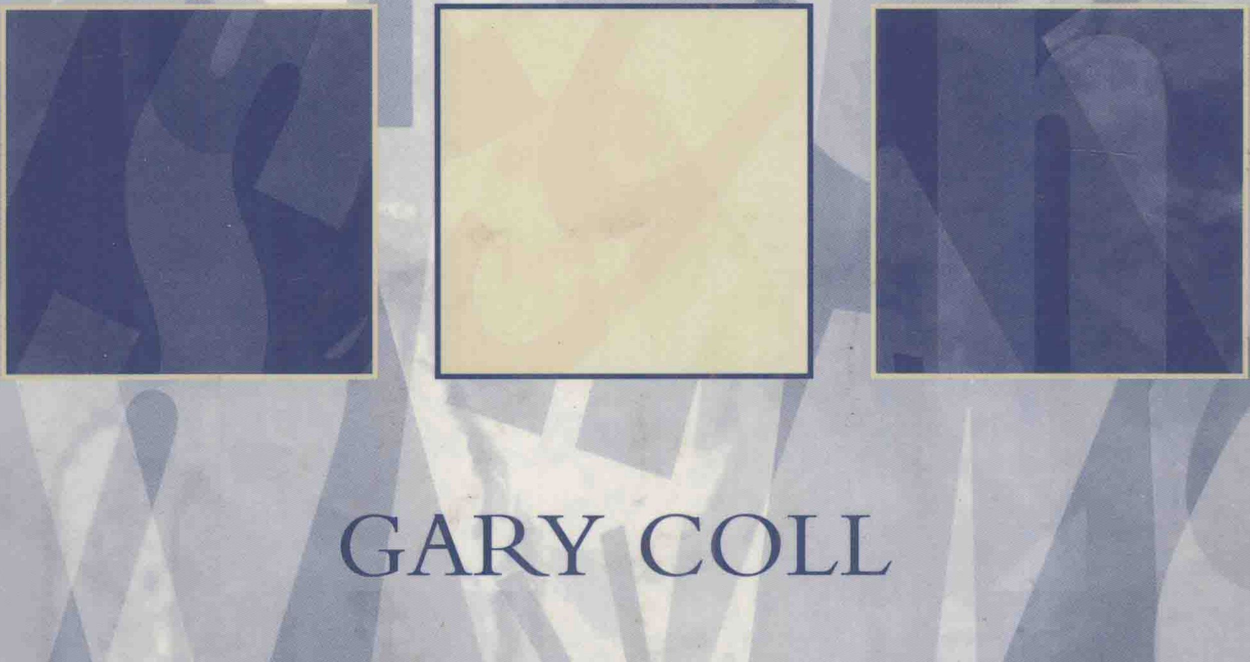
GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION

APPLYING PRINCIPLES



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PERFORMANCE SUPPORT & TRAINING SYSTEMS

GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION

APPLYING PRINCIPLES

GARY COLL

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PREFACE

Perhaps a bit of background will be helpful to those using this guide. I developed and have taught for a number of years a graphic arts course in the department of journalism at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh. For a number of years, our department did not have a proper laboratory, and so I focused on fundamental principles of graphic communication rather than on production of finished materials. Students learned these principles, passed the course, and were graduated. Some of them became professional communicators. They drew on their knowledge of the principles learned in the class and became successful at their jobs. When computers and graphics-related programs came on the scene, these graduates found themselves in training sessions where they learned to use computers to apply the principles of graphic communication that they already knew. They also learned that computers offer new capabilities and different possibilities for effective communications, and some became skilled at using those new capabilities. Of course I have invited a number of my former students to return to share their experiences with current students, usually by using a computer and image projector in a laboratory setting. Visitors have typically outlined a problem they once faced and then demonstrated how they solved it. Such visits have been successful. However, one of the results has been increasingly strong pressure from my students to emphasize computer skills in the class. Students have been quite open in expressing their conviction that, only if they learn to use programs such as QuarkXPress, Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator, and others will they be able to move smoothly into their professional careers.

I am not unsympathetic to their argument, but I don't feel I can justify spending the time needed to do much more than introduce some of the more useful programs and comment briefly on their capabilities. Besides, each day I see numerous examples of poorly conceived and produced graphic communications efforts in any number of media. So I continue to prefer to keep my graphics classes focused on learning and applying the principles of good graphic communication. This guide is an attempt at compromise. It offers both realistic and simple exercises that help develop each student's computer abilities while at the same time presenting fundamental principles of good graphic communication. The simplicity of the assignments allows students to spend at least some time learning computer skills, but the level of computer expertise required is not high. Once the basics are learned, most students build on that base and become facile quickly.

I would like to acknowledge the following reviewers for their comments and assistance in the course of the development of this

book: Shelly Dean, Department of Computer Science, Cumberland County College; Martin Greenwald, Ed.D., Department of Fine Arts, Montclair State University; and Anna Ursyn, Ph.D., Department of Visual Arts, University of Northern Colorado. I also wish to thank my wife, Elaine, for her helpful comments and unwavering support.

INTRODUCTION

This book of information and exercises is designed for graphic communicators in a variety of programs—communicators in such areas as marketing, communication, advertising, public relations, and journalism. In short, these are the types of programs whose graduates may be called upon in their careers to produce high-quality printed materials. And yet, many such learners are neither exposed to the information nor encouraged to develop the skills that will allow them to successfully meet such publication challenges. The exercises in this book lay out a number of problems that provide practice in turning well-written and edited verbal and visual copy into readable and attractive printed materials, including brochures, letterheads, business cards, signage, packaging materials, and even posters.

Many educational programs have acquired or developed advanced graphics laboratories filled with scanners and printers connected to computers which, in turn, are replete with programs that can do everything from simple word-processing to sophisticated composition and more. And these computers are increasingly connected to the World Wide Web so that students can learn to deal with that vast network.

Employers of graduates of such programs have come to expect that their newly hired employees have not only mastered a body of knowledge and learned to express themselves both verbally and visually, but have acquired design and layout skills and learned about typography and the use of color, as well some of the subtleties of paper selection, printing, and finishing. Communicators enrolled in these programs anticipate this pressure and increasingly demand to be taught the kinds of computer skills they imagine will be required of them upon completion of the class. Of course few training programs can afford to devote too much time to teaching proficiency in using a wide variety of hardware and software. As a result, many students become so impatient to learn that they jump right in, load a few of the easier to use programs, and begin to do graphics. Unfortunately, they typically fail to appreciate that computers and programs are no more than convenient tools, and that, like all tools, they have potential for good and bad use. The rule of the small boy and the hammer ("Give a small boy a hammer and everything he sees will need pounding") is especially pertinent here. It might be rephrased in this context to: "Give a beginning graphics learner a computer with a word-processing program, a file of clip art, and a basic desktop publishing program and everything he or she does will use as many capabilities of the computer and the programs as possible." Some results may be felicitous, but often they are not. Some may even be counterproductive. To compound the problem, using today's computers is not especially difficult, and poor-quality graphics can pour quickly from laser printers.

To further complicate matters, because they are focused so tightly on learning about computers and software programs, many learners don't take the time to learn principles of good typography and design. They listen to lectures and may read a textbook, but when it comes time to apply their knowledge, they rush to a computer and work harder on producing *something* than on producing good-quality creative graphic materials. In short, they tend to focus more on the software than on the problem they are trying to solve graphically. They often work until they have something on their monitor and then they begin to manipulate it endlessly—until they feel they have stumbled onto a good solution. They then print it, submit it, and go to the next task. In short, they do not allow themselves the time needed to think about the job and its content, the client and the client's need, or the printing variables so that a meaningful solution can emerge. Of course, the instructor must play a significant role in this process, and the exercises in this guide should allow virtually all instructors to participate successfully.

This collection of exercises attempts to recognize that both graphic communication and computer skills must be learned, but that the computer should never be permitted to become the central focus in a beginning graphics course. Students must be convinced early on that many societies got along quite well (and typographically beautifully) without computers in typesetting, layout, and design for more than 500 years. As recently as 200 years ago, there were only two communication media of any consequence: newspapers and books. Newspapers then were just beginning to use headlines, and books were set in one of only four or five different typefaces and sizes, with little or no graphic relief for their grayed-out pages. Even with such apparent limitations on printing and distribution, the voyages of discovery, the Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, the progress of science from Newton to Einstein, popular appreciation of religion and the arts, as well as the computer itself emerged and developed largely by means of the plain printed (or even handwritten) word on paper. The lesson is that progress is not solely a function of technology, but it is realized when people are encouraged to engage ideas. Of course computers play a large role in this process, but it is essential to know the underlying principles of using type, visual copy, color, and design. In addition, a keen reading of the intended audience of the communication and its intended purpose is necessary no matter what material or distribution medium is used. Good decisions that enhance the capability of a message to transfer meaning are lodged, not in a computer, but in the perceptive understanding of the task or problem at hand and in thorough contemplation and consideration of the means available to help perform that task. Only at the end of the process does technology become crucial.

The exercises in this book will help learners begin thinking about and practicing skills they need to produce printed material that engage audiences. Information that should be helpful in completion of the assignments is included in each section. The assignments are challenging for learners beginning to think about graphic presentations. This book is meant to be a convenient source of relatively realistic assignments that can engage learners in the types of thinking that will help them produce reasonably professional materials. Instructors who use it will want to integrate the exercises with readings in their assigned texts and use their own lectures and discussions to place all learners on solid footing in graphics. Each assignment has a number and a title and a statement of learning objectives. In each section the assignment is discussed and information necessary for completing it is set forth. In some cases, visual materials are included at the end of a section. It is a good idea for anyone using this guide to read the full assignment before getting down to the creative work. Spending a little time getting it right the first time can save a good deal of time and energy in the long run.

One of the features of this work is the incorporation of background information to help introduce each assignment. This type of information can help students learn that there are enduring principles of graphic communication and also that there is still plenty of opportunity for the evolution of graphic content and form.

One other feature is the personal relationship of exercise to student. Normally, when a graphic communicator is presented with a graphic problem to solve, he or she has to undertake and complete at least minimal research before proposing a solution. Most assignments in this work assume the student is simultaneously the client, the graphic communicator, and the content provider of the proposed publication. Most students have a pretty clear sense of who they believe themselves to be, and they are able to move quickly through the research stage of proposing graphic solutions to problems. Hence this book contains an autobiography assignment, a personal identification mark assignment, a personal stationery assignment, a résumé assignment, and so on. Assignments that are not personal in nature deal with subjects that most students are familiar with, including shopping malls, favorite beverages, television, money, and so on. The exercises proposed in the workbook are easily adaptable to particular situations. Users can easily alter the level of difficulty of any assignment. Of course, student-instructor interaction is necessary.

This book is meant to supplement a good textbook on graphic communication. I feel comfortable using any of them, although I supplement them in my own lectures, graphic materials, field trips, and speeches.

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1 AUTOBIOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT

OBJECTIVES This assignment is the first in a sequence that will help you learn some of the elementary principles and practices of typography and design. The assignments in this autobiography sequence will provide you with ample opportunities to learn about and reflect upon the proper use of type and visual copy for a given assignment and on the possibilities of presenting your selections attractively in a layout space. Because many typographic and design conventions in the graphic arts arose within the context of book design, completing this assignment will help to ground you in many current principles of effective design used in a variety of publications. A benefit of this assignment is that it extends over a substantial amount of time, not unlike a good deal of the work you will be called upon to perform in your career. This means that you will have to maintain your focus and allocate time wisely in meeting the needs of the assignments. Components in the sequence include

- Writing a chapter of your autobiography
- Planning and preparing a title page for it
- Developing an effective page layout plan for the pages of your autobiography
- Planning and preparing an attractive book jacket, including an author's blurb and the book's spine.

TO HAND IN

- A six-page (minimum) chapter of your autobiography
- A working title for your autobiography along with a subtitle and chapter title.

ASSIGNMENT BACKGROUND As with a good portion of the exercises suggested in this guide, this initial assignment is based on you, personally. It is your autobiography. The reason for basing assignments on you personally is to spare you from having to conduct research before beginning to prepare the materials. However, remember that the first job for a professional graphic communicator on assignment would be to conduct whatever research is necessary to thoroughly understand the problem he or she is trying to solve and the array of solutions possible. At least for now, the research step will not require much time at all.

There are, however, some important challenges posed by these assignments. For example, your understanding of yourself will eventually be revealed to others not only in the content of the words you write, but also in the typefaces you choose and in the size, shape, and layout scheme you choose for your pages. Many times this guide suggests that when you are faced with a graphic communication problem, you should look around to learn how others solved similar problems. However, you should not slavishly follow or copy the work of others; in some cases, to do so would raise ethical or legal questions. Instead, keep looking at similar efforts until you have a pretty fair idea of the possibilities, and then sit back and let your own fertile imagination do its work in suggesting a particular, effective solution to the problem at hand. In other words, don't copy what you find, but use those examples as a jumping-off point for your own creative impulses.

ASSIGNMENT

Part One. This first assignment requires you to write, edit, and submit a manuscript chapter of your autobiography. Pick a part of your life that you feel comfortable in telling. Use any word-processing program you are familiar with (Microsoft Word, Claris Works, etc.) and specify 12-point characters and a common typeface. (You might want to try Courier or Geneva to start.) Set the dimensions of your page at 8½ × 11 inches and place margins of 1 inch all round the page. Begin writing and don't stop until you have at least six double-spaced pages.

When you have completed your writing, print out a hard copy and edit it carefully. Make corrections, and then submit a hard copy. Preserve a copy on disk or hard drive for use later. Make certain that the pages of your work have an identifying slugline, preferably appearing as a header, and a page number.

Part Two. Think about the following variables and suggest a solution to each. Make a hard copy of your solutions to hand in and preserve a copy on your disk, for use later.

- What is the working title of your autobiography?
- What is a good subtitle to flesh out the title?
- What is a suitable title for the chapter you've written?

A working title can be looked on as a focusing device. Working titles can sum up a grand idea in only a few words, and if they appear as headers on all pages of a manuscript, they also provide instantaneous identification. Subtitles are supplementary to titles in both content and size of type. Sometimes they can be plays on words that open up new dimensions of a work intended to excite further interest. Pay a bit of attention to how others have handled these common parts of a work, and then, after a period of thought and reflection, respond with your own creativity.

TOPICS FOR THOUGHT AND CONSIDERATION

What information would you include if you were called upon to write a short blurb, or statement, about yourself such as those very often placed on the inside back flap of virtually any trade book jacket? Blurbs usually contain information that offers authors an opportunity to establish their contextual relationship with the work; magazines commonly rely on them to establish the credibility of freelance authors.

Also be thinking about how you see yourself portrayed in a book jacket photograph that accompanies a blurb. Are you smiling or serious? Are you looking at the camera or to the side? Is it a formal portrait or did someone capture the true you in a candid? What are your surroundings? What are you wearing? Eventually you will have to scan an existing picture of yourself or have one taken. So be thinking of the image you would like to project. Finally, begin to visualize a design for a book jacket. Stroll through a bookstore or library and pull down a number of books to see how professionals solve book jacket problems. Pay attention to the types of art and the typography used on these important wrappers, as well as the colors, special effects, and so on. Look carefully at the books' spines to see how publishers handle them.

2 TRIM AND TYPE PAGES, MARGINS, CONSTANTS, AND MASTER PAGES

OBJECTIVES Creating spaces to hold printed material—for book and magazine pages and spreads, bulletin boards, and posters—appears to be simple. However, doing it well consistently over a wide spectrum of media can be an extremely valuable skill for any graphic communicator. A good beginning to developing the skills needed to accomplish this is to become familiar with type, art, and page space. When you have made some basic decisions about these variables, creating a printed work becomes much simpler.

TO HAND IN

- At least four thumbnails of facing pages copied from autobiographies you find in a library, with page and margin dimensions clearly marked, and at least two thumbnails of chapter title pages
- At least two thumbnails of facing pages of your own autobiography, with page and margin dimensions clearly marked, and a thumbnail of a chapter opening page of your own autobiography
- A full-sized chapter opening page rough, with your copy in place
- A full-sized two-page grid of facing pages, with your copy in place.

ASSIGNMENT BACKGROUND As with the development of any skill, learning and then practice are in order. Fortunately, there is a simple approach to creating useful and attractive spaces on which to display printed materials. First, layout spaces must be appropriate in size and shape for the presentation of their content, and they should not differ noticeably in size and shape from what audiences have come to expect from similar offerings, unless there is a good reason for the variance. Second, readability is usually the most important consideration for most printed material, and apportioning space for lines of type is an important readability variable. For example, if a page appears to be too full of type, it may scare off potential readers. Lines of type that are too wide may tax an otherwise interested reader. Finally, proper arrangement and framing of printed materials on a page can increase an audience's acceptance of them by helping to make them appear inviting.

Whenever you volunteer for or are assigned a specific communication problem, a solid first step is to pay attention to how others have solved similar problems. In the case of your autobiography, it will help you to stroll around the library's autobiography section, where recently published autobiographies can easily be found. Leaf through a few of them until you have a feel for how book publishers typically present autobiographies of famous and infamous persons. Are the designers of those books in agreement on the general approach they take to this type of literature? Take along a line gauge/pica pole/ruler and a few sheets of paper. Take down a few books from the shelves and measure their pages, margins, and blocks of copy. Record the measurements so you can refer to them later. Do not allow what you find in this first step of your research to dictate precisely your solution to your own problem. Use your findings as guides only; use your imagination and creativity in crafting your own solution to your problem. Of course, if you find that virtually all autobiographies on a library's shelves are, say, 6 × 9 inches, it would not pay to deviate too far from those dimensions without good reason.

As you are doing this basic research, ask yourself the following questions and record your answers.

- How big are the pages of the autobiographies?
- Is there a common size?

Open a few of the autobiographies to facing pages. When professionals look at a page of a book they actually see two pages represented on the single sheet. One of them, the *trim page*, is the size of the publication after all printing, folding, binding, and trimming has been completed. Within this page, inside the margins, is what is called the *type page* or *live area*. This is the area of the page where type set *en masse* (the text of the work) appears. Another way to look at it is that the type page is equal to the trim page minus the margins. An example of trim and type pages can be found at the end of this section. Although headers and footers, page numbers, and even ornaments may appear in the margins, the type page, inside the margins, contains the textual material of the work. The headers and footers and other material are *marginalia*; they appear in the margin and are not a part of the text proper.

As you look at the pages before you, answer the following questions:

- Are odd page numbers on left-hand or right-hand pages? Always? Is this true for magazines as well as books?
- How wide, in inches or picas, are the margins (left and right, top and bottom)? They often differ in size. How do they differ?

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