

# Advice on how to be graphically creative [closed]

Asked 16 years, 3 months ago   Modified 10 years, 4 months ago

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8



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I've always felt that my graphic design skills have lacked, but I do have a desire to improve them. Even though I'm not the worlds worst artist, it's discouraging to see the results from a professional designer, who can do an amazing mockup from a simple spec in just a few hours. I always wonder how they came up with their design and more importantly, how they executed it so quickly.

I'd like to think that all good artists aren't naturally gifted. I'm guessing that a lot of skill/talent comes from just putting in the time.

Is there a recommended path to right brain nirvana for someone starting from scratch, a little later in life? I'd be interested in book recommendations, personal theories, or anything else that may shed some light on the best path to take. I have questions like should I read books about color theory, should I draw any chance I have, should I analyze shapes like an architect, etc...

As far as my current skills go, I can make my way around Photoshop enough where I can do simple image manipulation...

Thanks for any advice

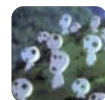
graphics

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edited Aug 10, 2014 at 16:18



[dwitvliet](#)

7,643 ● 7 ● 38 ● 64

asked Aug 28, 2008 at 14:56



[Jim Geurts](#)

20.4k ● 24 ● 99 ● 116

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This question is not related to programming. – [Werner Henze](#)  
Nov 13, 2013 at 14:26

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8 Answers

Sorted by:

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4

Most of artistic talent comes from putting in the time. However, as in most skills, practicing bad habits doesn't help you progress.



You need to learn basic drawing skills (form, mainly) and practice doing them well and right (which means slowly). As you practice correctly, you'll improve much faster.



This is the kind of thing that changes you from a person who says, "It doesn't look right, but I can't tell why - it's just 'off' somehow" to a person who says, "Oops, the arm is a bit long. If I shorten the elbow end it'll change the piece in this way, if I shorten the hand end it'll change the piece this way..."

So you've got to study the forms you intend to draw, and recognize their internally related parts (the body height is generally X times the size of the head, the arms and legs are related in size but vary from the torso, etc). Same thing with buildings, physical objects, etc.

Another thing that will really help you is understanding light and shadow - humans pick up on shape relationships based on outlines and based on shadows.

Color theory is something that will make your designs attractive, or evoke certain responses and emotions, but until you get the form and lighting right the colors are not something you should stress. One reason why art books and classes focus so much on monochrome drawings.

There are books and classes out there for these subjects - I could recommend some, but what you really need is to look at them yourself and pick the ones that appeal to you. You won't want to learn if you don't like drawing fruit bowls, and that's all your book does. Though you shouldn't avoid what you don't like, given that you're going the self taught route you should make it easy in the beginning, and then force yourself to draw the uninteresting and bland once you've got a bit of confidence and speed so you can go through those barriers more quickly.

Good luck!

-Adam

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answered Aug 28, 2008 at 15:14

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Adam Davis

93.5k ● 60 ● 271 ● 333



That's a difficult thing. Usually people think "artistic skills" come from your genes but actually they do not.

2



The bests graphic designer I know have some sort of education in arts. Of course, photoshop knowledge will allow you to do things but being interested in art (painting specially) will improve your sensitivity and your "good taste".



Painting is a pleasure, both doing it and seeing it. Learning to both understand and enjoy it will help and the

better way to do it is by going to museums. I try to go to as much expositions as I can, as well as read what I can on authors and styles (Picasso, Monet, Dali, Magritte, Expresionism, Impresionism, Cubism, etc) that will give you a general overview that WILL help.

On the other side... you are a programmer so you shouldn't be in charge of actually drawing the icons or designing the enterprise logo. You should however be familiarized with user interface design, specially with ease of use, and terms as goal oriented design.

Of course, in a sufficiently large company you won't be in charge of the UI design either, but it will help anyway. I'd recommend the book [About Face](#), which centers in goal oriented design as well as going through some user interface methapores and giving some historic background for the matter.

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edited Aug 28, 2008 at 15:21

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answered Aug 28, 2008 at 15:12



**Jorge Córdoba**

52.1k ● 11 ● 82 ● 130



2

I'm no artist and I'm colorblind, but I have been able to do fairly well with track creation for Motocross Madness and other games of that type (<http://twisteddirt.com> & <http://dirttwister.com>).



Besides being familiar with the toolset I believe it helps to bring out your inner artist. I found that the book ["Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain"](#) was an amazing eye opening experience for me.

One of the tricks that it uses is for you to draw a fairly complicated picture while looking at the picture upside down. If I had drawn it while looking at it right side up it would have looked horrible. I impressed myself with what I was able to draw while copying it while it was upside down.

I did this many years ago. I just looked at their website and I think I will order the updated book and check out their DVD.

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answered Aug 28, 2008 at 17:11

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[bruceatk](#)

5,138 ● 2 ● 27 ● 36



1



I have a BFA in Graphic Design, although I don't use it much lately. Here's my \$.02.

Get a copy of "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain" and go through it. You will become a better artist/drawer as a result and I'm a firm believer that if you can't do it with pencil/paper you won't be successful on the computer. Also go to the bookstore and pick up a copy of How or one of the other publications. I maintain a subscription to How just for inspiration.

I'll see if I can dig up some web links tonight for resources (although I'm sure others will provide some).

most importantly, carry a sketch book and use it. Draw. Draw. Draw.

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answered Aug 28, 2008 at 15:04

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user1921



1



Drawing is probably what I'd recommend the most.

Whenever you have a chance, just start drawing. Keep in mind that what you draw doesn't have to be original; it's a perfectly natural learning tool to try and duplicate someone else's work. You'll learn a lot. If you look at all the great masters, they had understudies who actually did part of their masters' works, so fight that "it must be original" instinct that school's instilled in you, and get duplicating. (Just make sure you either destroy or properly label these attempts as copies--you don't want to accidentally use them later and then be accused of plagiarism..)

I have a couple of friends in the animation sector, and one of them told me that while she was going through college, the way she was taught to draw the human body was to go through each body part, and draw it 100 times, each in a completely different pose. This gets you comfortable with the make-up of the object, and helps you get intimately knowledgeable about how it'll look from various positions.

(That may not apply directly to what you're doing, but it should give you an indicator as to the amount of discipline that may be involved in getting to the point you seek.)

Definitely put together a library of stuff that you can look to for inspiration. Value physical media that you can flip through over websites; it's much quicker to flip through a picture book than it is to search your bookmarks online. When it comes to getting your imagination fired up, having to meticulously click and wait repeatedly is going to be counter-productive.

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answered Aug 28, 2008 at 15:23

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spate

386 ● 2 ● 5



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**Inspiration** is probably your biggest asset. Like creative writing, and even programming, **looking at what people have done** and **how** they have done will give you **tools** to put in your toolbox.



But in the sense of graphic design (photoshop, illustrator, etc), just like programmers don't enjoy reinventing the wheel, I don't think artwork is any different. Search the web for 'pieces' that you can manipulate (vector graphics: [example](#)). Run through [tutorials](#) that can easily give you some tricks. Sketch out a very rough idea, and look through web [images](#) to find something that has already created.



It's like anything else that you wish to master, or become proficient in. If you want it, **you've got to practice** it over, and over, and over.

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answered Aug 28, 2008 at 17:04

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David McGraw

5,177 ● 7 ● 37 ● 36



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I, too was not born with a strong design skillset, in fact quite the opposite. When I started out, my philosophy was that if the page or form *just works* then my job was done!



Over the years though, I've improved. Although I believe I'll never be as good as someone who was born with the skills, sites like [CSS Zen Garden](#) among others have helped me a lot.

Read into usability too, as I think usability and design for computer applications are inextricably entwined. Books such as Don Norman's "The Design of Everyday Things" to Steve Krug's "Don't Make Me Think", have all helped improve my 'design skills'... slightly! ;-)

Good luck with it.

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answered Aug 28, 2008 at 15:08

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Galwegian

42.2k ● 16 ● 113 ● 158



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As I mentioned in a thread yesterday, I have found working through tutorials for Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, and After Effects to be very helpful. I use Adobe's [Kuler](#) site for help with colors. I think that designers spend a lot of time looking at other's designs. Some of the books out there on web site design might help, even for designing applications. Adobe TV has a lot of short videos on graphic design in general, as well as achieving particular results in one of their tools. I find these videos quite helpful.

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answered Aug 28, 2008 at 15:11



[Brian Stewart](#)

9,267 ● 11 ● 55 ● 66

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