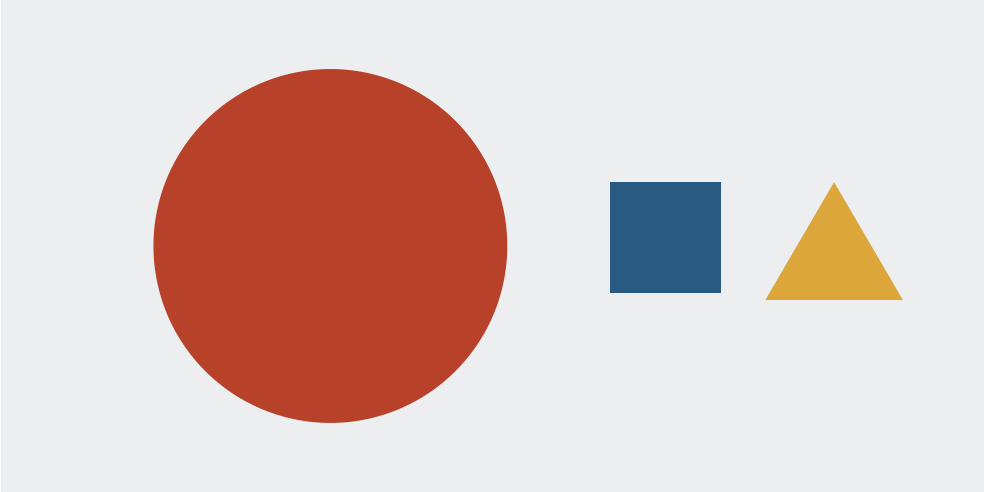
Learn & Make

See the rule. Make it your own.

Six complete design lessons and student worksheets.
For ages 11–14, with extensions for 14–18.



Original process demonstration. A rule offers a starting point, not a model to copy.

Begin with paper and pens. Each lesson has a 20-minute option, practical adaptations, a way to review the work and optional historical research. No purchase, account or internet connection is needed to teach the core activities.

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First edition · 25 November 2026. Suggested times are planning guides, not classroom-tested timings. Not yet mapped to a national curriculum. Choose materials and supervision appropriate to your setting.

One Rule Each · onerule.me/learn/
Studio Wren Limited · Company no. 10752715

Three shapes, one message

Build your image from circles, squares and triangles.

Make an event poster and explain how size and placement tell a viewer what to read first.

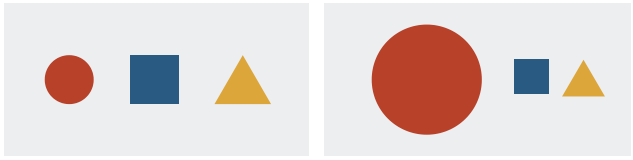
Ages 11–14 · 14–18 stretch task · 45 minutes including discussion and tidy-up · Individual work with optional partner feedback

What you need

Two A4 sheets, pencil and pens. For collage: scrap paper, glue stick and suitable scissors; pre-cut shapes work too.

Before the lesson

Invent a school event together: a short title, place and date. Prepare the same three shapes in two arrangements. Set out materials before the timed lesson.



One Rule Each process demonstration. First: starting arrangement. Second: one decision changed. In the first layout, three equal shapes compete for attention. In the second, a larger circle leads and two smaller shapes support it. Only size and position change. There is no single correct arrangement.

Make, test, change

1. **Look** — 5 min

   Name the shapes. Point to what you notice first and explain why, before saying whether you like it.

2. **Test** — 5 min

   Draw the same circle, square and triangle in two layouts. Enlarge just one shape. What changed?

3. **Plan** — 5 min

   Sketch three small layouts for your invented event. Decide whether the event name or the image should lead.

4. **Make** — 15 min

   Draw or arrange your shapes before gluing. Add the event title, date and place using one lettering style. Choose your own colours.

5. **Read and revise** — 7 min

   Ask a partner to find the title, date and place. Move or resize one element in response. If working alone, cover the page briefly and look again.

6. **Discuss and tidy** — 8 min

   Explain one decision that improved the message. Compare different solutions, then return materials and clear the table.

Your design decisions

The rule: Build your image from circles, squares and triangles.

What would happen if every shape were equally large?

Only 20 minutes?

20 minutes: use prepared shapes and one event title. Spend 5 minutes testing, 10 arranging and 5 sharing and tidying.

Ways in

Offer larger or pre-cut shapes, a short title word bank, partner assembly or a drawing-only version. Let the learner choose the arrangement.

Take it further

Ages 14-18: redesign the same event for two audiences. Explain which size, position and wording decisions change and why.

At home

Invent a family event. One person arranges the shapes and another tries to find the important information. Swap roles.

Working independently

Make two versions and view them at a smaller size. Record what you notice first and choose one revision.

What to look for

Can the learner name the shape rule, point to a hierarchy choice and explain a revision? Assess decisions, not resemblance to the demonstration.

Optional historical research

MoMA: graphic design collection. Find a work that uses shape to organise information. Describe one decision in words, then invent a different composition. Museum images are not included in this pack.

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Three shapes, one message

The rule: Build your image from circles, squares and triangles.

Try three small arrangements before choosing one.

First idea	Second idea	Third idea

My most useful decision was...

After testing, I changed... because...

What would happen if every shape were equally large?

Make a word sound loud

Use letters alone to suggest a sound.

Use size, spacing or repetition to make one word feel quiet, loud, fast or slow.

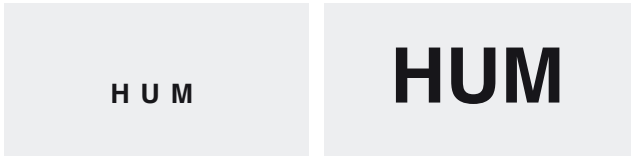
Ages 11–14 · 14–18 stretch task · 30 minutes including discussion and tidy-up · Individual work with optional partner feedback

What you need

Two sheets of paper, pencil and a dark pen. No special typeface or software needed.

Before the lesson

Choose a small bank of sound words such as tap, hum, rustle and thud. Prepare a quiet and a loud version of the same word. Offer a printed word to trace if helpful.



One Rule Each process demonstration. First: starting arrangement. Second: one decision changed. The letters HUM begin small and evenly spaced. Enlarging them and tightening the space changes their presence. Read each version aloud, or describe its visual rhythm without making a sound.

Make, test, change

1. **Notice** — 4 min

   Write a word normally. Discuss what makes a sound feel loud or quiet. A visual or tactile description is equally useful.

2. **Test** — 4 min

   Draw the word three times, changing only size in one, spacing in another and repetition in the third.

3. **Choose** — 3 min

   Choose one sound quality. Circle the most effective sketch and explain the choice to a partner or to yourself.

4. **Make** — 10 min

   Draw a larger version using letters only. Keep enough of each letter visible for someone else to read the word.

5. **Read and revise** — 5 min

   Ask a partner what quality the letters suggest before telling them your intention. Change one decision if the answers differ.

6. **Reflect and tidy** — 4 min

   Name the change that did the most work. Put materials away.

Your design decisions

The rule: Use letters alone to suggest a sound.

When does expressive lettering become too difficult to read?

Only 20 minutes?

20 minutes: 4 minutes testing, 10 making and 6 reading, revising and tidying.

Ways in

Trace an available word, use one short word, draw large letters or work with a partner. Listening or speaking is not required: point to or write a quality instead.

Take it further

Ages 14–18: make two contrasting treatments with the same word and page size. Explain how rhythm changes while legibility survives. Digital type is optional.

At home

Each person draws the same short word with a different mood. Guess the mood from its appearance, not from performance.

Working independently

Hide your written intention, pause, then look again. Does the layout suggest what you intended without explanation?

What to look for

Can the learner identify the letter decision that carries the intended quality and describe what changed after feedback?

Optional historical research

V&A: poster collection. Look at how a poster makes a title prominent. Compare size and spacing; do not copy its lettering or complete layout. Museum images are not included in this pack.

Make a word sound loud

The rule: Use letters alone to suggest a sound.

Try three small arrangements before choosing one.

First idea	Second idea	Third idea

My most useful decision was...

After testing, I changed... because...

When does expressive lettering become too difficult to read?

One shape becomes a pattern

Repeat one shape; change how the copies are arranged.

Create two repeat arrangements and explain how spacing or rotation changes their rhythm.

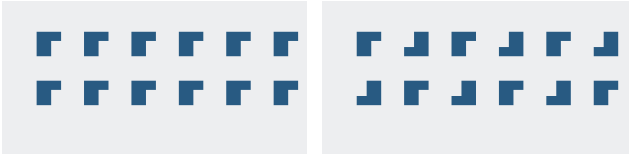
Ages 11–14 · 14–18 stretch task · 45 minutes including discussion and tidy-up · Individual work with optional partner feedback

What you need

Paper, pencil and one paper shape to trace. Optional coloured pens, scrap paper and glue. A ruler can help with spacing.

Before the lesson

Cut a simple asymmetric shape with no sharp point. Prepare one row of evenly spaced copies and another with alternating rotation. Avoid a recognisable brand symbol.



One Rule Each process demonstration. First: starting arrangement. Second: one decision changed. A single notched shape repeats first in rows, then with alternate copies turned. The shape stays the same; the spaces between shapes become part of the design.

Make, test, change

1. **Look** — 5 min

   Identify the repeated shape and the spaces around it. What stays the same? What changes?

2. **Test** — 5 min

   Trace six copies in a row. Make another row, turning every second copy. Compare the gaps.

3. **Plan** — 5 min

   Choose a repeat rule you can describe in one sentence. Mark light guide points rather than drawing every detail.

4. **Make** — 15 min

   Fill a page area by tracing or arranging copies. Let some shapes continue beyond the edge. Keep your chosen repeat rule consistent.

5. **Compare and revise** — 7 min

   Ask a partner to predict the next copy. If they cannot, explain or adjust the rule. Try changing spacing in a small second sample.

6. **Discuss and tidy** — 8 min

   Compare the effect of the two arrangements. Keep the reusable template and clear the table.

Your design decisions

The rule: Repeat one shape; change how the copies are arranged.

Can the empty spaces form a second pattern?

Only 20 minutes?

20 minutes: use a supplied template; spend 5 minutes testing two rows, 10 extending one and 5 reflecting and tidying.

Ways in

Use a large easy-to-hold template, pre-cut copies, fewer repeats or partner tracing. Contrasting outlines can make the gaps easier to see.

Take it further

Ages 14-18: design a repeat that continues across opposite edges. Test with four copies of the tile before adding colour. A foam stamp with water-based printing materials is an optional supervised extension.

At home

Make a shared paper border. Each person adds the next shape using the rule, then invent a second arrangement together.

Working independently

Photograph or copy one tile four times to test its edges. Keep notes on any gaps that need adjusting.

What to look for

Can the learner state a repeat rule, continue it consistently and explain the effect of a spacing or rotation change?

Optional historical research

V&A: William Morris collection. Look for repeated units and the gaps between them. Draw your own unrelated shape rather than copying a historical motif. Museum images are not included in this pack.

One shape becomes a pattern

The rule: Repeat one shape; change how the copies are arranged.

Try three small arrangements before choosing one.

First idea	Second idea	Third idea

My most useful decision was...

After testing, I changed... because...

Can the empty spaces form a second pattern?

A place in four colours

Describe a place using no more than four colours.

Simplify a familiar place into large areas and explain what the colour limit helped you leave out.

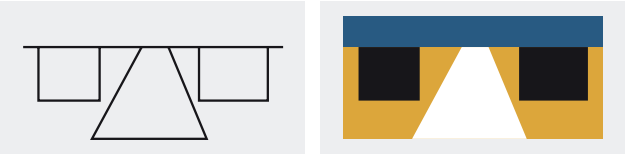
Ages 11–14 · 14–18 stretch task · 45 minutes including discussion and tidy-up · Individual work with optional partner feedback

What you need

Paper and four pens, pencils or paper colours. Count the paper background as one colour if it remains visible. Optional glue and suitable scissors.

Before the lesson

Ask learners to choose a place they know or use a photograph they took themselves. Prepare a rough sketch with large foreground, middle and background areas. No internet image is required.



One Rule Each process demonstration. First: starting arrangement. Second: one decision changed. The example starts as a few outlines: a horizon, two blocks and a path. Four flat colours separate the areas. Details are omitted so the route through the image is clear.

Make, test, change

1. **Observe** — 5 min

   List three features that make your chosen place recognisable. Choose what matters more than fine detail.

2. **Simplify** — 5 min

   Sketch the place using five or six large areas. Compare what remains readable when small details disappear.

3. **Plan** — 5 min

   Choose up to four colours, including exposed paper. Label the areas with colour names or numbers before filling them.

4. **Make** — 15 min

   Draw or collage the large areas. Use the same colour in more than one place when it helps connect the composition.

5. **Test and revise** — 7 min

   Show the image without naming the place. Ask what feels near, far or important. Change a boundary or colour assignment if necessary.

6. **Reflect and tidy** — 8 min

   Explain one detail you left out and why. Compare different palettes and put materials away.

Your design decisions

The rule: Describe a place using no more than four colours.

Which detail could disappear without losing the place?

Only 20 minutes?

20 minutes: choose a view from a window; spend 5 minutes simplifying, 10 colouring and 5 discussing and tidying.

Ways in

Use a supplied outline of an invented place, large areas, labelled colours or collage. Colour recognition is not the assessment: names, values and boundaries can guide choices.

Take it further

Ages 14-18: keep the same shapes and change the palette for a different mood. Test the design in greyscale and explain which boundaries still read. Paint is an optional translation.

At home

Draw the same familiar place independently. Compare which three features each person kept.

Working independently

Return to your chosen place or your own photograph after drawing. Which omission helped the design, and which lost useful information?

What to look for

Can the learner stay within the colour limit and explain a simplification and a change made after testing?

Optional historical research

V&A: poster collection. Explore travel posters for examples of simplified places. Use a different view of your own familiar place, not the source composition. Museum images are not included in this pack.

A place in four colours

The rule: Describe a place using no more than four colours.

Try three small arrangements before choosing one.

First idea	Second idea	Third idea

My most useful decision was…

After testing, I changed… because…

Which detail could disappear without losing the place?

The grid, then one exception

Align your information to a grid, then break it once.

Organise an event notice and explain how one exception creates emphasis without making the information hard to find.

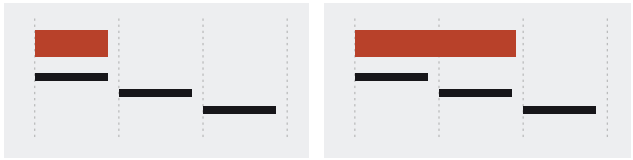
Ages 11–14 · 14–18 stretch task · 45 minutes including discussion and tidy-up · Individual work with optional partner feedback

What you need

Paper, pencil, ruler and pen. Optional strips of paper with an invented title, date, place and short description.

Before the lesson

Prepare an invented event with four pieces of information. Draw three equal columns with clear gaps. Explain that the grid is a guide, not a visible decoration to copy.



One Rule Each process demonstration. First: starting arrangement. Second: one decision changed. The first arrangement lines up every item. In the second, one title spans two columns. The date and place stay aligned so the exception does not disrupt everything.

Make, test, change

1. **Read** — 5 min

   Rank the title, date, place and description by what a visitor needs to know. Explain who the visitor is.

2. **Test** — 5 min

   Draw three columns and place the information on their edges. Compare with a version where nothing aligns.

3. **Plan** — 5 min

   Choose exactly one exception: a larger title, an image crossing a column, or a single shifted line. Sketch the effect.

4. **Make** — 15 min

   Arrange the notice using the grid. Apply the exception deliberately and keep the remaining information easy to find.

5. **Test and revise** — 7 min

   Ask a partner to find the event, date and place. If the exception obscures them, change its size or position.

6. **Discuss and tidy** — 8 min

   Point to the grid and the exception. Explain what each contributes, then tidy.

Your design decisions

The rule: Align your information to a grid, then break it once.

If everything breaks the grid, can anything stand out?

Only 20 minutes?

20 minutes: supply text strips and a grid. Allow 5 minutes ranking, 10 arranging and 5 testing and tidying.

Ways in

Use a pre-drawn grid, fewer text items, large print or partner placement. A ruler is optional if a guide sheet is available.

Take it further

Ages 14-18: adapt the notice to a narrow phone format while preserving reading order. Explain which grid decisions survive and which change.

At home

Make a notice for a shared activity. Ask another person to find when and where it happens without help.

Working independently

Read the notice at arm's length and as a small thumbnail. Check whether the exception helps in both views.

What to look for

Can the learner identify the alignment system, the single exception and the reason it improves emphasis?

Optional historical research

MoMA: graphic design collection. Choose a work and describe its information order. Build a different notice with your own text and grid. Museum images are not included in this pack.

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The grid, then one exception

The rule: Align your information to a grid, then break it once.

Try three small arrangements before choosing one.

First idea	Second idea	Third idea

My most useful decision was...

After testing, I changed... because...

If everything breaks the grid, can anything stand out?

One image, two meanings

Make one simple image suggest two ideas.

Develop a visual metaphor and test whether someone else can find both intended meanings.

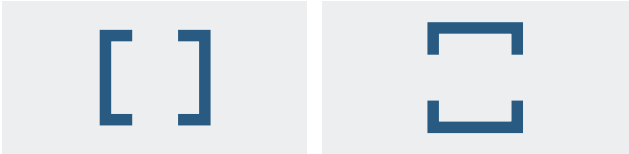
Ages 11–14 · 14–18 stretch task · 45 minutes including discussion and tidy-up · Individual work with optional partner feedback

What you need

Paper, pencil and pen. Optional scrap paper and glue. Use your own drawings rather than downloaded images or brand marks.

Before the lesson

Prepare two familiar words such as path and conversation. Demonstrate combining one visible feature from each. Explain that a metaphor connects ideas and may be read differently by different people.



One Rule Each process demonstration. First: starting arrangement. Second: one decision changed. Two brackets can describe a space between people; turning the same pair suggests an opening or a route. The example is deliberately simple: the viewer's reading matters more than a polished finish.

Make, test, change

1. **Connect** — 5 min

   Choose two ideas you want to connect, such as reading and discovery. List one recognisable feature for each.

2. **Test** — 5 min

   Draw each feature separately. Look for a shared shape, edge or space that might connect them.

3. **Plan** — 5 min

   Sketch three different combinations. Avoid adding many small symbols; choose the clearest single image.

4. **Make** — 15 min

   Develop the strongest sketch using simple shapes or collage. Keep both ideas available without explaining them in a long caption.

5. **Read and revise** — 7 min

   Ask someone what they see before naming your ideas. Record more than one reading. Change a feature if the intended connection is lost.

6. **Discuss and tidy** — 8 min

   Explain which reading surprised you and what you changed. Tidy the working area.

Your design decisions

The rule: Make one simple image suggest two ideas.

How much can you remove while keeping both meanings?

Only 20 minutes?

20 minutes: choose from two supplied word pairs. Spend 5 minutes sketching, 10 developing one and 5 testing and tidying.

Ways in

Offer concrete word pairs, large drawing space, verbal planning or partner drawing. Accept a clear connection between two shapes before asking for an abstract message.

Take it further

Ages 14-18: develop the image into an original poster with a short message for a named audience. Test ambiguity: which alternative readings help and which confuse?

At home

Each person draws a connection between two everyday ideas. Discuss the different readings without treating one guess as the only right answer.

Working independently

Leave the sketch for a short break. Return without reading your word pair and note the first two meanings you see.

What to look for

Can the learner explain the connection, report an independent reading and show how feedback affected the image?

Optional historical research

MoMA: graphic design collection. Look for a graphic image that communicates an idea. Describe the mechanism, then use different subject matter and a different composition. Museum images are not included in this pack.

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One image, two meanings

The rule: Make one simple image suggest two ideas.

Try three small arrangements before choosing one.

First idea	Second idea	Third idea

My most useful decision was...

After testing, I changed... because...

How much can you remove while keeping both meanings?