Understanding the Principles of Floral Design

Unit: Floriculture
Problem Area: Floral Design
Lesson: Understanding the Principles of Floral Design

Student Learning Objectives. Instruction in this lesson should result in students achieving the following objectives:

1. Analyze the principles of floral design.
2. Examine the concept of proportion.
3. Explain how the concept of balance is applied to floral design.
4. Describe how rhythm is applied in floral work.
5. Explain how the principles of dominance and focal point are used in floral design.

List of Resources. The following resources may be useful in teaching this lesson:


List of Equipment, Tools, Supplies, and Facilities

- Writing surface
- Overhead projector
- Copies of sample test
- Visuals from accompanying masters
- Copies of lab sheets
- Examples of floral designs (pictures or actual designs)

Terms. The following terms are presented in this lesson (shown in bold italics):

- asymmetrical balance
- balance
- centering
- contrast
- counterbalancing
- dominance
- floral design
- focal point
- free, variable rhythm
- physical balance
- principles of design
- proportion
- radiation
- regular, repeated rhythm
- repetition
- rhythm
- symmetrical balance
- transition
- variety
- visual balance
- visual weight
Interest Approach. Use an interest approach that will prepare the students for the lesson. Teachers often develop approaches for their unique class and student situations. A possible approach is included here.

Obtain pictures or photographs of floral designs from a florist in town or from the Internet. FTD has a calendar that has great designs which can be used for this purpose. Ask the class why the designs look good and how they could be improved. You might also try designing a poor-looking piece and bringing it into the classroom. A discussion could involve how to make this bad floral design look like the ones in print.

SUMMARY OF CONTENT AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Objective 1: Analyze the principles of floral design.

Anticipated Problem: What are the principles of floral design?

I. Floral design is the art of organizing the design elements inherent in plant materials and accessories according to principles of design art. This is sometimes called floral arranging. People who arrange flowers typically use floral design techniques.

A. Principles of design are rules and guidelines used by the floral designer to create a beautiful composition. The use of these rules promotes beautiful, artistic arrangements. Major principles include proportion, balance, rhythm, and dominance.

   1. Proportion is the pleasing relationship between size and shape among objects and parts of objects.
   2. Balance in a flower arrangement refers to the arrangement’s equilibrium and equality in weight, both physical and visual.
   3. Rhythm is the orderly organization of design elements to create a visual pathway.
   4. Dominance in a design means that one design element is more prevalent or noticeable, thereby capturing the viewer’s interest.

B. Minor principles of design include radiation, repetition, transition, variety, contrast, and focal point.

   1. Radiation is characterized by stems that radiate naturally from the container.
   2. Repetition is accomplished by repeating design elements throughout an arrangement to create unity in the work.
   3. Transition is the change from one material to another.
4. **Variety** is created by using a diverse assortment and different components in a design.

5. **Contrast** describes objects that have striking differences beyond mere variety or diversity.

6. A **focal point** is a center of interest.

Start the lesson with an interest approach, state the learning objectives, and introduce new terms. Using photos of floral designs, discuss with students the different principles of design. It might be useful to do an inter-curricular activity with the art department on this topic. Assign readings pertaining to the principles of design. Lead a class discussion using a multimedia presentation as a visual aid.

**Objective 2:** Examine the concept of proportion.

**Anticipated Problem:** How is proportion achieved in floral design?

II. In floral design, three aspects determine proportion: the location of the arrangement, the height of the arrangement, and the materials used in the arrangement.

A. The design must be in proportion to where it is going to be displayed. The display area could involve a room, a table, or sometimes a person wearing the design. Proportion requires that the design be suitable for and in harmony with its location.

B. The height of an arrangement should be at least 1½ times the height of its container’s greatest dimension. There are a few exceptions to this rule, including the idea that height may be increased to create proper dimension with the room. Another increase might be because of the materials with which the designer is working.

1. The container is a primary factor in determining appropriate height. Four aspects that need to be considered are the container’s:
   a. Physical dimensions
   b. Color
   c. Material and texture
   d. Shape

2. A heavy, dark container will support a taller arrangement, whereas a glass container will provide an excellent base for a shorter arrangement.

3. An exception to the height rule applies to centerpieces and horizontal arrangements. A centerpiece should not obstruct the view of people participating in a dinner conversation; therefore, the arrangement needs to be kept low. A horizontal arrangement is short, but its linear dimension should be about 1½ times the size of the container.
C. Using flowers and foliage of equal or nearly equal size will help in achieving proper proportion. Large jumps in flower size within an arrangement should be avoided. For example, large mums should not be mixed with baby’s breath.

Demonstrate floral designs that show proportion and those that lack proportion. Have the students complete a floral design and have them take photographs of it at home, where it is displayed. You might create two designs that are not in proper proportion and then redesign the arrangements in front of the students to show them how to correct their design problems and illustrate what the issues are.

Objective 3: Explain how the concept of balance is applied to floral design.

Anticipated Problem: What is balance and how is it achieved?

III. Balance, meaning design equilibrium and equality in weight, can be achieved through several different methods.

A. Physical balance is the actual stability of plant materials within a container. A properly designed arrangement that has physical balance will not fall over and can stand freely on its own.

B. Visual balance is the perception of an arrangement being balanced—that is, being of equal weight on both sides of the central axis. A design that is not visually balanced will bother the viewer much like a crooked painting on a wall. Visual balance should be evident from three views: side to side; top to bottom; and front to back. There are two types of visual balance.
   1. Symmetrical balance is present when a design has equal material placements and weight on both sides of its central axis. Symmetrical balance is historically European in style and often called formal balance. Typically, symmetrical arrangements are exhibited in formal or symmetrical settings. Examples of symmetrical designs are oval, round, fan, triangle, inverted-T, and vertical arrangements, as well as oval and round centerpieces.
   2. Asymmetrical balance is present when a design has material placements and weight that are not equal on both sides of its central axis. This is often called informal design and stems from Asian influences. Asymmetrical balance is achieved through compensation and counterbalancing. Examples of asymmetrical designs are crescent, Hogarth curve, fan, diagonal, vertical, ikebana, scalene, and right triangle. Asymmetrically balanced centerpieces are common.

C. Designers use three main techniques to help achieve balance.
   1. Visual weight is a flower’s perceived lightness or heaviness based on its color, shape, and pattern. Varying visual weight helps achieve the compensation or counterbalancing in asymmetrical designs. Lighter materials and color are used toward the outside of an arrangement, whereas heavier materials are used toward the center.
2. **Centering** is the technique of placing dominant plant material along a design’s central vertical axis. This allows heavier plant materials to be placed higher in a design.

3. **Counterbalancing** is the practice of balancing plant materials on one side of a design with visually equal materials on the opposite side. This technique is essential in asymmetrical design work, and can be used to avoid strict mirror imaging in symmetrical work.

Show a video that explains the various design shapes and how to achieve balance in an arrangement. After viewing one, lead a discussion on the various topics that were covered.

**Objective 4:** Describe how rhythm is applied in floral work.

**Anticipated Problem:** How is rhythm created in a floral design?

IV. Creating a pathway for the eye to follow is the purpose of rhythm. An arrangement with good rhythm will cause the viewer to look at the entire arrangement. There are two types of rhythm.

A. **Regular, repeated rhythm** is present when materials are repeated at regular intervals from the top to the bottom of an arrangement.

B. **Free, variable rhythm** is an unstructured style with subtle flowing movements created with unstructured materials.

C. Five techniques that can be used to achieve both regular and free rhythm are:
   1. Radiation—Stems radiate naturally from the container. A top view shows the stems appearing as spokes on a wheel. Crossing stems is avoided.
   2. Repetition—Repeating design elements throughout an arrangement to create unity in the work. It may include color, shape, space, and lines.
   3. Transition—Change from one material to another. It should be smooth and gradual. Lighter flowers near the container edge blend into the heavier ones near the center.
   4. Variety—A diverse assortment and different components in a design. Variety focuses attention and stimulates interest and imagination.
   5. Contrast—Describes objects that have striking differences beyond mere variety or diversity, taking variety to a higher degree.

Create several designs before the students arrive and allow them to create designs of their own using the techniques covered in this objective. The topic might be covered prior to this in a lecture and discussion format. Invite a local floral designer to appear as a guest speaker. Demonstrate how to incorporate different principles of design.
Objective 5: Explain how the principles of dominance and focal point are used in floral design.

Anticipated Problem: What is dominance and how is a focal point used to create it?

V. The use of dominance suggests to the viewer what is important in a design. Interest and attention are captured when one feature dominates and others are secondary.

A. Dominance can be achieved by:
   1. Using dominant plant material
   2. Using an emphasized design element
   3. Using a distinct style of design
   4. Using a theme
   5. Using a focal point

B. A focal point is a center of interest. It can be created several different ways. Not all arrangements need a focal point or center of interest. If, however, one is intended, there are several methods to create one.
   1. Use of large flowers
   2. Use of special-form flowers, such as orchids
   3. Use of dark shades
   4. Variation of concentration of plant material
   5. Use of framing materials
   6. Use of strong color contrast
   7. Radiation of plant materials to a particular area
   8. Use of accessories

Lead a discussion on dominance and focal points using a multimedia presentation as a visual aid. Have each student pick a different focal point technique and use it in his or her design work.

Review/Summary. Use the student learning objectives as the basis for review and summary. Have students explain the content associated with each objective. Use their responses in determining which objectives and concepts need to be reviewed or taught from a different angle. The anticipated problems can be used as student review questions.

Application. Use the included visual masters and lab sheets to apply the information presented in the lesson. When students create their first designs in class, remind them of the techniques they are to use. Grade their work on these techniques. Included in this lesson is an example of a grading sheet (LS–A) that might be used in evaluating an arrangement. You might bring in an arrangement and discuss the techniques that are used in achieving a good design. Contact a local funeral home and see if the class might obtain arrangements that go unused at the end of a memorial service. This would provide a basis for discussions on this topic.
**Evaluation.** Evaluation should be based on student comprehension of the learning objectives. This can occur during instruction, review, or later as students apply the information. The sample written test can also be used. Have the students do an evaluation of a floral design and explain in detail the techniques they would use to improve it. Make sure they provide reasoning as to why they think a design is poor.

**Answers to Sample Test:**

**Part One: Matching**
1. h
2. a
3. g
4. c
5. e
6. f
7. i
8. j
9. b
10. d

**Part Two: Multiple Choice**
1. d
2. b
3. a
4. c
5. d

**Part Three: Short Answer**
- radiation, repetition, transition, variety, contrast
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Part One: Matching

Instructions: Match the term with the correct definition.

a. balance  
   f. repetition
b. contrast  
   g. rhythm
c. dominance  
   h. proportion
d. focal point  
   i. transition
e. radiation  
   j. variety

1. The pleasing relationship between size and shape among objects and parts of objects
2. Equilibrium and equality in weight, both physical and visual
3. The orderly organization of design elements to create a visual pathway
4. One design element is more prevalent or noticeable, capturing the viewer’s attention
5. Characterized by stems appearing as spokes on a wheel
6. Repeating materials throughout an arrangement to create unity
7. The change from one material to another
8. The diverse assortment in a design
9. When objects have striking differences
10. The center of attention in a design
Part Two: Multiple Choice

Instructions: Write the letter of the correct answer.

1. What type of design is equal on both sides of the central axis?
   a. asymmetrical
   b. contrast
   c. informal
   d. symmetrical

2. How high should floral materials be for a container 6 inches high?
   a. 3 inches
   b. 9 inches
   c. 12 inches
   d. 24 inches

3. How is visual balance defined?
   a. the perception of an arrangement being balanced
   b. a design that has material placements and weight that are unequal on both sides of its central axis
   c. the actual stability of plant materials within the container
   d. a design that has the same physical balance on both sides of its central axis

4. What is a change from one material to another?
   a. repetition
   b. radiation
   c. transition
   d. variety

5. How can a focal point be achieved?
   a. using light-colored flowers
   b. using small flowers
   c. using flowers of the same form
   d. using plant material in varied concentrations

Part Three: Short Answer

Instructions: Complete the following.

Name the five techniques used to achieve rhythm.
FLORAL DESIGN DEFINED

The art of organizing the DESIGN ELEMENTS inherent in plant materials, containers, and accessories, according to the PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN to attain a composition with certain OBJECTIVES.

- Line
- Shape and Form
- Pattern and Texture
- Color
- Space
- Size

- Proportion
- Balance
- Dominance
- Rhythm
- Radiation
- Repetition
- Transition
- Beauty
- Simplicity
- Harmony
- Suitability
- Expression

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Bulky pottery can visually support a taller, larger floral design than a clear glass vase of the same height.
PROPORTION

Container height

1½ times container height

1½ times container length

Container length
STEPS TO PLEASING PROPORTION—A CHECKLIST

♦ Determine display area

♦ Select a container

♦ Select plant material in proportion to the display area and the container

♦ Establish a height

♦ Establish a width

♦ Note changes in proportion as you work

♦ Make necessary adjustments in proportion as you work
VISUAL BALANCE IN FLORAL DESIGN

BALANCED

NOT BALANCED

Side to Side

Top to Bottom

Front to Back
Using Floral Design Techniques—Evaluation Sheet

*Instructions:* Create a floral design and score the design using the evaluation sheet below.

<table>
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<th>Principles of Design</th>
<th># of Points Possible</th>
<th># of Points Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Contrast</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focal Point</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding the Principles of Floral Design

Instructions: Provide the word or words to complete the following statements.

1. _________________________ is the art of organizing the design elements inherent in plant materials and accessories according to principles of design art.

2. _________________________ are rules and guidelines used by the floral designer to create a beautiful composition.

3. _________________________ is the pleasing relationship between size and shape among objects and parts of objects.

4. _________________________ in a flower arrangement refers to the arrangement’s equilibrium and equality in weight, both physical and visual.

5. _________________________ is the orderly organization of design elements to create a visual pathway.

6. _________________________ in a design means that one design element is more prevalent or noticeable, thereby capturing the viewer’s interest.

7. _________________________ is characterized by stems that radiate naturally from the container.

8. _________________________ is repeating design elements throughout an arrangement to create unity in the work.

9. _________________________ is the change from one material to another.
10. _________________________ is created by using a diverse assortment and different components in a design.

11. _________________________ describes objects that have striking differences beyond mere variety or diversity.

12. A _________________________ is a center of interest.

13. _________________________ is the actual stability of plant materials within a container.

14. _________________________ is the perception of an arrangement being balanced—that is, being of equal weight on both sides of the central axis.

15. _________________________ is present when a design has equal material placements and weight on both sides of its central axis.

16. _________________________ is present when a design has material placements and weight that are unequal on both sides of its central axis.

17. _________________________ is a flower’s perceived lightness or heaviness based on its color, shape, and pattern.

18. _________________________ is the technique of placing dominant plant material along a design’s central vertical axis.

19. _________________________ is the practice of balancing plant materials on one side of a design with visually equal materials on the opposite side.

20. _________________________ rhythm is present when materials are repeated at regular intervals from the top to the bottom of an arrangement.

21. _________________________ rhythm is an unstructured style with subtle flowing movements created with unstructured materials.