

**Designing
Creative
Portfolios**

**Gregg
Berryman**



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Berryman**

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Dedicated to the Graphic Design Alumni
of California State University, Chico
for your dedication, esprit de corps,
professionalism and achievements.

A special thanks to my wife Phyllis for
her loving support and technical input.
Phil Gerould, Publisher, of Crisp
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his patience and encouragement which
extended far beyond the norm. The sage
advice and comments of the many
designers, educators and placement
professionals have helped add relevance
and dimension to this book.

Design: Gregg Berryman

Input: Phyllis Berryman

Editor: Kay Kepler

Illustration: Chris Ficken, Phil Quinn

Typography: Execustaff

Printer: Bawden, Inc.

Type: American Typewriter, Helvetica

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Introduction

An employer will spend five minutes looking over what has taken you years to accomplish. All of your effort must be focused on quickly communicating what you think about design and yourself, without reservation.

Craig Frazier
Principal
Frazier Design
San Francisco

Creative professionals view the portfolio as the single most important employment tool. Supported by an effective resume, strong recommendations and interviewing skills, the portfolio or “book” is your ticket for admission into challenging, creative positions. It offers hard evidence of problem solving and answers the “show-me” demands of employers.

This book defines a special kind of portfolio, the *creative portfolio*. Employers of creative professionals tend to be articulate, extremely selective and set high standards. They work under tight deadlines. These busy professionals know how to communicate visually and verbally and expect the same from those they interview. An average portfolio will not impress them. Only the bright, imaginative, creative portfolio will spark a positive response.

The creative portfolio needs to be exceptional. It must demonstrate how you think and communicate your thoughts while positioning you above the hordes of job seekers in competition for the most desirable positions. Your book must clearly articulate your uniqueness and connect your talents with the needs of a potential employer. Your creative portfolio holds the power to make each interview a special event.

Creative professionals assemble several portfolios in the span of a career. An application portfolio is required to enter top design schools. The internship portfolio is necessary to help you get stimulating part-time positions while you study or during summer vacation. An exit portfolio measures the quality and dimension of your undergraduate study. It guides you into the marketplace and helps jumpstart your career. Graduate schools of design require a portfolio for admission to advanced degree candidacy. As your design career develops, your professional portfolio includes updated samples and projects in progress.

The creative portfolio should not be a static package but an evolving collection of concepts, solutions and samples. It must identify you, enhance your credibility and project an honest profile of your capabilities. It should clarify your problem-solving skills and technical knowledge. Above all, the creative portfolio needs to demonstrate your promise and potential for growth to each target studio, agency or corporation.

The primary goal of this book is to provide a user-friendly portfolio reference for designers beginning their careers. Contents will help set a benchmark of portfolio information useful for educators, counselors and employers in creative visual professions. Readers are challenged to envision the portfolio-building process conceptually, rather than as a formula. By considering the portfolio as a distinct design problem, you are encouraged to develop an appropriate solution unique to you.

Employer Perceptions

Leading design studios, agencies and offices are very particular when hiring. Most are interested primarily in the cream of the crop. You need to clearly demonstrate that if you do not now fit this category you soon will. Employers demand the solid educational background provided by a recognized university or art school program. They realize that “skills-only” training will limit the future growth of a young designer. Only with a solid foundation in design history, theory and methodology will employees be able to absorb technology, interpret culture and communicate effectively.

Most employers have a different perception of “design talent” than your own. Designers often equate creativity with elegant visual form, sophisticated color systems and highly personal illustration. Employers see a bigger picture. They place an equal or greater value on consistency, competitiveness, reliability, dedication, integrity and interpersonal skills. Clients rate design output on yet another scale. A client's primary concern is the delivery of a design assignment on or before deadline. Next, they consider how the design piece affects the corporate bottom line. Clients are then concerned with the visual aesthetics of the assignment.

Successful design firms take hiring seriously. The process is time consuming and a good personnel decision is critical or the process must be repeated, often at great effort and expense. Over time, filling a design position represents a huge financial investment. While most beginning salaries are moderate, employers must supplement them with mandated benefits including social security and workers' compensation. Perks such as health coverage, paid parking, profit-sharing or health club memberships also increase the “invisible salary.”

Employers assume that it will take time to bring young designers up to speed, while they absorb office procedures and learn technical systems. If you can shorten this accommodation period, your value, to the company will increase. The sooner it is apparent that you are helping the firm make a profit, the faster you will be promoted.

Kris Edwards, president of Edwards and Shepard Agency, New York City design recruiters, has evolved her “CREPTT” formula for designers who are serious about retaining their position with a creative firm. This accurately mirrors employers' perception of employee value.

- C is for Creativity.** You can't survive without it—keep up with the times.
- R is for Reliability.** Show up on time, and be the one to be counted upon.
- E is for Enthusiasm.** Love what you do and what your employer does.
- P is for Performance.** Get it done, do it right and appreciate constructive criticism.
- T is for Trustworthiness.** Be loyal, devoted and limit personal matters at work.
- T is for Teamplying.** Work with others, help others, and be part of a whole.

The single most important ingredient to a successful designer/client relationship is for the designer to understand that the client is expecting a problem to be solved in exchange for money . . . a business problem generally. The designer is retained to aid in the successful prosecution of the client's business interests . . . not to develop creative concepts for the intrinsic value of the art itself.

William G. Townsend
Principal
William Townsend
Company
Sacramento, CA

Design Attitude

Study the history of art and design; knowing the past makes for a creative future. New and interesting concepts can only come from expanding on past experiences. Your board skills will make the above live or die.

John J. Sorbie
Professor Emeritus
Colorado State University
Fort Collins

Let's assume your work has good concept, fine execution and is presented impeccably—the only other ingredient necessary is an enthusiastic attitude. You want potential employers to know that you want to design for them.

Russell Leong
Principal
Russell Leong Design
Palo Alto, CA

Measure yourself against the characteristics of successful graphic designers. As individuals, most are extremely curious with diverse interests. They tend to be well read outside the field of design. A broad liberal arts background contributes to their worldliness as does travel abroad. An awareness of the creative visual disciplines of architecture, industrial design, landscape architecture and fashion design helps them place graphic design in context. Fine arts and art history serve as important stimuli.

Top designers develop a genuine love of design. They share a strong belief and conviction in their work, honed through sacrifice and commitment to excellence. They are self-critical and remain open-minded to constructive criticism. Many are driven to live by design. Design innovators assign their profession a very high priority in their existence. Assertive and confident designers tend to thrive in the most competitive circumstances.

Graphic designers work in close collaboration with others. Solid team players prosper. Selfish prima donnas tend to contaminate work environments already charged with high energy, stress and tight deadlines. A positive good-natured attitude helps contribute to the total team effort. Designers with genuine enthusiasm and outgoing personalities are fun to work with. If they are also courteous, have listening skills and possess a sense of humor, so much the better.

Conceptual Strategies

Strong conceptual ability is necessary for reaching the upper plateau of graphic design, as it is for all the creative professions. Those who can generate abundant fresh ideas and communicate them with clarity and elegance rise to the top. Consistent application of critical thinking skills and problem-solving methodology helps designers produce rich alternative solutions.

A foundation of communication theory provides the designer with a means to explore the nooks and crannies of the creative process. Worldliness and cultural awareness developed through reading and travel add rich texture to design solutions. Strong intuition is a characteristic of leading design innovators and supports their courage to take chances.

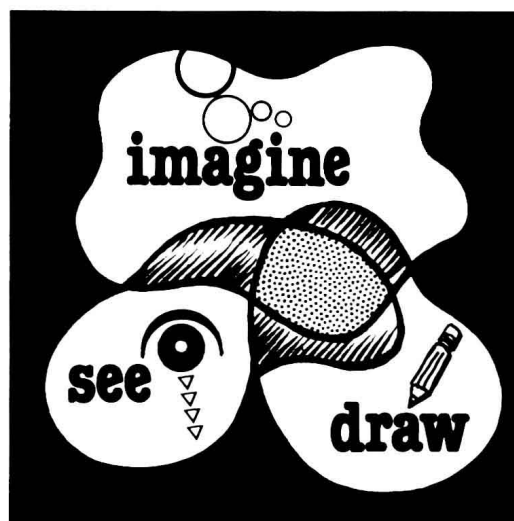
Concepts born in historical context help the designer to make relevant connections based on understanding rather than naivety. Empathy with the needs of clients adds validity to the creative process. Top designers are able to retain a global view of the problem at hand while detailing solutions. An ease of visualizing “big ideas” characterizes most successful design professionals.

Graphic designers must be able to subject each problem to careful analysis... breaking the whole into separate parts. They also learn to apply synthesis, which combines two or more dissimilar ideas into a single form. Designers use both inductive thinking (moving from problem specifics to a general concept) and deductive thinking (from general to specific). Synectics, a creative process incorporating both analogies and metaphors to stimulate ideas is also useful to designers.

Designers must be able to conduct effective research. Deciding *what* to investigate is critical. Research can be as simple as a conversation with a client or a field visit. It might also involve interpreting complex market research. Framing a problem in unique terms improves your opportunity for an original solution.

The creative process is only complete when ideas are recorded for evaluation. Designers often generate lists of words to stimulate images. By drawing on verbal descriptors, synonyms, literal meanings, slang, phonics, clichés and abstractions they expand design alternatives. Graphic designers need to be able to write about their ideas and discuss them. Concepts must be compared, edited and translated into forms meaningful to clients and audiences. Articulate communication is an accurate measure of visual intelligence.

Conceptual strategies are recorded and tested by graphic designers through an interactive visual process which involves seeing, imagining and drawing. Each of the three activities stimulates and activates the other. Architects, product designers, city planners, fashion designers, landscape architects and interior designers also share this process, most often through tracing and overlays. This visual thinking continuum is a potent incubator of alternative solutions.



Good thinking is as important as good design. Beyond the design's appearance, I look for the individual's ability to demonstrate an understanding of the problem, to state the design objectives and to explain how the solution meets those objectives.

Greg Silveria
Design Director
Group Four Design
Avon, CT

I'm looking for ideas—concept is more important than execution. If it is a poor idea I don't care how good it looks. I want to see how you think and can expand a concept into other pieces.

Craig Hedges
Vice President,
Director of Design
Ketchum Advertising
Los Angeles

Attractive and polished portfolios attract my attention, but the core of my review will always be the idea and its execution. The portfolio must show me how you think. Beautiful design is effective only if it solves the problem and communicates.

Frank Burris
Art Director
Kramer Carton
Sacramento, CA

Drawing Competence

Can you draw and sketch? Many designers forget to demonstrate this most basic ability. Include exhibits that illustrate your skills in concept visualization and rendering.

Steve Holler
Creative Director
Raychem Corporation
Menlo Park, CA

I like to see a small, tidy documentation of a design process included in a portfolio. To see the evolution of an idea from thumbnails to fruition gives me an instant read on a designer's thinking process and discipline. And of course keep it short.

Bobbi Long
Art Director
Publish Magazine
San Francisco

Show neatly organized development ideas, preferably pencil or marker (or laser print-outs). These idea sketches are always helpful to demonstrate your thinking process, and more importantly, sketches reveal your drawing abilities.

Doyald Young
Principal
Doyald Young
Graphic Design
Sherman Oaks, CA

Graphic designers need to develop extraordinary eye/hand skills. The ability to draw is fundamental to translating concepts and clarifies the communication process. Great designers master the language of drawing to indicate their thoughts. Leonardo, Picasso and Frank Lloyd Wright developed their genius from the foundation of masterful drawing.

Drawing is essential to translate ideas for evaluation. Designers should master a broad spectrum of specialized drawing techniques. Visual brainstorming, flow diagrams, graphic models and decision trees help to bridge the distance between raw concepts and reality. Strategic drawing probes the initial phases of the creative process. Designers utilize drawing overlays for quick modification of conceptual drawings... the act of tussling yields bountiful results.

Drawing to translate information is critical to understanding. Designers communicate with audiences through charts, graphs, tables and maps. They learn to integrate symbolic language with drawing to clarify distance, space and time. Graphic designers build their drawing vocabulary by absorbing the principles of proportion, view projection, rotation, cross-section and perspective. Combined with form translation through line, volume, surface and light, designers use drawing to stimulate ideation, memory and experience.

Accurate freehand drawing demands keen observation and reflects the designer's ability to see in a special way. Lucid idea sketches stimulate communication with others on the design team. Clients must view precise comprehensive visualizations to clearly understand the design intent. Without strong drawing, visual ambiguities tend to compromise the problem-solving process. Many superb ideas have been rejected by clients confused by distorted drawing and weak presentation.

Renown designer/illustrator Milton Glaser advises young designers about drawing in *The School of Visual Arts Guide to Careers*. "I don't think there's anything more wonderful than finding out you did a drawing that was better than you thought you could do... I am still astonished at what happens through drawing. I just can't believe it." The magic of solid drawing is tightly interwoven with the creative process. Your skills should be kept fresh through practice, application, experimentation and coursework to help expose you to the many dimensions of drawing. To continue to draw improves both your competence and confidence which in turn stimulates heightened creativity.

While the computer continues to grow in importance as a creative tool, designers must not neglect the development of strong drawing fundamentals. Computers with sophisticated programs are powerful assistants, but cannot substitute for your human touch and conceptual vitality. Renderings and illustrations produced with the help of computers depend on your drawing foundation to achieve viability.

Typographic Insight

Developing strong typographic skills reflects a reverence for the written and printed word. Virtually all graphic solutions involve information that must be translated into typography. Designers need to treat typography as a lifelong study, building sensitivity through exposure, experimentation and experience.

Committed designers must absorb the principles of both traditional and contemporary typography. The rich history of typography mirrors the development of the arts of civilization. To neglect the past and focus only on typographic fashion is short-sighted. To be driven only by the technology of the computer is limiting. Doyald Young, the Los Angeles master of typographic logotypes advises designers to "Avoid the trendy type cliché. Choose well designed types or those with a good track record. Remember classic types may be arranged in layouts so as to appear contemporary. But arrange them so that the reader gets the message easily."

Beginning graphic designers need to master the terminology of type. They must understand how typesetting systems have evolved and the technology of this evolution. A knowledge of the history of type and the classification of typefaces is expected. Old Style, Transitional, Modern, Slab Serif, Scripts and Ornamental styles compose broad categories of type from which the designer can draw for specific applications. Designers need to develop the knowledge to mine the rich lode of thousands of available type faces.

Researching the life and times of significant type designers lends depth and meaning to typography. Many successful graphic designers adopt inspirational typographic heroes like Gill, Tschichold, Goudy or Zapf as they develop a passion for their work.

Graphic designers must understand audiences and how typographic messages reach them. Designers should learn to control typographic legibility and the external factors that influence it. They establish typographic hierarchy to effectively interpret verbal messages.

Type can stand alone and become the sole subject of graphic expression. It can support and complete a message in conjunction with photos or illustration. Type can add finish detail and meaning to complex information. Designers need to be able to specify and apply type as mastheads, headlines, subheads, pull quotes, blurbs, body type, sidebars, captions, callouts, folios and credits. They must construct meaningful layouts to guide readers through the broad spectrum of publications.

Typography helps drive page structure, reading paths and layout systems that add clarity to information. The relationship of typography to icons, photography and illustration demands careful study by graphic designers. Typography must also be understood in the context of outdoor, wayfinding, retail and electronic environments.

The nuances of typography separate the exceptional from the ordinary. Designers learn to vary type size, weight and scale with appropriate contrast to affect the mood of an audience. The emotional content and voice of type can be adjusted to add pace and resonance to a poster, page, ad or television graphic.

Showing excellent typographic skills is most important. Remember that unlike photography or illustration, typography is involved in virtually every design project.

Bob Dahlquist
Principal
Bob's Haus
Sacramento, CA

I look for a practical understanding of typography. A knowledge and appreciation of classical typographic treatments, organizational ability and basic type skills are essential to the communication of even the wildest concept. Before one can create "bad" typography, one must have a thorough understanding of good typography.

Tony Auston
Design Director
Colona, Farrell:
Design Associates
St. Helena, CA

Computer Skills

Word Software

Microsoft Word®
Claris MacWrite®
WordPerfect®

Layout Software

Quark Xpress®
Aldus PageMaker®
Ventura Publisher®
Kodak Renaissance®

Draw Software

Aldus Freehand®
Adobe Illustrator®
CorelDraw®
Altsys Fontographer®
Fractal Design Painter®

Image Edit Software

Adobe Photoshop®
Aldus Photostylor®
Ventura PicturePro®

Presentation Software

Aldus Persuasion®
CA Cricket Presents®
MacroMedia Action®
Microsoft PowerPoint®

MultiMedia Software

Digidesign Audiomedia®
HyperCard®
MacroMedia Authorware®
MacroMedia Director®

3-D Software

Alias Upfront®
MacroMedia 3-D®
Ray Dream Designer®

Designers need to hone their computer skills as much as ever, if not more so—we're now talking about not just using computers but using them well. We need designers who can design a page that won't choke our service bureau's imagesetter. I'll ask to see not only a printed portfolio but also the files that created it.

Jake Widman
Editor
Publish Magazine
San Francisco

Fluent computer skills are prerequisite in today's design environment. Be prepared to demonstrate your design process . . . thumbnails through finished electronic art. Chart an efficient path using the appropriate software program. Include a demonstration disc as part of your portfolio. Don't be afraid to deviate from the computer if traditional tools yield quicker and superior results.

David Bacigalupi
Art Director
MMS Design
Sebastopol, CA

Computers play an important role in graphic design. While some of the most innovative professionals reject the computer, a larger number embrace it. Computers help relieve some of the drudgery of repetitive tasks. These tools help designers speed up the exploration of visual alternatives and free them to spend additional time on the creative process.

Understanding how computers integrate the design/production process is essential. Graphic designers should have a working knowledge of four types of software. Word processing software is used to generate and edit text. Draw/Paint software helps produce refined illustrations, icons and trademarks. Image editing software allows designers to scale, retouch and combine photographs. Page layout software is useful for creating pages, spreads and entire publications.

Digital prepress technology allows graphic designers to assume much of the traditional responsibility of typesetters and printers. Computers help cut costs and speed up the prepress process, adding precision while providing paper, film and even direct plate output.

Graphic designers need to acquire an understanding of animation, multimedia and interactive media. Presentation software is used to produce color slides for learning packages and product promotion. Three-dimensional software enhances the study and rendering of products, architecture and environments. Multimedia software helps integrate type, photos, sound and video for educational, corporate and institutional clients.

Business Awareness

To rise above the norm, graphic designers should develop a general understanding of the business of design. A good foundation includes a grasp of the basic principles of marketing, advertising, finance and management. Designers who can see from the client's perspective have a genuine advantage. An ability to understand project budgets and how they affect work flow is valuable. Efficient time management and the capability to work quickly add value to the designer.

Young designers must grasp how studios, agencies and corporations are organized and how each differs. You need to understand the strategies employed by each creative group to meet its business overhead, price its design services and earn profits. Once you achieve a business awareness by understanding personal responsibilities to the design effort, your career will gain meaning.

Solid writing contributes immensely to the design team effort. Graphic designers must be capable of generating intelligent project briefs, business letters, proposals and transmittals. Copywriting skills are important. Designers often write, rewrite and edit headlines, captions and body copy.

Design presentations determine the ultimate success of a proposed solution and involve both speaking and interpersonal communication skills. Clients must be persuaded to buy into design proposals in the language of marketing rather than the esoteric vocabulary of design. Truly gifted presenters develop an easy rapport with clients, master the art of persuasion and often move to the top levels of design management.

In presenting to an ad agency, I'm a firm believer in having your portfolio and presentation combine art and business. Don't get too cutesy-clever or you won't be taken seriously. Of course, if you're too grey and dry, your work won't stand out. Know the agency's work style. In presenting, tie your strengths into what they're looking for.

Greg Chew
Creative Director
DAE Media, Inc.
San Francisco

Let something in your portfolio demonstrate to me that you will be a valuable employee for my company. Can you use the Macintosh computer? Include a piece of work that proves it . . . using a typeface that I like.

Brian Burch
Art Director
Burch Design Group
Sacramento, CA