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**abstract visual hierarchy: dominant, sub-dominant and subordinate**

**By definition, visual hierarchy means a group of visual elements arranged according to emphasis.** This emphasis is achieved through contrasts which stress the relative importance and separation or connection of design elements (the gestalt principles of proximity and similarity). The study of visual hierarchy is the study of the relationships of each part to other parts; and to the whole. Visual hierarchies emphasize the relationship of each element to the expressed content of the page. This emphasis can be broken down into three levels;

**dominant, sub-dominant,** and subordinate.

A visual hierarchy is partly governed by punctuation. As a writer uses standard punctuation marks to separate words and clarify meaning, a designer introduces visual punctuation (space intervals, color, graphic forms, or pictorial elements) to separate, connect, and emphasize words, lines or images. Visual punctuation stresses a rhythmic organization that clarifies the reader's or viewer's understanding of the content and structure of an arrangement.

If visual punctuation helps to clarify the meaning of the intended message, visual accentuation is the stressing of particular qualities important to the structure of that message. The concern is really about relative emphasis: the properties of an arrangement that creates a visual hierarchy of dominant, sub-dominant, and subordinate.

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