

Composition in Visual arts is the arrangement or organization of the visual elements such as dots, shapes, lines, colors, or any other element that appears in the artwork. Depending on the locations of every object or element the depiction can cause different visual impressions or moods. So it is important for the author to keep in mind this aspect of art making. Composition encloses some aspects, like the **format**, the **rythm**, the **compositional scheme** and **balancing the image**. And there are also some **rules** that help to carry out a good composition.

TWO-DIMENSIONAL FORMATS

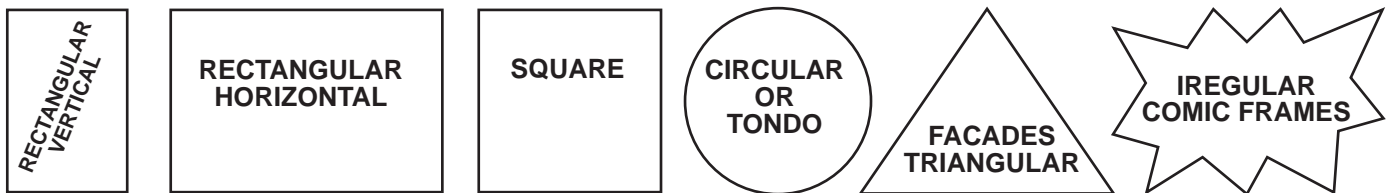
The **format** is the size, the shape and the disposition in the space of the surface on which an artwork is done. In **two dimensions** the format is usually a **canvas**, a **board** or any **flat surface** which are used as a medium to create the depiction.

When making a painting or a drawing the first thing is to decide the type of format to be used. First thing to decide is the **shape of the format**.

Most formats, for two-dimensional artworks, are **rectangular**. About these rectangular formats the first decision to be taken is the arrangement. A **vertical format** should be taken for depicting long raising elements such as human figure standing, trees or towers. **Horizontal formats** are more likely to be used in still life, lying people or landscapes. Many times the rectangular formats attend to mathematical ratios between the long and the short side. It is also common to find **square formats**.

Sometimes it is possible to find **round or circular formats**, these are called **tondi** (**tondo** in plural) which is an italian word. Tondi were popular in the renaissance period.

Not as usual are **Triangular** formats that can be found in buildings facades. And **irregular** formats can be found in comic frames.



THREE-DIMENSIONAL FORMATS

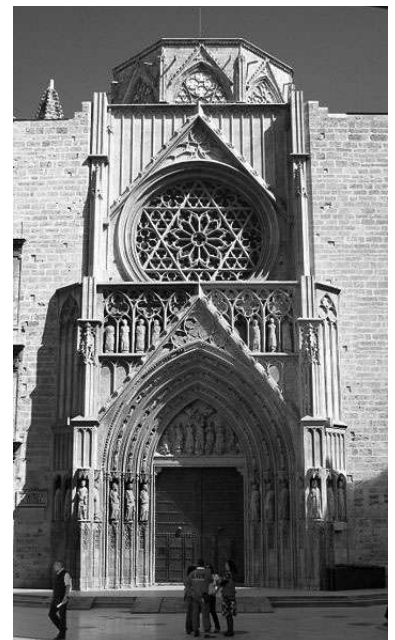
When a format is three-dimensional it means it has to be related to any **volumetric** figure such as buildings, objects or rooms. Greek **temples' facades** show a triangle on the top. These triangles are called **pediments** and usually hold **sculptures**. **Domes** are spheric roofs for some buildings like churches and on their inner face they usually show **murals**. And most churches access doors have a **tympanum** over them that also hold sculptures. All these are good examples for three-dimensional formats



Sagrario dome.
Granada's Carthusian monastery.
Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/>



Neoclassical Pediment.
Greek National Academy. Athens.
Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/>



Apostles' Gate.
Valencia Cathedral.
Source: <http://www.foroxerbar.com/viewtopic.php?t=7467>



Oma's forest. Agustín Ibarrola
Source: <http://www.traveler.es/>

In [this webpage](http://www.muralalarcon.org/) you can learn about Alarcon's murals, a good example about three-dimensional formats.

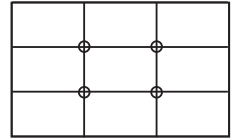


<http://www.muralalarcon.org/>

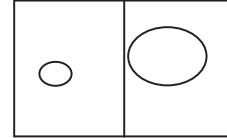
A COUPLE COMPOSITION RULES

The **rule of thirds** is mainly used in photography and graphic design, it consists of trazing a **grid** in the rectangle dividing it in nine smaller rectangles which structure the image and **distribute** the elements. This is achieved **dividing** the main **rectangle sides in three equal parts** and drawing two horizontal and two vertical axes through these divisions. The **four middle intersections** correspond with the image elements that have more **visual weight** or importance in the composition.

RULE OF THIRDS



RULE OF BALANCE OR COMPENSATION



A chair factory at Alfortville. 1897. Henry Rousseau.

Source: <http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/henri-rousseau/the-chair-factory-at-alfortville-1>

Seminarians playing soccer. 1959. Ramón Masats.
Source: <http://www.elmundo.es/magazine/2005/280/1107976642.html>

The **rule of the balance or compensation** is a simple way to compose an image. When using it, the visual weights, shapes and colors, are spread to both sides of an **imaginary middle axis**. So the **most important element** is **located towards the center** while the other elements, not as important, towards the edge.

In this **Youtube video** you'll watch a funny puppets sketch criticizing vertical videos.
<http://youtu.be/Bt9zSfinwFA>

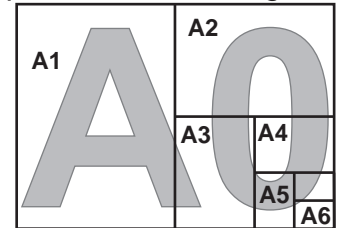


RECTANGULAR FORMATS IN COMPOSITION

Any figure such as circles, squares or triangles can be the format for an artwork. But most of the formats for paintings and images are rectangular. There are infinity of proportions for rectangles. But two of them are singular and more popular.

THE SILVER RECTANGLE

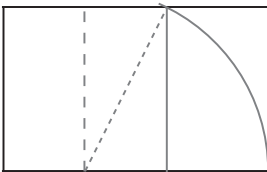
The **Silver rectangle** has the property that if its cut by the middle of its long side it **originates two similar rectangles** to the first one, but half of its size. This rectangle is used as a standard for paper sheets and industry and it is called formally **DIN, UNE OR ISO**. Depending on the size they are called DIN **A0**, the biggest, DIN A1, A2, A3, A4...



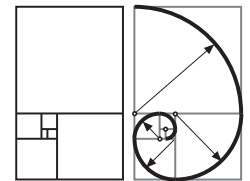
The silver rectangle, ISO, DIN UNE A0: ISO standarization rule #216

THE GOLDEN RECTANGLE

The **Golden rectangle** is structured by the **golden ratio which is 1,618**, this number is the result of dividing its long side by the short one.



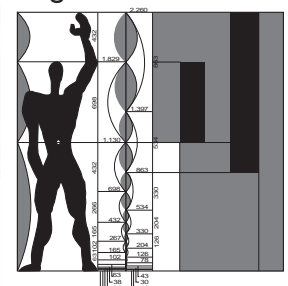
A golden rectangle can be divided in a square and another rectangle that is also golden. This operation can be applied to the resulting rectangles over and over, getting smaller and smaller golden rectangles and squares inside. This repeating operation can lead to inscribe a spiral in the main rectangle.



This proportion also **appears in the regular pentagon** and is very present in nature and human figure. Artists, architects and designers have been using this rectangle as a pattern for composition since centuries before Christ.

ACTIVITY- Match each label on the left with the corresponding picture on the right.

- 1- This Painting contains characters who are forming a pentagon or a pentagram whose proportions are strictly related to Golden ratio.
- 2- In this Painting the artist used the Golden ratio and arranged the elements following an inscribed golden spiral.
- 3- The author of this drawing compared the human figure to golden ratio and both to architecture, he was an architect.



Giant Flying Mocca Cup with an Inexplicable Five Metre Appendage . Salvador Dalí
Source: <http://www.dali.com/blog/giant-flying-mocha-cup-with-an-inexplicable-five-meter-appendage-reveals-enigma-humor-of-dali/>

Sacred Family. 1503-1505
Michelangelo Buonarroti
Source: <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/michelangelo/holy-family.jpg>

Le Modulor. Le Corbusier
Source: [Drawing by laslaminas.es](http://www.laslaminas.es)

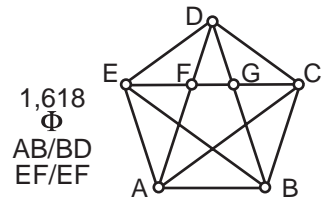
SEGMENTS GOLDEN SECTION:



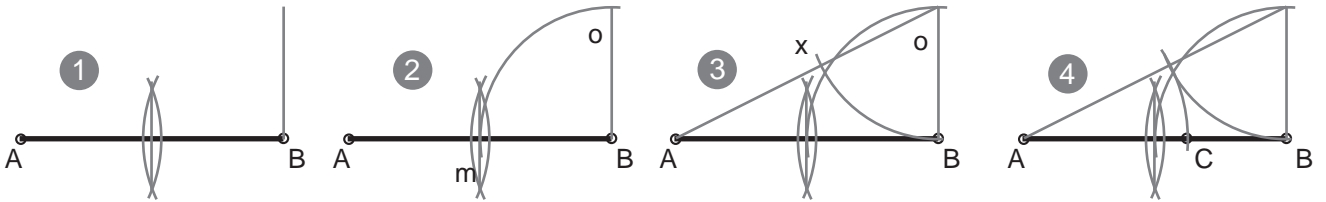
The **golden section of a segment** is a point which divides it into two parts so that:

$$AC / AB = AB / BC = \Phi = 1.6180\dots$$

Φ is directly related to the regular pentagon dimensions and the star pentagon, also related with the Fibonacci sequence: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13 ...

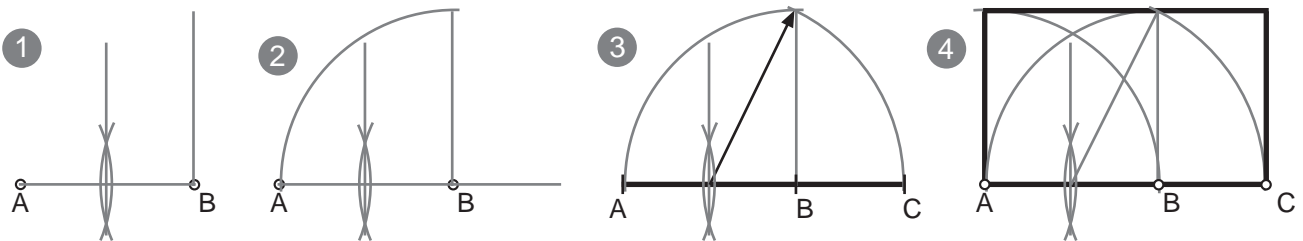


GOLDEN DIVISION (C) OF A SEGMENT AB



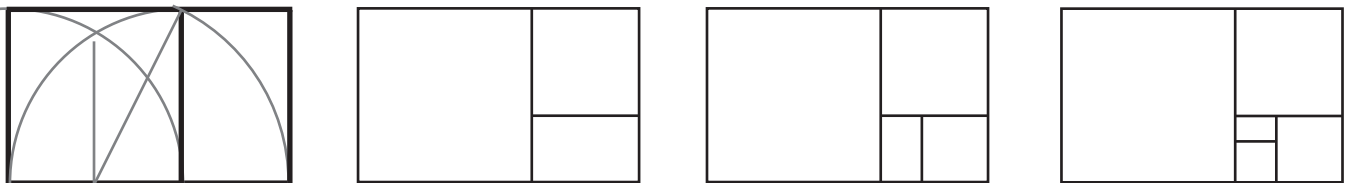
- 1 - We draw the segment's perpendicular bisector and raise a perpendicular by one end point.
- 2 - With center at B and radius half of AB, we turn half of the segment's length to meet the perpendicular line, getting the point (o). We draw an arc with radius (o) B centered at (o).
- 3 - Connecting A with (o) we obtain x in the intersection with the last arc drawn.
- 4 - With center A and radius Ax we turn that length on the segment AB obtaining C.

GOLDEN SEGMENT (AC) of another (AB), Golden Rectangle:

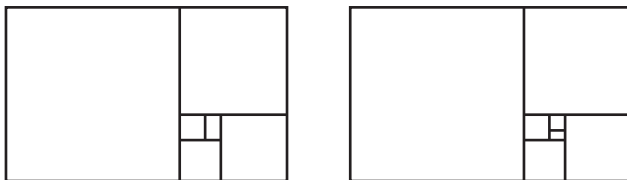


- 1 - We draw the segment's perpendicular bisector and raise a perpendicular through one end point.
- 2 - With center at B and radius AB we turn the segment's length to meet the perpendicular line raised.
- 3 - With center at the midpoint of the segment and radius to the upper end of the perpendicular distance we turn that length on the extension of the segment AB finding C.
- 4 - To draw the golden rectangle we build the rectangle with short side and AB and long side AC.

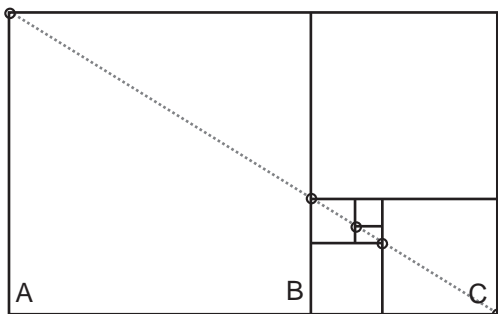
Once we got the golden rectangle we can observe it is divided by a vertical line in a square and another rectangle which is also golden. So we need to proceed with the same type of division for that golden rectangle.



So this way we divide the golden rectangle in squares and other smaller golden rectangles. It is very close to what fractals are in nature. This type of growth is called "gnomic growth".



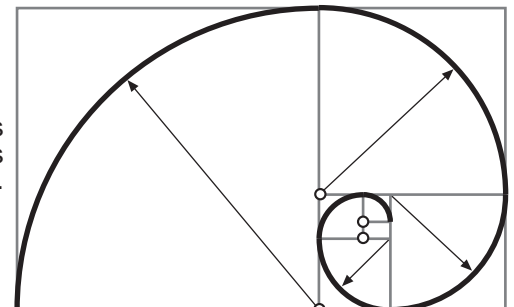
The diagonal for the bigger rectangle matches with two vertices of all other golden rectangles.



Having the rectangle divided in this way, draw the spiral by joining the opposite corners of each square with arcs with center in another of the vertices of each square, so that the arcs are inner links of tangent circles.

In this [Youtube video](http://youtu.be/YVODhFL0mw) you'll watch Donald the duck explaining the golden section.

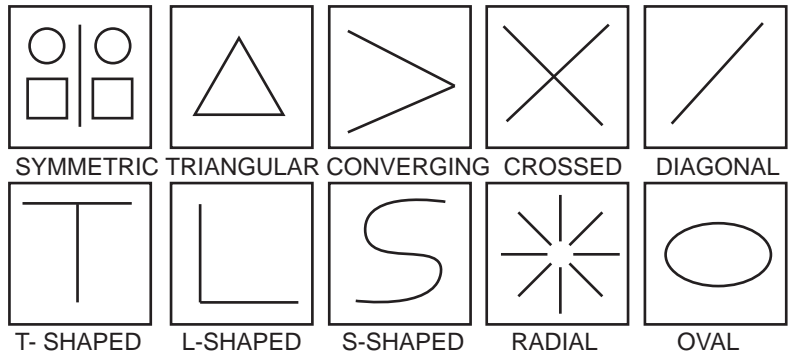
<http://youtu.be/YVODhFL0mw>



COMPOSITIONAL SCHEMES

Compositional scheme: Set of lines and basic geometric shapes on which the image is supported. Sometimes the composition can be guided by modular patterns. The compositional schemes can be classified in simple or composed depending on their complexity.

Simple compositional scheme: They are normally formed by one or several basic geometric figures or lines. The most common are: symmetrical, triangular, two converging lines, cross, diagonal, forming an "S" or "L", radial, circular, oval, spiral, etc.



In [video](#) you'll watch a funny speech about a image book called "tidying up art" in which his author destroys famous artworks' compositional schemes.

http://www.ted.com/talks/ursus_wehrli_tidies_up_art.html



Composite compositional scheme: A representation, as it is analyzed in a meticulous way, can contain several simple compositional schemes. The compositional schemes can vary depending on the observer that performs the analysis, because to obtain them different criteria can be met such as the gaze directions, the positions of the different principal elements of the artwork, and the orientations of the elements or movement of the characters.

COMPOSITIONAL RYTHMS:

The **compositional rhythm** is a **regular succession**, rhythmic and harmonic of **shapes or colors**. It performs an **active and dynamic aspect**, both in nature and music as well as in art composition, to **enrich the expressive or aesthetic artworks senses**. There are different types of rythms and they can be applied either in two or three dimensions.

Rhythms regarding the shapes:

Rectilinear: It expresses seriousness and order.
Broken: It transmits nervousness, tension, dynamism and aggressiveness.
Curved: It expresses little movement.
Wavy: It enhances the sense of movement.

Rhythms for the disposition in space:

Continuous: They are monotonous.
Alternate: It gives feeling of controlled movement.
Discontinuous: It expresses freedom of movement
Increasing: It enhances the effect of depth.

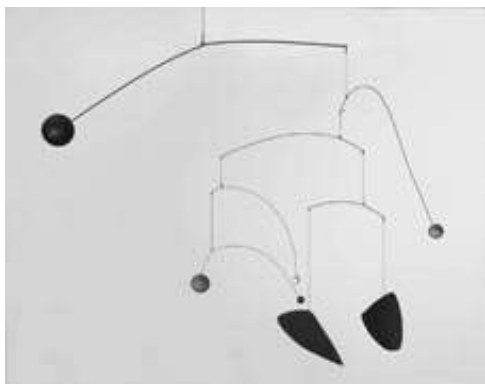
RHYTHM IN PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURES: VAN GOGH AND CALDER

Van Gogh was a Dutch painter in the late 19th century. One of his artworks main features is the prominent use of paint in very big amounts creating textures and even giving his paintings certain relief. He sometimes even used the paint straight from his **paint tubes**. This feature provides the paint an aspect in which it is easy to observe every **brush stroke**. Depending on how Vangogh arranged the brush strokes on the canvas, the artwork would show one rhythm or another.



Starry night. 1989. Van Gogh.

Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/>



Mobile. 1932. A. Calder.

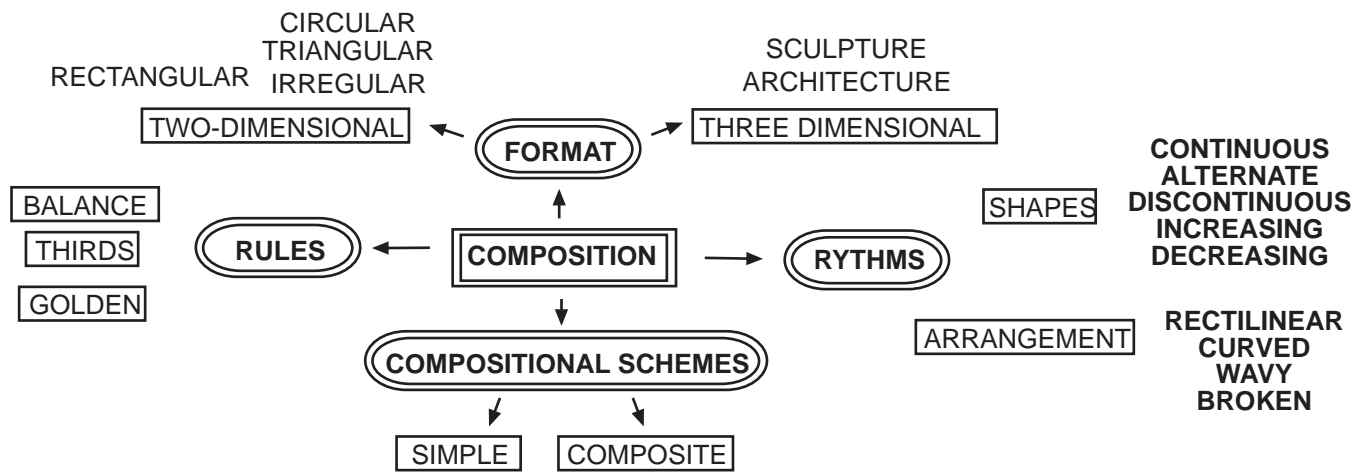
Source: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/calder-mobile-l01686>

Alexander Calder was an american artist, mainly sculptor famous for his **Mobiles**, which were the beginning of **kinetic art**. He also made **non moving sculptures** called **Stabiles**. Mobiles are sculptures made with **wire** and **metal leaves** forming abstract organic and geometric shapes that determine a rhythm by their shapes and sizes and also by their movement along with air currents in the rooms.

Check out this [webpage](#) to learn more about rythms and patterns in art or design.



<http://flieschool.com/content/repetition-rhythm-and-pattern>



Composition: It is an arrangement or organization of visual elements (dots, shapes, lines, colors, etc) that constitute an artistic expression.

FORMAT

Format: It is the size, the shape and the disposition in the space of the surface on which an artwork or two-dimensional image is done.

Flat or two-dimensional formats:

Rectangular: It is the most frequent of the flat formats; if its disposition is vertical it can produce elevation sensation, balance and lightness. If it is placed horizontally it can transmit peace, stability, firmness and solidity or heaviness.

The golden rectangle: Meets that the longest side divided by the shortest side is equal to the sum of the two sides divided by the larger side. This proportion appears in nature, in most of the artistic disciplines and it was discovered by the ancient Greeks. The golden rectangle can be divided in a square and other golden rectangle and this division can be applied over and over obtaining smaller squares and golden rectangles. This proportion suggests harmony and naturality.

Square: This format focuses the vision and transmits stability.

Circular: It is not that frequent and can be marked by the architectural support. It can suggest a radial motion, or an enclosure and suspension where the shapes are floating.

Triangular: It is also rare, can be found on pediments or over the doors of buildings, it restricts propagation of the forms on the top enclosing them, but produces a strong feeling of stability. In many artworks even though the format of the support is rectangular the compositional scheme is triangular.

Three-dimensional formats: They fit the spaces and they can be found in sculpture or in mural paintings.

Irregular formats: They are rare, especially those found in comics and advertising. They are dynamic and transmit motion and speed.

COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES / VISUAL EQUILIBRIUM

Weight or visual forces: They are shapes and colors and other elements of an image that call the attention and attract the observer's eye.

Static compositions: They get the balance in a composition distributing the elements on both sides of one or more axes as they are generally symmetrical and are meant to be stable.

Dynamic compositions: If the shapes and colors are distributed only on one side of one or more axes getting a single visual weight, or a visual weight that dominates others, compositions with unstable balance or asymmetric or unbalanced are obtained.

Rule of the balance or compensation: It is a system to compose an image. The visual weights, shapes and colors, are distributed on both sides of a middle axis. The bigger mass is located towards the center while the smaller mass towards the edge.

Rule of thirds: It is used mainly in photography and graphic design and consists on dividing the format rectangle in nine smaller rectangles which structure the image and distribute the elements. This is obtained by dividing its sides in three equal parts and drawing two horizontal and two vertical axes through these divisions. The four intersections of the four axes correspond with the parts of the image that have more visual weight in the composition.

Golden divisions: The Golden Ratio in many cases is used to distribute the visual weights. The golden rectangle can be divided into smaller squares and golden rectangles and place on the golden spiral. These divisions can make the artworks composition in a balanced way.

