graphic design concepts: the Gestalt Principles

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Gestalt means
unified whole.
Gestalt principles

These theories of visual perception were developed by German psychologists in the 1920s.
Gestalt principles

These theories attempt to describe how people organize visual elements into groups or unified wholes when certain principles are applied.
Why do we care?

Humans are very good at finding patterns with very little information. Gestalt principles provide a good description of how we do this. Understanding them can improve your design work.
Gestalt principles

There are many principles, we will focus on these 5:

1. Similarity (and anomaly)
2. Continuation
3. Closure
4. Proximity
5. Figure & Ground
1. Similarity

Similarity occurs when objects look similar to one another. People often perceive them as a group or pattern.
1. Similarity
10 shapes appear as 1 or 2 shapes
1. Similarity
10 shapes appear as 1 or 2 shapes
1. Similarity & anomaly

When similarity occurs, an object can be emphasized if it is dissimilar to the others. This is called anomaly.
1. Similarity & anomaly
The dissimilar object is emphasized
2. Continuation

Continuation occurs when the eye moves through one object and continues to another object.
2. Continuation
The follows motion, connecting shapes
3. Closure

Closure occurs when an object is incomplete or a space is not completely enclosed. If enough of the shape is indicated, we fill in the missing information.
3. Closure
We fill in missing information, closing the shapes
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We fill in missing information, closing the shapes
3. Closure
We fill in missing information, closing the shapes
4. Proximity

When elements are placed close together, they tend to be perceived as a group.
4. Proximity
   no proximity = no grouping
4. Proximity
proximity = grouping
4. Proximity at work
15 figures are perceived at 1 shape, a tree
5. Figure & Ground

The eye differentiates an object from its surrounding area.

A shape is naturally perceived as figure (object), while the surrounding area is perceived as ground (background).
5. Figure & Ground
5. Figure & Ground
5. Figure & Ground
(this is how type works)

figure
5. Figure & Ground
playing with figure/ground can give interesting results
5. Figure & Ground
M.C. Escher
5. Figure & Ground
M.C Escher
Combination

These principles can work in concert
Similarity/anomaly + Proximity
Similarity/anomaly + Proximity
Similarity/anomaly + Proximity + Closure