# Gestalt Design Laws

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## Seeing is believing?

We do not perceive the world as it is. Instead, we interpret what we see in terms of our own filters. We impose order and meaning on what we perceive. Meanings are different, according to each person's individual cultural and personal experiences. While the visual system is often compared to a camera, the analogy is inaccurate because our brain does more than look at pictures. It interprets them, tries to make sense of them, and considers cause and effect.

In the checker board image are two squares marked A and B that appear to be different shades of gray. They're not. They are exactly the same shade of gray.

Gestalt psychology can be understood by experiencing the Gestalt Laws of Organization. These laws describe the ways we organize our experiences in a simple and coherent way.

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## Law of Closure

### We tend to make our experience as complete as possible

Gestalt theory seeks completeness. With shapes that aren't closed, our mind will "fill in the gaps". We see two squares overlaid on four circles even though none of these shapes actually exist in the graphic.

Our minds react to patterns that are familiar, even though we often receive incomplete information. It is speculated this is a survival instinct, allowing us to complete the form of a predator even with incomplete information.

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## Law of Figure-Ground

We tend to organize our perceptions by distinguishing a figure from a ground

The Figure-Ground phenomenon captures the idea that in perceiving a visual field, some objects take a prominent role while others recede into the background. Your mind can perceive them as two distinct shapes but only focus on one or the other.

This effect is often seen in logo design where negative space is used to convey meaning, as Search Squidoo e FedEx logo designed by Lindon Leader so that the white space between the 'E' and the 'x' forms the shape of an arrow.

## Law of Proximity

We tend to group things together that are close together in space

We tend to group things together that are close together in space. Objects that are grouped together then become a single perceived object.

This is commonly seen in web design where the visual hierarchy of elements on the screen provides the grouping of related objects. Hence the navigation links or the input fields representing a mailing address are readily discernable.

## Law of Similarity

We tend to group things together that are similar

We tend to group similar shapes together as a coherent object and then attach some kind of meaning to the result.

The graphic shows a group of diamond shapes grouped together as a larger, single diamond object amongst a group of circle shapes, rather than as separate diamond shapes. We are able to quickly discern the larger object as it is a simpler and more stable form to focus on.

## Law of Continuation

We tend to perceive things in good form

This principle of organization holds that there is an innate tendency to perceive a line as continuing its established direction. That is, we tend to continue contours when we perceive them to be heading in an implied direction.

When two lines of objects intersect, the continuation of each line is apparent.

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