

Graphic Design Methods and Principles

23757-AVT-311-K01

Class meeting days and time: M 2:00–4:40 p.m.

Location: Mason Korea ART Building A105

Instructor: Miriam Ahmed, MFA, PhD

Email: mahmed62@gmu.edu

Office Hours: I'm available by appointment over Zoom. Please make appointment requests at least 24 hours in advance.

Faculty bio: <https://art.gmu.edu/miriam-ahmed/>

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23758-AVT-311-K02

Class meeting days and time: W 2:00–4:40 p.m.

Location: Mason Korea ART Building A105

Course Description

Emphasis on developing design solutions requiring demographic, historical, and/or cultural research. Course strengthens design and typography skills, introduces conceptual problem solving, audience considerations, and broad-based tools designers use to develop effective visual communication solutions. Offered by School of Art. Limited to three attempts. **Required Prerequisites:** AVT 215C or 215XS

Course Objectives

- Develop visual sensitivity and competency in graphic communications by following a disciplined design methodology
- Define problems, research, conceptualize, establish priorities, and develop graphic alternatives
- Introduce students to design history, contemporary practices, perceptual psychology, and information design
- Further develop computer design skills in page layout and image creation software
- Develop the ability to effectively communicate design concepts visually as well as verbally

Section Information for Spring 2024

With a focus on social responsibility and entrepreneurship themes, students in this course apply foundation graphic design and visual communication concepts, tools, and methods to solving real-world, interdisciplinary communication problems and have the opportunity to pursue creative enterprises through semiotic mark-making and publication design. This course is taught at a level suitable for beginners as well as intermediate level graphic designers.

Projects include experimental digital compositions, logo design, and students are guided through completion of a self-authored, self-illustrated children's book. Over 50 beginner-level students taking this course with Dr. Ahmed have published books which are now for sale on Amazon.

Grading Requirements

Projects and Assignments

Informed by lectures, experiential studio work, readings, discussions, and critiques, students will design a series of projects developed from rough schematic level to final presentation. The learning objectives are achieved through participation in coursework and completion of assignments. We will build on skills learned in prerequisite and major foundation courses, as well as concepts learned in the initial content areas and apply them in subsequent projects. Students will provide solutions to the visual communication problem; keep records of the design process, conceptual development, and exploration of ideas that lead to the solution; refine solutions based on critiques; and present the finished work.

The design projects and assignments will be covered in detail in class or on Blackboard. Each project is broken down into phases, and deadlines for each phase must be adhered to for full credit. Additionally, **you have a responsibility as a designer to not simply complete the project, but to complete it to the very best of your ability with the utmost concern given to aesthetic value, professional techniques and innovative solutions.** You will be required to review and/or complete software assignments to gain working knowledge of Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, and InDesign.

Readings and Discussion

Students are required to read the assigned PDF handouts and resources in Blackboard, participate in discussions about these readings, and demonstrate understanding and application of the knowledge gained from these readings within assignments and projects.

Design Process

You will be following the recommended design process: specific industry-standard methodologies that increase ideas and enhance production efficiency. Evaluation of your design process will factor heavily in project grades. This evaluation includes your ability to meet interim deadlines, to present the required quantity and quality of sketches and roughs, and to utilize critique feedback. The best final solutions come from practicing and mastering a methodology that can be repeated for a variety of design problems. You will be examining and cataloging your process for all projects during the semester. The process includes research, brainstorming, thumbnail sketches, variations, iterations, and polished solutions. You are required to present ideas for critique and develop a revised, refined final solution based on critique feedback.

PDF Course Portfolio

Students are required to submit a well-organized, well-presented portfolio at the end of the semester in PDF format that serves as a permanent record of your work and progress in this course. The PDF portfolio must include all projects you completed in this course (but may also include non-course work, ie if you already have an existing PDF version of your portfolio that you use, you may add your course projects to it rather than create/design an entirely new portfolio). In the PDF portfolio submission, at least one of the projects (completed in this course) must show documentation and annotations of the process, thinking, and development behind the project. The professional presentation of each course project and the overall design of the portfolio will be evaluated. Non-course projects (if included) will not be evaluated.

Extra Credit

To be fair and equitable, all students are given the same opportunity to make up for lost points by taking advantage of extra credit assignments. It is your responsibility to complete the extra credit assignments if needed.

Grading Criteria

Assignments are generally graded by the following criteria: concept/development, process, execution, and presentation. In assessing each assignment, the following will be evaluated:

1. **Concept/development:** Creative, innovative, and unique concept/solution. Is the main idea of the piece communicated effectively?
2. **Process:** Attention to the guidelines and overall comprehension of the given assignment. Are the instructions carefully followed and sensitively used? Is the Design Process followed: research, schematic thumbnail sketches, computer roughs (exploration and ideation), and final execution?
3. **Execution:** Application of learned techniques and execution—Is the end-product well crafted, adding to the quality of the finished piece? Are design elements and principles effectively demonstrated? Is the implementation of the design solution (visual organization, typography, communication) successful? How well did you incorporate your research and class/instructor feedback?
4. **Presentation:** Presentation and critique of the finished product, and craftsmanship. Production quality of your project, as well as your professional presentation (timeliness, verbal/written articulation, craftsmanship, and critique participation).

Project 1	20%	PDF Course Portfolio	5%
Project 2	20%	Participation	5%
Project 3	25%	TOTAL	100%
Readings/ Discussions	25%	Extra Credit	Up to 5%

Grade	Quality Points	Percentage Points	Grading Scale (Overview of grading standards)
A+	4.00	97 – 100	Superior execution; maximum originality; excellent concentration and initiative; cooperative with peers; excellent judgment; superior attitude and dedication; highly imaginative, original, and experimental; very consistent in work ethic; significant improvement.
A	4.00	94 – <97	
A-	3.67	90 – <94	
B+	3.33	87 – <90	Strong execution and originality; adequate concentration and initiative; cooperative with peers; good attitude, dedication, and judgment; imaginative and experimental; consistent in work ethic; noticeable improvement.
B	3.00	84 – <87	
B-	2.67	80 – <84	
C+	2.33	77 – <80	Average execution, concentration, organization, and attitude; some imagination and originality; lacks some consistency in work ethic; some improvement.
C (PASS in AVT)	2.00	74 – <77	
C-	1.67	70 – <74	
D	1.00	60 – <70	Poor execution and improvement; limited originality; little concentration and organization; poor judgment; evades responsibility and cooperation; lacks work ethic, concentration, organization.
F	0.00	59 and below	Fails to execute to minimum standards, insignificant improvement; no originality; minimum concentration and organization; evades responsibility and cooperation; no work ethic.

Required and Recommended Readings / Software / Equipment

Required Software: Adobe Creative Cloud active subscription to Illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign, Acrobat Pro. Up-to-date full-featured apps are required (not mobile/tablet version). We do not have any Enterprise Adobe Creative Cloud licenses available for students.

Students may purchase Adobe Creative Cloud subscriptions for personal use with student discounts directly from Adobe. Details for student pricing can be found on Adobe's Creative Cloud for Students page.

Eligibility for student pricing requires proof. If a student provides a school-issued email address during the purchase, they are instantly verified. If they do not have a school-issued email address or their email address cannot be verified, additional proof of eligibility may be requested after purchase. Additional proof of eligibility may include a school ID card, report card, transcript, or tuition bill issued by the institution with the student's name, institution name, and current date.

Required Texts: Readings will be provided in Blackboard as PDFs or article links.

Recommended Texts: *Design Elements: A Graphic Style Manual*, by Timothy Samara
Universal Principles of Design, by William Lidwell, Kritina Holden, Jill Butler

Equipment

- Access to a computer/ laptop with Adobe Creative Cloud applications
- 2 independent storage devices – primary + backup systems (It is *critical* to backup your work)
- Project-dependent materials that will vary per brief/concept
- Sketchbook, pens/pencils

Enrollment

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class.

Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. (Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Website registrar.gmu.edu.)

Last Day to Add: Feb. 26

Last Day to Drop: Mar. 4

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

Attendance and Participation Policy

Attendance & Timeliness

Your attendance, participation, and punctuality are critical to successful completion of the class. You must be on time—and prepared with the required assignments completed, and materials necessary to work in class. Not being properly prepared is considered an absence from the class. Students can have three (3) absences (excused or unexcused). Any additional absence will result in failure of the course. Late arrivals and early departures are disruptive and unacceptable. Excessive tardiness will also affect your final grade. Two late arrivals = 1 absence. If absent or late, you (*not the instructor*) are responsible for retrieving and catching up on missed content.

In professional practice, graphic designers solve client problems with tight time requirements. Our projects will have deadlines to hit so you can get a feel for the pace set in professional practice. You will be given as much time as possible to work during the studio, but discussion and critiques will consume a significant amount of the time. The time spent in the studio may only be a fraction of the time that is necessary to complete the projects successfully so be prepared to make headway outside of the classroom.

Deadlines

Work due in class (such as presentations or critique materials) is due at the time and date given. There is no grace period for work due in class. Blackboard assignments are due at the date and time shown in Blackboard. There is a 3-hour grace period to account for technical difficulties and in-class revisions to submissions. Late work received 3 hours to 3 days after the deadline will receive a 50% grade deduction and late work received more than 3 days after the deadline will receive a grade of zero (0) unless there are documented extenuating circumstances (i.e. unforeseen emergencies) or prior arrangements have been made with the instructor's approval. It is your responsibility to ensure you submit work before the deadline, and to verify before the deadline that the submission was successful and is visible/accessible/not corrupted/etc. If you lose points due to late submissions (or for any other reason), extra credit assignments are equitably available to all students for the purpose of making up lost points.

Critiques, Presentations, and Participation

Critiques and presentations are the equivalent of exams. Students must attend all project critiques/presentations and work-in-progress critiques. You must be present at the start and for the full duration. Late arrivals or early departures on critique/presentation days, or missing any portion of the critique/presentation will result in a 50% grade deduction for the critique/presentation unless there are documented extenuating circumstances. Audio/visual presentation of work, submission of critique presentation files and project files, and participation in critique discourse (including during other students' presentations) are required and graded. Neglecting to attend, present, participate, or submit/upload required critique/presentation deliverables will result in a 50% grade deduction for the critique/presentation. Critiques and presentations are important opportunities to shape verbal skills, strengthen design solutions, and help your peers develop as professionals. Designers must be able to professionally articulate and convey ideas to clients, ask relevant questions, and understand client concerns. It is imperative that you offer constructive criticism to your classmates in an effort to better their solutions. The classroom critique is an open forum for you to reflect upon, evaluate, and discuss concepts and solutions with your classmates. This is an extremely valuable tool for a designer, and you will be expected to utilize this forum to its fullest. You will also be required to defend your design decisions during reviews and critiques. Critiques/presentations may last multiple class periods. Be prepared to participate in the entire session. Students who fail to have adequate work to present will lose a valuable opportunity to learn, which will also directly affect their grades. Thoughtful feedback and inquiries during other students' critiques and presentations are evaluated as part of your own critique and participation grades. In addition, we will discuss readings and assignments, and your input is expected. A portion of your final grade will be based on class participation.

Course Expectations

Printing, Mounting and Craftsmanship

It is imperative to learn professional craftsmanship and mounting techniques for client presentations. All work must be printed and mounted for critiques/presentations unless otherwise specified. Prints must be actual size, and on good quality paper. Print artwork with bleeds and crop marks. Neatly and carefully trim off edges with a ruler and clean, sharp blade on a cutting mat. Diecuts should be cut carefully and often require a practice run (or more). Folds should be scored for clean, sharp creases. Mount using professional grade Gafix Archival Double Tack Mounting Film. Practice using this adhesive – it is permanent. Do not use spray mount, liquid adhesives, double-sided tape, etc. Lower quality adhesives will result in work falling off the

mounting boards and this will negatively affect your grade. Mount on black foamboard or illustration/matt boards using 1 inch margins all around and 1 inch in between prints.

Writing Standards

Written work must be proof-read, checked for correct spelling and grammar, copy-edited, and revised. Students should utilize the services at the Writing Center. Work must meet the academic writing standards of a 300-level undergraduate course. As this is not a writing or English course, instructor feedback will not identify writing deficiencies, however, work that does not adhere to expected writing standards will receive a 50% grade deduction. Like submitting work on time, writing standards are part of academic responsibility and professionalism.

Hardware/software access, Storage and Backup

Graphic design work is produced in a digital environment on software and hardware that are susceptible to crashes and bugs. These are NOT extenuating circumstances (not valid reasons for late work); these are part of the *normal* production process and you must *expect* them. Always keep a backup of your files. Train your left hand to hit CMD+S (save on Mac) or Ctrl+S (save on Windows) every 30 seconds while working. Get in the habit of copying all your files over onto a secondary backup storage device every time you complete a major step in your project. Your primary storage is guaranteed to crash/fail/be inaccessible at some point because that's just what hardware/software does.

When that happens, there are 2 types of people in this world: those who cry, and those who backed up. Which type are you?



Disability Statement/Accommodations

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. If at any point in the semester, you would like to apply for specific accommodations, please contact the Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs (Jiye Chang - jchang22@gmu.edu) or Joanna Park (spark214@gmu.edu), who will connect you with Disability Services on the Fairfax campus. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me.

Disability Services (Fairfax Campus) Contact Information: Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474

Honor Code

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited.

All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

Any student use of Generative AI tools should follow the fundamental principles of the Honor Code.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

This class will be conducted as an intentionally inclusive community that celebrates diversity and welcomes the participation in the life of the university of faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. All may feel free to speak and to be heard without fear that the content of the opinions they express will bias the evaluation of their academic performance or hinder their opportunities for participation in class activities. In turn, all are expected to be respectful of each other without regard to race, class, linguistic background, religion, political beliefs, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, veteran's status, or physical ability.

Title IX

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking: As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Responsible Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason Korea's Deputy Title IX Coordinator pursuant to University Policy 1202 and 1412. If you would like to speak confidentially with the Mason Korea counselor, please see <https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/resources-and-services/counseling-and-wellness> for more information. For more information about what Title IX is, please see <https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/resources-and-services/title-ix>

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

(Subject to change)

	Projects, Lectures	Discussions
Week 1 Feb 19-25	Course Introduction/Syllabus Review Lecture: Intro to Graphic Design Project 1: Designing Form: Principles + Compositions Project 1 Phase 1	Week 1 Discussion: Responsible Design
Week 2 Feb 26 – Mar 3	Lecture: Gestalt and the Golden Ratio Project 1 Phase 2 Studio	Week 2 Discussion: Good/ Design Thinking
	F Mar 1 Independence Movement Day (no classes)	
Week 3 Mar 4-10	Project 1 Phase 3 Studio	Week 3 Discussion: Grid Systems
Week 4 Mar 11-17	Lecture: Color Theory + Intro to Typography Project 1 Phase 4 Studio	Week 4 Discussion: Preparing for Critiques
Week 5 Mar 18-24	Project 1 Phase 5 studio (30 mins) <i>due in class</i> Presentation & Critique prep (30 mins) Project 1 Presentation & Critique (1 hour) (2-minute presentations of 20 students = 40mins + 15-minute discussion board critique of 3 classmate's work)	Week 5 Discussion: Paul Rand & Doug Davis
Week 6 Mar 25-31	Lecture: The Design Process (1 hour) Project 2: Form + Meaning: The Design Process & Semiotics Project 2 Phase 1 – research and brainstorm name + mark for game about solving a real-world problem	Week 6 Discussion: Design v Art & The Symbol in Advertising
Week 7 Apr 1-7	Lecture: Semiotics Project 2 Phase 2 - variations	Week 7 Discussion: Michael Bierut How To
Week 8 Apr 8-14	M-T Apr 8-9 Spring Recess (no classes) W Apr 10 National Assembly Election (no classes)	
Week 9 Apr 15-21 MIDTERMS	Lecture: Iterations Project 2 Phase 3 – iterations <i>due in class</i> Project 2 Phase 4 – game screenshot mockup <i>due next class for presentation</i>	Week 9 Discussion: Grid Systems
Week 10 Apr 22-28	Presentation & Critique prep (30 mins) Project 2: Presentation & Critique (1 hour) Project 3: Designing Form: Concept to Production Project 3 Phase 1	Week 10 Discussion: The Vignelli Canon
Week 11 Apr 29 – May 5	T Apr 30 Make Up Day 1 Follow Wed schedule W May 1 Labor Day (no classes) Project 3 Phase 2 Studio Lecture: Layout & Composition + Grid Systems	Week 11 Discussion: Ruined by Design

Week 12 May 6-12	M May 6 Children's Day holiday (no classes) Project 3 Phase 3 Studio (Wed K02 section) Lecture: Resolution, Bleed & Trim	Week 12 Discussion: Armin Vit
Week 13 May 13-19	W May 15 Budha's Birthday (no classes) Th May 16 Make Up Day 2 Follow Wed schedule Project 3 Phase 3 Studio (Mon K01 section) Lecture: Resolution, Bleed & Trim Project 3 Phase 4 Studio (Wed K02 section) Lecture: Colors for Print v Screen	Week 13 Discussion: Debbie Millman
Week 14 May 20-26	Project 3 Phase 4 Studio (Mon K01 section) Lecture: Colors for Print v Screen Studio – Adjustments and Finalization (Wed K02 section) Critique & Presentation Prep (Wed K02 section)	
Week 15 May 27 – Jun 2	Studio – Adjustments and Finalization (Mon K01 section) Critique & Presentation Prep (Mon K01 section) Project 3: Presentation & Critique (Wed K02 section)	
Week 16 Jun 3-6	W Jun 5 Reading Day Th Jun 6 Memorial Day (no classes) Project 3: Presentation & Critique (Mon K01 section)	
Jun 7-14	Final Exams	DUE: PDF Portfolio, Extra Credit
Sat Jun 15	Graduation Ceremony	