

Types of Rhythm and Pattern

Arranging beats or motifs and space in different ways creates different visual rhythms and patterns. There are many ways to combine beats or motifs and space. Each combination gives a different character to the rhythm or pattern depicted.

Random

A motif repeated in no apparent order, with no regular spaces in between, creates a random rhythm. One example is autumn leaves that cover the ground. Cracks in mud and splashes of paint are also examples of random rhythm.

Crowds of people often create random rhythms —think of holiday shoppers, rush-hour commuters, and students in the halls between classes. A large group of people pushing onto a bus is full of rhythm. The beat is one person. Every person is different, and the space between and around each person is slightly different.

Philip Moulthrop, the creator of the *White Pine Mosaic Bowl* in **Figure 8.8**, is an artist and craftsman. He uses a machine called a lathe to create the form of his wooden bowls. At the beginning of the twentieth century, wood turning was considered an industrial activity since lathes had been used to



◀ **FIGURE 8.8** To create this random rhythm of round shapes on the surface of his turned bowl, Moulthrop placed white pine branches in a specific arrangement and embedded them in a black resin mixture.

Philip Moulthrop. *White Pine Mosaic Bowl*. 1993. White pine, resin, lathe-turned. 23.5 x 29.8 x 29.8 cm (9¼ x 11¾ x 11¾"). Mint Museum of Craft + Design, Charlotte, North Carolina.



▲ **FIGURE 8.9** This building was the first office building to rise above 1,000 feet. Notice how the pairs of windows form a regular beat both vertically and horizontally. The negative spaces between them are the rests between the beats.

William van Alen. *Chrysler Building*, New York, New York. Completed in 1930.

Activity

Using Random Rhythm

Applying Your Skills. Choose one letter of the alphabet. Look through newspapers and magazines for large examples of that letter. Cut out about 20 letters. Arrange them on a piece of colored paper in a random pattern. If you have trouble finding large letters, draw letters of your own on your design.

Computer Option. Choose one letter of the alphabet. Using different fonts, create about 20 different examples of the letter. You can use Flip, Rotate, Size Change, and Color options if your program has them. Then arrange the letters in a random pattern.

mass-produce furniture. Gradually, the turners became accepted as craftspeople. They believed that the finding of a piece of wood with specific qualities led to the quality of the finished piece of work. In Figure 8.8, the pieces of wood create a beautiful random pattern. Today, you will find turned-wood vessels in crafts museums around the world.

Regular

Regular rhythms and patterns have identical beats or motifs and equal amounts of space between them (**Figure 8.9**). Regular rhythm has a steady beat. Regular repetitions are used to organize objects. Parking spaces are laid out with regular rhythm. Stores organize merchandise into regular stacks and rows. This makes it easier for you to find things, and it also makes the displays more attractive than if items were arranged in a random fashion.



◀ **FIGURE 8.10** While doing research for this project, Maya Lin stumbled on a photo of the “Stokes Wave” that occurs naturally on the open sea. She transformed something that was liquid and moving into a solid sculpture in the landlocked, Midwestern landscape.

Maya Lin. *The Wave Field*. 1995. Shaped earth. 30.5 × 30.5 m (100 × 100'). University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

A grid is based on regular rhythm. It is a regular arrangement of parallel lines. A football field is laid out in a grid, as is a checkerboard. Windows form a grid pattern on the side of a building. Maya Lin used a grid to lay out her *Wave Field* in **Figure 8.10**. It is a series of 50 grass waves in eight rows. The texture of the grasses and curved forms engage the viewer. The field was built with a combination of soil and sand and covered with green sod. The crest of each wave is three feet high. Lin has created an interesting space for relaxing, studying, or playing.

The tunic in **Figure 8.11** was woven to be part to the formal dress of the ancient Peruvian people known as the Huari. It was worn at court and placed on the body for burial. Another strong example of regular rhythm is Figure 1.18 on page 20.



▶ **FIGURE 8.11** Look closely at the designs in the repeated geometric shapes. They are stylized eyes and mouths with fangs that symbolize powerful feline deities.

Peru, Huari. Tunic. c. A.D. 800–1000. Cotton and wool. Height: 210.8 cm (83”). Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. Founders Society Purchase with funds from Lee and Tina Hills.



▲ **FIGURE 8.12** Notice how this artist has switched the direction of every other column so that the designs seem to reverse as you look across the row of designs.

Upper Orinoco River, Venezuela. Yekuana *muaho* (woven beaded apron). Early twentieth century. 25.1 × 33.7 cm (9⁷/₈ × 13¹/₄”). Courtesy National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



► **FIGURE 8.13** Try to find all the alternating patterns in this design. Can you detect white flowers formed from the hexagon motif in the bag's bottom section? What other patterns can you find on this bag?

Ojibwe. Bandolier Bag. Beaded cloth. 108 × 33.7 cm (42¹/₂ × 13³/₄”). Courtesy National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Alternating

Alternating rhythm and pattern can be created in several ways. One way is to introduce a second beat or motif. Another way is to make a change in the placement or content of the original beat or motif. A third way is to change the spaces between the beats or motifs. Sometimes, alternation is created simply by changing the position of the motif. For example, the motif may be turned upside down. The native Venezuelan artist used alternation to make the beaded apron in **Figure 8.12** more interesting. The Ojibwe Native American who sewed the beads on the bandolier bag in **Figure 8.13** made the design interesting by alternating the colors of the beaded flowers.

Flowing

Flowing rhythm is created by repeating wavy lines. Curved shapes, such as rolling hills or ocean waves, create

Activity

Alternating Pattern

Demonstrating Effective Use of Art Media in Design. Using a pen or pencil, draw a checkerboard grid on a sheet of white paper. Create an alternating pattern using one motif. Turn the motif upside down in every other box. Next, draw a checkerboard grid and create an alternating pattern using two motifs.

Computer Option. Design two motifs using the tools of your choice. Use the Select tool and the Copy and Paste options to create an alternating pattern using both motifs. On a new screen, create an alternating pattern using only one motif. In this design, you can change the placement of the motif—for example, turn it upside down, or change the spaces between the motifs. Label and save both designs.

flowing rhythms. In **Figure 8.14**, the artist was able to capture the flowing movement of the waterfall as it rolled over the rocks. Your eyes follow the curving path as it changes direction gradually. There are no sudden breaks in the line. In **Figure 8.15**, the artist has used flowing rhythm to arrange the heads of the singers to create the mood of the flowing melody coming from the harp.

Flowing rhythm is created using upward swells and downward slides. You might think of the upward moves as the beats and the downward moves as the rests. Allan Houser has used flowing rhythms symbolically in his sculpture, *Coming of Age* (**Figure 8.16**). The work expresses the symbolic union of nature and femininity. The thick, rhythmically flowing strands of hair suggest motion and the act of running. They also suggest the movement of the wind, of water, or even the blazing motion of flames.



▲ **FIGURE 8.15** This sculpture was inspired by the song *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, which was a popular song among African Americans in the 1930s. This is a cast-iron souvenir version of the original sculpture, a 16-foot plaster work exhibited at the 1939 World's Fair.

Augusta Savage. *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. 1939. Cast iron. 27.6 × 23.5 × 11.4 cm (10⁷/₈ × 9¹/₄ × 4¹/₂"). Countee Cullen Collection, Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia.



▲ **FIGURE 8.14** Borsky captured the white flow of this waterfall in his photograph by increasing the amount of time he exposed the film to light.

David Borsky. *Waterfall*. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.



▲ **FIGURE 8.16** This sculpture was created to celebrate feminine youth and beauty. The upturned head symbolizes the girl's desire to run to the four directions of the earth. The small shape above her forehead represents an abalone shell, a fertility symbol. The feather in her hair signifies a long life.

Allan Houser. *Coming of Age*. 1977. Bronze, edition of 12. 19.2 × 39.4 × 17.8 cm (7¹/₂ × 15¹/₂ × 7"). Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado.

Progressive

In *progressive* rhythm, there is a change in the beat each time it is repeated. The change is a steady one. Each time the beat appears, it is slightly different (**Figure 8.17**). A progressive rhythm may start with a square. The size of the square may be changed by making it slightly smaller each time it is repeated, or each square may be made a different color of the spectrum or a different step on the value scale each time it is repeated. Shapes can be progressively changed. The sides of a square can be gradually rounded until the square becomes a circle.



▲ **FIGURE 8.17** In this etching, Escher creates a progressive rhythm of reptiles climbing out of a flat drawing and evolving into fully formed creatures. The progression ends with a fully three-dimensional reptile standing on the polygon, steam blowing from its nostrils. Then the reptile reenters the two-dimensional drawing.

M. C. Escher. *Reptiles*. 1943. Lithograph. 33.3 × 40 cm (13¹/₈ × 15³/₄”).
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Activity

Progressive Rhythm

Applying Your Skills. Start with a simple geometric shape, such as a square, for your motif. Create a progressive rhythm by gradually changing the square into a free-form shape. Next, draw a picture using simple shapes. Change the shapes gradually, using progressive rhythm, to tell a visual story.

Computer Option. Look around the room and select a simple handmade object such as a stapler, a chair, or a faucet. Use the tools of your choice to draw the outline of this shape, adding details. Consider what shapes can be used to simplify and represent the object—circles, squares, rectangles, or triangles. Gradually change the image using a minimum of six or seven steps so that the transition appears smooth. Begin in black and white but later you may explore changes in size, value, or color to enhance the progression. Tip: After completing each step, make a copy of it and place it next to the one you are about to alter, or use the tracing paper option, if available, to guide your changes.



Check Your Understanding

1. Explain the difference between random and regular rhythm and pattern.
2. In what ways can an alternating rhythm and pattern be created?
3. Compare and contrast the use of pattern in Figures 8.12 and 8.13 on page 208.