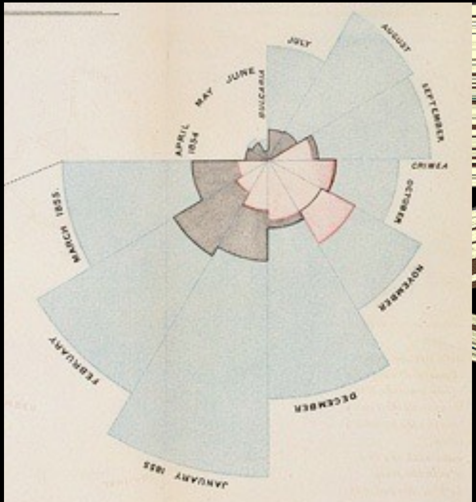
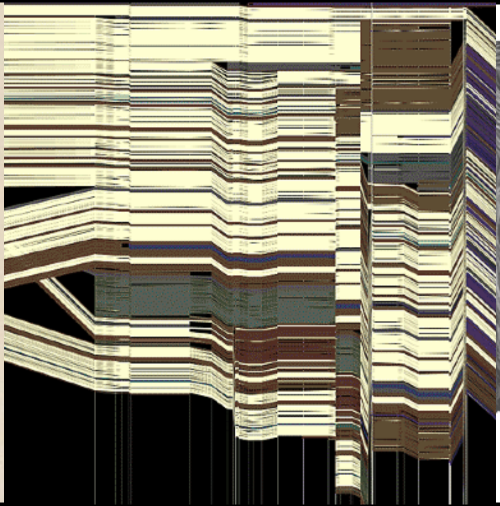
CSE 512 - Data Visualization

Perception






Jeffrey Heer University of Washington

Graphical Perception

The ability of viewers to interpret visual (graphical) encodings of information and thereby decode information in graphs.

Design Principles [Mackinlay 86]

Expressiveness
A set of facts is *expressible* in a visual language if the sentences (i.e. the visualizations) in the language express all the facts in the set of data, and only the facts in the data.

Effectiveness
A visualization is more *effective* than another visualization if the information conveyed by one visualization is more readily perceived than the information in the other visualization.

Design Principles *Translated*

Tell the truth and nothing but the truth
(don’t lie, and don’t lie by omission)

Use encodings that people decode better
(where better = faster and/or more accurate)

Effectiveness Rankings [Mackinlay 86]

QUANTITATIVE	ORDINAL	NOMINAL
Position	Position	Position
Length	Density (Value)	Color Hue
Angle	Color Sat	Texture
Slope	Color Hue	Connection
Area (Size)	Texture	Containment
Volume	Connection	Density (Value)
Density (Value)	Containment	Color Sat
Color Sat	Length	Shape
Color Hue	Angle	Length
Texture	Slope	Angle
Connection	Area (Size)	Slope
Containment	Volume	Area
Shape	Shape	Volume

Perception Topics

Signal Detection

Magnitude Estimation

Using Multiple Visual Encodings

Pre-Attentive Processing

Gestalt Grouping

Change Blindness

Signal Detection

Detecting Brightness

Which is brighter?

Detecting Brightness

(128, 128, 128)　　(144, 144, 144)

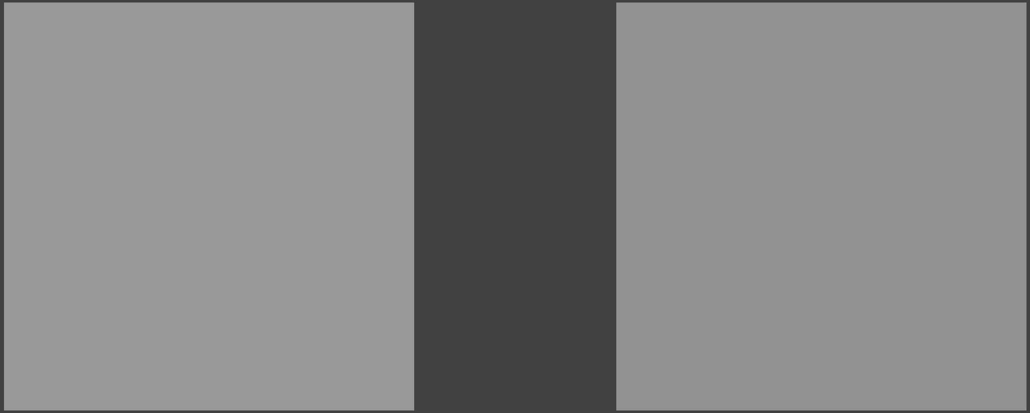
Which is brighter?

Detecting Brightness

Which is brighter?

Detecting Brightness

(134, 134, 134) (128, 128, 128)



Which is brighter?

Just Noticeable Difference (JND)

JND (Weber's Law)

Scale Factor
(Empirically Determined)

Perceived Change → $$\Delta S = k \frac{\Delta I}{I}$$

← Change of Intensity

← Physical Intensity

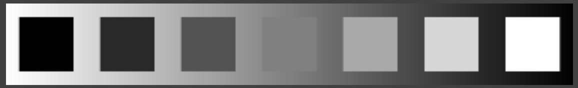
Ratios more important than magnitude

Most continuous variation in stimuli are perceived in discrete steps

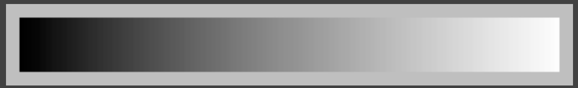
Encoding Data with Color

Value is perceived as ordered

∴ Encode ordinal variables (O)



∴ Encode continuous variables (Q) [not as well]



Hue is normally perceived as unordered

∴ Encode nominal variables (N) using color

Steps in Font Size

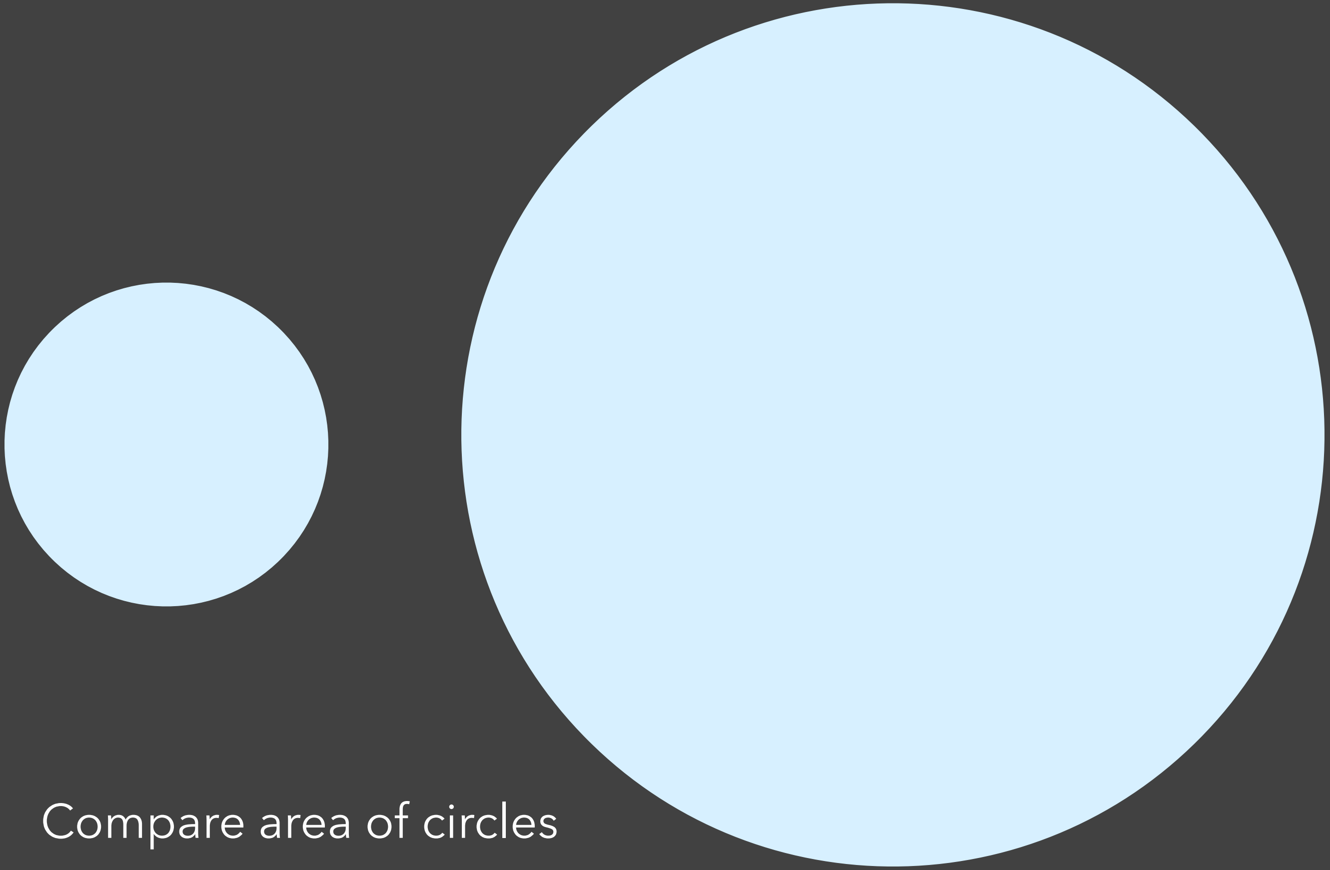
Sizes standardized in 16th century

a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a

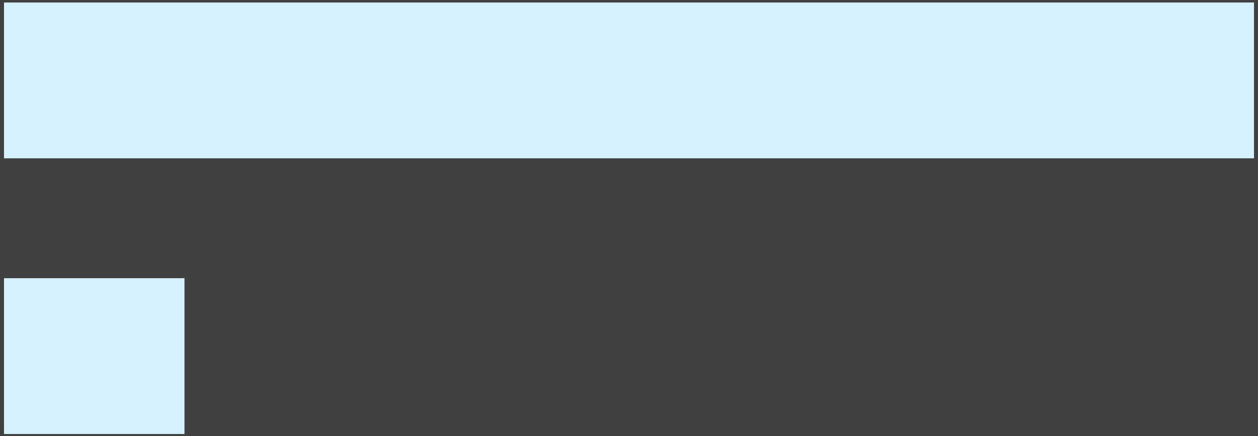
6 7 8 9 10 11 12 14 16 18 21 24 36 48 60 72

Magnitude Estimation

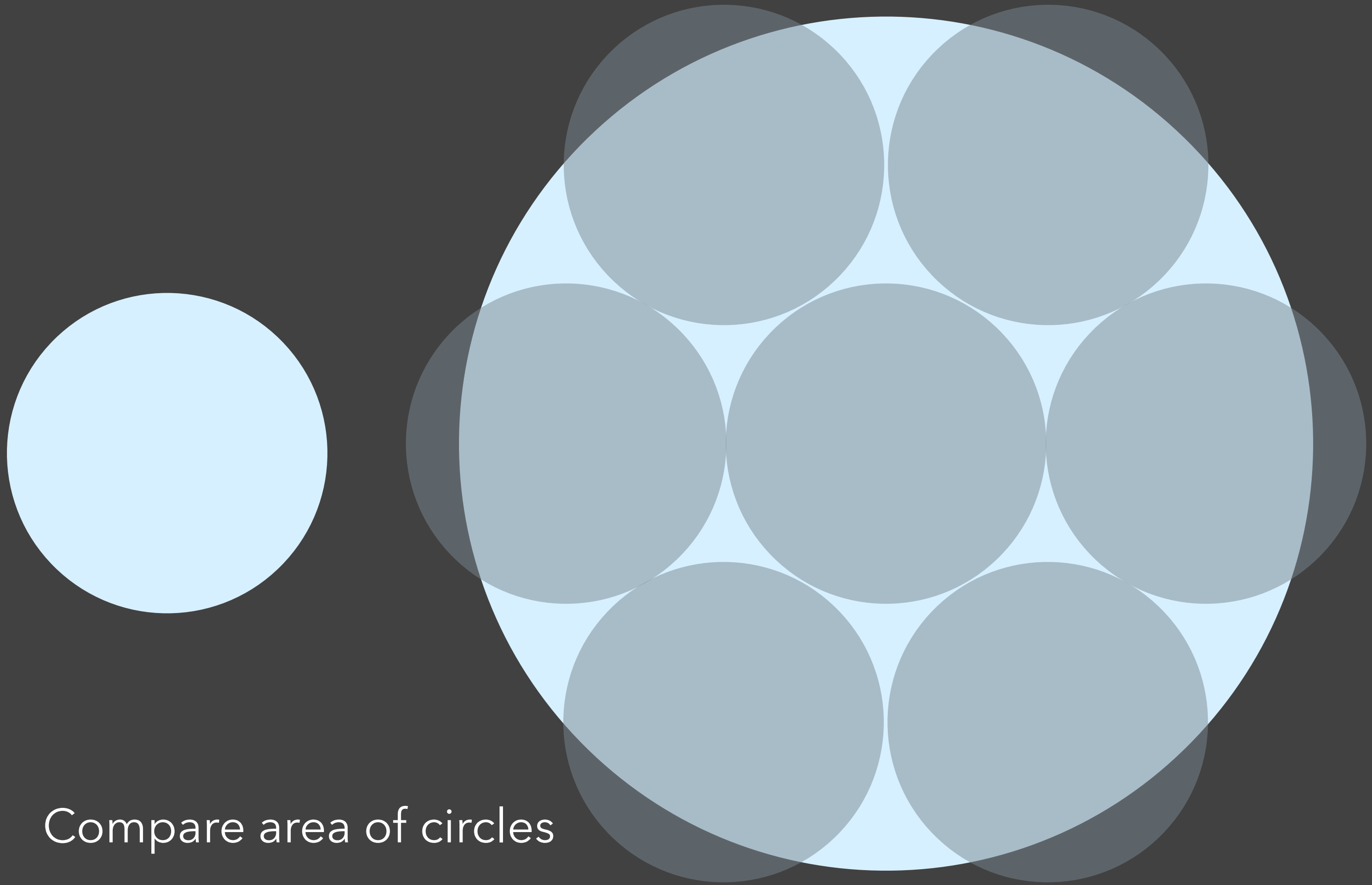
A Quick Experiment…



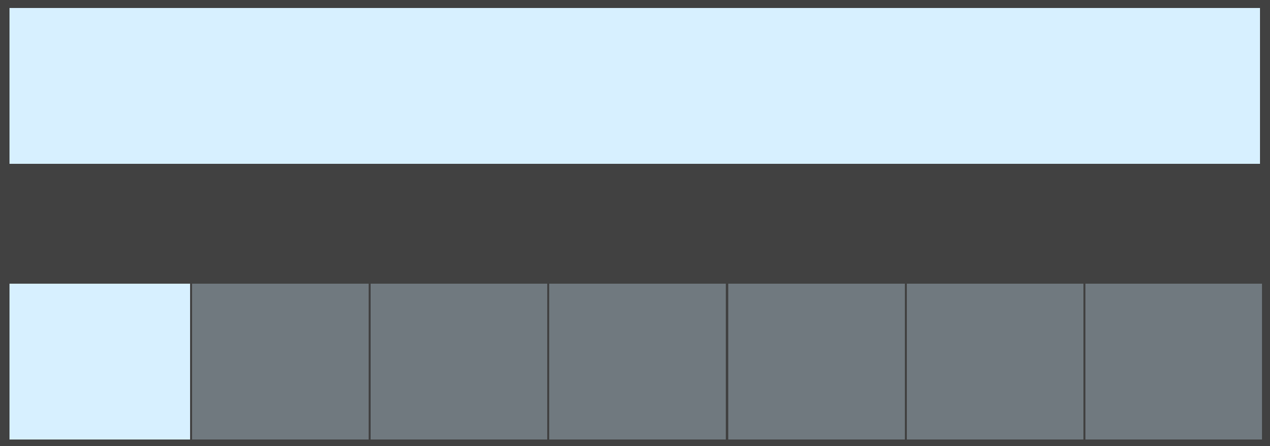
Compare area of circles



Compare length of bars



Compare area of circles



Compare length of bars

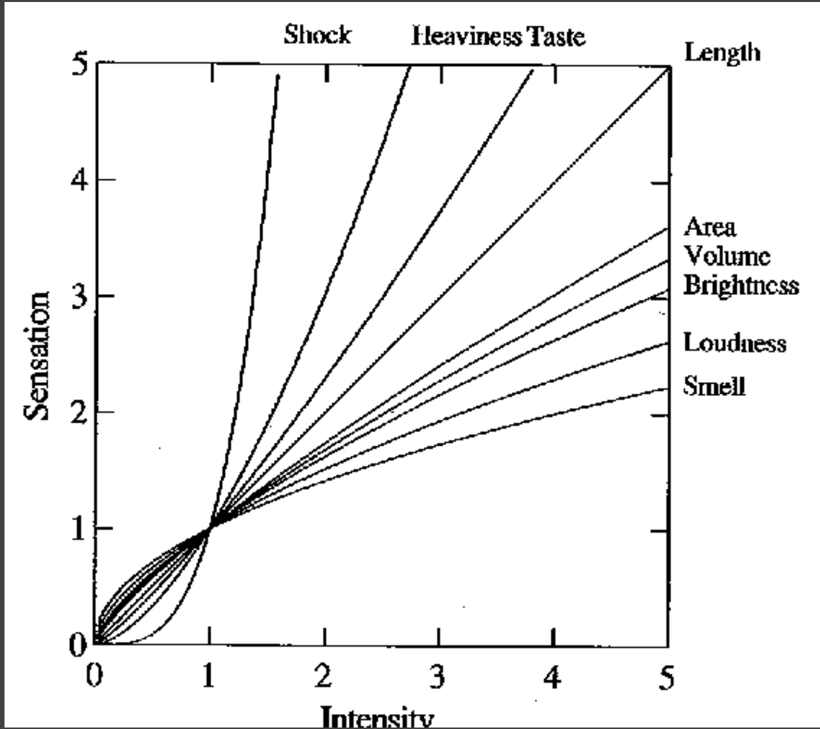
Steven's Power Law

Exponent
(Empirically Determined)

$$S = I^p$$

Perceived Sensation — Physical Intensity

Predicts bias, not necessarily accuracy!



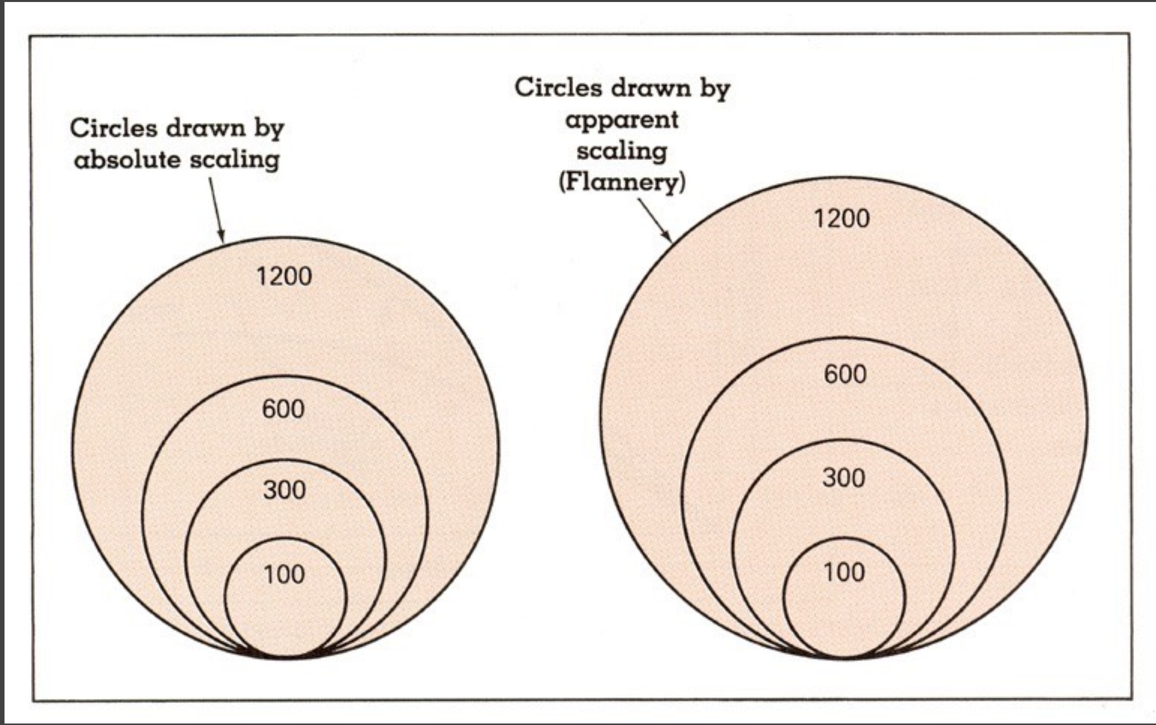
[Graph from Wilkinson '99, based on Stevens '61]

Exponents of Power Law

Sensation	Exponent
Loudness	0.6
Brightness	0.33
Smell	0.55 (Coffee) - 0.6 (Heptane)
Taste	0.6 (Saccharine) -1.3 (Salt)
Temperature	1.0 (Cold) – 1.6 (Warm)
Vibration	0.6 (250 Hz) – 0.95 (60 Hz)
Duration	1.1
Pressure	1.1
Heaviness	1.45
Electic Shock	3.5

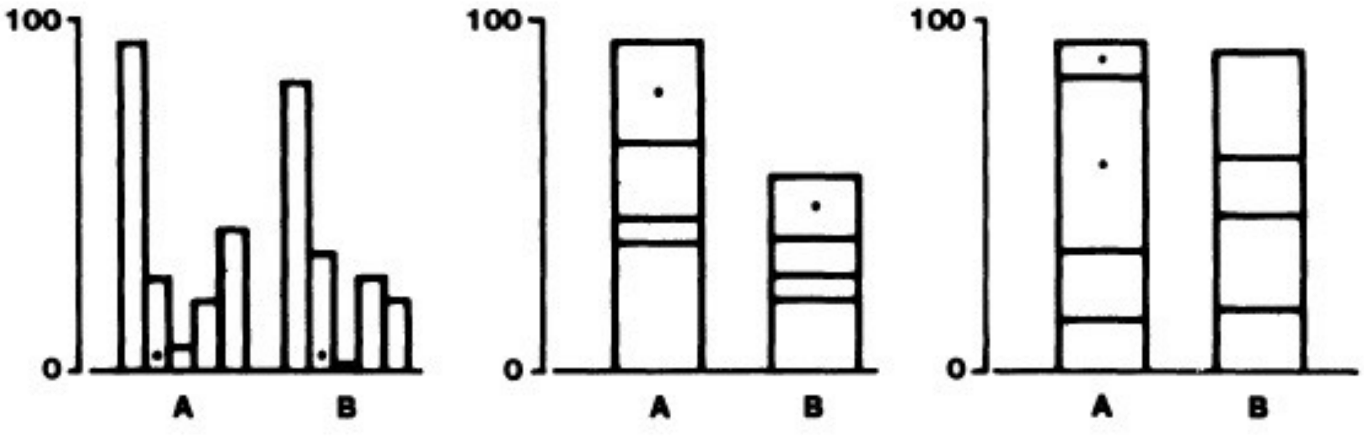
[Psychophysics of Sensory Function, Stevens ’61]

Apparent Magnitude Scaling



[Cartography: Thematic Map Design, Figure 8.6, p. 170, Dent, '96]

$S = 0.98A^{0.87}$ [from Flannery '71]



Graphical Perception [Cleveland & McGill 84]

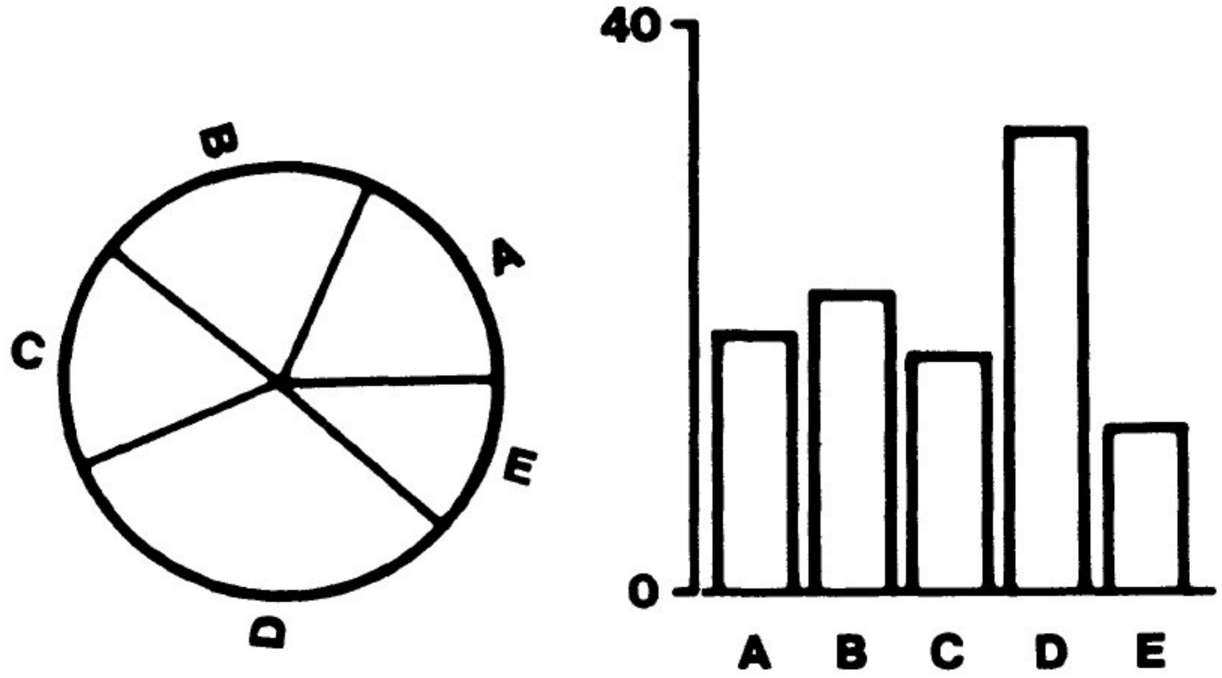
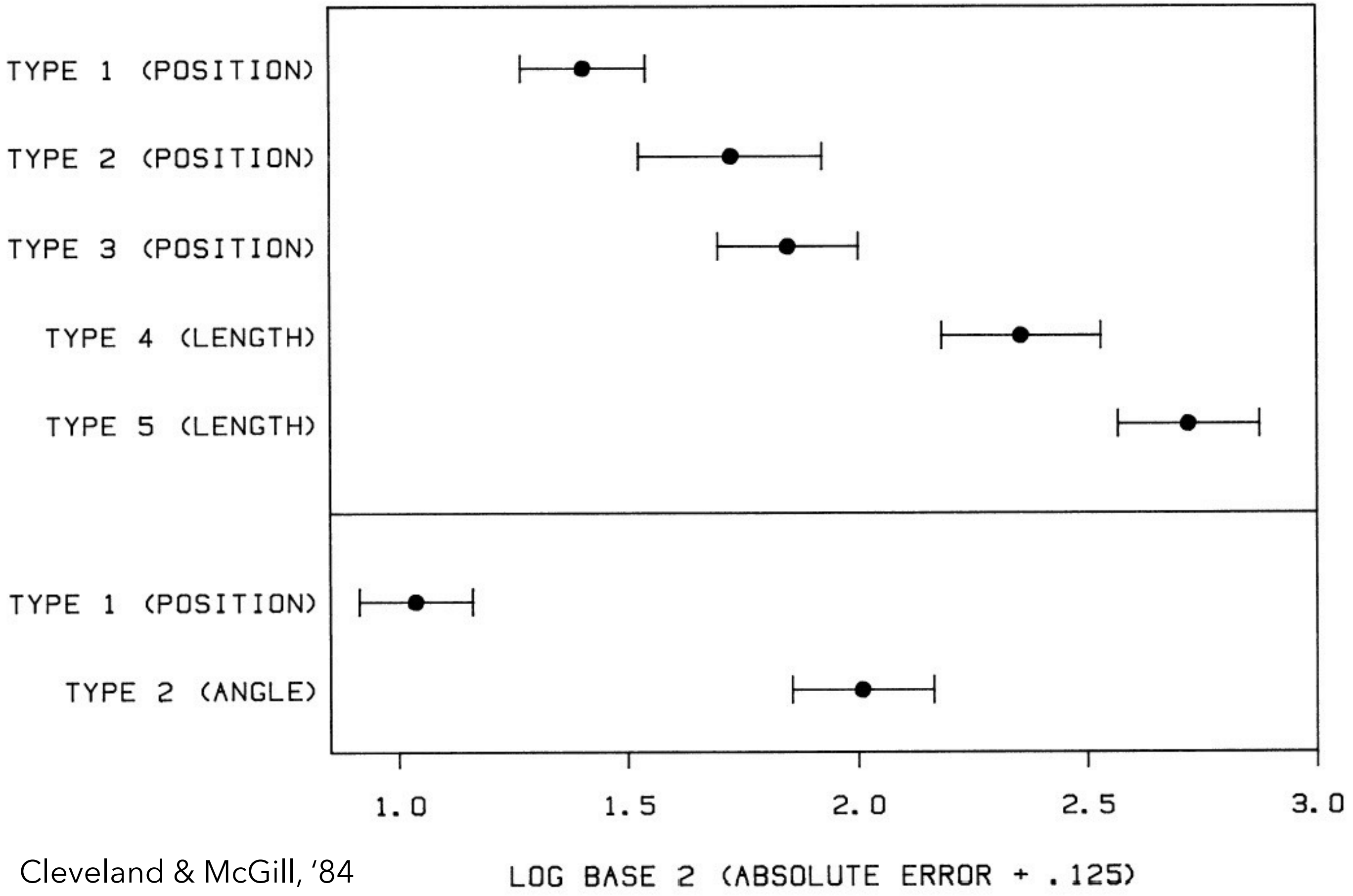
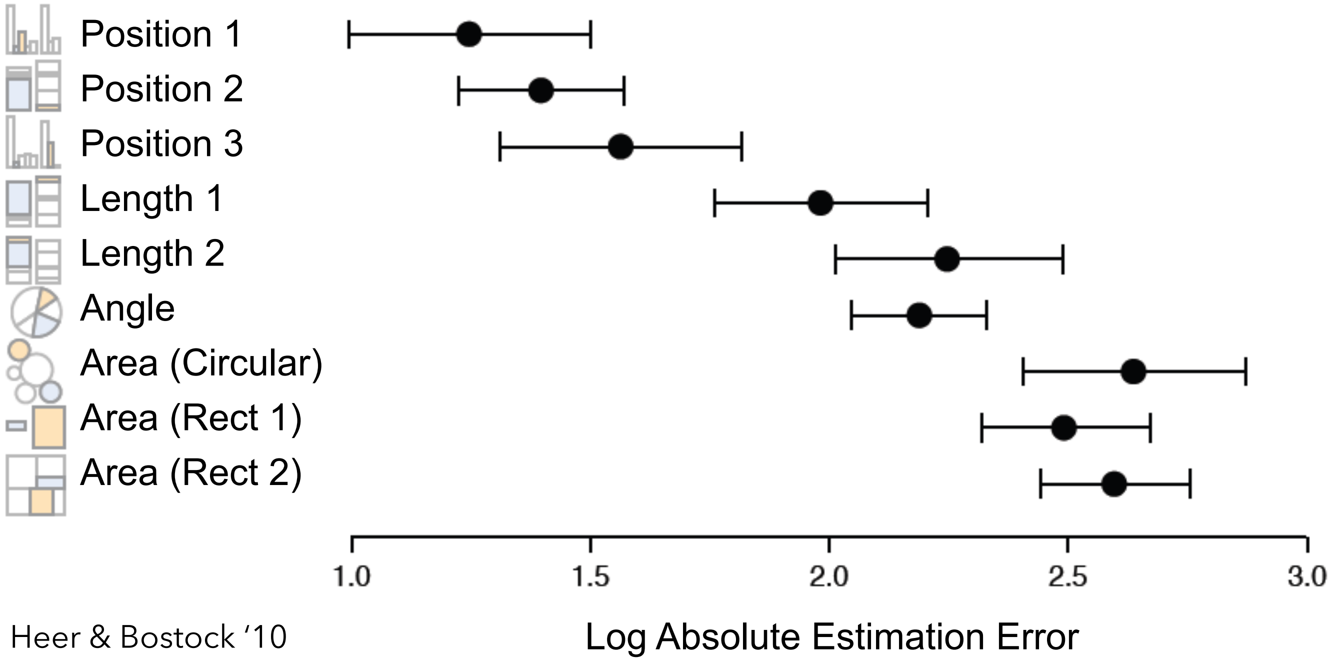


Figure 3. Graphs from position–angle experiment.



Cleveland & McGill, '84

Figure 16. Log absolute error means and 95% confidence intervals for judgment types in position–length experiment (top) and position–angle experiment (bottom).



Heer & Bostock '10

Graphical Perception Experiments

Empirical estimates of encoding effectiveness

Relative Magnitude Comparison

Most accurate

Least accurate

Position (common) scale

Position (non-aligned) scale

Length

Slope

Angle

Area

Volume

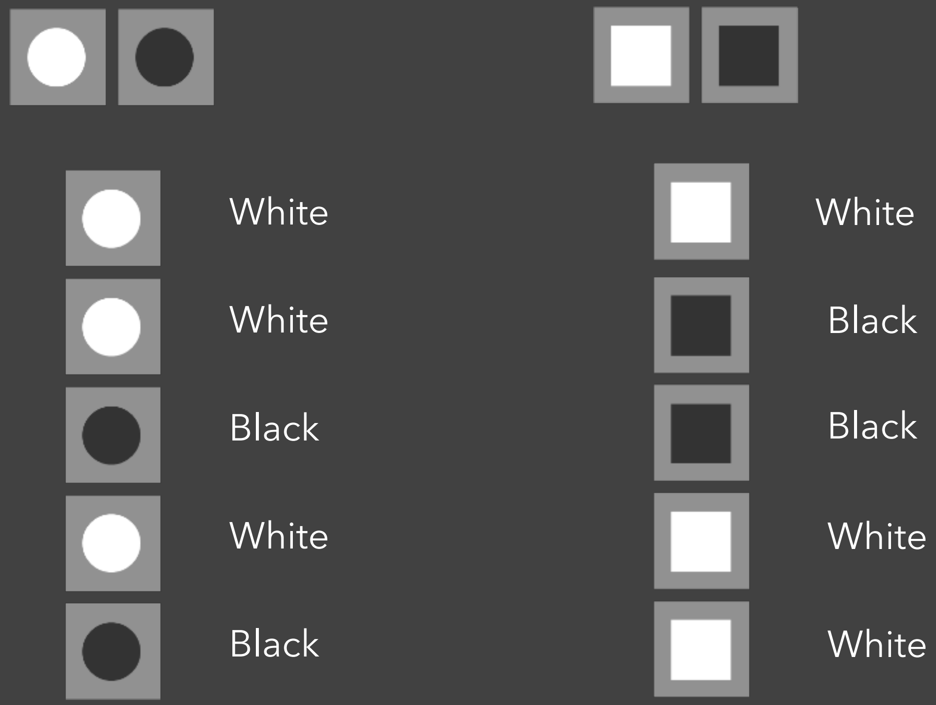
Color hue-saturation-density

Effectiveness Rankings [Mackinlay 86]

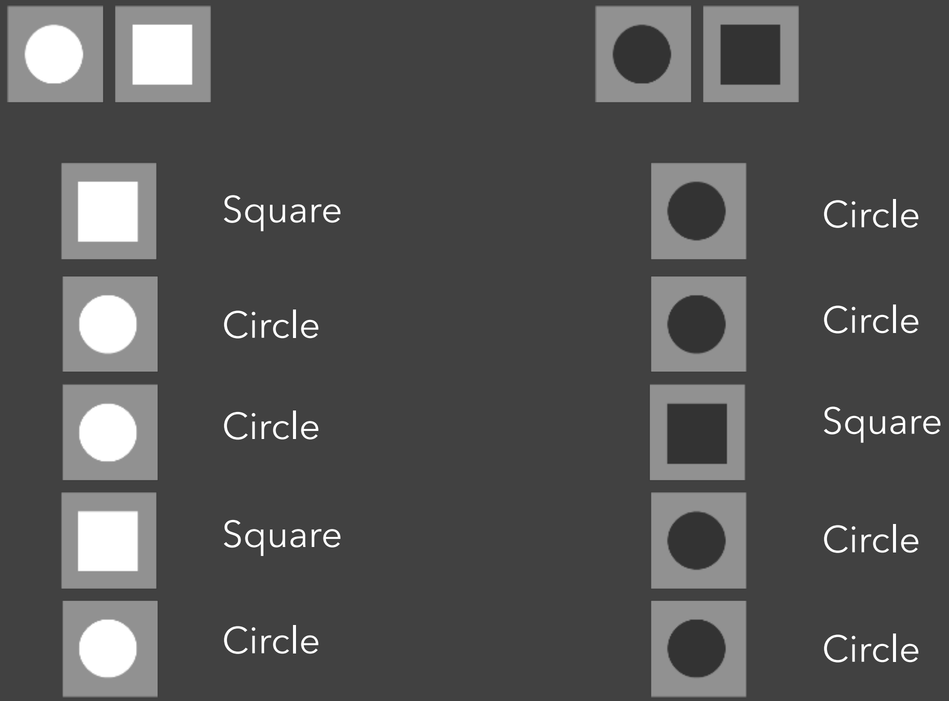
QUANTITATIVE	ORDINAL	NOMINAL
Position	Position	Position
Length	Density (Value)	Color Hue
Angle	Color Sat	Texture
Slope	Color Hue	Connection
Area (Size)	Texture	Containment
Volume	Connection	Density (Value)
Density (Value)	Containment	Color Sat
Color Sat	Length	Shape
Color Hue	Angle	Length
Texture	Slope	Angle
Connection	Area (Size)	Slope
Containment	Volume	Area
Shape	Shape	Volume

Multiple Attributes

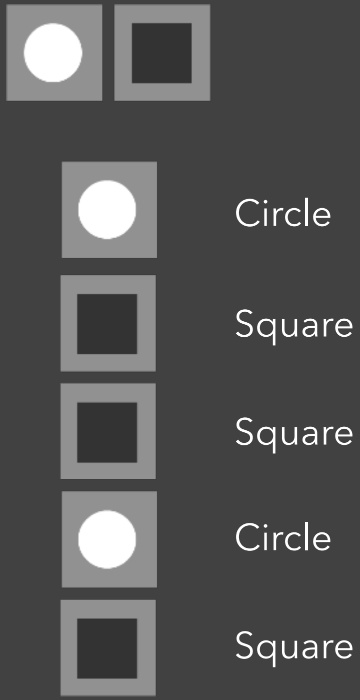
One-Dimensional: Lightness

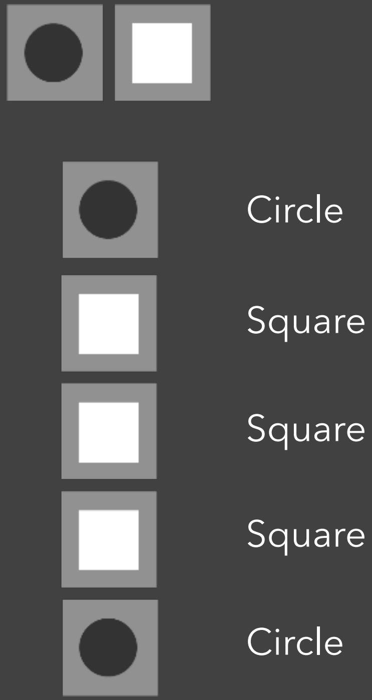


One-Dimensional: Shape

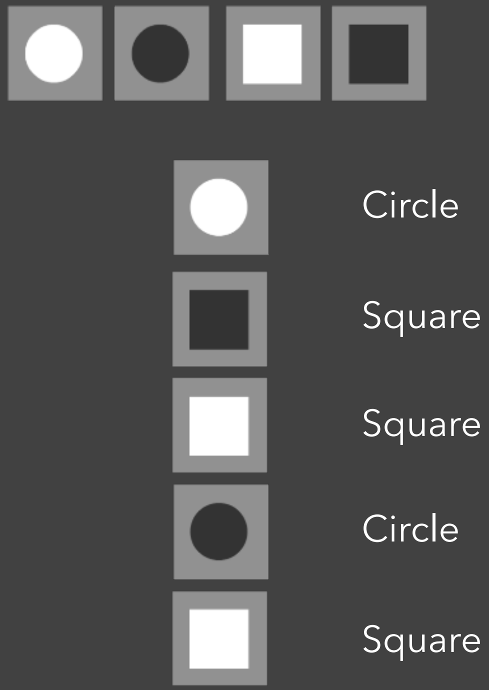


Redundant: Shape & Lightness





Orthogonal: Shape & Lightness



Speeded Classification

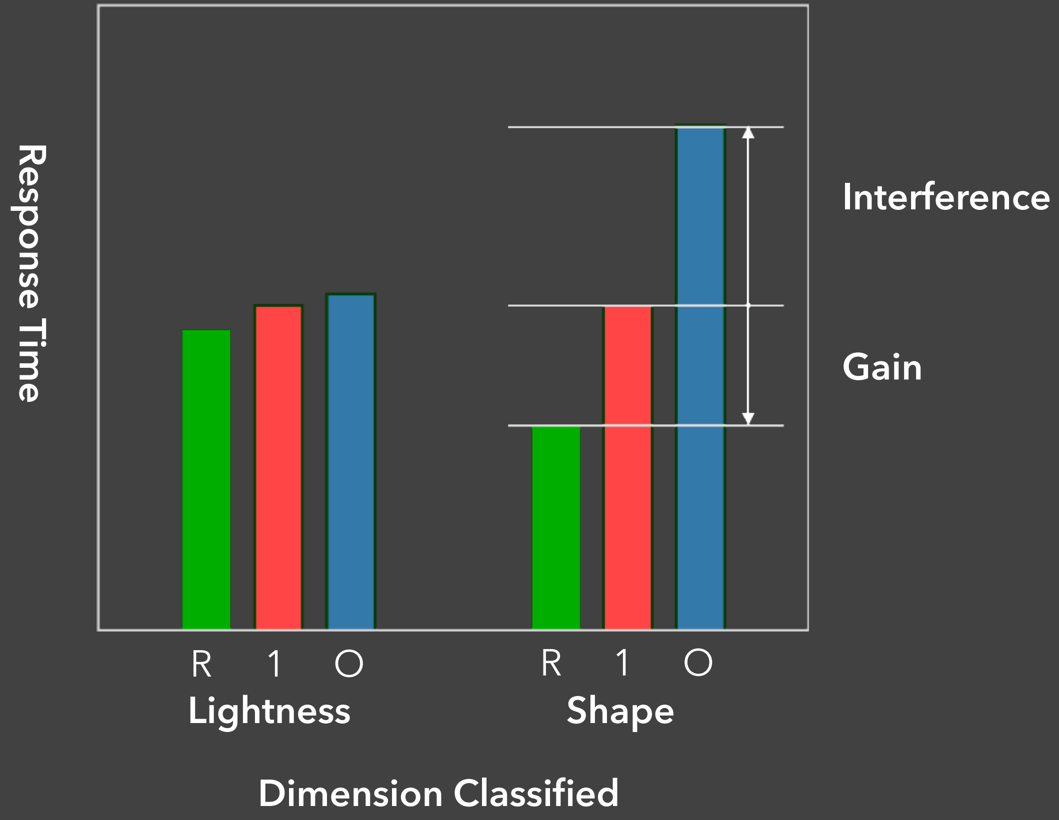
Redundancy Gain

Facilitation in reading one dimension when the other provides redundant information

Filtering Interference

Difficulty in ignoring one dimension while attending to the other

Speeded Classification



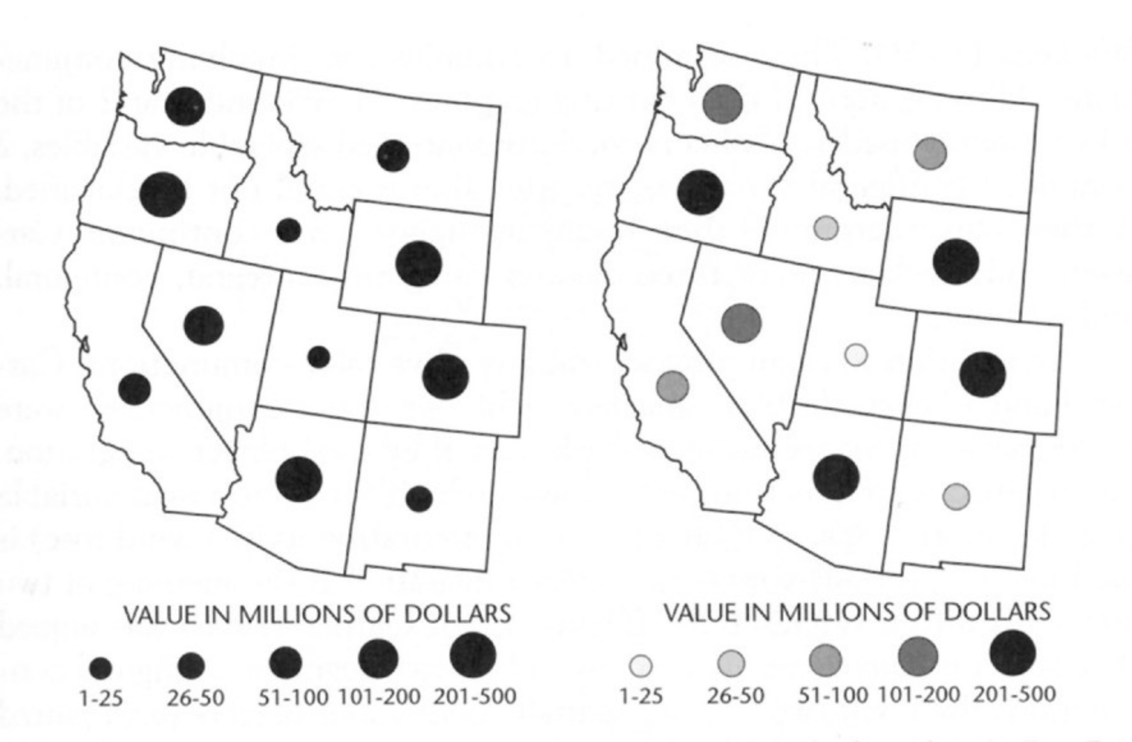
Types of Perceptual Dimensions

Integral
Filtering interference and redundancy gain

Separable
No interference or gain

Asymmetric
One dim separable from other, not vice versa

Size and Brightness



W. S. Dobson, Visual information processing and cartographic communication: The role of redundant stimulus dimensions, 1983 (reprinted in MacEachren, 1995)

Orientation & Size

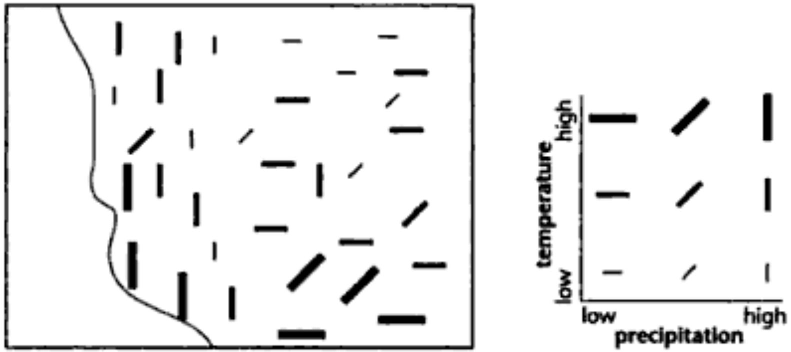


FIGURE 3.36. A map of temperature and precipitation using symbol size and orientation to represent data values on the two variables.

How well can you see temperature or precipitation?

Is there a correlation between the two?

[MacEachren 95]

Length & Length

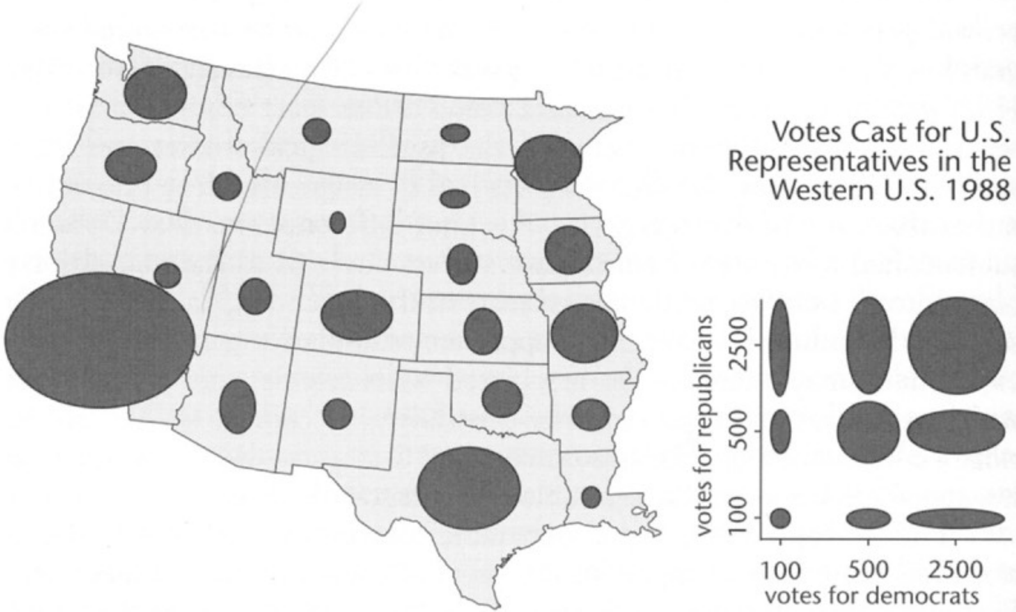


FIGURE 3.38. An example of the use of an ellipse as a map symbol in which the horizontal and vertical axes represent different (but presumably related) variables.

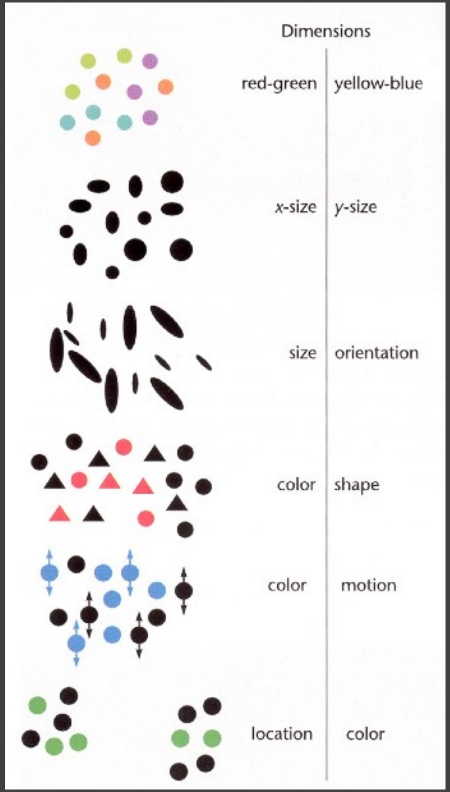
[MacEachren 95]

Angle & Angle

FIGURE 3.39. Bivariate map of NO_3 and SO_4 trends. The original Carr et al. version of this map used a wheel with eight spokes, rather than a simple dot, as the center of each glyph. When large enough, this added feature facilitates judgment of specific values. *After Carr et al. (1992, Fig. 7a, p. 234). Adapted by permission of the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping.*

[MacEachren 95]

Summary of Integral & Separable



[Figure 5.25, Color Plate 10, Ware 2000]

Set

Each card has **4 features**:

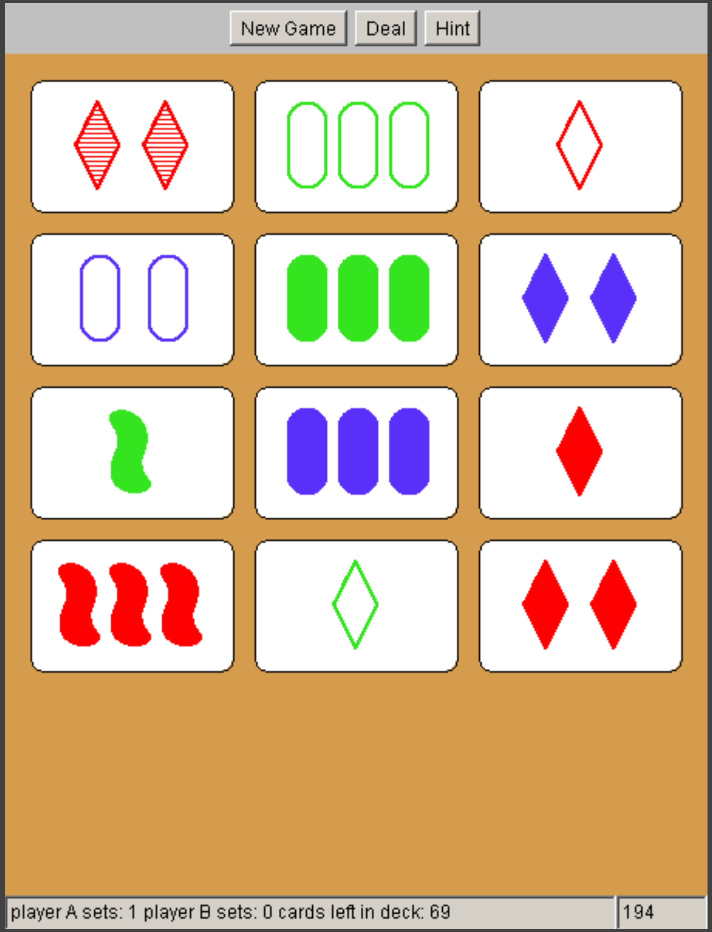
Color

Symbol

Number

Shading/Texture

A set consists of 3 cards in which each feature is the SAME or DIFFERENT on each card.



Pre-Attentive Processing

How Many 3's?

1281768756138976546984506985604982826762
9809858458224509856458945098450980943585
9091030209905959595772564675050678904567
8845789809821677654876364908560912949686

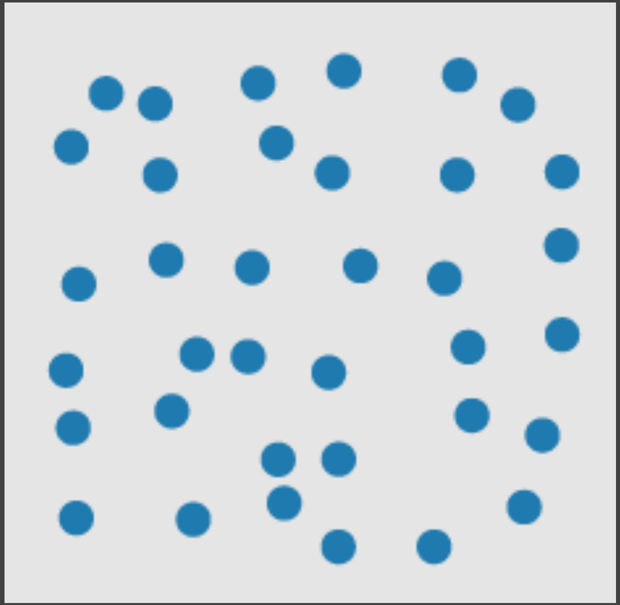
[based on a slide from J. Stasko]

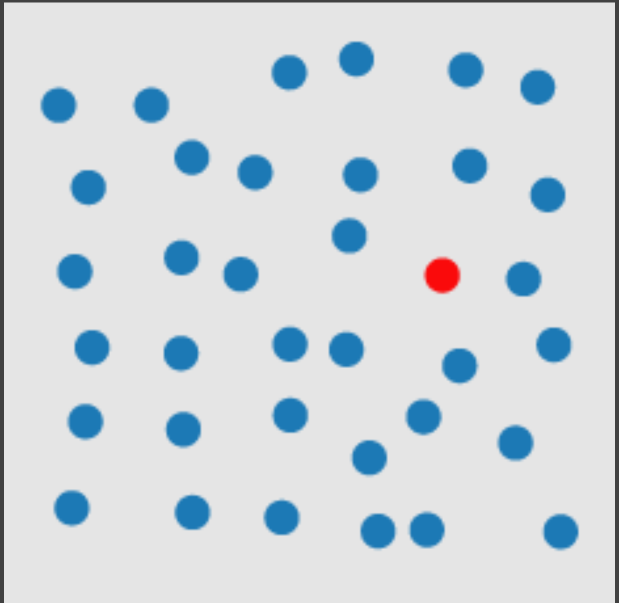
How Many 3's?

1281768756138976546984506985604982826762
9809858458224509856458945098450980943585
9091030209905959595772564675050678904567
8845789809821677654876364908560912949686

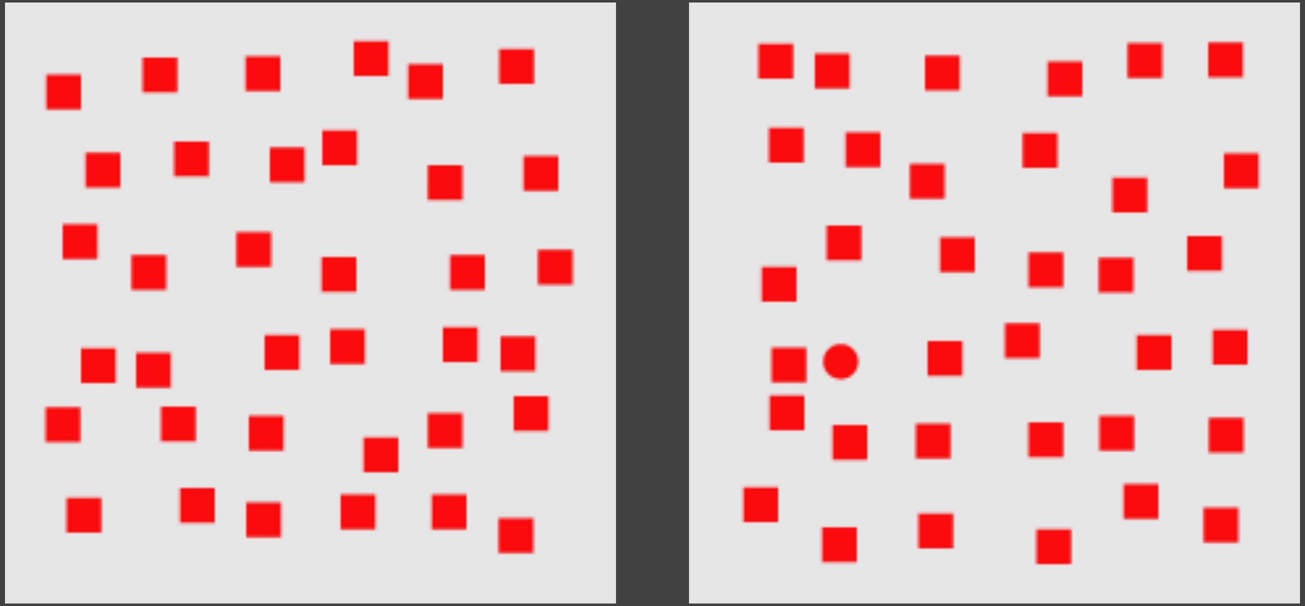
[based on a slide from J. Stasko]

Visual Pop-Out: Color

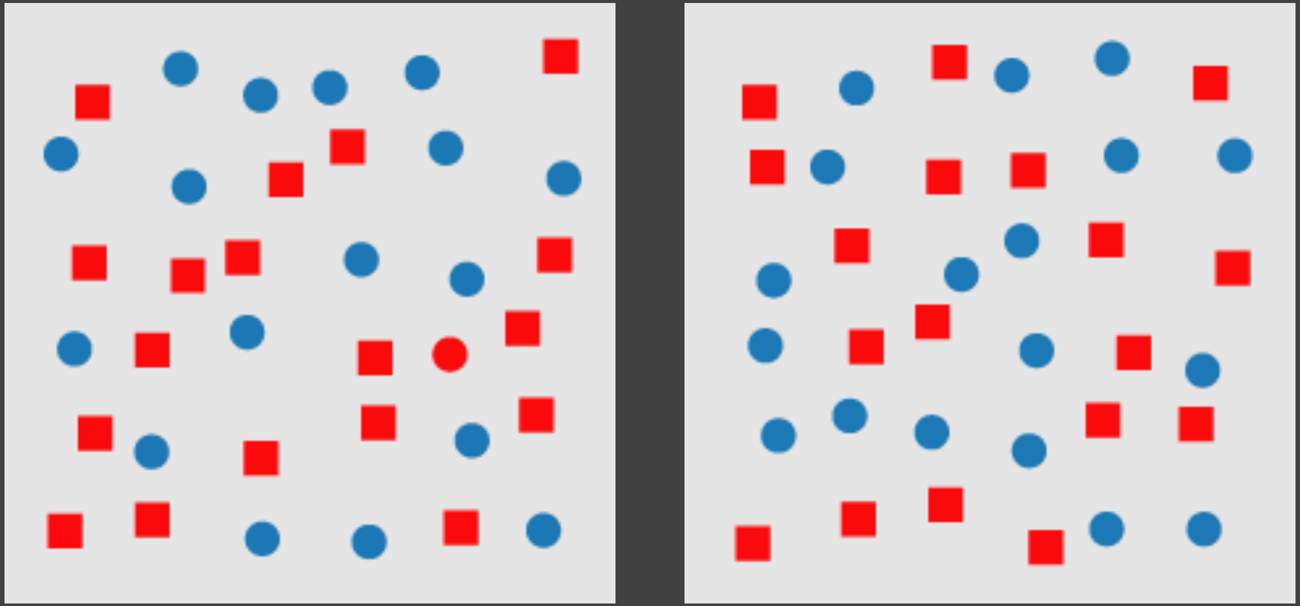




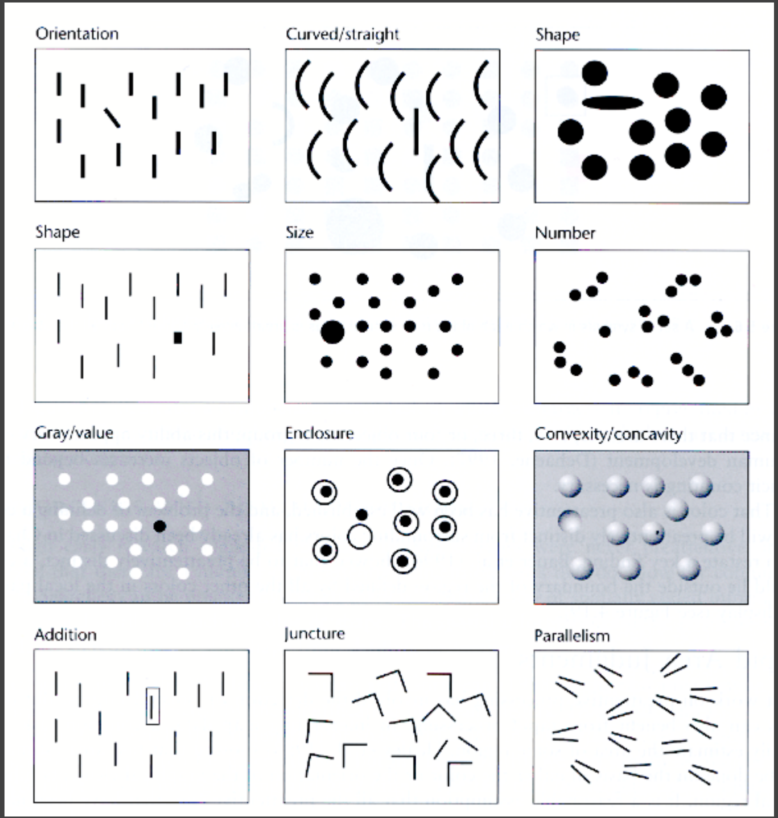
Visual Pop-Out: Shape



Feature Conjunctions



Pre-Attentive Features



[Information Visualization. Figure 5. 5 Ware 04]

More Pre-Attentive Features

Line (blob) orientation	Julesz & Bergen [1983]; Wolfe et al. [1992]
Length	Treisman & Gormican [1988]
Width	Julesz [1985]
Size	Treisman & Gelade [1980]
Curvature	Treisman & Gormican [1988]
Number	Julesz [1985]; Trick & Pylyshyn [1994]
Terminators	Julesz & Bergen [1983]
Intersection	Julesz & Bergen [1983]
Closure	Enns [1986]; Treisman & Souther [1985]
Colour (hue)	Nagy & Sanchez [1990, 1992]; D'Zmura [1991]; Kawai et al. [1995]; Bauer et al. [1996]
Intensity	Beck et al. [1983]; Treisman & Gormican [1988]
Flicker	Julesz [1971]
Direction of motion	Nakayama & Silverman [1986]; Driver & McLeod [1992]
Binocular lustre	Wolfe & Franzel [1988]
Stereoscopic depth	Nakayama & Silverman [1986]
3-D depth cues	Enns [1990]
Lighting direction	Enns [1990]

Pre-Attentive Conjunctions

Spatial conjunctions are often pre-attentive

Motion and 3D disparity

Motion and color

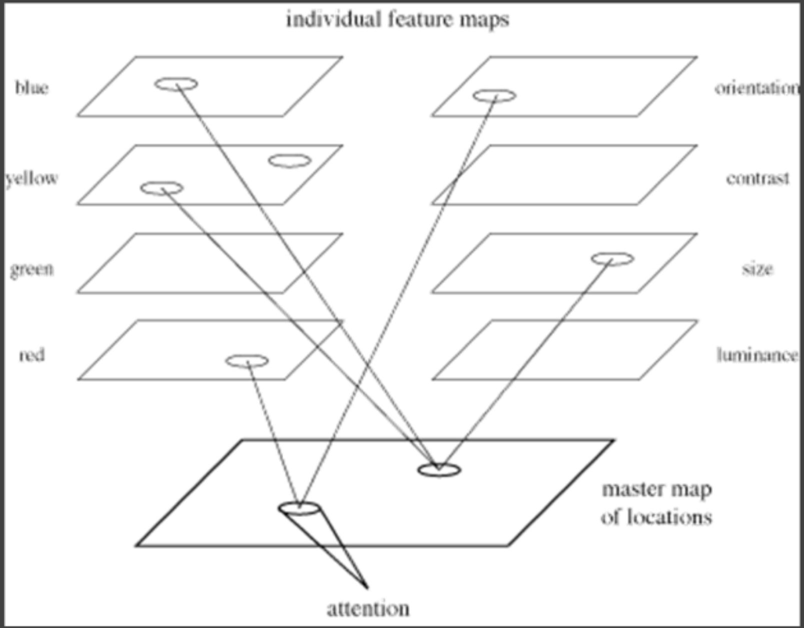
Motion and shape

3D disparity and color

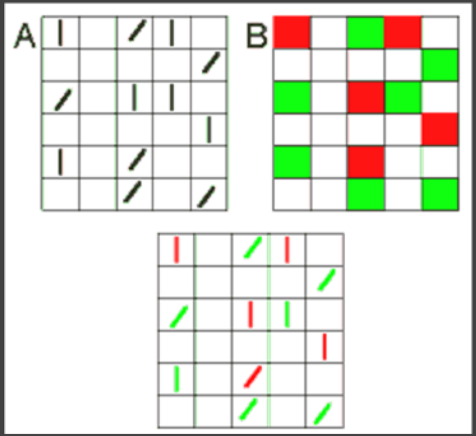
3D disparity and shape

But most conjunctions are NOT pre-attentive

Feature Integration Theory



Treisman's feature integration model [Healey 04]



Feature maps for
orientation & color [Green]

Gestalt Grouping

Gestalt Principles

Figure/Ground

Proximity

Similarity

Symmetry

Connectedness

Continuity

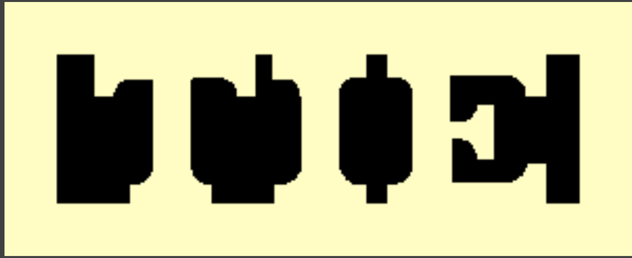
Closure

Common Fate

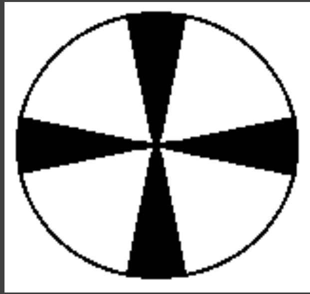
Transparency

Figure/Ground

Ambiguous



Principle of surroundedness

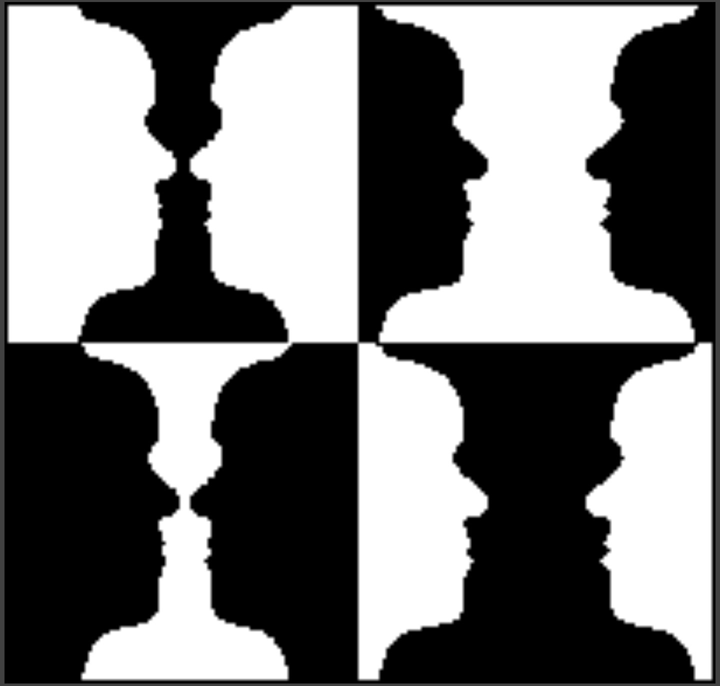


Principle of relative size

http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Modules/MC10220/visper07.html

Figure/Ground

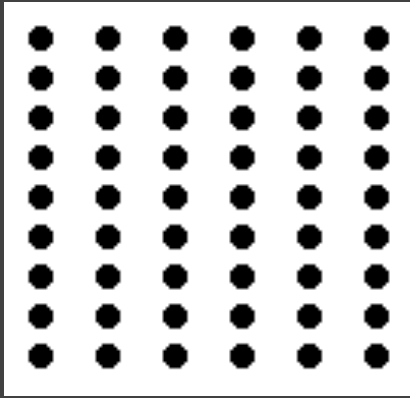
Ambiguous

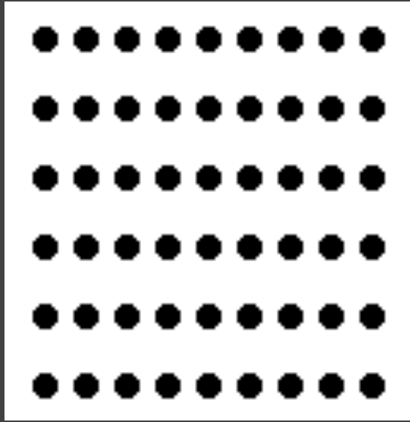


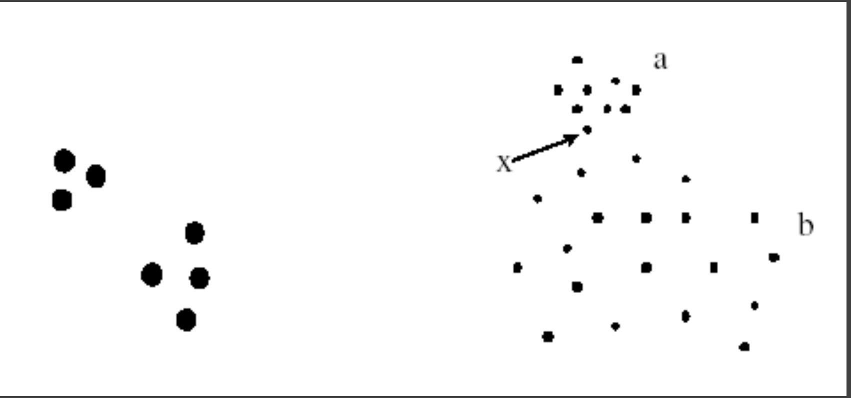
Unambiguous (?)

http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Modules/MC10220/visper07.html

Proximity

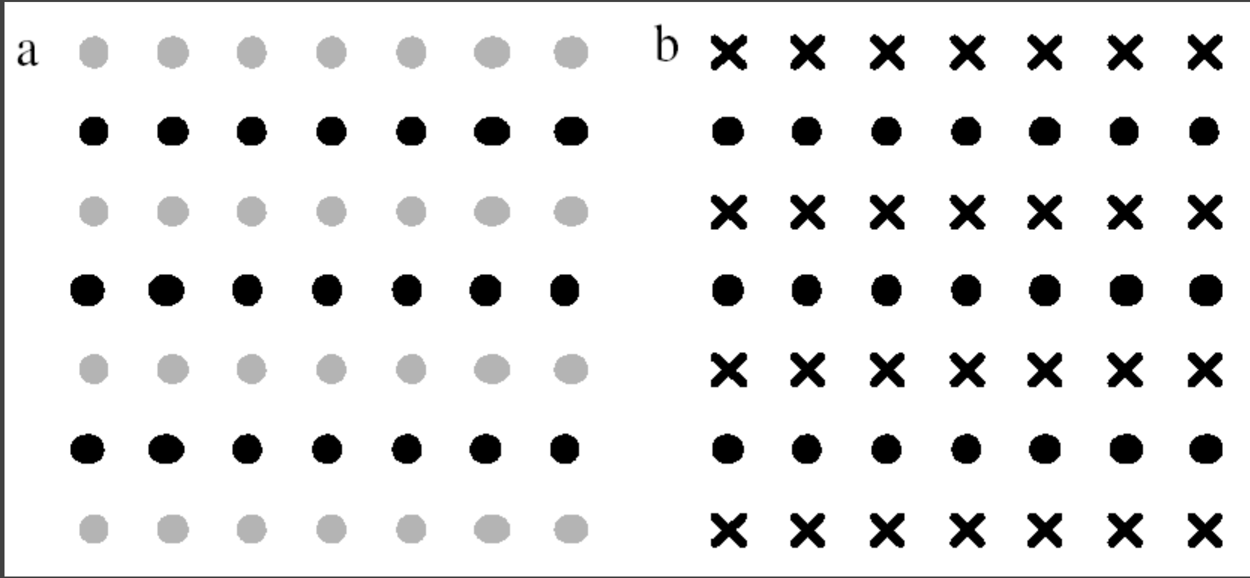






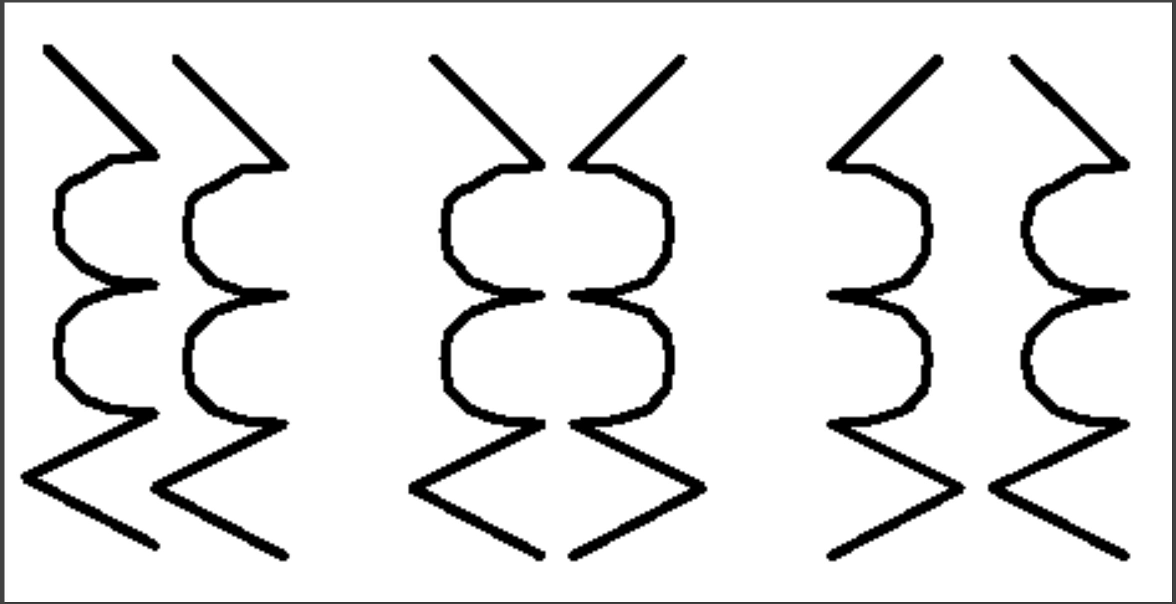
[Ware '00]

Similarity



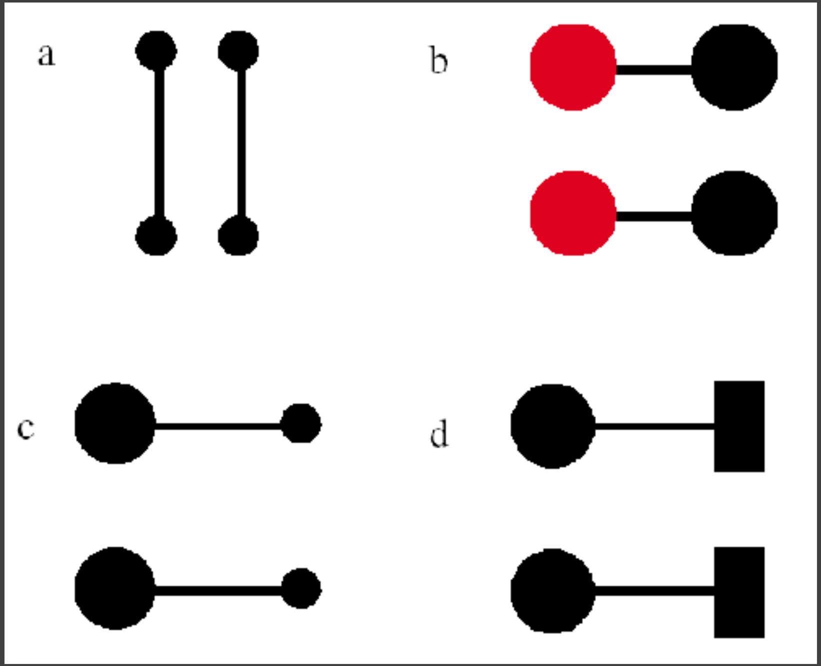
Rows dominate due to similarity [from Ware '04]

Symmetry



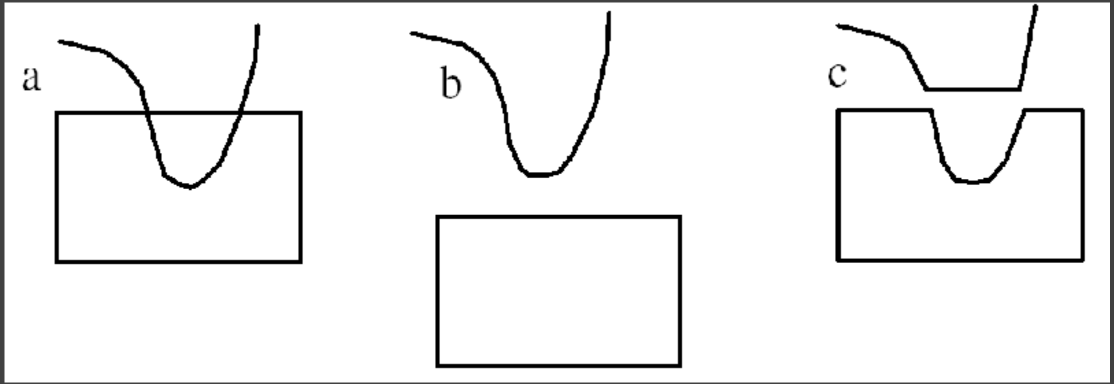
Bilateral symmetry gives strong sense of figure [from Ware '04]

Connectedness

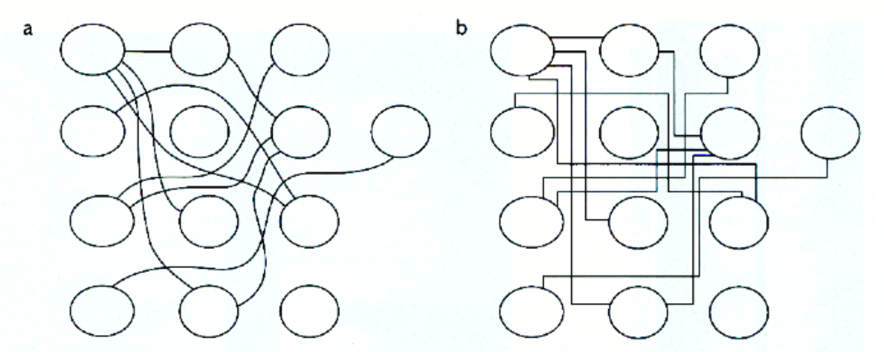


Connectedness overrules proximity, size, color shape [from Ware '04]

Continuity

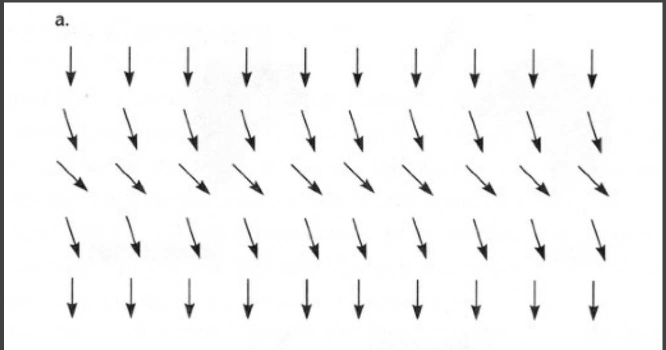


We prefer smooth not abrupt changes [from Ware '04]

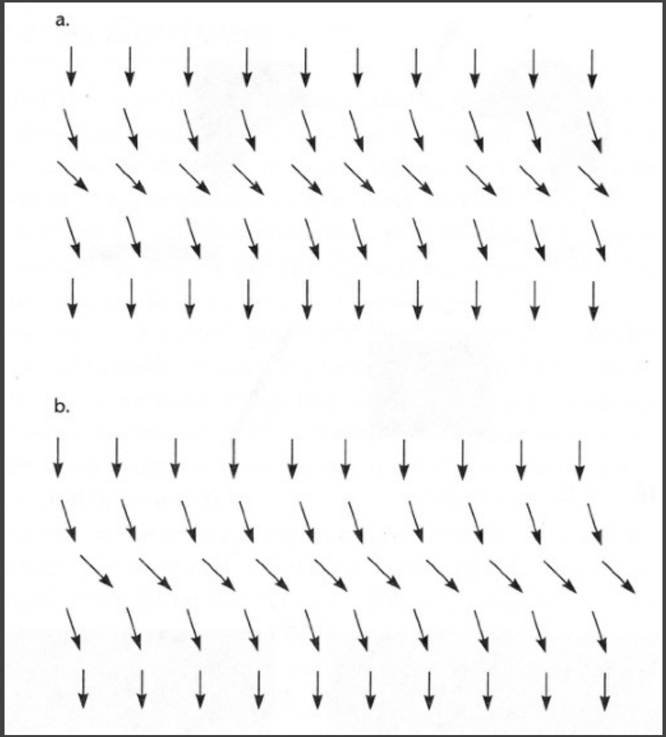


Connections are clearer with smooth contours [from Ware '04]

Continuity: Vector Fields

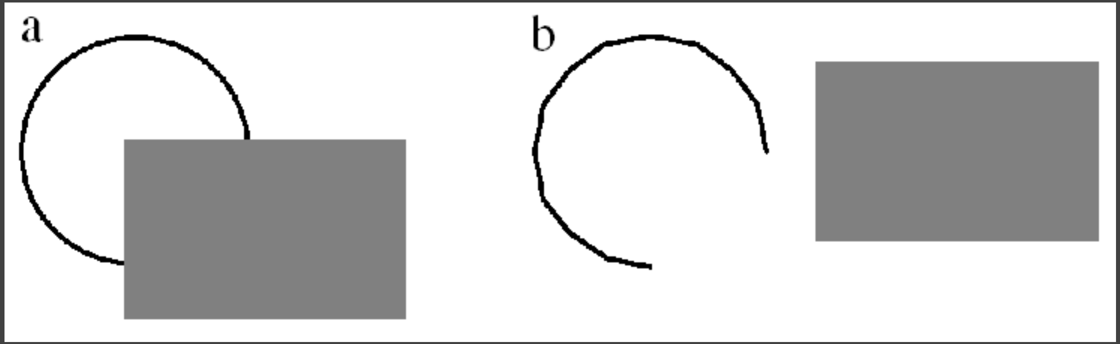


Continuity: Vector Fields

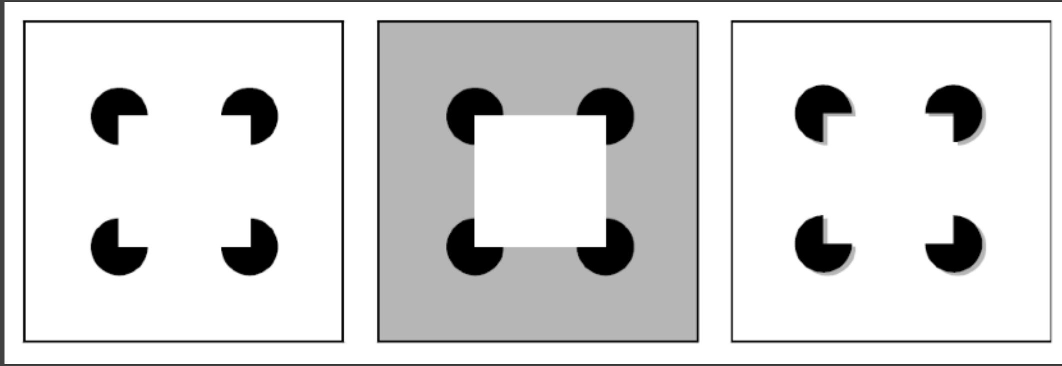


Prefer field that shows smooth continuous contours [from Ware '04]

Closure

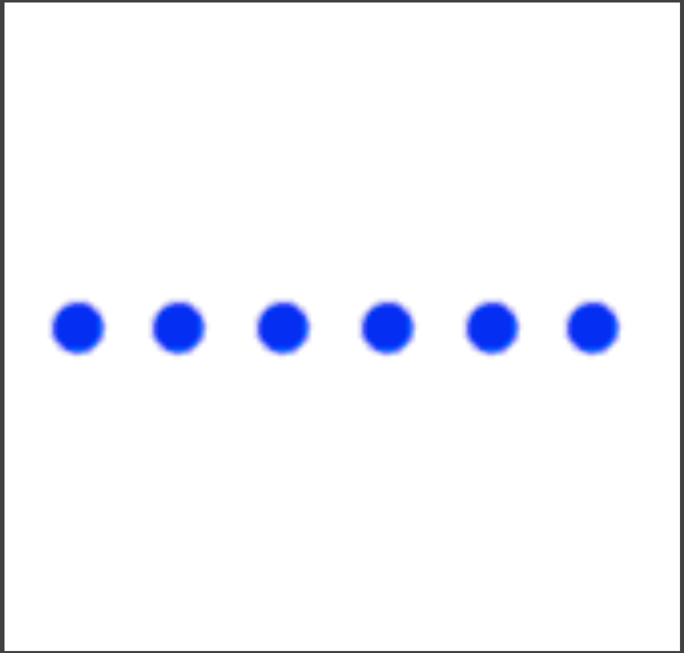


We see a circle behind a rectangle, not a broken circle [from Ware ’04]



Illusory contours [from Durand ’02]

Common Fate



Dots moving together are grouped

Transparency

Requires continuity and proper color correspondence [from Ware '04]

Change Blindness

Change Blindness

Change Blindness

Change Blindness

Change Blindness

Change Blindness

[Example from Palmer 99, originally due to Rock]

Demonstrations

https://www2.psych.ubc.ca/~rensink/flicker/download/

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4

Summary

Choosing effective visual encodings requires knowledge of visual perception.

Visual features/attributes
Individual attributes often pre-attentive
Multiple attributes may be separable or integral

Gestalt principles provide high-level guidelines

We don’t always see everything that is there!