

Visual Communications 1: Course Basics

Description

The purpose of this course is to give you a sense of what goes into the process of communicating ideas visually, using both words and images. It will not make you a designer, but it will introduce you to the problems that designers face, the tools they use, and the issues and compromises that they wrestle with. It is a survey course, so you will be exposed to the surface of many aspects of design. Take heart, because unless you decide to change majors, you will have your hands full enough with your respective business careers. The exposure you get here will sensitize you to the communications issues that you will face both in business and in your own personal communication.

Through research, examples, readings, and *critiquing* individual assignments we will sharpen awareness, build a vocabulary for assessment, and form some criteria for evaluating visual communication that we encounter every day.

For many of you this will also be your introduction to the process of art education. Unlike the disciplines of science or math, there may be many right solutions here, just as surely as there are many wrong answers in math. What is most important is not whether a solution is right or wrong, but whether we can learn from its success or failure. We do this by looking at—*critiquing*—work, talking about it objectively with respect to how it satisfies the requirements of the assignment, and paying close attention to opportunities missed, personal innovations and flourishes added, and the overall strength of the solution.

Course Requirements

This is a studio course. Unlike courses where you are asked to read, think, and tell what you have learned I will be asking you to create assignments that also demonstrate your accomplishment—both what you have learned and how well you have tried to use it. During the first part of the semester we will have weekly skill-building assignments. Near the end of the semester we'll work on an extended project that will require more planning and several weeks to complete. For logical and practical reasons, it is important that you complete these assignments on time, for the skills you acquire in one assignment will be needed in the next. The best suggestion I can give you is to approach your work with interest, curiosity, enthusiasm, and thoughtfulness. And don't be afraid of mistakes.

Equipment

You will need a sketch pad for roughing out ideas in class. It should be near 11 x 14 inches in size, and does not need to be high quality paper—newsprint is fine. You'll also need a soft pencil and an eraser, just in case. And you may also find a notebook handy, for whatever notes you need to keep for yourself.

In this class we'll be creating and managing a lot of digital data, so you will need a way to store and transport it safely, as well as a way to work with it quickly in class and lab. The best (and only safe) way to do this is to have a portable hard drive that you can use to plug in to the lab's computer with your images and design files. I'm recommending a portable drive that's at least 250gb (bigger is better) in size, preferably with a firewire 400 (or 800 with fw400 adapter) interface. (You are not likely to use more than 60gb of space so if you already have a smaller drive it may be fine.)

Grades

According to the Registrar, letter grades A through F have the following meanings: Exceptional, Good, Acceptable, Poor, Failure. If you care about your grade, there are at least three things you can do to improve your chances for success.

1. Come to class. It's worth a quarter of your grade.
2. Turn in assignments, on time, every week. They are worth one quarter of your grade.
3. Do interesting work. The effort and quality you put into your work is worth one quarter of your grade.

Enthusiasm and a good attitude toward work will be an asset in this course. Extra weight will be given for work produced in the second half of the course, once basic technical issues are solved. And yes, although it does not appear in the above equation, your participation in discussing work, both yours and that of others, will affect your grade by making up that remaining one quarter of your grade. Exceptional students take heed. Talk to me if this, or anything else covered in this course, is not clear.

Course Site

A course web site is at <woodypackard.com/auviscom1>. I will post as much as I can there, including information about your assignments, additional reading you can do, some notes on subjects we cover in class or don't have time to cover in class. You can also check your current standing by logging in to *Progress* with your last name and a password that you give me in class.

Technical Problems

Although this is not strictly a technical course, your results will depend on technical proficiency, so at some level technical issues will be unavoidable. Most of them can be solved if you take advantage of the work times scheduled for your class so that you can simply ask me when problems arise. For work completed outside of class you will need to find help from a lab monitor or other staff member on the fifth floor. You must be able to show results each week, so if you're having trouble with this part of the process, we need to talk and find a solution sooner rather than later.

For software or printing problems, you should feel free to ask me questions in class, or during the week by calling me at 585 415-3648. I get email at wood@woodypackard.com, so if your question requires a really brief answer this will work. (Email gets lower priority than a phone call and is less useful in solving a problem of any complexity.) For specific issues with the computer lab's equipment, talk to Don Weinhardt or the lab assistant on duty.

Outline of Topics

The Trouble With Design

Practical Matters

Software and Hardware

File Management

Elements

Value

Color

Line

Form

Principles

Figure/Ground

Symmetry/Motion

Repetition

Attention and Hierarchy

Signal/Noise

Perception

Perspective

Color constancy

Gestalt

Interest and Focus

Tools and Planning

Preferences

Working with Styles

Communication Media

Media and Meaning

Page/Screen Properties

Color Models rgb; cmyk; Lab; HSV

Image Types

Typography

Typeface/Font

Leading

Size

Page Design

Typographic Systems

Looking at Photographs

Brief History

Anatomy and Aesthetics

Working with Images

Vector

Bitmap

Application of Elements and Principles

Escaping Flatland

Micro/Macro

Layering and Separation

Small Multiples

Color and Information

Persuasion and Emotion

Visual Rhetoric

Professional Design

Suggested Reading

Books

Elam, Kimberly. *Typographic Systems*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007.

Gladwell, Malcolm. *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*. New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 2005.

Heskett, John. *Design: A Very Short Introduction*. Very Short Introductions. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Lupton, Ellen. *Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students*, Princeton Architectural Press, 2004

Spiekermann, Erik and Ginger, E. M. . *Stop Stealing Sheep and Find out How Type Works*. Mountain View, California: Adobe Press, 1993.

Tufte, Edward R. *Envisioning Information*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1990.

Web Sites

I will list these on the course site under *Resources*, < <http://woodypackard.com/auviscom1/pages/resources.php>>