

ASYMMETRY

An a- at the beginning of a word means not or without. Asymmetry means without symmetry -- with no mirror imagery. It is possible to achieve balance without symmetry.

In this lesson you will:

- Learn some of the finer points of symmetry in order to avoid them.
- Make an asymmetrically balanced composition.

ASYMMETRICAL BALANCE

Asymmetry means without symmetry. That by itself has nothing to do with balance. It just means that there are no mirror images in a composition. The term, however, is usually used to describe a kind of balance that does not rely on symmetry: asymmetrical balance. There is no simple formula for achieving balance in asymmetrical balance (hence the term informal balance) so the designer must sense whether or not the composition is balanced. This is where your sense of balance really comes into play.

The composition either looks like it is balance or it does not. Where does your attention go when you look at an image? If it seems to wander around more or less evenly, there is probably balance. If you seem to always come back to the same area, and that is not the center of the composition, then the balance is suspect.

One way to achieve balance that is almost a formula is to have more or less equally interesting things randomly distributed throughout the format. The effect is like confetti dropped on the area. There is balance because interest is evenly distributed, and there is unity. The problem is that everything is likely to seem too equal and hence too uniform. There is not enough variety and the design soon becomes boring.



It is possible to push the envelope of balance with asymmetry. A small visually interesting object can balance a much large less interesting object.

You can sometimes use nothing to balance something. Negative space has visual interest if used properly. Exact amounts and correct placement are required.



There are no rules or limits with asymmetrical balance. That does not mean that anything goes. Careful adjustments in size, shape, color and placement of the elements in the format are required before balance is achieved.

The attraction of asymmetrical balance to artists is its lack of a formula. This allows greater freedom which lends itself to more creative compositions. The difficulty lies in its lack of organization. This must be overcome by careful placement of objects and the use of other organizational devices (like figure/ground and, as you will soon learn, Gestalt principles).

PROJECT

ASYMMETRICAL COMPOSITION

Use the same format, but with different shapes and colors from the last project to make a new composition that does not use symmetry in any way. The image should be constructed with a few large irregular shapes to break up the background and smaller organic shapes on top to add interest and focus. No recognizable subject matter is allowed.

NO SYMMETRY

There are two reasons for not using symmetry in this project: to learn how to balance asymmetrically and to better understand what constitutes symmetry.

Symmetry is a very attractive design concept and some people have difficulty avoiding it. To help you understand more about symmetry and whether you can do without it, you need to know more about its subtleties.

Types of symmetrical relationships to be aware of and avoid for this project include:

Centers -- do not put anything in the center of the format or any other object. That means along a center axis going in any direction. Be equally cautious about putting one object in the centers of another object.



Corners – do not put any object exactly in the corner of the format or any other object. There is an axis that runs through the center of a corner. Also be careful about using an object that looks like it is half on or over the edge of another object or the format.

Alignment – center axes continue out from a shape. Do not line up two or more objects on their center axes (this does not apply to two circles since they have axes in all directions -- the possibility of using two circles together would be eliminated). More than two circles in a line, however, still uses symmetry.



For this project avoid using the center of anything as a reference for placement.

Do not glue anything down until you are completely satisfied with the image

SUGGESTIONS

Start with a few L A R G E shapes that break up the background. Keep them different proportions for more interest. Add smaller and smaller shapes as you go, being careful to keep the overall image both balanced and interesting. Shape size is one of the few ways you have to create variety in an image where the shapes and colors are so limited.

Try creating a flow or rhythm in the composition. The shapes should look like they are placed in relationship with each other and not just randomly distributed.

Test the balance by turning the composition around, looking at it from several different directions. If it is well balanced, it will look balanced from any angle. There will, however, be one direction from which it looks best. That is because the top to bottom balance is not quite the same as left to right balance. A well-balanced composition will be slightly heavier on the bottom.