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COMPOSITION



0:00 - 0:14

The term composition means 'putting together' and can apply to any work of art or design, from music to writing or photography. It is an arrangement of elements or ingredients that make up a work.



0:14 - 0:28

When initially thinking about how to compose information, graphics, images, and other artifacts together, the most important decisions you will make will always come down to understanding the purpose of the work.



0:29 - 0:54

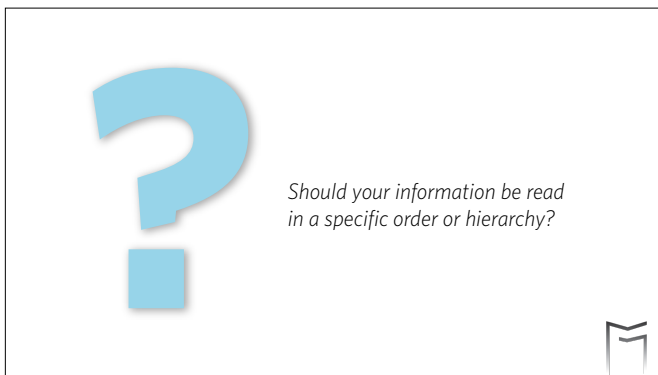
Therefore, you might ask yourself:

What is the big goal or purpose of the work, and exactly what information needs to be there in order to relay it? Then decide on purposeful images or artifacts, such as icons or graphs, that you need to illustrate this purpose. Putting extraneous details that distract from the main purpose will only confuse your audience, rather than help them.



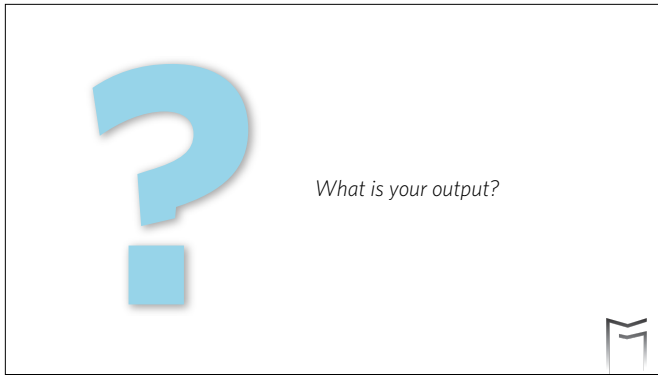
0:54 - 1:07

When you know the essentials of what you need in the composition, you can then look at it all to make relationships between the components and group them together. This will help you know how you need to arrange it all.



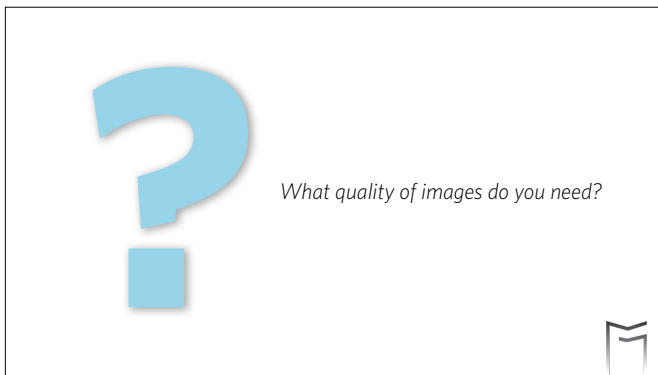
1:07 - 1:17

This can include hierarchal or chronological inferences, and your delivery can imply certain directions for your information to be read.



1:17 - 1:39

On a more practical note, you should also figure out how this will eventually be shown. Will this be a large printed poster or a small pamphlet? Will it be projected on a large wall in landscape orientation, or viewed on a personal cell phone in portrait orientation? You will make many compositional decisions based on how it will eventually be shown.



1:39 - 2:06

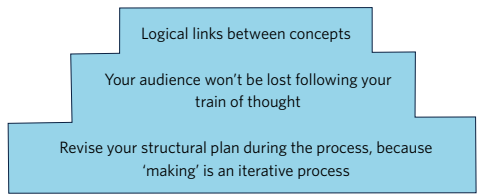
When you know the output, you can then find or make images that will look good for that presentation. For example, how big, or how to crop or your image in order to see specific details, as well as obtaining images at a quality that looks good for that output size. For instance, if you are creating a large public banner, you will need a high resolution photograph versus a lower resolution image for showing on a small phone.



2:06 - 2:36

You can also calculate what size font you need for legibility and as a result, how many words you can fit in the composition area for text. This might mean you need to edit your word count, combine sentences, or use a bulleted list. But overall, visual projects should be really particular and specific on how they use words, because the text becomes part of the composition to be looked at! This isn't the form for delivering a long essay!

STRUCTURE



2:36 - 3:20

After identifying your purpose, you need to draw out and organize a structure to execute your goals in identifiable small steps. Structure is the logical chain between the concepts of your presentation. Having an organized structure will ensure that you won't lose any references to ideas or links to how you tell your story. As well, you want to make sure that your audience won't feel lost trying to follow your train of thoughts. It is important to know that while you can pre-organize much of what you will do, you will revise your structural plan during the process of making. Iterative processes are a part of figuring out what is important.

Things to consider when planning your composition

Orientation
White Space
Layout
Juxtaposition



3:20 - 3:36

Considering your audience and how you want them to view your work, there are four major components of composition you want to consider when planning your multimodal project. The orientation, white space, layout and juxtaposition.

ORIENTATION



Portrait



Landscape



Square



3:36 - 4:33

Orientation is the proportional distribution of either a single image or area of text, but can also apply to the overall document. The three most common orientations are portrait, landscape and square. Portrait mode can refer to the orientation of a body, taller than it is wide, or to a face. It relates to the shape of the person viewing, and a shared understanding of subjectivity. Think of it as giving the same impression of looking in a mirror. Landscape proportion is wider than tall. Like its name, it can give a sense of space and geography, and as a result orients the viewer into ideas of place. A square orientation, which is the same dimensions tall as it is wide, can emphasize objecthood and what it depicts, an inventory or a neutrality or a product shot, of 'things'. As of late, the square format also refers to Instagram.

WHITE SPACE

▶ **Higher Comprehension**

*studies show that organized white space
increases comprehension by up to 20%*



4:33 - 4:55

White space, or blank space, is a very important component of composition, therefore you should ensure you have it and use it wisely. For instance, by organizing information into groups surrounded by balanced or purposeful sections of white space, you can help a viewer negotiate the information they are seeing as it relates and connects.

WHITE SPACE

▶ **Improves Legibility**



4:55 - 5:03

It helps legibility and gives pathways and directions of ideas which can impose certain qualities on what is depicted.

WHITE SPACE

▶ **Increased or Directed Attention**



5:03 - 5:22

White space can also be a powerful way of drawing a users attention to a particular element, or directing it around to read the elements in a particular way. To a non-designer the most obvious way to make something stand out is to make it bigger, however, surrounding the item in white space can be just as effective.

WHITE SPACE

► Saying too Much

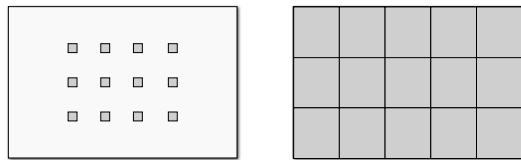
viewers have limited attention, so 'spend' it wisely



5:22 - 6:03

Finally, a common mistake with many multimodal projects is trying to say too much, which is sometimes more distracting than useful. Organizing your white space is a force for you to edit and figure out what is really important.

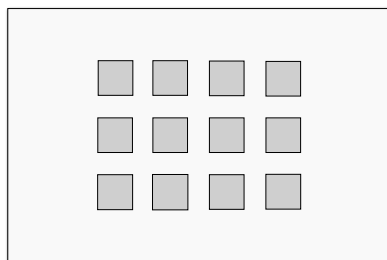
If you visit google vs. yahoo, you can see a common difference of the desire to communicate too much information, or directing the viewer with a specific clarity. We know you have a lot to say, but users have a limited attention span, and when faced with too much information, a viewer would rather turn it off. Therefore, it is important that you 'spend' the user's attention wisely.



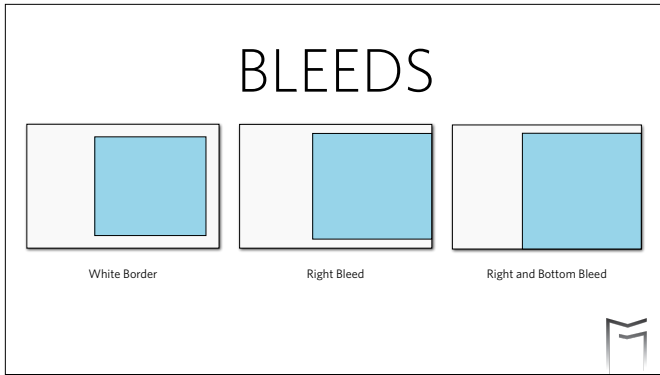
6:03 - 6:38

Here we have an example of utilizing a lot of white space. We have large, spacious white borders that emphasize a strong stylistic formatting which almost overwhelms, leaving the image area small in relation. This emphasizes a feeling of preciousness or intimacy to whatever is depicted. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the example on the right eliminates the white space altogether - the images bleed off the page and touch each other on their edges, leaving absolutely no white space. This gives it an overwhelming, crowded quality which can be a useful inference for some content.

6:38 - 6:48



You can also evenly scale your borders, or play with the white space and content at other proportions. It all depends on the effect that you want.



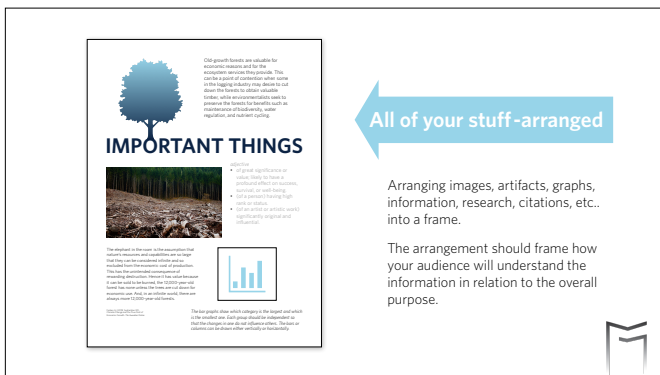
6:48 - 7:06

Images or content that go off the edge are called “bleeds” and you can use them to cause an unbalanced or unconfined feeling to your audience. Whereas the white border example on the left provides a more contained feeling, and a viewer wouldn’t think anything is happening in the image off the page.



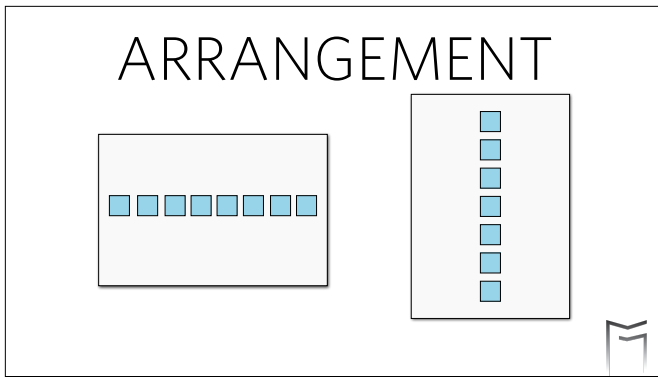
7:06 - 7:26

Composition is often used interchangeably with other terms such as design, visual ordering, or a formal structure, depending on the context. In graphic design for press and desktop publishing, composition is commonly referred to as page layout. The picture shows essential elements scattered, before they are organized.



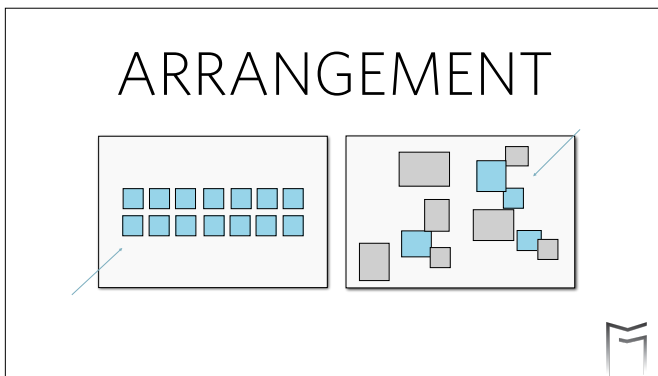
7:26 - 7:46

Learning about elements that help you to make decisions for composition is a great skill to help you to organize information and artifacts for visual communication. Taking time to make thoughtful arrangements can be applied to making a poster, a website, a display in a video, a presentation, or even in taking a photograph.



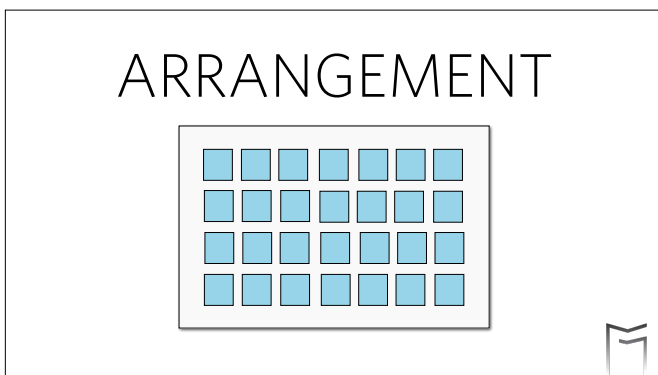
7:46 - 8:17

An especially western habit, we tend to read from left to right, top to bottom. You can use this to direct a viewer's gaze in relation to your arrangement of images on a page or on a document. If you set up images horizontally in a long line, this relays an idea of time or chronology, and most would read the order from left to right. On the right, you can have a vertical arrangement that implies hierarchy, or height in space, or a scroll and it usually reads from top to bottom.



8:17 - 8:57

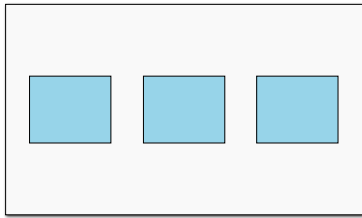
You may want it to insinuate a symbolic form, for example on the left we have two rows of seven images which also connects to the arrangement of the 2 week calendar. We would read the images from Sunday to Saturday as we use society's organizational structure of time. If you wish to set out a feeling of disarray or unstructured purposes, you can consider an abstract layout. However if you do this, know that it will read as ambiguous, or perhaps even disorderly. It may seem ambivalent about its purpose and the enrichment demonstrates the artist's style and personal taste.



8:57 - 9:17

Here we have a classic grid which refers to objects or product shots of an inventory. It's very orderly, like products in a catalogue and also feels scientific or even clinical. There is identity of an inventory or objecthood which is applied to images when arranged in this form.

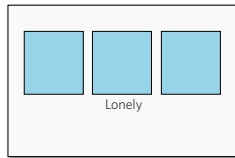
JUXTAPOSITION



9:17 - 9:43

Juxtaposition happens when arranging multiple images, graphics, or information on a single paper or document. When we do this, we are making relationships between them. For example, if one image is placed close to another while another image is far away, the viewer will try and figure out the relationship of the two that are closer and see the other as somewhat unrelated.

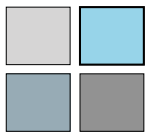
JUXTAPOSITION WITH TEXT



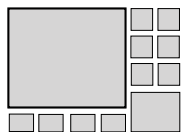
9:43 - 10:36

This can also happen with text, as where it is placed can give a direct narrative to the viewer about how to read the relationships. For example, the word 'lonely' at the bottom of the page on the left seems to refer to all the images on the page. Whereas on the right, it seems like the word lonely refers only to the image in the centre because it is so close to it. Therefore, where you place your text can change the way the audience reads the information. As well, viewers tend to go for what is most easy, and language is easier to understand than the many references of an image. Therefore, a viewer habitually depends on text or language when trying to understand context, or negotiate what is happening in an image. This can lead the interpretation of an image in a very particular way.

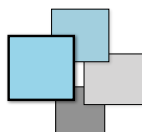
VISUAL HIERARCHY



Colour



Scale



Depth



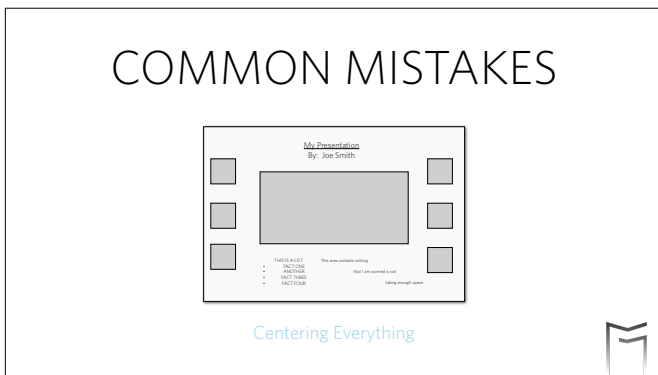
10:36 - 11:38

Juxtaposition mixed with other elements can also demonstrate a visual hierarchy, and you can use it to direct your viewer in your overall design. Visual hierarchy controls all of the visual information in an arrangement that implies contrast and draws attention to the main subject in a composition. Hierarchy exists in many visual ways such as in differentiations of the brightness of colour as seen on the left. The scale of an area over another can also relate to hierarchy of this component being more important than the others in a composition as in the middle example. As well, there are ways to give sense of depth to a 2D format, as one object is "on top" of the others, thus its content is more important. You can also arrange this with a difference in saturation which can enhance it further, and many more visual combinations to imply hierarchy.



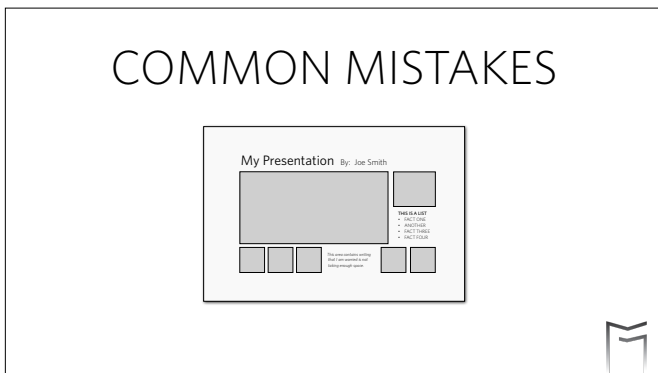
11:37 - 11:47

By going through some common mistakes we can quickly refine some composition decisions to work their best.



11:47 - 12:07

One of the most common mistakes is arranging everything into a composition and out of practicality, therefore making it even and symmetrical, centred, and haphazardly considering how things relate to make more intimate connections between the material. It produces a boring and technical feeling, like looking at an ATM screen.

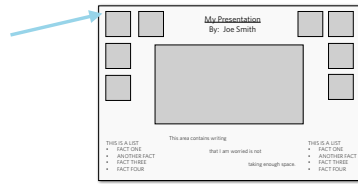


12:07 - 12:27

Instead you can use an asymmetrical balance, align things in a certain direction, and add dimension and dynamism to a composition. It makes relationships between objects and information interesting, and moves the viewer's eye around the information rather than getting stuck in dead zones.

12:27 - 12:47

COMMON MISTAKES



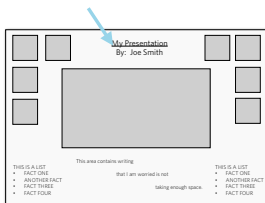
Corners + Clutter



Another common mistake is pushing elements of your composition to the edge and not leaving enough white space or breathing room from the border. This results in things looking cluttered and shows a lack of consideration of how the elements are working together as forces, rather than the page or screen of your background.

12:47 - 12:56

COMMON MISTAKES



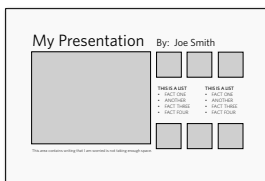
Underline



Another small tip, underlines for a title is pretty out-dated and doesn't always work for visual presentations of text.

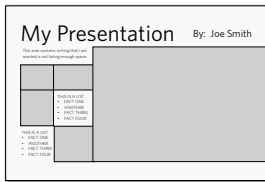
12:56 - 13:21

COMMON MISTAKES



Change to a font size or weight can denote what is a heading or a sub-heading rather than an underline and identifies the text that is more important. By tucking things in so that they have some breathing room from the edge, and grouping elements together and using white space to make associations, you can set a more poignant tone for how to look at the composition.

COMMON MISTAKES



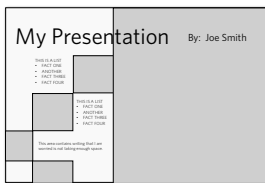
Bleeding Edge



13:21 - 13:32

If the content of your work works well with a bleeding edge, then you will have to adjust some other areas to work with it. Otherwise, the entire design seems out of balance.

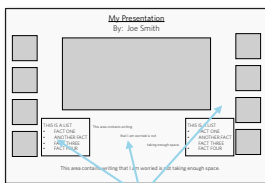
COMMON MISTAKES



13:32 - 13:40

You might want to think about emphasizing the overlap and continuation off the page as a formal style in the work.

COMMON MISTAKES



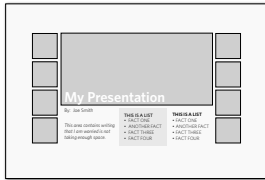
Trapped Negative Space



13:40 - 14:13

Another mistake is trapping negative space in a way that stops flow, rather than helps it. For example, between these two lists is wasted white space that actually splits the information, or the space between a bullet and the text separates the association and doesn't use the white space in a useful way, or the separation by use of white space of the central image and text with the images on the outside make it seem like it doesn't belong on the same page, or in the same conversation.

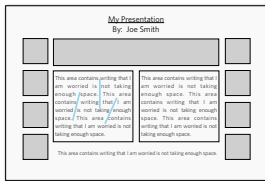
COMMON MISTAKES



14:13 - 14:25

Pulling areas together to better illustrative a cohesive whole, and using things like a shaded background, icon, or grouped text, can help you avoid dead white zones.

COMMON MISTAKES



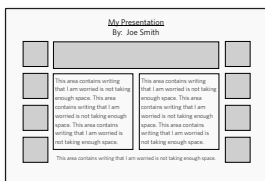
Justified Rivers



14:25 - 14:56

As mentioned in the text video, try to avoid excessive spaces between text causing rivers of negative space. This make it difficult for your viewer to read and hurts the flow and consistency while reading. This usually happens when you justify text but the text area is too small, or the text size is too big, therefore asking the computer to justify it puts in large gaps of white space that creates vertical rivers.

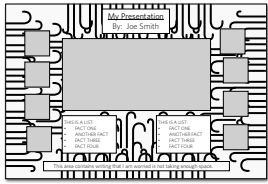
COMMON MISTAKES



14:56 - 15:00

A simple change to align to the left will fix this issue.

COMMON MISTAKES



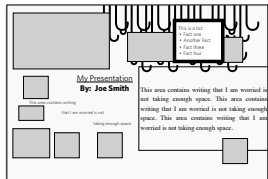
Busy Background



15:00 - 15:32

A really busy or patterned background can be quite distracting to the flow of your composition. While it is great to use shape or shaded blocks or a coloured background, when you put a busy pattern in your background it makes it unnecessarily convoluted, difficult and uninviting to read. If you find yourself putting white boxes around your text so that people can read it, it probably means your background is not a good choice! This is exacerbated when the image from the background has nothing to do with the content of the work.

COMMON MISTAKES

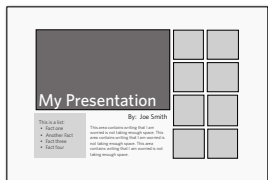


Lack of Consistency



15:32 - 15:52

Lack of consistency in fonts, alignment of text, random dimensions and overlaps, as well as uneven spacing of images and borders can cause confusion for the viewer and overall looks like it lacks a specific vision or purpose on how your decisions relate or what they are supposed to convey.



15:52 - 16:33

Grouping information can help people read the content better, and you can use shading or borders to delineate information. But you do not, and should not, use every design strategy in one piece, just the ones that work for your project. Orientation, white space, layout and juxtaposition of your multimodal project will help you achieve your intended outcome, they all effect how your viewer interacts with your work. Have fun visually problem solving your composition, and like most things - good design is about paying attention and spending time to get all your details just right!