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MUST-READ DESIGN TIPS FROM DESIGNERS, TO DESIGNERS

“Art Is The Only Place You Can Do What You Like.”

Paula Rego Visual Artist

You can never know enough about Design. With technology constantly evolving and new trends emerging, the exciting world of Graphic Design is picking up speed. Whether you have 2 or 20 years' experience under your belt, there's never a limit to how much you can progress and learn.

We asked incredible Graphic Designers to share 50 hard-earned tips they wish someone had told them sooner. From client management to typography, brand identity to finding alternative textures in Photoshop, our collection of experts provide advice covering all problems Graphic Designers may face. This eBook not only provides practical tips you can apply to your own work, but from the collective minds of our contributors it offers new ways in which to think about design.

#01. Presentation Is Very Important In Design.

With logo designs, always show them not only in colour but also in black and white, one colour and on a coloured background. A logo should be versatile enough that it can be used across different mediums. Always show logo designs 'in-situ'. Find out at the brief stage what items the client is interested in branding in the future. Show the client how the logo works on a business card, stationery, shop window and social media platforms. It will help the client visualise how the branding can come together across a variety of items.

Lesley Moss Creative Designer
Northsouth Design
www.northsouthdesign.co.uk

#02. Design & Produce A Welcome Pack...

...for all new and existing clients advising them what to expect with regards to the way you work.

For example, when designing and artworking a newsletter, set out how best they can organise the copy and supply images to suit you. For example, naming the images in relation to the article helps as does providing the copy in order of page numbers either in one document or individual ones depending on how you prefer it. We also stipulate:

- No images lifted from Google search
- Written confirmation from the client that they own the copyright of the images.

#03. Make It Very Clear At The Outset...

...that you charge Authors Corrections if you do; it saves problems later on down the line getting the invoice approved and paid.

Philippa Smart Owner & Founder of BeSmart Design
www.besmartdesign.co.uk

#04. Go The Extra Mile: Look Out For Copy Mistakes!

Even if it was supplied by a pro copywriter, don't assume it's error-free, and be mindful that gaffes can creep across in copy-and-pasting. Mistakes are jarring and unprofessional and negatively affect the client and the designer's reputation.

Obviously watch for the basics, such as typos, grammar errors, and consistent punctuation (like the Oxford comma). But also check brand names (with accurate capitalisation), spelling variations between dialects (for example, differences between US and UK English), and the use of superscript or subscript (such as entertainment venue The O2).

Leese Johnstone *Graphic Designer*
www.lajohnstone.co.uk



#05. Who's Signing Off Your Work?

It's your responsibility to find out who's going to be signing off your work. If there's stakeholders that haven't been at your client meetings, then you are relying on your contact within your client's company to do a good job of explaining your design rationale. It might be worth putting together a supporting document to send post-meeting to ensure your side has everything circulated directly from the horse's mouth. It's key to try and get all stakeholders on board early, and find out who they are; that way your work will have less gateways for approval and less people tinkering with things.

Ryan Carter *Freelance Designer*
www.ryancarter.co.uk

www.route1print.co.uk **04.**

#06. Start The Design Process On Paper!

Your hand is freer to get all the ideas out than it would be on your computer. It lets you quickly write down ideas while you sketch things out. You can be messy and random. Some of your best ideas will happen this way. Then you can jump on your computer and refine, refine, refine.

Brent Galloway *Graphic Designer*
www.brentgalloway.me

#07. There Is No Place For Ego In Design.

Chris Blackhurst *Freelance Creative Consultant
& Creative Director*
www.chrisblackhurst.co.uk

05. www.route1print.co.uk



#08. Contrast Is Everything.

As with music where the pauses and verses are as important as the beats and the choruses, visual design is the intelligent orchestration of contrast. Just the right amount of difference in sizes, shapes, space, fonts, colour and tone can give you the perfect melody. Too much and it's just a noise, too little and it's all very, very bland.

Chris Blackhurst *Freelance Creative Consultant & Creative Director*
www.chrisblackhurst.co.uk



Blackberry Design
Graphic communications for business

#09. How To Cut Out Hair In Photoshop Keeping The Stray Hairs in Place For Realistic Effect.

Take the image and duplicate the layer. Create a coloured layer below the two duplicated picture layers.

Make the bottom one a 'multiply' layer. With the magic wand, take away the main background on the top layer. This leaves those fiddly hair strands.

So go to the top layer and with the eraser just take the edges off the hair. The multiple layers will show through with the original hairs so it looks like an intricate cutting out job, but has instead taken seconds.

Amanda Freelance Designer
www.amandadesign.co.uk

#10. Make Use Of Layer Palettes in InDesign.

You can have common elements on one layer with other layers containing different layouts and designs. This makes it really easy to compare designs.

#11. Create A Habit Of Using Paragraph, Object Styles & Master Pages in InDesign.

They really do save time when working on a publication. Styles can also be copied across publications making it easier to achieve design consistency in your work.

#12. For Large Areas Of Black, Use A Rich Black...

...(usually something like 100k, 60c, 40m, 0y.) This will make those black areas look really dense. However, don't use this for text as you may run into registration issues.

Martyn Joyce
www.blackberrydesign.co.uk



#13. Never Restrict Yourself.

Being a creative, you're bound to have a million and one ideas running around your head at the start of any project. If you're anything like me, each idea is likely to be more outrageous than the next. Never be afraid to bring these ideas to the table. Although they may not be considered the best ideas in the world, your basic concept can always be harnessed, reigned in and moulded into something that may inspire other creatives involved in the project. Whereas it's not always the case that one idea will lead to the next, it's continually been my best practice to never leave an idea-rock unturned, and encourage people to share. What may be seen as an outrageous and impossible concept to some, could be considered thought-provoking and revolutionary to others.

Tim Hurst Graphic Designer
www.route1print.co.uk



#14. Don't Undervalue Your Work.

Don't undervalue your work. Seek criticism, not praise. Always keep learning & don't be a static learner. Do this by reading books, magazines, blogs and practising. Collect & share things. Teach others. Never give up. Keep practising. Again, keep practising.

Jacob Cass Graphic Designer
www.justcreative.com

#15. Ideas In Design.

Basing your projects on ideas is the only way to create great work. An idea will only come from fully understanding the brief and a process of thorough research. **Have a reason behind every design decision, the colour, imagery and typography that you choose will have a meaning.** Design is much more than just creating pretty things.



Ash Flint Graphic Designer
www.ashflint.com

#16. Start At The End & Work Backwards

If you start at the end of a project then you begin in the same place as the user.

Think about who they are, and when, where and how they will be using whatever it is you are designing. Ask yourself the sort of questions the user will themselves be asking. Put yourself in their shoes.

And then work backwards - from distribution and production, through design, and beyond to content and the message that needs to be communicated.

If you can align all these things in your mind before you put pen to paper then you will fully understand what is required and the constraints that you must work within.

Do it well and you'll end up with a design that is truly fit for purpose.

Sarah Cowan Freelance Graphic Designer & Typographer
www.lettica.co.uk



#17. Build-Up A Mental Toolbox Of Successful Design Approaches.

When starting out as a designer, so that you can learn design tools, techniques and trends, I recommend looking at the work of some of the best designers and spending time recreating it as a training exercise. This will allow you to build up a mental toolbox of successful design approaches that you can eventually use within your own designs. As you progress through your career it's always worth keeping a collection of benchmark design work, so that you can continually work towards creating designs of a similar calibre, pushing yourself to become a better designer.

Ian Paget Logo Geek & Graphic Designer
www.logogeek.uk



#18. Print Production.

Every print job that leaves our studio is meticulously checked for both content errors and technical artwork errors. The best way to spot many technical errors is to open your final design as a PDF in Adobe Acrobat Pro. Then from the tools, select 'Print Production > Output Preview'. This allows you to switch on/off virtual CMYK printing plates. It's a great way to identify unexpected problems like spot colours, overprint and knockout issues. The 'Sample Tool' will also let you spot check areas of your design for total ink coverage, handy as you always want to be less than 300% to keep your printer happy.

#19. Font Identification.

Establishing a good working relationship with a new client who already has a logo, branding and various other digital assets can be tricky. You're both excited to be working with each other but then you, the designer, bombard the new client with technical questions about their logo and branding. Often, the client hasn't a clue what the font in their logo is called or what their house font style is supposed to be. Online services like WhatTheFont!, Identifont and WhatFontIs.com can be invaluable in identifying fonts that you're unfamiliar with. It saves you time and is one less question for your client.

Quentin James Freelance Creative Graphic Designer
www.quentinjamesdesign.co.uk



#20. Create Simple Function Typography Using Maths.

Good typography is essential for good communication and the key to this is establishing a hierarchy. The best way to do this is to start with your body copy size, let's say its 10pt, you can then use the 5 or 10 times tables to establish a subheading size of 15pt and a heading size of 30pt, for example, to create an even typographic balance.

#21. Embrace Your White Space.

Using white space is a fundamental design element that can provide many benefits.

When creating a brand, white space can create a feeling of sophistication and elegance. White space creates harmony and comfort. It can improve readability, it creates balance and highlights key objects on the page. Essentially, white space has a quality control element to it and therefore it depends on your brief and who your target audience is. If your product is low value, less white space is required. Adding more white space give the produce an appearance of high value and quality.

Matt Hollands Graphic Designer & Typographer
www.matthollandsdesign.co.uk

#22. Always Improve Your Branding.

The first impression of your company needs to make your clients go wow! My general rule is whatever hours you spend a week on client work, then 75% of that time should be spent again working on your own company image, marketing and general skills.

#23. Don't Hide Your Identity.

Clients like to know who they will be working with so don't be afraid to get your picture and personal information on your website.

Paul Gill Freelance Designer
www.gillgraphics.co.uk

#24. Always Be On The Lookout For Interesting Textures & Imagery.

A good brick wall or some recycled paper, photograph or scan them. File them all to your design image library on your computer. Then browse through your design image library when stuck or looking for inspiration. I use the textures I've found almost daily.

#25. When Discussing A Brief, Use Imagery & Words To Illustrate Your Discussion.

#26. Show Your Design's In Context.

If it's a logo, show it on a business card or embossed on a letterhead, if it is web design, show it inside an image of a computer screen and an iPad. First impressions are important and any help you can give them imagining what you are imagining, the better.



POLLY
PLAY *design*
FORD

Polly Playford
Freelance Graphic Designer
www.pollyplayford.com

#27. Be Inspired By Other Designers.

When you see amazing work from other designers, don't let it make you feel inferior but let it encourage you to broaden your skills and try new styles of design. Just as you are inspired by that person, so you too are inspiring others.

It is very easy to be hard on yourself as I learned a few months ago after admiring another designer's work and silently wishing I was even half as good, only to have that same designer message me out of the blue, telling me about how they loved my work. It was a real wake-up call, to remember to be kinder to myself.

On that note, be kind to your fellow designers too, and embrace the abundance mentality. There is plenty of work out there and more than enough for everyone.

Ness Graphic Designer
www.artenesse.com



#28. Make Sure The Brief Is Understood.

The most important aspect to be successful in design is coming up with a solution to the brief provided by the client. You are problem-solving in essence.

The best briefs use simple language with clear direction. Don't be afraid of questioning the brief if it's not clear as to what is actually required.

Many clients don't really know what they actually want and getting them to think about the brief will focus their direction and give you a more confident and appropriate solution.

Charlotte Delmonte Creative Designer
www.charlottedelmonte.co.uk



#29. Stand Out & Be Unique.

Creatives too often fall into a trap of regurgitating work from others in the same field. Strive to be original and focus less on what others are doing. Providing clients with regurgitated work leaves you easily replaceable.

Tyson Beck Graphic Designer & Digital Artist
www.tysonbeck.com

#30. Your Most Valuable Asset Isn't Necessarily Your Product, Your People Or Your Building.

It's your brand identity.

So whatever you do, you can't ignore it.

After all, other people won't (or even worse, they will and then you're in real trouble).

Think of it this way, if you had to replace your team could your company continue going? It would be hard, but it would be possible.

How about if you lost one of your products? If you've got a few it should also be survivable.

But what about if your brand either suddenly ceased to exist or – even worse – went completely into the toilet so that nobody trusted it anymore?

Then you'd have to start over.

You'd have to reinvent your company and even modify your products. Even if you kept the same people, even the same location, could you say it's the same company?

I think not.

So don't ignore your brand. Instead, nurture, hone and protect it.

Stuart Crawford Inkbot Design
www.inkbotdesign.com



#31. A Successful Design Is Made On The Capacity Of The Designer.

More often than not, clients don't know why their products/services are better than their competitors. They usually fall on quality and service proposition, however, everyone else promotes these attributes. Designer and Client should have this very clear. Once you have this, everything else will fall into place.

A good client should communicate to the designer the uniqueness of their product/service and trust the designer's skills to produce something great.

Often clients and designers get caught up on colours, fonts and images and they forget that a design that does not SELL the uniqueness of the product/service it is simply a waste of resources.

Clients tend to ask for advice on design from their peers, so their opinion starts to change the design based on personal taste rather than a reasoning behind it. Designers need to let the client know the reasoning behind their design decisions to avoid the design being butchered based on a personal taste.

Julian Palomares-Ramos Director/Senior Digital Designer
www.percevaldesign.co.uk

#32. Book & Magazine Design: The Importance Of Solid Style Sheets.

Don't make the mistake of going headlong into the layout of a publication without designing solid style sheets first.

Design all the page furniture and text styles you think you will need. From these initial designs, create your style sheets.

Only then, start flowing main content in whilst applying the new styles. This will cut down on potential inconsistencies and make processes quicker in the long-term.

When producing your next publication you'll already have done half the work – jobs will become quicker and so you can concentrate on fine-tuning your designs.

Nathan Ryder Freelance Designer
ryderdesign@gmail.com



#33. Many Designers Are Too Focused On Following Latest Trends...

...or worrying about what other designers are doing. The best designers are the ones who are able to make their own style and stay true to it rather than chasing what is popular.

Gaz Battersby
Founder of www.headoffice.com

#34. Certain Fonts Are Overused, Not Engaging Or Just Plain Ugly!

And it's the use of these fonts which make for unimaginative work and show you haven't put enough thought into your designs. The worst fonts to use, in my opinion, are probably the ones you're most familiar with due to their ubiquity in graphic design: Times New Roman, Helvetica, Papyrus and Curlz.

Keep away from these fonts to ensure that your design doesn't jostle for room in a world already crowded with mediocre typography.

Markus Wilson Graphic Designer
www.markustudio.com

#35. Make Being A Thoughtful Communicator Your Differentiator.

It may sound overly simple, but we often get so swept up in the creative side of our work that we neglect the obvious. Even the most talented designers can overlook this, thinking that a “good design” will speak for itself—as long as we deliver on time and it’s a great final product we’re doing just fine, right?

If we want clients to respect that design is a process and we offer something of greater value, we should take the time to provide detailed rationales for our design decisions and also make the effort to connect with them along the way. This doesn’t mean we have to get their constant input (that can be dangerous!), but by simply answering their questions with care, acknowledging emails, or letting them know we’re still planning on delivering a few concepts at the end of the week we set ourselves apart from fellow creatives who fall silent. Building trust is essential to clients understanding our worth, and with so many remote work opportunities it’s even more important to put emphasis on the basics. It really does make a difference.

Robyn Chell Freelance Graphic Designer
www.robynchell.com

Jayne
BRADD

#36. It Is Important To Listen To Your Client & Gauge What They Need.

Some know exactly what they want while others want guidance. Some need a result imminently while others are invested in the development process. It can be trying at times to embrace creativity under the direction of a brief, but it’s important to remember that they approached you because they liked your portfolio. Always be respectful, but you are there to guide, design and inspire.

Jayne Bradd Graphic Designer
www.jaynebradd.co.uk



#37. Make Sure Your Proposal Documents Are Looking Amazing...

...while detailing how you are going to execute the project and why clients should choose you. How you present yourself can be the key to getting clients to sign up with you and always try and upsell services they may not have asked for marked as an additional cost.

Alex Colley Branding & Digital Designer
www.ikon.london

#38. Make Time For Personal Projects Every Once In A While.

Use them as an opportunity to work outside your comfort.

Stina Jones Freelance Illustrator & Graphic Designer
www.stinajones.co.uk



#39. Need A New Idea? Think Opposite.

Amy Kilner Freelance Digital & Print Graphic Designer
www.amykilner.co.uk

#40. It's All Too Easy To Go With The First Decent Idea That You Think Of...

...always be sure to try out as many different ideas and variations as you can — you'll be surprised at what you can come up with if you push yourself.

I find this is especially true for logos, sketch out as many ideas as you have time for and then work up the most promising ideas in Illustrator (or whichever program you use) together with a bunch of variations for each.

Matt Pealing Graphic Designer – Brand / Print / Web
www.mattpealing.co.uk



#41. Try & Resist The Urge To Jump Straight On To The Computer When Designing Something.

It's quicker and more productive to go straight to your sketch book first. The beauty of this is that it keeps things nice and loose, and you can create an idea or layout rough within a few seconds. If you are working with a team, this is also great for discussing your initial thoughts and the direction of the design. I sometimes make notes next to my preferred ideas which can help remind me of my thought process later.

#42. Constantly Check Out What Other Designers Are Doing.

I find this vastly improves my standard and it's also a good reference point as far as judging the quality of my ideas. Never be satisfied with what you have produced and keep pushing yourself, no matter how small the project.

Mark Narusson Freelance Graphic Designer
www.marknarusson.com



#43. Be Brave & Push Boundaries.

During my years in the creative field, one of the most important things I have learnt is to be brave and push the boundaries when it comes to ideas and design. It has been said that there is no such thing as a bad idea, and there's a lot of truth in that. Sat in meetings, that blank stack of paper is sat in the middle of the table and sometimes no-one dares to be the first to suggest an idea. But the thing is, no matter how wild an idea is, it's a starting point, and sometimes, just like digging for treasure, you have to get lots of rubbish out to get to the good bit.

As a Graphic Designer and Artist, I've also experienced both sides of the coin when it comes developing your skills and establishing your own style. In art college, we were always taught to develop our own distinct, instantly recognisable style. Yet in design, I have found the opposite to be true. In design, while companies and individuals will select you to work on their projects based on your portfolio of past work, what they want is fresh, new ideas which are as good if not better than brands they've already seen out there. Be inspired by brands and designers, but don't just copy or fall into looking the same as everyone else – break the mould and be the trendsetter. Great design is often down to versatility; being able to change your style, adapt to requirements and keep up with the current creative market, never allowing your style and work to stagnate. Draw inspiration from everywhere you go and everything you do, and never be afraid to strive for your work to be different.

Alan Pennington Creative Designer
www.bohemiant.co.uk

#44. Do Your Research.

Once you have a theme or direction for your design, research the hell out of it. Create mood boards of all the things you find so you have a record of it and can share it with clients and co-workers. This is important for two reasons: 1) Filling your subconscious mind with images and ideas so you will stimulate your own imagination to come up with new ideas yourself. 2) You will avoid accidentally copying someone else's concept as two designers can very innocently and independently reach the same conclusion.

David Pugh Freelance Graphic Designer
www.freelancegraphicdesigner.co.uk

#45. Website Design Is The Presentation Of Information.

Every time you start a new web project ensure that your first step is getting all the required elements in on the PSD. Only when everything is in on one file can you decide the most user-friendly and the most beautiful way to display all the information together.

Adam Shabbo Digital Designer
adamshabbo.com



#46. Give The Briefing Phase Of Your Projects The Attention It Deserves.

Challenge your client. Ensure they've fully considered, and you understand, what they're looking to achieve from the project. Take time to glean all relevant information and thoughts from them before you start work. By agreeing on a clear brief you'll deliver a better solution, which means you'll be more likely to meet (hopefully exceed!) your client's expectations.

Duncan Gilroy Down The Line Design & Marketing
www.downtheline.design.co.uk

#47. Sketch Ideas & Don't Focus On Detail Too Early.

When asked by a client to design a new logo or modernise an existing identity, it is all too easy to go straight to the computer and begin rendering ideas using the available software and fonts installed. This is NOT the way to be truly creative. By nature of the specific tools at hand, you could potentially stifle your creativity due to the limiting resources. Sketch ideas and don't focus on detail too early. It's the only way we work and has created some of the UK's most well-known and successful brand identities.

Drew Selman Creative Director Lemon Creative
www.lemoncreative.co.uk

#48. Don't Be Scared To Say No To A Project!

It's understandable to think that you need to take on every project that is offered to you. After all, you want to make money and you never know when your next project is coming in.

However, taking on a project that you already know has the potential to be very stressful, with a budget that likely isn't worth the headache - it all just leads to you wondering why you even ever chose graphic design as a career.

I started out taking on every little thing I could and quickly realised something. Around each month a good project would come along with a good brief, a nice client or a respectable budget, but I had taken on so much guff-work that I either had to turn it down or deliver less than I'm capable of.

Don't fall into this trap. Be confident in waiting for the right project and fill your time proactively seeking out the right projects. Sure, if you desperately need to pay the rent it's OK take on the odd guff client project (we all have to). Focus on putting out work that you are proud of simply by saying NO! a lot more.

Lee Mason Freelance Brand Designer
www.leemasondesign.com



#49. The Power of Empathy.

Find creative ways to understand and resonate on a deeper level with your design clients. Understand their world. Listen and discover common feelings and experiences. When you can genuinely empathise with them, you'll find that they are much more understanding in reciprocation (not to mention easier to work with). Can you imagine how your design work will reap the positive benefits? When clients are easier to deal with, stress has a much harder time to creep in. And there's never room for stress...especially in the creative field.

#50. Where Stress Is Absent, Creativity Thrives.

So, empathise with your clients. Understand where they are coming from. You'll be amazed how many more design clients you'll win (and keep) as a result.

Kyle Courtright
Graphic Designer | Courtright Design
Founder / Judge | Logo Wave International

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We're passionate about print. Helping resellers grow by providing high quality, low cost print is what we're good at.

As the UK's fastest growing trade printer we see ourselves as partners with our clients, with reseller tools, white label packing and an order process that makes your life easier. In return, our growing customer base has given us a 9 out of 10 score on Trustpilot.

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