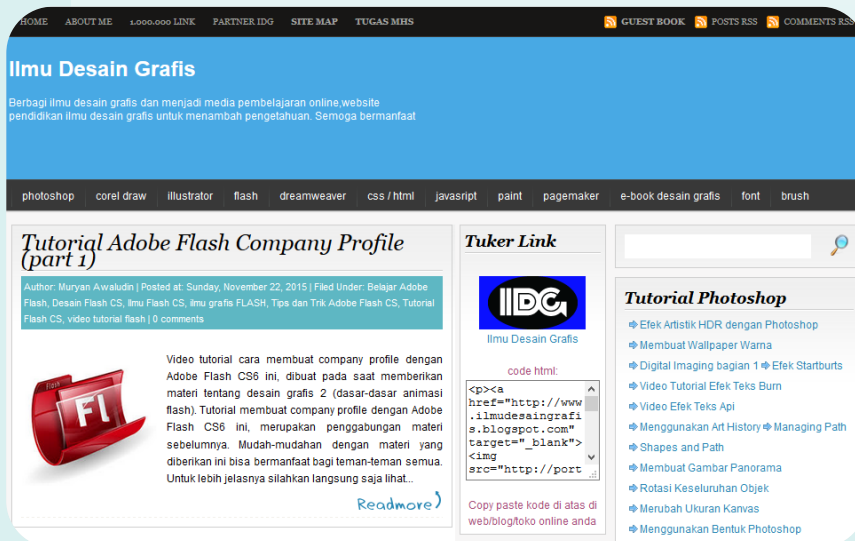


6. Pace and contrast



6. Pace and contrast

Pace and contrast are vital qualities for catching and maintaining a reader's interest in graphic design: they provide variety, and set the rhythm and the mood



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6. Pace and contrast



Momentum

The publication Gateway 241 neatly divides spreads with a strong landscape/horizontal image and provides enough variety of form to keep it interesting.



6. Pace and contrast



Simple lines

Showcased products become the composition in this series of spreads. **Interesting image placement adds rhythm and horizontal and vertical motion to the compositions**, with little or no distraction from the clean design of the products themselves.

7. Size and format

7. Size and format

Size and format are important considerations in any printed design. They are affected by budget, practical restraints such as mailing costs, and by the needs of the job

← **Vertical orientation**

Stacked vertical columns of text, supported by vertically oriented typographic illustrations, add height and drama in this text-as-image approach to page design.



↑ **Nostalgic** The clever accordion fold was produced to celebrate and commemorate a community arts project run by artist Mark Storer in the seaside town of Jaywick. The concept design and format mimicked a vintage-style folded postcard.

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7. Size and format





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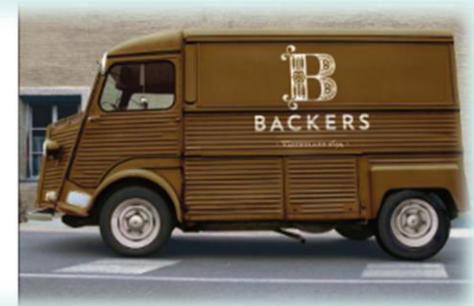


8. Identity and extended systems

8. Identity and extended system

Few things are designed to work as stand alone pieces.

Look at a successful branding: the logos and corporate identity, advertising campaigns, direct mail campaigns, annual reports, websites, and social-media presence all have common design elements, binding them together and identifying them as part of the same brand.





8. Identity and extended system





8. Identity and extended system



The repetition and variation of the linework, the exchange of positive and negative color, and the use of the diagonal in dividing space crosses over from the printed system to the website design.

9. Photography and illustration

9. Photography and illustration

Whether to use photographs, illustrations, or even type as image-or all three together-are important design considerations. A well-coordinated look is a hallmark of good design, and the way you plan, edit, and incorporate images significantly affects the outcome.

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9. Photography and illustration



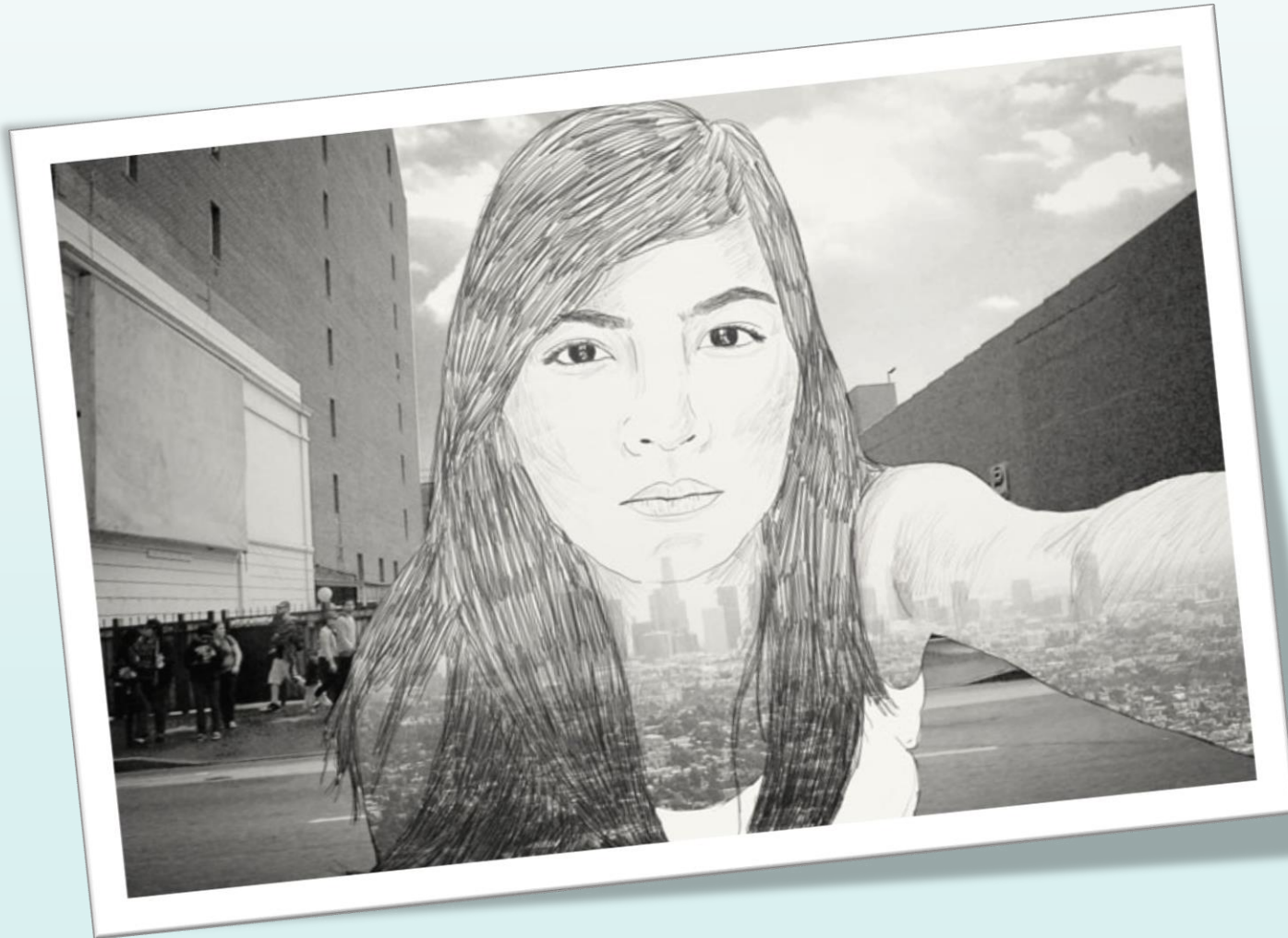


9. Photography and illustration





9. Photography and illustration



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9. Photography and illustration





Reference

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Further Reading:

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