

17-Week Graphic Design Skills & Sensibility Improvement Plan

Week 1: Foundations of Design & Visual Analysis

- **Exercise:** Learn fundamental design principles (contrast, hierarchy, alignment, balance, etc.) from a beginner resource or course. Then apply your knowledge by identifying these principles in everyday designs around you – for example, analyze a flyer or website and note how it uses contrast or alignment. **Goal:** Build awareness of core design concepts, as these fundamentals are the foundation of every visual medium ¹. **Tools/Resources:** Intro to design tutorials (e.g. GCF Global), design books/blogs on principles, notebooks for jotting observations.
- **Exercise:** Perform a daily *design critique* of something around you (ad, poster, package). Ask yourself what makes it visually effective or not – this trains your *visual sensibility* (the ability to discern what works visually) ². Jot down the good and bad aspects you notice in composition, typography, and color. **Goal:** Develop a critical eye by seeing design “in the wild” and understanding why good designs work (and bad designs fail). **Tools/Resources:** Your smartphone camera or sketchbook to capture examples, design review blogs for reference.
- **Exercise:** Try a hands-on composition activity. For instance, cut out images and text from magazines and rearrange them on paper to create a simple layout. Working *by hand* forces you to think in terms of space and form without digital aids – a great way to sharpen your design sensibility ³. **Goal:** Strengthen fundamental layout skills and creativity through tactile practice. **Tools:** Scissors, glue, paper (or a whiteboard and sticky notes); physical crafting can augment on-screen learning.

Week 2: Typography Basics

- **Exercise:** Dive into typography 101 – learn about type families (serif, sans-serif, etc.), anatomy of letters, and typographic hierarchy. Create a simple one-page layout (e.g. a mock event flyer or a menu) using *only text*: pick two contrasting fonts (for instance, a serif for body and sans-serif for headlines) and establish a clear hierarchy (big title, medium subtitle, small body text). **Goal:** Cultivate your “type sensibility” – knowing what fonts look good together and how to space and size them for readability ⁴. **Tools/Resources:** Google Fonts (to find and pair fonts), InDesign or Canva (for layout), online guides on font pairing and spacing.
- **Exercise:** Practice typography offline with a bit of hand-lettering. Draw a favorite word or quote in a stylized way using pencil or calligraphy pens, focusing on the shape and proportion of letters. Try basic calligraphy drills to understand stroke thickness and letter anatomy ⁵. **Goal:** Gain a deeper feel for letterforms and improve your kerning/spacing skills by literally drawing the letters – this builds muscle memory for good type design. **Tools:** Pencil, marker or calligraphy pen, paper (graph or dotted paper helps); inspiration from hand-lettering tutorials or books.

Week 3: Color Theory Essentials

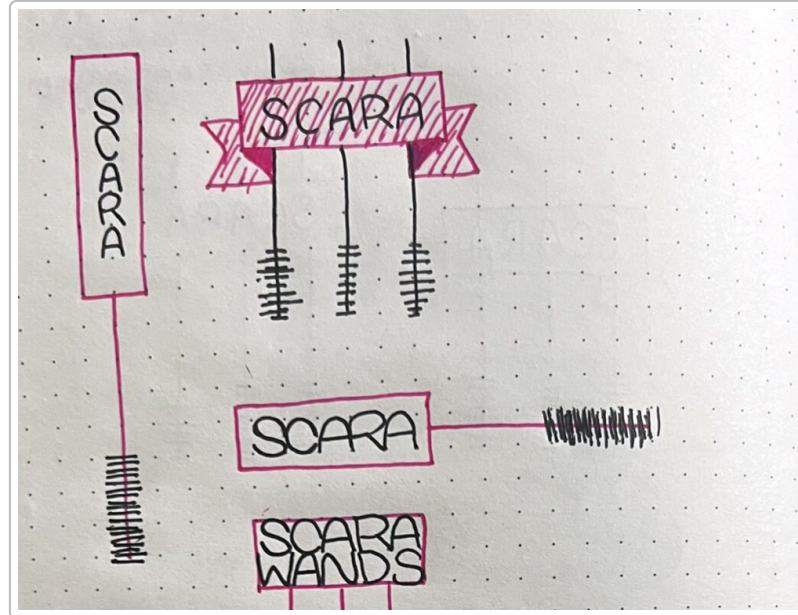
- **Exercise:** Study color theory fundamentals (color wheel, primary/secondary colors, complementary vs. analogous schemes, etc.), then create your own color toolkit. For example, paint or assemble a simple color wheel, or use an online color picker to generate different harmonies from one base color. **Goal:** Understand how colors relate and how combinations can evoke different moods. **Tools/Resources:** Adobe Color (online color wheel generator), color theory videos/articles, perhaps a set of color swatches or paint chips for a physical color wheel.
- **Exercise:** Train your eye with a color observation project. Start a “color journal” in which you collect anything with interesting color combos – take photos of designs or nature, clip magazine images, or screenshot websites with palettes you love. Next, try to *recreate* those color palettes manually (without color-picking the exact values) ⁶ ⁷ and note why they work. **Goal:** Improve your color sensibility through critical observation and practice – this exercise forces you to really see subtle differences in hue and value. **Tools:** Sketchbook or digital board for a color scrapbook, colored pencils or a digital drawing app to mimic palettes, palette-generating tools to check your guesses after.
- **Exercise:** Apply color theory in a small design. Design a simple poster or social media graphic with a restricted color scheme (e.g. choose a dominant color and one accent using a complementary or triadic scheme). Experiment with swapping palettes – how does a warm scheme versus a cool scheme change the design’s feel? **Goal:** Learn to use color intentionally to set a mood or hierarchy in your design. **Tools:** Photoshop or Canva (to create the graphic), color contrast checker (to ensure text is legible on your background), references like Color Hunt or design blogs for palette inspiration.

Week 4: Layout & Composition with Grids

- **Exercise:** Learn about composition techniques (rule of thirds, use of grids, visual hierarchy). Practice by sketching a few thumbnail layouts for a given content – for example, imagine a one-page newsletter or webpage: draw different ways to arrange a headline, image, and text block. Alternatively, do an analog exercise like arranging paper cut-out shapes on a page to find a balanced layout. (Taking inspiration from Matisse’s paper cut-outs, try creating an abstract design with just colored shapes to explore balance and negative space ⁸ .) **Goal:** Strengthen your sense of arrangement and whitespace, and learn to quickly explore multiple layout ideas. **Tools:** Pencil and paper for thumbnails, scissors and colored paper for collage; or use a digital wireframing tool for quick block layouts.
- **Exercise:** Design a simple flyer or webpage mock-up using a formal grid system. Set up a grid (e.g. a 2-column or 3-column layout with consistent gutters) and align text and images to this grid. By using a grid as an underlying structure, you bring order to the design. **Goal:** Practice using grids to create cohesive, organized layouts – grid systems form the fundamental framework of any design, helping you balance creativity with structure ⁹ . **Tools:** Adobe InDesign or Figma (enable layout grids), layout rulers/guides; reference grid templates or baseline grid tutorials.
- **Exercise (Feedback):** Show one of your layouts to a friend or share it in a design community for critique on composition. Ask if the hierarchy of information is clear at a glance. **Goal:** Verify that your composition effectively guides the viewer’s eye as intended, and get tips for improvement. **Tools:** Online communities (Facebook design groups, Reddit r/graphic_design), or in-person feedback; a checklist of design principles to self-evaluate alignment, spacing, balance, etc.

Week 5: Branding Basics – Concept & Logo Design

- **Exercise:** Choose a fictional brand to create (e.g. a cafe, a bookstore, a tech startup) and define its identity concept. Write a one-paragraph brief about the brand's personality, values, and target audience. Next, gather inspiration and create a **moodboard** for the brand's vibe – collect logos, color swatches, and imagery that feel aligned with the brand's message ¹⁰. **Goal:** Establish a clear vision for the brand's look and feel before designing, and practice visual research skills. **Tools/Resources:** Pinterest or a Miro board (to assemble moodboard images), branding blogs or Behance for inspiration, a style keywords list to focus your concept.



- **Exercise:** Sketch a large variety of logo ideas *on paper* for your brand. Aim for 10–20 quick rough logos exploring different symbols, typefaces, and layouts. Use tracing paper to iterate by layering and tweaking your best concepts ¹¹ – for instance, trace a shape and try altering it without starting from scratch each time. **Goal:** Encourage broad exploration and rapid iteration in logo design *before* jumping to the computer. This hands-on process helps generate creative ideas and refines them quickly. **Tools:** Paper, pencil, markers, tracing paper; logo inspiration from logo galleries or books for reference (but focus on original ideas).
- **Exercise:** Choose the most promising logo sketch and recreate it digitally in a vector tool. Refine the typography (adjust kerning/spacing of letters) and shape until it's clean and scalable. Create a few variations (e.g. different font or layout tweaks) in black-and-white first (ensuring it works in its simplest form), then add your chosen brand colors. **Goal:** Translate a concept to a polished digital logo and ensure it works in various sizes and color modes. **Tools:** Adobe Illustrator or Inkscape (for vector drawing), font libraries for selecting a typeface, a grid or circle guide if your logo needs geometric consistency.
- **Exercise (Feedback):** Share your logo design for critique and iteration. Post it on a design forum or social media (Behance, Dribbble, or a subreddit like r/design_critiques) and ask for honest feedback on clarity, scalability, and originality. Remember, it's nearly impossible to improve a design without external input – other eyes will catch things you missed ¹². **Goal:** Improve your logo through at least one feedback loop, refining details like proportions or legibility based on critique. **Tools:** Online

design communities for feedback, or ask a few peers/mentors directly; versioning your file so you can compare before/after changes.

Week 6: Branding Extension – Visual Identity & Collateral

- **Exercise:** Develop a basic **style guide** for your brand. Define the official logo (and how it can/can't be used), the brand color palette (primary and secondary colors), and the brand fonts (for headings, body text). Document these choices on a one-page style sheet. **Goal:** Ensure consistency in all your brand visuals and start thinking in terms of a system, not just one logo in isolation. **Tools:** Illustrator or InDesign (to lay out a style guide page), colors.co or Adobe Color (to finalize color codes), Google Fonts or similar (to choose complementary typefaces).
- **Exercise:** Design one piece of brand collateral. This could be a business card, letterhead, or a social media profile image/banner – something that applies the logo, fonts, and colors in context. For example, make a double-sided business card with the logo on one side and info on the other, following the style guide. **Goal:** Practice applying the brand identity to real-world formats and consider details like spacing, margins, and visual hierarchy with brand elements. **Tools:** Adobe InDesign (ideal for business cards or print layouts), or Canva template if needed; mock-up generators (like Placeit) to visualize the card or collateral in use.
- **Exercise (Review):** Check your branding elements across different mediums. Does the logo work in grayscale (for fax or black-and-white print)? Does it scale well from a tiny favicon to a poster size? Make adjustments if needed (e.g., a simplified logo version for small sizes). **Goal:** Refine the versatility of your brand design and ensure it remains effective and recognizable in any context. **Tools:** Mockups and print tests (print your logo small and large to see), Adobe Photoshop (to test it on various backgrounds), feedback from a friend if the brand looks cohesive across pieces.

Week 7: Print Design – Poster Layout Fundamentals

- **Exercise:** Conceptualize a **poster** for a cause or event you care about (e.g. a charity fundraiser, a concert, or a public service message). Define the poster's purpose and audience, then outline the content: title, subtitle or tagline, date/venue (if event), a brief description, and any imagery. Sketch a quick layout idea on paper, thinking about where text and images will go. **Goal:** Approach the poster with a clear communication goal and a plan for visual hierarchy before you begin designing. **Tools:** Pencil and paper for sketches; inspiration from good poster designs on Pinterest or design annuals (to see effective layouts and content strategies).
- **Exercise:** Design the poster in a digital layout program, paying special attention to **visual hierarchy and balance**. Use a grid to align elements and make sure the most important info stands out (big, bold text for the title, supportive details smaller). Aim for strong composition: create visual emphasis on key ideas, organize the text for easy reading, and harness negative space to guide the viewer's eye ¹³. **Goal:** Apply fundamental layout principles in a real project – the poster should be both attractive and immediately communicative. **Tools:** Adobe InDesign or Illustrator (for precise control over print layout), high-resolution images or illustrations if needed (ensure they are print-quality), your brand color palette or bold high-contrast colors for impact.
- **Exercise:** Set up the file with proper **print settings** and produce a test print. Add bleed and crop marks if the design goes to the edge. Ensure colors are in CMYK for print and that text is readable at a distance. Print it on a home printer (scaled down if necessary) or export as PDF and view at 100% size on screen to double-check details. **Goal:** Learn the technical side of print design so your work is

printer-ready and professional. **Tools:** InDesign's print export settings or PDF presets (e.g. PDF/X-1a for print), a printer or print shop for proofing, a ruler to check dimensions/margins on the print.

- **Exercise (Feedback):** Pin your printed poster on a wall and take a few steps back – is the message clear in 5 seconds? If possible, get a friend's reaction: What do they notice first? Adjust the design if important details aren't grabbing attention. **Goal:** Evaluate the effectiveness of your poster's design from the audience's perspective and improve its clarity or visual impact. **Tools:** Physical printout for testing, or share a PDF with a peer; use their critique to guide final tweaks.

Week 8: Digital Design – Social Media Adaptation

- **Exercise:** Adapt your poster's campaign into a set of **social media graphics**. Identify two or three formats – for example, an Instagram square post, an Instagram Story (vertical), and a Twitter banner (horizontal). Each should maintain the core visual identity of the poster (same colors, fonts, key imagery) but rearranged to fit the format. **Goal:** Practice translating a design across different digital dimensions, learning to keep consistency while optimizing layout for each size. **Tools:** Adobe Photoshop or Canva (excellent for quick social media layouts), template size guides (for dimensions, e.g. 1080x1080px for IG post, 1080x1920px for Story, etc.), your assets from the poster (export and reuse graphics, text).
- **Exercise:** Optimize the designs for on-screen viewing. Ensure text is large enough to read on a small phone screen and that colors have enough contrast on digital displays. Also consider file format and size – export in web-friendly formats (JPEG/PNG) and check that the graphics still look crisp. **Goal:** Learn the differences between print and digital design requirements (e.g. RGB color, resolution, readability on-screen) and make your graphics effective for online use. **Tools:** Photoshop's "Save for Web" or Canva download options (to control resolution/quality), an actual smartphone to preview how the graphics look when posted, contrast-checker tools for ADA compliance if text is over images.
- **Exercise (Engagement/Feedback):** Actually post one of the graphics to a social platform or share it in an online design community. Monitor feedback: do people understand the message and design? You might ask a question like "Does this catch your eye?" to a group of peers or on a design subreddit. **Goal:** Get real-world input on your digital design's effectiveness and practice responding to critique (e.g., if someone suggests the text is hard to read, refine it). **Tools:** Instagram or chosen platform (to publish), or Behance/Dribbble for more formal design community feedback; use polls or comments to gather responses.

Week 9: UI/UX Introduction – Research & Wireframing

- **Exercise:** Pick a simple app or website idea to design (for instance, a to-do list app, a recipe sharing site, or a personal portfolio site). Start with the **user experience**: write a short problem statement or goal for the product (e.g. "Help users track tasks easily"). Identify the target users and list their top needs or tasks (this can be done by imagining a persona or even interviewing a friend who fits the user profile). **Goal:** Ground your design in user-centric thinking – define what you're solving and for whom. **Tools/Resources:** Persona templates (to outline user characteristics), basic UX research methods like a few interview questions or surveys, notes app to capture user needs.
- **Exercise:** Sketch out the **user flow** and wireframes for key screens. Decide on 3–5 core screens your app/website needs (e.g., for a to-do app: a home screen showing tasks, a form to add a task, a settings or profile screen). Draw a simple flowchart of how a user would navigate these. Then create low-fidelity wireframe sketches for each screen on paper – just boxes and placeholder text to layout where things like headers, buttons, lists will go. **Goal:** Focus on content placement and functionality

without worrying about visuals yet, ensuring the interface will be intuitive and the information hierarchy makes sense. **Tools:** Paper and pencil (quick wireframe sketches), or a wireframing tool like Balsamiq/Figma in wireframe mode; reference common UI patterns (for example, look at similar apps' layouts for guidance).

- **Exercise:** Translate your paper wireframes into a clickable digital wireframe prototype. Use Figma, Adobe XD, or similar to create simple grey-box screen designs and link them together (e.g., make the "Add Task" button clickable to navigate to the add-task screen). Keep it very basic – no need for colors or images, just structure. **Goal:** Test the flow of your design to ensure it's logical and covers all user tasks before investing time in high-fidelity visuals. **Tools:** Figma/Adobe XD (utilize built-in prototyping to link screens), Invision or Marvel as alternatives for creating clickable wireframes, a friend to do a quick run-through of the prototype and see if they understand how to use it (usability check).
- **Exercise (Review):** Evaluate your wireframes against UX best practices. Is the navigation clear and consistent across screens? Is the content prioritized correctly (e.g., main actions are prominent)? Make notes of any changes to improve the user experience. **Goal:** Refine the structural design of your UI so that it's user-friendly and aligns with the needs you identified. **Tools/Resources:** UX design checklists or heuristics (Nielsen's heuristics can be a guide), possibly feedback from a potential user or mentor on your wireframe clarity.

Week 10: UI Design – High-Fidelity & Usability Testing

- **Exercise:** Take your wireframes from Week 9 and create a **high-fidelity UI design** for each screen. Develop a simple UI style guide first – choose a color scheme (consider your earlier color theory lessons for accessible contrast), choose typography for headings and body (legible, and consistent with your brand if any), and define basic UI components (buttons, form fields, icons). Then apply these to design pixel-perfect mockups of the key screens. **Goal:** Bring the skeleton to life with visual design, ensuring aesthetic consistency and usability (e.g., sufficient font sizes, tap-friendly button sizes). **Tools:** Figma or Sketch (for detailed UI design with styles and components), icon libraries (Material Design icons, etc.), a color contrast checker (to verify text is readable on backgrounds).
- **Exercise:** Build an **interactive prototype** of your UI design. Link the high-fidelity screens in Figma/Adobe XD so that clickable areas (like buttons or menus) navigate to the corresponding screen. Add subtle interactions or transitions if the tool allows (e.g., slide-in menu). **Goal:** Simulate the user experience of your app/website to prepare for testing – the prototype should feel like a real product walkthrough. **Tools:** Figma/Adobe XD prototyping features, or InVision for clickable prototypes; mobile phone or web browser to test the prototype in the appropriate environment (e.g., use Figma Mirror to view on an actual phone if designing a mobile app).
- **Exercise:** Conduct a **usability test** with 2–3 people. This can be informal: ask a friend or family member to perform a couple of typical tasks using your interactive prototype (for example, "Add a new to-do item and then change its due date"). Observe where they get confused or where the design fails to guide them. Take notes on any pain points. **Goal:** Identify usability issues in your design through real user interaction – this is crucial because designers often miss problems that fresh eyes catch. **Tools:** The prototype (on a phone or laptop for the tester), a task script for the user, and a notebook or recording app to capture their feedback and actions.
- **Exercise:** Iterate on your UI design based on the test findings. Maybe you discovered a button was hard to find, or instructions were unclear – tweak the design to fix these issues (e.g., make the button bigger or label it more clearly, adjust the layout for clarity). **Goal:** Improve the user experience by refining the design, practicing the cycle of design > test > refine which is key in UI/UX

work. **Tools:** Figma/XD to update the design, and possibly a second quick round of testing to validate the changes; UX forums or a mentor's input on tricky UI problems if any came up.

Week 11: Advanced Typography & Visual Hierarchy

- **Exercise:** Create an **expressive typography poster** – a design that communicates a message *using text only*. Pick a short phrase or quote that you feel strongly about. Design a poster (or web graphic) where you use typography as the main element: experiment with size, weight, case, and arrangement of the text to convey emotion or meaning. Try creative techniques like overlapping letters, using extreme scale, or rotating words, while still keeping legibility. **Goal:** Push your creative skills in using type not just for reading, but as a design element that can have impact on its own. Also, sharpen your sense of hierarchy and contrast with type (what part of the quote do you make biggest/boldest?). **Tools:** Illustrator or InDesign (for fine control of typography), a variety of fonts (try combining a decorative display font for a key word with a simpler font for others), inspiration from famous typography posters (research Swiss typography posters or contemporary kinetic type for ideas).
- **Exercise:** Refine the details of typography in one of your previous designs (for example, revisit your Week 7 poster or your app design typography). Pay attention to *micro-typography*: adjust kerning (space between specific letters) on a logotype or title, tweak line height and justification on paragraphs for optimal readability, and ensure consistent use of dashes, quotes, and other characters (Typos). You might even create a custom lettering for a logo or title to see the difference detail makes. **Goal:** Elevate your work by focusing on the often-overlooked typographic details, developing an eye for precision (a key part of “type sensibility”). **Tools:** InDesign or Illustrator (which allow optical kerning adjustments, tracking, etc.), a grid or baseline grid for aligning text, articles on typography rules (like proper use of en/em dashes, quotes) as a checklist.
- **Exercise (Feedback):** If possible, get a critique focused solely on typography. For instance, post your expressive poster in a typography enthusiasts group or ask a designer colleague to review your typesetting on a project. Ask questions like “Is my hierarchy clear?” or “Any suggestions to improve readability or style?”. **Goal:** Gain insights into how others perceive your typographic choices and learn advanced tips (like using fewer font families, improving contrast, or alignment) from more experienced eyes. **Tools:** Online communities (the TypeThursday community, Reddit's r/typography), or typography forums; print out your design to see it away from the screen (sometimes issues like spacing are easier to spot on paper).

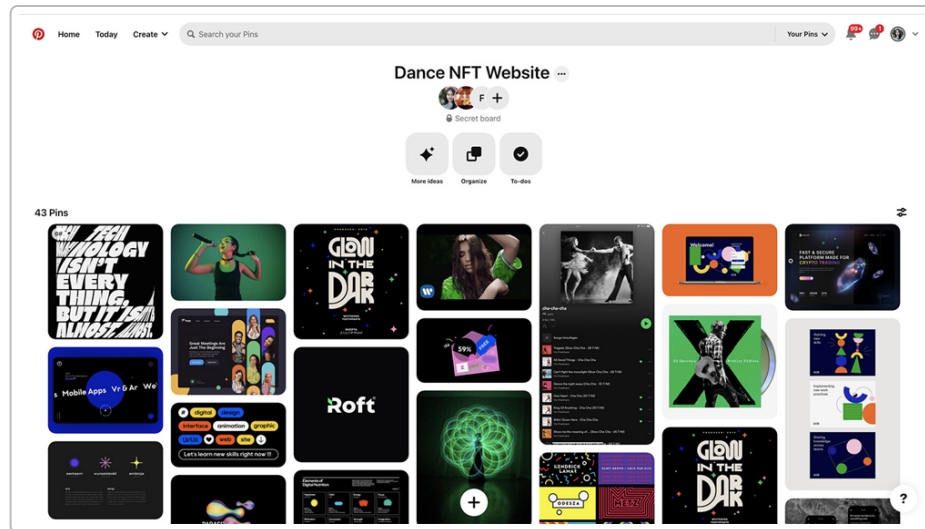
Week 12: Advanced Layout – Grid Systems & Multi-Page Design

- **Exercise:** Design a **multi-page document** (such as a 2–4 page newsletter, mini brochure, or magazine spread) to deeply practice layout and grid systems. First, set up a grid framework appropriate for the project: for a magazine spread, maybe a 3-column grid with consistent margins and a baseline grid for text; for a brochure, perhaps a modular grid. Use this grid to place text and images across your pages consistently. *Tip:* Establish styles for headings, subheadings, body text, etc., so your typography is uniform. **Goal:** Learn to handle complex layouts with lots of content while maintaining order and readability – grids provide the structure that keeps multi-page design cohesive ⁹. **Tools:** Adobe InDesign (ideal for multi-page layout with master pages and styles), lorem ipsum text or a real article to typeset, high-quality images if needed (ensure you flow text around images neatly), and a ruler or grid overlay to check alignment.

- **Exercise:** Populate and polish the design. Pay attention to how elements flow from one page to the next – for instance, ensure that if a paragraph splits between pages, the break is at a logical point, and maintain consistent headers/footers. Incorporate visual elements like pull quotes, section headings, or small graphics to add interest but align them to your grid. **Goal:** Refine your ability to create **visual harmony** in a complex layout, making it not only functional but aesthetically pleasing as a unit. This solidifies your understanding of composition at a macro level (multiple pages together). **Tools:** InDesign styles (for automatic consistency), pre-flight or preview in InDesign (to catch widows/orphans, alignment issues), printed proof of the pages (to see if everything looks right in physical form, especially margins for binding).
- **Exercise:** As an alternative or addition, try designing an **infographic** that combines data with design – this challenges both layout and visual communication. Take a small set of data or a process, and design a one-page infographic poster. Use grid-based sections to organize information, and include charts or icons you create. **Goal:** Translate information into visual form, practicing hierarchy and clarity in a different context. **Tools:** Illustrator (for drawing charts or icons), Excel/Google Sheets to generate a quick chart to stylize, references from *Information is Beautiful* or other infographic collections for inspiration on layout and style.
- **Exercise (Feedback):** Have someone read your multi-page document or examine your infographic. Do they find it easy to follow? Are there any confusing jumps or cluttered areas? Use a critique to identify any layout issues (like too much text in one area, or misaligned elements breaking the grid rhythm). **Goal:** Fine-tune your advanced layouts for both aesthetics and user comprehension, learning how consistent and well-structured your work appears to others. **Tools:** A colleague or friend as a test reader, or even yourself – come back to the design after a day's break with fresh eyes; mark up a printout with any adjustments needed.

Week 13: Visual Culture & Moodboard Exploration

- **Exercise:** Research a **design movement or iconic designer** to broaden your visual culture. For example, you might explore the Bauhaus movement, Swiss Modernism, or a designer like Paula Scher or Massimo Vignelli. Gather information about the key characteristics: what fonts, colors, layouts define that style? What cultural or historical context influenced it? **Goal:** Enrich your design sensibility by learning from the history of design – understanding different styles will inform your creative choices and inspire new ideas. **Tools/Resources:** Design history books or online articles, YouTube documentaries (e.g. *Helvetica* documentary for typography history), museum archives or AIGA articles for specific movements. Take notes on signature elements (e.g., Swiss Style = sans-serif type + grids + minimalism).



Exercise: Create a **moodboard** that captures the essence of the style you researched. Collect 10–20 visual examples – posters, logos, color swatches, type specimens – and arrange them on a board (physical pinboard or digital canvas). Aim to showcase the common themes (maybe a specific color palette or composition technique). **Goal:** Train your eye to see patterns in design aesthetics and practice synthesizing a visual theme. Making a moodboard helps you gather diverse inspiration and decide on an overall visual direction for projects ¹⁰. **Tools:** Pinterest or Milanote for a digital moodboard (or print images and use a poster board physically), graphic design archives (like *Graphic Design Archive* or Behance galleries sorted by style) to source images, annotation notes to point out what you find characteristic (e.g., “bold diagonal lines” or “muted earth tones”).

- **Exercise:** Design a piece *inspired by* that style or designer. For instance, if you studied Swiss Style, create a minimalistic poster for a modern event using a grid and sans-serif type; if you explored an Art Deco style, design a wedding invitation with geometric patterns and elegant 1920s typography. Try to strike a balance between emulating the style and adding a bit of your own creativity. **Goal:** Apply new aesthetic principles in practice, which expands your range and sensitivity to different visual approaches. By stepping into another style, you’ll become more versatile and aware of how design elements create a distinct mood. **Tools:** Your choice of design software suitable for the piece (Illustrator/InDesign for print, or Figma if digital graphic), color palettes or fonts typical of the era (many retro fonts are available on sites like DaFont or Google Fonts), and any special assets (perhaps you need to draw some Art Deco ornaments or find a geometric pattern – use this as a chance to create or source those).
- **Exercise (Share):** Present your mini “historical” project and moodboard to a design community or even just friends and explain the style you attempted. See if they recognize the influences. **Goal:** Validate whether you managed to capture the key elements of the style (e.g., someone might say “This poster looks very Bauhaus!” which means you hit the mark). This also trains you to articulate design choices in relation to style and context. **Tools:** Online design forums or a personal blog where you can write a short case study about what you learned; feedback from someone knowledgeable in design history can be especially insightful here.

Week 14: Capstone Project 1 – Brand Identity & Print Campaign

- **Exercise (Concept):** Undertake a comprehensive **branding project** to synthesize what you’ve learned. Choose a project brief that excites you – for example, **rebrand** a small local business or

create the identity for a fictional event or organization. Start with deep research and planning: write a brand brief (mission, values, target audience), and create a refined moodboard that sets the tone for the brand's visuals (drawing on your Week 13 practice in style gathering). **Goal:** Approach the project like a professional branding process, emphasizing concept and consistency from the outset. **Tools:** A brand brief template (covering vision, audience, attributes), Pinterest or Adobe Illustrator artboards for the moodboard/style scape, reference brand style guides (to see how others do it).

- **Exercise (Logo & Identity):** Design the **logo and core identity** elements. Iterate through sketching and digital refinement (repeating your Week 5 process on a more advanced level) until you have a strong logo. Then define the brand's color palette and typography in detail (consider variations like primary vs. secondary colors, heading font vs. body font). Develop a few supporting graphics or patterns if useful (for instance, a background pattern or icon style that matches the logo). **Goal:** Create a cohesive brand identity where all pieces feel unified and reflect the brand's personality. **Tools:** Illustrator for logo work, color palette generators to test variations (ensure colors work well in print and web), possibly user feedback – show 2–3 logo options to stakeholders/friends and see which best communicates the intended personality.
- **Exercise (Print Collateral):** Apply the new brand in a print campaign or collateral set. For example, design a **brochure or poster series** advertising the brand or event. Ensure you use the brand fonts, colors, and style consistently. Layout the content with strong hierarchy and include the logo and any graphic elements in a polished way. **Goal:** Demonstrate the brand in action and solve real design problems (like fitting compelling content into a limited space) while maintaining brand integrity. **Tools:** InDesign for multi-page brochure layout or Illustrator for poster design, high-resolution images or illustrations that match the brand style, and grid systems to keep layouts organized.
- **Exercise (Cross-medium):** If appropriate, also create a digital component (like a social media post template or small website homepage mockup) with the new brand, to show its flexibility. Adapting the design from print to digital ensures the brand works in both arenas. **Goal:** Prove that your brand design is versatile and effective across different media, a hallmark of a well-crafted identity. **Tools:** Figma or Photoshop for digital mockups, social media mockup generators, responsiveness considerations if it's a web design (how might your brand look on mobile vs desktop).
- **Exercise (Feedback & Iteration):** Throughout this capstone, involve others in **design reviews**. Hold a midpoint critique – for example, present your logo concepts and one finished collateral piece to a few designers or peers for feedback. Later, do a final review of the whole identity package. Embrace this like a real client presentation, incorporating constructive criticism. **Goal:** Refine your work to a professional level and practice justifying your design decisions. This will also improve the final quality significantly through iterative improvement. **Tools:** Behance or a personal website to present the brand project (even as a draft to share privately for feedback), slide deck or PDF to showcase the brand guide and applications, and feedback forms or direct conversations with reviewers.

Week 15: Capstone Project 2 – UI/UX Design Project

- **Exercise (Discovery):** Tackle a capstone **UI/UX project** to consolidate your digital design skills. Choose a more complex app or web concept than Week 9 (or expand the one you started). For instance, design a small e-commerce mobile app, or a community website with a few interactive features. Begin with a thorough UX discovery: define user personas, map user journeys (what are the key tasks and how do users flow through them), and list the required screens/features. **Goal:** Simulate a full UX design process from research to design, ensuring you keep user needs at the forefront. **Tools:** User persona templates, journey mapping tools or simply a whiteboard to sketch

flowcharts, competitor analysis (look at similar apps/websites to identify common features and opportunities to stand out).

- **Exercise (Wireframes to Design):** Create wireframes for all major screens and states (e.g., different pages, pop-up modals, error states) and then systematically convert them into high-fidelity designs, following a consistent design system. Develop a UI **design system** along the way: set up a palette, text styles, and reusable components (buttons, nav bars, etc.) in Figma. **Goal:** Manage a larger-scale design efficiently by using consistent components and styles – this not only speeds up your work but also ensures a unified product look. **Tools:** Figma/Sketch with component libraries (design system features), possibly Storyboard or FigJam to plan out screen states, UI kits for inspiration (Material Design guidelines or iOS Human Interface Guidelines if designing for those platforms).
- **Exercise (Prototype & Interactions):** Build an interactive prototype of the entire user flow. Include transitions or animations for added realism (for example, a sliding menu, a fade-in for a modal). If your design has multiple paths (like checkout flow, browsing flow), link them all up so you can simulate various usage scenarios. **Goal:** Create a prototype that you can practically use as a pseudo-app, which will be useful for testing and presenting your design. **Tools:** Figma's prototyping (use conditions/variants if available for interactive components), Protopie or Principle for more advanced animations (optional, only if you want to challenge yourself with motion design), a device mockup to showcase the prototype (like an iPhone frame).
- **Exercise (User Testing & Iteration):** Do a comprehensive round of user testing with new participants (not the same friends from Week 10 if possible). Give them scenarios to accomplish in your prototype (e.g., "Find and purchase an item" or "Join a group on the community site") and observe their behavior and feedback. Afterwards, compile the issues (maybe some navigation was unclear, or a button was hard to find) and iterate on the design to address them. This may involve tweaking layouts, adding tool-tips, or even rethinking certain features based on feedback. **Goal:** Validate and improve your design's usability and usefulness, mirroring a real iterative design cycle in product design. **Tools:** Recording software (if remote testing, record the screen and audio with permission to review later), a test script and follow-up questions for users, and Figma to quickly update the prototype.
- **Exercise (Presentation):** Prepare a case study or presentation of this project as if pitching to stakeholders. Include the problem statement, key research insights, your design system (show snippets of your style guide), a walkthrough of the final screens, and a summary of changes you made from testing feedback. **Goal:** Practice articulating your design rationale and process, which is crucial for a senior-level skillset. It also helps you reflect on your own project critically. **Tools:** PowerPoint, Keynote or Behance case study format to layout the story; use visuals from your project liberally (user persona snapshot, wireframe-to-final comparisons, etc.). This will also feed nicely into your portfolio preparation next week.

Week 16: Design Critique, Refinement & Polishing

- **Exercise:** Organize a thorough **design critique session** for your capstone projects (and any other pieces you want to polish). This could mean presenting your branding project and your UI/UX project to a small group (in person or online) and actively soliciting critique. Provide your reviewers with context and specific aspects you want feedback on ("Is the color palette effective?", "Does the app flow feel intuitive?"). **Goal:** Embrace structured critique to catch any remaining issues and identify areas for improvement – open feedback is essential to elevate a design ¹². **Tools:** If possible, a panel of peers or an online meetup (there are design critique groups on Slack/Discord, or even scheduling a session with a design mentor), or use forums (post detailed images on a Behance

project and share for feedback). Take notes of all suggestions without defending the work on the spot; digest them calmly later.

- **Exercise:** Create a to-do list of refinements based on the critique. For the branding project, maybe you'll adjust a color or tweak the kerning in the logo, or improve the layout of the brochure. For the UI project, you might simplify a busy screen or add an onboarding tooltip where testers got confused. Work through these changes systematically. **Goal:** Learn how to filter critique into actionable design improvements – a key professional skill – and push your projects to a polished, portfolio-ready state. **Tools:** Your design files (Illustrator, InDesign, Figma) for edits, and possibly project management tools (even a simple checklist) to track changes you want to make. If any feedback is about areas you're unsure how to fix (e.g., "typography feels off here"), do a quick micro-research – lookup similar designs for inspiration or ask follow-up questions to the reviewer.
- **Exercise:** Fine-tune the **technical details** of your projects in preparation for presentation or printing. This includes things like ensuring consistent margins, cleaning up alignment, using proper bleed and export settings for print files, optimizing image assets (so your digital designs are not loading huge images unnecessarily), and double-checking for any typos or placeholder text that needs real content. **Goal:** Achieve a professional level of polish where nothing distracts from the quality of your design – this is the final cleanup that makes a big difference in perception. **Tools:** Pre-flight checks in InDesign (for print readiness), a spelling/grammar check for any copy in your designs, image compression tools for web assets, and perhaps a friend to do a "fresh eye" proof check.
- **Exercise (Reflection):** Take some time to reflect on your growth over the past weeks. Compare an early piece (say, something from Week 1–3) to your latest work – note improvements in use of color, typography, composition, etc. Write down what you found most challenging and most enjoyable. **Goal:** Solidify your learning by acknowledging progress and pinpointing remaining areas to work on. This reflection will guide your ongoing skill development even after this 17-week plan. **Tools:** Journal or blog to write a short reflection, possibly create a before-and-after visual comparison to see improvement, and feedback from a mentor or teacher if you have one (they might give perspective on your growth and next steps).

Week 17: Portfolio Building & Next Steps

- **Exercise:** Curate a **portfolio** of the work you've done. Select 3–5 of your strongest pieces from the program (for example, your branding capstone, the UI/UX capstone, and a couple of the best smaller projects like the poster or typography poster). Refine them if needed (you've done that in Week 16) and prepare presentation images. Write a brief case study for each major project describing the challenge, your process, and the outcome. **Goal:** Showcase your improved design skills in a coherent way – assembling a portfolio not only helps in a career sense but also forces you to synthesize what you learned about design problem-solving. **Tools:** Behance or Dribbble (to publish your projects online), or a PDF/website builder if you prefer, high-quality mockups to display your work (for instance, mockup your posters in a realistic setting, or show your app in a phone frame).
- **Exercise:** Solicit feedback on your portfolio from design peers or mentors. A portfolio critique can tell you if your presentations are clear and if you chose the right pieces. Ask if the visual sensibility and skills you've developed are coming through to an outside observer. **Goal:** Ensure your work is communicated effectively and identify any remaining weak spots to work on in future projects. **Tools:** Online forums (there are subreddits like r/Design_Critiques specifically for portfolios), or ask a friendly professional if they'd spend a few minutes reviewing your site/PDF. Take notes on any suggestions (for example, maybe you need to reorder projects, or take better photos of a printed piece).

- **Exercise:** Engage with the design community and continue the cycle of learning. Join an online design challenge or a local meetup to keep practicing beyond this curriculum – for instance, do a 30-day logo challenge, or contribute to an open-source design project. Also consider exploring new facets of design as next steps (motion graphics, 3D modeling, illustration, etc., depending on your interest). **Goal:** Maintain the momentum and keep your design sensibilities sharp through continuous practice and community feedback. **Tools/Resources:** Platforms like Dribbble weekly warm-up, Daily UI challenge, or FakeClients design briefs to prompt new exercises; communities on Slack/Discord (e.g. Design Buddies) to network and exchange critiques regularly.
- **Exercise (Wrap-up):** Reflect on this 17-week journey one last time. Update your personal development plan: write down key strengths you’ve developed (maybe you found you excel in layout or enjoy UX research) and areas you want to focus on moving forward. Set one or two concrete goals for the next few months (for example, “Design and code a personal website for myself” or “Learn Motion Design basics to animate my UI”). **Goal:** Transition from this structured program into a self-driven learning path, using the confidence and knowledge gained to tackle new challenges. **Tools:** Personal journal or blog post to summarize your experience, goal-setting frameworks (SMART goals, etc.) to make sure your next steps are actionable, and perhaps a mentor’s input on career direction if relevant (they could help align your new goals with industry expectations).

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