

Processing the Design Process

Breathe a sigh of relief! The Unit 4 folios are complete and Unit 2 is all wrapped up. The encouraging, cajoling, pleading and nagging as those folios evolved is over... but in this busy time, taking the time to reflect on how well our students understood and applied the Design Process (or not) can be valuable indeed.

Many schools begin the Unit 3 course in late November as part of an orientation program. This can be a great opportunity to get started on that first, somewhat daunting folio. The first step is the creation of a brief - the foundation of the folio. Getting the brief right can make the initial stages of the Unit 3 folio seem a little less overwhelming and provide productive starting points for the ensuing design process. Nailing the brief well at the start can also make *your* life that little bit easier...

The brief

Whether you offer students pre-written briefs, negotiate the communication need or leave it entirely up to students, the brief needs to be a 'meaty' one. It should contain enough information for students to glean starting points and to refer back to as the folio progresses. A 'meaty' brief doesn't have to be a long brief, but it should be descriptive *and* contain essential information. The brief should clearly state what the communication need is and what the associated task will be. For example: The design of a watch is clear but is too limiting. Students need starting points (we all dread the plaintive, "I don't know where to start" comments as they stare helplessly at a blank page). If the communication need is the design of a water resistant sports watch including the face, band and packaging gives many more options. Essentially, the brief should contain 'clues', information that might trigger a creative response or a research direction.

- A sample brief, written by you can be an effective means of conveying the 'perfect brief'.

The client

Who are the students working for?

A client without a name is fine but a client without details is not. It is important for the brief to define exactly who the final presentations are for. Real or fantasy, the client should be described in terms of their background. Like the task description above, client information can

provide clues for students and enable you to ask, as the folio progresses 'Does this suit the client and their need/s?' Such a question can certainly assist students to reflect back on the brief and ensure that their folio remains on track.

Audience

The **audience** should be clearly identified using terminology that is appropriate and informative (this is great practice for Analysis and Prof Prac). Generalisations and stereotypes should be discouraged, opting instead for broader descriptions of the target market. A memorable audience description used by one of my students in a Unit 4 brief was 'Latte-swilling, inner-urban types who drive BMWs and visit arthouse cinemas', Although we tweaked the description of the audience into language that was less judgmental, the detail remained - we knew where they lived, what interests they enjoyed, what their socio-economic status was and what products they might purchase. Such knowledge then allows students to target their research and initial ideas quite specifically.

- Class discussion can be a great method of 'deconstructing' audiences. The use of examples of visual communication and discussion of the target audience also provide a lovely link with Unit 3 Outcome 2. Simple version of the game 'Snap' where students match the audience to the visual communication can also be lighthearted but effective diversion.

- An audience collage can also help students to picture their target market by collecting images, swatches, letterform and existing designs that describe or appeal to their audience

The Purpose.

For some students the purpose is a tricky area to understand so it helps to define the purpose of visual communication at an early stage. Students need to be aware that their final presentations may have multiple purposes.

- Using existing examples of visual communication for each of the different purpose can help students visualise the difference between advertising and promotion, for instance. Free postcards are a great source for display and discussion of the purpose of visual communication and they make a cheap class set!

To Advertise	Used for the presentation of a product or service, advertising <i>suggests a commercial outcome</i> such as the sale of a product. Example: Yellow Pages advertisement for DJ and Jukebox hire
To Promote	Used in reference to the <i>promotion</i> of an event, organisation or something intangible such as a belief or philosophy. Example: A brochure for a jazz festival, Red Nose Day postcard
To Depict	Used when the presentation or illustration of visual information is the primary concern. There may be no agenda or message other than the visual details of the visual communication itself. Example: An illustration of a vacuum cleaner
To Teach	Used when the outcome of viewing or applying the visual communication is one of <i>learning</i> and <i>education</i> . Example: A poster which depicts the use of a series of French verbs
To Inform	Used when conveying information that is pertinent to a specific audience and leads to the <i>understanding</i> of an event, concept or opinion. Example: The front page of a newspaper
To Explain	Used when <i>visually describing</i> a process, event or system. Example: An explanatory diagram in a Biology textbook, explaining the lifecycle of a butterfly
To Guide	Used to assist in establishing and identifying a location or area. Example: A map depicting walking trails through a national park.

The context

The brief should clearly outline the context of the final presentation/s. Where will they be displayed/used/viewed? The context can be briefly covered but should give an indication of the impact the context may have on the final presentations. For example, the packaging of shampoo may be displayed on the shelf of a supermarket (**context**) so additional information in the brief may refer to the need for the packaging to be distinctive and eye-catching in what is a competitive market.

Constraints

Constraints are important and despite the temptation for students to say that their client has an unlimited budget, they can also be a helpful tool. Constraints might include, cost, time, scale and contextual issues such as location or venue. However, the most important *real* constraint is set by you - the due date! Time constraints are a real consideration in both a student and professional context. Students should be encouraged to plan their process so that they have the maximum amount of time available to fulfill the assessment criteria. In an ideal world, students finish with a week to spare but we all know that simply isn't the case. However, a class planner or intermittent

deadlines for aspects of the design process e.g. the orthogonal drawing (Unit 3 folio) must be completed by this date... can help to make life a little less stressful for all.

Next issue: The non-padding approach to effective research.

Interestingly, the Design, Creativity and Technology domain of VELS brings our familiar design process into a wider sphere by mandating the dimensions of 'Investigating and Designing', 'Producing' and 'Analysing and Evaluating' and includes working to a design brief. You may find your non-VC&D colleagues picking your brains for ideas and information.

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