Instructor: Alex Keays
Contact: akeays@ualberta.ca

Design Process

INSPIRATION

IDENTIFICATION

RESEARCH

CONCEPTUALIZATION

**EXPLORATION/
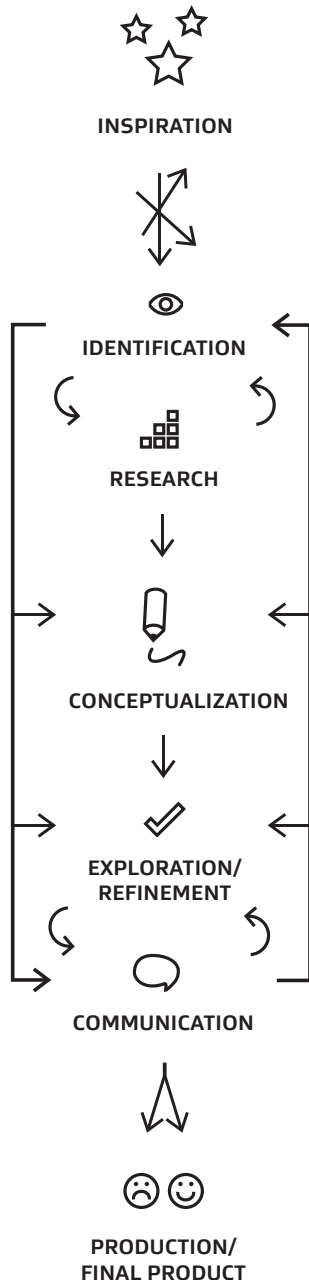REFINEMENT**

COMMUNICATION

**PRODUCTION/
FINAL PRODUCT**

Inspiration

It is necessary for designers to inspire themselves throughout the creative process. Sources of inspiration exist throughout everything and should be infused in the creative process.

Methods:
- Visualize your thoughts and ideas through sketching, collages, mind maps, or mood boards. Keep things very loose, do not try to be rational.
- Keep an ongoing sketchbook or image bank. Update it daily with things that excite or interest you.

Common mistakes:
- Don't wait for inspiration or the "aha moment" to come to you. Actively seek inspiration! Create connections!
- Be wary of immersing yourself in the work of other artists or designers; doing so will result in ideas that are heavily influenced by this already existing work and will rob your ideas of creativity and originality.

Identification

The first definition of the problem. A project's needs and limits are its constraints, and by identifying them, we understand what we need to engage with to create an effective design.

Design constraints:
- End User Constraints (functionality/form, societal constraints, safety)
- Constraints of Production (materials, techniques, capabilities)
- Constraints of the designer (information, time, budgets)
- Sustainability

Methods:
- Think about the Who, What, Where, When, Why, How of your project.
- Think about potential benefits and consequences of your design.
- Think about the apparent or potential problems that need to be solved.
- Define the objectives. What should the product do? What does it need to achieve?

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Research

This stage aims at gathering information about the client, the product, the competition (if it exists), and the public. Here the designer places the project in context.

Methods:
- Analysis of the product itself (can be a product to be designed or a product being advertised)
- Observations, focus groups, and interviews can be used to gain information from the public
- Analysis of similar products, including the competition (if it exists)

Conceptualization

Once you identify the design problem, you are ready to examine methods for conceptualizing your ideas to come up with a solution.

Methods:
- Brainstorming
  (mind maps, stream of consciousness writing/drawing)
- Sketching
- Modeling

Exploration/Refinement

When exploring and refining your concept, you must examine and question everything, try everything, and test everything. The methods you use to find the essence of your ideas should be a blend of the practical, the methodical and the impulsive.

In the stage of exploration and refinement the brainstorming process segues into a more focused state, and the tools you use become more tailored toward creating a specific result.

Methods:
- Refer back to your constraints. Has everything been addressed?
- You must weigh your concept on the balance of "making it perfect" versus "getting it done".

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Communication

Communication is a key factor for the successful conclusion of a design project. It should be a key issue throughout the design process. Presentations and discussions, large and small, take place from the very beginning of your inspirational stage onward. Presenting communication as a separate stage of the process should in no way be taken to mean that it is only important at this stage.

Production

The designer should not be misled into believing that, once one has handed in a file and some specifications, the rest is just mechanical implementation. Many steps and subtle details could dramatically affect the final result.

Once the design is produced and distributed, it is necessary to measure the degree to which the objectives pursued have been achieved. This determines the quality of the design.

Methods:
• Think about things that are likely to go wrong during the production process. Is it possible to avoid them?
• Use prototypes or proofs to gauge the quality of final production
• Reflect on your experience with this project. What will you carry forward to your next project? What advice would you give to someone else who is about to try a similar project?

Aspelund, Karl. *The Design Process*. New York: Fairchild books, 2015.

Frescara, Jorge. *Communication Design: Principles, Methods, and Practice*. New York: Allworth Press, 2004.