

Situated Design for Multiliteracy Centers: A Rhetorical Approach to Visual Design

SOHUI LEE

The story of multiliteracy and writing has been told many times already. One part of the story is how the emergence of computer technology has allowed modern writers to communicate creatively, broadly, and quickly through various combinations and remixes of visual, verbal, and aural features. In her 2004 keynote to the College Composition and Communication Conference, Kathleen Blake Yancey called this creation of new genres of writing through pictures, audio, and video “a tectonic change” (298) for composition studies. Although scholars like Eric Hobson and Jason Palmeri have rightly observed that we have always already created multimodal composition throughout history with calligraphy and picture drawings, Yancey’s observation still touches on something critically different about twenty-first-century multimodality, which directly impacts how multiliteracy centers support writing (Hobson 3; Palmeri 5). Revolutionary change in the technologies of writing and communicating continues to transform our culture of production and publication: the audience is no longer only listening or reading in words, sound, and video, but talking back, composing, and publishing in words, sound, and video. As James Paul Gee pointed out at the Computers and Writing Conference in 2013, more people than ever before are both consumers and producers; they are “participants [who]...act and think like designers” (Gee). In our age of YouTube, author and audience are merging. This, in turn, has generated a new interest in visual design: online and offline, in pixel and pencil, and with images and materials.

Dr. Sohui Lee researches multimodal and digital composition in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stanford University, where she has been teaching students and training instructors since 2001. She was also the Assistant and Associate Director of the Hume Writing Center (now renamed Hume Center of Writing and Speaking), where she launched the Digital Media Program.

However, seeing visual design around us, being saturated in design, and being given the tools to design is (as most composition instructors know) not the same as being able to critically understand and effectively produce visual design. The skills and tools needed to understand visual literacy and produce digital or multimodal texts require instruction and teaching. Thus, another important story of multiliteracy (a story still in the making) is the story of how we teach it. Early in writing studies, Mike Markel noted the importance of visual design with the rise of word processing software, and argued that writing teachers needed to instruct students in “codes of visual rhetoric” (381). Within this last decade, a growing number of composition scholars have argued for teaching design principles as a means for helping students create visual and multimodal compositions (George; Yancey; Selfe; Wysocki; Graham, Hannigan, and Curran). In writing center studies, few explore the topic, although visual design theory lies at the heart of multimodal pedagogy. Introducing the idea of “multiliteracies centers” in 2001, John Trimbur forecasted how writing centers will need to attend “to the practices and effects of design in writing and visual communication” (30); however, only Jackie Grutsch McKinney led the way in exploring how tutors might discuss “practices and effects” of design principles.

Although McKinney’s suggested design principles are useful and important, the application of the principles, by themselves, fall short in fully explaining the visual design of multimodal genres such as videos or research posters. Composition and writing center studies have generally presented design principles as a fixed set that can be plugged in as needed, and they often privilege print or static two-dimensional communication practices. By situating design, multiliteracy center practitioners have an opportunity to reinforce the profoundly rhetorical practice of visual design and to integrate design theory more meaningfully into workshops and consultations. In this essay, I argue for a way to approach visual design in multiliteracy centers that is both new and also familiar, in that it is rhetorically responsive to audience and media environment. Situated design involves approaching visual design as a critical extension of the composition process. Alongside rhetorical considerations of audience, purpose, and media, I propose that multimodal composers study their design approach, reflect on the dimensional affordances of media, and then choose relevant design principles. Most writing centers and multiliteracy centers have a pedagogy shaped by a broad interdisciplinary mission: to inform and support writing and communication across disciplines for a range of audiences working on diverse media. This unique mandate to colleges and universities makes the practice of situating design more applicable to multiliteracy centers; moreover, situated design allows centers to fold design into their existing writing center practice and theory, strengthening and unifying their ways of rhetorical doing. By proposing a decision process that situates visual design, I hope to initiate further conversation

on how multiliteracy centers explore and practice their engagement with visual design theory to teach multimodality.

Our Rhetoric of Design

Published several decades ago, Roland Barthes' "Rhetoric of the Image" in *Image Music Text* made a case for visual rhetoric and semiotics: visual language not only relays messages differently from verbal language, but also possesses its own "stock of signs" (19). Barthes' article was one of the earliest visual analyses joining rhetoric and visual design; only recently has rhetoric and visual design re-emerged in composition studies, and interest has shifted from examining how design supports written texts to how design theory frames the production of visual texts. For instance, early scholarly conversations about visual text focused on how visuals support traditional essay writing. Pamela Childers, Eric Hobson, and Joan Mullin's 1998 study *ARTiculating: Teaching Writing in a Visual World* related visual expression to verbal text, arguing that visuals can help students discover ideas, organize information, and overcome writer's block. By 2002, writing scholars discussed visual "production" in composition classrooms. Diana George's *College Composition and Communication* article "Analysis to Design" urged composition instructors to provide students with concrete skills to both examine and produce visuals (George). Also, in Cynthia Selfe's "Toward New Media Texts: Taking Up the Challenges of Visual Literacy" and Anne Frances Wysocki's "The Sticky Embrace of Beauty," both published in 2004, design emerged as a critical (if controversial) tool for teaching multimodal composition.

For multiliteracy centers, the most significant arguments for teaching design theory are introduced in Margaret Graham, Katherine Hannigan, and Paula Curran's "Imagine: Visual Design in First-Year Composition" and Jackie Grutsch McKinney's "New Media Matters: Tutoring in the Late Age of Print." Graham, Hannigan, and Curran argue that composition instructors fail to fully explain "the aesthetics of the visual," which comes at a cost of "lead[ing] students to assume that visual elements and design principles are irrelevant, ornamental, or at best subordinate to rhetorical considerations" (25). In light of this problem, they demonstrate how visual elements and design are introduced in composition courses. Recognizing the same need for design pedagogy in writing centers, McKinney recommends in "New Media Matters" that tutors learn specific design language to communicate how visuals shape arguments.

Dimensions of Situated Design

While McKinney's article and Graham, Hannigan, and Curran's study provide a list of design principles, their recommendations diverge dramatically from one another and reveal how design principles were selected to support different dimensional forms of media. McKinney presents four design principles: contrast, repetition,

alignment, and proximity. Graham, Hannigan, and Curran, on the other hand, offer principles of variety, repetition, balance, focal point, and proportion, which are maintained by four visual elements of line, color, shape, and space (see Table 1).

McKinney/Williams	Graham, Hannigan, and Curran	
Design Principles	Design Principles	Visual Elements
contrast	variety	line
repetition	repetition	color
alignment	balance	shape
proximity	focal point	space
	proportion	

Table 1. Comparison of Design Principles presented by McKinney and Graham, Hannigan, and Curran.

McKinney’s design principles are drawn from Robin Williams’ *The Non-Designer’s Design Book*, in which Williams acknowledges a selective focus on four principles. While not explicitly stated in the book, Williams appears to have chosen these principles to help beginners design static two-dimensional print formats. According to *The Non-Designer’s Design Book*, which features the design of business cards, flyers, and newsletters, the principle of “alignment” is especially important for visual and text-based layout of documents like newsletters. “Proximity” is another design principle that is particularly relevant for design on two-dimensional space such as on a page; the principle relies on the visual process of grouping and helps readers scan related texts and visuals.

Likewise, Graham, Hannigan, and Curran’s selection of principles reveals an interest in visualization techniques. As faculty in the English Department and the College of Design at Iowa State University, Graham, Hannigan, and Curran argue for teaching design theory alongside rhetorical theory in order to help students improve how they interrogate and produce visual texts by “drawing, painting, photographing, or sculpting” (31). Thus, unlike Williams’ selections, their principles consider how design supports “texts” in both two and three dimensions (25-31). For example, the principle of proportion asks the designer to identify relationships between two or more visual elements (such as comparison between color values or between sizes of images). For two-dimensional artifacts, the issues of proportion of visual elements are contained within the boundaries of print space such as the page, poster, or computer display; however, for three-dimensional artifacts such as outdoor sculptures, proportion includes size and mass in physical space. Graham, Hannigan, and Curran’s attention to physical “space” allows for multidimensional conceptualizations of visual design that consider the depth of the visual area and even visual effects shaped by time.

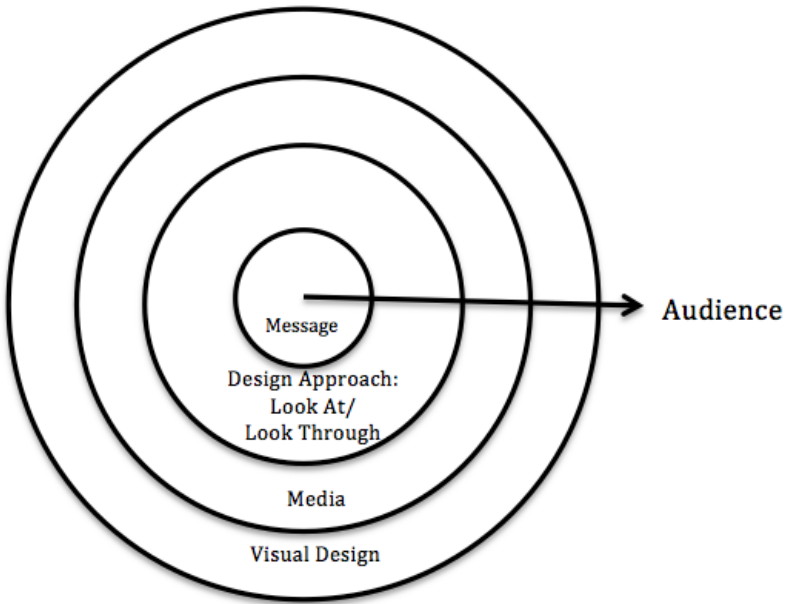


Figure 1. *D-M-V Model of Situated Design.*

By drawing a comparison between the list of visual design principles by McKinney/Williams and by Graham, Hannigan, and Curran, I hope to show that design principles not only vary, but also support a range of dimensional media forms. This is not to say that the McKinney/Williams list of design principles are not valuable, but that the selection and application of design principles require rhetorical decision-making. To aid students, I propose teaching a visual design process called situated design in which the rhetor assesses design approach and media situations before designing. To visualize the approach, I provide the Design Approach-Media-Visual Design (D-M-V) Model, illustrated in Figure 1, recommending the three stages of a design decision process. The stages (D-M-V) reflect how the design message, in its route to the audience, may filter through “Design Approach,” “Media,” and “Visual Design.”

Design Approach: Transparent and Opaque Design

We begin the first of these, “Design Approach,” the philosophy that informs how visual elements and principles will be applied for a specific communication situation, soon after we know the project and the audience. Amongst visualization scholars, there are two general but competing thoughts for what makes good visual design. For a lack of better terms, I call these two approaches “transparent design” and “opaque design.” The disagreements in approach have to do with what scholars believe to be the ultimate purpose of design and function of graphical communication. In *Envisioning Information*, Edward Tufte, for instance, argues that the primary focus of visualization should be on the data rather than the “data

containers,” and ideal design of information-rich visualizations such as tables or charts should be “transparent and self-effacing in character” (33). By contrast, designers like Connie Malamed assert the value of data containers, maintaining that effective graphic design improves cognition, draws connections and relationships, and delivers “emotional content” (210). Opaque design, for Malamed, is design that asks to be looked at and is itself the source of information. Thus—to borrow terms from Richard Lanham—while transparent design asks viewers to “look through” design to see information inside, opaque design invites viewers to “look at” design for information or message. Another perspective, provided by Lanham, contextualizes the practice of transparent and opaque designs through Western literacy history and offers an important resolution to the dueling philosophies through rhetoric. In *Electronic Word* and *Economics of Attention*, Lanham explores the concept of “Look Through” and “Look At” in terms of how audience is asked to visually experience meaning and see written language. He believes the design of text invites audiences to look “through” text to retrieve content, or invites audiences to look “at” the manner of its expression. Lanham credits the digital computer with re-immersing our academic field in an appreciation of nonverbal means of creating meaning including communication through graphic design (Lanham, *Economics* 180). Moreover, the dynamic and “expressive space” of the computer invites the audience to continuously oscillate between “looking through” and “looking at” text (Lanham, *Economics* 19). For Lanham, transparent or opaque design of text is not an “either/or” problem; it is a “both/and” environment of new media.

What does this idea of oscillating design mean for multiliteracy centers? Rather than adopting one philosophy over another, multiliteracy center practitioners might ask students to take Lanham’s theory into account, recognizing the dynamic possibilities of design for new media and for non-digital multimodal work. I view transparent design and opaque design as residing on two ends of a sliding spectrum of design approaches: on one extreme end, transparent design holds that the medium carries the message while opaque design assumes that the medium is the message. Most visual and multimodal messages, however, reside somewhere in between, depending on purpose, media, and needs of the audience. For instance, a scientific audience in an academic journal may prefer visual work that displays information or arguments mainly through transparent design, focusing on clarity and accuracy. On the other hand, a more general audience with less understanding or interest in the subject may require more motivation to engage with the information—that is, a visual method of connecting or identifying with the issue or data. Yet in both cases, some degree of opaque design or transparent design may be necessary in different parts of a visual project.

Conversations on transparent/opaque design theory and Lanham’s notion of “Look Through/At” design can help bring focus to the rhetoric of design. For instance, at

Stanford University's Hume Center for Writing and Speaking, I lead research poster workshops for students in a range of disciplines from Earth Science to Education. When creating posters, most students usually apply transparent design without thinking; they treat research posters as abbreviated forms of scholarly articles or lab reports, which are primarily read, not seen. In order to counter this perspective, I introduce examples of research posters illustrating how design can curate viewers' understanding of data and information. Students learn, for instance, that traditional "newspaper column" layout of research posters is organized to make its content transparent, but also to order each section of the poster in recognizable templates. Nonetheless, some elements of opaque design remain important to the "newspaper column" template, because colors are used to highlight data, unify subheadings, or direct attention to key sections. Though less common, research posters can also draw attention to visualizations of research results. These "visualized" research posters use opaque design layout to feature visualizations prominently while graphically reinforcing a theme or message. In the workshops, I invite students to discuss and practice transparent and opaque design approaches as they work on poster layout and data visualizations. They consider questions such as the following: How can the design change the way the audience sees, understands, and remembers data or information? How should strategies in transparent and opaque design respond to the needs of a general or specialized audience? Questions like these can help students understand how design is flexible and responsive to rhetorical contexts.

Dimensions for Design: Media and Visual Design Elements

In my proposed D-M-V Model for situated design, the first interpretive stage asks the rhetor to consider his or her "design approach," whether it leans toward transparent or opaque design. The next two stages in the design process provide additional features to the message: media and visual design. By media, I mean the range of visual media types in two or three dimensions that might be published, displayed, or shared (i.e., paper, Internet, PowerPoint, presentations, posters, sculptures, or curated displays). In the "media" stage, rhetors might further specify whether media are static or dynamic. Detailed examples of each category of visual media type appear in Table 2; but, briefly, static two-dimensional forms might include print flyers or essays; dynamic two-dimensional forms include video and stand-alone slideshows; some static three-dimensional forms include product packages and research posters; and, finally, dynamic three-dimensional forms include kinetic sculptures and live presentations (with or without slideshows).

While earlier I presented the D-M-V model with three recommended stages (design approach, media, and visual design), Table 2 expands the stages to present a detailed decision process for situated design. Six sections in Table 2 are presented

Project Purpose/ Message	What is the purpose of the project? (To teach, to argue, to inform, to sell, to engage, to entertain/enjoy, to reflect, to gain appreciation, etc.) What is the message or point of the project?			
Audience	Who is the intended audience? How much do they know about the topic or message? What does the audience care about? What is the best way to engage and interest them?			
Design Approach	<div> <div>Transparent (Look Through)</div> <div>←————→</div> <div>Opaque (Look At)</div> </div>			
Media	Static-2D	Dynamic-2D	Static-3D	Dynamic-3D
	Examples: Flyers, Print ads, Static webpages, Print essays, Print or static infographics	Examples: Animated web sites, Video games and apps., Film and video, Dynamic infographics, Stand-alone slideshows	Examples: Product packages, Billboards, Manipulatives, Furniture, Museum displays, Sculptures, Picture books, Scrapbooks, Research posters	Examples: Wind sculptures, Modern art (i.e., Rothko Chapel), Fountains, Performing arts, Theatre (set design), Live presentations (with or without slideshow)
Visual Elements (Visual Design)	Color Line Shape Texture	Color Line Shape Texture Motion and/or Change	Color Line Shape Texture Mass Space	Color Line Shape Texture Mass Space Motion and/or Change
Design Principles (Visual Design)	Focalization (also dominance, emphasis, proximity, focal point) Unity (also harmony, containment) Repetition (also rhythm) Balance			
	Alignment Contrast		Proportion (also scale) Variety	

Table 2. Decision Process for Situated Design: Audience, Approach, Media, Visual Design. The list of visual elements and design principles are not comprehensive but represent some commonly cited concepts in design that may be helpful guides for organizing and strategizing visual design.

in descending sequential order, starting with project purpose and ending with visual design; however, the arrangement of the first half of this order would undoubtedly vary based on project requirements or assignment prompts. Ideally, visual design is determined at the end of the process, because design strategies build on initial understanding of audience, design approach, and media.

To understand the importance of dimensional forms of media and its connection to visual design, it is critical to understand the concept of “visual elements,” also known as design elements or art elements, which are the basic building blocks of design principles. While design principles provide design goals, visual elements are used to enact these principles. Graham, Hannigan, and Curran identify four visual elements, but there are at least nine crucial visual elements working in two or three dimensions.

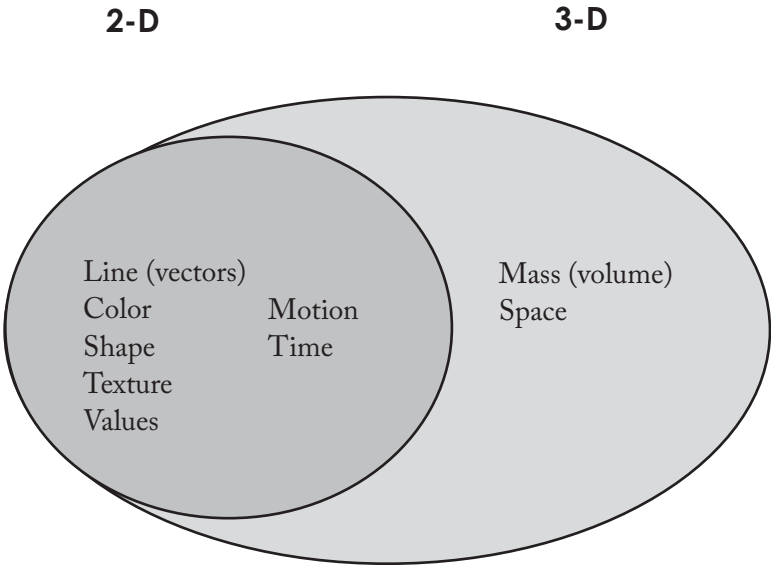


Figure 2. Diagram of Visual Elements in Dimensional Forms (2-D and 3-D).

Two-dimensional designs include shapes and forms like a circle or square; by contrast, three-dimensional forms include shapes and forms with depth or volume like a sphere or cube. As shown in the diagram in Figure 2, two-dimensional visual projects share visual elements with three-dimensional visual forms. In two-dimensional drawings, blurred effects in comic drawings might relate motion without time; with the advent of the computer, animation effects provide motion within the context of time. Three-dimensional visual works such as wind sculptures (or kinetic sculptures) work in motion as part of their design. Finally, while mass and space might be implied in two-dimensional visuals, physical mass and absolute space (defined by area, volume, and distance) are visual elements belonging solely to three-dimensional forms.

Four Principles To Rule Them All?

Having considered design approach and media, the rhetor finally situates design by exploring the last stage of the design process: visual design. While visual design is defined in numerous ways depending on discipline and profession, I emphasize a rhetorical approach. Visual design is the rhetorical combination of art elements (such as color, line, scale, and texture) composed to produce an overall effect for an audience or for a purpose, which design professionals call “design principles.” In this section I discuss eight design principles listed in Table 2, but I will argue that four primarily support two dimensions or three dimensions. The other four design principles (focalization, unity, repetition, and balance) may be considered “common” principles, because they are frequently applied to both two- and three-dimensional forms.

Design Principles for Two Dimensions or Three Dimensions

Scholars in the design field often disagree over which principles are the most important, but they generally acknowledge that they “are not strict rules, but rules of thumb that might even oppose and contradict one another” (Agrawala, Li, and Berthouzoz 60). However, design principles are useful guidelines only if rhetors are aware that principles are organizing tools that can be selected (or omitted) to help the audience perceive and appreciate the aesthetic, functional, and rhetorical properties of visual products. Students, for example, might select design principles by considering how they can support two-dimensional or three-dimensional designs. Alignment and contrast are examples of design principles that are frequently applied to two-dimensional visual work. The design principle of alignment, which I discussed earlier, refers to the lining up of graphic and textual elements on the page from the top, bottom, middle, or sides (left or right justified). The design principle of contrast refers to the use of contrasts in value (light and dark), color, size, and other visual elements as a means of creating pictorial elements that stand out or generating visual interest. Both of these are main principles in graphic design of print and web pages.

While two-dimensional visuals consider graphic layout in page space, three-dimensional visuals require principles of design involving physical space. In interior design and architecture, for instance, proportion and scale are important to drawing attention to a working space that people inhabit. Scale refers to a design principle that attends to size between two or more objects in three-dimensional space relative to human scale. Related to scale, size proportion considers the relative size or ratio of one object to another, such as proportion of a sculpture to a building. The principle of variety refers to the combination of two or more elements (such as texture, mass, movement) to generate visual interest and engagement.

To explain how selecting design principles in light of media dimensions is crucial for how center practitioners frame multimodal composition as a rhetorical activity,

I return to my earlier example of the research poster. Because the research poster is a multimodal genre with three dimensions, design principles such as scale and proportion are as important to research posters as principles of alignment and contrast. As large visual displays of science- and humanities-based research, research posters are sometimes taped or glued on large poster boards, but also can be silk-screened onto fabric. They can have shape and texture, but more importantly, mass and space. The research poster's dimensionality is directly relevant to how students understand the strategy of layout and font size, since research poster design requires legibility and visibility in space that varies greatly (hallway wall, foyer, large conference halls, classroom, etc.). While students may desire specific sizes of text for title, headers, and body copy, multiliteracy centers may want to resist providing merely a list of font size guidelines such as "85 pts" for title, "40-55 pts" for headers (Welhausen). Given alone, guidelines of font size tend to be prescriptive (assuming or privileging a particular poster size and shape), and discourage critical reflection on design motivations. However, by discussing strategies of proportion (such as the title font size relative to the rest of the poster) and/or scale (title font size relative to physical display space to maximize human interaction), research poster workshops can teach students to assess and select effective font size based on the poster size, location, and even the type of audience interaction desired.

Four "Common" Design Principles and Examples

Unlike the four principles of alignment, contrast, scale, and proportion, the following visual design principles are frequently cited by designers as common principles for both two- and three-dimensional work: focalization, unity, repetition, and balance. Here, I'd like to illustrate the four principles with an example of a student's print infographic: Chloe Colberg's "Saving Our Rhinos," created for my multimodal composition course called "Information Design: Visual Language of Graphic Communication." Workshops developed for the Hume Center have been greatly informed by composition courses I teach at Stanford University, where I first introduced design language. In addition to the student example, I will also present Don Yeomans' "The Stanford Legacy," a public outdoor sculpture at Stanford University. Together, these two works demonstrate how focalization, repetition, unity, and balance work similarly and differently across dimensional forms.

The principle of focalization refers to the way in which visual elements (such as line, shape, or mass) are arranged to capture the viewer's attention as primary points of interest and direct the viewer's gaze to certain parts of the visual work. Focalization is also called a variety of other names: dominance, emphasis, proximity, and focal point. Regardless of the name, the purpose of this organizing principle is to help provide salience and hierarchy of viewing. In "Saving Our Rhinos" (Figure 3), Chloe Colberg's focalization strategy includes using the color red and rhino footprints to prioritize the major parts of her infographic. The bright cluster of

SOLVING THE POACHING PROBLEM SAVING OUR RHINOS

With rhino poaching rapidly increasing across Africa, the fate of this incredible species rests squarely on our shoulders.



WHY DOES THIS SITUATION MATTER?

Number of rhinos poached in South Africa



2006 → 2013
In recent years, the number of rhinos poached in Africa, has increased at an alarming rate. If trends continue as such, rhinos could be extinct in as few as 15 years.

WHERE IS DEMAND COMING FROM?



Demand for rhino horn is coming from Asia, particularly Vietnam. Rhino horn can be poached off of a rhino and reach marketplaces on the streets of Hanoi in under

48 HOURS

HOW MUCH IS RHINO HORN WORTH?

GOLD	\$43,000
PLATINUM	\$54,000
RHINO HORN	\$96,000

Kilo for kilo, rhino horn outprices both gold and platinum. Its high price is due to high demand, which is forcing more and more rhinos to be poached.

WHY IS DEMAND SO HIGH?



Demand is so high in Vietnam because of common but scientifically unproven beliefs that rhino horn in medicine can cure a number of different ailments.

There is no doubt that the poaching situation is dire. However, a lot is being done to stop the problem with more ideas constantly being introduced into anti-poaching efforts.

DEHORNING RHINOS

Dehorning is performed by removing 90% of a rhino's horn, thus taking away the value of these rhinos as poaching targets. Dehorning has seen some success. For example, a conservancy in Zimbabwe found that dehorned rhinos had a 29.1% higher survival rate than their horned counterparts.

Despite this, poachers still target dehorned rhinos out of vengeance and to cut off the small slab of rhino horn that remains on a dehorned rhino. Additionally, dehorning is an expensive process that does pose some risk during the operation.

POISONING RHINO HORN

Several rhino conservationists have attempted injecting poison into the horns of rhinos in order to deter poachers and poison anyone who consumes the horn. If poachers know that rhinos from a certain area may have poisoned horns, they are less likely to target or kill these rhinos. This solution presents some ethical concerns. Poisoning unsuspecting consumers and attempting to physically harm them could be seen as just as bad as poaching rhinos.

LEGALIZING THE RHINO HORN TRADE

Legalizing the rhino horn trade would allow people to legally farm rhinos for their horns and directly sell this product to consumers. There are many potential economic benefits to legalization. Revenue from the legal sales of rhino horn could be used to fund anti-poaching efforts. Also, the black market would shrink, dropping prices. Many view legalization as ethically wrong and believe it sends a message that legitimizes the use of rhino horn in medicine.

BETTER EDUCATION

Education is a crucial part of raising awareness on this issue. In particular, education has been aimed towards the demand side of the equation, hoping to convince Vietnamese consumers to stop purchasing rhino horn medicine. If demand decreases due to better education about the ineffectiveness of rhino horn in medicine, supply will no longer be needed and will also fall. There are concerns that even with great education materials, some people will never be willing to change their minds or their ways.

HARSHER PUNISHMENTS

Punishments for poaching are insignificant compared with the money that can be made from a kill. Additionally, in many countries punishments are rarely enforced. As fines get higher and jail times get longer, poachers will be less and less inclined to risk their livelihoods by killing rhinos, thus reducing poaching. As long as demand still exists, many believe that harsher punishments will have little effect, since there will always be individuals willing to take the risk for a big payday.

DNA SAMPLING

Rhino DNA is being gathered so after rhino horn seizures are made or crime scenes are investigated, the found rhino horn can be compared with DNA databases to determine if rhinos were illegally poached. DNA sampling is extremely accurate and thus effective in finding guilty poachers. This solution requires a significant amount of training and is difficult to implement due to high costs. Furthermore, for this to be effective the number of rhinos sampled needs to be significant, and this would require a long amount of time.

What can you do to make a difference?
There are a number of different ways to get involved.



1 GET INFORMED

Continue to educate yourself on this issue. Visit the WWF website to learn more specifics and details about the rhino crisis.

2 SPREAD THE WORD

The more people that know about this issue, the better! Let your colleagues, friends and families know about this serious problem.

3 SUPPORT A CAMPAIGN

Support the WWF and other organizations' campaigns by learning about their efforts and considering a financial contribution.

SOURCES:

<http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/updates/1187708>
<http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/updates/1187708>
<http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/updates/1187708>
<http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/updates/1187708>

DESIGNED FOR:

World Wildlife Fund
Chloe Colberg
December 2013



Figure 4. Don Yeomans. Totem Pole. "The Stanford Legacy." 2002. Stanford University. Photo: Sohui Lee.

Figure 3. Chloe Colberg. Infographic. "Saving Our Rhinos." Fall 2013. Stanford University.

red graphics (rhino, circles, boxes) draws the eye to the top of the infographic as it relates the crisis in rhino poaching. Chloe provides another focal point with a line of rhino footprints in the second half of the infographic, pulling our eyes downward as the tracks widen. The rhino tracks demarcate and unify the second section of infographic, while reminding readers of the rhino theme. In three-dimensional forms, focalization works in the same manner, as a means of drawing attention; however, designers can use setting in space as a means to focalize objects. Focalization can be seen in landscape design, where an object or an activity area draws attention by being placed on or along a line such as a pathway, or framed within shaped hedges. Don Yeomans' piece "The Stanford Legacy" (Figure 4) is focalized by being placed at the edge of the lawn, "framed" by sequoia groves. While the elongated shape of the Totem Pole repeats the long silhouette of the sequoias, the lighter cedar wood stands in sharp contrast against the thick green leaves.

Another important principle, unity refers to how the various visual elements work together to achieve a "unified" overall message or effect. Chloe's infographic creates unity through consistent use of symbolic colors: The dark green used at the top right rhino connects readers visually with a "solution" at the bottom of the infographic, quantifying ways readers can get involved with three green numbers. In three-dimensional forms, unity might appear in a collection of sculptural works or within the design of a specific work of art. In Yeomans' "The Stanford Legacy," the colors blue and sienna create unity, visually connecting each figure of the totem pole and inviting the eye to catch each facial expression along the vertical length of the pole.

The principle of repetition refers to strategic repetition of form, color, image, lines, or texture to lend balance, focalization, and unity in visual design. Repetition might come in the form of direct duplication, alternating pattern, or sequential change. In Chloe's infographic, repetition appears in low-resolution rhino icons or rhino tracks to visually reinforce the theme of the dwindling number of rhinos, unify the infographic, and direct the eye. In the totem pole, repetition appears in color and shape of the mouths and eyes, lending unity and focalization to each figure.

The last principle of balance refers to the use of visual elements to create visual symmetry along an invisible fulcrum line (along a horizontal or vertical axis) to distribute the viewer's gaze and maintain their attention. Chloe's infographic is balanced in vertical symmetry—the rhinos at the top literally reflect this symmetry in their mirrored forms. Likewise, one can observe vertical symmetrical balance in the totem pole itself, but as a sculpture in public space, balance includes the sculpture's position in a plaza, which opens in front of the Crown Law Library. In fact, viewed in the greater space of the plaza, the totem pole on the left side of the library is aligned with another columnar sculpture—an equally tall piece, metallic and modern, by James Rosati—flanking the right side of the library.

In evaluating the three-dimensional design of Yeomans' totem pole, one cannot consider the design principle of balance without its context in physical space, set within landscape (sequoias) and in light of its proportional/spatial relationship to buildings and other structures.

Conclusion

To borrow from Wysocki, students can “talk analytically about design,” (151) but it is up to instructors and consultants to provide students with the tools by which their analysis may be framed. My “D-M-V” (design approach, media, visual design) model for situating design is one attempt to more deeply integrate design theory into writing center practice; situated design asks students to apply design rhetoric through an assessment process that involves reviewing the dimensional affordances of media and selecting appropriate design principles. Currently, multiliteracy centers mainly handle two-dimensional composition, which may call into question the usefulness of reflecting on two- and three-dimensional forms. Even if students primarily work with two-dimensional forms, I believe the concept of situating design is valuable and necessary. Dimensional awareness and design principles support the aim of multiliteracy centers to increase students' understanding of how to compose a visual or multimodal argument. Layered onto discussions of audience, argument, and purpose, center practitioners can provide students with theoretical knowledge and tools for supporting the selection of design principles. To situate design in dimensional and design contexts, then, is to teach design rhetorically and to promote a reflective, critical practice that has been the heart of writing center work.

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