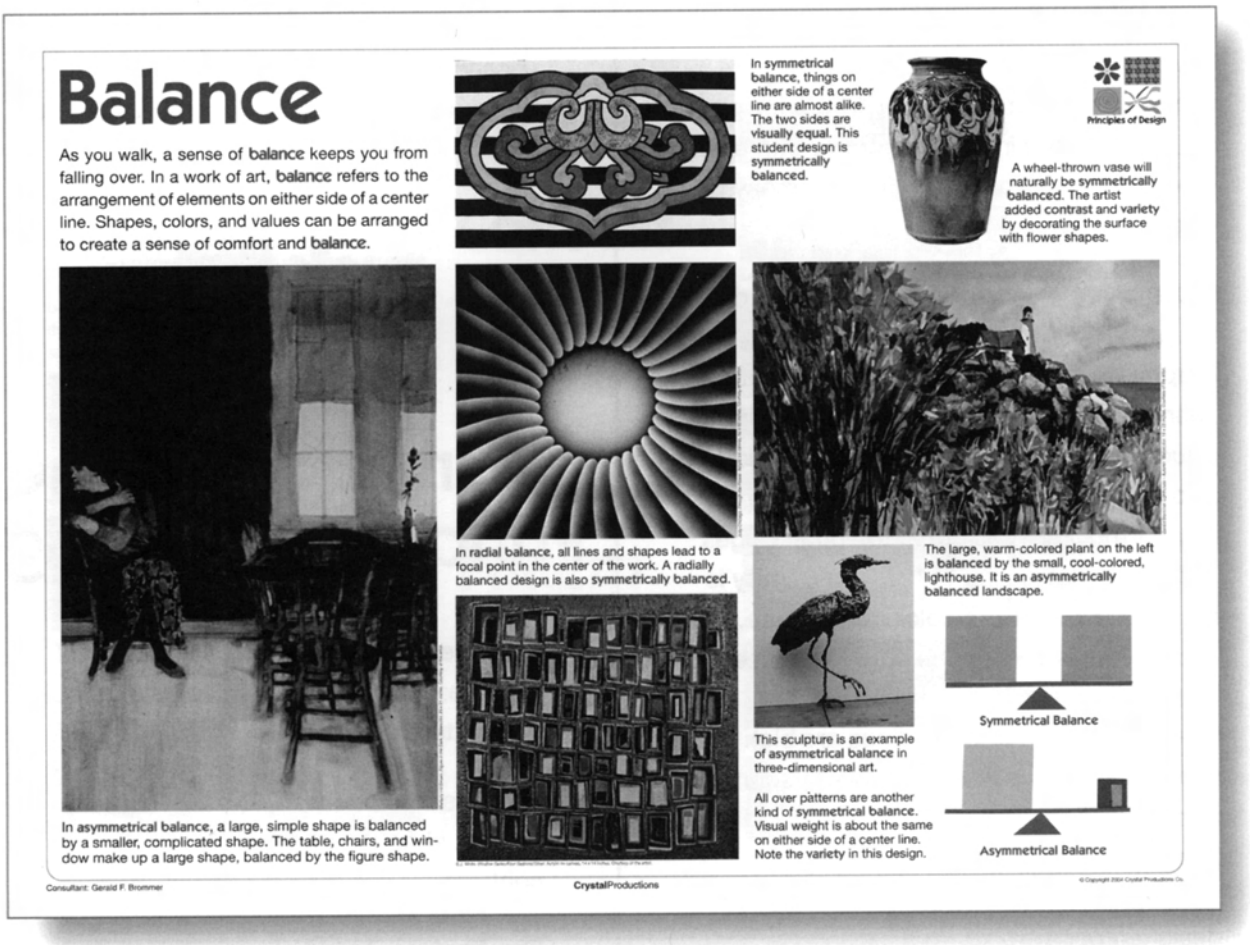
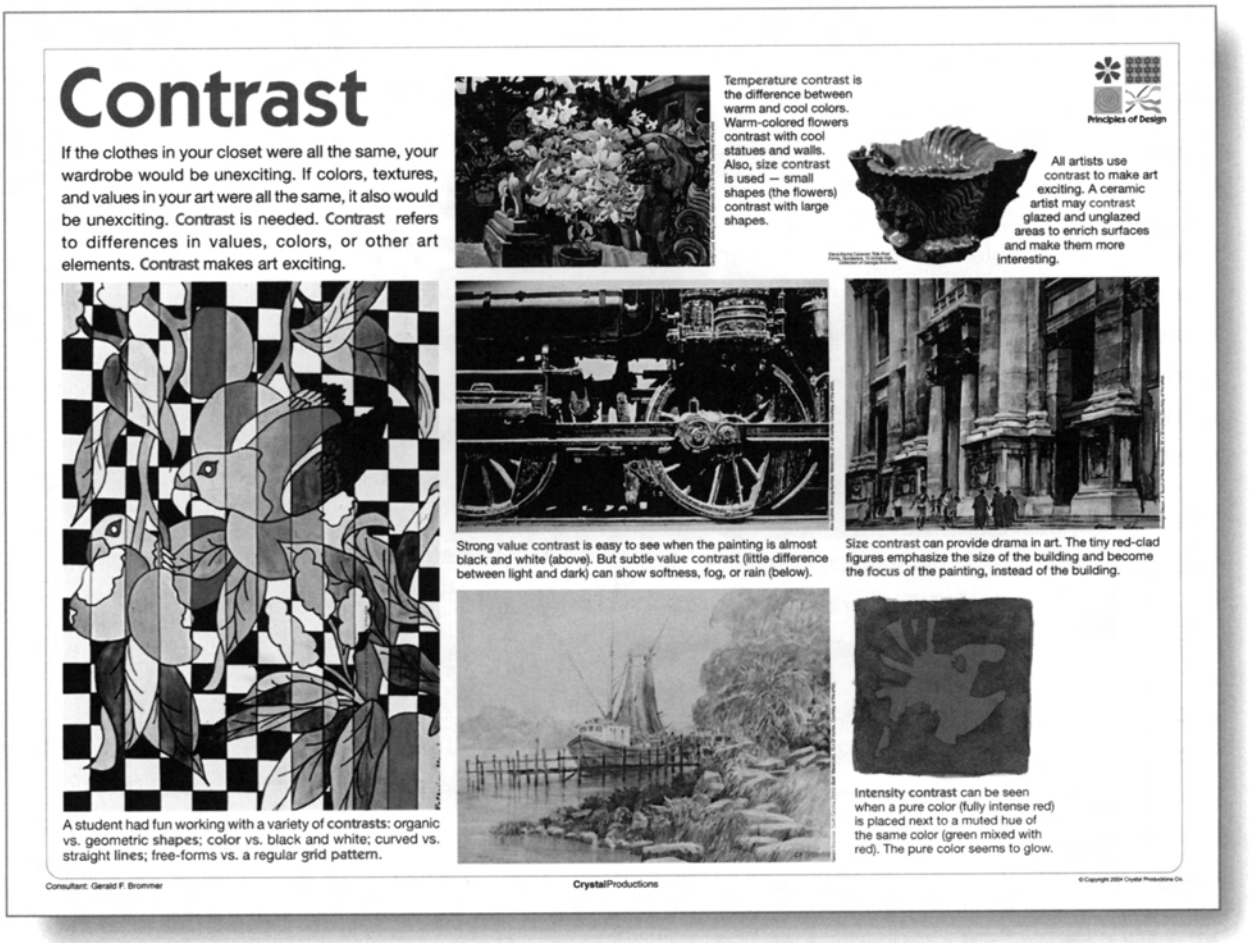
Principles of Design

Once you are familiar with the Elements of Art, you need to understand **composition** or **visual design**. This helps artists use the **Principles of Design** to make their artwork better. The **Principles of Design** are **balance**, **contrast**, **emphasis**, **movement**, **pattern**, **rhythm**, and **unity** with **variety**. They help artists organize any kind of artwork so it feels more comfortable to viewers.



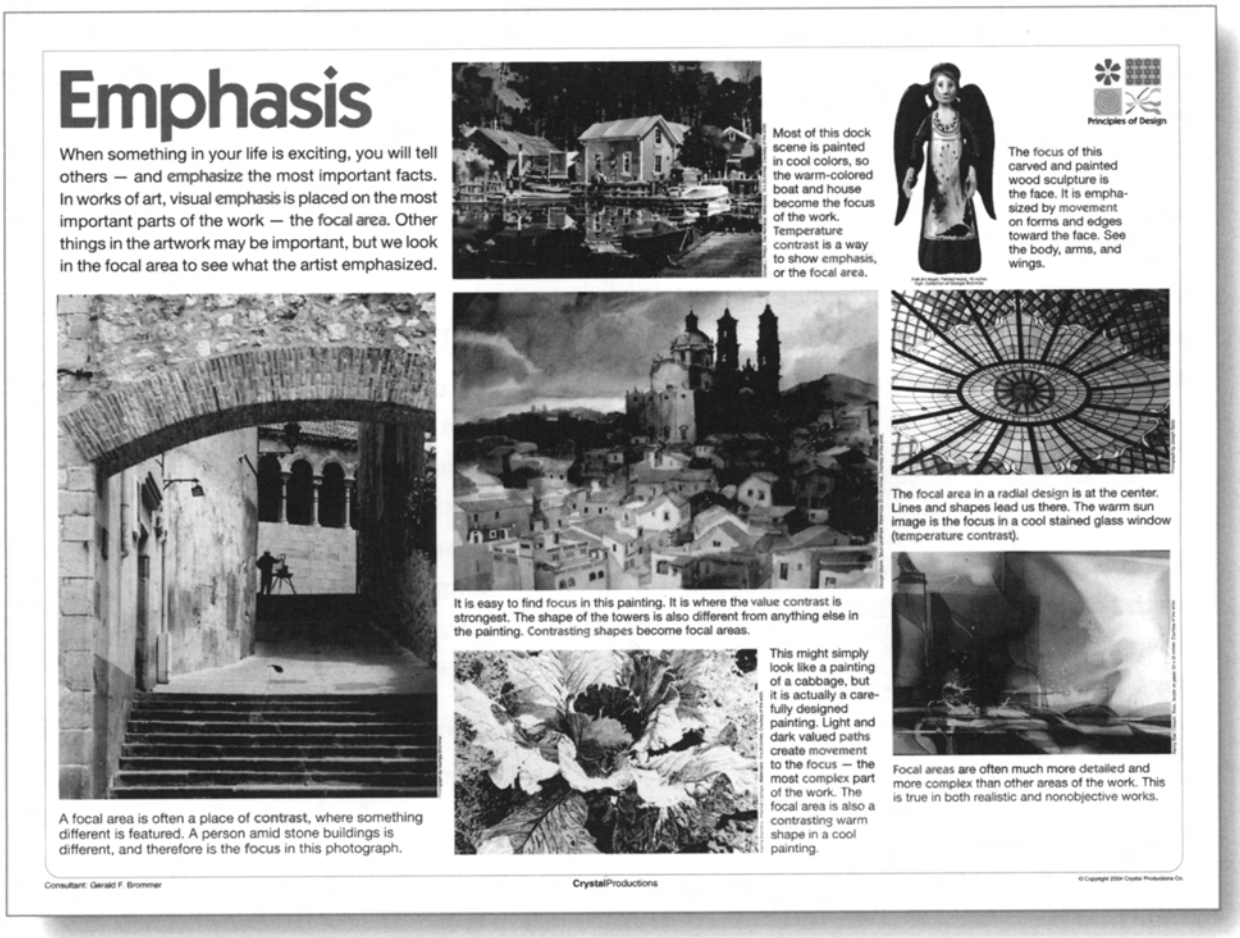
Balance

As you walk, a sense of **balance** keeps you from falling over. A ballerina needs a fine sense of **balance** to stand on one toe. In a work of art, **balance** refers to the arrangement of elements on either side of a center line. Shapes, colors, and values can be arranged to create a sense of comfort and balance.



Contrast

If people, clothes, and things in your life were all the same, life would be dull and unexciting. If colors, textures, lines, and values in your art were all the same, it also would be dull and unexciting. **Contrast** is needed. **Contrast** refers to differences in values, colors, or other art elements. **Contrast** makes art exciting.



Emphasis

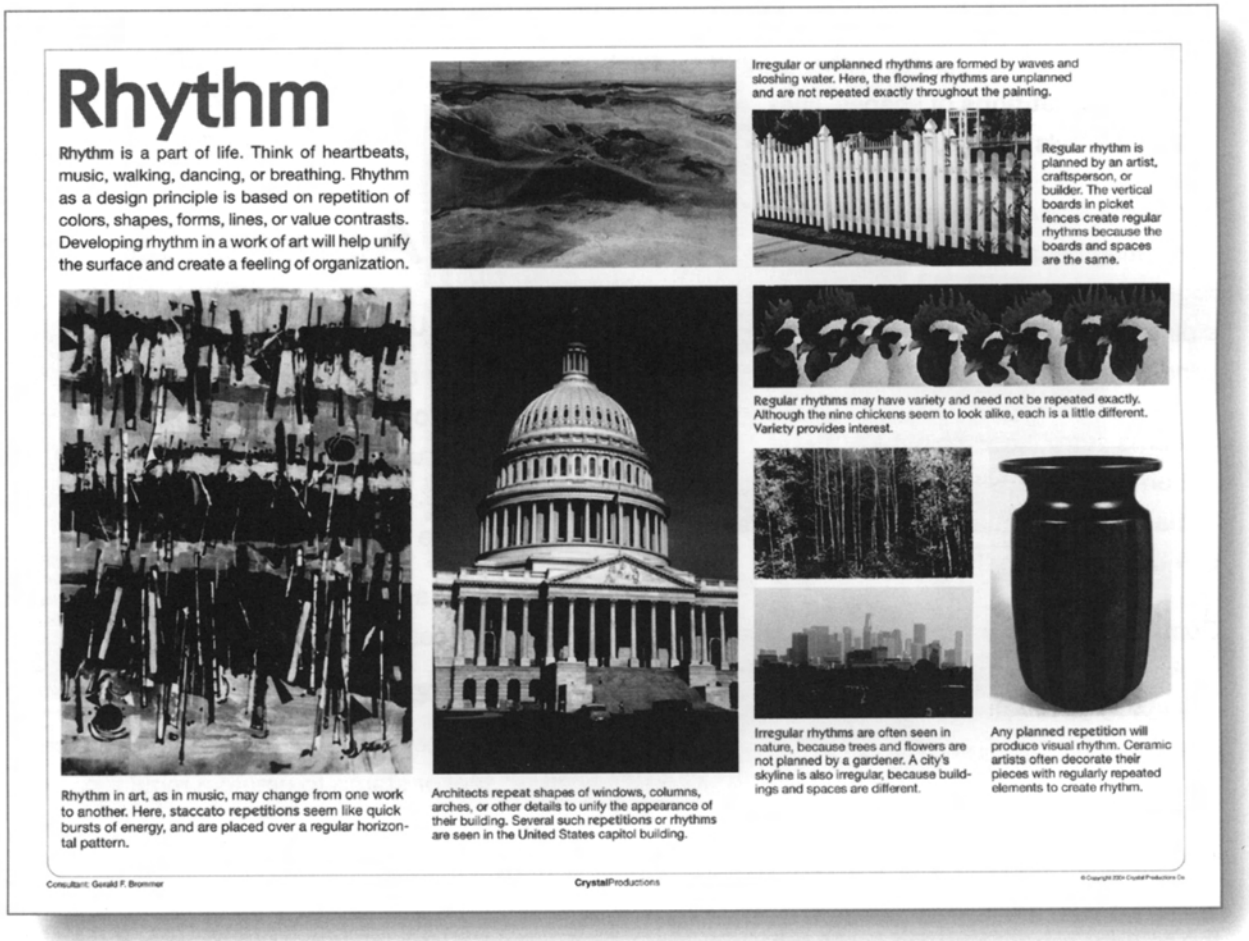
When something in your life is exciting, you will tell others — and **emphasize** the most important facts. In works of art, visual **emphasis** is placed on the most important parts of the work — on the **focal area**. Other things in the artwork may be important, but we look in the focal area to see what the artist emphasized.

Movement

Artists use **visual movement** to take viewers on a trip through their work. When we look at art, our eyes move along **edges** and **lines**, and also on paths made of connecting **shapes** of similar value or color. Such movement often leads us to the **focal area** and gives our work a sense of **unity** and organization.

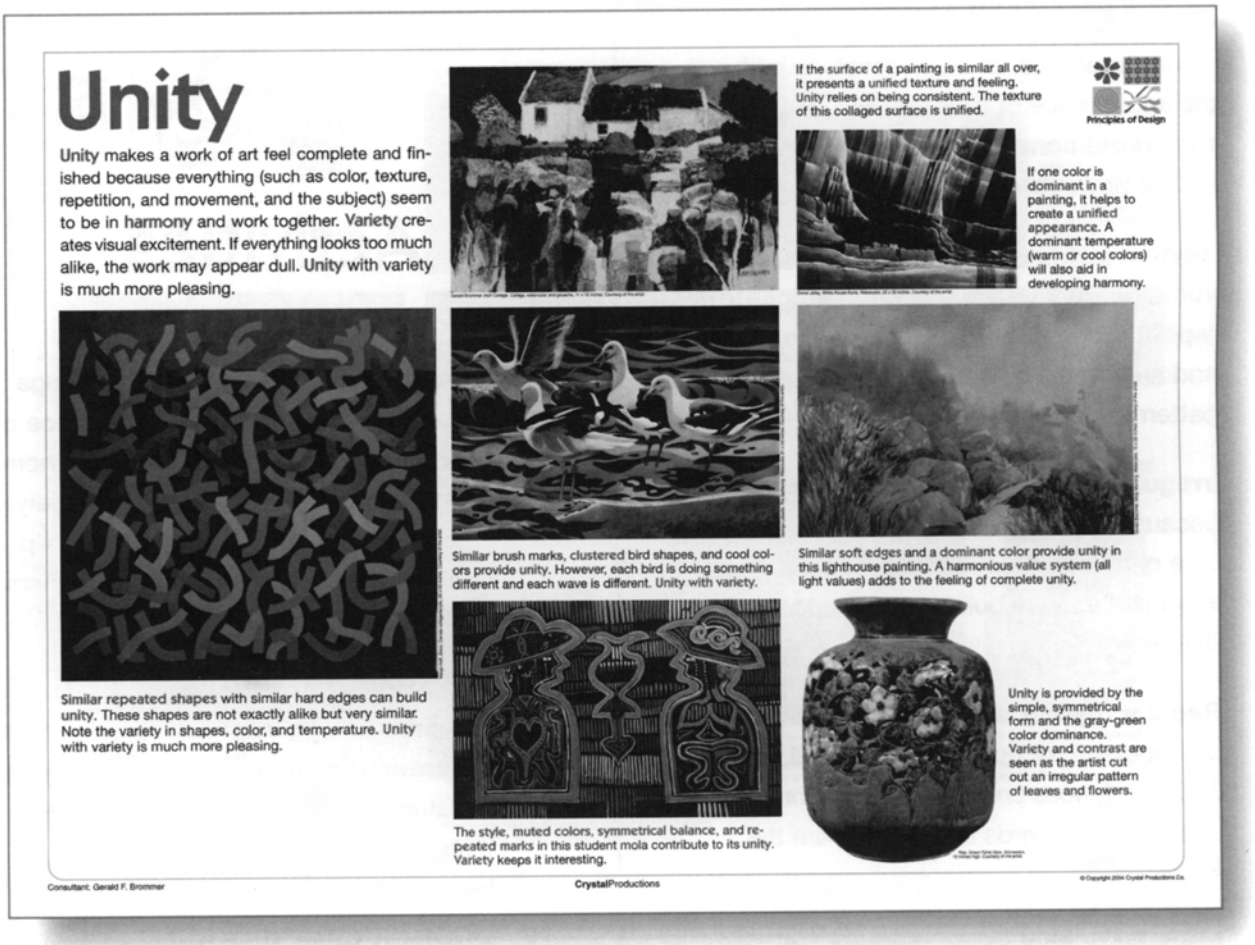
Pattern

Pattern is everywhere you look — in clothes, buildings, carpets, animals, trees, and manufactured things. **Patterns** are made in art when the same shapes or elements are **repeated** again and again. **Pattern** makes art more exciting by decorating the surfaces of paintings, sculptures, crafts, or architecture.



Rhythm

Rhythm is a basic part of life. Think of heartbeats, music, walking, dancing, or breathing. Rhythm as a **design principle** is based on **repetition** of colors, shapes, forms, lines, or value contrasts. Developing rhythm in a work of art will help **unify** the surface and create a pleasant feeling of planned organization.



Unity/Variety

Unity makes a work of art feel complete and finished because everything (such as color, texture, repetition, and movement, and the subject) seems to be in **harmony** and work together. **Variety** creates visual excitement. If everything looks too much alike, the work may appear dull. **Unity with variety** is much more pleasing.