

# The Gestalt Principles

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[SIMILARITY](#) / [CONTINUATION](#) / [CLOSURE](#) / [PROXIMITY](#) / [FIGURE & GROUND](#)

*Gestalt* is a psychology term which means "unified whole". It refers to theories of **visual perception** developed by German psychologists in the 1920s. These theories attempt to describe how people tend to organize visual elements into **groups** or *unified wholes* when certain principles are applied. These principles are:

## Similarity

*Similarity* occurs when **objects look similar** to one another. People often perceive them as a group or pattern.



The example above (containing 11 distinct objects) appears as a **single unit** because all of the shapes have **similarity**.

Unity occurs because the triangular shapes at the bottom of the eagle symbol **look similar** to the shapes that form the sunburst.

When similarity occurs, an object can be emphasised if it is *dissimilar* to the others. This is called **anomaly**.



The figure on the far right becomes a focal point because it is **dissimilar** to the other shapes.

[SIMILARITY](#) / [CONTINUATION](#) / [CLOSURE](#) / [PROXIMITY](#) / [FIGURE & GROUND](#) / [TOP](#)

## Continuation

Continuation occurs when the eye is compelled to **move through** one object and **continue** to another object.



Continuation occurs in the example above, because the viewer's eye will naturally follow a line or curve. The smooth flowing crossbar of the "H" leads the eye directly to the maple leaf.

[SIMILARITY](#) / [CONTINUATION](#) / [CLOSURE](#) / [PROXIMITY](#) / [FIGURE & GROUND](#) / [TOP](#)

## Closure

*Closure* occurs when an object is *incomplete* or a space is not *completely enclosed*. If enough of the shape is indicated, people perceive the whole by filling in the missing information.



Although the panda above is not complete, enough is present for the eye to complete the shape. When the *viewer's perception completes a shape*, **closure** occurs.

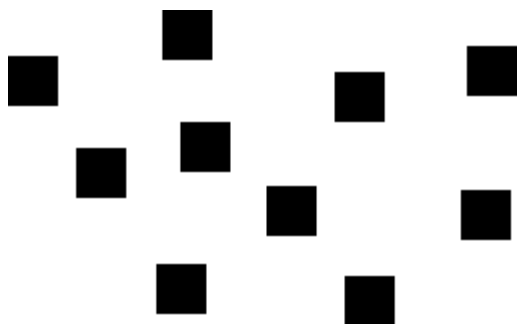
### Examples



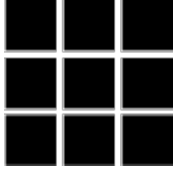
[SIMILARITY](#) / [CONTINUATION](#) / [CLOSURE](#) / [PROXIMITY](#) / [FIGURE & GROUND](#) / [TOP](#)

### Proximity

*Proximity* occurs when elements are placed close together. They tend to be perceived as a group.



The nine squares above are placed without proximity. They are perceived as **separate shapes**.



When the squares are given close proximity, unity occurs. While they continue to be separate shapes, they are now perceived as **one group**.



The fifteen figures above form a *unified whole* (the shape of a tree) because of their **proximity**.

[SIMILARITY](#) / [CONTINUATION](#) / [CLOSURE](#) / [PROXIMITY](#) / [FIGURE & GROUND](#) / [TOP](#)

## Figure and Ground

The eye differentiates an object from its surrounding area. A form, silhouette, or shape is naturally perceived as

**figure** (object), while the surrounding area is perceived as **ground** (background).

Balancing figure and ground can make the perceived image more clear. Using unusual figure/ground relationships can add interest and subtlety to an image.

# Figure

The word above is **clearly perceived** as figure with the surrounding white space ground.



In this image, the figure and ground relationships **change** as the eye perceives the the form of a shade or the silhouette of a face.



This image uses **complex figure/ground relationships** which **change** upon perceiving leaves, water and tree trunk.

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[SIMILARITY](#) / [CONTINUATION](#) / [CLOSURE](#) / [PROXIMITY](#) / [FIGURE & GROUND](#) / [TOP](#)

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