Shape
Objectives

- Define and explore the varieties of shape
- Gain an understanding of shape in composition
- Become aware of shape and the illusion of spatial depth
- Recognize the potential expressive-ness of shape
What Is Shape?

• A shape is a configured or delineated area on a format, created either partially or entirely by lines (outlines, contours) or by color.
What Is Shape?

- Shapes may be drawn by hand with traditional techniques and materials such as crayon, chalk, paint, ink, pencils, or markers.
- Shapes can be rendered with computer software or “captured” in a photograph.
What Is Shape?

• The appearance of a shape can be straight and angular or curve softly. Shapes can appear to be flat or dimensional, solid like a rock, or transparent and amorphous, like clouds.
What Is Shape?
Flat Shape and Volumetric Form

• Starting on the most fundamental level, a shape is essentially flat—it is actually two-dimensional and measurable by height and width.
Flat Shape and Volumetric Form

• Shapes may be drawn as a/an:
  – Outline
  – Contour
  – Gesture
  – Filled shape
  – Shape having the illusion of receding into space
Flat Shape and Volumetric Form
Flat Shape and Volumetric Form

• When *more* than the one side or plane of a shape is visible, and it seems to have the *illusion* of containing volume (space within it), and existing in three-dimensional space, the shape may be called a form.
Flat Shape and Volumetric Form
Types of Shapes

• All shapes may be essentially derived from three basic delineations: the square, triangle, and circle.

• Each of the basic shapes have corresponding volumetric forms or solids: the cube, pyramid, and sphere.
Types of Shapes

Square

Cube

Triangle

Pyramid

Circle

Sphere
Shapes within Shapes

• Within a single shape, many shapes may be found.
Shapes within Shapes
Beyond the Basic Shapes

• The basic shapes may be grouped into two broad categories: geometric and organic.
• Shapes can be rigid and static or softly curvilinear
Beyond the Basic Shapes

Enclosed  Rigid/Geometric  Nonobjective

Open  Curvilinear/Organic  Representational
Geometric Style

- Shapes created with straight edges, precise curves, and measurable angles are geometric or mechanical in stylistic appearance.
- In geometry and in design, these types of shapes have names such as rectangles, squares, triangles, hexagons, octagons, circles, trapezoids, and parallelograms.
Geometric Style

• Geometric shapes can be drawn with any matter of complex angles—these are called polygons.
Geometric Style
Organic Style

• Organic, biomorphic, or curvilinear shapes and forms seem to have a naturalistic feel and stylistic appearance.

• The curving and soft edges seem organic in comparison to exacting geometric structures (straight, angular, and hard-edged).
Organic Style

- Organic shapes may be drawn with precision and contain gracefully choreographed curves, or the shapes can be freely handled for a spontaneous or ragged appearance.
Organic Style
Typographic Shapes and Letterforms

• In graphic design, a letterform or the numerals and alphabet of letters known as a typeface, are also shapes—albeit highly specialized ones that visually symbolize the sound of language.
Positive and Negative Shapes (Spaces)

- In design, the immediately discernable shape is known as the figure or positive shape (or space).
- However, when composing elements on a format, awareness must also extend to the area between and around shapes—the interstices or the areas known as the ground or negative shape (or space).
Positive and Negative Shapes (Spaces)

- Seemingly unoccupied areas do have shape and do significantly affect design. The ground actually takes shape—negative shape.
Positive and Negative Shapes (Spaces)
Figure and Ground Reversals

• At times, the positive and negative shapes can be arranged in a composition to equally represent either the positive or negative areas.

• Figure and ground are capable of a “reversal”—meaning the figure and the ground can be seen interchangeably, as either a positive or a negative shape.
Figure and Ground Reversals

- This ambiguity or confusion of determining which shape is positive and which negative is called equivocal space
Figure and Ground Reversals

• Taking playful ambiguities to stylistic extreme, many artists and designers have filled whole compositions with a pattern of positive/negative shape reversals.
  – This type of composition is called tessellation.
Shape Reversals in Logo Designs

• Logo designs are compositional microcosms and may be studied for their economical precision in arrangement of shapes.

• A logo, by nature of its application, must be a highly simplified shape and communicate broad ideas and meanings in a very limited composition.
Shape Reversals in Logo Designs

• The use of positive and negative shape reversals is a visually economic way to increase the number of shapes in a very limited area.

• Positive/negative reversals are visually engaging because of their inventive interaction of shape. For this reason, designers frequently use positive and negative shape reversals in logo design.
Shape Reversals in Logo Designs

• Logo: Fusion
• Studio: Mires Design for Brands, San Diego, CA
• Art director: Scott Mires
A Note on Knock-Outs

• A knock-out is a design and production term derived from the printing industry to designate a shape that is defined by the area surrounding it and the color of the paper on which it is printed.

• Specifically (but not literally), the shape has been “knocked-out” so it will take on the color of the substrate.
A Note on Knock-Outs
Expressive Shape

• Whether organic or geometric, literally realistic or nonobjective, shapes are used to represent and describe our environment or symbolize our ideas and emotions.

• The selection and choice of shape employed in a composition should be determined by what the designer is trying to communicate and the message of the design.
Interpretations

- A representational shape depicts a recognizable object or thing from a known environment.
- However, no matter how realistically rendered or perfectly recognizable or literal, shapes are always *interpretations* or *representations* of the actual world.
Interpretations

• Abstracted shapes are simple or complex exaggerations or distortions of objects and are used for stylistic distinction and/or communication purposes.

• Abstracted shapes may suggest meaning beyond the literal object.
Nonobjective Symbols

• Shapes that do *not* represent specific objects in the environment are nonobjective shapes.

• These types of shapes are meant to symbolize an idea, rather than refer to a thing or object.

• Within symbolism, there is an opportunity to explore a far-reaching meaning.
Summary

• Shape is the element that embodies communication.

• On an individual basis, geometric and organic shapes—whether volumetric or flat, representational or literal, abstract or nonobjective—have many practical purposes in composition and expressive qualities that can be employed for communication.
Summary

• When interacting within a design, the individual qualities of shape and form combine with other shapes and elements to expand and enhance meaning and communication.