ACTIVITY 1 | STEP 5
FORMLINE DESIGN
FLASH CARDS

Preparing the Flash Cards for Class
Use Formline Flash Cards to review the names of the formline shapes with the class.
1. Copy each page.
2. Fold each page in half. Tape at the bottom (optional).
3. Your flash cards are ready.

positive space
negative space

Positive space
The painted 'foreground' aspect of design. Left on the surface in relief-carving, often painted black or red.

Negative space
The unpainted, 'background' aspect of formline designs, like the cut-out spaces in a doily pattern. Negative space is cut away in relief-carved designs.
Ovoids are building blocks that form visual centers, or sources, from which design patterns or movements flow or emanate.

Ovoids are used to represent joints (shoulder, hip, wing, pectoral fin, eye, sock). Ovoid formlines are thickest on the top, thinner on each side (each side of the same width), and thinnest on the bottom. Specific proportions can vary with individual artist's styles. They can change orientation (right-side-up, upside-down), and their shape characteristics remain constant.

The mother of designs, ovoids are building blocks that form visual centers, or design.
Finelines

The 'opposite' of formlines, these lines are thin and remain at or near their original thinness. They add a level of detail and a sense of depth in painted designs.

Formlines

The connected pattern of painted, positive space that creates and defines Northwest Coast design images. Formlines alter their thickness as they bend around a corner, which introduces tension and release in traditional designs.
Positive space

The painted 'foreground' aspect of formline designs, left on the surface in relief-carving, most often painted black or red.

Negative space

The unpainted, 'background' aspect of formline designs, like the cut-out spaces in a doily pattern. Negative space is cut away in relief-carved designs.
The smaller, same-shaped version of the ovoid that floats slightly above the center of negative space and is almost always surrounded by a fineline. The smaller, same-shaped version of the ovoid that floats slightly above the center of negative space and is almost always surrounded by a fineline.
A negative (unpainted) transitional device in the form of a quarter moon that helps define the edges of formlines.

Can be interchangeable with trigons.

crescent
Working cooperatively with the ovoid, U-shapes direct design flow or movements and form various parts of design images. U-shapes are thickest on top, thinner on each side (sides can differ in thickness and form), and taper down to a fine tip where they join other formlines. U-shapes (and ovoids) traditionally do not stand free on their own, but always connect with other design elements.
A negative (unpainted) triangle with concave sides that helps to define the edges of formlines. One of three transitional devices, including the crescent and circle.
What is meant by a salmon-trout head? “Looks like the head of a salmon-trout” was the translation of a Tlingit term given to the ethnographer G. T. Emmons for an elaborated inner ovoid that looks like a profile head in formline design. The phrase was shortened to “salmon-trout head” in recent times. It does not, however, represent a fish head. The term salmon-trout head has stuck because it’s a tidier phrase than ‘elaborated inner ovoid’, which is the analytical term for the design form.