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Irvine Royal Academy—Technical Department

Graphic Communication—Advanced Higher Golden Ratio—Rule of Thirds—Focal Points

These three design principles are related, but are not exactly the same. Designers use them as they create 'pleasing' layouts, and seem to appeal to the eye. By using them, your designs will appear more professional in appearance. Note, however, that some designers prefer not to use them, as it makes their design look different.

Golden Ratio (also known as the Golden Mean or Golden Section)

This is a mathematical ratio that produces shapes, in particular rectangles, that look 'right'. The ratio is 1:1.61. When creating layouts, or deciding on sizes for photographs, the golden ratio should be considered.

Ancient Greek designers used the ratio in architecture—the temple front is 1.61 times wider than it is tall. It looks right! If the proportion was different, the building wouldn't be as attractive.



Rule of Thirds

A page should be divided into three both vertically and horizontally. Good designers will then position important things on the lines which separate the thirds—in this picture the woman is on one of the vertical lines, and the sheet is close to the top third. This is commonly used in photography—the important thing is one a third line. Often, the horizon in the picture, or edge of the loch, would be on a horizontal third. Note how the picture below looks better (more professional?) when positioned in this way.



Focal Point

A focal point is found by using the Rule of Thirds. The four lines intersect at four points—these are the Focal Points. In the image of the woman running her head is on a focal point. In the image above left, nothing is on the focal points, whereas on the right the woman's eye is. In this image, the dog is on the focal point and is draws your attention to it.