

Lecture 9: Designing to Communicate

When you sit down for the first time to design, it can be extremely daunting. The art of learning to communicate through design takes time to master. Many new designers are capable of producing excellent designs which look absolutely gorgeous. But do they communicate? Are they *effective* as design pieces?

No matter what you are designing, you will need to have a basic idea of the message you are trying to get across. This will help you form design considerations specific to that piece. Whether it is commercial, graphic art or an abstract film, design is primarily designed to communicate. As such, the message is key. Your actual message may be related to the words or visual imagery you employ, and these, in turn, can be supported and emphasized through various elements within the overall composition, such as colour, size, placement, typeface and treatment. But first you need to figure out what your message is!

So what's your message?

Most of us covered this in primary school, and funnily enough even here in postgraduate education it's still relevant! Think about who, what, where, when and why in terms of your message.

- *Who*
Who are you communicating to? Think about this audience. What do they have in common? Different groups or target markets are going to require different design approaches, so start out by figuring who you are going to target. After all – there's no point designing in a heavy metal rock band style if your audience is conservative recent retirees! Often you will find if your message is for a large group, you may need to break your audience down into significant sub-groups and develop a multifaceted campaign or design to target these.
- *What*
What is your primary message? What do you want your design to communicate? Sometimes it may not be a specific message – sometimes it's just a feeling. Other times you may have several specific messages you are trying to get across. No matter what, make sure you know the specific message your design is aiming to deliver.
- *Where*
Do you have a plan of which medium you're using to communicate? Sometimes it's a given (e.g. "*design a poster to...*") but other times you will be called on to suggest suitable media to communicate a specific message. If so, think about your audience and what you're trying to say. In any case, you will need to establish artistic and technical limitations associated with your delivery mechanism(s) and work to accommodate these.
- *When*
Think about the timeline for your message. How long is your delivery mechanism viable? Do you have time sensitive information? If so, how are you going to design to accommodate this? Are you doing a long term campaign, or is this a quick one off? All of these considerations will impact on the way you chose to articulate your design.
- *Why*
Closely related to what, why is a little different in that it considers the overall motivation for the design or campaign. For instance, your 'what' might be to get the message across to consumers that all shoes are 50% off for one week only. The why, however, might be to clear excess stock and increase traffic and brand awareness of the store. Knowing not just *what* but *why* gives you an edge when creating your designs. In the above example, since reinforcing brand awareness is one of the primary motivations, it is important to consider this when you are planning your design solution.

Once you've covered the 5 Ws, it's time to move on to the H. HOW are you going to use design elements and techniques to further and support your message?

Colour

Colour selection is an integral element in design. It is one of the most immediate methods of conveying message and meaning. Additionally, particularly in corporate design, often once a colour is 'owned' it will be forever associated with your company or your message. For instance, think of *Coca-Cola*, and you'll almost invariably think of red! This is no accident. Coca-Cola, and other businesses, spend millions of dollars on advertising and brand recognition. Often colour is a primary component in their visual media.

The best way to measure effectiveness of colour is through its analysis in particular design applications. You will note that when colour is used well, it can be a vital key in communication. Colour can help create enough interest or curiosity to attract your audience to engage with the design in order to find out more about your message. To achieve this sort of intrigue within the target audience, it is important to understand the psychology behind colour choices. A good selection can strengthen the transmission of your message, making your design more effective. Conversely, a poor colour selection can confuse or dilute the strength of your design and thus your message.

The influence of colour is demonstrated in all forms of visual communication, including logos, corporate stationery, postcards, print media, advertisements on television and in print, on the Internet and even in user interface design for websites and computer applications.

Colour can communicate in various ways:

1. Colour emphasises, highlights, and leads the eye to important points or links
2. Colour identifies recurring themes (i.e. headings and subheadings are often the same colour)
3. Colour can differentiate, such as different colours to show different aspects or areas of importance
4. Colour can symbolize or trigger emotions and associations

How Colour is Perceived

Warm colors include Reds, Oranges and Yellows and create a mood of excitement & warmth, stimulating activity and creativity.



Cool colors have passive, calming qualities that aid concentration and can create a mood of peacefulness and tranquility by reducing tension. Cool shades include Violets and Blues.


















Green can be either warm or cool. When it's influenced by yellow, it becomes warm and when it's influenced by blue, it becomes cool.









Neutrals are great for adding stability and balance. They include colors that contain a significant amount of gray, beige and taupe.



| | | |
|---|----------|--|
|  | Red | Stimulating, exciting, passion, dynamic, sexy, provocative, intense. It is great for accents and boldness, stimulates appetites, but is also associated with debt. |
|  | Pink | Romantic, youthful, happy, sweet, spirited, innocence, femininity, soft, health. In business, be sure you're aware of its feminine implications and associations. |
|  | | |
|  | Orange | Energizing, inviting, friendly, vital, tangy, un, whimsical, loud. Orange is great for highlighting information as it evokes positivity and sunshine. It can also symbolize cowardice. It appeals to intellectuals and is excellent for accenting things. Too much can be unnerving. |
|  | Yellow | Luminous, enlightening, warm, sunny, cheerful. Yellow motivates; it stimulates creative and intellectual energy; it's cheerful and easygoing. |
|  | | |
|  | Brown | Rustic, sheltering, wholesome, rich, durable, earthy, reliable. |
|  | Green | Nature, fresh, soothing, refreshing, healing, tranquility, environmental. Deep tones convey status and wealth; pale tones are soothing. |
|  | Purple | Regal, spiritual, sensual, elegant, royal, mysterious. Excellent for use with luxury items. |
|  | | |
|  | Neutrals | Timeless, natural, classic, quality, quiet, delicious, ghostly. |
|  | White | Lightweight, pristine, pure, bright, innocent, friendly. |
|  | | |
|  | Black | Powerful, mysterious, strong, classic, elegant, magical, mournful, bold, heavy. |
|  | Blue | Constant, cool, dependable, quiet, serene, wet, fresh. |

Some dominant colors include:

| | | |
|---|---------|---|
|  | Lime | Tart, acidic, refreshing, fruity, lively. |
|  | Gold | Warm, valuable, royal, expensive, radiant, prestigious. |
|  | Fuchsia | Bright, exciting, sensual, fun, high energy. |
|  | Teal | Pleasing, rich, classy, unique. |
|  | Silver | Classic, cool, expensive, money, futuristic. |
|  | Navy | Credible, strong, nautical, confident, basic, conservative. |

Typeface

Another important element when looking at how your design will communicate is font.

“Type is important because it’s an unconscious persuader. It attracts attention, sets the style and tone of a document, colors how readers interpret the words, and defines the feeling of the page - usually without the reader recognizing a particular typeface. Change your typeface and you go from casual to formal, silly to serious, staid to stylish, old fashioned to modern.

You’d dress your best if you were going to an important meeting, and your designs need to be well-dressed, too. Type can reinforce your image as a company or an individual. If you use it consistently enough, people will start to associate you with certain typefaces.” Think, for instance, of Coca-Cola. Their product is instantly recognizable by typeface alone. Same with Resident Evil, Buffy, Walt Disney and Harry Potter – the list goes on!

RESIDENT EVIL WALT DISNEY Harry Potter

When people see those fonts, even if they’re not being used to advertise those products, they might find themselves thinking of these famous brands, without realizing why! ‘This is because type has an effect on you even if you don’t consciously notice it. You can use this power to your advantage to attract attention, strengthen your message, and improve your image, or you can overlook it and work against yourself saying one message with your text while conveying another with your font.

The right typeface can encourage people to read your message. The wrong typeface or bad typography can make your message go unread.

There are no good and bad typefaces, there are appropriate and inappropriate typefaces. Think about your reader and the feeling you want to convey, then choose a typeface that fits. Simplistic? Maybe so. But if everyone followed these two rules, you would have read more things in your life, and understood better what you did read.

So Which Fonts to Use?

And the answer is ‘It all depends.’ The most important point you need to realize about type is that it’s emotional. Type is emotional on a subliminal level because of the connotations it conveys. Here’s the best example I can give (I’ve tried thousands of them and everyone seems to understand this one): Helvetica is the typeface used on taxation forms. Now, how do you think you’re going to feel when you read something set in Helvetica? You may not consciously realize that it’s the same typeface the IRS uses, you may not even know it’s Helvetica. You may be under the impression that “Helvetica” is the name of a small imported sports car from Hell, or you may even know that Helvetica means “Swiss” in some foreign language (Latin). But none of that matters. What matters is that you’ve seen that typeface before, and not under the most pleasant circumstances.

What's Appropriate?

If your business is one that needs to be taken seriously, such as banking, don't choose a whimsical typeface or you'll lose credibility. If you have a fun business, such as a party service, don't use a serious typeface such as Helvetica or you'll come across as boring. With that in mind, we get to the key to choosing the best typeface for the job: finding the most appropriate typeface. Not the prettiest, not the most space-efficient, but the most appropriate.

If the absolutely most important thing about your document is that it has to be easy to read by anyone of any age with any kind of eyesight under any kind of lighting conditions, then the typeface you choose must fit those criteria and you'll probably end up with something that has a large x-height such as Cheltenham, Melior, or Serifa. If the most important thing is that it looks traditional, then you'll choose a typeface such as Centaur, Bembo, Bodoni, Galliard, Palatino, or Weiss. If you want something casual and friendly, you'll choose something like Cheltenham, Souvenir, or Bitstream Cooper". (Harris, 2000)

Choosing a font

Clearly, the predominant factor is how well a typeface conveys the mood, the message, the communication needs of the design project in question. A well-chosen font, respondents say again and again, sets the tone, matches the feel, evokes the desired emotions and reactions, and speaks to specific audiences and demographics.

Type sets the tone of the design. Our projects mostly are posters, brochures and web pages, and type plays a big part in all such projects. They have to communicate with the readers; in other words, type is the key.

Ocha Sakarin, NYCTA Graphics, New York NY

There is nothing more important than the message. Typography is the glue that holds it all together.

Michael Missen, Petersen Communications, Mesa AZ

Type is very important. It sets the tone of a piece. Type leads readers into the piece without them knowing it. Type is the silent factor of design that creates a strong impact.

Donna Shipman, Port of Long Beach, Long Beach CA

Type is extremely important. It makes or breaks any project. Having readable type is a plus when it comes to communication.

Matthew McIntosh, New Media Group, San Francisco CA

Type is extremely important. I began as a typesetter, just post-Linotype. I can sometimes work my way through dozens of faces before finding the right look and feel for a project.

Martha Jolkovski, Independent Lubricant, Alexandria VA

When working on a project, typography is one of the first elements I consider. Of course, it depends on the project, but type is always important. It often takes me an hour or more on type studies to get a font to fit the piece. Type is an artform in itself and can make or break a piece. I love type.

Gwendy Greenhagen, Yuma AZ

Type is probably the most important thing in a project. Type is what typical viewers spend the most time looking at, even if they don't intend to. Type choice is critical in creating the personality of a design. Choosing a typeface is my favorite part of most projects!

Kelly Wilson, Kelly Wilson Graphic Design, Aurora IL

(www.gdusa.com)

Font Legibility

One thing that many designers agree on is that as well as being decorative, conveying a message through its shape and form and previous association type, primarily, has to be legible. Base text, in particular, must be easy to read. This is particularly important when you're relying on that text to convince, sell or otherwise get a message across.

Given designs are increasingly being ported across multiple platforms (print, online, on portable devices such as PDAs and phones etc.) font consistency and legibility across a range of platforms and devices is crucial.

For instance, some typefaces are more legible than others on the screen. A traditional typeface such as Times Roman is considered to be one of the most legible on paper, but at screen resolution its size is too small and its shapes look irregular. Screen legibility is most influenced by the x-height (the height of a lowercase "x") and the overall size of the typeface.

Times New Roman is a good example of a traditional typeface that has been adapted for use on computer screens. A serif typeface like Times New Roman (the default text face in most Web browsers) is about average in legibility on the computer screen, with a moderate x-height. Times New Roman is a good font to use in text-heavy documents that will probably be printed by readers rather than read from the screen. The compact letter size of Times New Roman also makes it a good choice if you need to pack a lot of words into a small space.

Typefaces such as Georgia and Verdana were designed specifically for legibility on the computer screen; they have exaggerated x-heights and are very large compared to more traditional typefaces in the same point size. These fonts offer excellent legibility for Web pages designed to be read directly from the screen. However, the exaggerated x-heights and heavy letterforms of these fonts look massive and clumsy when transferred to the high-resolution medium of paper.

The most conventional scheme for using typefaces is to use a serif face such as Times New Roman or Georgia for body text and a sans serif face such as Verdana or Arial as a contrast for headlines. Various studies purport to show that serif type is more legible than sans serif type and vice versa. You can truly judge type legibility only within the context of the situation — on the screen — as users will see your Web page.

You may use either a variation of the serif font or a contrasting sans serif face for the display type. It is safest to use a single typographic family and vary its weight and size for display type and emphasis. If you choose to combine serif and sans serif faces, select fonts that are compatible and don't use more than two typefaces (one serif, one sans serif) on a page.

(<http://webstyleguide.com/type/face.html>)