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There are no 50 shades of grey anymore



One thing that really grinds my gears is the increasing prevalence of extreme opinions on almost any topic you can think of. It seems like these days, you're either a die-hard pro-vaccination advocate or an anti-vaxxer, either for or against the war in Ukraine, with no room for a middle ground (Campbell, n.d.; Bandow, 2022). I remember a time when being a lateral thinker was a desirable trait, something to put on your CV as a valuable skill – the ability to think outside the box and come up with innovative solutions. But nowadays, that seems to have fallen by the wayside, even being frowned upon.

The media has a toxic obsession with dividing society into two warring camps, creating echo chambers where people are encouraged to blindly follow one side or the other (Nuwer, 2017). It's frustrating that even when there's clear evidence that money-driven companies are behind the push for vaccinations (and other products), some people refuse to acknowledge it and blindly follow what they're told (Burleigh, 2021). Similarly, many politicians are not the paragons of virtue that we'd like

them to be, and there's often a lot of money and corruption involved in the decisions they make (Bandow, 2022).

On the other hand, there are people who take conspiracy theories to an extreme, refusing to engage in any kind of dialogue or find a middle ground with those who hold different opinions. Instead, they resort to name-calling and mockery, creating further division and hostility. It's like being stuck between a rock and a hard place – if you're not on one extreme or the other, you're seen as a pariah by both sides.

This black-and-white perspective is incredibly toxic and a major contributor to conflict in every sphere, from classrooms to global politics. Social media and the news media are complicit in perpetuating this problem, as they profit from clicks and attention-grabbing headlines (Nuwer, 2017). This creates echo chambers where people only hear the views that reinforce their own, further entrenching them in their extreme positions.

It's a challenging time to live in, and it doesn't look like things will change anytime soon. The only thing we can do is recognize that there's a problem and start actively seeking out different viewpoints, rather than just reading articles that reinforce our existing beliefs. We need to start accepting that there are shades of gray between black and white and make an effort to listen to and understand opposing views (Sundaram, 2018). After all, an opinion is just that – an opinion, and there's nothing stopping us from changing our minds if we're presented with compelling evidence to the contrary.

So, read widely and don't be afraid to expose yourself to views that challenge your own. We can all benefit from having a more nuanced and open-minded approach to the world.

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Wisdom from the Future: Lessons for a Young Designer



Being at the age of 42 now and working as a designer for the past 15 years now, I sometimes look back on the time I've spent learning new skills and ask myself if the time was spent right and if I made the right decisions. While, of course, there are some regrets and some decisions had not been the wisest, I can happily say that I would mostly do it all the same again. But if I could go back in time, I would tell my 19-year-old younger self the following things:

"Lex: You will be a designer in the future, and you will love it. You can stay young at heart and make money out of the stuff that you love anyway. But check out these major skills and start practicing them as soon as you can:

Lex! Start to listen, when you know how to listen everyone is the guru (Dass, 1978, p. 49):

Not only in conversations, but also to yourself, your surroundings, your projects, your users, and your clients. And by that, I mean not hearing but really actually understanding the deeper meaning of what lies beyond a certain opinion, statement, or function. Everyone and everything speaks to you, and the sooner you start listening, the better you can understand and learn from everything that is going on. (Schell, 2008, p. 4-6)

Lex! Understand systems! Everything is a system!

When we say „everything is a system,“ we are acknowledging that nothing exists in isolation and that everything is part of a larger whole. This perspective allows us to see the world as a complex network of interdependent systems, rather than a collection of isolated parts. If you change one thing in a system, it has impacts on all the other parts. This thinking would have helped me a lot in understanding my surroundings and understanding things that just didn't want to fit in my head. (Scott Miker, n.d.)

„Don't say that something is not your thing. Try it out at least. Go learn another instrument, start woodworking, do a sport, read books, practice beatboxing, go breakdance.“

Lex! Failure is great! Fail faster!

I should appreciate failing sooner. At its core, failing is the only way to learn something. Without failing, there is no learning. For too long, I considered failing as a weakness and a sign of incompetency when, in fact, it is the only way to succeed at something. The more fails you make, the more information you get on how to do things right. And sometimes you find completely new ways of doing something while you fail. Don't spend too much time talking, weighing up possibilities and planning things. Get on your way and start doing it. (Extra Credits, 2014)

Lex! Don't stop drawing! You will want to communicate your ideas!

Being able to bring your ideas to paper is a great way to save time and make a vision clear. It saves you a lot of time explaining. It is a great hobby to get in flow and unlocks unused parts of your brain. It will open

a whole new set of possible jobs and skills. There will be great tools to power your creativity if you can draw. Understand 3D Design, landscape, and architecture. (21 Draw, n.d.)

Lex! Learn everything you can. You never know when you might use it.

Don't say that something is not your thing. Try it out at least. Go learn another instrument, start woodworking, do a sport, read books, practice beatboxing, go breakdance. Travel more! Get into the human brain and learn about psychology. It will help you understand the behavior of your friends, partners, and customers. A lot of skills take quite some time to learn, and time is the most valuable resource, not money or fame! – you don't understand it yet, but believe me! It's the truth. Oh yeah – and start coding while you are ahead – coding lets you create your own worlds and makes you pretty independent as a designer. (Sutton, 2017)

I might tell myself also a few other things but as we all know time travel is limited to roughly 500 to 600 words, so I guess this will be a good choice of advice. And yeah – buy Facebook, Amazon, and Apple stocks. It will ease your start in life.”

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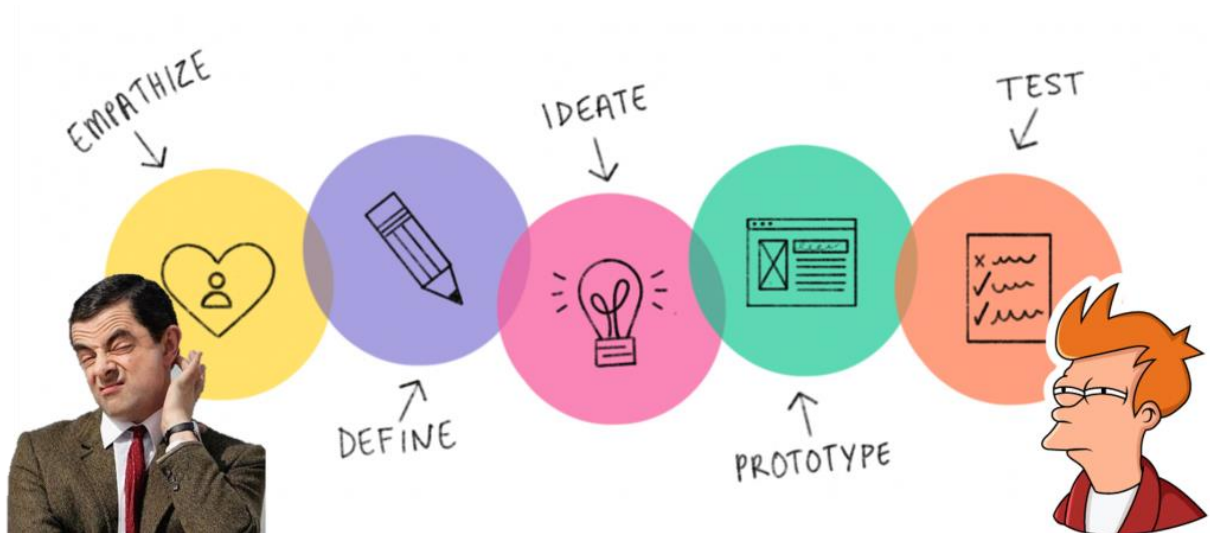
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Design Thinking: Great for Post-its, Not So Much for Live Entertainment – Here's Why



As a designer I am always open to new technologies, systems and ideas. Having worked on a variety of projects, I have to say that the 5-step design thinking process (What is Design Thinking?, 2016) is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Sure, it's a good general approach, but it lacks the flexibility that is needed when working on complex projects that require a lot of creativity and out-of-the-box thinking.

Let's take the example of immersive experiences, theme park design, or theatre design. These are all live entertainment projects that require a different approach than what is prescribed by design thinking. You can't just empathize with the user or customer and define their problems and needs, and then ideate, prototype, and test your way to a successful project. It's just not that simple.

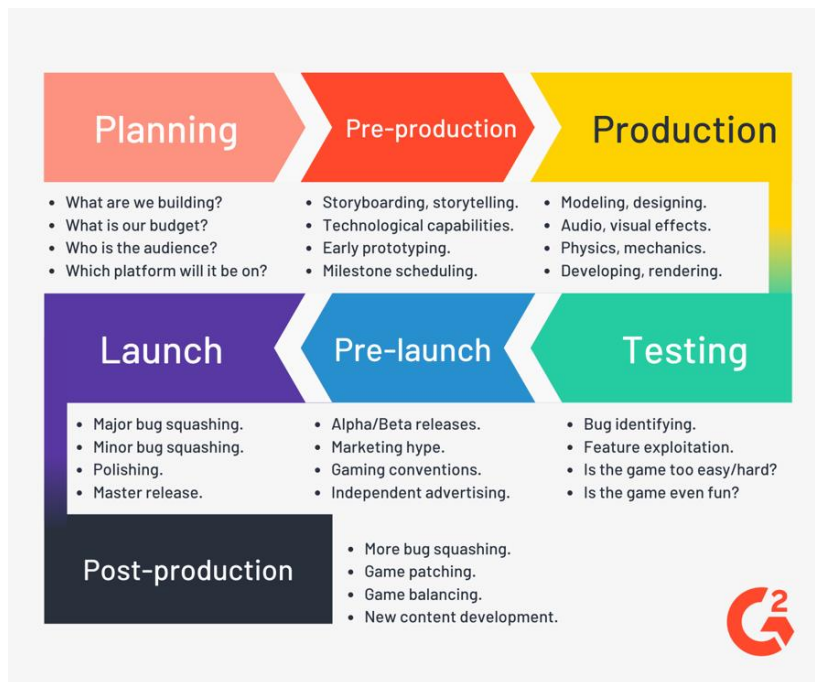


Figure 1: This is how an imagineering team would approach a design challenge

(<https://imagineeringtoolbox.wordpress.com/>)

For example, if you're designing a theme park, you need to check the needs, requirements, and constraints of the project first. Then, you need to go into a long blue sky phase where you throw everything in, even if it sounds super off. You need to come up with a lot of ideas, and then decide on one that you will go with. After that, you need to start the long and extensive design phase where you look at the design from all perspectives, start making models, and then build it. There is no room for redoing – it has to be on spot the first time.

And what about game development? You can't just ideate and prototype your way to a successful game. You need to have a lot of creativity, intuition, and experience to make a game that people will actually want to play. You need to have a sense of what will work and what won't work, and you can't just rely on user feedback to guide you.

Figure 2: An example how the design of a videogame would look like (<https://www.g2.com/>)

I mean, can you imagine going to a Broadway show and the designers using design thinking to come up with the sets and costumes? Empathizing with the audience to understand their needs and problems? I don't think so. You need to have the vision to create something that's going to blow people's minds, something that they've

never seen before. You can't just follow a step-by-step process and expect it to work.

And let's not forget about immersive experiences. You know, those experiences where you step into a different world and lose yourself for a little while. These are the types of experiences that require a lot of creativity and imagination. You can't just ideate and prototype your way to a successful immersive experience. You need to have the vision to create something that's going to transport people to a different world, something that's going to make them forget that they're in a room with a bunch of other people.

I'm not saying that design thinking is a bad approach. It's a good starting point, but it's not the end-all-be-all solution. Design is a complex process that can't be put into a formula. It's like cooking – you can follow a recipe, but it doesn't guarantee that you will make a great dish. You need to have some creativity, intuition, and experience to make a dish that people will actually want to eat.

So, when and why won't design thinking be able to solve your problem? Well, if you're working on a project that requires a lot of creativity, intuition, and experience, then design thinking might not be enough. You need to have a more flexible approach that allows you to think outside of the box and come up with solutions that are not obvious.

In conclusion, design thinking has its place in the world of design, especially to explain how to generally approach design to a newbie but it's by far not the only approach that should be used. As designers, we need to have the flexibility to adapt to the project we're working on and use a range of tools and methods that allow us to think creatively and produce innovative solutions to create something meaningful and meet the unique needs of our clients and users. And that just can't be put in a formula. Sorry Design Thinking – but I still like you as a friend.

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Figure 1: *The Imagineering Process – an overview* (2018) *The Imagineering Toolbox*. Available at: <https://imagineeringtoolbox.wordpress.com/resources/the-imagineering-process-an-overview/> (Accessed: April 23, 2023).

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