

Fundamentals of ITEC and Design

Gestalt Laws and Principles of Perception

By

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Gestalt Laws and Principles of Perception

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Introduction

Gestalt Laws and principles of perception are key to understanding visual presentation. Virtually every instructional design has a visual element, whether it is traditional paper-based materials, classroom presentations or websites. In the introduction course to instructional design at San Francisco State University (ITEC800), visual design principles are not well explained or illustrated. While the sheer volume of knowledge covered during the course precludes an in-depth study of this single topic, an overview is considered crucial, yet concise and memorable learning materials are scarce. This project provides an instructional unit developed in Macromedia Flash (Flash) to accompany and augment the course as a distance education module. It can be used as an introduction, or as a review of Gestalt Laws and principles of perception.

This paper is organized following the ADDIE phases of the Traditional Model of instructional systems design. What is presented here is a comprehensive design, not a finished product. Some of the design features could not be developed in time for presentation and were omitted. In some cases substitution have been emplaced to represent those features.

View this project online at <http://www.chrismary.com/gestalt/index.htm>

Analysis

This section includes the needs analysis, learner analysis, context analysis and topic analysis.

Needs Analysis

This section will identify the performance gap that exists in the current instruction by analyzing the needs of the students and the current instructor. As current and former students in ITEC800 at San Francisco State, the design team draws on personal classroom experience as well as casual conversations with the instructor and peers.

As a requirement of the ITEC department, students learn skills in various media technologies such as video production, website construction, and animation. ITEC800 instructional material, on the other hand, rarely uses these media in class presentations. Students, therefore, gain little insight into the effectiveness of these technologies. Flash animation is one of these technologies. It has been demonstrated to be effective at gaining student attention.

A minor topic of the course is Gestalt Theory and Principles of Design covering a mere few pages of the inch-thick course reader, yet visual design is a significant aspect of much of the ITEC program course work. Clearly a gap exists between course materials and student need for instruction. The current instructor, Dr. Foreman, has identified the needs¹ as:

1. A memorable overview of the principles of Gestalt psychology – the content should cover enough material to demonstrate the broad scope of the topic but limited to a single, 30-minute module of instruction.
2. An effective and accessible Distance Education format – simple, clear demonstration of the principles available to any student at any time.
3. Instructional design that uses modern technologies – the module must provide an example of how students might use these technologies in their own designs.

Our findings suggest that a performance gap exists in ITEC800 in the topic of Gestalt theory and that both the students and the instructor would benefit from an instructional program viewable built with Flash animation delivered via website.

¹ These specific needs were ascertained by casual interviews with Dr. Foreman early in the project and confirmed by email formally on December 9, 2003.

Learner Analysis

The design team opted to forgo in-depth formal analysis for the sake of expediency. As current and former students in ITEC800 at San Francisco State the team was able to draw from personal experience, observation, and discussion with peers. The characteristics below were determined:

1. The target audience is first semester graduate students enrolled in ITEC 800 although enrollment in graduate study is not a prerequisite to this instructional module.
2. Learners have a high affinity for instructional materials that use modern media. They perceive these as not only as interesting lessons but also as examples of how they might construct interesting and memorable instruction.
3. Learners especially like what is new and visual. Discoveries of new and interesting instructional websites are eagerly shared.
4. Learners attend classes either from 4-7pm or 7-10pm. Very little time is spent on campus. Most are not available during the daytime to use computer labs and the library.
5. Learners depend on online resources that can be accessed from their daytime jobs or from home.
6. Access to computers and the Internet is universal and computer competency is high.
7. Learners have high ability for self-guided instruction.

Based on these characteristics, a brief, visually stimulating, self-guided online module using Macromedia Flash (Flash) is likely to provide an effective learning experience for our target audience. The technologies and prerequisites skills necessary to use this instructional module should be familiar and accessible to every student in the target audience. To verify our assumptions, a survey was distributed among current ITEC800 members to determine specifics about computer and Internet usage. The survey instrument with results is included in Appendix A. The results indicate that a Flash module delivered through a website or through Blackboard would be available to all learners. No limitations on computer skills or technology are present that would present barriers to accessing and using such an instructional presentation.

Context Analysis

This section discusses the orienting context, instructional atmosphere, access to equipment, the learner's motivation, the learner's perceived utility of the instruction, and the transfer context. As current and former students in ITEC800 at San Francisco State, the design team draws on personal classroom experience as well as casual conversations with the instructor and peers.

1. Students receive instruction in class for up to 3 hours per week. The classroom is equipped with one Macintosh computer, one PC computer, a projector and a projection screen. The computers have high-speed Internet access and carry recent if not the latest versions of multimedia software including Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer and related plug-ins, such as Shockwave, RealAudio, etc. An adjacent computer lab is available for students. The class also has a website that hosts instructional materials, resources and projects.
2. The atmosphere is relaxed. Students are free to arrange seating so they can work in groups and to have a comfortable view of the screen. The instructor controls the content. No discussion board or other device except email facilitates students to post feedback or information to share with classmates.
3. Most students perform computer-based activities at home or at work. High-speed Internet connections cannot be assumed. Websites and resources of small file size therefore offer greater incentive for exploration.
4. This module provides a solid demonstration of Gestalt theory through a brief and interesting self-guided instructional presentation that includes vivid examples through images and animation.
5. This module may be a replacement of current text-based instruction.
6. This module serves as a refresher before a midterm or final exam.
7. Understanding Gestalt principles and how they shape our perception of the environment provides comprehension for using these principles in graphic design and the development of instruction.
8. Because this module is a product of their peers in the department, students can look to it as an example and guide for producing modules of their own.

Because the proposed intervention is a distance education module, specifics about the learning environment cannot be fully assessed. How the module is presented and reinforced by the instructor and whether the learner views it in class, in a computer lab, or through the Internet at home or at work will alter the context for the learner

Topic Analysis

This project measures performance based on the accumulation of knowledge and cognitive skills. A topic analysis was therefore chosen. Below are the topics this project covers in an overview of the visual aspects of Gestalt theory and the principles of perception.

- 1) Gestalt Laws – define, illustrate, give examples, provide related information, direct the learner to resources for further study
 - a) Proximity (Contiguity)
 - b) Similarity
 - c) Closure
 - d) Common Fate (Shape from Motion)
 - e) Figure and Ground
 - f) Continuity or Good Continuation
- 2) Principles of Perception - define, illustrate, give examples, provide related information, direct the learner to resources for further study
 - a) Area
 - b) Change
 - c) Color
- 3) Pioneers of Gestalt
 - a) Max Wertheimer
 - b) Kurt Koffka
 - c) Wolfgang Kohler
- 4) Resources
 - a) Links to other websites for further study of the topics
 - b) Links to other websites that provide information on non-visual aspects of Gestalt theory

The topics covered here is not the entire scope of Gestalt theory and principles of visual perception. Our purpose is to reinforce topics covered in ITEC800 and provide direction for further study.

Design

The design team consists of three people collaborating using the ADDIE model as a guide. One concentrated on Analysis, another on Design and Development, and the third on Implementation and Evaluation. Contributions are not mutually exclusive; the members collaborate across all phases. This is technically rapid prototype instructional design since corners were cut to ensure that this project is delivered by the deadline.

Instructional Objectives

The list below contains cognitive and behavioral objectives that inform the learner what she or he is expected to know or do as a result of completing this instructional intervention.

Given the material in this module, learners will be able to:

- 1) Understand the theory of Gestalt Law and principles of perception
 - A) Identify the laws of Proximity, Similarity, Closure and Common Fate in use
 - B) Define the laws of Proximity, Similarity, Closure and Common Fate
 - C) Construct examples
- 2) Understand principles of perception for Area, Change and Color
 - A) Identify the principles of Area, Change and Color in use.
 - B) Define the principles of Area, Change and Color
 - C) Construct examples
- 3) Identify the concepts of Figure/Ground, and Continuity (Good Continuation) in use
- 4) Name the three pioneers of Gestalt
- 5) Score 80% or better on the online assessment quizzes

Because of the important nature of this material to the learner's overall performance in the ITEC program, and because the scope of this project only touches on the visual design aspects of Gestalt theory, demonstration of an understanding of 80% or better is considered a reasonable objective. The intent is to ensure that enough material is understood so that the learner obtains the primary objective.

Instructional Unit

This instructional unit is a single module prototype for a series of DE instruction in the Fundamentals of ITEC and Design. Macromedia Flash is used to create an interactive website. It is meant to be capable of standing alone or to be expanded into a series of modules spanning the whole of this topic. This particular module covers Gestalt Laws and Principles of Perception. The time necessary to complete the module is approximately 30 minutes.

The module is constructed using Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction as a guideline.

1. Gaining Attention
2. Informing the learner of the objective
3. Stimulating recall of prior learning
4. Presenting the stimulus
5. Providing learner guidance
6. Eliciting performance
7. Providing feedback
8. Assessing performance
9. Enhancing retention and transfer

This was chosen because it is an effective model of organization and because it coincides with other ITEC800 material. The learning experience is enhanced by serving as an example for students who are exposed to Gagne' approximately simultaneously. This is especially significant if this module is to be used to review before exams.

The overall plan for this module is to provide a visually stimulating experience that gains and keeps attention by virtue of small, entertaining chunks of information in a hierarchy of levels. Visual appeal in form and color are essential as is an easy-to-follow navigation scheme. This module combines an entertaining experience with opportunity for more challenging exploration. The introduction uses animation to gain attention and then presents the learning objectives. Questions are posed to stimulate thinking and prior learning on the subject of visual perception. The learner chooses when to continue by clicking "Next". The first level of each section introduces a selection of topics via an animated example of the law or principle combined with a brief description. Text is minimized to keep the experience memorable. The topic title serves as a button to the next level; the topic is isolated there and expanded to fill the screen with a rich resource of further examples, deeper explanations and links to interesting websites and the resource page. This level may contain more text. The third level is the links to outside websites. Links combined on a resource page provide deep exploration of Gestalt theory.

A section for Gestalt, Principles of Perception, and the founders of Gestalt theory will conclude with short assessments. Interactive quizzes (matching, multiple-choice, etc.) will elicit performance and provide instant feedback. The entire module concludes with overall assessment activities including interactive games such as a crossword puzzle and an opportunity to perform more complex demonstrations such as providing written response to a series of questions and constructing examples. An email link will deliver the responses to the class instructor.

This design represents the ideal product, the one that would be constructed given sufficient time, resources and skills. The models that were constructed provide a view into this design but cannot fully achieve the simplicity, beauty and ease of use envisioned in the ideal.

Instructional Activities

The current version of this interactive website will use Flash action scripting and HTML with JavaScript to provide interactivity. The design team envisions the entire module to eventually incorporate all features into one single Flash movie. These features include:

- Animated instructional movies embedded into the webpages and Flash file.
- Links from each topic that present more information. Currently the content is displayed in pop-up windows activated through links on a navigation bar to the left of the Flash movie. Ultimately the content would display within the Flash movie.
- Links in the pop-up windows to websites for further study. Currently these links lead to a Resources page that can also be accessed through a link on the navigation bar.
- Multiple-choice quizzes at the conclusion of each section. Currently HTML/JavaScript.
- End of module assessment activities: a crossword puzzle and a test (multiple-choice, fill in the blank, true or false, and drag and drop matching). Feedback is immediate.
- More in-depth assessment poses situations and exercises to the learner who will submit responses via email links. Email links and subjective response questions (providing examples) have not been incorporated into the present design due to lack of time. The design team will work with the ITEC800 instructor to prepare those activities if and when the module is implemented.

Development

A formal plan never materialized for this project. Initial meetings developed the topics and a separation of duties that was lacking in detail. Individual efforts were coordinated by email and in meetings in and out of the classroom. The product took shape over the course of several weeks. The following is more of a Development History than a precise plan of action.

Development Plan

One product design was developed along two pathways for the sake of expediency. The development proceeded in a manner that allowed the intended features to be demonstrated in time for presentation. Work towards the look and feel of the ultimate Flash design continued along one path while along the other content was researched and developed by incorporating original images and Flash movies into HTML files. Storyboards and outlines laid out the visual and content elements. JavaScript pop-up windows accessed through the navigation bar served to provide further information on the topics and a deeper level of functionality. If time permitted, content and resources links would be merged into the Flash movie and eliminate the need for HTML pages. This final phase was not completed.

Assessment instruments followed the same course. The ability to build, test and refine original Flash interactive assessment instruments was beyond the time limitations of the project and perhaps beyond the current technical skills of the design team. Flash assessment files were borrowed and modified. Preliminary testing showed them to be lacking in functionality so, again, HTML pages using JavaScript were inserted. These pages are simple multiple-choice quizzes that are accessed through the navigation bar. Since they are limited in their ability to fully assess the learning objectives and provide feedback, they serve in representation of fully developed Flash units.

Whole sections of the module were not completed. An overview of the founders of Gestalt theory was scrapped and replaced with a mention on the Resource page. Interactive assessment by email was considered inappropriate to include without direct involvement of the ITEC800 instructor. The intent was to complete construction well before the presentation to give time for usability testing. Because the ideal product did not emerge as rapidly as proposed, the final product is lacking in simple and intuitive navigation and relies on a mix of technologies.

Implementation

This section will identify the methods for ensuring that this instructional module is presented to the target audience, ITEC800 students. Dr. Foreman has already stated that she is eager to use this project for her ITEC800 classes. Approval by Dr. Foreman is the most crucial step in this plan. She is aware of the project and will review it at the end of the semester. In the past she has used student projects as in-class presentations and as resources on the ITEC800 website.

Several options exist for implementation of this instructional module into the ITEC800 curriculum:

1. The instructional module is uploaded to the ITEC800 website where it will be available to all. That website already contains an email link to the current instructor, Dr. Foreman, allowing her to respond to feedback and act as support to the material.
2. Pre-Activity – learners access the module outside of class as a prerequisite to reading the article on Gestalt. Load the module into the Blackboard section for the class.
3. Simultaneous - the instructor presents the module in class in conjunction with the corresponding material in the course reader. Module loaded onto computer from disc.
4. Review – learners access the Flash unit as a review activity prior to taking a test of the information.
5. In Class Alternatives – learners view the module prior to participating in group activities.

Since the object for the design team is to produce a useful instructional module regardless of adoption by the ITEC800 curriculum, other paths of implementation may be chosen. By publishing this module to an independent website, it would still be available as an alternative to current online resources. In this case, it would exist as an unsupported, stand-alone unit with no email links.

The design team has carefully considered the options for implementation and determined that the ones presented here offer the full range of possibilities.

Evaluation

Formative and summative evaluation were employed to provide feedback on the design and to discover whether this module improves performance.

Evaluation Strategies:

Formative:

1. Impartial reviewers evaluated the initial Flash file and first batch of webpage templates for visual appeal and usability upon completion. Available subjects were chosen from local high school students and faculty. The procedure was informal.
2. Assessment instruments were chosen, completed by test subjects and reviewed for clarity, reliability and validity. This evaluation informally measured reaction and learning.
3. The module in its presentation version was subject to peer review. Evaluations sheets measuring reaction were distributed and filled out by peers in the ITEC department within and outside this class (see Appendix B).

Summative:

1. Learning is evaluated within the unit by multiple-choice quizzes at the end of each section that test whether learning objectives are met (see Appendix B).
2. Matching, true-or-false, and multiple-choice questions end the module. These and interactive games assess learning.
3. Open ended questions request written responses and the construction of examples. These will be emailed to the class instructor. This section may test for reaction, learning or behavior depending upon their construction. This area is not included in the presentation version of this module.

Due to time constraints, assessment instruments used in the presentation version of this module are lacking in solid demonstration of their ability to test whether learning objectives are met. The ones presented stand in place of more sophisticated instruments proposed for the final product.

Conclusion

This project succeeds in designing a useful instructional module to augment classroom instruction for Instructional Technology students taking ITEC800 at San Francisco State University. Upon full development and implementation of this module a fuller presentation of Gestalt Laws and principles of perception can be made readily available to learners. Due to the short duration of this project, development did not conclude with a finished product. What is presented is a hybrid of technologies containing most of the proposed features but lacking in content and adequate assessment instruments.

This paper is but one of two submitted by the design team. Differences in perception could not be contained in a single document. If this project offers a view into the real world of Instructional Systems Design, it highlights the need for clear planning, documentation and communication. Rapid design and development such as this must especially rely on a solid understanding of the ID process.

Appendix A

Learner Survey **RESULTS (total responses 14)** In Class Portion

Complete this portion and return to Liana NOW!

I have access to a computer (circle one) at home **13** at work **11** at SFSU **8**

How much RAM is there? (PC users right click on **My Computer**. Select Properties> General tab. The RAM should be listed toward the bottom) Mac users select About this computer> Apple menu. The RAM is listed under Built in Memory

1 Gig, 3 ; 256, 3; 512, 3

I use the computer for? (circle all that apply)

- 14** Email
- 12** Work tasks
- 14** Word processing (school papers etc...)
- 14** Browsing the Internet
- 10** Shopping
- 13** Downloading information
- 13** Research
- 10** Chat/Online Forums
- 12** Multimedia Art

I use **Netscape (3)** or **Internet Explorer (12)** as a browser (choose one or write it in if it is different).
Mozilla (2), Safari (2)

What version is it? Find this by opening your browser window and selecting Help>About Internet Explorer /Netscape **IE 5(2), 6.0,5.0,5.5. Netscape 7, 7.1. Safari 6, 2 Beta**

I connect to the Internet via (circle one) dial up modem (**5**), cable modem (**5**), DSL or T1 line.(**10**)

I view video/streaming video on my computer (circle one) Yes (**11**) No.(**4**)

I have experience using Blackboard (circle one). None (**1**) A little (**7**) A lot (**5**) I am an expert at using Blackboard.(**1**)

If you have experience using Blackboard, please tell us your impressions of it. What do you like about it? What don't you like?

- 1. Log in slow, java applet loads very slowly**
- 2. It's great**
- 3. Some issues, ok I guess**
- 4. Very good tool if someone is a moderator**
- 5. A great tool, but each iteration makes changes that screw things up.**
- 6. I like being able to get in touch with professors and classmates**
- 7. I like the discussion boards and file exchange. I don't like the fact that when you send an email, you don't know if everyone got it.**
- 8. It is awful, everything.**
- 9. Only as good as the community**
- 10. Blackboard is ok, it gives quick access to class information, and it helps with projects and when action with fellow classmates.**
- 11. It provides a standard format for all classes.**

Appendix B

1. Online assessment – Gestalt Quiz

2. Course Evaluation Forms

George Dechant

Juan Valladares

Ken Wischmeyer

Gestalt Quiz

This script will automatically check your answers for you. Test your knowledge of Gestalt principles.

1. Which law explains our ability to see a shape even when part of its outline is missing?

- Common Fate
- Proximity
- Closure
- Change

2. Which law explains why we tend to group items that are close together?

- Closure
- Common Fate
- Similarity
- Proximity

3. Mentally grouping items by color, texture, size or shape is an example of...?

- Proximity
- Color
- Similarity
- Common Fate

4. While at a concert you notice five people in the crowd headed in the same direction. Your tendency to group them is due to.

- Similarity
- Common Fate
- Good Continuation
- Figure/Ground

(continued)

5. If the same five people were wearing the same uniform you would group them because of...

- Similarity
- Freudian learning
- Common Fate
- Color perception

6. If those same five people were standing together in a circle you would group them because of...

- Similarity
- Common Fate
- Figure/Ground
- Proximity

7. The tendency to treat lines as if they continue is called...?

- Proximity
- Connectionism
- Cognitivism
- Good Continuation

8. We naturally group objects because...?

- we are bored
- the mind tries to make order of what it sees
- similarity overrides proximity
- we are building a network of knowledge

9. Also referred to as Shape-from-Motion

- Connectionism
- Good Continuation
- Common Fate
- Similarity

(continued)

10. Why do we see an X as a crossing of two lines even if we know it was constructed by four lines meeting at the center?

- Continuity or Good Continuation
- Common Fate
- Similarity
- Constructivism

Gestalt Laws and Principles of Perception

PEER EVALUATION – Distance Learning Unit

My Name: George Dechant Design Group Name (s): Fundamentals of ITEC and Design

Instructional Topic: Gestalt Laws and Principles of Perception

For each statement below, select the number that represents your level of agreement with the statement

Please bold and increase the font size of your selection, then save the file with your first name.

Email to cfaust@sfsu.edu

1. Instruction was well organized. *Comments:*

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

2. Instructional activities were used effectively. *Comments:*

5 **4** 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

3. Instructional materials were professional in appearance. *Comments:*

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

4. Instructional content was clear and easy to understand. *Comments:*

5 **4** 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

5. Navigation (directions) was clear and easy to use. *Comments:*

5 **4** 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

6. I learned quite a bit for such a short chunk of instruction. *Comments:*

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

7. Information is organized in a hierarchical matter.
I am able to tell which are main topics, subtopics, etc. *Comments:*

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PEER EVALUATION – Distance Learning Unit

My Name: Ken Wischmeyer Design Group Name (s): Fundamentals of ITEC and Design
Instructional Topic: Gestalt Laws and Principles of Perception

For each statement below, select the number that represents your level of agreement with the statement
Please bold and increase the font size of your selection, then save the file with your first name.

Email to cfaust@sfsu.edu

1. Instruction was well organized. *Comments:*

5 **4** 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

2. Instructional activities were used effectively. *Comments:*

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agree disagree

3. Instructional materials were professional in appearance. *Comments:*

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agree disagree

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strongly strongly
agree disagree

5. Navigation (directions) was clear and easy to use. *Comments:*

5 **4** 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

6. I learned quite a bit for such a short chunk of instruction. *Comments:*

5 **4** 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

7. Information is organized in a hierarchical matter.
I am able to tell which are main topics, subtopics, etc. *Comments:*

5 **4** 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

8. The font size is readable. There is enough spacing and alignment. *Comments:*

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly strongly
agree disagree

9. Overall, this instruction was outstanding! *Comments:*

Gestalt Laws and Principles of Perception

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly agree strongly disagree

10. What I liked most about the instruction:

The graphics and Flash animation are well constructed and professional in appearance. The information was presented in easy to understand “chunks”. The learner is not overwhelmed.

11. What I liked least about the instruction:

Some of the site was not operational:

- 1. The three links in the Resources did not work.**
- 2. There was no “Next” button in the Multiple Choice are of Assessing**

The Quizzes did not tell the user what the correct answer was if they chose wrong and did not let the user try again.

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PEER EVALUATION – Distance Learning Unit

My Name: Juan Valladares Design Group Name (s): Fundamentals of ITEC and Design
Instructional Topic: Gestalt Laws and Principles of Perception

For each statement below, select the number that represents your level of agreement with the statement
Please bold and increase the font size of your selection, then save the file with your first name.

Email to cfaust@sfsu.edu

1. Instruction was well organized.

Comments:

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly agree strongly disagree

2. Instructional activities were used effectively.

Comments:

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly agree strongly disagree

3. Instructional materials were professional in appearance.

Comments:

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly agree strongly disagree

4. Instructional content was clear and easy to understand.

Comments:

5 **4** 3 2 1 0
strongly agree strongly disagree

5. Navigation (directions) was clear and easy to use.

Comments:

5 **4** 3 2 1 0
strongly agree strongly disagree

6. I learned quite a bit for such a short chunk of instruction.

Comments:

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly agree strongly disagree

7. Information is organized in a hierarchical matter.
I am able to tell which are main topics, subtopics, etc.

Comments:

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly agree strongly disagree

8. The font size is readable. There is enough spacing and alignment.

Comments:

Gestalt Laws and Principles of Perception

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly agree

strongly disagree

9. Overall, this instruction was outstanding!

Comments:

5 4 3 2 1 0
strongly agree

strongly disagree

10. What I liked most about the instruction:

I liked the ability to learn from the website and it was interactive. It was great in design and the delivery of instruction was great.

11. What I liked least about the instruction:

Not much at all.