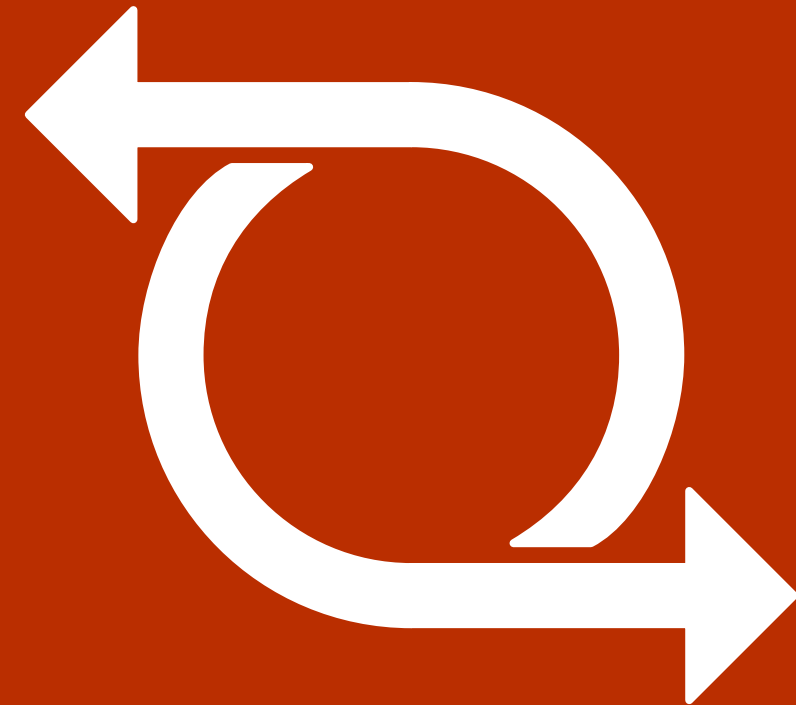


ROD GRAVES COMMUNICATION DESIGN

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**READ-ME FIRST**

THE DESIGN PROCESS

# PACKAGE CONTENTS

## READ ME FIRST

You're reading it now: the what's, why's, how's and who's of the design process. Wondering about when and where? The design process may be applied any time and anywhere!

## CHECKLISTS

Before going into any situation, it's best to be prepared. These checklists provide an overview of the important things to prepare or ask for each phase of a design project.

## INPUT

What I do.

## OUTPUT

What you get.

## DATA

Top-secret documents, templates and inspirational materials vital to our success.

## MINI-VIEWMASTER

Take a look through my eyes.

## DESIGNER WHISTLE

Just call and I'll be there.

## DESIGN PILLS

A tasty preview of my work: Fresh & Sweet.

## ENCOURAGEMENT BALL

Give it a shake when I'm not around.

# WELCOME

**If you're reading this, you must be pretty special.**

I've worked with only a small number of the organizations out there, and I'd like you to be one of them. I've given you this package to guide us through the design process, and help me understand just what it is that makes you so special!

## **Here's what's inside:**

- WHAT A Personal Definition Of Design
- WHY The Value Of Design
- HOW The Design Process
- WHO The Role of the Client & Designer
- PLUS Creating a Design Brief

## WHAT: A PERSONAL DEFINITION OF DESIGN

There are as many definitions of design as there are designers, and this has created a great deal of confusion as to what design is and designers do. Here is my version.

Design is a process that uses the power of ideas to create change. A good designer combines logic and imagination to create an outcome that responds to many needs at once. A design is a strategy to be put into action, not the result of that action: Bruce Archer of The Guardian said that “Design is what you do, not what you’ve done.”

Design acts as an intermediary: it serves to create or change connections within human systems (relationships between individuals, organizations, and society).

Design is an activity everyone performs, even if it’s as simple as planning their day or preparing a picnic basket. Any purposeful planning activity is a form of design of one sort or another, and therein lies a source of confusion. While most people specialize in a specific aspect of the design process, such as consultation, research, planning or

production, designers specialize in the practice of the design process itself.

While it’s true that there are sub-divisions within the field of design, what they share in common is the ability to apply the design process to the creation of almost anything. This adaptiveness is one of the most valuable qualities of design.

Design is a process that uses the power of ideas to create change.

## WHY: THE VALUE OF DESIGN

The design process allows designers to analyze systems, recognize opportunities, envision functional and innovative strategies, and integrate them into organizational and societal contexts.

Design can provide not just a solution to the problem, but answers to questions that have never been asked: the power to conceive the un-conceived and give birth to it. Put in a less grandiose way, problem solving is necessary, but the real power of design is the ability to cause paradigm shift. Even clearer: designers create functional and imaginative stuff.

With the complexity and quantity of information around us increasing exponentially, design holds great value in its capacity not just to create persuasive messages, but also to validate them by turning data into meaningful, appropriate, and useful pieces of information.

In order to be heard, speaking loudly or at length is no longer enough: you have to speak well. Design is the principal tool for organizations to communicate effectively, and thereby increase

brand awareness and equity. The AIGA Guide to Graphic Design as a Strategic Business Tool/ Graphic Design Handbook for Business states that “strategically guided graphic design positions an organization to set off a very desirable chain reaction: Positive impressions create higher perceived value which boosts sales. The final links in the chain tug nicely on the bottom line because the first links are forged into place with a results-oriented plan – a communication strategy.

# HOW: THE DESIGN PROCESS

The design process is not just what designers 'do', it's also what they facilitate by collaborating with the client.

For the process to function effectively and efficiently, the client and designer must work in harmony. This requires that the designer to adapt their design process to each client and project, and for the client to understand how the process can work for them.

A defining characteristic of the design process is that it is comprised not of steps, but rather a variety of activities. These activities are performed with varying intensity and frequency throughout the process, but a good designer uses the results of each activity to inform the next, while being conscious of current and anticipated needs.

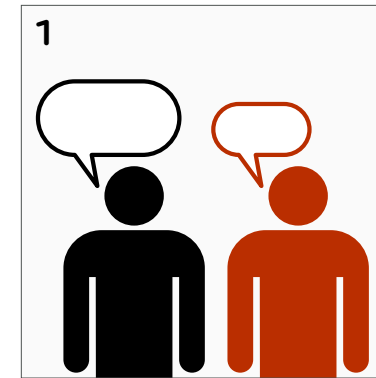
One way of portraying the design process is to represent each phase of the design process as consisting of two opposite activities, performed repeatedly and in concert with other phases to create harmony. In each phase, thought and action are the basic elements. Designers think before

they act, then act on that knowledge, evaluate the results, react to that and so forth in order to create an appropriate, rational and well-executed result.

The design process is therefore about much more than just the production of the final product. Production is in fact almost the last stage - it's all the work done up to that point that is most critical to the success of the project once produced. Within the design process, the means justify the ends.

Design when utilized as part of a comprehensive organizational strategy becomes a feedback cycle. Past designs are analyzed to judge their effectiveness, and this in turn affects how the organization oversees the growth and maturation of their design strategy.

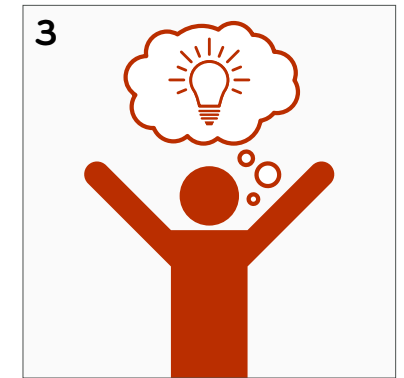
The means justify the ends.



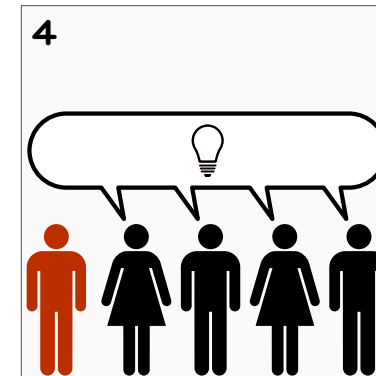
1 COMMUNICATION & UNDERSTANDING



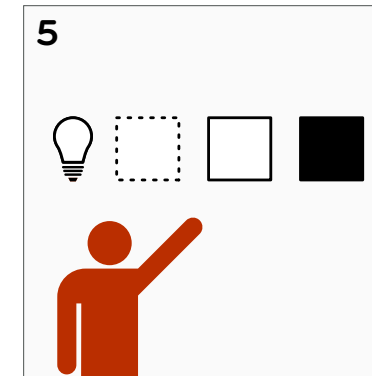
2 DISCOVERY & ANALYSIS



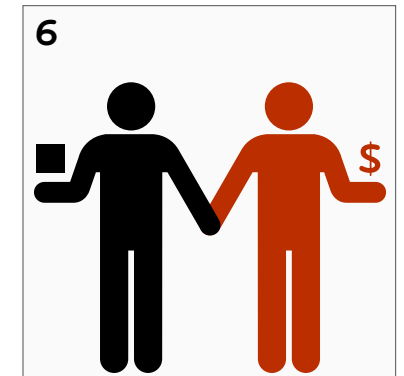
3 IDEATION & ITERATION



4 TESTING & VALIDATION



5 PRODUCTION & APPLICATION



6 DELIVERY & PAYMENT

## WHO: THE ROLE OF THE CLIENT

The client and designer have both critical and distinct roles within the design process. The process functions and harmonizes best when each party leverages their unique skills and abilities to the best possible advantage, while respecting those of others. The ideal situation is one in which a 'synergistic value proposition' exists, when both the client and designer have interlocking needs and capabilities that allow for a mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationship to form.

The word 'client' often carries many unquestioned assumptions. Perhaps the simplest definition is that the client is the person or group whose needs must be fulfilled and take precedence over those of others. When a designer is hired to perform the design process, their client isn't necessarily the person who contacted them: in larger organizations, it may be someone higher up the org chart, a group or committee (gasp), a nebulous 'all of us', or sometimes even another organization.

A vitally important part of the initial stage of the design process is determining who the real

client of the project is, and then involving them as directly, accurately, and/or as transparently as possible. The client may want a great deal or very little involvement, or to be involved by proxy – the designer can adapt the design process accordingly. Whatever the situation, the stakeholders' needs, motivations and even tastes must be understood in order to be satisfied. The designer needs clear and consistent leadership so that they may supply clear and consistent results.

The core responsibility of the client or contact is to provide project leadership. Stemming from this, they should provide objectives, a design brief, a budget, a project schedule, easy access to pertinent information and resources, and be able to see the design produced, applied, or deployed.

If you are representing the client, it's important not only to be able to sign-off on work with confidence, but also to articulate to the final authority how the design project supports their objectives and meets your responsibilities. This internal marketing can ensure an open and eager reception.

## WHO: THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNER

The designer's role is to fulfill the needs of the client through the design process. The designer draws upon experience and insight to create options for the client to select and provide feedback on.

It is the responsibility of both the client and designer to facilitate a trusting and honest working relationship so that the client can evaluate these options based on strategic instead of solely aesthetic or subjective criteria, confident that the designer knows what they're doing.

The designer brings into the process experience from all of the previous client sectors they have worked with. While a client may have a deep, vast knowledge of their own industry or field, designers can use the breadth of their knowledge to provide questions and answers that challenge the assumptions and traditions of the client in useful ways. After all, the designer has been hired because they possess a capability or perspective that the client does not. By bringing an open mind and fresh

eyes to persistent problems or wishes, designers can offer fresh thinking and new insights.

A broader responsibility also exists. The designer must view the design process within larger ethical contexts. They must attempt to foresee not only how the results of the process will affect the client and their needs, but also how it may affect industry, government, society and the environment. By example, clients and therefore industries will be slow to use more green, sustainable, or fair-trade products and processes unless designers provide them as options during the design process. The role of designer as intermediary between the client and the rest of the world is a bidirectional one, as neither exists in isolation from the other.

Design and therefore designers can enrich or impoverish: materially, aesthetically, or functionally. Everything has consequences; nothing exists in a vacuum unto itself.

## PLUS: CREATING A DESIGN BRIEF

The following excerpt is from the AIGA document 'A Client's Guide to Design':

A design brief is a written explanation given by the client to the designer at the outset of a project. As the client, you are spelling out your objectives and expectations and defining a scope of work when you issue one. You're also committing to a concrete expression that can be revisited as a project moves forward. It's an honest way to keep everyone honest. If the brief raises questions, all the better. Questions early are better than questions late.

### WHY PROVIDE A DESIGN BRIEF?

The purpose of the brief is to get everyone started with a common understanding of what's to be accomplished. It gives direction and serves as a benchmark against which to test concepts and execution as you move through a project. Some designers provide clients with their own set of questions. Even so, the ultimate responsibility for defining goals and objectives and identifying audience and context lies with the client.

Another benefit of the design brief is the clarity it provides you as the client about why you're embarking on a project. If you don't know why, you can't possibly hope to achieve anything worthwhile. Nor are you likely to get your company behind your project. A brief can be as valuable internally as it is externally. If you present it to the people within the company most directly affected by whatever is being produced, you not only elicit valuable input, but also pave the way for their buy-in.

When you think about it, the last thing you want is for your project to be a test of the designer's skills. Your responsibility is to help the design firm do the best work it can. That's why you hired the firm. And why you give it a brief.

Questions early  
are better than  
questions late.

### HOW TO WRITE ONE

A brief is not a blueprint. It shouldn't tell the designer how to do the work. It's a statement of purpose, a concise declaration of a client's expectations of what the design should accomplish. And while briefs will differ depending upon the project, there are some general guidelines to direct the process. Among them:

- Provide a clear statement of objectives, with priorities
- Relate the objectives to overall company positioning
- Indicate if and how you'll measure achievement of your goals
- Define, characterize and prioritize your audiences
- Define budgets and time frames
- Explain the internal approval process
- Be clear about procedural requirements (e.g., if more than one bid is needed from fabricators, or if there's a minimum acceptable level of detail for design presentations).

In the final analysis, design briefs are about paving the way for a successful design effort that reflects well on everyone involved.

### USING THE DESIGN BRIEF TEMPLATE

- 1 Insert the Data disc into your computer.
- 2 Open the file 'Design Brief Template.pdf'.
- 3 Type or copy & paste text into the various fields to complete the template.
- 4 Save the file on your computer.
- 5 Email the file to me: [contact@rodgraves.com](mailto:contact@rodgraves.com)

**Thanks for your time!**

I hope this guide has helped you better understand how my design process can work for you. Please check out the rest of the package!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rod Graves', written in a cursive style.

Rod Graves