

Graphic Design is a multidisciplinary genre, spanning the realms of fine art, typography, color theory, and classical composition, while requiring requisite technological skill to combine all of the preceding elements into a functional and compelling work that communicates to the desired audience. Graphic design is not reliant on computers and software as we know it today. In fact, graphic design as a discipline has always embraced the technology of its day, following its roots through early alphabet development, composition of a written language, printing processes, color reproduction, and finally digital and interactive design.

Although graphic design is not as potentially freeing as traditional studio art for the individual, the act of designing for a client and potential audience gives the work breath and purpose. No longer is it the passionate personal ramblings of a disconnected artist; if it fails to communicate as graphic design, it fails in its mission.

The kernel of purpose in graphic design is first and foremost communication. Every effective design created in this discipline has communication at its heart. Graphic design is all encompassing as a discipline, especially in today's technology and branding concentrated environment. In an urban environment, graphic design can be

encountered at the clothing store and restaurant alike, ranging from collateral design to packaging and environmental design. Moving a step further, every interactive encounter on a web site, kiosk, or digital device was also envisioned and executed as an exercise in graphic design.

The job graphic designers share is immense. Not only are they responsible for designing things all around us, they are also responsible for upholding the heritage of a discipline with roots in fine art and illustration. Designers should be practitioners of responsible and carefully set typography.

Graphic design goes far beyond computer based design or software; it is truly the art of the masses. Graphic design is the touchstone upon which virtually every human experiences art. Intimate experiences with hand-assembled print materials and worldwide marketing campaign launches alike, both define the scope of graphic design, and its persuasive draw on the global consciousness.

The concept of creativity is one of the most important factors in developing an effective design process. Although a universal design process does not exist for every design or designer, elements of an effective personal design process serve as an important roadmap to successful communication. To this end, creativity is merely an act of imitating. All personal creativity is drawn directly from God, who is the ultimate Creator. As a graphic designer, productive creativity draws from nature, existing design, and historical precedent. Creativity can also exploit technological features inherent in the creation or reproduction of a design, both in the past and the present.

1 The first stage of the design process is brainstorming. This stage assumes direct knowledge and study of past design and design movements, as well as related and unrelated disciplines, such as other visual art disciplines, performing arts, music, and literature. All of these disciplines have the potential to serve as an effective foundation on which to base a design.

Many creative solutions to design problems start in the brainstorming stage, often in a completely separate and unrelated medium and field. To this end, complete immersion in every area of the arts, culture, and learning are beneficial to further creative brainstorming.

2 The second stage of the design process involves linking potential brainstorming subjects with the message to communicate. The list of possible subjects can be further refined during this stage by exclusion on audience appropriateness. Then, disparate subjects can be ranked by tangibility and cognitive appropriateness to the intended audience. This will provide a viable list of appropriate subject matter that will be easily understood by the projected group.

3 Once the brainstorming process has been executed and filtered, the conceptual or third stage can commence. This is a two-part process, working with a combination of thumbnails and marker comps or roughs. Thumbnails are created from the results of stage two, and are cyclically expanded and refined until certain solutions begin to emerge as successful, both in terms of creativity and concise communication capacity.

Often, several trips through this process are necessary over a period of days or weeks to provide invaluable perspective and distance from the concepts in progress. The feedback of peers or professors may also be helpful at this stage.

4 The fourth stage involves the production of final mechanicals. This stage brings together all of the concepts gleaned from the creative process thus far, and combines them with appropriate imagery, type, and color.

Often, the designer must rely on trial and error during this stage, experiencing frustration similar to the early stages of concept development in order to create a finished whole. Selection of appropriate typography and color are especially crucial to the success of the finished design. These two elements affect the readability, and thus communication, of the finished design more than almost any other combination of elements.

The investment of time to try out many combinations of typefaces, sizes, values, and spacing considerations can be significant, but can have a dramatic effect on the final product.

At the completion of this stage, it is customary to provide final client approval or decision on design options. Some clients prefer complete digital mechanicals, while others prefer to see concepts early on in the thumbnail and rough stage. This stage must be tailored to the specific client and project at hand. By the end of this stage, a comprehensive, well formed design should be ready for print or deployment.

5 The final stage involves production or deployment of the design, either through a traditional press environment, or in the interactive sense, deployment through the web, kiosk, or other presentation medium. Although the design for the product is finished at this point, it provides an excellent opportunity to review success in several crucial areas for further growth as a designer and practitioner of the creative process. Especially important is the overarching goal of communication. If the design fails to communicate effectively to the specific target audience, it has failed as graphic design. It may still be aesthetically pleasing, but it no longer serves the goals set out by the client. Also, specific relevance and communicative ability to the target audience is especially vital to the success of the design. If the design fails in any one of these areas, it may be appropriate to rethink the entire concept behind the design, often requiring the process to begin again with brainstorming.