

B B C BITESIZE

In art, balance is the arrangement of the elements. Each part has a visual 'weight' influenced by its shape, size, colour, texture, quantity and position. Balance is achieved by arranging these within the composition.

There are three types of balance.

Symmetry gives a sense of stability and formality. A central line creates mirror images.

Asymmetry is about arranging the visual weights to create a sense of balance - but it's not a mirror image.

In radial symmetry the elements radiate from a central point.

Balance is vital in architectural design - for function and beauty.

Look at the symmetry of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India. Each side is a perfectly symmetrical composition of domes, walls and openings even the corner minarets. The result is formal, balanced and tranquil.

In comparison, the asymmetrical roof structure of the Sydney Opera House creates a dynamic sculpture. The white shell forms vary in size - the big shells are matched by a number of smaller ones creating an overall sense of balance.

Graphic designer Saul Bass created a sense of vertigo - a fear of heights - in this poster for the 1958 film. The swirl is an example of radial balance which plays with our sense of depth and draws our eye in and out of the spiral. Our attention is guided to the figures who are off-balance or falling.

The visual weight of the figures who are right of centre is balanced by the left-aligned text but the overall effect is imbalance - creating a sense of unease or vertigo.

Whatever type of art and design you're looking at, think about balance. Is there a perfect symmetrical mirror image? Is there radial symmetry around a central point? Have asymmetrical elements been arranged according to their visual weight? You might even create imbalance to suggest tension or movement.