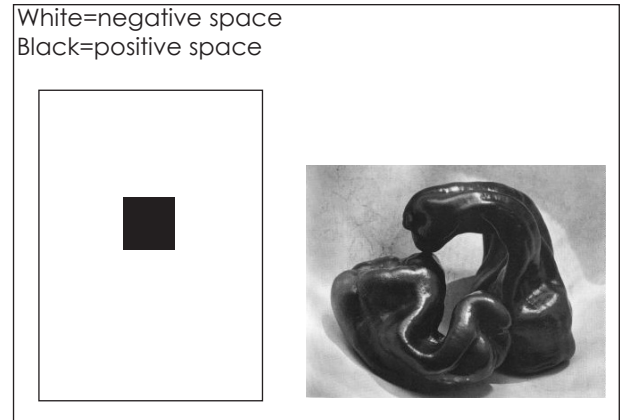
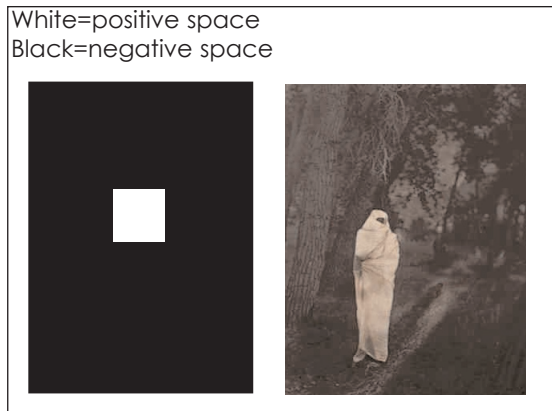


Positive space is generally what we think of as the “thing” in a composition. If we place a white object in a black field, we immediately think of the object as the “thing”, or the positive space. Vice-versa.



As a result, most designs tend to focus on positive space. This is natural, since as designers we want to get the point across which usually means showing some “thing” as clearly as possible.

This is natural. Our content (what subject matter we are dealing with, our message) is most accessible through what is there (positive space), rather than what is not there (negative space). Unfortunately, all too often negative space gets the shaft.

Think of any design as the sum of it's parts. Negative space is often 80-90% of the overall design. If the negative space isn't considered, the design will suffer.

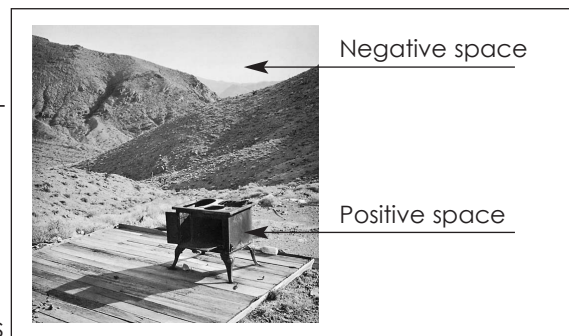
**How do we recognize positive space? How do we spot recognize space?**

Positive space often appears as the foreground object in the image, and negative space the background. We can also spot positive/negative space by looking at areas of high-contrast, and imagining the areas as positive and negative space meeting.

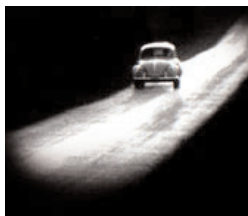
**What about grey? What about ambiguous foreground objects/background areas?**

There is no perfect answer. Experimenting with ways

to treat these areas is a very good way to strengthen design skills. If we feel the composition will be strengthened by making a grey area black or white, we have creative liscence to do so.



If we can break a image down into core parts, we can understand how great designers think. Photographers are perhaps the best “designers” because they are ultimately concerned with how our eye moves are we look at an image, and make it their goal to get us to look at the most important parts of the image. We can learn quite a bit by studying great photography's handling of positive and negative space and apply our findings to graphic design.



What is the foreground object here? The car, the road, the car and the road? What is the positive space? What is the negative space? Asking ourselves these questions helps us understand an expert image composer's mind.

Photo credits:  
Edward Curtis,  
Edward Weston,  
Ansel Adams,  
George Tice.