COMPOSITION!

The arrangement of visual elements in an image.

GOAL: To emphasize the subject/mood/action of an image and make it both easily understood and aesthetically pleasing to the viewer.

Composition includes: Color, Shape, Line, Contrast, Proportion, Positioning, Cropping, Viewpoint, Rhythm, Perspective, and Geometry, AND MORE!

Basically, it includes everything in an image!

(that's why it's so tough to master; you have to keep track of a bunch of stuff!)

The Rule of Thirds

Divide your image into thirds, both horizontally and vertically.

The Golden Mean

Divide your image into approximately 5/8's and 3/8's.

This results in a more pleasing, balanced image!

DO NOT bisect your image horizontally or vertically!
DO NOT place important subjects too close to the edge!
(unless you want to create an uncomfortable tension)

Positioning

Besides the rule of thirds or the Golden Mean, there are some other guidelines for positioning key points in your image:

A line leads your eye to the most important area of the composition. Use lines to lead the viewer's eye around.

For a more dynamic image, make use of your image's diagonals.

Use lines to lead your eye to the point of interest.

The heavier the visual "weight" of an image, especially the more distant it is from the center of the composition, the more it balances the visual weights in the picture.

To create depth and distance, overlap objects in your image!

Beware of tangents, which are where a line just touches the edge of another object or the edge of the picture.

Shapes & Lines

Horizontal shapes are perceived as stable & calm.

Vertical shapes imply energy & growth (or nothing).

Diagonal shapes are the most dynamic and imply movement and tension.

Think about the mood of your image & the emotions it projects. Is it calm? Tense? Is it exciting or relaxing? Lively or static? Funny or serious? Angry or happy? etc.

Curves are more relaxing, softly shaped lines.

Triangles are a solid, strong shape that tends to lead the eye around.

Circles attract the viewer's attention. Use circles for the most important objects in your image. (i.e. faces, moons, etc.)

One of my favorite tricks is to "frame" the point of interest in the image by surrounding it with other objects. (i.e. trees, arches, etc.)

Rhythm & Repetition

Repeating the same types of shapes or lines within your image creates a pleasant rhythmic flow...

...which you can also strategically break for more emphasis on a point of interest!

Repeating similar elements in an organized arrangement emphasizes structure and formality...

...whereas overlapping similar elements creates a more natural layout.

Cropping

The way you crop your image helps give it context. Cropping out too much can leave the viewer confused, but too little can be distracting. Use it to your advantage!

Leading lines can help lead the viewer's eye to the point of interest in your image.

Cropping out unnecessary objects or background can help bring focus to your subject.

Cropping out a character's body at the joints (i.e. ankles, knees, wrists, elbows, neck, waist) can be awkward.

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Viewpoint

The viewpoint you choose influences the viewer's understanding of your illustration & which figure they identify with!

Viewing a figure or object from a low angle gives it a sense of dominance or importance.

Unconventionally viewing a figure or object from a high angle has the opposite effect.

Viewing a character directly from behind can help put the viewer in the character's shoes, as if looking through their eyes.

The viewer will tend to identify with the character who is most visible. Don't rely on the character that is closest to the viewer! But could be a useful technique...

Keep this in mind if you are trying to show a hero/villain showdown!