Elements of Design

Texture

Essential Questions

- Can texture be used in desktop publishing? How?

Texture can refer to the actual surface of a design, the feel of the paper, or to the visual appearance of a design.

Texture is the look or feel of a surface. You can add richness and dimension to your layouts with texture. Tactile texture can actually be felt, making it unique from the other elements of design. Is it smooth to the touch or rough? Selection of paper and materials in package design can affect actual texture. Printed publications can be printed on textured paper that readers can feel. Certain printing and finishing techniques such as thermography and embossing can add both actual and visual textures to a printed piece.

Textures can also be visual. Texture is implied through the style of design. Rich, layered graphics can create visual texture that mirrors actual texture. Visual texture creates an illusion of texture on a printed publication or web page. On the Web, especially, backgrounds that simulate familiar fabrics, stone, and other textures are common. Patterns, such as images printed on wrapping paper, are a type of visual texture. We may also add visual textures through the arrangement of lines and shapes or the use of photographic images of specific surfaces.

Texture can be used to:

- Give a printed publication, presentation, or web page a mood or personality
- Create contrast for interest
- Fool the eye
- Provoke emotions
- Create a feeling of richness and depth

Paper Textures & Finishes

Paper is often something we take for granted. It's just "there." Sometimes we have no choice about the type of paper on which our designs are printed. Normally we can't dictate the paper used for ads in newspapers or magazines. Even when we do have a choice, we're limited by budget, printing requirements, or other factors. However, paper can be an important textural element in our desktop published documents.

Some papers just "feel" better than others. Grab up some paper from around you. Get a newspaper, a magazine, some paper from your printer. Close your eyes and touch the different surfaces. Can you identify the general type of paper (newsprint, etc.) simply by touch? Probably so. But also consider how they feel to your touch – smooth, rough, slightly patterned, fuzzy, bumpy, slick, shiny, dull, warm or cold.
Design Concept & Texture
Varying paper surfaces can dramatically or subtly alter the mood you want your designs to convey. An exercise from *Using Design Basics To Get Creative Results* by Bryan L. Peterson uses the example of a piece of jewelry placed against two totally different surfaces – a shiny tile of black Formica vs. a piece of cement.

Translate this same concept to paper and imagine a photograph of a well-preserved vintage automobile printed on extremely smooth, glossy paper or printed on a rough, pebbly surface. Neither one is necessarily better or worse. It depends on the mood you want to convey. Increased contrast between the image (and it's visual texture) and the actual surface of the paper can create interest in your design.

When selecting paper, choose a texture that is related to the concept of your design and doesn't overwhelm or get in the way of the message. While you can make a bold statement with texture, sometimes a subtle texture that stays "in the background" is most appropriate. Make sure that your texture works with your choice of type and images so that text does not become unreadable or images unrecognizable. It may be necessary to use a bolder typeface if your paper is rough or strongly patterned.

Visual Textures
Everything around us has a texture. Sometimes we can simulate those textures with paper, but more often the textures we create in our designs are visual rather than tactile. However, those visual textures can be just as provocative or full of meaning as actual textures we can touch.

It's extremely easy to find or create visual textures for your designs. There are four basic ways to incorporate visual texture.

1. **Objects within a photograph**

   Textures: fairly smooth surface of the chalk; rough surface of the cement.

   Textures: smooth glass bottles; fabric of the potholders.

   Textures: worn wooden mallet; grass.
2. **Images created with photo-editing software**
   These textures may mimic actual textures or be imagined textures
   
   Texture: mimics drapes or folds in a satiny fabric.

   Texture: simulates a rough, rocky surface.

   Texture: random soft circles create an imaginary texture.

3. **Digitized images of actual textures**
   (from scans, digital photos)

   Texture: a straw mat.

   Texture: piece of door mat made from old tires.

   Texture: tree bark.
4. **Symbolic textures created with lines or shapes**

These patterns suggest various textures and are similar to the use of symbols or icons to represent ideas or objects.

Texture: wavy lines could symbolize water, waves, rolling terrain.

Texture: overlapping circles give the look of fish scales.

Texture: a grid of lines could simulate plaid or linen fabrics, wire mesh, or other textures.

You can enhance or alter the appearance of visual textures depending on the actual texture of the paper used. Keep this interaction in mind when using texture. While you can easily simulate a rough texture on smooth paper, using a "slick" visual texture on some rough papers changes the visual appearance.

As with paper textures, choose textures that relate to the concept of the piece and are appropriate to the design. Just as some paper textures can interfere with the readability of text, so can visual textures used as backgrounds. Use caution when placing text over heavy or busy visual textures.

**Printed Textures**

Some textures are added after the design process is complete and the project has gone to the printer. Embossing, debossing, foil stamping, engraving, thermography, and varnish are examples of texture added during or after printing. Embossing and foil stamping can add both visual interest and can alter the overall texture of a piece.

Often confused, engraving and thermography are two different printing processes. Engraving is not widely used today but can be found in some fine letterhead and wedding invitations. Both create raised printing that gives text and even images a 3D effect. Engraving is a type intaglio printing, a printmaking process used to print US paper currency.
Commonly known as poor man's engraving, **thermography** produces raised printing similar in appearance to engraving but using a completely different process. In thermography, a special powder is added to the document with it adhering to the ink printed on the paper. After removing the excess powder the printed piece is heated and the powder and ink mixture dries to form a raised effect on the paper. Thermography is often used in place of the more expensive engraving process to produce wedding invitations, business cards, and letterhead.
Do
In your document titled **Elements of Design**, make a title called **Texture**. Answer the following questions.

1. Define texture.
2. What is visual texture?
3. Can texture be used in desktop publishing? How?
4. Name five things that texture does.

**Team Assignment**
Find examples of each of these four examples of textures and tell where you found it; i.e.,

**I found Visual Texture in the National Geographic March 2008 issue page 79.**

a. actual smooth paper  
b. actual rough paper  
c. visual texture (simulated fabric, stone, or even water, etc. printed on the paper)  
d. an example of thermography or embossed  

e. Go through the samples looking for as many different types of actual and visual textures as you can find. Can you tell by looking whether a paper will be soft and smooth or rougher? Are visual textures used in place of an actual texture or do they relate in some way to the purpose of the printed piece – such as stone texture for a tile company?

Find examples of visual texture as follows and tell where you found it; i.e.,

**I found Visual Texture in the National Geographic March 2008 issue page 79.**

a. Objects in photographs that create interesting textures, especially textures that relate to the purpose and concept of the whole piece.  
b. Backgrounds or filled objects that appear to use simulated textures or scans of actual textures.  
c. Symbolic textures and patterns created with lines or shapes.