

Visual Weight Tutorial

By Hummie

What is the goal of visual weight? If you follow the principles of visual weight, your "photos will pop." What does that mean? When a person looks at a layout, you want their eye to go to the photos first. Of course, sometimes your goal may be for the eye to go to another element first, but in general, most often, the goal is for the eye to go to the photos first.

There are many factors that should be paid close attention to in order to make your photos pop. These include:

- 1) [contrast](#)
- 2) [size](#)
- 3) [color](#)
- 4) [shape](#)
- 5) [texture](#)
- 6) [isolation](#)
- 7) [value](#)
- 8) [balance](#)

1) The biggest mistake made on layouts is the principle of [contrast](#). Using a contrasting color, tint, shade, or tone in the background, mat, or border will make a big difference in your layout.

A good place to start is to decide whether your photos are dark photos or light photos. It takes some practice to get a good eye as to whether the photos are dark or light. Practice by putting your photo on a page, create a solid color background, and then play with the sliders and watch how they affect your photo.

Here's the important rule for visual weight: If your photo is a dark photo, use a light background. If your photo is a light photo, use a dark background. Always use the opposite brightness to make your photos pop.

On these samples, the first background color is equal to the photos and competes with the photos. In this case, make the background darker or lighter to make the photos pop. The bottom elements need to be tweaked too. Can you spot the contrast problems there? Also, the yellow competes with the photos and should be changed. A smaller amount of yellow would work well.



-Original, no contrast-

-Contrast with dark-

-Contrast with light-

What do you do if you have more than one photo on your page, but some are light and some are dark? Fix this problem by using an appropriate mat or border around the photos.

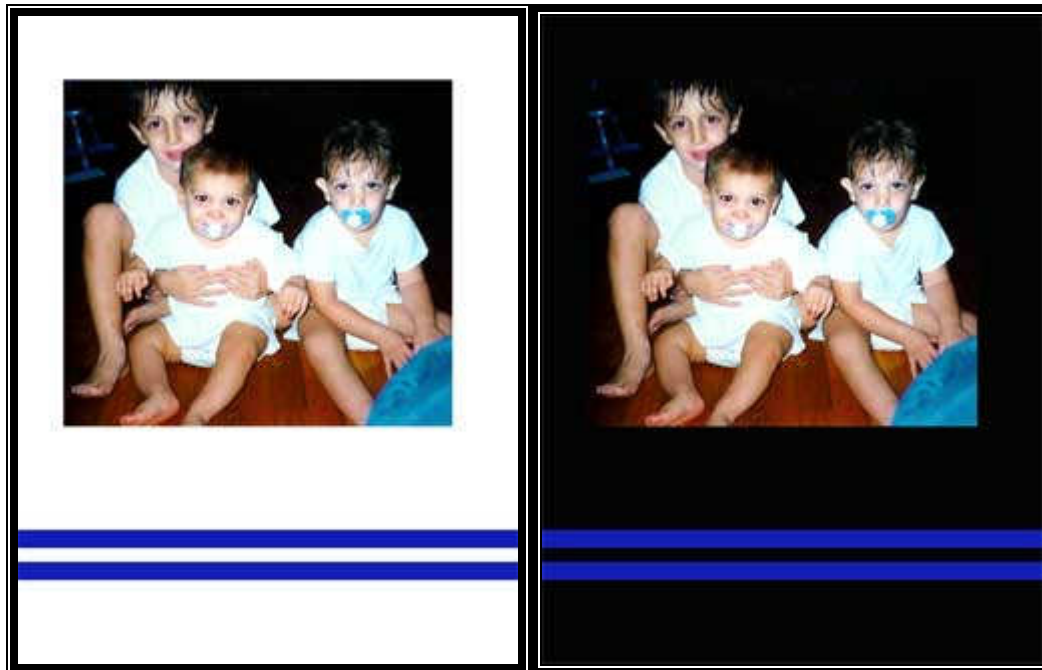
In the below before and after examples, one photo is light and one photo is dark. In the first example, the dark background matches the dark photo, rather than contrasting it. The dark background works okay with the light photo. However, this is a good example of how color in other parts of a layout can bring your eye to a photo. The red strip at the bottom does bring your eye to the red leaves in the photo. Also, this is an example of bad size. The title is too big and your eye goes there first (also, the text is not a contrasting color to the background).

In the second example, the light color background contrasts the dark photo, but to bring your eye to the photo, a red border to match the leaves was added a distance from the dark photo. For the light photo, the dark red mat behind it creates contrast and draws out the red in the photo. The photos are made larger so the focus is on them rather than the title. The title is smaller to take focus away from it.



Sometimes the photos are both light and dark. For instance, the background of the photo may be dark, but the person may be light. In this instance, you need to decide what part of the photo you want to be your focal point. If you want the person to be the focal point, use a matching brightness to the background of the photo. Maybe your background is black and your person is wearing white clothes. In this case, a black paper would make the white person pop (although it matches the background of the photo exactly).

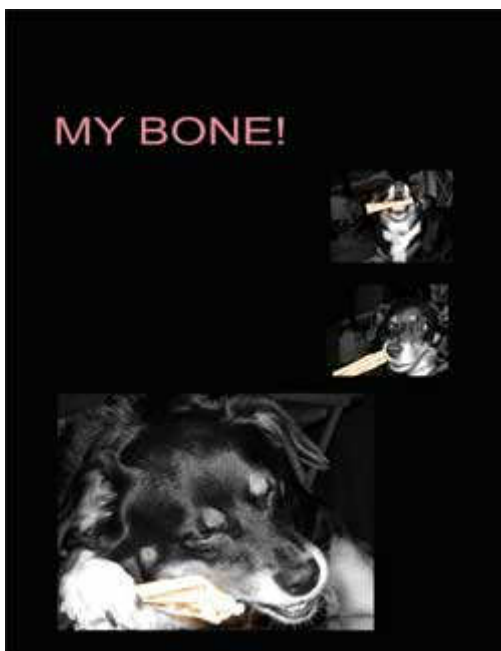
In these samples, either would work. On the first one, the background matches the white shirts. If the shirts were orange, then an orange background would work. On the second one, the background matches the background of the photo, bringing all of the focus to the boys.



2) **Size** is the easiest way to make your photos a focal point. The larger the photo, the more it will pop. If you are using more than one photo, decide which photo you want to be your focal point with the heaviest weight and make it the largest photo so that your eye goes to that photo first.



3) **Color** is a factor in contrast as detailed above. However, choosing a good color scheme will also help your photos pop.



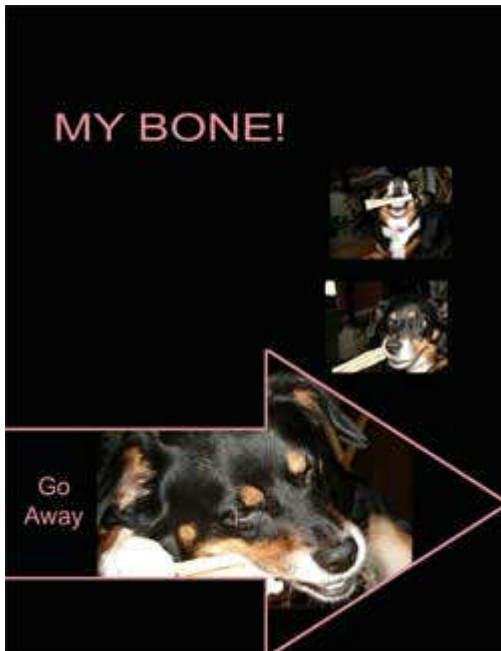
For instance, if you have a certain color in the photo itself that you want an eye drawn to, placing that color in key locations elsewhere on the page in just the right places and amounts will carry your eye to the photo. Maybe you have a child holding a yellow flower and you want the eye to be carried to the flower, then you might mat the photo in same yellow.

A technique may be to note the color of clothing and to use a complementary, monochromatic, or analogous color to the color of the clothing on the other elements in your layout. Use the color schemer tool on this site to help you make color choices.

Another technique would be to make an entire photo grey except for the focal point of the photo which is left in color. The bone in this layout is left in color while the rest of the photo is grey.

A third technique in color which is effective is to watch the balance of your color about your page. Placing a certain color in three (rule of thirds) places (in a triangle or even a distorted triangle shape) helps the eye to flow about the page.

In other tutorials in these lessons, you will learn about hue, saturation, and value that will help you make color choices.



4) You can make your photos pop by cutting them into different [shapes](#). For instance, you might want all your photos in a rectangular shape and your focal point photo in an oval or star shape. Or, draw a square or circle around the focal point in a photo.

5) Use of [texture](#) can make a photo pop. Be careful, it can also detract from your photo. Texture is not tactical texture, but rather visual texture. For instance, use patterned paper in ways to accent your photos, not detract from them. In another lesson, you will read about patterned paper guidelines. Inking edges of a mat will draw your attention to the photo. Using the punch technique (in another lesson) around the edges of photos or mats will create a focal point.

6) [Isolation](#) can cause your eye to go to a certain area of your layout. If your photo is isolated in one corner or part of your layout, your eye will go there first. White space layouts are so well liked because they isolate the photos.

7) [Value](#) can draw your eye to a spot first also. A cute element will get your attention faster than a dull one. A great photograph will get your attention before an average one.

9) [Balance](#) is another huge factor in visual weight. There are many aspects to balance and it is often difficult to pay attention to them all.

One side of your layout should contain as many elements as the other. I'm sure your elementary art teacher taught you about symmetrical artwork. Your layouts do not have to be exactly symmetrical; however, the concept should be utilized. One big photo on the left side should be balanced by two or three small photos or elements on the right side.

There is a general "rule of three" that works well for balance. Divide your whole layout into thirds. Use three photos, three buttons, or three elements together.

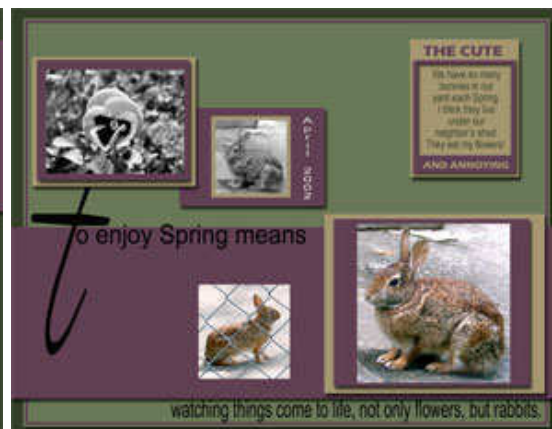
As suggested above in #3, each color should be used all around your layout. If you have one sole color in a spot, the eye goes there. That may be good if it brings your eye to a focal point photo, but generally, it is not good. If you use a color in the title, you may want to put it on a mat on the opposite side of the layout. Often, it only needs to be a small amount of color; an element as small as a thin line around the end of a mat will bring the color to that side of a layout.

Another aspect which is difficult to learn is that a bottom heavy layout is often preferred to a top heavy layout. Of course, center heavy layouts work well. Back in elementary school, do you remember your teacher telling you to put your title at the top of the page? Well, now is the time to break that habit! We tend to put our titles and focus photos at the top of the page, maybe because we write from the top down?

Putting both the title and the focal photo on the top really weights the layout down on the top. I often do this naturally, but then catch myself after the layout is done. It is easiest for me to see the weightiness of a layout if I make the layout small, as in icon size. The weightiness usually jumps out at me when looking at the layout in a small size.



Top Heavy Layout



Bottom Heavy Layout