The Process of visual communication runs throughout our daily lives. While visual communication can be as simple as a traffic light or as complex as sign language, most people find that learning its underlying principles is an intense personal venture. Unfortunately, most graphic design and illustration teaching methods focus on technical facility, ignoring the need for personal and innovative thought in visual communication.

Judith and Richard Wilde propose that the repertoire of principles and techniques needed for effective visual communication cannot simply be taught; this repertoire must be developed, through hands-on experience with broad-ranging visual problems. Visual Literacy documents this learning process by presenting challenging visual problem assignments and over __ pieces of solution art actually executed by Graphic Design Technology Student, Andrew Bartolotta.

Each problem in the book displays a detailed analysis of the problem’s underlying intent and special notes that will be of particular interest to instructors. Specific design principles that are reinforced include framing reference, negative-positive relationships, and cropping techniques. The innovative results thrown throughout the book give an idea of the solutions that can be achieved with this teaching approach.

With its uniquely practical hands-on approach and wide variety of Andrew’s art, Visual Literacy will be welcomed throughout the visual communications field, by professionals looking for new avenues of inspiration, students, and instructors.

Jacket Design by Andrew Bartolotta
For most people, learning the principles of effective visual communications is an intensely personal venture. Among the more curious and vexing predicaments is the fact that the necessary visual communications concepts cannot be taught directly. The study of various media and techniques offers a certain tangibility for direct study, of course but there is very little practical knowledge that can be imparted regarding an overall conceptual approach to visual communications. It is therefore necessary to create conditions conducive to students’ personal exploration and discovery of this knowledge.

For educators in the ever-changing visual communications field, understanding how to create these conditions is a formidable challenge. It is essential that assignments be both educationally sound and personally meaningful to the students, creating sufficient interest to open up the students to previously unexplored avenues of problem solving. Educators should never assume that a student’s mere enrollment in design school will inherently constitute a serious interest in solving visual communications problems - this interest must be developed, through the employment of personally interesting and involving problems.

The concern, then, for design educators is to demystify the visual communications process while presenting it in an exciting and challenging way. The problems in this book are structured to achieve just that, serving as original strategies to prompt original results. Each assignment is designed to lead students away from traditional thought processes, away from traditional avenues of visual research, and away from “right” and “wrong” answer; faced with open-ended questions many of them presented in the content of seemingly narrow parameters, students are forced to look inward for personal design solutions. In short, the necessary conditions or personal creative growth are established again and again.

The issues addressed by the problems in this book include the following: re-evaluating a problem in personal terms; creating conditions for self-questioning by moving from the known to the unknown; encouraging the use of concepts to dictate techniques, instead of the other way around, discovering design principles, rather than directly learning or memorizing them; and discovering personal conceptual methods of problem solving. The problems were given to Andrew Bartolotta, a somewhat beginner in Graphic Design, having experience working...
with InDesign and other Adobe products through being on a yearbook staff. These conceptual exercises were used not only to teach basic design fundamentals but also to encourage personal creative processes and self-reliance. The wide variety of solutions shown for each problem reflects the diversity of options and potential approaches presented by each problem. Because self-discovery is stressed as the primary goal, certain “deviant” but nonetheless worthwhile solutions are presented as well.

Most of the assignments ask for several solutions to a single problem, a condition that expands problem-solving repertoires, breaks down limitations, and reinforces the need to explore. By dedicating themselves to creating, say, twenty solutions to a single problem, rather than just one or two, students can come to realize that the potential number of successful solutions is infinite. The idea of unlearning comes into play here as well, prodding students to go beyond habitual, learned responded and thought processes, into the realm of a more instinctive, spontaneous approach.

Visual Literacy can be used to simulate this experience, and the book is formatted to this end. Readers are encouraged to consider and solve the given problems prior to reviewing the displayed solutions. Approaching the book in this manner will allow readers to assess the solutions more meaningfully than if they had simply viewed the solutions in terms of their formal concerns.

This conceptual approach to visual problem solving embodies the quest for visual literacy. Tis is accompanied by a responsibility that must be embraced by visual communicators, for it can enrich our culture by increasing the level of visual literacy throughout our society. It is this approach - facing the unknown, armed with the tool of diligent and introspective questioning- that is the best hope for creating future generations of visually literate designers.

This book was constructed the Second Semester of Andrew Bartolotta's Graphic Design Technology Program that was at Northwest Mississippi Community College. His Instructor, Cheryl Rice, has worked in the advertising and graphic design field academically and professionally. Her work has been seen nationwide in publications and Andrew's work has been seen in high school and college publications across Mississippi. This book demonstrates work of conceptual visual literacy design as taught by Mrs. Rice.
**Black Square Problem:** By using four black squares of the same dimensions, create a graphic image that beset expresses the meaning of each of the following six words (see below). Make eight preliminary sketches for each word in the areas indicated. Then select the most effective solution and execute it in the larger designated area. Using only four squares is a seemingly limited palette to express such diverse words, yet these squares can be expanded into a more comprehensive language by utilizing various design principles.

**Analysis:** The intention of this problem is to develop a geometric idiom through the discovery of the various two dimensional design principles needed to extend a limited graphic vocabulary. The necessary principles include: fratal reference; touching; overlapping and cropping of forms; illusory space; contrast of elements in terms of size, direction, space, and position; and the dynamics of negative-positive space relationships.
Negative space is an important aspect of graphic design. An equivalent of this is the Zen idea that the essence of a bowl is the part that is missing. Apply this idea to the graphic technique of using only negative shapes and visualize three (3) of the following subjects: Jaws, a vanilla ice cream cone and a polar bear. The actual subjects themselves should not be drawn. Only the negative space can make for visually intriguing solutions. As a design consideration, the chosen images may be cropped. Use the smaller areas indicated for preliminary drawings and the larger areas for final executions.

Analysis: The idea of formulating and image by only addressing its background changes the habitual approach toward seeing. When viewers are led to focus solely on background and shadowed areas, it is the unmarked portion of the page -the white ground- that becomes magically transformed into a recognizable subject. The traditional image making process is thereby reversed with a greater emphasis on compositional concerns, negative-positive relationships, and framal reference.
ANALYSIS: This problem is a vehicle for simplicity and personalization. The intent is to inspire personal expression by giving each sign a unique life of its own. The familiar context suggests a traditional idiom, while the nonsensical topics allow for uninhibited design exploration and the opportunity to play; the parameters offer an opportunity to transcend the road sign’s functional aspects through the creation of a personal statement in the name of design exploration.
The UPC mark is one of the most widely used symbols in the world, appearing on packaged goods, magazines, paperback books and other massproduced products. Yet this image seen so frequently is often not seen at all. With this in mind, redesign the UPC symbol, making it visible by interpreting it as a Environmental, Political, or Social statement. There are no limitations on medium or color.
The primary intentional this problem is to explore various aspects of the fundamental design principle **contrast**. Students will experiment with negative/positive relationships, as it pertains to contrast, and patterning. Using only letterforms and as many colors as your concept dictates, except for the negative/positive problem, where only black and white is required. Note: Carefully consider the following design principles: framing reference, detachment, touching, overlapping, penetration, cropping, repetition, illusionary space, and contrast of shape, size, color, and direction.
Richard Wilde is the founder of the Graphic Design Department at the School of Visual Arts and has been chairman of both the Graphic Design and Advertising Departments for more than 25 years. He is a senior vice president/design director at Ryan Drossman Marc USA and a principal of Wilde Design. He has won over 150 professional awards and is a laureate of the Art Directors Club hall of fame. Richard has been a board member of the American Institute of Graphic Arts and has taught creatively around the world.

Judith Wilde is the creative director of Wilde Design and an associate professor and director of the graphic design and illustration program at Kingsborough Community College. Alongside her husband they have written multiple conceptual design books and have worked around the world teaching Design.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Andrew Bartolotta is a Graphic Design Technology major at Northwest Mississippi Community College. He grew up in Chicago and loved design since as far back as he can remember. He has won over 18 State Yearbook awards and has been the Northwest Mississippi Community College Yearbook Editor. For him, life consists that everything in this world is made up of design and that is why he loves it.