

Design Beautiful Pages— Minimal Design

Test Your Skills Challenge 3

The Power of THREE

by Linda Sattgast

We've tried one element and then two elements, so it's time to move up to—you guessed it—three elements!

If you recall, Jen White gave us a formula for creating a great cluster with three elements. If you can't remember the formula you may want to watch her video again. [Here's the link.](#)

3 Step Cluster Recipe (review)

1. Start with a main shape—ellipse or rectangle.
2. Add the opposite of that shape in a slightly smaller size.
3. Add an ellipse or a rectangle in a much smaller size.

In addition: Place elements above each other in a logical order and make the drop shadows look realistic.

In this challenge we'll look at Jen's recipe and one other method to give us a starting point for creating clusters.

Identifying Shapes

Jen's recipe calls for choosing two kinds of element shapes—an ellipse or a rectangle. Most were easy to classify, but a few elements weren't as easy to classify.

For example, is this leaf an ellipse or a rectangle? The leaf itself looks like an ellipse, but when you add a stem, does that make it a rectangle shape? I decided to ask Ms. Cluster Expert herself. Here's what Jen had to say:



“When identifying a shape I think in terms of the overall loose shape of the element. Not the actual edges of it. Take your finger and draw a loose shape around the element. If it's boxy with four distinct sides, then it's a rectangle. If the loose shape is like a blob with no obvious structure, it's an ellipse.”

Jen classified the leaf as an ellipse.

Challenge #1: Cluster Practice

If you haven't yet taken the time to practice creating clusters using Jen's formula, my first challenge is to do it: pick a kit and create 3 clusters using the 3 Step Cluster Recipe.

Look at the following pages to see what I created.

Credit

Perfect Harmony by Digilicious

Notice that I didn't follow the **3 Step Cluster Recipe** *exactly* on every cluster. The rule says each element in the cluster should get progressively smaller. Can you identify which cluster doesn't follow this rule?



It's the flower and leaves above the musical notes. The flower element and the leaf element are elliptical shapes that are approximately the same size but slightly offset.

So use your common sense when applying the cluster formula. Variations are OK as long as they look good overall.

Also, keep in mind that this is just ONE recipe. It's a fast way to get a great looking cluster using certain kinds of elements, but it's not the only way to create clusters.

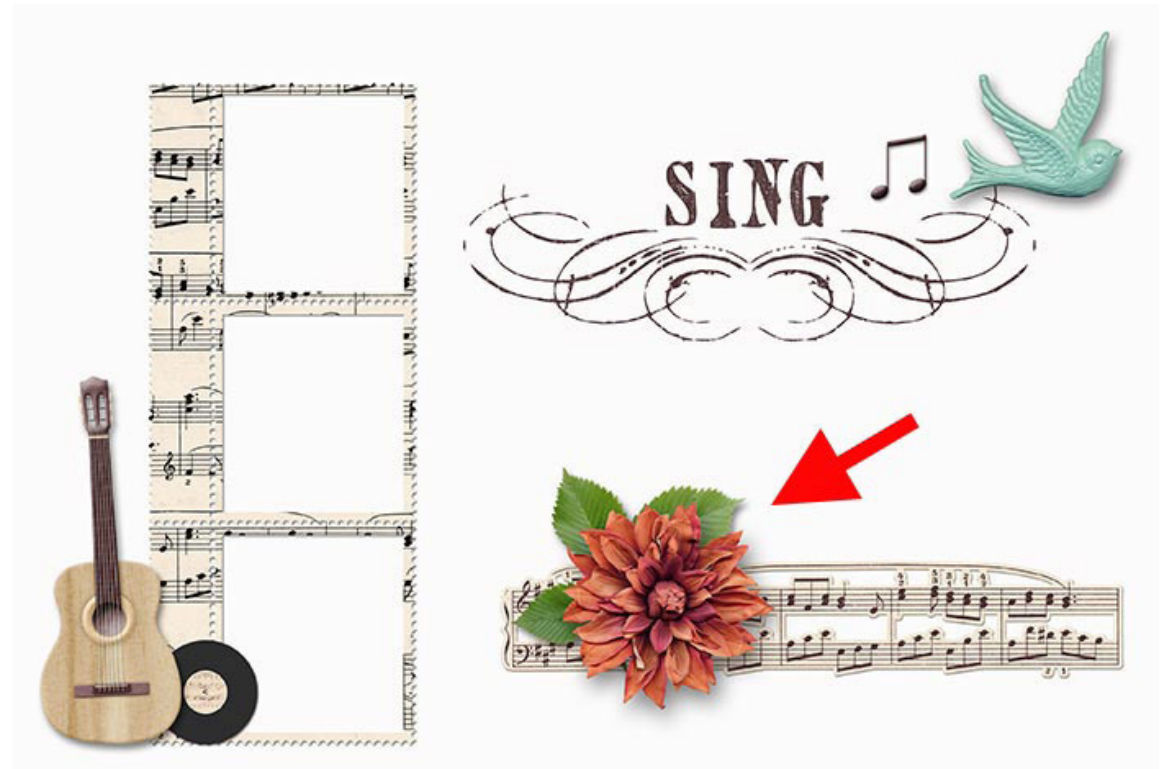
Let me show you another way to approach clusters.

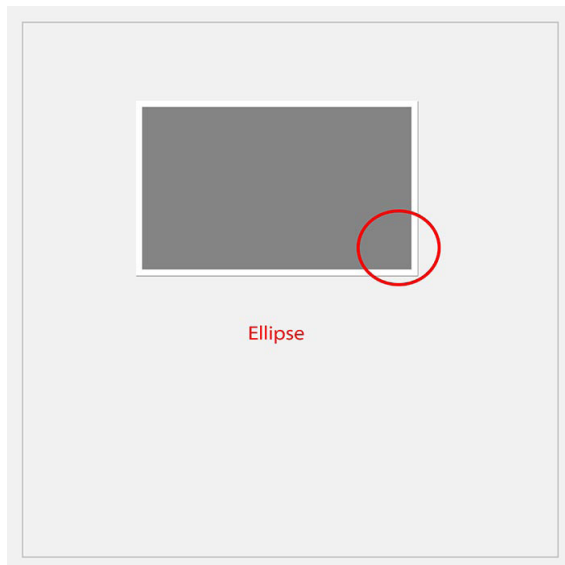
Cluster Shapes

With this method you'll think of the entire cluster as the shape, and you'll choose one shape per cluster. Here's how to do it:

- Start by identifying where you want to place the cluster.
- Choose the dominant element you want to use in the cluster.
- Based on the location and the dominant element, choose the shape you want for the cluster.
- Use three elements to build a cluster that strictly or loosely forms the shape you've chosen.

Let's look at some examples. Look at the following pages and read my comments below the images.





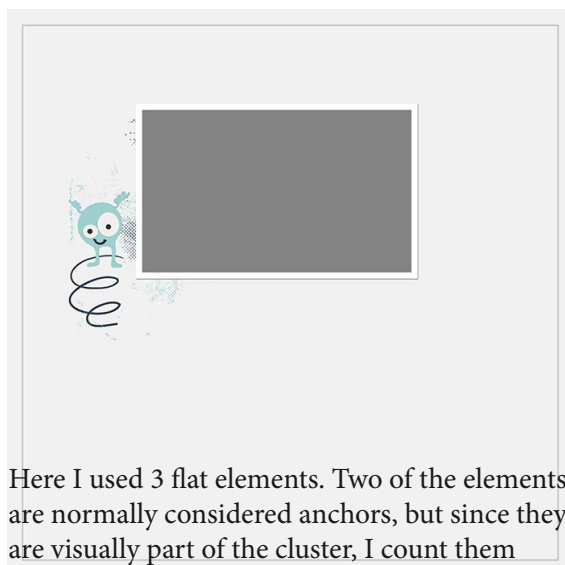
With this shape all the elements in your cluster form a circle or oval.



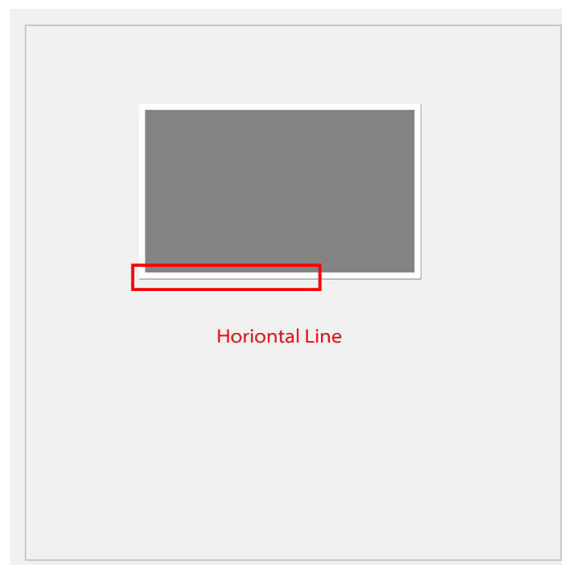
The dominant shape of this cluster is an oval. The focal element I chose was the larger flower, though the crown came in as a close second.



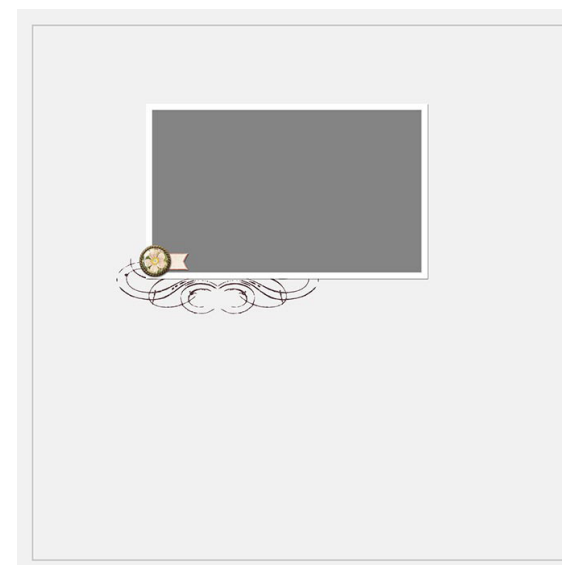
Here's another oval. I started with the eyeglasses, but the crown is actually more dominant by position and color.



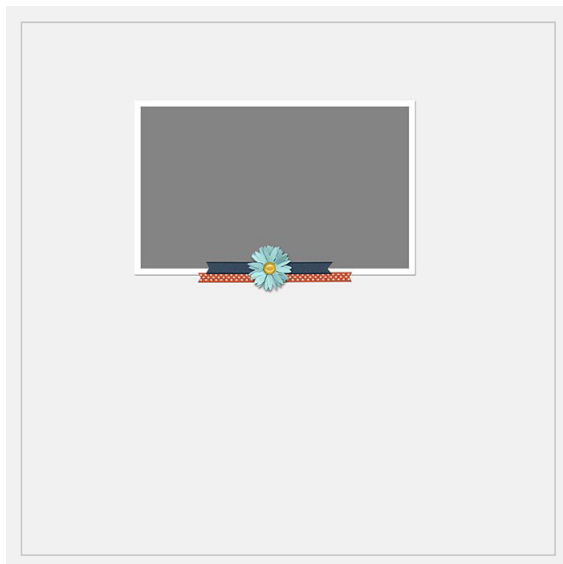
Here I used 3 flat elements. Two of the elements are normally considered anchors, but since they are visually part of the cluster, I count them as part of my 3-element cluster. A piece of the ellipse shape is behind the photo, but most of it is visible.



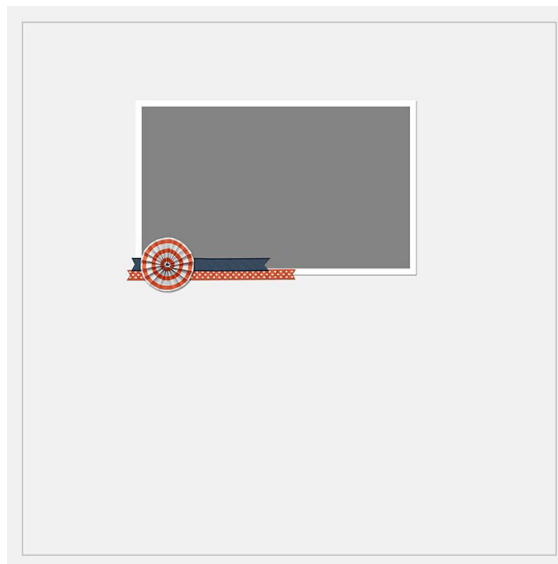
A horizontal line shape simply creates a fairly thin line of elements.



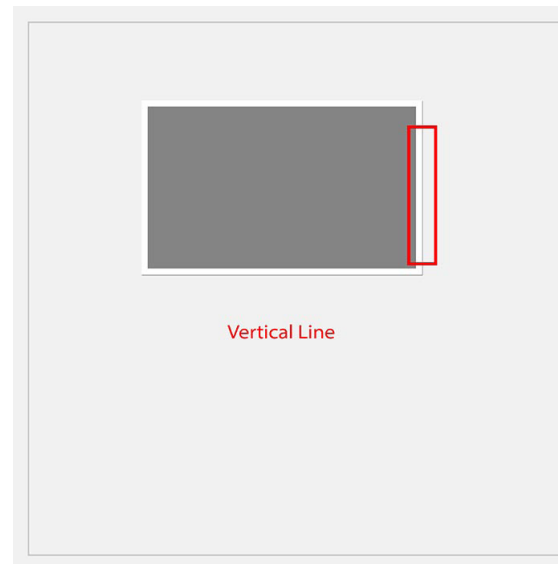
Horizontal Line Shape



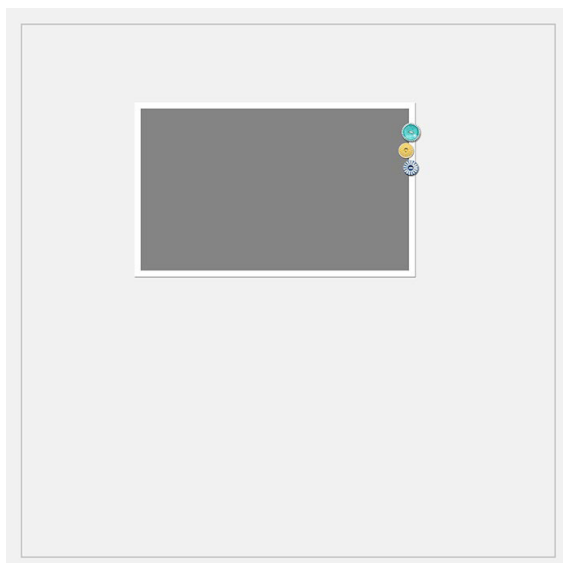
Be mindful about where you put clusters. This cluster line shape is in the center of the bottom edge. It isn't bad, but it would be better offset.



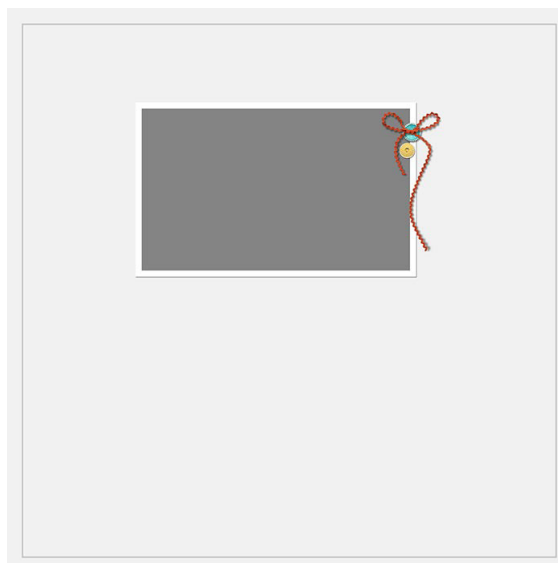
Here's an example of an offset horizontal line cluster. This is generally more pleasing to the eye.



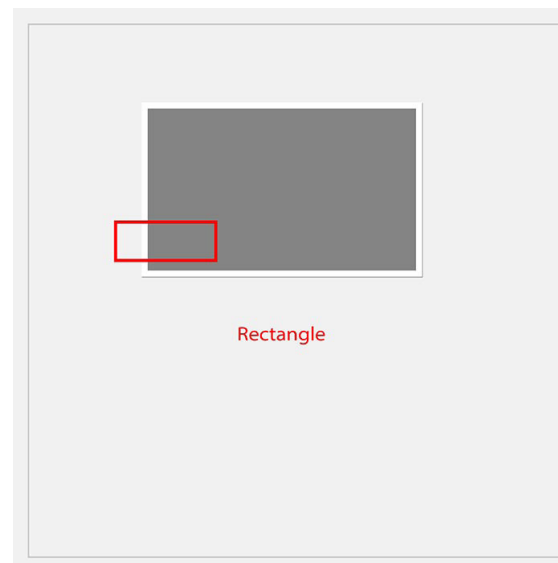
Vertical Line Shape



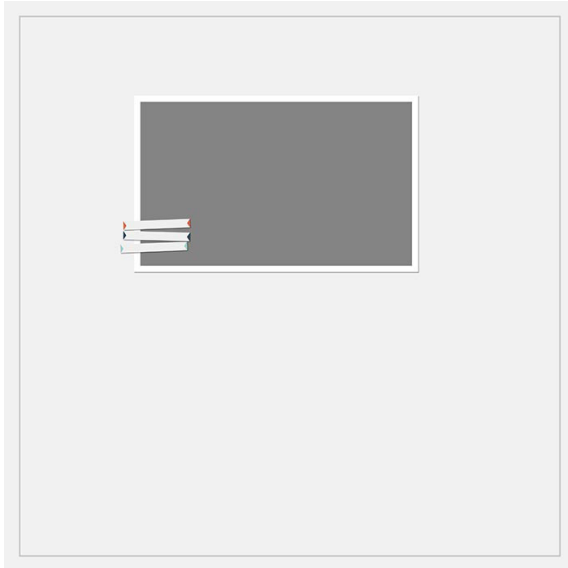
Here I used three circles of about the same size, so this doesn't follow the 3 Step Cluster Recipe, but it still makes a cute cluster shape.



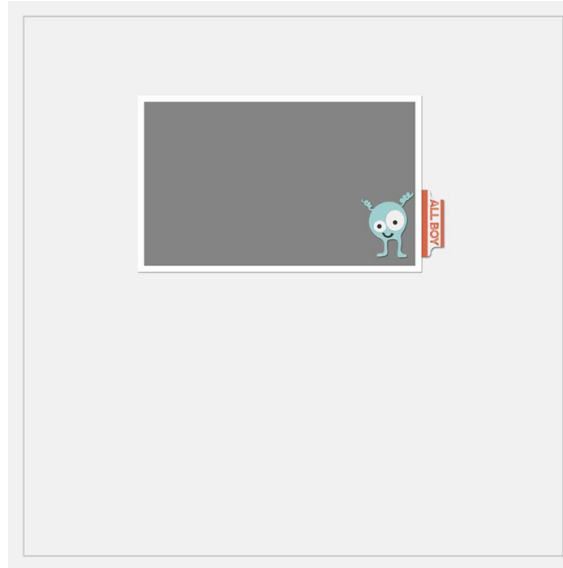
The "Cluster Shape" approach often goes hand-in-hand with the 3 Step Cluster Recipe principles as you see here.



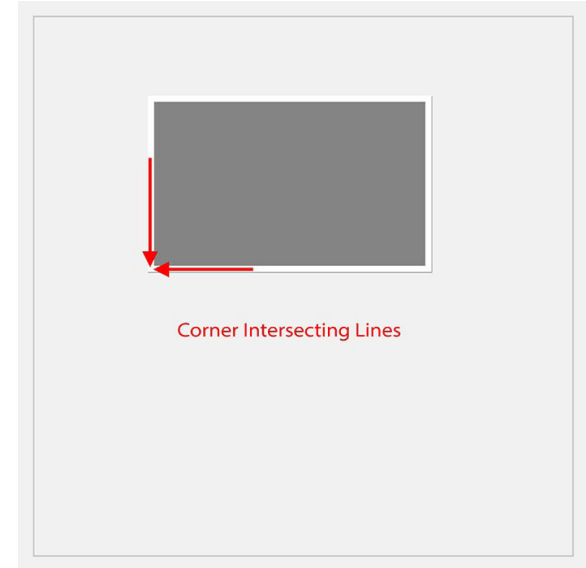
A Rectangle Shape is shorter and feels more like a rectangle than a line.



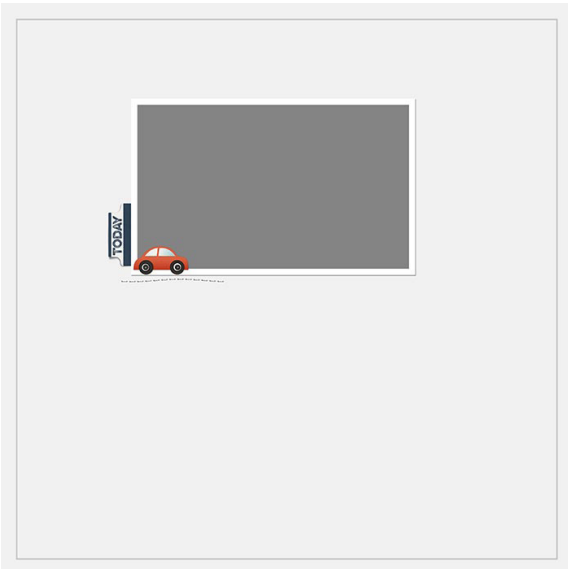
Here I used 3 word tab elements to create the rectangle cluster shape.



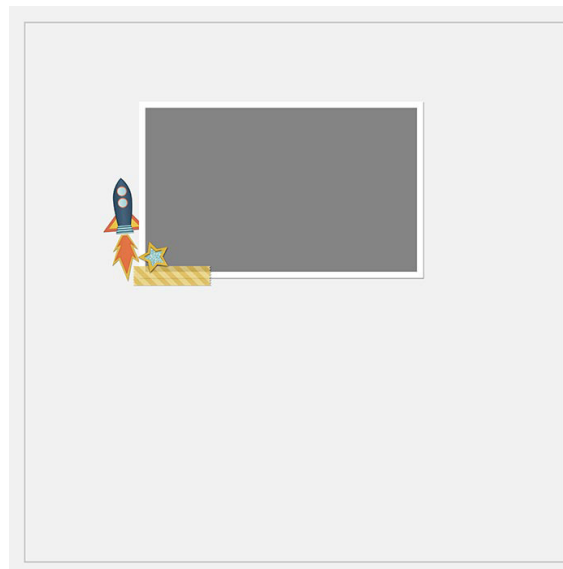
Rectangle Shape. Oops! I only used two elements. Shhhh. Don't tell anyone.



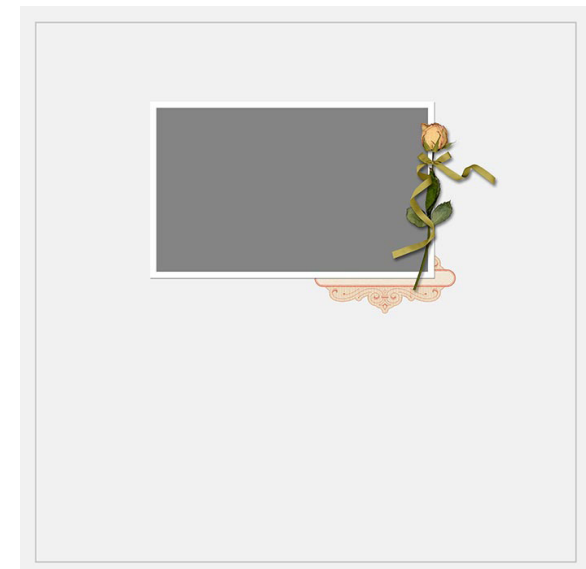
Corner Intersecting Lines are two line shapes put together, one vertical and one horizontal, with the end meeting at a corner.



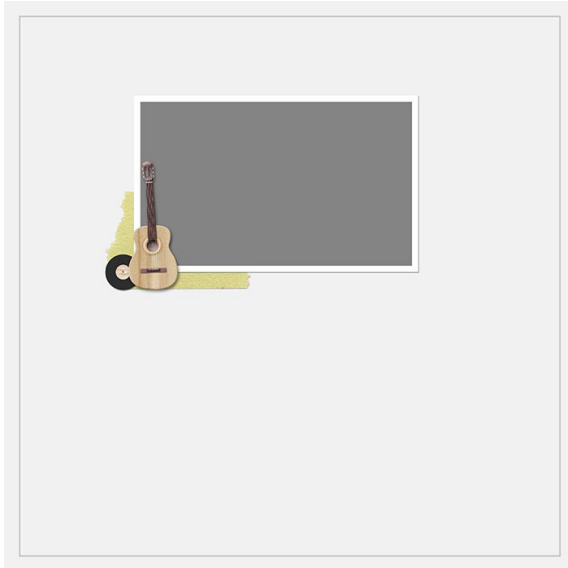
Corner Intersecting Lines



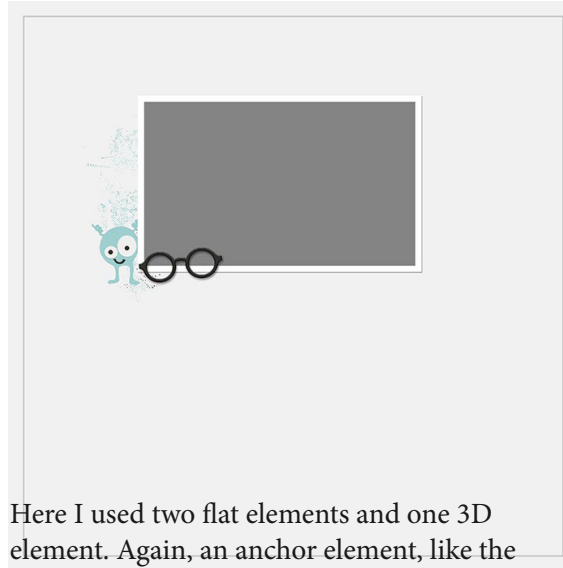
Corner Intersecting Lines



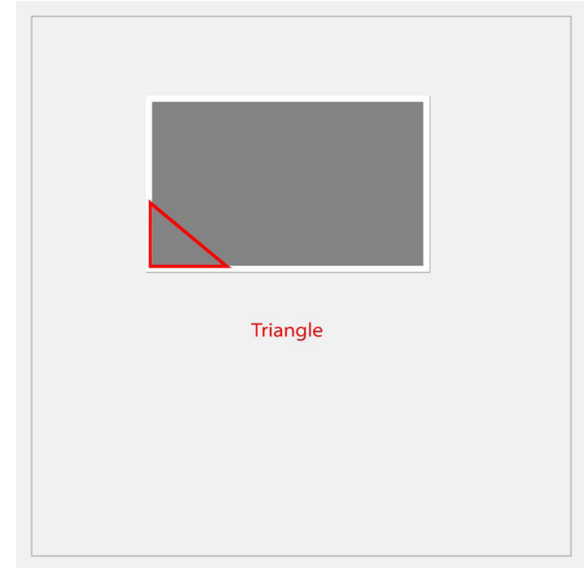
Corner Intersecting Lines



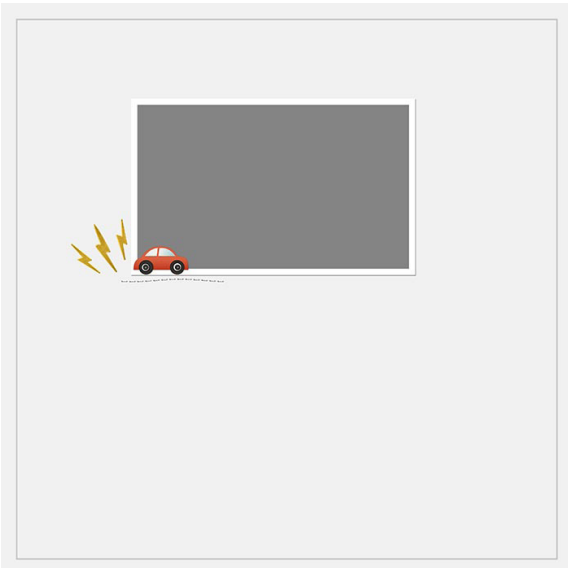
Corner Intersecting Lines



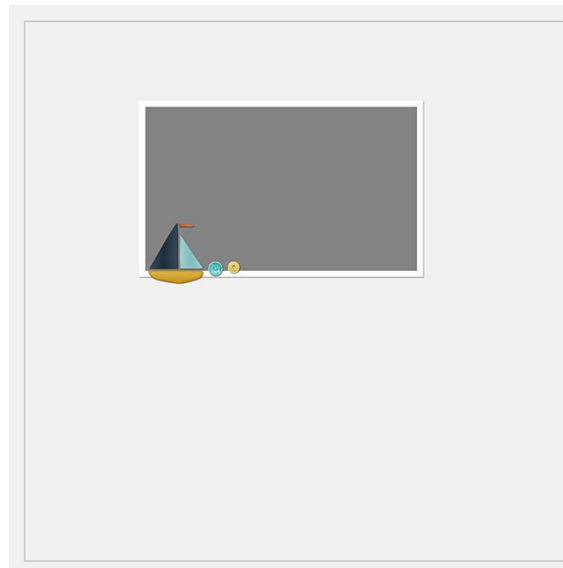
Here I used two flat elements and one 3D element. Again, an anchor element, like the paint splatter, is considered part of the cluster if it's visually connected with the cluster. If the paint was around the entire photo, I probably wouldn't consider it part of the cluster.



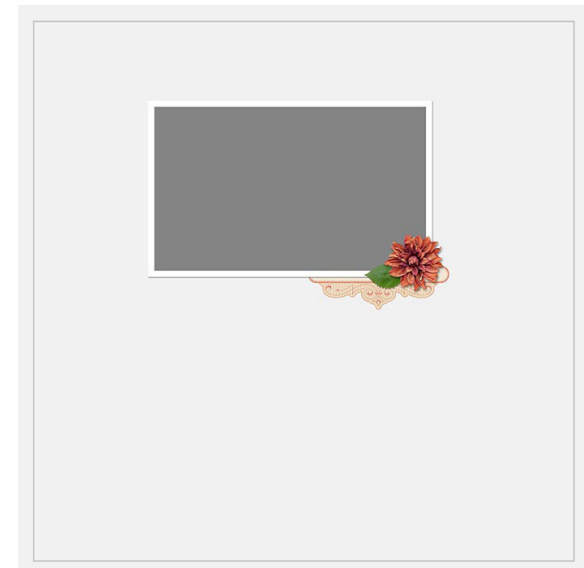
A Triangle Cluster has elements that form a firm or loose triangular shape.



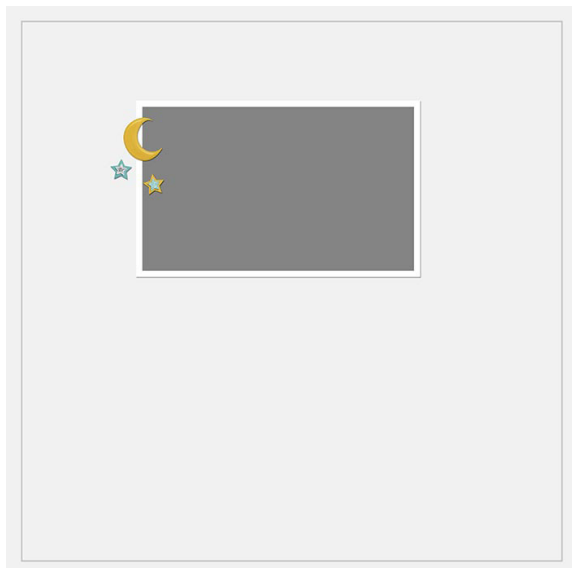
Most often my triangular element clusters are loosely triangular like this one.



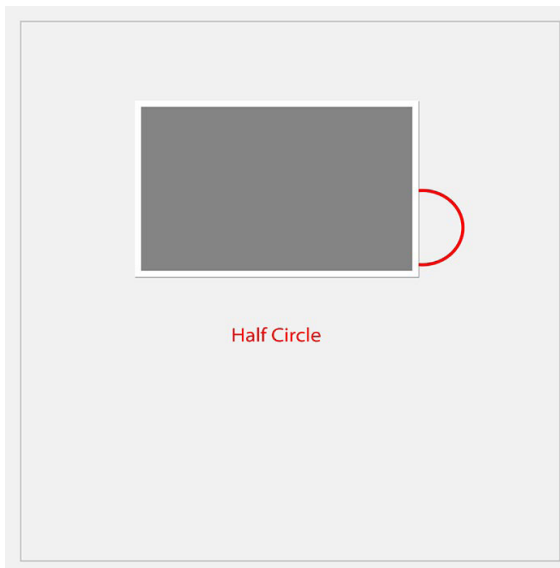
Triangle Cluster



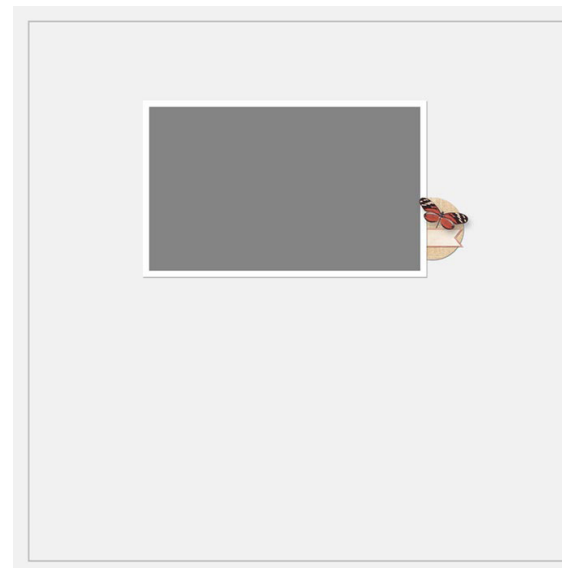
Triangle Cluster



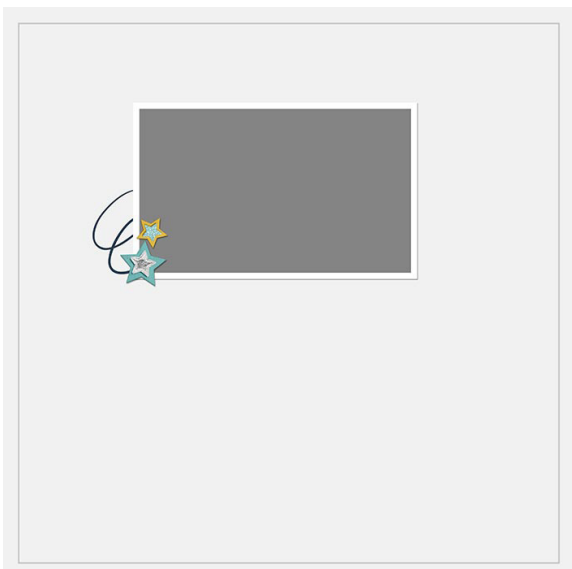
The triangle doesn't have to be in the corner, though that's where you'll find it most often.



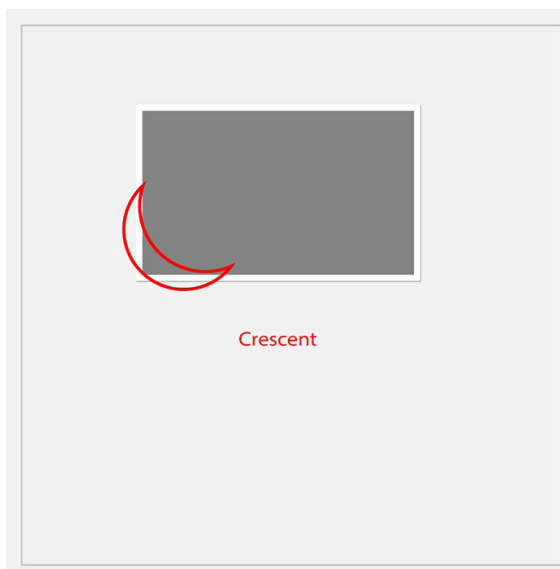
A Half Circle Cluster is most often a round cluster that's partially behind a photo or mat or on the edge of the page.



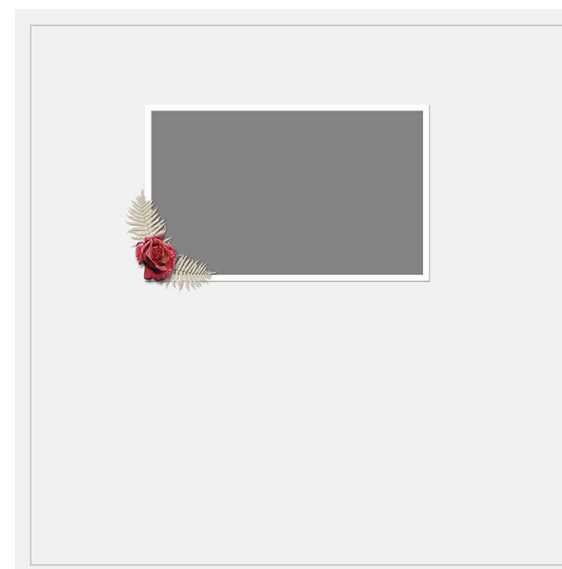
Half Circle Cluster



This is a little looser Half Circle Cluster with part of the cluster behind the photo and part of it above.



A Crescent Shaped Cluster is a quarter moon shape, usually with the center being the widest part.



Most crescents have multiple elements, so creating a crescent with just three elements is not as easy.

Credit—All elements from:

All About A Boy by Shawna Clingerman
and Perfect Harmony by Digilicious

Challenge!

It's time to practice the “Cluster Shape” approach to creating clusters.

- Choose your kit. (Using elements from one kit can make it easier to create clusters.)
- Choose the main element you want to use in your cluster—the focal element.
- Choose a Cluster Shape that would show off the photo and focal element well.
- Choose two other elements that loosely fit within the cluster shape you're using. (You can decide whether or not to use the 3 Step Cluster Recipe when selecting and placing the other two elements.)
- Make your final adjustments to placement and shadows as needed.

NOTE: There's one secret ingredient to creating AWESOME clusters. Want to know what it is?



A banner is a great way to create the curve of a crescent shaped cluster.

It's practice, practice, practice—just like any other skill!

Here are some tips:

- Practice on a template with nothing else on it. This allows your mind to run freely and experiment.
- Use the Cluster Shape method to make as many clusters as you can in a specified time period—say 15 to 30 minutes.
- To speed up the process, see if you can swap out one, or even two, of the elements and keep one, forming a new cluster.
- Once you've made at least 10 clusters, choose a photo for your template.
- Finish designing your page using one of your newly created templates, or create a new one that matches your photo or theme better.

By the way, I followed all these steps myself and found it to be empowering!

Here's my finished page.

I love using a method rather than reinventing the wheel each time I create a page. That's what these two cluster recipes give you—a starting point that helps you produce great clusters!

Credits

Page by Linda Sattgast

Kit: Perfect Harmony by Digilicious

Fonts: Northshire Script and Myriad Pro

