

CAN GRAPHIC DESIGN SAVE YOUR LIFE?

This essay will consider whether graphic design can save people's lives, focusing on the different roles it plays and methods used. The positives and negatives of graphic design will be researched and discussed in terms of its ability to advise, instruct and inform.

Graphic design is a method of communication that uses visual methods to transfer information to a large quantity of people. Using photos, illustrations and typography with hundreds of layouts, graphic designers create a way to grab the public's attention by providing information which could save your life.

The style or way in which the graphic is done also affects the persuasive power of the overall message. A style that is congruent with the message will reinforce the message subtly, while a style that clashes with the content of the message will dilute it and perhaps even make it unintelligible (Duckworth, 2018).

The use of symmetry in graphics helps to create an aesthetically appealing piece of work, helping people to feel comfortable, safe and confident in the information being provided to them. "The visuals and the copy should form a cohesive message, each reinforcing the other" (Duckworth, 2018). The use of clear shapes, straight lines, simple diagrams and clear typography enable information to not only be understood but also be reassuring.

To be an effective graphic designer you need to understand your market and audience while creating for a specific purpose. Signs are a readily used form of graphic design that use both aesthetic appeal and marketing; signs must be easy to understand using a 'person centred approach' whilst also being in line with culturally understood norms such as colour, shapes and sizes (Interaction Design Foundation, 2021). For a sign to be effective the viewer's eyes must be drawn to the information and this can be encouraged using the golden ratio theory; the way a person scans an image and how the brain transmits that information (canva.com, 2021).

The use of colours, shapes and sizes all have their own different meanings which if used wrong could put a person in danger. The colour theory and the power colour can hold, helps persuade the audience. Colour has a vital role in the design world triggering emotional reactions in viewers, be it sad, hungry, alert or happy, using colour. Colour has the power to "communicate something important without using words at all" (GCF Global, 2021). Graphic designers use colour theory to help find which colours work well together using a colour wheel and which create the appropriate reaction in the viewer.

For millions of years, we have subconsciously created a way to put emotions and feeling into colours. For example, looking at the colour green can be linked to nature which can be associated with the trees and grass creating a calm and safe feeling (Lundberg, 2019). Another example can be using pink for a girl and blue for a boy which is used in most western countries but could be different in other places in the world. When considering 'can graphic design save your life', certain colours used in the graphic design world have specific meanings that are already subconsciously planted in a person's head.

A graphic by itself carries no power to persuade. When we use visual persuasion, we are relying on the context of the audience to supply vast amounts of knowledge, and to decode the visual and draw conclusions (Duckworth, 2018).

The colour red would be used for danger, while yellow/amber would be used for warnings, green is used for safety (looking back how green can create a calm feeling) and blue is used for information. It's important to use the right colours and not mix them up for example if a warning sign is written in blue then this could cause accidents and possibly death as it may not draw as much attention as red. A graphic designer must be aware of the colour coding needed for each purpose and what it stands for in order to convey meaning. The shape and size can dictate how important information can be. UK signs are standardised in terms of shape and colour enabling information to be delivered silently (Evans, 2017). For example, with a sign, the size and shape make it eye catching and the information easily obtainable. Using all three, colour, shape and size can help save lives.

There is a different range of shapes for signs such as triangles, circles and rectangles. Different shapes help the viewer to interpret what the sign means quickly and comprehensively (Viking Signs, 2021). Warning signs use different shapes dependent on the information they provide. Triangular shaped signs are often yellow/amber and have for a long-time been used in workplace environments and associated with warnings with the help of the colours used (Evans, 2017). Other shapes such as circles have been used as a shape that tells people where things shouldn't be or depending on the colour what they should do. These shapes help drivers to know if there is danger up ahead. The size helps with that also depending if you are on a road then the sizes must be big enough to catch the driver's attention while passing. This is for them to take the information in and adapt to the situation in front of them. While in a work place the size will need to be big enough for people to see and comprehend the information. The colour will dictate whether this sign is providing information (blue) or a warning (red), (see figure 1), with speed signs also in a red circle providing both information and a speed warning.



Fig.1: *Know Your Fire Safety Signs.*

Fig. 2: *First Aid*

Fig.3: *Red First Aid Sign*

These signs are good examples of how graphic design can save your life without you realising, using the right colours, shapes and sizes. Some may use two colours to represent one piece of information. For example, first aid signs can be seen in red for danger or green for safety as it can do both (see figure 2 and 3). Covid-19 posters often use the colour blue to demonstrate washing instructions and the yellow helps to inform that this is a warning and to help people know how urgent it is to read.



Fig. 4: Covid Information signs. Fig.5: Covid Symptoms sign.

Road signs are a well-known way of using graphics to help the public know about upcoming danger when needed. Most are common and imprinted into the minds of drivers. For example, signs like the stop sign, one way, road works ahead, and speed limits help people to know what is happening on a daily basis. There are other methods of informing people that are not contained within signposts. Simple lines are often used to help people know where they can and cannot go. On the road, lines can indicate pedestrian and zebra crossings used to help drivers know when to slow down and look at their surroundings for people crossing. Other lines such as double yellow or red lines warn people not to park there, with the colour designating the level of danger. Double yellow lines are also used by train tracks to show the dangers of standing too close to the tracks. Most recently during the covid pandemic stickers have been placed on the floor to indicate a one-way system or 2-metre standing distance to ensure that people do not stand too close, increasing the chances of spreading the infection.

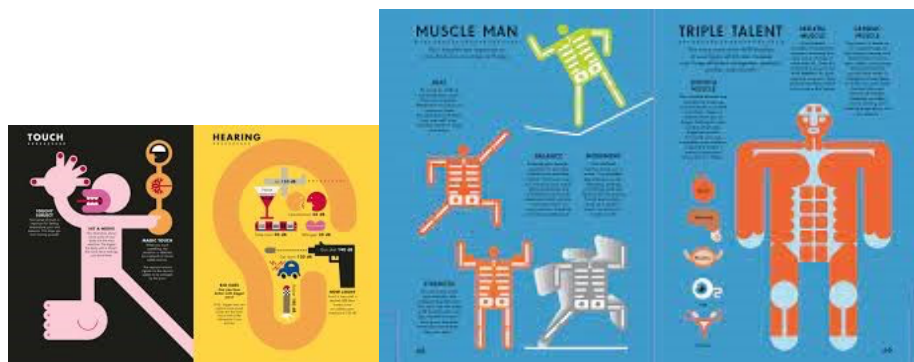


Fig.6: *The Body Book.*
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Fig. 7: *Gallery: How Peter Grundy visualises human body.*

Graphic design can be used as a method to inform and learn, teaching people of all ages important information. Peter Grundy is a graphic designer who created a human body book with simple illustrations to help children understand their bodies and the science behind it, looking at areas such as the heart, brain and the human skeleton. The characters have their own eye-catching, fun components about them and work well with the page they are on. Having small paragraphs helps children to stay interested, while looking and understanding what the page represents and means, through the imagery used. Providing information to children at a young age prepares them for life by teaching them how to look after their bodies. This type of sign is provided to inform the individual however this in turn can enable the person to take better care of themselves, encouraging a healthier lifestyle which can have a positive impact on the way they live.



Fig.8: Vintage Cigarette Packs



Fig.9: Plain tobacco packaging- what you need to know

Graphic design can be used as a method to both warn and inform both positively and negatively dependent on the company using it and the intended effect. During the early 1900s graphic designers were creating bright, eye appealing packaging, to encourage people to buy their brand (see figure 8). A wide range of colours, layouts and typefaces were used to appeal to the majority, across all ages, races and classes, drawing people in not only through the health benefits but also the attractive packaging. In more recent years the negative effects of smoking have been highlighted and graphic designers have had to create packaging to reflect this and stop people smoking. Tobacco products are now sold in plain brown packets with photos showing the damage being caused to your body, highlighted in red for danger (see figure 9).

Out went brands aiming to seduce with jolly jack tars, camels and cowboys; in came a brief that required the product to look disgusting. A drab colour known as Pantone 448C was chosen after market research determined that it was exceptionally repellent (Bayley, 2017, p.1).

The packaging is boring and uninteresting with often disturbing images; brown is considered a boring colour and is used to prevent people from buying the product in direct opposition to the bright colours used previously. Although arguably this use of marketing will not stop people who are already smoking but it may have a deterrent effect on those thinking of starting.



Fig.10: Smoking is slow motion suicide.



Fig.11: Passive Smoking Kills

Biman Mullick is the graphic designer who started the campaign in the 1970s, trying to stop people from smoking. Biman Mullick was not a smoker and knowing the dangers of smoking he created a way to help spread awareness through using posters and simple illustrations so people could understand from all ages the negative effects of smoking. The bold typefaces use red and black, both colours associated with danger and warning signs to show how serious this is. Both figures 10 and 11 use clear visual imagery so even an illiterate person can understand the meaning, through the use of image, colour and size. It was important for everyone to get this message and as a result of his campaign he was able to help ban smoking indoors.



Fig.12: Recycling logo.

The Recycling logo is a well-known and well publicised visual for helping people to remember to save the planet. The logo is supported with multiple graphics behind it for example adverts, posters, leaflets and many more. The logo is green, a calming colour commonly associated with nature and the natural world. The logo consists of 3 arrows each following the other representative of a life cycle; this indicates that recycling is a continuous loop of cause and effect and cannot be fixed overnight. Recycling posters provide information on the methods that can be taken to make a positive change whilst highlighting the serious nature of the issue. Recycling bins are colour coded making the idea of recycling more visually appealing and easier to understand (see photo 1).



Fig.13: General Recycling the basics the



Fig.14: Advantages of Recycling



Fig.15: Recycling by numbers

Simple graphics show where each product should go, and the additional use of colour makes the recycling poster understandable by all regardless of age, disability or language barriers. The simple graphics provide a 'can-do' attitude making it appealing for all, and uniting people towards a common cause. Figure 14 provides information and encouragement through showing the positive impact recycling can have on the world. This is used to encourage a feeling of worth; showing people the impact of their actions can encourage them to do more due to the great feeling it creates. Responsibility is key within recycling posters and figure 15 explains how the products currently used can damage the environment. This poster uses simple visuals in green making a visual connection to nature whilst the highlighting in red indicates that this is also a warning. Through

providing people with the reasons for climate change and the need for recycling, the person is made accountable for their actions, helping people to make better decisions.

The benefits of recycling are reducing pollution from the air, water, and lands. Through the process of recycling fewer trees are cut down preventing deforestation and creating a better environment, which plays an important role in helping the planet. In terms of global warming, recycling helps to minimize the greenhouse gasses such as carbon dioxide and nitrogen from being trapped in our atmosphere. Graphic design plays an important role within recycling material, saving multiple lives through protecting the world. The use of simple graphics and colours encourages a mantra of reduce, reuse, recycle which helps with natural resources; recycling old bottles, car parts and paper helps them be used over and over which conserves natural resources (Conserve Energy Future, 2021).

Can graphic design save your life is an expansive question and there are many positive and negative elements to consider. This can be dependent on the individual person and the way they see the world. Graphic design is ultimately a marketing tool and will be used to promote whatever it was employed to promote whether positive or negative for the individual. Smoking was considered to benefit a person's health and as a result the graphics used encouraged people to buy cigarettes which was damaging; it has only been in recent years that science has proved otherwise impacting on the use of graphics on tobacco products. A person is arguably encouraged to believe what they are told on advertising material and if they believe the information given then it will, for the majority, be followed. The use of clear graphics such as shapes, and colours such as red for danger and blue for instructions indicate the purpose and enable clear choices to be made by the individual. Recycling signs in addition indicate how to look after the environment using the colour green as a link to the natural world. Graphic design arguably has an important role in saving a person's life and can be extremely beneficial however it can also be down to the individual as to whether they take this on board.

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Red Box Fire (2020) *Know your fire safety signs* [Digital image].

Available at: <https://www.redboxfire.co.uk/blogs/know-your-fire-safety-signs> (Accessed: 20 October 2021).

Figure 2: RS Industrial Services (2021) *First Aid* [Digital image].

Available at: <https://www.rsis.co.uk/first-aid-signs-c864/first-aid-first-aid-signs-p1859> (Accessed: 1 November 2021).

Figure 3: Zazzle (2021) *Red First Aid Sign Square Sticker* [Digital image].

Available at: https://www.zazzle.co.uk/red_first_aid_sign_square_sticker-217432905699094591 (Accessed: 10 November 2021).

Figure 4: Creative Solutions (2021) *Coronavirus (Covid-19) Site Safety Sign Board* [Digital

image]. Available at: <https://www.creative-solutions-direct.co.uk/shop/details/site-safety-covid-19-sign-boards> (Accessed: 29 October 2021).

Figure 5: Gallagher, J. (2021) Covid symptoms: What are they and how do I protect myself?

[Digital image]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51048366> (Accessed: 7 November).

Figure 6: Grundy, P. (2014) *The Body Book* [Infographic]. Available at: <https://the-dots.com/projects/the-body-book-116082>

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Figure 7: Grundy, P (2014) Gallery: how Peter Grundy visualises the human body [Infographic]. Available at: <https://simonrogers.net/2014/03/05/gallery-how-peter-grundy-visualises-the-human-body/> (Accessed: 20 October 2021).

Figure 8: Retrowow (2021) *Vintage Cigarette Packets* [Photo]. Available at: https://www.retrowow.co.uk/retro_collectibles/smoking/vintage_cigarette_packets.php (Accessed: 27 October 2021).

Figure 9: British Lung Foundation (2021) *Plain tobacco packaging- what you need to know* [Photo] Available at: <https://www.blf.org.uk/take-action/campaign-with-us/plain-packaging-tobacco-q-and-a> (Accessed: 27 October 2021).

Figure 10: Mullick, B. (1972) *'Smoking is slow motion suicide'* [Poster] Available at: <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/WagjzC0AAPV0Y10z> (Accessed: 26 October 2021).

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Figure 12: Polytan (2021) *Recycling logo* [digital image] Available at: <https://www.polytan.com/sustainability/recycling/> (Accessed: 25 October 2021).

Figure 13: Heritage (2020) *General Recycling the basics* [digital image] Available at: <https://www.heritage-enviro.com/general-recycling-the-basics/> (Accessed: 25 October 2021).

Figure 14: Visually (2021) *Advantages of Recycling* [Digital image] Available at: <https://visual.ly/community/Infographics/environment/benefits-recycling> (Accessed: 28 November 2021).

Figure 15: Graphsdotnet (2021) *Recycling by the numbers* [photo]. Available at: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/424745808584992178/> (Accessed: 1 November 2021)

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