The Four Basic Design Principles

INTRODUCTION

This course provides you with direction, not arbitrary rules to follow, for good graphic design. One of the first things you'll learn as a designer is how to explore various possibilities to create a great design. Eventually, you'll have ingrained the good practices that you'll learn in this course and will combine them with your own creative ideas for your projects.

Communication is one of the most important aspects of being a graphic designer. As a graphic designer, you're trying to communicate a message to your audience, rather than simply creating an appealing design. Designers communicate their messages by conceiving, planning, and carrying out their ideas for designs.

The field of graphic design is constantly changing due to advances in technology and changing demands. This makes it an exciting field to work in, as you must always stay abreast of the latest trends and tools in the field. Early in your career, you should think about your goals and values to help you shape your ideas about what direction you want your career to move in.

When looking into a career in graphic design, keep in mind the various environments in which you can work. These locations could be any of the following or carved out of one of the newer areas of graphic design:

- Design studios

- Printing companies

- In-house design

- Advertising agencies

- Freelance

Many opportunities also exist in news media, such as in motion graphics, the Web, or multimedia, and new opportunities arise all the time.

Lesson 1

Before you start reading your textbook, you should be familiar with a little bit about the *history* and *types* of graphic design. In addition, you'll examine the design process, which will help you to establish good working habits and demonstrate superior presentations for your client. Once you understand how graphic design started, then you can use the information provided in the textbook to become skilled at applying that knowledge to your needs as a graphic designer. The beginning of this study guide will provide that information. Once you gain knowledge of the different types of design, you can decide which type of design you would like to specialize in.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Read in your textbook pages 1–14. Then read the following assignment in this study guide. Be sure to complete the self-check to gauge your progress.

Graphic Design History

For examples of the various art movements, refer to **http://www.huntfor.com/arthistory/** as you read this section.

Graphic design started centuries ago, though it has been studied only since the end of the nineteenth century. The start of the Industrial Revolution brought great advances to the field with new inventions, such as metal engravings and color process work, and more advertising dollars. Then, in late-nineteenth-century France, Jules Cheret and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec led the *art nouveau movement. Art nouveau* translates to "new art" in French and was present from 1880s to 1910s. It represents handcrafting decorative style that broke away from classical art. New forms of art grew around the world, such as Lewis Tiffany stained-glass art in the United States.

While many embraced the mass production associated with the advances of the Industrial Revolution, some thought it made products inferior. William Morris and John Ruskin emphasized the quality of a handcrafted product and brought

the essentials of art into individual's homes in their wall-paper. Morris, through his high ideals and ethics, brought a resurgence of the standards in artisanship.

The explosion of communication at the turn of the century greatly influenced the shape of design to come. Pablo Picasso and *cubism* freed design from the restraints of reality, leaving artists free to experiment with other forms. *Expressionism* followed with an emphasis on subjective emotion, which is still seen in neoexpressionist art today. Max Wertheimer described the *Gestalt* in 1910 in regard to how elements are grouped, which was later applied to art and design.

With *modernism* (1908–1933), many movements in art arose, including *futurism* and *dadaism.* Dadaism was extremely important, as it challenged classical notions of people's behavior and values, including that of art.

In the *abstract movement,* many art forms also developed, such as *constructivism* in the former Soviet Union, which started as a youth movement and combined propaganda and commerce. El Lissitzky was a constructivist who developed typography rules and was influential in creating grid systems. The *Bauhaus* school in Germany included several experimental artists from different disciplines who changed the face of graphic design, architecture, product, and furniture design. When the Nazis closed the Bauhaus in 1933, many artists fled to America, changing the face of American art and design. A movement similar to constructivism, known as *de Stijl,* grew in Holland and was based on utopian style designs.

Art deco appeared in Paris in 1925 as part of the *figurative movements.* Art deco combined figurative art with a decorative appeal. In addition, in the 1920s, *surrealism* appeared on the art scene with many of the former dada artists. Surrealism's biggest influence was on the area of illustration.

American design was greatly influenced by modernism and European art. In the 1950s, schools began offering more courses on design, and market research was seen as an important part of businesses. Television grew as a means of communication and magazines represented an area reflecting creativity and glamour. With the emergence of postmodernism in the 1970s, older styles, such as art nouveau and

art deco, were revived and new styles, such as *New Wave,* were created. The advent of technology influenced new ways of communicating in the electronic age, while the 1980s brought forth the idea of "style over substance." With new advancements and technologies, such as computer graphics, graphic design radically changed. The Internet provides a new arena for creating and publishing graphics and offers interactivity as well as new ways to store and share media. Another arena for technology in the future is *virtual reality,* in which a person moves virtually through a computer-simulated environment.

One of the most important studies that enhanced graphic design was the Gestalt theory. In 1912, the Gestalt school of psychology was created in Germany to study how humans see visual information and organize it into a whole. The psychologists concluded, "The whole is more than the sum of its parts," meaning that individual pieces have more meaning when they're combined into one piece. Since these pieces are then influenced by other pieces, they acquire new meanings. Gestalt itself means that the eye looks for a whole unified piece rather than individual parts. Understanding how this theory works can help you create unified designs. In other words, your eye will naturally group like objects together and look for patterns and similarity. The Gestalt principles include

1. *Similarity*—Things that are similar (Figure 1)

FIGURE 1—Similarity refers to similar items that are grouped together. In this figure, the colored squares will appear as rows.
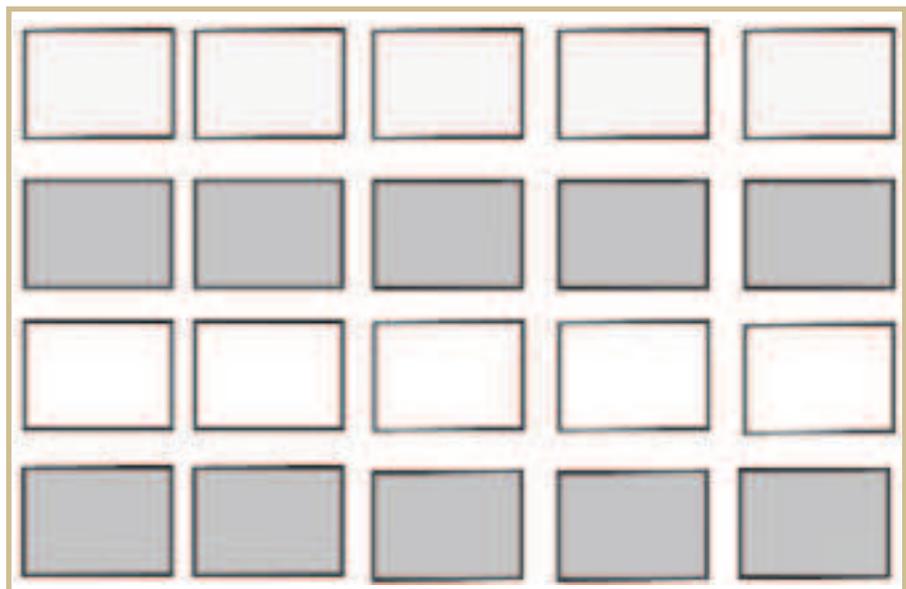
2. *Proximity*—Grouping by similarity in spatial location; nearness (Figure 2)
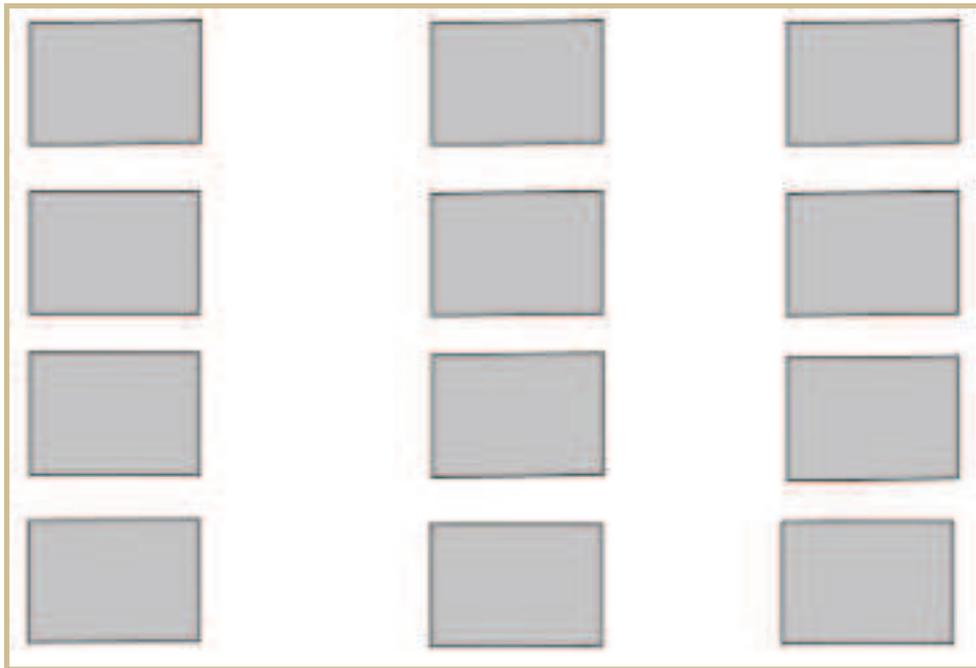
FIGURE 2—Elements that are close together will be perceived as an object. In this case, the same colored squares are used, but their proximity creates columns.

3. *Continuation*—Carrying the eye smoothly into the line or curve of an adjoining object (Figure 3)

4. *Closure*—Using the eye to complete a line or a curve to form a familiar shape (Figure 4)

FIGURE 3—When you look at this image, you should see a curved line with a vertical line through it. The continuation of the line is stronger than the color here so your eye will follow that path first.

FIGURE 4—Even though the square isn't complete, enough of it's present for the eye to complete the shape. When your eye completes a shape, closure occurs.

5. *Figure/ground*—The fundamental law of perception that makes it possible to discern objects (Figure 5)

FIGURE 5—A classic example of figure/ground is Rubbin's vase. What are you looking at here? Is it a white vase on a black background or two profiles of black faces on a white background?

When you look at something, what you see is partially determined by what your own mind brings to the act of perceiving, such as your past experiences and expectations. Gestalt psychologists studied how people perceive information and believe that there's interplay of tensions among shapes on a flat surface because the appearance of any one element or shape depends on its surroundings. In other words, people are looking for simplicity in what they see. In graphic design, you should remember that less is sometimes more.

One of the most important things to learn when you're creating proximity is to not fear your white paper, or *negative space* (Figure 6). It can be an important part of your visual element. Figure 7 shows *positive space.*

FIGURE 6—Negative space is shown on this figure as black. All designs have positive space, which in turn will create negative space. You can use this space as part of your design process.

Semiotics is the study of the influences on our perception. It may include symbols, icons, and indexes that affect how things are interpreted.

Graphic designers working on two-dimensional objects must remember the important standard of *figure/ground* (or *positive/negative space*), which is the relationship between the figure and background. Figure/ground relationships can be broken down into the three following categories:

- *Stable figure/ground*—Each two-dimensional mark or shape is perceived in an unchanging relationship of object against background (Figure 8).

- *Reversible figure/ground*—Figure and ground can be focused on equally (Figure 9).

**FIGURE 7—Positive space in this figure would be the flowers.**
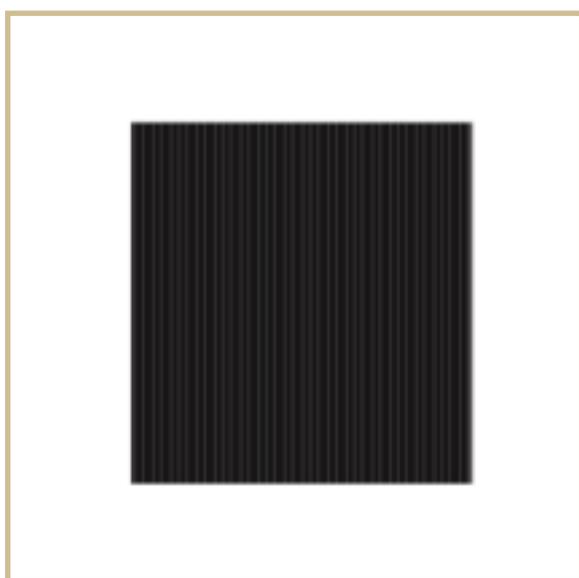
FIGURE 8—A stable figure/ground occurs when the background is clearly apart from the background.

FIGURE 9—A reversible figure/ground occurs when your eye views the background and foreground equally.

FIGURE 10—An ambiguous figure/ground occurs when your eye travels back and forth between the foreground and the background trying to find a focal point. This famous image is an example of ambiguous figure/ground. From one point of view you can see an old lady with a big nose. But can you also see a young lady looking away?

■ *Ambiguous figure/ground*—One figure may turn out to be made up of another or of several different pictures (Figure 10).

The Design Process

The design process is a six-step procedure for good practice in implementing your project. The following are steps in the design process:

1. *Research*—Determining the parameters

2. *Thumbnails*—Idea sketches

3. *Roughs*—Two or three of the best thumbnails for art director or client review

4. *Comprehensives*—The piece you present to the client for final approval

5. *Presentation*—Presenting your piece

6. *Ready for press*—Job is ready for production

The first step is *research.* Who are your audience and what are you trying to achieve? Once, you've decided the answer to that question then you can create some *thumbnails,* or idea sketches. Some designers prefer pencil and paper for this first process others will find photos to use.

A great resource for finding find free photos online is at **http://www.sxc.hu/.** (Always submit to the copyright rules when using any photos.)

Once you've decided on how you'll create the thumbnails, either by drawing or by using software, you start to create a few different designs. You want to use your imagination at this point and have fun with various ideas. After you decide which ideas you feel are the best, you would create some roughs for your client to review by presenting two or three of your best thumbnails. Once your client reviews your roughs

and decides which one they prefer, you would create a *comp* (or *comprehensive*) of your rough that includes object placement and color. (At this point, you don't have to provide fine details of your piece.) After the client approves your comp, you can refine the piece with details and present it to your client. The last step would be ready for press. The file must be cleanly prepared and all files, links, colors, and fonts must be included for the printer.

One of your aims as a graphic designer is to create a balance between *intellectual unity* and *visual unity. Intellectual unity* focuses on the ideas coming across that are conveyed by words. *Visual unity* is achieved by how objects are arranged in a piece. Many times, you may work with another person such as a copywriter in an ad agency to achieve this balance. While the copywriter specializes on the words, you focus on the image. Another aspect of being a good graphic designer is to be a good abstract artist. *Abstract art* concentrates on color, value, texture, shape, and direction. In many ways, graphic design itself is abstract art combining different elements.

Visual perception is an emotional and physical experience for the viewer. Dynamic tension is then created not by the piece itself, but by reaction to the piece. People are programmed to read things from the top to bottom, rather than bottom to top, due to the sense of gravity. People also tend to be more comfortable with work that seems anchored or stable on the bottom; if it's the other way around, people sense tension. People tend to prefer vertical and horizontal lines rather than diagonal, which make them feel as though there's movement. In addition, in Western culture, people are used to reading from left to right, which influences how people perceive balance on a piece. If you want to communicate effectively, you need to include balance in your work and that requires understanding how to manipulate visual tension.

Remember *balance* as a state in which tension is equal on all sides, rather than a piece with no tension at all. People are drawn to balanced pieces, and ideas are more likely to be communicated through balanced work. Two basic types—symmetry and asymmetry—can achieve balance.

Symmetry achieves balance through likeness; *asymmetry* achieves balance through contrast. In creating balance through contrast, the two considerations are weight and direction. Weight and direction, however, can be influenced by several factors, including the following:

- Location

- Spatial depth

- Size

- Texture

- Isolation

- Subject matter

- Value

- Shape

- Structure

- Color

Illustration

At times in your career in graphic design, you may need to work with illustrations or photographs—either creating them yourself or locating them. *Illustration* is an image making a visual statement. Illustration can communicate in ways that photography can't, as the illustrator is able to manipulate details for the viewer to focus on certain aspects of the design. With the Web, the field of electronic illustration has grown and expanded into animation as well.

Illustration varies by the style and medium the artist chooses, such as through drawing, painting, or computer generation. The two main divisions in types of illustration are *advertising* and *editorial.* Illustration can be further categorized into the following fields:

- Fashion illustration

- Recording covers and book illustration

- Magazines and newspapers

- Illustration for in-house products

- Greeting cards and retail goods

- Medical and technical illustration

- Animation and motion graphics

You can create illustrations in many ways, such as using pen and ink, mixed-media collage, and computer generation. You can also use a variety of computer software, including Photoshop or Illustrator, to create illustrations. You may be wondering where to get ideas for your illustrations.

You can follow the design process that you read about later in this study guide to research the material, to generate ideas, and to create thumbnail sketches to begin. Also, keep several samples of illustrations you see on file that you can use for inspiration later.

Photography

Just as with illustrations, you may be called on to create or obtain photographs. Many people believe that photographs show accurate slices of life; however, in fact, the photo can be manipulated by a variety of factors, including point of view and darkroom techniques. Photographs are needed in design for many reasons, such as to illustrate a story or sell a product. With digital photography, it's quick and easy to acquire and manipulate photographs for your projects.

The two categories of photography are *candid* and *staged* photographs. Photojournalists generally take candid shots of events taking place, while studio photographers generally take staged photographs of people in high-quality lighting. Areas of photography include

- Photojournalism

- Product photography

- Corporate photography

- Photo illustration

Therefore, when you need photographs for your design, you have three options. You can take the photograph yourself, hire a photographer, or buy stock photographs from an agency.

Advertising Design

The main purpose of advertising design is to persuade the audience. Advertising design can come in many forms, such as billboards or commercials, and its usual intent is to generate income from sales or profits. The three main points for successful advertising are as follows:

- Attracting attention

- Communicating a message

- Persuading an audience

The two main categories of advertising are *retail* and *national,* which are then divided into smaller groups. These smaller categories include

- Television

- Newspapers

- Direct mail

- Internet

- Other advertising, such as magazines or billboards

- Personal promotion

Before beginning any advertising project, be sure you know the answers to the following questions:

- Who is the audience?

- What is the nature of the product?

- Where will the ad appear?

- What is the purpose of the ad?

- What is the budget?

Web Design

The Web has opened up a new arena for graphic designers. There are new tools, new processes, and new opportunities. With the communication power of the Web, you're able to reach millions of people all over the world in a short time period.

Web-based media differ from print mainly because they're interactive and nonlinear. The differences between the two stem from the fact that printed designs are generally linear, in that magazines and newspapers are read from front to back. However, in a Web page, you can click several options, links, or pages to go in any number of directions. With the Web, you also can have more media, such as motion or sound. Once the production stage is reached, the differences multiply even more, such as with download times to view graphics, image scan dpi, and viewing designs on a screen versus the printed page.

Some recent versions of graphic tools, such as Photoshop, allow you to specialize your images for the Web. This will help you when it comes time to make some choices, such as color selection or file format.

Self-Check 1

At the end of each section of *Introduction to Graphic Design,* you'll be asked to pause and check your understanding of what you've just read by completing a "Self-Check" exercise. Answering these questions will help you review what you've studied so far. Please complete *Self-Check 1* now.

Indicate the answer to each question.

1. What are the six steps in the design process?

   _____

2. What are the four basic principles of design according to Robin?

   _____

3. What are three main points for successful advertising?

   _____

4. What are the two main divisions in types of illustration?

   _____

5. What can you use to create illustrations?

   _____

Indicate whether the following statements are True or False.

_____ 6. Figure and ground can be focused on equally in ambiguous figure/ground.

_____ 7. Copyrighters specialize in images.

_____ 8. Intellectual unity focuses on the ideas coming across that are conveyed by words.

_____ 9. The two categories of photography are candid and staged photographs.

_____ 10. Photographs are accurate portrayals of life.

_____ 11. The two main categories of advertising are retail and national.