## Professional ethics

Professional ethics in the creative industry can be likened to a set of rules. They are principles, standards, and codes of conduct that designers should uphold to guide their interactions with clients, colleagues, and the wider public. These principles are based on honour and truthfulness, and support ethical practices that are essential for maintaining trust, integrity, and professionalism within the design industry. While there may not be a universal set of ethics specific to fashion design, photography, and interior design, there are several key principles that designers commonly adhere to.



Fig 1. Pixabay (n.d.) Design involves ethical decisions

As a first principle, you should always be honest and transparent in your communications with clients, stakeholders, colleagues, and employers. This includes truthfully representing your skills, experience, and capabilities, as well as providing honest feedback and recommendations. Along with communicating accurately, it is also important that you ensure accuracy and authenticity of the information presented in your work. All information you communicate must be verified and all information must be factual.

A creative practitioner must respect the work they are providing by adhering to intellectual property rights and copyright laws and regulations. It is your responsibility to obtain proper licensing or permissions for any third-party assets that you use in your designs and refrain from plagiarising or infringing upon the work of others. Another element of respect that you’re required to show is towards diversity. You need to be mindful of all cultural differences, show diversity, and inclusivity in your work and pay heed to creating outcomes that are respectful and accessible to a wide range of audiences. Avoid stereotypes, biases, or offensive imagery.

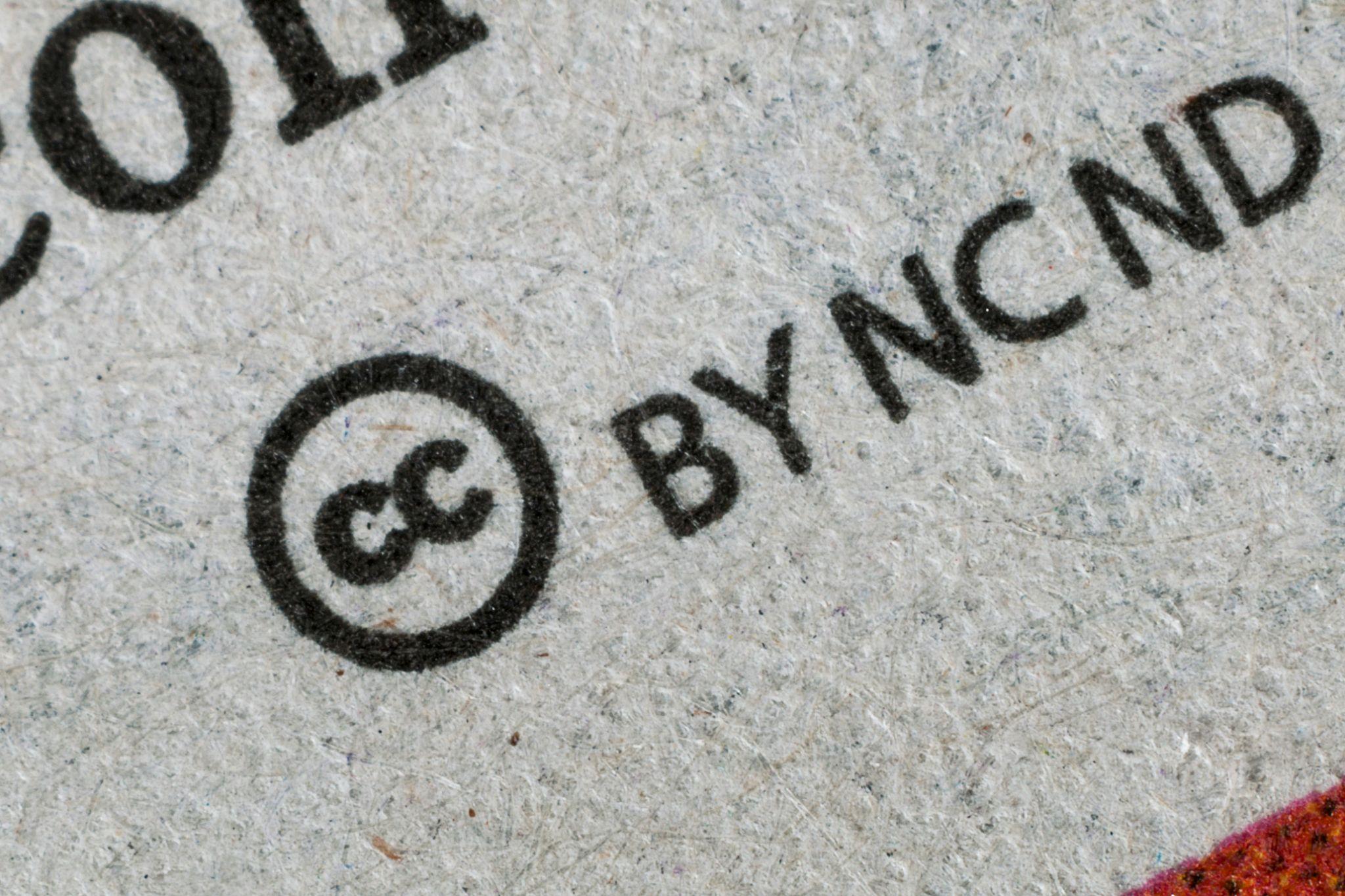


Fig 2. Unsplash (n.d.) Creative Commons (CC) licensing symbol

A designer’s responsibilities doesn’t end there. It is also your duty to protect the confidentiality of client information and sensitive project details at all times. If need be, you should first get explicit consent from clients before you can share any confidential information with third parties. If not, you may end up having to face legal charges.

A designer also has a responsibility to their environment. Throughout your work process, consider the environmental impact of your work. If there are certain practices or materials for example, that are not eco-friendly, it is your responsibility to strive to minimise waste, conserve resources, and promote sustainability.

Finally, you should conduct yourself in a professional manner at all times, especially when dealing with clients and other creative professionals. This means paying them respect and courtesy, and to be conscientious about things like keeping to deadlines, responding promptly to questions, and maintaining a positive and collaborative attitude as you interact. Another aspect of professionalism is your knowledge and skills as a designer. Working with others and showcasing that, for example, you are familiar with the latest trends or emerging technologies, inspires trust from your clients and colleagues, and enhances your air of professionalism. Professionalism is something you can develop, so it is important that you commit to lifelong learning and professional development to stay updated on industry developments. This may include participating in workshops, attending conferences, and pursuing certifications or advanced training opportunities.

## Protecting vulnerable audiences/stakeholders

In line with exhibiting respect to your audience and diversity in your work, it is also important to protect more vulnerable audiences and stakeholders. This involves being aware of the potential impact of creative choices on individuals who may be more susceptible to harm, exploitation, or manipulation due to their age, cognitive abilities, or other factors. You have a responsibility to ensure that your design outcomes are ethical, inclusive, and respectful of the needs and vulnerabilities of all audiences.

Here are some strategies for protecting vulnerable audiences and stakeholders in design:

* **Clarity and simplicity:** Strive for clarity and simplicity in your work through clear concept presentations and simplified visuals. This can help improve comprehension and reduce confusion for your target audience.
* **Avoiding exploitative imagery:** If applicable to your area of design, avoid using exploitative or sensational visuals that may harm or exploit vulnerable audiences, such as graphic violence, explicit content, or stereotypes.
* **Informed consent:** When designing for audiences, such as children or individuals with limited decision-making capacity, you should obtain informed consent from legal guardians or authorised representatives before collecting personal information or engaging in targeted marketing efforts.
* **Ethical guidelines and best practices:** Familiarise yourself with ethical guidelines and best practices established by professional design organisations.

A way to assess whether the above strategies are effective, is to conduct user testing with sample representatives of vulnerable audiences. You can then gather feedback and insights on the usability, accessibility, and effectiveness of your creative solutions. Incorporating feedback from a diverse range of perspectives can help identify and address any barriers or challenges faced by vulnerable users.

## Equality, diversity and representation

Equality, diversity, and representation are essential considerations in design, as they contribute to creating inclusive and culturally sensitive visual communications that resonate with diverse audiences. Some key aspects of promoting equality, diversity, and representation in design is through inclusive practices, having cultural sensitivity, and collaborating with wider communities.



Fig 3. Pexels (n.d.) Graphic design should consider diverse communities

Adopting inclusive design practices means considering the needs, preferences, and experiences of diverse audiences. This includes the following categories:

* age
* ability
* gender
* ethnicity
* culture
* background

This involves designing with empathy and theory of mind in order to understand the unique perspectives and challenges faced by various groups. It also means creating designs that are accessible, user-friendly, and inclusive for all, including audiences with diverse languages and localisation requirements. Once you have established this level of empathy for audiences, you are much more likely to understand cultural context, symbolism and the significance of certain visual elements. In turn, this awareness will help you avoid stereotypes, biases, and cultural appropriation in your designs. Another role of empathy, is to allow you to prioritise accessibility and universality in your designs. It allows you to create work that considers, for instance, colour contrast and physical accessibility, thus making it usable and understandable for all people.

It is becoming more pertinent that designers and, to a larger scale, companies and brands include diverse representation in their visual communications. This refers to people from all backgrounds, genders, races, body types, etc., being represented accurately and authentically in their materials (e.g. advertisements, posters, websites, etc.). Throughout the design process, it is critical that you actively engage with diverse communities and stakeholders to gain their input and feedback, to ensure that your outcomes reflect their needs, values, and perspectives.



Fig 4. Pexels (n.d.) Collaboration is key to assess accessibility and inclusivity of designs

By embracing equality, diversity, and representation in the creative sphere, designers can create meaningful and impactful visuals that foster empathy and understanding, and contribute to positive social change celebrating the richness and diversity of human experiences.