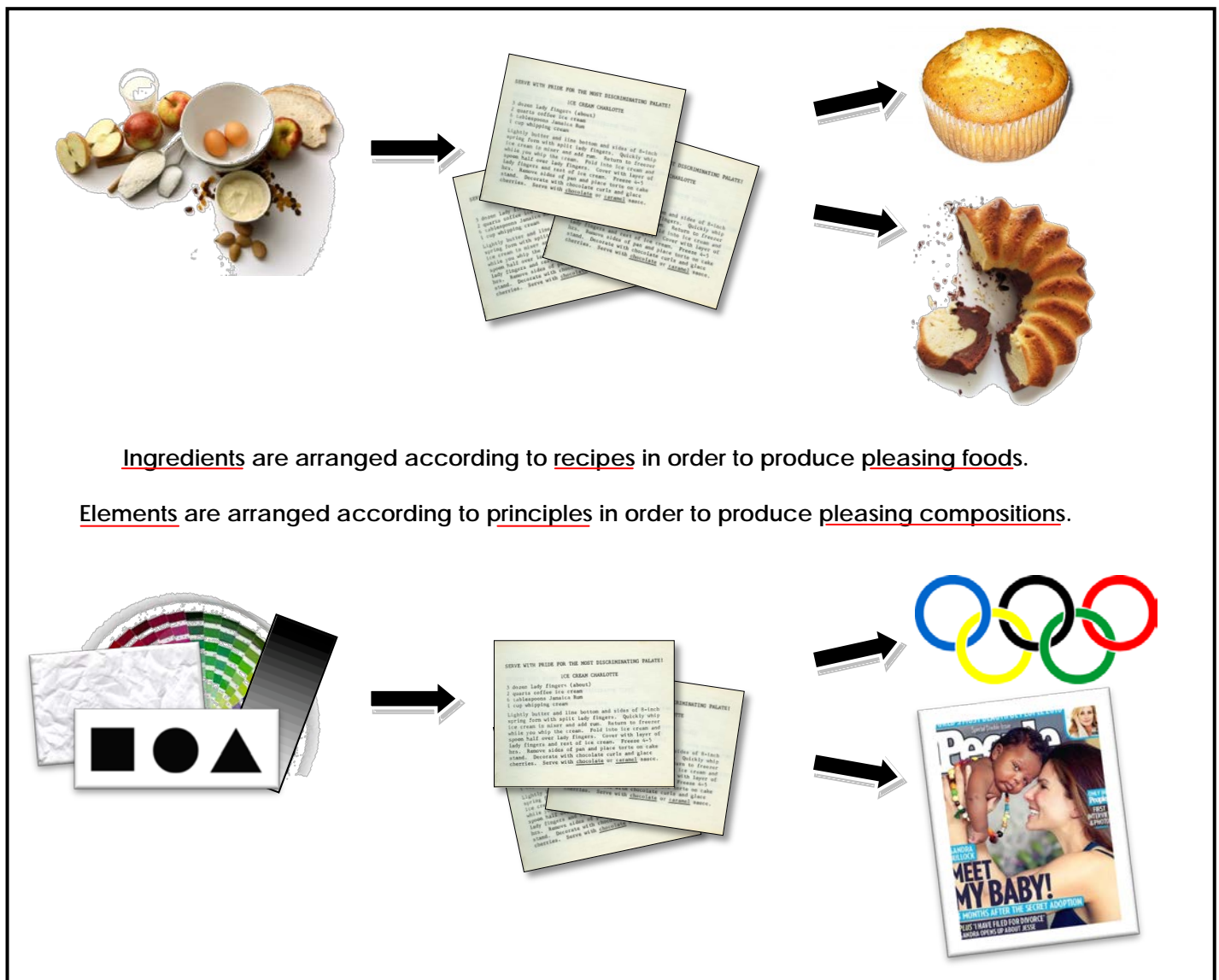# The Elements & Principles of Design

You will find the elements of design in advertisements, paintings, and even ...gardens! In fact, you will find the elements of design in *any* visual arrangement because the elements of design are the components of the designs themselves.

Think of these design elements like ingredients. Like ingredients, these design elements can mix together according to certain principles (recipes or rules). Each of these elements could stand alone or be combined in any number of creative ways to produce unique designs, each with its own unique flavour.

Ingredients are arranged according to recipes in order to produce pleasing foods.

Elements are arranged according to principles in order to produce pleasing compositions.

What are these elements of design? What are the principles that guide their combinations?

Some of the elements of design are:
- line,
- shape (2D) or form (3D),
- colour
- texture,
- depth (perspective),
- direction (motion),
- mass (visual weight),
- tone (black & white) or value (colour), and
- space (positive and negative).

Some of the principles of design are:
- balance,
- emphasis,
- proportion (scale),
- repetition (rhythm/pattern),
- unity,
- contrast,
- harmony,
- proximity,
- variety

A brief word of caution: The terms 'element' and 'principle' are sometimes used interchangeably in design and an element or a principle can often have more than one name. Students should understand that some flexibility in this respect is appropriate.
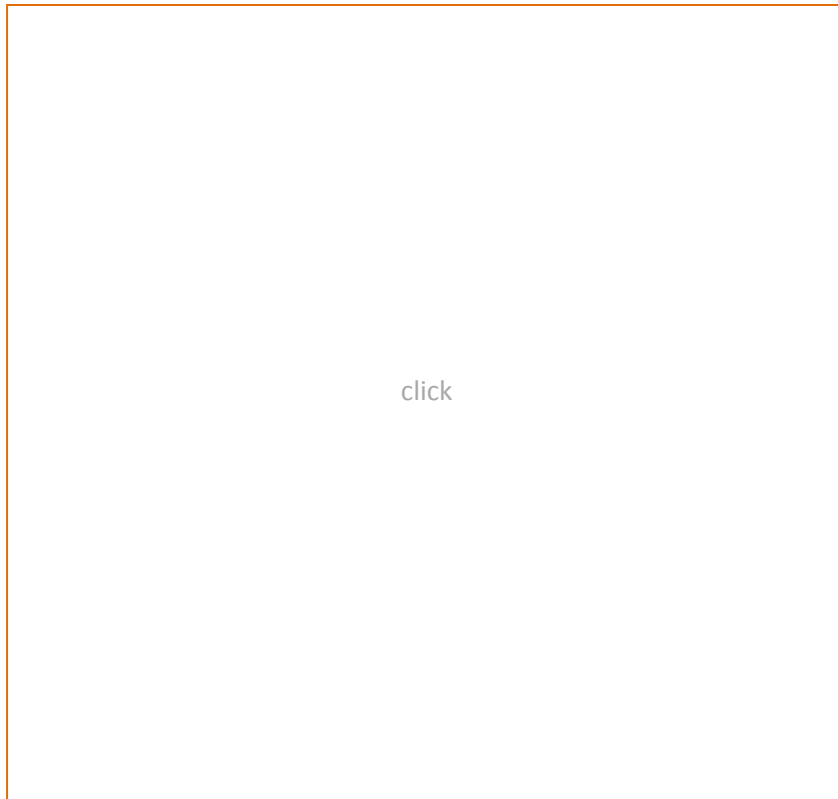
Lines

Lines can be straight or curved, thick or thin, solid, hollow, or dashed. In design, lines can be used to organize, guide the eye, or provide movement.

Keep an eye out for brochures, ads, newsletters, graphics, logos, and other print projects that include examples of lines.

How and why are lines used in the two advertisements shown above?

Find and attach an advertisement that incorporates lines effectively.

click

Explain how lines are used effectively in this image.

Shapes and Forms

Rectangles, triangles, and circles are the basic **shapes**. The 3D versions of these shapes are called forms. Shapes and forms are often used to organize, emphasize, symbolize an idea, convey a mood or emotion, create movement, and provide texture or depth.

Squares look `serious` and can be used to convey a sense of trust or safety. Because most of the text we read is set in squares and rectangles, it has become familiar, safe, and comfortable.

Circles suggest continuity and infinity. They can also denote movement like rolling or spinning. Circles can grab attention, provide emphasis, and break up blocks of text.

Triangles suggest action. They are dynamic. Triangles may convey either conflict or strength. Triangles can direct movement (up, down, left, right — depending on which way they 'point') but rather than moving themselves, they point the way for the eye.

Exercise: Exploring shape with union, punch, and crop

Print this page and submit it when finished.

Shapes can be altered in many ways. They can be joined, repeated, cropped or punched to create all kinds of new shapes and forms.   Creatively used, these simple methods can provide you with power and versatility to create ideas.

union	punch	crop
■	■	■
●	●	G
↓	↓	↓
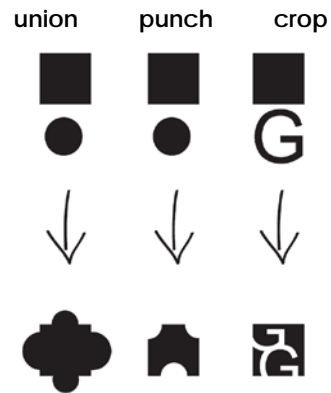
UNION: By combining forms of similar or different shapes, we can explore to create new shapes by repeating, varying the size, rotating or simply by placing the components for effective unions between them.

PUNCH: By punching the counter (the outer line) of one shape through another, you are actually altering them into another form to create an interesting new form.

CROP: Shapes can be cropped or contained within the boundaries of another shape.

Union ● ■				
Union ● ▲				
Punch ● ■				
Punch ● ▲				
Crop ■ G				

Colour

Colour is often used to draw attention to a particular part of an image or composition.

Complementary colors are colors that are opposite to each other on the color wheel. Complementary colors are used to create **contrast** like in the LA Lakers logo.


Analogous colors are colors that are found side by side on the color wheel. These can be used to create **harmony**.

Warm colors are a group of colors that consist of reds, yellows, and oranges. **Cool** colors are group of colors that consist of purples, greens, and blues.

Texture

Texture is an illusion in two-dimensional design. In other words, the designer/artist creates the "feel" of a brick, water, or other object through drawing or through photographic representation.
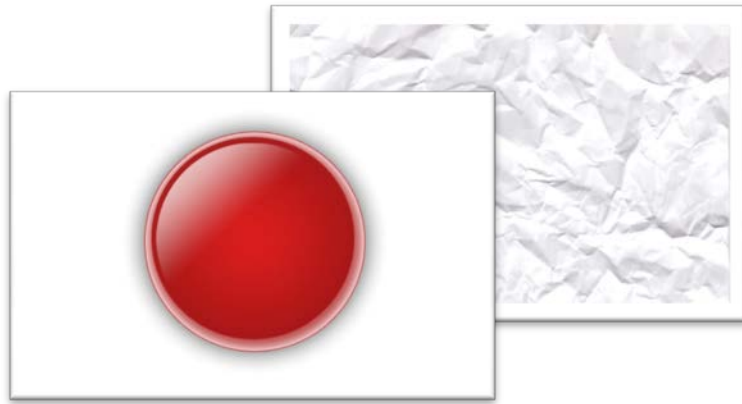
Depth

The appearance of depth within a two dimensional image is achieved by perspective. Perspective is the way objects appear to the eye based on size, shape, and position. There are many ways to convey depth within a two dimensional image.
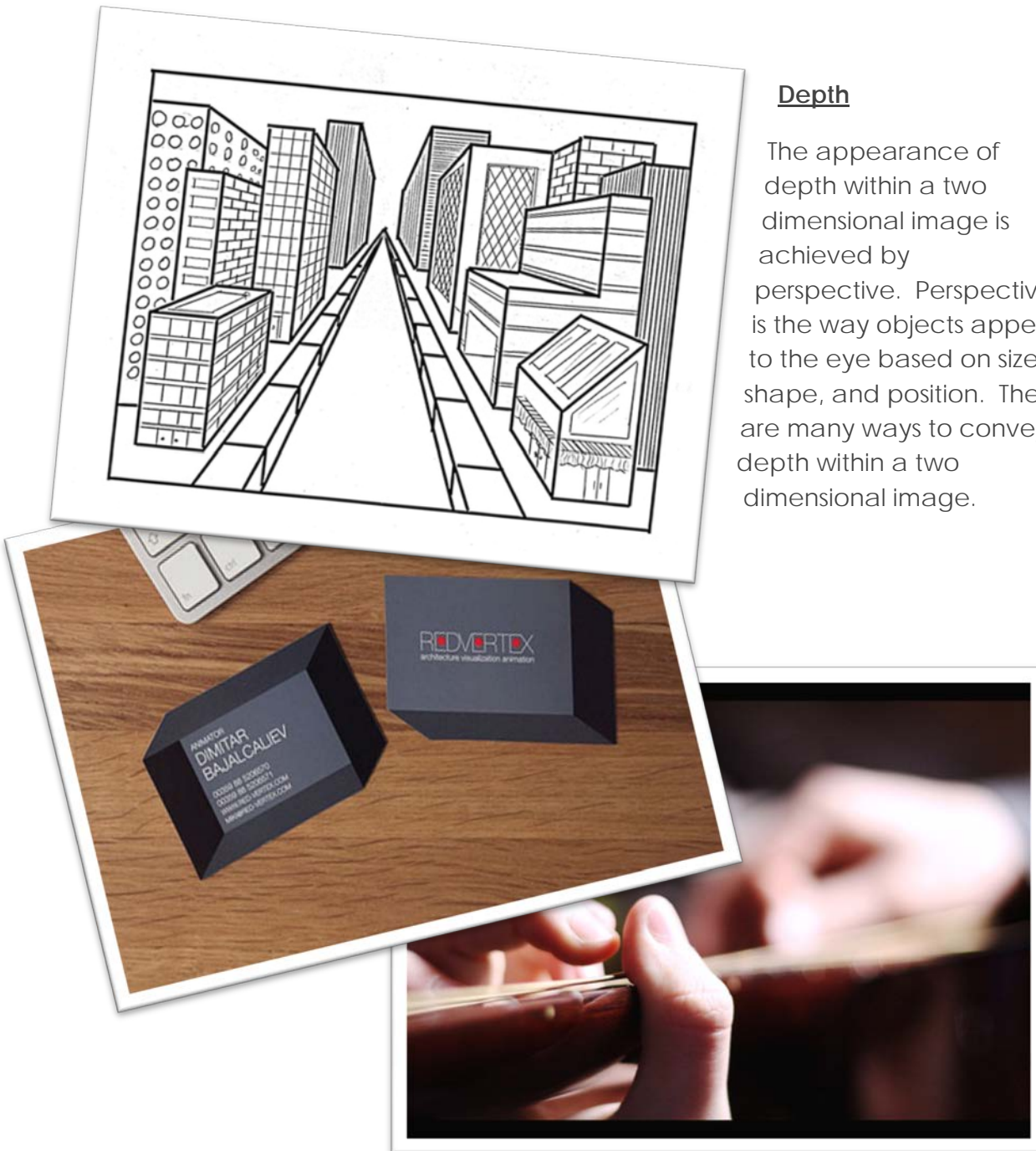
Direction (motion)

Direction (or motion) is conveyed in a design by how the eye moves through a space based on how the design elements are placed or arranged. Look back at the two advertisements given as examples for lines (Adidas and Pantene).

How do your eyes move within the layouts? How was this accomplished? Why was this done?

Direction or motion may also be conveyed in other ways. Look at the following photographs and see if you can find other ways in which motion is conveyed.

Mass (Visual Weight)

How big is it? The **mass** or **visual weight** is how large or small something is. Size is very important in making a layout functional, attractive, and organized. Mass shows what is most important, attracts attention, and helps to fit the layout together. Mass can be used to show which elements are the most important, attract attention, or contrast two elements to create interest. Compare the mass or visual weight of graphic and text elements in these magazine covers. What effects do these differences have on the design?

Tone (Black and White) or Value (Colour)

The terms tone and value mean brightness.
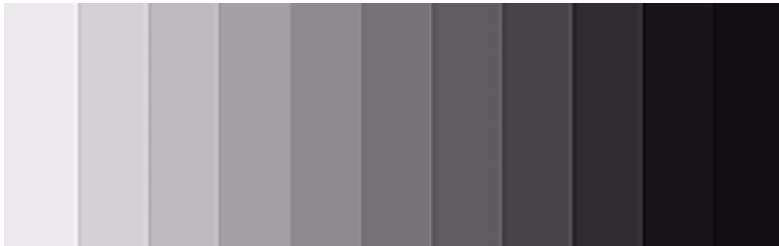
Tone refers to the brightness of different shades of grey (greyscale)

and **value** refers to the brightness of colour images.

The use of tone and value can be used to create contrast. We will talk more about contrast later.

Space (Positive and Negative)

When creating a graphic design, you work with the positive space, and the negative space (also called **white space**). The frame is the bounding size of the artwork, the positive space is the subject, and the negative space is the empty space around the subject. The three images below will give you a basic understanding of this principle. The airplane is the subject, this is **positive space**. The clouds and sky are background, they are **negative space**.
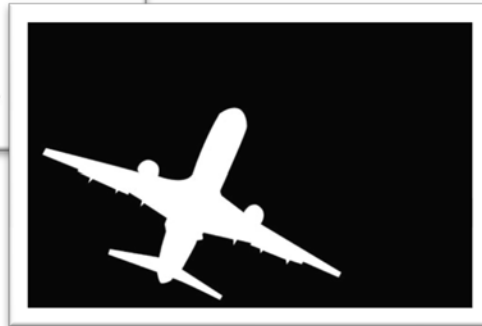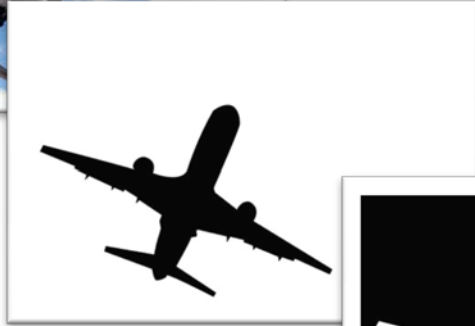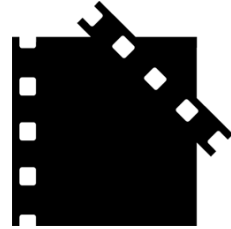
The three logos seen below make clever use of negative space.

Can you spot the messages hidden within the negative space?

You don't have to be an artist to create seemingly complex designs. The logo designs shown here use only simple shapes like lines, circles, squares, and triangles! In fact, in the world of logo design, simple is often *more* effective!

There are so many things you can "draw" using only circles, squares, or triangles. Group several together to form interesting patterns. You can make one shape from another.
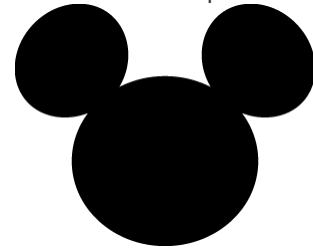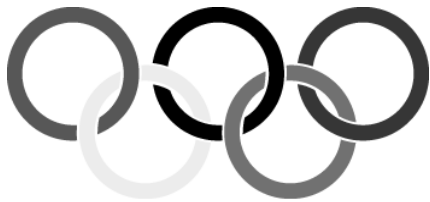
Logo designs don't need to be elaborate -- and usually work best when they are kept simple... so simple shapes work beautifully!

Click For an inside look at the process of logo design check out a bit of what went on behind the scenes of the 'hub' logo.

Exercise: Hi! My name is _____ ™

Using only **lines, circles, squares, triangles, and letters**, create a logo that captures the essence of you. You may repeat, punch, crop, or join these elements to create new shapes and forms.

Render **three copies** of your final logo design (use marker pens and the paper supplied) One in black and white, one in warm colours, and one in cool colours
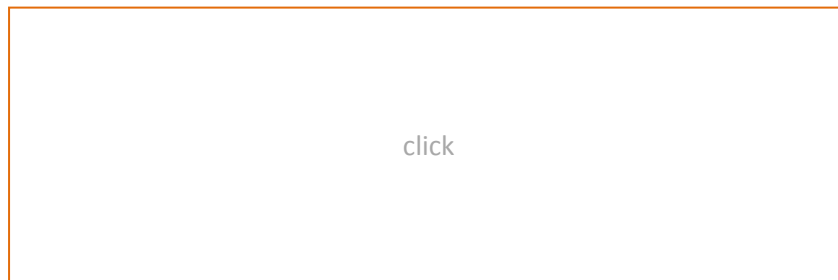
Photograph or scan your rough work (thumbnail sketches) and attach it here:

click

click

click
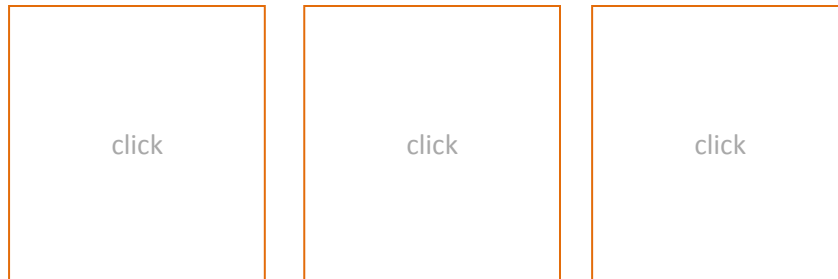
Photograph or scan your warm coloured logo and attach it here:

click
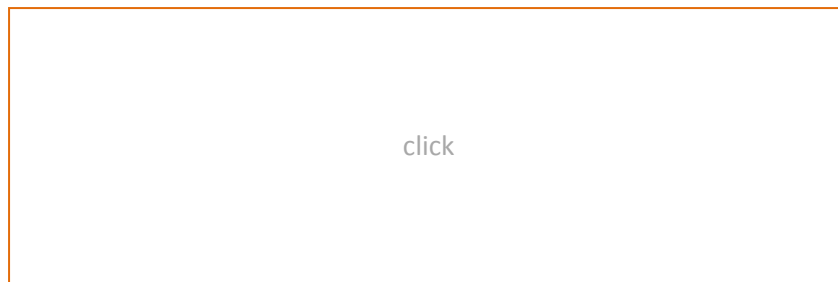
Photograph or scan your cool coloured logo and attach it here:

click

Comment on why the logo captures your essence and comment on which colour scheme you prefer and why.