

Project 1. Visual Texts

Phase 1

Instructions

1. **Find a short text source.** For example, this could be a set of haikus, aphorisms, truisms, a specific social media account on Twitter or Bluesky, a list of titles or chapter headings, or something else. I encourage you to “unpack your library” a bit to find something that could be suitable. Essentially, with whatever you choose, you are aiming for a set of at least 60 (if not more) short texts that are at maximum about 140 characters long each. They should only contain text; not images or symbols.
2. **For four out of the seven days a week for the entire duration of this course, create something called a “visual text” —**

Each visual text...

* Has the same specific dimensions. At the outset, choose an aspect ratio and corresponding size in pixels that resonates with you. Below are some you can begin choosing from. If you have a different aspect ratio, do some research around recommended pixel sizes for sharing images on the web / social media.

1:1 — Square
1080 x 1080px

3:2 — Photography / 35mm
2000 x 1319px

4:5 — Portrait / Instagram
1080 x 1350px

16:9 — Film / Screen / Keynote
1920 x 1080px

* Is in either .jpg or .png file format. Research these to know which one is best for you.

* Includes a single short text from your text source. The text should be legible.

* Includes some intentional visual treatment. Maybe it's a separate image, graphic, or typeface. Or a custom background. Feel free to experiment.

* Should not take longer than 20 minutes to create.

3. When you're done choosing your text source, email it to me (laurels@wustl.edu). Share with me at least 15-20 of the short texts so that I can sense what it's about. I'd like to get familiar with the material you're using. Once I approve, I'll send you the next steps.

Guidelines

This assignment is an exercise in endurance. By the end of the 15-week course, you will have ~60 visual texts, showing your evolution over time.

This assignment is also a good testing ground: I encourage you to try new techniques and surprising combinations. No single visual text you make is that important since there will be many. You will also not spend that long on each one, ideally encouraging you not to take any single visual text too seriously. This project is about practice.

You might consider utilizing this project to teach yourself a new software and/or technique. You could also use it to try to recreate amazing designs you see as a way of understanding how they were made. For example, students in the past have used this project as a way to get better at Figma or Adobe InDesign or practicing calligraphy by hand. There is no wrong way to create visual texts as long as you are utilizing this project to learn or explore something you're interested in.

Sourcing your Short Texts

If you don't know how to source your short texts, here are some starter ideas:

- Aphorisms
- Truisms
- Haikus
- Posts from a Twitter or Bluesky account
- Titles
- Chapter Titles
- Lyrics
- Headlines

Specific artists to check out who explore presenting shorter texts include Jenny Holzer, Yoko Ono, and Brian Eno, to name a few. If you decide to go the social media route, note that many actors and actresses, artists, athletes, authors, comedians, fast food restaurants, fictional characters, hackers, museums, musicians, newspapers, politicians, scientists, and television shows post to Twitter or Bluesky. Finding someone relevant on social media will lead to people similar by exploring their network. And please don't hesitate to ask me if you need any guidance in sourcing your texts!