

**Instructor**

Faryal Khalid  
fkhalid@andrew.cmu.edu

**TA**

David Scoville  
dscovill@andrew.cmu.edu

# Communication Design Fundamentals

51261B • Fall 2014 • CFA 318 • Tu Th 8:00 pm - 9:20 pm

**Overview**

Communication design is used to inspire, influence, incite action or simply to help us get from point A to point B. This course introduces non-majors to the field by focusing on the foundations of visual communication that are relevant to a variety of disciplines, such as two-dimensional composition, letterforms, typesetting, and the typographic grid. Through studio projects, presentations, and demonstrations, you will become familiar with the visual and verbal language of communication designers, the design process, and the communicative value of word and image.

This course is studio-based, comprised of assignments ranging from short foundational exercises to more in-depth communication projects. You will learn basic principles and vocabulary for composition, color, and typography, and employ them to create thoughtful design solutions. Projects require work in both traditional and digital mediums. Basic software tutorials and guidance will be provided, but remember that this course focuses on design principles, not software training.

**Learning Goals**

- understand the context of communication design in our lives and in the world
- through the principles of typography, color, gestalt, heirarchy and grid systems learn to communicate through effective designs
- sketching as a process in design development
- offer constructive criticism and speak thoughtfully about design decisions
- develop a discerning eye and skillful hand

**Logistics**

Class time will be spent either in the computer cluster CFA 318 or MM 121. CFA 318 will be used for digital work sessions and small lectures. MM 121 will be used for non-digital work sessions and group critiques. For the session in MM 121 an announcement will be made in the class prior. If not told explicitly class will always be held in CFA 318.

**Critiques**

You will meet as a group to critique each assignment. A large portion of your grade depends on your ability to discuss your work and that of others. It can not be over emphasized how important meaningful class participation is in a studio class like this.

Critiques develop your ability to objectively evaluate your work and that of your

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colleagues. They help you learn the accurate vocabulary, develop your ability to verbalize your thoughts but most importantly they allow you to maturely accept criticism and work constructively in a collaborative setting. Your active participation is expected and welcomed at all critiques.

## Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on the following criteria.

- Final design concept and execution, based on each assignment's grading rubric
- Documentation of your process towards each final design on your Wordpress portfolio
- Contribution in class and crits
- Attitude, tardiness, preparation for class, ability to learn from crits and meeting deadlines

## Grading

% RANGE	GRADE	MEANING
90-100	A	Student successfully employs many design principles in their own design, can identify design principles used in other work and can identify target audiences for their own and other's work. Student often contributes comments to lectures, discussions and critiques. Student completes designs after extensive sketching explorations.
80-89	B	Student employs some design principles in their own design, can identify some design principles used in other work and identify target audiences for their own and other's work. Student is less vocal in class and sketches are less extensive.
70-79	C	Student employs few design principles in their own design, can identify few design principles used in other work and has trouble identifying target audiences for their own and other's work. Student is less vocal in class and sketches very little.
60-69	D	Student does not intentionally employ design principles in their own design, has difficulty identifying principles in other work and has trouble identifying target audiences for their own and other's work. Student is less vocal in class and does not explore by sketching.
0-59	F	Student cannot employ design principles in their work or identify them in others. Student does not consider target audience, is not vocal and does not explore by sketching.

## Attendance

Since this is a studio course, the most important thing you can do is to attend class. There are many things that comprise this course that cannot be made up if you miss class, including work sessions, critiques, discussions and demonstrations. Participation in discussions and feedback on your work is essential to your development as a designer. Please email me in advance if you know you will miss a class so that we can plan accordingly (note that in many cases this will still count as an absence). However, a note from your doctor or your course advisor may count towards an excused absence in the event of an extended illness or some special circumstances. **Interviews and career-related functions are unexcused absences so be sure to manage your absences carefully.**

Absences:  
3 = OK  
4 = Grade will drop by 1 letter  
5 = No credit for the course

## Tardiness

The roll will be taken at the beginning of class. Please notify me and David prior to class if you plan to come late. If you arrive after roll is taken, it is your responsibility to ask the teaching assistant to add your name to the roll so you are not marked as absent. Excessive tardiness (> 15 minutes late) will count as an absence. Leaving before class (> 10 minutes before the end) will also count as an absence. Excessive

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amounts of either will result in a reduction of your final Participation / Attitude grade.

Assignments are meant to be completed in small steps, not in one heroic effort the night before. Keeping up with the deadlines of the project ensures we can give you good feedback. Missing critiques and/or delivering late work (such as blog posts or intermediate deliverables) will result in a reduced project grade and a reduced Participation / Attitude grade. Late projects and resubmissions will not be accepted; there will be ample class time to discuss and redo your design work before final critiques. Students show academic integrity in this course by authoring and designing their own work at all times. Any sources for written or creative assignments must be clearly cited.

### **Plagiarism**

Students show academic integrity in this course by authoring and designing their own work at all times. Any sources for written or creative assignments must be clearly cited. Students are generally expected to provide their own photographs and images and write their own text for assignments and not imitate or borrow the work of others from any source. If in doubt please ask David and I for guidance. Work found to be plagiarized will result in a failing grade.

For more information, please see the University Policy on Plagiarism:  
<http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Cheating.html>

### **Projects**

**A0** Identifying Communication Design  
find real world examples of communication design (short)

**A1** Visual Composition / Gestalt principles  
use simple shapes to communicate a specific effect (long)

**A2** Letterform / word / sentence / paragraph  
Use typographic variables to change the way a message is read (short)

**A3** Hierarchy in Context  
typographic variables, color and position to make a poster (long)

**A4** Content Development / Write and Design  
design your resume (short)

**A5** Image, type and grid  
multi-page text treatment with imagery (long)

**A6** designer presentations  
research famous designers, present and learn (short)

Each project will begin with a lecture and group discussion on assigned readings. Most subsequent classes will be devoted to working on your designs and getting feedback from David and I, as well as your classmates. We will be using Adobe Illustrator, InDesign and Photoshop to complete assignments. Implementing communication design principles is the goal of the course. While time in class will be devoted to the technical use of these programs, you may need to spend considerable time outside of class to sharpen your skills. Software tutorials will be recommended for each assignment.

### **Office Hours**

Feel free to reach out to us at any time for additional feedback, help with programs or design principles. Office hours are by appointment only. Both David and I will try our best to reply promptly. We are located on the second floor of Margaret Morrison in the Graduate Design Studio.

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## **Required Supplies for class**

- Pencils (2B, 4B, 6B), mechanical pencil, eraser and sharpener
- Sketchbook (must!)
- Fine tip sharpie marker
- 18" ruler (preferably cork bottom! It makes cutting a whole lot easier)
- X-acto knife and blades for cutting
- USB drive, or other means of backing up your files (such as Dropbox)
- 2-3 sheets of Letratak
- Black illustration board (need will vary based on each project)
- Cutting Mat (large size)

## **Required Book**

Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors and Students  
by Ellen Lupton

Available on Amazon:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thinking-Type-2nd-revised-expanded/dp/1568989695>

**Most importantly, remember that you will do well in this class if and only if you have fun, relax (stress and design do not mix) and put in consistent work. Trust the process and let it take you far.**