

Information of basic shapes. Read over and utilize this information in your development of a Personal ID symbol. The following information is taken from:

**Signs and Symbols: Their design and meaning**, by Adrian Frutiger; 1998.

### 1. The Square

- A symbolic object, bounded property, a dwelling place *with the feeling of* floor, ceiling, walls, protection, etc. In the prehistoric sense it meant the earth's surface, at the same time indicating the four points of the compass. In the Chinese world of symbols, the four corners represented the outermost points of the earth.
- As soon as the square becomes an oblong it loses its **neutral**, symbolic character. The viewer immediately looks for the intention of the difference between length and breadth. An oblong is recognized as such so long as one dimension is not less than half the other, at which point two squares are formed by a central dividing line. Oblongs with a greater difference between the sides begin to be felt as beams or pillars.
- With the square standing on its corner (as a diamond) we come into the field of oblique lines. It is disquieting and indicates a certain intention. (ideal for signs).

### 2. The Triangle

- According to Gestalt psychology, human attention is primarily attracted by vertical and horizontal movements. It is also certain that the human eye first seeks out the vertical and the horizontal (over diagonal or circular). If neither of these dimensions are present, the viewer will try to imagine them in order to "place" the sign or symbol. Such movement is interpreted in relation to the person's physiological position:
  - vertical—force of gravity
  - horizontal—standing level
- The expression of a triangle is always first judged in relation to a vertical or a horizontal. In a square standing on its corner, the triangular form is already present, since the sign is bisected vertically or horizontally in the viewer's subconscious.
- On its apex, it becomes a direction-giving character (horizontal, left or right). When the direction is up, down, or oblique, confusion may result.
- Triangles with a horizontal base convey an impression of stability and permanence (pyramid), form ideal backgrounds for signals (road signs, etc.), are symmetrical. Also a symbol for "wait," *like a mountain, whose only active function is to suffer erosion*. A friendly symbol, may resemble a roof of a shelter.
- The reversed triangle, standing on its apex is active, a symbol of a tool, an action, also of scales. This positioning can also be considered a limitation, *not stable for along period of time*. Tends to produce a reaction of alarm.

### 3. The Circle

- Modern humans have a more spontaneous relationship with the straight line than with the curve. As the majority of our environments have been built on the concepts of horizontal & vertical.
- The line with eternal recurrence, no beginning or ending, compares with the idea of time, *which comes from nowhere and has no end*.
- For primitives it was associated with sun, moon, and stars. Today, associated with wheels and gears of every kind, for travel/movement (but not like arrow-direction).
- Viewed from outside-in, it may become a round hole (empty); as a line it is a hoop (play)
- Depending on their character, viewers will place themselves either inside or outside the circle.
- Inside the circle- impulse toward the center, search for unity of life, security & protection. Enclosure may be disquieting/ claustrophobia. Or: active life radiates from the invisible center outward, growth.