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Title: Why consistency is important in your design process

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One thing we designers don’t always take into account nearly enough is the value of consistency. We let our schedules go crazy, we strike whenever inspiration happens to hit, and we solve problems with in what-ever tools are available or popular at the time. Yet Consistency is an essential part of being a successful professional, and with rare exception, every successful designer you know about has had to learn this at one time or another. Let’s look at some of the reasons why consistency is every bit as important as creativity.

Consistency makes creativity easier — This situation is all too damaging. A designer rolls into the office somewhere between 7am and 11am, once there they sometimes eat breakfast, and sometimes drink the coffee. This disregard for any sort of a system or habit to their workday can really decrease productivity. Habits help creativity because your mind learns to recognize certain events as triggers that signal the start of a workday. Once your body recognizes these triggers, it will automatically start the creative juices flowing, and it becomes easier to consistency produce creative work. If you are curious about how to set up habits I highly recommend Zen Habits.

Consistent workflow allows for consistent estimates — Many designers and developers switch willy nilly between tools for no reason other than novelty. Sure you may learn a lot of valuable tools, and maybe even different ways of solving problems. This does however come at a cost. If you regularly switch tools you will never gain a sense of how long a task will take in any given tool. What takes 10 minutes in a tool your comfortable with may take an hour in your new workflow. Designers compensate by sandbagging their estimates or eating the time required to learn the new tool. Both come with a real cost — sandbagging to your competitiveness, and eating the time to the amount of work you can get done.

Consistent estimates make reliable work and better process. — This discrepancy in estimates will likely lead to inconsistent patterns being implemented, and as every designer is constantly pitching, inconsistent patterns lead to endless confusion for your users.

Steve Martin once said “just stick with this, just keep playing, and one day you’ll have been playing for 40 years, and at this point, you’ll know how to play.” The only way you’ll ever really learn design well, and really know you’ve learned it, is when you become disciplined and consistent enough to see the benefit of those years of practice. I encourage you to get started today, and to keep going tomorrow.