

4.053 Visual Communication Fundamentals (FA2022)

Catalog + Poster Word Count
= min 50 words total

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Time Tuesdays 9AM–12PM (in-person N52-399),

Thursdays 7PM–10PM (remote)

Office hours By appt

Zoom ID <https://mit.zoom.us/my/fundamentals>

Slack <http://mit-4-053-2022fa.slack.com>

TOTAL = 5000+ words

Course Objectives

1. To gain an understanding of how we read, process, and use visual communication forms.
2. To gain familiarity and ease with different techniques that can create meaningful visual messages.
3. To recognize type as form.
4. To decode and utilize images.
5. To begin building a personal visual vocabulary.
6. To gain a greater appreciation for the fundamentals of communication design, from theoretical, historical and practical perspectives.

Course Description

This studio course provides an introduction to visual communication. Through readings, screenings, history lectures, assignments, and short exercises that draw from semiotic theory and practice, students will become familiar with the basic building blocks of visual communication—image and text—and the various ways they come together to make meaning. Students will learn and engage with various modes of representation in visual *and* written form, becoming familiar with core techniques and strategies in both. By the end of the class, students should have developed confidence in being clearer and more effective visual communicators, understanding how to generate and manipulate images and text to express their own ideas with confidence, clarity, and precision.

This is a CI-H class and features extensive writing as a core part of the curriculum. Students should expect to write up to a cumulative total of 5000 words over the course of the semester, with a significant portion of that dedicated to the curation, editing, and publication of the final assignment: a speculative exhibition that includes a poster and catalog with a curator's note and project descriptions. The rest of the word count will be filled with weekly reading responses and writing exercises to be performed in-class including but not limited to: close analyses and deconstructions, ekphrasis, and free-writing.

The writing count breakdown is as follows:

- 6 reading responses (400 words ea)
= 2400 words
- 3 free-writing exercises (750 words ea)
= 2250 words
- 1 writing exercise (300 words ea)
= 300 words

Required Materials

Adobe Illustrator

Adobe Photoshop

Adobe InDesign

A laptop

A smartphone

A digital image-capturing device (i.e. iPhone camera)

Meetings

Tuesday morning sessions will be held in person, which will also be reserved for review. Thursday evening sessions will be held remotely through Zoom, which will be recorded and posted in our class Slack channel.

Course Structure

This course is made up of three (3) units—form, form systems, and form circulation. Each of these units contain an assignment that will contribute to the content of a final collection of work (an “exhibition”) with an accompanying poster and catalog (“book”) that features your own writing about the work. In-class exercises, lectures, and readings with accompanying discussions will inform aspects of these major assignments, but will also touch on topics that the assignments do not necessarily cover.

Participation and effort in these areas are given equal weight to the performance of the assignments. This studio will also ask you to contribute weekly to a class Instagram account (format to be discussed on the first day).

Reading Responses

This course will assign six (6) reading assignments that will each require 400-word reading responses. Reading responses must be posted on Google docs before class.

All the readings will be provided by me. (There is no need to go buy textbooks).

Image Bank

Students are expected to contribute to the class image bank by posting one (1) image with a caption at the beginning of every week. This means there should be 14 total by the end of the semester. The platform will be decided as a group on the first day.

Communication + Slack

You are expected to contribute openly and generously to discussions and critiques happening both in class and through Slack, which will be our main communication channel for announcements, references, and direct messages. You should think of this environment as a community of peers and collaborators, and be looking to your peers for sources of inspiration and feedback.

Class Resources

This class is taught in collaboration with MIT's Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication (WRAP) program, an academic program located within the Comparative Media Studies/Writing (CMS/W) department. In addition to the instruction provided by me and the course TA, students also have access to a writing advisor who will be available to help them throughout the course of the semester. This year's advisor is Andreas Karatsolis (karatsol@mit.edu).

The MIT Writing and Communication Center is also available to any MIT class. Appointments are accessible online via mit.mywconline.com or on site at E18-233, 50 Ames Street.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences and tardiness may affect the final grade. Greater than two absences from studio without a medical excuse supported by a doctor's note or verifiable personal emergency could result in a failing grade for the studio. If there are any medical issues, personal emergencies, and special circumstances that impede the fulfillment of your academic obligations, please discuss them with me.

Grades

A Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.

B Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.

C Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems.

D Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems.

F Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.

Grade Breakdown

The grade will be assigned based on the following three categories:

- 40% Participation and Engagement
- 30% Concept and Exploration of Ideas
- 30% Communication, Delivery, and Craft

These grades will be applied holistically across the components of the class:

- 10% Image Bank
- 30% Reading Responses and Discussion
- 20% Exercises
- 40% Assignments

Midterm grades will be provided.

Academic Integrity

MIT's expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently: <http://integrity.mit.edu/>

The Department of Architecture promotes a learning environment that supports the diverse values of the entire MIT community of students, faculty, administration, staff and guests. Fundamental to the mission of architectural education is the stewardship of this diversity in a positive and respectful learning environment that promotes the highest intellectual integrity and cultural literacy. As architectural design learning is often accomplished through project-based activities during and outside of class times, maintaining this environment at all times is the responsibility of the entire community. Faculty and students should strive to understand and mutually respect the varied commitments of each other and work together to manage expectations of time and effort devoted to assignments, pin-ups, and public reviews.

Course Schedule

1	Unit 1 Understanding Form	Sept			08	What is Visual Communication? Assignment 1: Object begins Exercise (in-class)	Choose object			IG #1
2			13	Gestalt: Black Shapes and White Shapes Exercise (in-class) Assignment 1.1 begins	15	Gestalt: Black Shapes and White Shapes Assignment 1.1 files due Assignment 1.2 begins Reading #1 assigned (400 words response)	Object Black-and-White Forms	Object Representations ("Prints")		IG #2
3			20	Signs and Indexes Reading Responses due Assignment 1.2 progress	22	Signs and Indexes Assignment 1.2 Slides due Assignment 1.3 begins Free-writing Exercise for 1.3 (in-class) Reading #2 assigned (400 words response)		Object History Presentation		IG #3
4			27	Object History Reading Responses due Assignment 1.3 progress	29	Object History Assignment 1.3 Presentation due Reading #3 assigned (400 words response)				IG #4
5	Unit 2 Understanding Form Systems	Oct	04	Material Language Reading Responses due Assignment 2.1 (in-class) Assignment 2.2 starts	06	Material Language Assignment 2.2 progress Quiz Reading assigned (open-book)	Found Alphabet 1	Object Alphabet 2		IG #5
6			11		13	Type Anatomy and History Quiz (open-book) Assignment 2.1 progress				IG #6
7			18	The Logic of Type Assignment 2.2 Slides due Assignment 2.3 begins	20	Explaining a Process Assignment 2.3 progress (group-meetings) Free-writing Exercise for 2.3 (in-class)		Mapped Alphabet 3		IG #7
8			25	Alphabets as Systems of Shapes Assignment 2.3 progress	27	Alphabets as Systems of Shapes Assignment 2.3 Presentation due				IG #8

				Exercise (in-class)		Free-writing Exercise for 2.3 Revision (in-class) Guest: Andreas Karatsolis						
						Reading #4 assigned (no response due)						
9	Unit 3 Form and Meaning (Image + Text)	Nov	01	Images Reading Discussion Assignment 3: Circulation starts Ekphrasis Writing Exercise Part 1 (in-class)	03	Collections of Images and Typesetting Assignment 3.1 (identity) begins Ekphrasis Writing Exercise Revision (HW)	Exhibition details decided	Exhibition Identity Lock-up			IG #9	
10			08	Text and image Circulation Guest Lecture: Eline Mul Assignment 3.1 (identity): sketches round 1 due Ekphrasis Writing Revision due	10	Text and Image Circulation, and Identity Assignment 3.1 (identity): sketches round 2 due Reading #5 assigned (400 words response)					IG #10	
11			15	Text Lock-ups and Identity Reading Responses due Assignment 3.1 (identity): type lock-ups due Assignment 3.2 (poster) begins Assignment 3.3 (catalog) typography begins	17	Text and Image Circulation Assignment 3.2 (poster) rough sketches due Assignment 3.3 (catalog) typography check-in			Exhibition Poster	Exhibition Catalog design		IG #11
12			22	Poster, Catalog (Layout), Curator's Note Assignment 3.2 (poster) drafts due — pin-up Assignment 3.3 (catalog) typography check-in Free-writing Exercise for 3.3 (in-class) → Curator's Note Workshopping starts Exercise (in-class)	24		Curator's Note (Writing)		Project Descriptions (Writing)			IG #12
13			Dec	29	Poster, Catalog (Structure), Writing Assignment 3.2 (poster) finals due — pin-up Assignment 3.3 (catalog) typography due Exercise (in-class)	01	Poster, Catalog (Structure), Writing Assignment 3.3 (catalog) sketches due Project descriptions check-in					IG #13

			Curator's Note draft due (Scheduling 1:1 meetings with Andreas begin)		Reading #6 assigned (400 words response)					
14		06	Poster, Catalog Production, Writing Finalization Reading Responses due Assignment 3.3 (catalog) review	08	Work time + 1:1 meetings Curator's Note Finalized Project Descriptions Finalized					IG #14
15		13	FINAL REVIEW Assignment 3.3 poster and catalog due							IG #15

Core Readings

Jurij Meden, *Scratches and Glitches* (2021). Austrian Film Museum

[“Film as an Object in Time, or Film Fermentation, Part 1”](#)

[“Film as an Object in Space, or Film Fermentation, Part II”](#)

Bruno Munari, *Design as Art* (1966). London: Penguin Group

[“Two in One”](#)

Norton Jester, Selection from [The Phantom Tollbooth](#) (1961).

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (1977)

[Episode 1](#)

Chris Marker, [La Jetée](#) (1963)

Canal Street Research Association, [“PECUNIA NON OLET”](#). From The Serving Library Issue #17.

Laurel Schwulst, [Spiral](#) (2016). Published for The Creative Independent.

How To With John Wilson S1E2: How To Put Up Scaffolding

John Kane, *A Type Primer* (2011)

[Introduction & Basics](#)

[Development and Classification](#)

[Text](#)

[Columnar Organization](#)

[Grids](#)

References / Secondary Readings

Armin Hoffman, [Graphic Design Manual](#)

David Reinfurt, [“G-E-S-T-A-L-T”](#) (2019)

Donald Knuth, [“The Concept of a MetaFont”](#). First published in Visible Language, Winter: 1982**

Roy R. Behrens, [“Art, Design, and Gestalt Theory”](#) (1998) in Leonardo, Vol. 31 No. 4

Bruno Munari, [Design as Art](#) (1966)

Bo-Won Keum, [“On the Letterform of the Age”](#) (2020).

Jost Hochuli, *Detail in Typography* (2008). London: Hyphen Press

[Basics, Letter, Word](#)

Michael Rock, [“Fuck Content”](#) (2009).

Dexter Sinister, [Style Guide for KADIST](#) (p. 31–42 of [the PDF](#))

Dexter Sinister, [“Letter and Spirit”](#) (2018).

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, New York: Harper Collins

[Chapter 3](#)

Bruno Munari, *Good Design* (1963). Mantova: Corraini

[The Orange](#)

[Peas](#)

Plato, [“Discussion of Writing”](#), Phaedrus, 274C–276A. Trans. by Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff

Plato, [The Allegory of the Cave](#), The Republic Book VII, 514 a 2 – 516 a 7. Trans. by Thomas Sheehan

Hito Steryl, [In Defense of the Poor Image](#) (2009)

Beatrice Warde, [“The Crystal Goblet”](#) (1955)

Resources

[The People’s Graphic Design Archive](#)

[The Letterform Archive](#)

[Eye on Design](#)