

Design Vocabulary Word Wall

Forty essential design terms as print and cut cards, each with a plain language definition students actually understand. Post them on a word wall, use them for matching games, or hand out a few as a warm up: students find each term in a real design and explain it.

Ways to use the cards

- Word wall: print on card stock, cut on the lines and add new words as each unit introduces them.
- Match up: cut the word from the definition and have pairs race to match them.
- Spot it: give each student a card. They find that term in a poster, ad or website and explain it.
- Critique language: during critiques, students must use two words from the wall in their feedback.

Term list

Line, Shape, Form, Space, Color, Value, Texture, Balance, Contrast, Emphasis, Movement, Pattern, Rhythm, Unity, Hierarchy, Alignment, Proximity, White space, Typography, Serif, Kerning, Leading, Raster, Vector, Pixel, Resolution, RGB, CMYK, Thumbnail, Mockup, Composition, Focal point, Brand, Logo, Target audience, Client, Critique, Copyright, Layer, Export.

Line

A mark that connects two points. It can be thick, thin, straight or curved.

Shape

A flat, enclosed area with height and width.

Form

A shape that looks three dimensional, with height, width and depth.

Space

The area around and between things. Empty space is called negative space.

Color

What we see when light reflects off a surface: hue, value and saturation.

Value

How light or dark a color is.

Texture

How a surface feels, or looks like it would feel.

Balance

How visual weight is spread so a design feels stable.

Contrast

Strong differences that make things stand out, like dark next to light.

Emphasis

The focal point: the first thing the eye notices.

Movement

The path the eye follows through a design.

Pattern

Elements repeated in a regular, predictable way.

Rhythm

Repetition with variation that creates a visual beat.

Unity

When every part looks like it belongs together.

Hierarchy

Arranging content so the most important thing is read first.

Alignment

Lining things up along a shared edge or center so the layout feels organized.

Proximity

Placing related things close together so they read as a group.

White space

Empty space left on purpose to give a design room to breathe.

Typography

The style and arrangement of letters to make text readable and expressive.

Serif

A small stroke at the end of a letter. Fonts without them are sans serif.

Kerning

The space between two specific letters.

Leading

The space between lines of text.

Raster

An image made of pixels. It gets blurry when enlarged too much.

Vector

Artwork made of math paths. It stays sharp at any size.

Pixel

The smallest square of color in a digital image.

Resolution

How much detail an image holds, measured in PPI for screens and DPI for print.

RGB

Red, green and blue light. The color mode for screens.

CMYK

Cyan, magenta, yellow and black ink. The color mode for print.

Thumbnail

A small, quick sketch used to explore many ideas fast.

Mockup

A realistic preview of how a design will look in real life.

Composition

How all the parts of a design are arranged.

Focal point

The area of a design that grabs attention first.

Brand

The personality and promise people connect with a company or person.

Logo

A symbol, word or both that identifies a brand.

Target audience

The specific group of people a design is made for.

Client

The person or business a designer creates work for.

Critique

A respectful discussion of what works in a design and what could improve.

Copyright

The legal right of a creator to control how their work is used.

Layer

A separate level in a digital file that can be edited without changing the rest.

Export

Saving a finished design in a format ready to share, print or post.

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