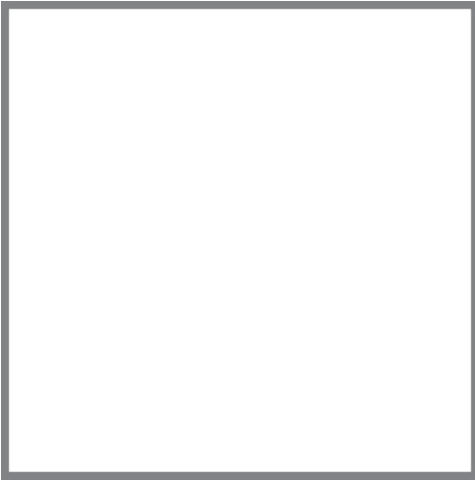


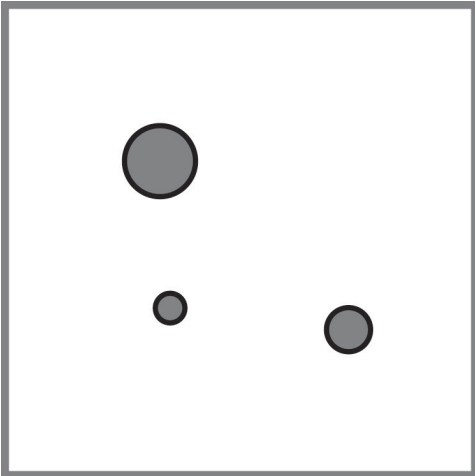
# Some Useful Information for Designing a Still-life

## Some Terms & Information about this Document



Most of the illustrations herein are little squares with grey borders. The space inside the borders is referred to as the **picture plane**.

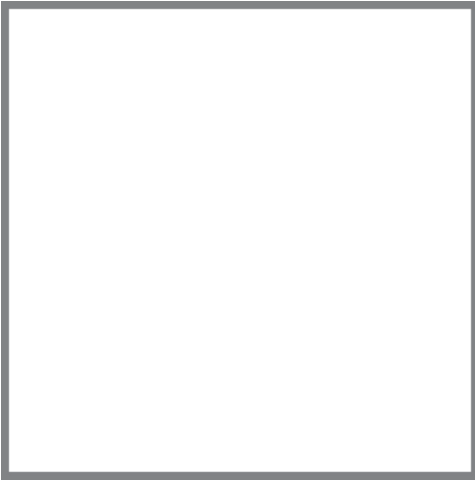
**Ground** is analogous to background (it doesn't have to be at the bottom). **Figure** represents any subject (doesn't have to be a person) that occupies the artwork. **Negative space** doesn't 'contain anything'; it recedes. **Positive Space** contains figures & advances.



In this example the the circles are the figures / positive space, and the white area is the ground / negative space. Although... darker values tend to recede, so one might also view this as a white plane with three holes cut into it, in which case the relationship would be reversed.

## **Orientations**

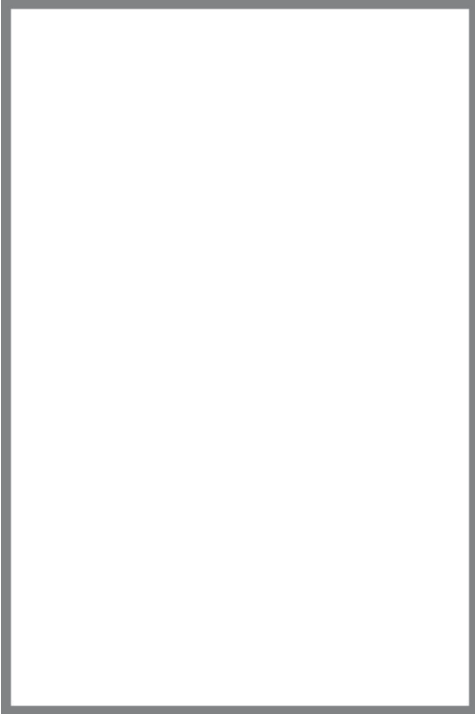
One of the first decisions in creating a composition is the orientation. If you are working digitally (and therefore have complete flexibility), you may want to consider some common aspect ratios so then later on it'll be a little easier to mat & frame your work.



**Square** - Square is one of the most difficult orientations to work with. It is so stable that it stifles all but the most interesting compositions.



**Panoramic / Horizontal / Landscape** - More dynamic than a square, but less dynamic than a vertical orientation.



**Totemic / Vertical / Portrait** - The most dynamic orientation (short of using unorthodox shapes or hangings). Good to use to spice up an otherwise calm piece.

## **Principles & Elements of Design**

Knowing some of the Principles & Elements of Design will help you make more beautiful images as well as communicate effectively about the visual aspects of your artwork.

Principles are guidelines for producing visually pleasing artwork. Elements are the components you can manipulate to achieve those principles.

I'll only mention a few of them here & provide a separate document with some additional information.

## **Contrast**

Contrast is the difference between two elements. **Simultaneous Contrast** occurs between two elements interacting with one another. **Successive Contrast** occurs between elements located separately on the picture plane. **Juxtaposition** describes contrast as well but tends to be used more often to describe conceptual contrast, e.g., a beggar standing next to a rich man would be a juxtaposition without visual contrast.

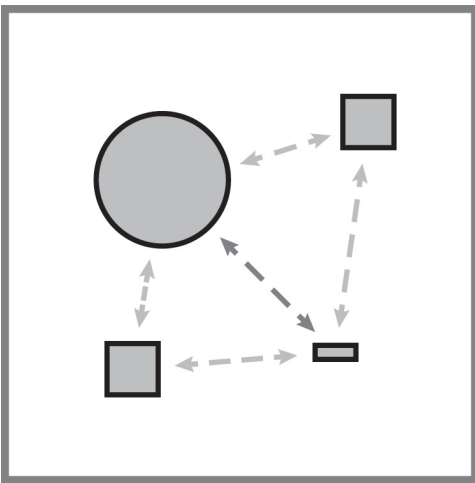
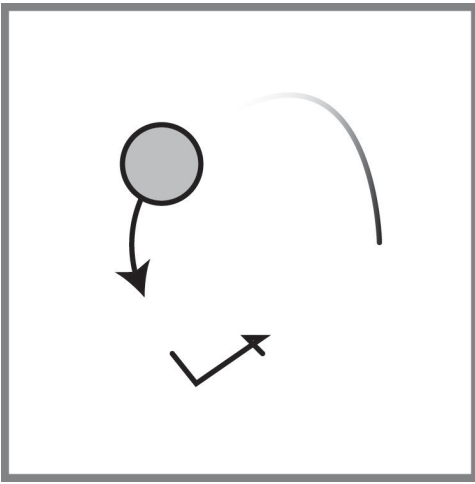
Contrast is the most common way to control **Emphasis & Movement**.

## Emphasis / Dominance

The principle of giving visual priority to certain parts of the image.

## Movement

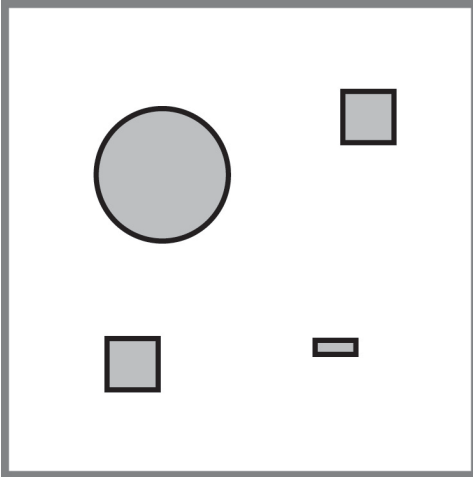
Movement refers to how the viewer's eye moves across the artwork. As a principle the goal is to keep the viewer's eye moving - but not off the picture plane. For this reason it is advisable not to place a single figure dead center, or to create tension by almost (but not quite) running elements off the picture plane.



The pathways followed by your eye across the piece are called **psychic lines**.

## Focal Point / Accents

The most dominant point of the artwork is called the **focal point**. Subsequent points of interest are called **accents**.



In this instance, the circle is the focal point because it contrasts with the smaller rectangles. The rectangle in the lower right is probably the primary accent as it contrasts (a little less so than the circle) with the slightly larger squares. The two identical squares could be considered secondary accents - although there really isn't much happening in this piece so they don't have much competition.

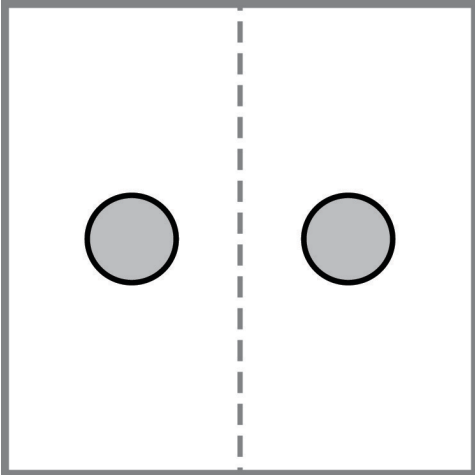
### **Visual Weight**

The degree to which your eye is drawn to an object represents its **visual weight**. The rule of thumb is that the more an element contrasts, the more visual weight it has. Elements may also have more visual weight because they are bigger, more isolated, in better focus, representing a subject that naturally draws the eye (such as a human face), etc. Pay attention to how your eye moves around an image. The more it dwells on a single element the more weight that element has. Note that even negative space can have visual weight if there's enough of it.

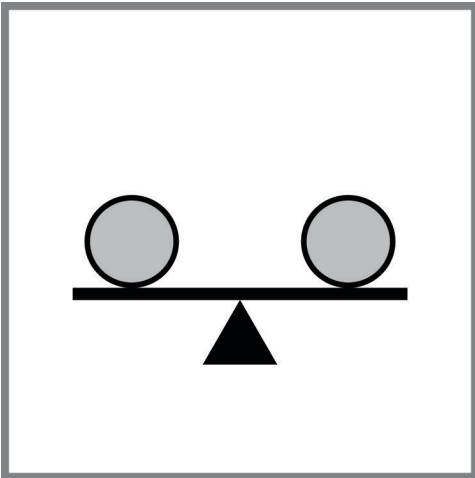
### **Balance**

The principle that visual weight should be evenly distributed such as to make the picture plane feel stable.

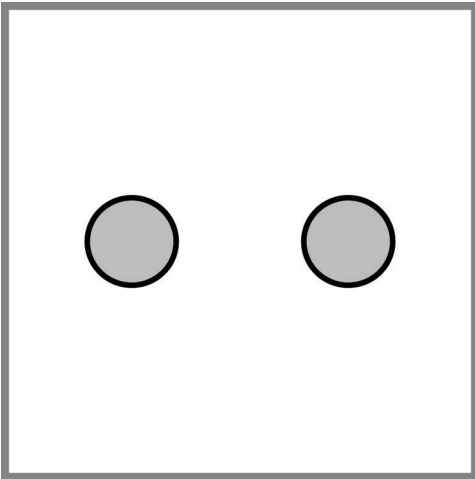
### **Symmetrical Balance**



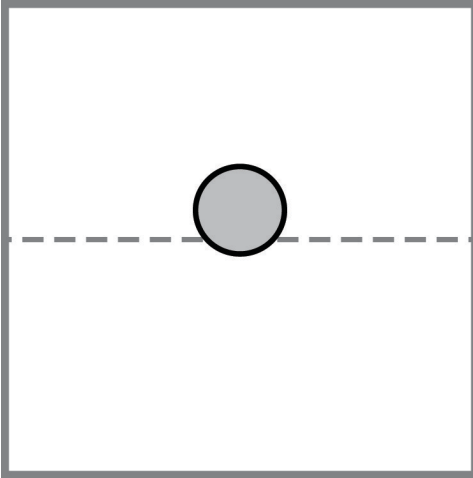
Symmetrical balance places approximately the same visual weight on opposite sides of the y-axis.



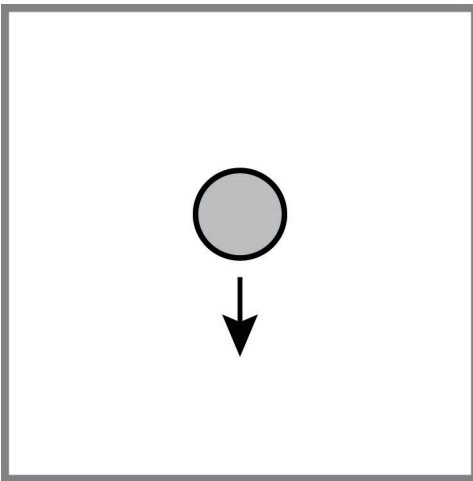
If you imagine that all the elements are on a scale, that scale should not be tipping in any direction.



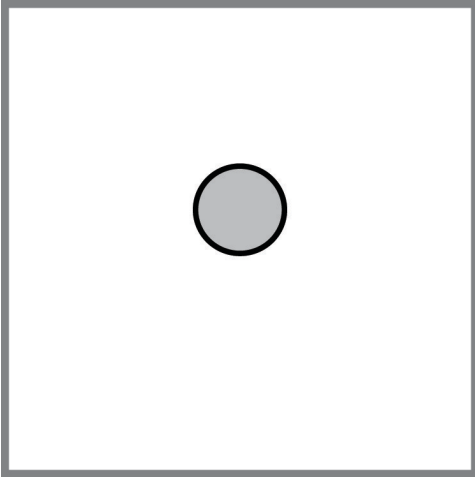
## Vertical Balance



Unlike horizontal balance across the y-axis, vertical balance usually needs to be slightly above the x-axis. If so and how much will depend on the subject matter.

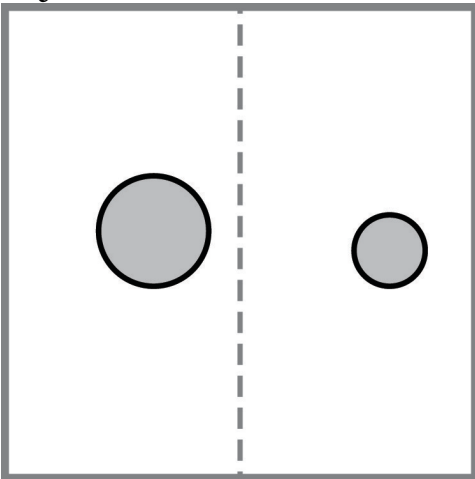


This is because we expect that most objects in the air will fall downward, which generates eye-movement, and therefore visual weight, in the negative space below certain figures.

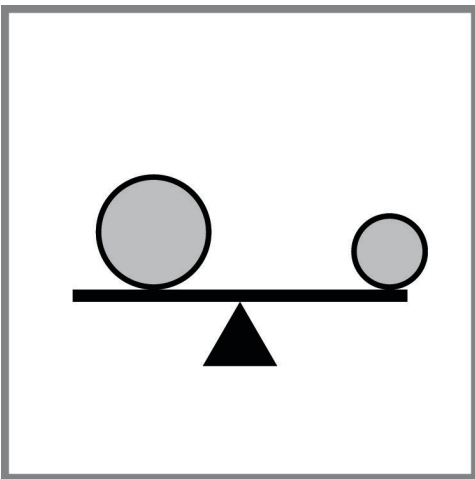


'Top-weighting' as it's called is commonly applied to matting photographs.

### Asymmetrical Balance



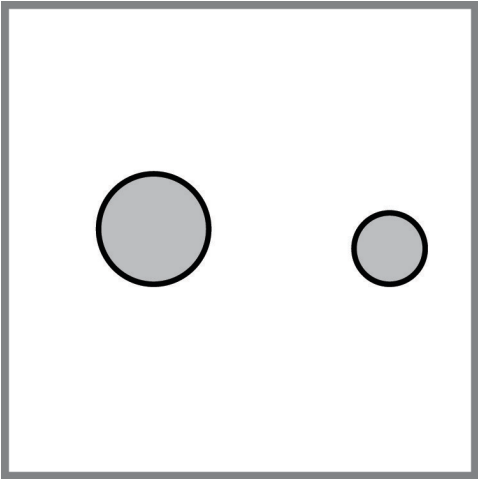
With asymmetrical balance visual weight is still evenly distributed across the y-axis; however it is not reflected.



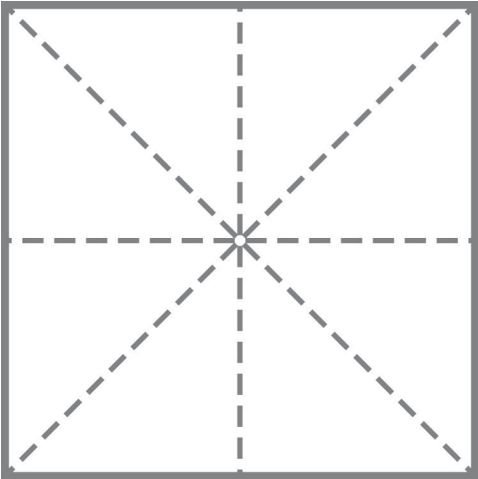
Again, if you think about a scale, you might remember that a smaller object can balance



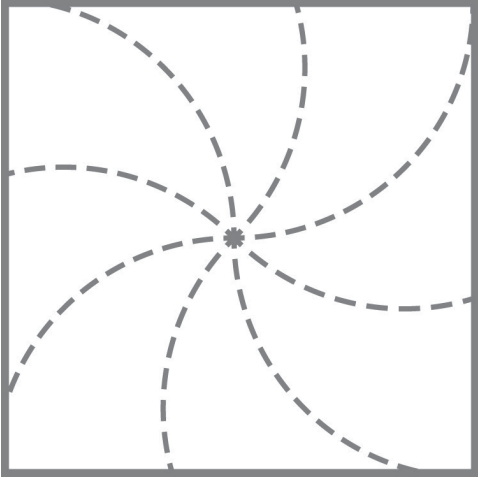
against a larger object by being placed further away from the point of balance.



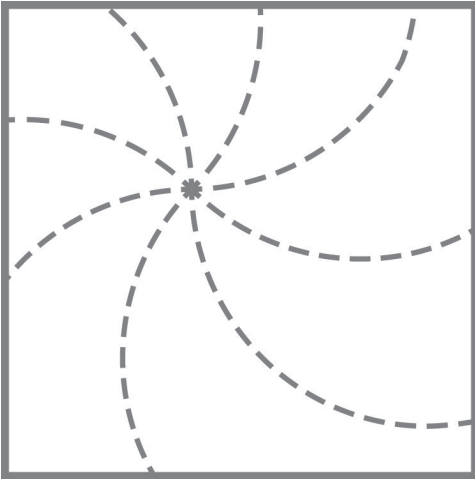
**Radial Balance**



One can also balance an artwork by distributing visual weight with radial symmetry.



...or spiral symmetry.



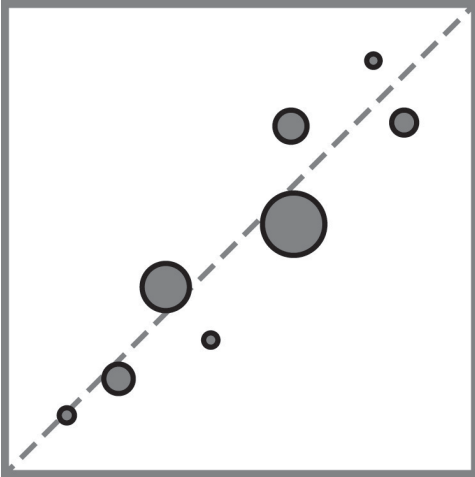
The focal point of radial/spiral symmetry doesn't actually have to be the center, but be careful about leaving it too close to the edge.

## Common Compositions

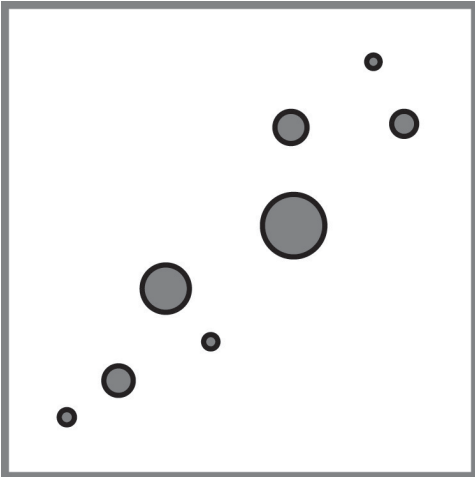
While it seem natural to center your subject; try not to. While it makes sense for a study, it's pretty awkward in most other cases. Spreading out the visual weight along the vertical or horizontal axis isn't quite so bad, but if you can avoid centering all together you can achieve much more dynamic compositions that don't feel so contrived. If you are working with a larger object that is centered but filling most of the composition, it's the subcomponents of the object that need to be considered.

Ultimately it isn't necessary to adhere strictly to one type of arrangement, but there are some classic options to consider if you're stumped.

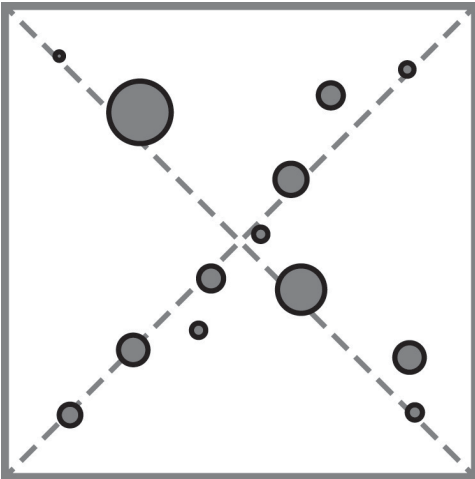
## Diagonal



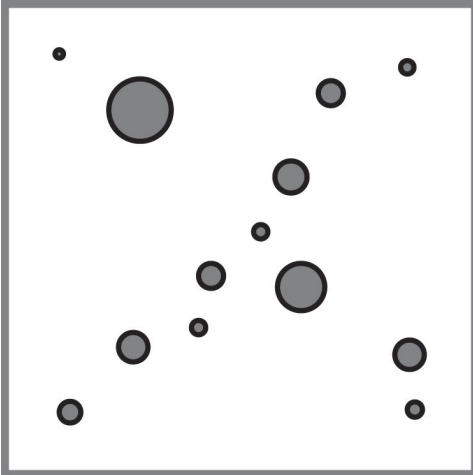
Creating movement along a diagonal running from corner to opposite corner.



X

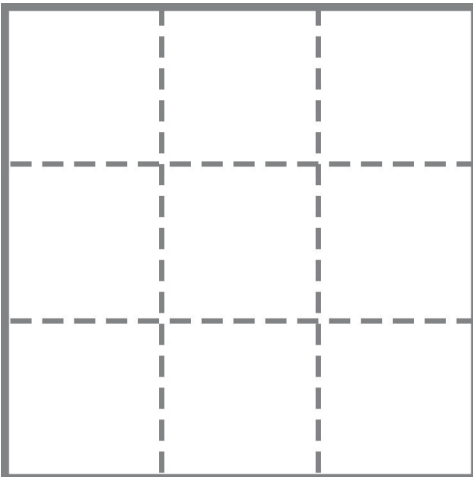


Creating movement along two diagonals simultaneously.

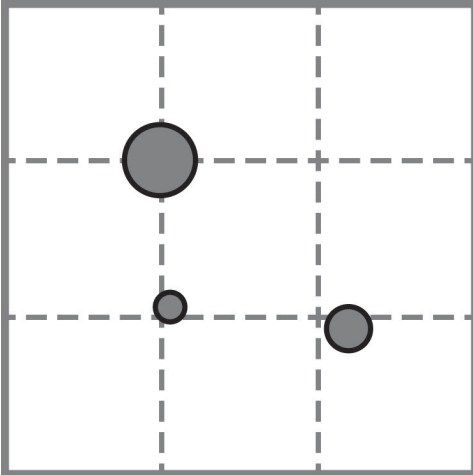


Although in these examples attention was drawn with direct placement of figures, this isn't the only way to achieve the same result. What's important is the path followed by the eye across the composition.

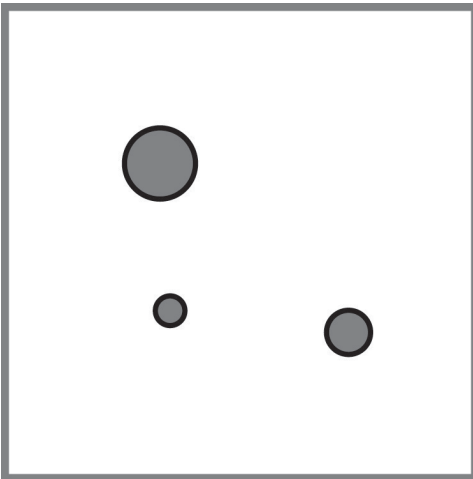
### The Rule of Thirds



Probably the easiest & best rule of thumb for compositions is the **Rule of Thirds**. If you divide up the picture plane into a 3x3 grid, the points of intersection are good locations for focal points & accents. If you are creating a landscape one of the horizontal lines might be a good option for positioning the horizon line.

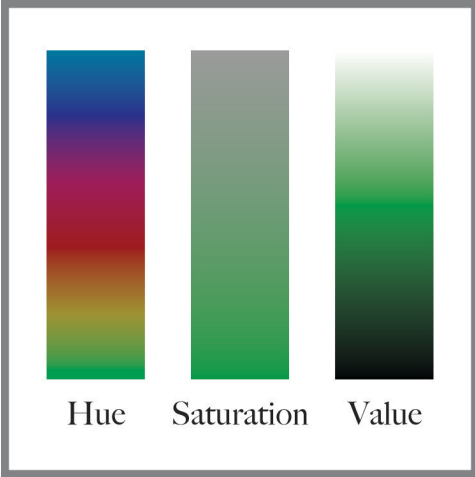


Exact placement isn't as important as balance. You do need to place something at each intersection - they are merely good locations to place prominent elements you already know are going to be in the composition.

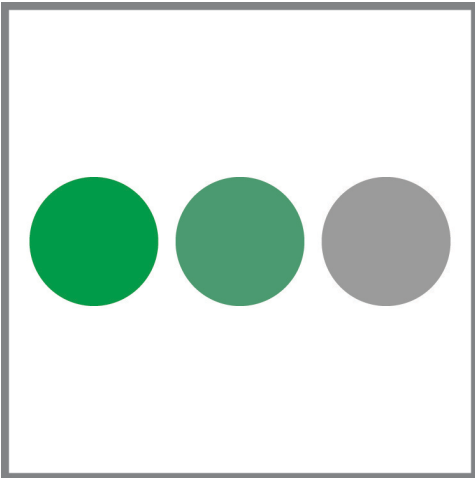


## **Color**

Color has three properties:



Hue - What is usually thought of called color; the position on the color wheel.



Saturation - How 'bright' or 'brilliant' a color is.



Value - How light or dark a color is.

## Color Schemes/Groups

There are many options for unifying color in an artwork according to its properties.

- Hue - I recommend <http://mudcu.be/sphere/#> for making color schemes. From there you can pick your color and see others that can be paired with it. Note that the color wheel there is always keeping the saturation/values consistent. It is also possible to choose a color scheme and then afford different saturations/values to different hues within a scheme - although you may not need to worry about it as the program you use might render different values, e.g. based on lighting.

- Saturation - Using a limited range of saturations.
- Value - Using a limited range of values.

## Refreshing The Eye

The longer you've been looking at your artwork the more difficult it can be to make objective judgements about it. If you're having trouble making a decision, step away from that piece for a while and come back to it later. A lot of the time your original dilemma will resolve itself.

Similarly, sometimes it's useful to get the help of a second party who either hasn't seen your work recently or at all.