Elements and Principles of Design Definitions

You may be surprised to find that there are many definitions of each of the elements and principles of design. A little research will reveal that there is even disagreement in the art world over what the design elements and principles are! ***Below are the design elements and principles (and the definitions for each) that we recognize in our classes.***

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN: The tools of design, elements are the actual things that you can create to make art (line, shape, color, value, texture, form, space)

Elements:
- **Line:** A mark that creates a visual path; a moving dot
- **Shape:** An area enclosed by line
- **Color:** The phenomenon by which a surface reflects some wavelengths of the visual spectrum of light, while it absorbs the others. The reflected wavelengths display themselves as the object's color
- **Value:** The relative lightness or darkness of something. Value can be a series of grays between black and white, and tone in terms of a range of color
- **Texture:** Real or simulated surface qualities
- **Form:** The three-dimensional version of shape, it refers to objects that are or appear to be three-dimensional (3-D)
- **Space:** Height and width as well as the illusion of depth … the area around, within, or between images or parts of an image – may be positive or negative

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN: The rules of design, principles are the ways in which you may use the elements (contrast, balance, pattern, emphasis, movement, rhythm, unity)

Principles:
- **Contrast:** Putting dissimilar things near each other to make the viewer more aware of them (rough next to smooth, light next to dark, etc)
- **Balance:** The feeling that a viewer gets when graphic elements are evenly distributed within a work of art. The artwork doesn't appear to be visually "heavy" or over-filled in any area, or empty in any area.
- **Pattern:** The regular measured repetition of a design element or of a group of design elements.
- **Emphasis:** The use of design elements to focus the viewer's attention on a particular area of the design
- **Movement:** The use of design elements to create a path along which a viewer's attention will travel
- **Rhythm:** Repetition of similar design elements, but not necessarily in a measured way (a measured repetition is a pattern
- **Unity**: All parts of an image working together to be seen as a whole