

How to Get Started in Graphic Design

eBook



SELF-MADE
DESIGNER

Why Get Into Graphic Design?

You want to get started in graphic design. You have many options, but you don't necessarily know where or how to begin.

In this eBook, I lay down a simple, actionable plan that you can follow to get started in graphic design.

You might pursue a degree in graphic design, take online courses or just embark on a self-learning journey.

HOWEVER, no matter which option you pursue, only YOU can make yourself a graphic designer. Only you can put in the work, the study, the practice, and the experience.

So, if you really want or need this, START RIGHT NOW. I will show you how.

Let's begin.



Learn More:

- [What is Graphic Design all About?](#)
- [Is It Hard to Become a Graphic Designer?](#)

My Approach

After teaching graphic design to hundreds of college students with NO previous experience, I have developed a simple, repeatable method for learning graphic design.

The method centers around the idea of *learning how to learn graphic design*. Once you understand the “basic ingredients” of design, you can apply the “recipe” to any level you’re at, whether it is complete beginner to advanced.

These are the areas on which you will center your learning:

- Theory
- Software skills
- Graphic design applications and formats
- Projects
- Visual vocabulary

Let’s look at these areas more closely:



The Building Blocks of Graphic Design

Theory

You need a solid foundation in graphic design theory and principles. The more you understand these principles, especially at the beginning of your journey, the more effective you will become as a designer. One of the objectives of [Self-Made Designer](#) is to give you accurate, easy to understand explanations of graphic design theory. You should definitely start there, but there are many other valuable, free resources out there at your disposal.

Software Skills

My students start to goof around with graphic design software from the very first day, and so should you. Graphic design software can be very complex, but you'll move forward as you practice, [so the sooner you start to familiarize with the software](#), the quicker you'll get comfortable with it.

Graphic Design Applications and Formats

The application of graphic design involves creating different visual renderings in specific formats. A graphic design application is the use of design elements and principles to create a specific graphic rendering, such as a logo, a flyer, a set of icons, or a magazine cover. You will have to understand the most important graphic design applications, such as logos, business cards, and posters.

Projects

Playing with software without a purpose is not enough. You need projects around which to center your learning. So, start completing tutorials on specific things you want to accomplish, such as drawing a basic character or icon, creating a logo for a friend, or making a flyer for your band. This is crucial: Projects drive actual learning.

Visual Vocabulary

You need to start looking at, appreciating, and collecting other people's graphic design work to develop what I call a "design vocabulary".

The more you expose yourself to and appreciate well-executed graphic design, the more you will understand what works and what doesn't design-wise.

The more you look at good examples of graphic design, the more you will understand the principles of design. In addition, you will start to develop your own style by understanding what you like.

You can start looking at other people's work on a site like [Behance](#) or start following graphic design accounts on Instagram.

Your Plan of Action

Learn and Practice These Areas Simultaneously

In my approach, you don't master any one of these "ingredients" before you move to the next.

Instead, you engage with all of them simultaneously.

If you are a complete beginner, you start to learn graphic design principles as you begin a project in a vector graphics program. As you get better, you continue to engage with theory, software, inspiration, and actual projects.

Now that you are familiar with the overall approach for learning graphic design (*learning to learn* graphic design), let's look at the baseline skills you'll need to get fluent in.

REMEMBER, these areas will serve you as a "map" that will guide your learning. If you feel lost or without direction and motivation, pick any one of these action items and spend a couple of minutes, hours, days, or weeks on it.

Any time you spend learning graphic design will pay off, I promise!

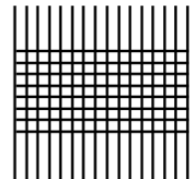
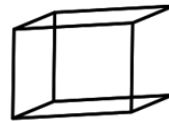
What You Need to Learn

Elements of Design

Everything that we see is “made up” of “visual materials”, so to speak.

The elements of design are just that, the building blocks of everything that we perceive visually. They are the following:

- Line
- Point
- Texture
- Color
- Value
- Space



Learn to “see” these elements in everything around you, from trees and buildings to flyers and billboards. Then, learn and understand how to use these building blocks to create your own graphics.

What You Need to Learn

Principles of Design

You need to understand graphic design principles to succeed as a graphic designer. Graphic design principles are a set of guiding “rules” about what works and what doesn’t work in a design or composition.

Design principles serve as a map for arranging visual elements in the best possible way, according to specific intentions, strategies, and objectives.

In other words:

Design principles are proven guidelines that humans have put together through trial and error in their quest for understanding how to represent the world.

You need to understand the following 6 principles:



1. Unity

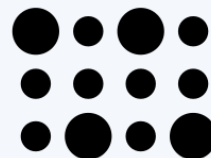
The unity principle has to do with the relationship between the elements of a composition.

Through relationships, we can communicate status, mood, structure, kinship, hierarchy, etc.

Unity manifests itself in terms of

- Proximity
- Similarity
- Repetition

Similarity unites elements by color, shape, size, and form:



2. Totality (Gestalt)

The German term Gestalt refers to the “totality” or “wholeness” of a design.

Totality in design is our ability to create structural wholeness in a composition.

There are three main components of totality:

- Figure/Ground
- Closure
- Continuity

The principle of *Figure / Ground* is used effectively in these famous logos:



These famous logos use the *Closure* principle:



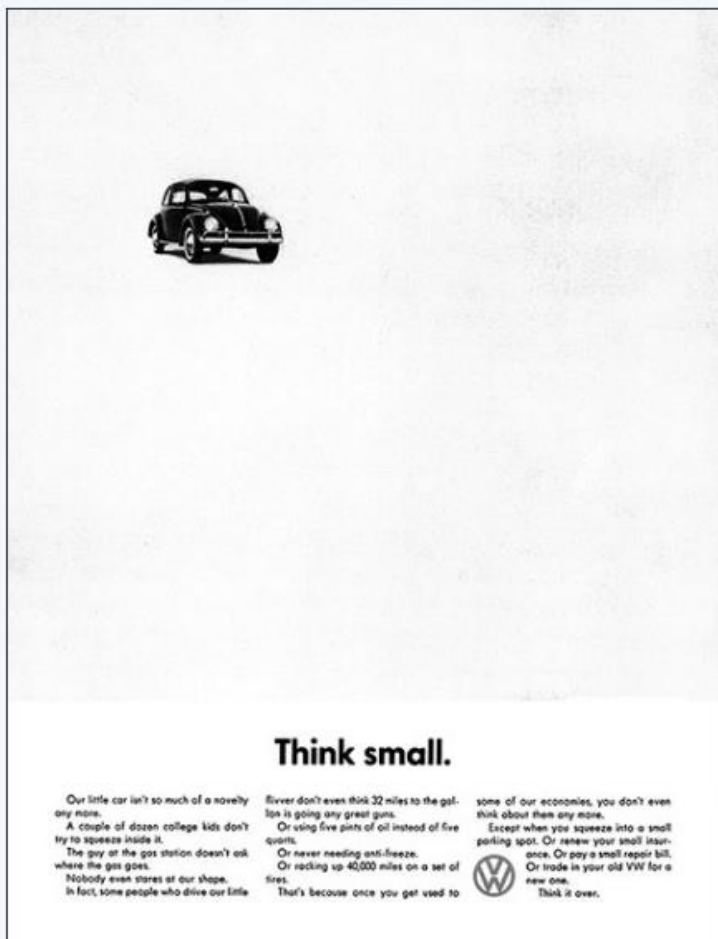
3. Space

Space is one of the most powerful elements of design.

Just like zero is not nothing but something (a number), space is the all-encompassing fabric that holds all the elements that make-up a design.

We can use space to enhance the quality, sharpness, and focus of the elements of a design.

The strategic use of space implies the use of “white” space as a force and presence in a composition.




Think small.

Our little car isn't so much of a novelty any more.
A couple of dozen college kids don't try to squeeze inside it.
The guy at the gas station doesn't ask where the gas goes.
Nobody even stares at our shape.
In fact, some people who drive our little

liver don't even think 32 miles to the gallon is going any great guns.
Or using five pints of oil instead of five quarts.
Or never needing anti-freeze.
Or racking up 40,000 miles on a set of tires.
That's because once you get used to

some of our economies, you don't even think about them any more.
Except when you squeeze into a small parking spot. Or renew your small insurance. Or pay a small repair bill. Or trade in your old VW for a new one.
Think it over.



4. Dominance

Dominance in design is the ability of one element to control other elements in a design.



This results in creating a focal point in the composition, which “directs” the “eye” of the viewer.

Use the dominance principle when you want to convey a sense of urgency, direction, drama, or emphasis.

5. Hierarchy

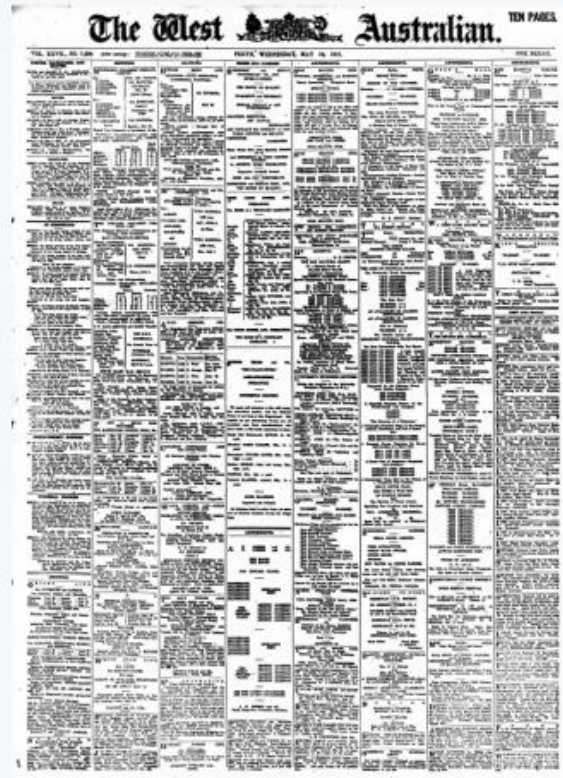
Hierarchy refers to the structuring of information.

Use the hierarchy principle to give levels of importance to the elements of a composition.

You may use color, size, or form to establish hierarchy.

Hierarchy:

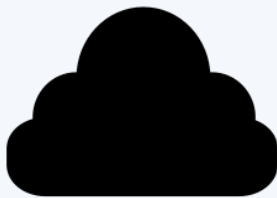
Which one is more readable?



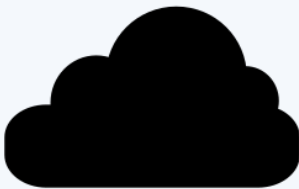
6. Balance

Balance is the design principle that binds all other principles together.

Balance Principle



Symmetrical Balance



Asymmetrical Balance

The goal of a finished composition is to achieve balance.

Balance in design is a state in which all visual elements are arranged in complete harmony, each one serving its precise purpose in the composition.

Balance can be symmetrical or asymmetrical.

What You Need to Learn

Software Skills

You need to learn how to use graphic design software to create visual material. There are two main graphic design software frameworks to produce graphics: [vector graphics](#) and [pixel graphics](#). Each has its own applications and uses. You'll have to learn both to become a professional designer, but you can focus on the kind you like best.

I, for example, am not very fond of pixel software but LOVE to work on vector software. I am proficient in pixel graphics but I'm an advanced user of vector software.

These are some basic skills you need to understand and perform:

- Cropping and clipping objects
- Sculpting and transforming strokes and nodes (Bezier curves)
- Vectorization of images and objects
- Layers and masks
- Removing backgrounds of images (“liberating” images)
- Transforming vector objects or pixel layers (moving, scaling, rotating, skewing, etc.)
- “Drawing” by using geometric shapes
- Resizing images
- Importing and exporting graphics and images
- Layout techniques

What You Need to Learn

Graphic Design Applications and Formats

There are some graphic design applications that you need to master over time. These are some of the most common:

1. Logos

In my view, logos are the most important application of graphic design, since they are included in every other graphic design application (for example, a business card features a logo).

Also, logos teach you A LOT about graphic design, since you need to follow certain principles and visual communication rules that apply to all other graphic design applications.



Learn More:

- [Fundamental Principles of Logo Design \[With Examples\]](#)
- [Gestalt Logo Examples in Graphic Design](#)
- [Parts of a Logo \[Explained\]](#)

2. Websites and Apps

We think of websites and apps as mostly the work of programmers, but graphic designers play a crucial role in their creation.

Designers are responsible for making websites and apps user-friendly, intuitive, professional-looking, and beautiful.

As a professional designer, you will have to learn how to design a homepage or the different screens of a phone app.

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History of the Bauhaus

The school was founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar in 1919 as a merger of the Grand Ducal School of Arts and Crafts and the **Technical Academy of Fine Arts**. The school was the first to combine the disciplines of architecture, design, and the arts.

Research in 1900 and directed by Belgian Art Nouveau architect Henry van de Velde. When van de Velde was forced to resign in 1913 because he was Belgian, he suggested Gropius, Hermann Finsterlin and August Endell as possible successors.

In 1919, after delays caused by the destruction of

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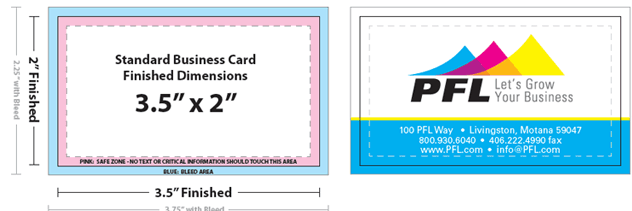
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3. Print Material

Posters, flyers, and business cards are just a few examples of graphic design applied to print.

A professional graphic designer will have to deal with these and more complex formats, such as magazine covers or advertisements.

However, you can learn much from basic print applications, such as a business card, a flyer, or a newsletter. Start mastering these and you will build a solid foundation for the more complex stuff.

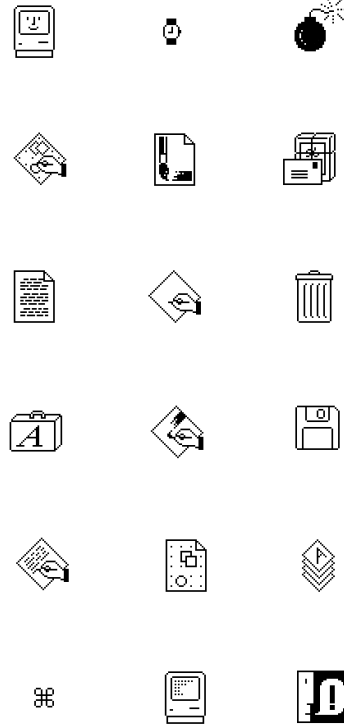


4. Icons and Symbols

Today, icons are a crucial part of graphic design.

Icons and symbols help to communicate information and ideas effectively. Flyers, posters, signs, and phone apps include icons for optimizing communication.

You will need to understand how icons are created and how they are used to communicate effectively.



Susan Kare
USER INTERFACE GRAPHICS



Learn More:

- [What Is An Icon \[In Graphic Design\]](#)

What You Need to Do

Projects

So far, we have reviewed the knowledge and skills you need to master for becoming a graphic designer. However, remember that, to become good at this, it will take time and effort.

So:

If you want to become a graphic designer, **my single most important recommendation is to center your learning around a specific project *from the very beginning***. The reason is that it is very difficult to learn a skill in thin air.

If you start on a particular project, you will encounter specific problems that, in turn, will guide you to specific solutions.

You will search for advice, tutorials, and knowledge that will be specific to those problems, and so you will be incrementally adding up to your abilities and experience.

So, take on a specific project right now. Maybe you need to create a newsletter for a group, a business card for your friend, or a logo for your Instagram profile.

Start small and build up from there. Here are some basic tutorials you can try:

[Easy Inkscape Icon Tutorial](#)

[Creating Game Art in Inkscape – Beginner Skills Circles](#)

Next Steps

The purpose of this eBook has been to show you the critical areas on which you need to focus to develop the knowledge and skills needed to become a graphic designer.

You now have an actionable plan that you can follow.

But it's up to you! Only you can put in the work required to achieve your goals. If you are consistent and never give up, I assure you will achieve results.

I believe in you!

Say Hi:

My passion and specialty is to break down graphic design in a way you can understand. It's what I do best.

What are you struggling with right now?

Let me know by sending me an email to theselfmadedesigner@gmail.com and let's start the conversation.

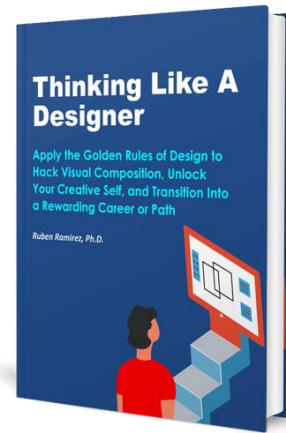
Talk to you soon!

Want to Take It To The Next Level?

Thinking Like a Designer

Apply the Golden Rules of Design to Hack Visual Composition, Unlock Your Creative Self, and Transition Into a Rewarding Career or Path

[Learn More About the Book](#)



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