

B B C BITESIZE

Emphasis is the bit that catches your eye. Whatever the art or design, emphasis is the focal point.

There are five key techniques to create emphasis.

Contrast can make something stand out through differences in colour, size, shape or even texture.

Isolation means separating out one element from the others.

Placement of an element towards the centre of a composition maximises our natural tendency to look there first.

Convergence means lines, real or implied, that direct us to the focal point.

And last but not least, the more unusual something is the more it grabs our attention.

These techniques allow the artist or designer to guide the viewer's attention around the piece of work, creating a sequence or hierarchy.

In Steve McCurry's photograph we're immediately drawn to this Afghan girl's piercing eyes. The contrast of the bright whites of her eyes against her skin tone and dark hair grabs our attention. Her hazel green eyes harmonise with the intense green background and contrasts with her red shawl.

These contrasts all help focus attention on her powerful stare at the camera.

An element in isolation might not be the first thing you see but it will stand out. El Lissitzky experimented with shape, colour and layout - the foundations of graphic design. The placement, size and colour of the red square grouped with other items, means we look there first. But the isolation of the lonely black square, the darkest part in the image, means that it dominates the poster.

Francisco de Goya created emphasis through his placement of the figures in this painting. The two banks of men are roughly equal in size and divide the painting in two. The figure in the bright white shirt is placed just off centre. Placement, the contrast of his bright clothes, and his posture immediately draws our attention.

Convergence can direct the eye to a focal point. In this painting by L.S. Lowry, the shape and placement of the figures imply converging lines leading to the station. Lowry also used contrast and placement, just off-centre, to emphasise the doorway as the focal point. You could almost feel drawn into the crowd!

The 'unusual' is something we don't expect. In this painting we're taken by the scenic view presented in cool blue-greens. Into this conventional landscape, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, injected something unusual - the striking black and red woodpecker. Once you've spotted the woodpecker's red crest your eye repeatedly returns.

Emphasis is the focal point. It can be achieved through the unusual, like the woodpecker, or through using converging lines, isolation, placement and contrast - or a combination of all of these.

Step back. What catches your eye? And how does the artist or designer use this to support their expression?