

Goals

Psychology is the science of behavior, the science of “how and why organisms do what they do.” This course aims to examine the psychological processes involved in the visual communication of information. In doing so, we will focus on basic issues in perceptual and cognitive psychology, restricting our inquiry to the visual system. Class presentations and readings will be the principle vehicle for your study of these matters. In addition, the course has a practical aim—to improve your ability to communicate your ideas visually. This involves the effective simultaneous presentation of words, numbers, and pictures. To do this well will require your to learn some desktop publishing software (i.e. Adobe InDesign for document layout and Adobe Photoshop for image processing).

Readings

Recommended, but not required:

Hoffman, D. D. *Visual intelligence: how we create what we see*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1998.

Parker, R.C. *Looking good in print, sixth edition*. Scottsdale, AZ: Paraglyph Press, 2006.

In addition User Guides for InDesign and Photoshop (both in version CS3), as well as selected chapters from the two books below are available in Adobe Acrobat pdf format on BlackBoard. Before using these materials please review the license agreements; you are bound by their terms.

Adobe InDesign CS2: Classroom in a Book. Adobe Press, 2004.

Adobe Photoshop CS2: Classroom in a Book. Adobe Press, 2004.

Web Links and Tips

Photoshop:

<http://www.adobe.com/support/photoshop/>

InDesign:

<http://www.adobe.com/support/indesign/>

Software

I emphatically recommend that you begin to learn to use the software during the first week of the course. Class presentations will introduce you to the basics of InDesign and Photoshop, but there is simply no alternative to extensive hands on experience with these programs. Campus computer labs which have all the necessary software are as follows: Macintosh—Mudd Academic Commons Classroom 113; Mudd Academic Commons Multimedia Area, Science Library, Art Library).

Thirty-day evaluation versions, for both operating systems, of InDesign and Photoshop are available for download from Adobe's web site.

Class Meetings

Class meeting will include several types of activities: more-or-less traditional lecture presentations covering didactic materials (on perceptual and cognitive psychology, as well as principles of document design), software demonstrations, and critiques of student work. A tentative calendar is presented below.

Projects

Term Paper (due 19 February)—Most Oberlin College term papers are doubles-paced text documents printed on an inkjet or laser printer and submitted as hard copy to the instructor. How many “real world” documents look like that? Not many. Real world documents (think, for example, of popular magazine or scholarly journal articles) provide a visual structure that serves to organize the content. They are often illustrated.

Begin with the text of a term paper, or other written assignment, at least four pages in length. Transform that text into a document that communicates visually. The February 9th class meeting will introduce additional ideas and the basics of using InDesign for document layout.

Poster (due 10 March)—Design a poster (to be affixed to walls in classroom buildings and other suitable locations) for a campus event. Include at least one image. Use actual events from the activity calendar for the fall term. Your goal is to generate the largest possible audience of interested persons.

Statistical Graphic (due 9 April)—Find a relatively simple set of quantitative data. Create a brief text description of the issue they cover, and prepare an appropriate, informative graphic to accompany the text (to be published in a national news magazine).

Print Ads (due 28 April)—Design a print ad campaign (consisting of at least three ads) introducing a new product or service. You should begin by constructing a brief prospectus (one or two text paragraphs maximum) describing the new product or service, and its target audience. Select a publication, or publications, for the ads' placements, and design them, either in black and white, or color.

Newsletter (due 7 May)—Prepare the first issue of a four-page newsletter for an organization. In an accompanying text document briefly describe the publication's purpose, readership, and frequency of publication.

Final Project (due 17 May)—Develop a substantial document that incorporates many of the principles you have learned in this course. The project can take a variety of forms, depending largely on your own interests.

Portfolio

Looking closely at visual communications is an excellent way of

sharpening your eye, and of developing your own sense of basic design principles. I therefore encourage you to collect examples, both good and bad, of print materials and web sites. Keep the exemplars of excellence in one folder (designers call this a “swap file”); keep odious oddities in another file (I’d call this “dead meat”). In both cases annotate the examples, indicating the strengths and weakness of each.

Critiques

Some class sessions will be devoted to critiques of student Projects. You should attempt to provide constructive criticism, offered with collegueship, taste, and good humor. I will, of course, provide my own comments on each work presented for in-class critique.

Evaluation and Grading

The course is offered on a Pass/No Pass basis only. To pass the course, projects must be completed in a timely fashion, and with some reasonable level of effort and quality. If an individual project does not meet this standard, I will ask you to submit it again. While the class critiques provide the primary basis for feedback about student work, I am always prepared to provide additional assessment during individual meetings. Please schedule appointments via e-mail.

Documents

All Project documents must be submitted, by 4:00 p.m. on the due date, in Adobe’s pdf format, to the Assignments section of Blackboard for this course. To upload your file, click on “View/Complete Assignment”, navigate to “Attach local file”,

and click “Browse”. Find the file on your computer. Once you have located it, double-click or highlight and click “Open”. The path to the file should appear. Click “Submit” to finish and upload the file.

Document names are to take this format:

[Name]_[Assignment].[extension]

Where:

Name—your ObieID, generally your first initial plus the first seven characters of your last name (e.g. scarrier)

Assignment—the assignment name, i.e.,

Project1—Project 1

Extension—the correct extension for the type of file, for example:

.pdf for Adobe Acrobat portable document format files

Thus, the first Project should have a file name like:

scarrier_Project1.pdf

Honor Code

Oberlin’s Honor Code applies to all work in this course. For the Projects, you may discuss the overall assignment and your approach to it with other students and you may seek technical assistance with the software, but the final product must be exclusively yours. Submission of a document effectively constitutes your signature to the Honor Pledge: “I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment”.

Visual Communication Calendar

February

4 Introduction to course
6 Document layout and InDesign basics
11 Fonts and typography
13 Optics
18 Visual physiology
20 Term Paper project critique
25 Image acquisition
27 Image processing and Photoshop basics

March

4 Gestalt principles
6 Form
11 Poster project critique
13 Depth
18 No class
20 No class

25 Spring Break

27 Spring Break

April

1 Statistical graphics
3 Maps
8 Business communications
10 Statistical graphic project critique
15 Advertising
17 Memory
22 Eye movements and reading
24 No class
29 Print Ad project critique

May

1 Printing
6 Web design
8 Newsletter project critique