UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Visual Design

2627-2-E2006P012

Learning area

1: Linguistic and communicative processes and related cultural contexts.

Learning objectives

Knowledge and understanding

- Understanding and critical analysis of visual communicative artifacts.
- Historical knowledge of graphic design styles and influences.

Applying knowledge and understanding

- Ability to consciously use different visual languages.
- Management of an editorial project from the brief to the realization.

Making judgements

- The course, in its theoretical component, aims to foster in students the ability to formulate independent and well-argued evaluations concerning the processes and purposes of visual communication. Through critical analysis of the evolution of historical styles and the examination of contemporary case studies, students will be guided to recognize the impact of formal choices on the construction of visual messages.
- In the practical component, independent judgement is exercised and assessed through project reviews and moments of discussion, where students are required to justify and articulate their design decisions. Particular attention is given to understanding how the treatment of images, color, typography, and composition influences both the perception and reception of a message.

Communication skills

Development of communication skills on three levels: visual, spoken, and written synthesis:

- Visual: Students will be guided in the ideation and development of effective graphic design projects capable of conveying clear messages that are coherent with both the context and the intended audience.
- Spoken: The course aims to enhance students' ability to present and articulate their design choices, both within group dynamics and during evaluation sessions with the instructor. The teaching methods are modeled on professional review contexts.
- Written synthesis: During the evaluation phase, students are required to submit written documentation of their projects, with the aim of developing the ability to structure clear and coherent presentations and to summarize their work effectively. In addition, the written test assesses their capacity to synthesize the historical and theoretical knowledge acquired throughout the course.

Learning skills

- The course is designed to promote autonomous management of the creative process and the conscious use of both theoretical tools (historical knowledge and visual models) and technical tools (software and technologies) specific to visual design.
- The didactic approach is based on a *learning by doing* methodology, aimed at supporting the empirical and progressive learning required in design practice. Students will be encouraged to develop personal critical and operational tools, useful for deepening their own aesthetic awareness, also through the analysis and selection of relevant visual, theoretical, and design sources.

Contents

The course implies in theoretical and practical modalities.

The four theoretical modules purpose to provide the student with a cultural, historical and planning basis of visual design and are structured in frontal lessons. The first module focuses on the history of visual communication (styles and influences from 1880 to today), the second addresses the elements of composition (e.g. typography and layout) and applied theories of visual design (e.g. Gestalt), a the third concerns visual identity and corporate communication, while a fourth and final module deals with the more technical aspects of print and digital.

The practical part focuses on the graphic design of an editorial artefact in both printed and digital format. The lesson plan includes three workshop lessons to support the editorial design project.

Detailed program

Historical introduction to styles and protagonists (from 1880 to the contemporary):
• Art nouveau and jugendstil
• Plakatstil (“object-poster” in German)
• Bauhaus movement
• International typographic style / Swiss style
• Pop art and radical design
• Digital Age
• Identity Design, brand and corporate

Elements of the composition:

• Typography and lettering
• Layout
• Color theory
• Language of images (photographic, graphic and illustrated)
• Printing technology

Prerequisites

Knowledge and basic competences required for the visual design class: an interest for art history and images analysis capabilities.

For the academic year 2026/2027 it will not be possible to select this course as a single-course entry.Exam not selectable from the study plan by students not enrolled in Scienze Psicosociali della Comunicazione (Psychosocial Sciences of Communication).

Teaching methods

The course is planned in 11 lessons of 42 hours total: 6 lessons of 4 hours in-person lecture-based classes, 3 lesson of 4 hours in interactive-classes as a project laboratory, 2 lessons of interactive-classes for the presentation of group work (6 hours in total) always in presence.

Theoretical lessons and multidisciplinary design activities aimed at exercising skills in the perspective of know-how, critical thinking and conscious choices.
Primary goal is develop the ability to analyze and decode visual communication.
The course is supported by a computer lab for practical teaching of graphic design software.
The course is in Italian.

Assessment methods

Written test with mandatory oral exam.
Assessment modality is theoretical and practical.
The exam consists of two parts: the elaboration of a graphic project (individual or group) and a written computer exam (open-ended questions and multiple choice questionnaire) based on the bibliography and the teaching material provided.
Evaluation: both the design and theoretical methods will be evaluated up to 30 points and will average each other.
For attending students, the design activity will be verified on an ongoing basis with a presentation in the last classroom lessons.
For non-attending students, the methods for developing the project are specified on the e-learning page of the course. The project will be presented on the dates scheduled for the exam session, immediately following the written exam.

- **practical:** editorial graphics design activity with final presentation and related critical discussion. The evaluation of the student will take place on the basis of the quality of the work carried out and the characteristic elements of the project (strategy, creativity, coherence with the objectives, realization and effectiveness of the developed prototype);
- **theoretical:** written exam, set up with open-ended questions and a multiple-choice questionnaire, aimed at

verifying the acquisition of historical and critical knowledge relating to the topics covered in the exam bibliography and in the teaching material provided.

Although this course is held in Italian, for Erasmus students, course material can also be available in English, and students can take the exam in English if they wish to do so.

Assessment criteria and grading thresholds

The final grade is based on the average of the written test and the oral/practical examination (project presentation).

30 cum laude (with honors): Excellent

- Written test: The student demonstrates depth and completeness of acquired knowledge, along with the ability to synthesize and critically elaborate on the material.
- Practical/oral examination: The graphic design project is visually engaging and of high quality; it is refined in detail and presented to the audience with clarity, awareness, and persuasive communication. The brief is interpreted with originality and design maturity.

30: Optimal

- Written test: Complete knowledge, well-structured and correctly expressed, including some analytical and personal insights.
- Practical/oral examination: The project is well-structured, visually effective, and coherent with the intended communication objectives; the presentation is fluent and well-argued.

29–27: Good

- Written test: Substantially complete knowledge, with minor inaccuracies or limited critical articulation.
- Practical/oral examination: The project adequately responds to the brief, with good technical execution and a clear, though not always incisive or fully developed, presentation.

26–24: Fair

- Written test: Basic knowledge has been acquired, though presented with some uncertainty or organizational gaps.
- Practical/oral examination: The project meets the minimum requirements and is understandable, but shows conceptual, technical, or communicative weaknesses.

23–21: Sufficient

- Written test: Fragmented knowledge, with errors or simplifications that hinder overall comprehension.
- Practical/oral examination: The project is poorly structured, with weak or unconvincing visual solutions; the presentation is hesitant and lacks coherence.

21–18: Barely sufficient

- Written test: Minimal and incomplete knowledge, with poor command of the specific terminology.
- Practical/oral examination: The project only partially meets the stated objectives; the presentation is basic and ineffective.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

- Lupton E. (2024), *Thinking with type*, Quinto Quarto
- Falcinelli, R. (2014). *Critica portatile al visual design: da Gutenberg ai social network*. Einaudi.

Further information will be available and updated on the course's e-learning website.

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Sustainable Development Goals

GENDER EQUALITY | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS