

Design Process

Define the Problem | Learn | Generate Ideas | Design Development | Implementation

National Visual Art Standards

VA:Cr2.1.IIa: Through experimentation, practice, and persistence, demonstrate acquisition of skills and knowledge in a chosen art form.

VA:Cr2.3.IIa: Redesign an object, system, place, or design in response to contemporary issues.

VA:Re7.2.IIa: Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of...

VA:Re8.1.IIa: Identify types of contextual information useful in the process of constructing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works.

Guiding Questions

- Why are project objectives important?
- Why must designers scrutinize every project detail?
- How can a designer uncover the underlying or real design problem?

Objectives

Students will...

- recognize that information given them is not always correct and useful;
- pinpoint the actual root(s) of a problem;
- explore, analyze, and formulate new creative solutions to the presented problems.

Vocabulary

Band-aid solution: a temporary solution that does not deal with the root cause of a problem.

Define the problem: Well-defined problems lead to breakthrough solutions. A big problem is when the wrong problem is approached leading to band-aid solutions. Designers can seek out the real problem in an effort to provide solutions which will actually fix the problem. [hbr.org/2012/09/the-power-of-defining-the-prob]

Interpersonal: relating to relationships or communication between people.

Perceptive: having or showing sensitive insight.

Solution: something used or done to deal with and end a problem—solving the problem.

Visual hierarchy: is the arrangement of visual elements in a way that not only implies importance, but leads the eye from one place to another creating visual contrast and order.

Time Period: at least two classes, 45-60 minutes in length

Lesson Introduction: Define the problem

In order to solve a problem designers need to understand it. Sometimes what is presented and described as the problem actually is not. Designers must learn to figure out (evaluate) for themselves (and their clients) what the root problem is and then proceed to solve it. The tendency is to blame the easiest scapegoat. This is called the **band-aid solution**—temporarily cover it up only.

In December 2015, Steve Harvey was hosting the Miss Universe pageant and announced the wrong winner. He proceeded to correct his error while speculation soared. As usual, the public wanted a scapegoat, Steve owned up to the mistake but an error still happened. What was the real problem?



FIGURE 1: 2015 Miss Universe Elimination Card. Though the MISS UNIVERSE 2015 is set in bold capital letters, it's also the furthest away from the top left corner, where we first look for information in print. The huge amount of empty space surrounding it actually helps to hide it in this instance.

It would be easy to point fingers at the host and ignore the real issue—the wrong person was announced as winner. Though it may have made the show more exciting, it was an embarrassing error. The elimination card and bad design have been identified as possible culprits. Figure 1 portrays the actual elimination card. At first glance one may judge this as perfectly obvious, but if put in context in the heat of the moment with millions of eyes on us. How easy it would have been to overlook the actual winner, in the bottom right corner, and crown miss Colombia.

Defining the problem is the first step in the design process. If the designer doesn't understand the real problem, there isn't much

Materials

- Paper
- Pencil
- Sketchbook

Figures

1. 2015 Miss Universe Elimination Card
2. Miss Universe Elimination Card alternative designs

Art Context, Cultural Connections and Relevancy

Often, people take what is presented at face value. Just look at current issues in politics, religion, social circles, etc. This can also be applied to complicated high school social circles. There are ample examples of misunderstanding, where the real problems behind issues are ignored, and band-aid solutions slapped on. Understanding the underlying causes behind something (defining the problem) can bring about more understanding and better solutions. This awareness will better prepare students to not only solve creative problems but creatively understand and solve larger life issues. Students can start defining what the real problems are and start deciphering the real reasons behind the issues that surround them. The sooner students really understand a problem, the sooner they can choose to do something about it.

Let's look at racism for example. A student may not think they are racist, yet may not look an African American person in the eye, or unconsciously avoids places where Asians shop or play. These subtle actions are noticed and hurtful to the recipient of those actions, even if unintended. They may unknowingly perpetuate racism. Being able to define real problems can help students realize they're even participating in these behaviors and habits in the first place. Once they've identified the problem, then they can act to change their behavior, but first they have to recognize there is a problem.



FIGURE 2: Miss Universe Elimination Card alternative designs. The top two design solutions are provided by The Hustle (<http://thehustle.co/steve-harvey-was-set-up-to-fail-in-miss-universe>), which states that Steve Harvey was set up to fail because of the poorly designed elimination card (which even included a spelling error—see Figure 1). The third redesigned card by Branding Specialist Eric Thomas (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-bad-design-wrecked-steve-harveys-universe-eric-thomas>) exemplifies simple utilitarian design that matches the rest of the show.

that can be solved and the status quo stays the same. Evaluation leads to understanding, which leads to action. If the Miss Universe pageant doesn't implement change (whatever that may be), the potential for the same mistake is still there. Figure 2 showcases three

alternative designs for the results card. The underlying design issues in the original card lie with the lack of logical order including sizing, placement, and organization issues. The three examples easily lead the eye from 2nd Runner Up to 1st Runner Up to Miss Universe. The innate **visual hierarchy** emphasizes the winning name instead of the position. It should be pointed out that there may be more than one possible **solution** to a problem. The design process can help students find the most appropriate.

Students need to understand the real problem in order to look for appropriate solutions. The tendency is to do what has been done in the past because that is easy to see and do. By learning how to search out and define the problem, students will be better prepared to come up with unique solutions.

These skills can be useful not only with design and art making but also other areas of their lives as well. Let's take a look at **interpersonal** relationships for example. Though this is especially important in the business world, communication between people and building relationships can sometimes be bumpy. Students can learn to "define the problem" in an effort to understand, define, and keep healthy relationships.

ACTIVITY PROCESS

Engagement (the hook–motivation and relevancy)

Ask students if they have ever jumped to conclusions or if others have jumped to conclusions about them. How did they feel when someone else jumped to conclusions concerning them? Ask them why they think people jump to conclusions. Often, it's because there is a lack of understanding. The Define the Problem step of the design process is the understanding that keeps people from jumping to conclusions. Once a deeper understanding has occurred, people often regret jumping to conclusions and the trouble and hurt it has creates.

DAY 1

Assignment 1–Band Poster

SCENARIO: The band Nirvana (client) comes to you (agency) seeking help. Their music sales have dropped so they want a new advertising poster to drive up sales.

OBJECTIVE: To find out what the real problem is and suggest possible solutions (not actually design a band poster). Note: The first inclination students will have is to literally design a band poster because the client suggested it. The client/professional relationship is often perceived as authoritative—"I'm paying you so you do what I want, and I want a poster." This activity can be a good springboard to discussion on value of professional design services and professionalism in general.

SPECIFICATIONS: Each group must identify and present at least five possible reasons why sales are down and five possible solutions to fix the real problem.

PROCESS:

1. Form small groups (three–four students per group).

2. Analyze the presented problem—the obvious problem is that sales are down, the real problem is why sales are down. This is what you're after.
3. Analyze the real problem and have students list possible reasons why sales are down. Possibilities include: Nirvana music style is no longer popular, fans are older and have moved on, lead singer has died and they now suck... It is not important for them to be correct at this point but analytical instead. Preposterous reasons are all right at this point. The idea is to have students think about the possible underlying issues driving the presented problem. Once the real problem has been identified, appropriate solutions can be developed.
4. Come up with solutions to the list of possible problems. Example: problem—lead singer is dead; solutions—a. current lead singer is terrible (define terrible) and a new one is needed, b. band needs to dissolve, c. repurpose old music with original singer, d. rebrand as new band... The real issues are what you're after. Thinking about hypothetical solutions is an added bonus and can be fun. There are no "wrong" ideas at this point.

HINTS: Let students be silly. Play is a useful tool in the creative process.

Adaptations and Accommodations

Students who need more support may be allowed to present less possible reasons and solutions to the real problem with in less detail.

Extensions

Students who need more of a challenge could be required to provide additional detailed solutions to the real problem.

Even though students haven't learned the rest of the design process yet, more advanced students can start thinking about visual solutions to the real problem.

Homework or Independent Work

Depending on how long and thorough the introduction was, students may need more time to complete their portion of the project.

Closure

Things may not be as they first appear. The first goal (step) in the design process is to evaluating and defining the problem. As students start to come up with possible solutions, have them start to think about how they can present their findings to the class as groups on day two.

Checks For Understanding

When students are working in groups, double check to make sure they're addressing the real problem and contribute to their process by adding a possible solution yourself, reinforcing what ideas they're already coming up with but also giving them direction if they've gone off track.

DAY 2**Assignment 1–Band Poster (continued)**

Students should be close to completing the first project. Give them a little time to finish up and gather their thoughts. Once groups have had ample time to complete the project specifications, it's time to have them present their findings.

Verbal presentation skills are a "must have" in the design industry, if not all industries. Designers often find themselves pitching a project or educating their client or boss. In an effort to start building presentation skills, have each group come up with a presentation method that works for them and then present to the class. The only requirement is that there must be a verbal component. All media is available for presentations.

This presentation is less about perfection as it is about experiencing public speaking, which scares most people. As groups are preparing, encourage good presentation skills through practice. Have students use note cards or other preparation/practice methods.

Adaptations and Accommodations

Public presentation can be nerve racking for some, yet others can thrive in the limelight. Hopefully the class will be comfortable with each other for this to go over smoothly. For those who struggle, try using prompts of some sort or emphasizing the group part of the presentation. Other group members can lead but purposefully include the shy student. For those who need more of a challenge, prepare counter questions, which will require students to think in place. These curve balls can be challenge but also realistic of a client relationship as we never work in a bubble and often have conversations instead of presentations.

Extensions

Students who need more of a challenge could provide specifically assigned visual aids to enhance their presentation.

Homework or Independent Work

None. Complete this assignment in class today.

Closure

The presented problem (revenue is down) and perceived solution (Band Poster) is often not the real issue (why sales are down). The client may not actually understand what the real problem is and may need help understanding the real reasons behind the problem. Appropriate solutions can only emerge by truly understanding the problem. To truly understand the problem students must delve deeper into everything that surrounds it. This is done through research, the next step in the design process.

Checks For Understanding:

Ask why students didn't actually make a band poster. A band poster would have been fun to create but not actually solve the real problem. Graphic designers need to be **perceptive** enough to understand and communicate the real problem to their clients. This makes them a

valuable asset to their clientele. If a poster were created, it would only have been a band-aid solution to the problem.

Lesson Assessment Based On Objectives

Students should be assessed on their ability to demonstrate an awareness and proper use of the Define the Problem step in the design process as it applies to their own work. The correct use of unit vocabulary in class dialog and in written reflection should be accurate and appropriate to the work they make and see. All work produced in and out of class—as well as student writing—should be collected and analyzed. (See *Unit 3D and 3E Rubrics.docx* for assessment and rubric ideas. Customize to meet class specific assessment needs.)



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