

Graphic Design

“Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works.” –Steve Jobs

National Visual Art Standards

VA:Cr1: Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.

VA:Cr2.1: Engage in making a work of design without having a preconceived plan.

VA:Cr10.1: Document the process of developing ideas from early stages to fully elaborated ideas.

Guiding Questions

- Where and how do we encounter images in our world?
- What is graphic design?
- How do designers grow and become accomplished?

Objectives

Students will...

- Generate multiple ideas in the form of thumbnail drawings;
- Determine which of their ideas are the best;
- Make roughs;
- Make a final comp.

Vocabulary

Abstract: existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence.

Ambiguity: uncertainty of meaning.

Composition: a complete work of art or design, seen in total, not as individual visual elements.

Comprehensive design: the final rendering of a graphic idea, short for comprehensive.

Format: refers to the layout of a design, the surface area in which a composition is created and its boundaries, such as the size of a business card or brochure.

Idea: a thought or suggestion as to a possible course of action; a concept or mental impression; the aim or purpose.

Line: a line is an identifiable path created by a point moving in space. It is one-dimensional and can vary in width, direction, and length. Lines often define the edges of a shape. Lines can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal, straight or curved, thick or thin.

Representational: relating to or characterized by depiction of the physical appearance of things.

Time Period: at least four classes, 45–60 minutes in length

The graphic design curriculum

The purpose of this curriculum is to:

- Help train high school teachers to incorporate graphic design into their high school art classes;
- Introduce graphic design to high school students, help them understand what graphic design is, and how to use it.

Most high school art teachers are exceptional artists who—while well-trained in traditional art media—may not feel confident teaching graphic design. This curriculum was created to help bridge this gap, focusing on the similarities between art and graphic design, and reinforce the common foundation of technique, materials, and craft that they share. Though the purposes of fine art and design differ, they are rooted in the same two-dimensional design elements and principles. Starting with these commonalities the curriculum walks both the teacher and student through the design thinking and making processes.

The curriculum has been built to support a full course on graphic design. With that in mind, it is also meant as a curricular springboard, with plenty of room for customization based on the unique classroom dynamics, access to technology, and needs of each individual art teacher and their particular classroom. Though the intent is for teachers to use the entire curriculum, any unit can stand alone.

The curriculum has been created in an effort to be inclusive and therefore does not include the use of specialized technology (hardware or software). These digital tools are important, but not necessary to teach and learn the fundamentals of traditional graphic design and visual communication. Computers and software are important tools necessary to succeed as a professional, yet they are just that—tools. If design was merely about organizing text and pictures on a page, machines would have already replaced graphic designers. Beyond simply communicating, graphic designers strive to stimulate intellectual and emotional responses. The role of graphic design is not only to communicate and explain, but to be the catalyst that propels a viewer to a new way of seeing, experiencing, or thinking about the world.

If students continue to pursue graphic design in post-secondary education, they will have ample opportunity to learn the necessary—and ever changing—software; they will not be behind or need to catch up. Students completing this curriculum are likely to have a better grasp and understanding of the design process, which will put them ahead of their peers who focused on technology instead of a

Rough sketch: a mid-stage development of a graphic idea, often shown to a client for approval.

Shape: the form of an object or its external boundary, outline, or external surface, as opposed to other properties such as color, texture, etc.

Texture: an interwoven pattern of light and dark tones that imparts a physical quality to a surface—rough, smooth, etc.

Thumbnail sketch: a small sketched idea, a fast way to generate multiple ideas.

Ubiquitous: present, appearing, or found everywhere.

Materials

- Black markers
- Colored pencils
- Pencils
- Plain paper (8½" × 11")
- Printouts of the thumbnail and rough templates
- Sheet protectors and a three ring binder for each student (optional)

Figures

1. *The Universal Arts of Graphic Design*
2. Examples of Assignment 1
3. Examples of Assignment 2—thumbnail sketches, rough sketches, and final comprehensive design
4. Examples of Assignment 3
5. Examples of Assignment 4

Art Context, Cultural Connections and Relevancy

Graphic design is a **ubiquitous** art form. We are exposed to thousands of ads every day, on TV, billboards, radio, on the web. Graphic design is literally everywhere.

Personal computers have made it possible for anyone to make their own brochures, signs, and other visual communication. However, many people think that designing something involves using a lot of fancy fonts, finding some clip art, and that's it.

Design is not decoration, it is problem solving. This curriculum walks students through the design process and gives them lots of practice solving problem in order to grow their skills as graphic designers.

Handouts

- Handout 1A.1-Thumbnails.pdf
- Handout 1A.2-Roughs.pdf

solid design foundation. Successful design comes from empathetic, thinking people, not machines and technology.

The curriculum will give high school students exposure to the design process and design problems as a way of introducing them to visual communication. The curriculum includes:

- Unit 1: Introduction to Graphic Design
- Unit 2: 2D Design Basics—Points, Lines, and Planes; Gestalt—Shape, Balance, Rhythm, Unity; Color
- Unit 3: Design Process—Define the Problem; Learn; Generate Ideas; Design Development; Implementation
- Unit 4: Typography—Typography in Action; The Language of Type; Font Pairing and Hierarchy
- Unit 5: References; Glossary

This curriculum has been created with the needs of both students and teachers in mind. Adhering to the National Visual Arts and K-12 curriculum standards, the curriculum is designed not only to be educational for students, but also practical for art teachers to apply in their classrooms, while still meeting current art standards. In addition to visual communication, a core focus of this curriculum is design thinking: a strategic form of creative problem solving that is not limited to graphic design—or even art—but is being applied to problems as diverse as land use and traffic flow, to agriculture and engineering. While the curriculum has been created to help prepare students interested in pursuing graphic design at the college or university level, its focus is on how people communicate visually and how to utilize design thinking to help students prepare for any occupational or academic field they may choose.

An introduction to graphic design

In the intro to their documentary *The Universal Arts of Graphic Design*, (see Figure 1) PBS Digital Studios describes graphic design thusly:

“Though often overlooked, Graphic Design surrounds us: it is the signs we read, the products we buy, and the rooms we inhabit. Graphic designers find beauty within limitations, working towards the ultimate goal of visually communicating a message. Utilizing a language of type and imagery, graphic designers try to make every aspect of our lives defined and beautiful.”



FIGURE 1: *The Universal Arts of Graphic Design* (www.pbs.org/video/2311391293), PBS, Digital Studios.

While this is a good “nutshell” description of graphic design, in contemporary society, design has grown beyond only being a means to organize a visually cluttered environment, or to persuade, inform, and organize an audience to meet the needs of business and industry. Design has become, as Richard Grefé, former Executive Director of AIGA, defined it, “the intermediary between information and understanding.” Properly applied, effective design—design which solves specific problems—can influence individual and group behavior, political policy, and even society.

While traditionally the term “graphic design” has referred to two-dimensional surface design—the arrangement of text, images, and color to express a message—the discipline has evolved to incorporate three-dimensional objects and spaces, and time-based audio/visual experiences. As graphic designers now find work in every field from publishing to entertainment, the sciences to finance, and are incorporating traditional media such as print and television with new and emerging technologies such as smart phones and virtual reality, now more than ever, design education is a lifelong endeavor. By focusing on the visual communicative fundamentals of art and design, in combination with creative thinking and problem solving as opposed to technology, this curriculum aims to prepare students to be lifelong learners able to thrive as the methods of information communication and consumption continue to change.

In addition to design studios and advertising agencies, graphic designers also work as in-house talent for companies, for traditional and for new media content creators and publishers, and even as individual entrepreneurs. The practice of design is highly collaborative, and designers frequently work with writers, illustrators, photographers, printers, advertisers, marketers and other professionals.

A brief list of careers in graphic design includes:

- advertising (promotional) design
- book design
- book jacket design
- brand and identity design
- corporate communication design
- editorial design
- environmental design
- interactive (experience) design
- illustration
- information design
- motion design
- package design
- publication design
- retail design
- wayfinding design

Beyond these more traditional roles, designers are finding their creative problem solving and communication skills in demand in a growing list of industries, including government and public policy,

insurance, health care, architecture, environmental services, and engineering. Graphic design is a competitive and ever-evolving profession that offers an expanding and rewarding number of career paths to the curious, determined, and hard working.

One of the key skills all designers must develop is a sensitivity to and awareness of the activity in the larger design community. For students just beginning their design education, knowing where to look can be confusing. In addition to traditional periodicals such as *Print* and *Communication Arts*, portfolio sites such as [Behance.net](https://www.behance.net) can expose students to the work of professional and student designers from all over the world. As students begin the curriculum, ask them to find and follow at least ten designers (via [Behance](https://www.behance.net), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com), or [Pinterest](https://www.pinterest.com)) who they find inspiring.

ACTIVITY PROCESS

Engagement (the hook–motivation and relevancy)

Ask students what they think graphic design is. How did their perspectives change after being introduced to graphic design? How does their design compare to professional design? Just because everyone can do it (access to desktop publishing software), doesn't mean everyone can do it effectively. Learning basic graphic design skills will enable students to become more confident communicators and create effective design solutions.

DAYS 1–4

The Elements of Design

At the beginning of the curriculum, easing students into their start with graphic design and the design process is important. One of the most difficult aspects of design for students to initially grasp is that graphic design is seldom a **representational** depiction of an object, but more often an **abstract** image that communicates a larger **idea**. The following exercises can be thought of as ice-breakers to introduce students to the way graphic designers work out solutions to problems.

Another challenge for students when beginning a design class is that they often become attached to their first idea, and as a result, have difficulty coming up with more than one. As graphic designers are expected to explore many ideas in order to find the best solution to a problem, they use **thumbnail sketches** (thumbnails—small, quick sketches) to quickly get many ideas down on paper. These thumbnail sketches are then evaluated and further developed into mock-ups of the concept, or **rough sketches** (roughs). It is these rough sketches that are often presented to the client as a way of ensuring that the designs are on track. Once the rough sketches are approved, they are developed into a finished, neatly executed **comprehensive design** (comps). By learning and working through this process (see Figure 3), generating multiple ideas will be ingrained as part of the design process as students move through the curriculum.

Assignment 1: Line (see Figure 2)

OBJECTIVE: Introduce students to a traditional, multi-step design and development process (thumbnails, roughs, and comps), while utilizing the elements and principles of two-dimensional design to solve visual problems. Another goal is to help students create meaning

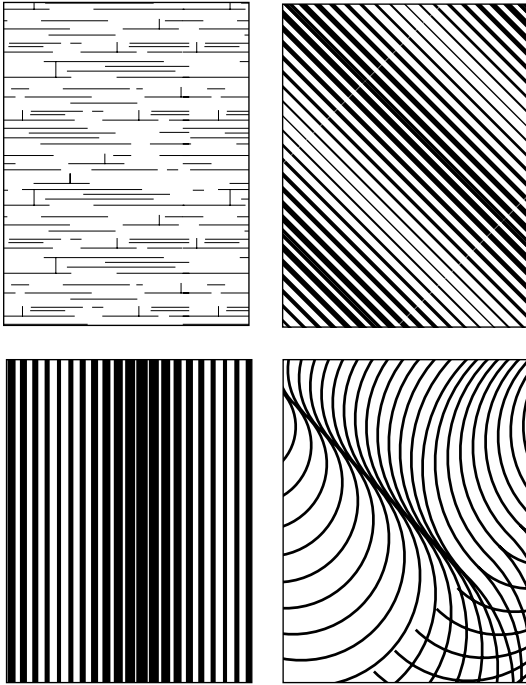


FIGURE 2: Examples of Assignment 1.

with abstract images using the visual elements of design: **line**, **shape**, **texture**, and color (more on this in Unit 2). This process may feel awkward at first, as students are used to creating one idea and making it into art, but designers generate many possible solutions to a problem as a way to improve the quality of their work. Making abstract images allows **ambiguity** to exist, and ambiguity allows for many interpretations. For example, the final comprehensive design (see Figure 2) could be a closeup of a cow, or fabric floating in the breeze. Practice is the key to feeling comfortable using the design process, and these introductory assignments are designed to give students the practice they need to develop confidence in their ideas.

SPECIFICATIONS: Students must accomplish the following:

- Create 16 thumbnail sketches for each of the four assignments.
- Look objectively at their ideas, show them to other students, and evaluate their thumbnail sketches to determine which three ideas are the best, and create three rough sketches for each of the four exercises. This, too, may feel awkward because it is a new skill. With practice, students will feel comfortable evaluating their own and others' ideas to select the three best ones. Remind them that there are not just one, but many right ways.
- Evaluate their rough sketches, use the same process as above to select the one they think is best, and create a single, neatly executed comprehensive design for each of the four assignments.

PROCESS:

1. Have students use letter size plain paper to sketch small ideas. Sometimes students don't know how to get started and just stare at the blank page. If so, a template may be provide (see *Handout 1A.1-Thumbnails.pdf*).
2. Using a pencil, have students draw a variety of lines with varying thickness and distance from each other across the thumbnail box. Repeat for each thumbnail box.
3. As students work on their thumbnails, have them experiment with as many different types of line as they can think of—thick, thin, wavy, dotted, etc.
4. Students should create 16 unique thumbnails, then evaluate their work, and select the three strongest sketches. What makes a strong idea could be **composition**, great movement, eye-catching contrast, or a host of other qualities. Students usually know when a design is successful, but may not have the ability to create successful design themselves until they have practiced many times.
5. Have students make their own rough sketch on plain letter-sized paper, or provide them with a template (see *Handout 1A.2-Roughs.pdf*).
6. Continuing to work in pencil with their three chosen thumbnails, students should develop each thumbnail sketch into a more developed design (roughs). A rough is drawn more neatly and with more care than a thumbnail, and can be started in pencil and completed with a black marker.

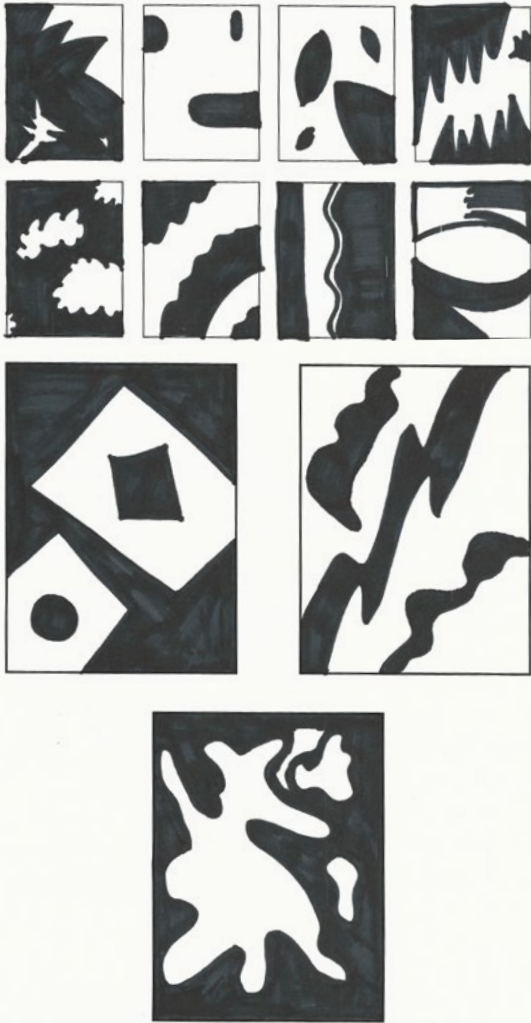


FIGURE 3: Examples of Assignment 2—thumbnail sketches, rough sketches, and final comprehensive design. These thumbnails, roughs, and final comp showcase a student's sketching process. The student is exploring black and white shapes in relationship to the specific format (the rectangle's edges).

- When their roughs are complete, have students evaluate their work and select the strongest rough. If they don't know which is the strongest, they can ask you or other students for help. Continually refining their work strengthens and develops their design sense.
- With their chosen rough, students can now create their final comp on a clean sheet of plain letter-size paper. Students should develop their concept into a neatly executed comprehensive design, working first in pencil and then finishing the comp in black marker.

Assignment 2: Shape (see Figure 3)

PROCESS:

- Provide students with the pre-printed thumbnail sheets (see *Handout 1A.1-Thumbnails.pdf*), or have them work on plain, letter-size paper if they prefer.
- Using a pencil, have the students draw four shapes that have similar qualities (e.g. four geometric shapes or four organic shapes) in each thumbnail box.
- As students work on their thumbnails, challenge them to arrange the shapes in each thumbnail so as to allow the viewer's eye to move from one shape to the other with ease.
- Students should create 16 unique thumbnails, and then evaluate their work using the same process they did in the line assignment, selecting the three sketches they feel are the strongest or most successful.
- Provide students with the pre-printed rough sheets (see *Handout 1A.2-Roughs.pdf*), or have them make their own rough sheets on plain letter-size paper.
- Working from their three chosen thumbnails, have students develop each sketch into a more developed design, working first in pencil and then finishing each design in black marker.
- When their roughs are complete, have students evaluate their work and select the rough they feel is the most successful. They can ask for feedback from the teacher and other students before they make their decision.
- On a clean sheet of plain paper and working from their chosen rough, have students develop their concept into a neatly executed comprehensive design, working first in pencil and then finishing the comp in black marker.

Assignment 3: Texture (see Figure 4)

PROCESS:

- Provide students with the pre-printed thumbnail sheets (see *Handout 1A.1-Thumbnails.pdf*), or have them draw their thumbnail sketches on plain letter-sized paper.
- Using a pencil, have the students draw different textures (e.g. a cross hatched basket weave or a "sandy" texture made of closely drawn dots) in each thumbnail box.
- As students work on their thumbnails, challenge them to see what textures they can create using other materials they find in the classroom (e.g., chalk, charcoal sticks, carpet, ceiling). Ask them to imagine how they might recreate the texture made by those tools graphically with their black markers.

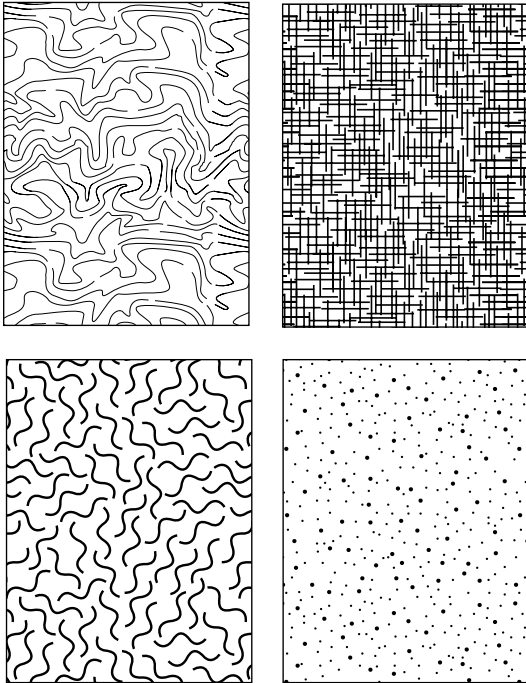


FIGURE 4: Examples of Assignment 3.

- Students should create 16 unique thumbnails, and then evaluate their work, selecting the three sketches they feel are the strongest. They can ask for feedback from other students before they make their decision.
- Provide students with the pre-printed rough sheets (see *Handout 1A.2-Roughs.pdf*), or have them make their rough drawings on plain letter-size paper.
- Working from their three chosen thumbnails, have students develop each sketch into a more developed design, working first in pencil and then finishing each design in black marker.
- When their roughs are complete, have students evaluate their work and select the rough they feel is the strongest.
- On a clean sheet of plain paper and working from their chosen rough, have students develop their concept into a neatly executed comprehensive design, working first in pencil and then finishing the comp in black marker.

Assignment 4: Color (see Figure 5)

PROCESS:

- Provide students with the pre-printed thumbnail sheets (see *Handout 1A.1-Thumbnails.pdf*), or have them make their thumbnail sketches on plain letter-size paper.
- Using pencil, have the students draw thumbnails for 16 different abstract patterns.
- As students work on their thumbnails, refer students to the work they made in Assignments 1-3, and challenge them to create designs that make different use of line, shape, and texture, and that create different focal points for the viewer.
- Once students have 16 unique thumbnails in pencil, have them apply two contrasting colors of the purest hue (e.g. purple as opposed to violet red, green as opposed to yellow green) to their thumbnails. Challenge the students to consider what could happen when the colors overlap, or how the design might change if they leave certain areas white.
- With their two colors applied, have students evaluate their work, selecting the three sketches they feel are the strongest.
- Provide students with the pre-printed rough sheets (see *Handout 1A.2-Roughs.pdf*), or have them make their rough drawings on plain letter-size paper.
- Working from their three chosen thumbnails, have students develop each sketch into a more developed design. In each rough, have students use different hues of their chosen colors (e.g. adding violet red to purple, or lime to green) to create a sense of motion or energy, calm or stillness in each design.
- When their roughs are complete, have students evaluate their work and select the rough they feel is the strongest.
- On a clean sheet of plain paper and working from their chosen rough, have students develop their concept into a neatly executed comprehensive design, working first in pencil and then finishing the comp by making use of their full set of colored pencils.

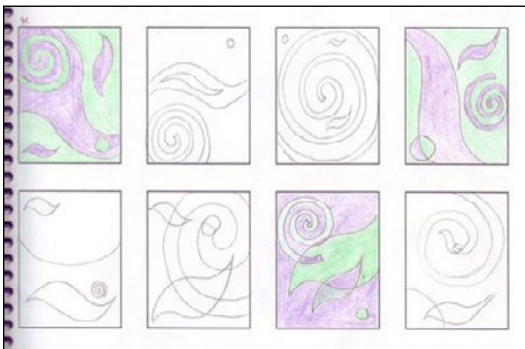


FIGURE 5: Examples of Assignment 4. In-progress thumbnail sketches (top) and finished comp. Note the limited colors in the thumbnail sketches have been expanded in the finished design to draw the viewer's eye to the lower left corner.

HINTS: When coloring in their work, if students place a clean sheet of paper between their hand and their work, it won't smudge.

Adaptations and Accommodations

If students have limited motor skills, encourage them to do the best they can and try to improve. If they are unable to use their hands as needed, they could use a computer to complete the assignment, or students could work in pairs. They could also try thicker drawing tools such as markers or fat pencils.

Extensions

There are many insightful readings devoted to rhythm and balance that would make a nice accompanying text to the assignments in this unit (see Unit 5A References). Go over the content in class, if desired.

Homework or Independent Work

If students need more to do, they could create their own symmetry and asymmetry drawings like the example on page 26 of *Graphic Design: The New Basics* book, cut patterns out of paper as shown on page 27, or take photos of repetition and rhythm, as shown on pages 28-29.

Closure

Have students put their four, finished comps on the wall and look at them together. Ask the students if they can detect a unifying factor between each of their comps, or if they appear as unrelated pieces? Ask the students to identify what they might do differently if they were to repeat the exercise to unify the four designs. Task students with making use of the thumbnail, rough, and comp techniques in completing their assignments for Units 2-4 (more in Unit 3).

Checks For Understanding

Early in the curriculum students may have difficulty coming up with abstract, nonrepresentational ideas for images. If so, ask them to enlarge a detail from an object in the classroom (e.g. the pull tab on a soft drink can or the cap of a pen) in their thumbnail square until it is too large to be recognizable. Encourage students to talk with one another as they sketch and compare their use of line, shape, and color introduced in this unit (more in Unit 2). Seeing others' work will spark discussion and new ideas of their own. It's alright if students are influenced in part by another person's design. This is how new designers can improve their work. Check each student as they work, reinforcing the vocabulary and principles with feedback and critique, asking questions to ensure comprehension.

Lesson Assessment Based On Objectives

Students should be assessed on their ability to demonstrate an awareness of what line, shape, texture and color are, and apply those concepts to their own work. They need to exhibit a willingness to come up with sixteen ideas for each exercise, and then practice looking and evaluating which they determine to be their best three concepts to rough out. The care they take in making their final comp reflects how they feel about their work: are they doing it to just get it done, or are they trying to make it the best they can?

The correct use of unit vocabulary in class dialog and in verbal reflection should be accurate and appropriate to the work they make and see. All work produced in and out of class should be collected and analyzed. (See *Unit 1A Rubric.docx* for assessment and rubric ideas. Customize to meet class specific assessment needs.)



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AIGA is the profession's oldest and largest professional membership organization for design—with 70 chapters and more than 25,000 members—they advance design as a professional craft, strategic advantage, and vital cultural force. From content that defines the global practice to events that connect and catalyze, they work to enhance the value and deepen the impact of design across all disciplines on business, society, and our collective future.