Gestalt Principles of Perception

closure  proximity  continuation  similarity  figure and ground (tree within the letter ‘A’)

Closure

A form exhibits closure when its separate elements are placed so that you perceive the design as a whole rather than as disparate sections.

— Introduction to Two Dimensional Design

The principle of closure enables designers to reduce complexity by using a smaller number of elements to organize and communicate information.

— Universal Principles of Design
The elements are perceived holistically as a single pattern first (circle), and then as individual elements.

— Universal Principles of Design
People supply the images in between each frame. This allows us to “see” the figure climbing the stairs. This same principle is at work in film and comics.
Elements in text and graphics can be minimized to allow viewers to participate in the completion of the pattern. The result is a more interesting design.

— Universal Principles of Design
Proximity refers to distance between the parts comprising a form. Elements that are closer together appear to be related.

— *Introduction to Two Dimensional Design*

Elements that are close together are perceived to be more related than elements that are farther apart. The grouping resulting from proximity reduces the complexity of designs...

— *Universal Principles of Design*
Proximity between the circles influences how they are grouped—as columns, a square group of circles, or rows.

— *Universal Principles of Design*
This rendering of a sign at Big Bend National Park has undoubtedly sent many hikers in unintended directions. The proximity between unrelated words (e.g., Chisos and South) lends itself to misinterpretation. Positioning the related words closer together corrects the problem.

— Universal Principles of Design
Window controls are often placed on the center console between seats. The lack of proximity between the controls and the window makes it a poor design. A better location would be on the door itself.

— Universal Principles of Design
Similarity among parts in a form helps hold the form together and can be an effective way to create meaning. Elements similar in size appear related.

— *Introduction to Two Dimensional Design*

Elements that are similar are perceived to be more related than elements that are dissimilar.

— *Universal Principles of Design*
Similarity among elements influences how they are grouped—here by color, size, and shape. Note the strength of color as a grouping strategy relative to size and shape.

— Universal Principles of Design
This remote control uses color, size, and shape to group functions. Note the relationship between the anticipated frequency of use of the buttons and their relative size and shape.

— Universal Principles of Design
Similarity is commonly used in camouflage. For example, the mimic octopus can assume the color, pattern, and approximate form of one of its fiercest predators—the highly poisonous sole fish—as well as many other marine organisms.

— Universal Principles of Design
The terms figure and ground are used to describe a perception of spatial interaction. Figure refers to an element on the picture plane, while ground is the larger area surrounding it.

— *Introduction to Two Dimensional Design*

When the figure and ground of a composition are clear, the relationship is stable; the figure element receives more attention and is better remembered than the ground. In unstable figure-ground relationships, the relationship is ambiguous and can be interpreted in different ways; the interpretation alternates between figure and ground.

— *Universal Principles of Design*
The Rubin vase is unstable because it can be perceived as a white vase on a black background or two black faces looking at each other on a white background.

— Universal Principles of Design
Initially, there is no stable figure-ground relationship in this image. However, after a moment, the Dalmatian pops out and the figure-ground relationship stabilizes.

— *Universal Principles of Design*
Placing the spa name below the horizon line in the logo makes it a figure element—it will receive more attention and be better remembered than the design that places the name at the top of the logo.

— Universal Principles of Design
The FedEx logo utilizes the principle of figure-ground in a clever way. The negative space between the “E” and “X” is both figure and ground. The figure is an arrow and the ground is negative space that allows us to see two letterforms instead of an orange rectangle.
Other Principles of Perception

Reading Left to Right
Reading Horizontally
Grouping and Organizing
What syllables or words do you see spontaneously?
There is nothing to guide the eye; there is no visual order.
We do notice size differences, but reading direction, left to right, is
the most important factor that guides us.

— 2d Visual Perception
Which syllables do you read first, the horizontal or the vertical ones? The spacing is the same in both directions. Out of habit we read horizontally more easily than vertically.

— 2d Visual Perception
Reading Horizontally

Here the direction of reading is clearly horizontal.
Our eye is guided by the use of different typefaces.

— 2d Visual Perception
Grouping and Organizing

Unstructured:

You are booked on United flight 237, which departs from Auckland at 14:30 on Tuesday 15 Oct and arrives at San Francisco at 11:40 on Tuesday 15 Oct.

Structured:

**Flight:** United 237, Auckland → San Francisco

*Depart:* 14:30  Tue 15 Oct  
*Arrive:* 11:40  Tue 15 Oct

Which of these is easier to read and understand?
The bottom set of text has been grouped and organized using space. This makes it easier quickly grasp the content.