# GRAPHIC DESIGN ELECTIVE

Summer 2025

CFA AR 389

*Foundations of graphic design*

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|---|---|
| LEVEL | Elective · condensed summer course |
| CREDITS | 4 |
| MEETS | Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 9:30–12:30 |
| DATES | May 21 – June 26, 2025 (six weeks) |
| LOCATION | [confirm] |
| INSTRUCTOR | Associate Professor Nicholas Rock |
| OFFICE | 808 Commonwealth Ave — 406A |
| CONTACT | nickrock@bu.edu |
| OFFICE HOURS | By appointment |

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## Overview

> Not everything is design. But design is about everything. So do yourself a favor: be ready for anything. —Michael Bierut, *79 Short Essays on Design*

The goal of this studio is to give you a basic understanding of the foundational principles of graphic design. You will be introduced to different concepts and studio processes through a series of projects, working both on and off the computer, readings, and homework assignments.

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## Learning Outcomes

We will cover three major learning objectives:

### Explore the relationship between object and image.

Basic principles of visual form making and image composition. Understanding of object and image through representation, visual metaphor, and context.

### Investigate the use of language through typographic form.

Introduction to basic concepts of typography. Basic principles of typography as form, typography as content. The impact of the written word on visual form.

### Develop communication through the use of narrative and visual storytelling.

Building on what we discussed in the first two topic areas, we will begin to experiment with combining concept, type, image, and language to create narratives and visual stories to more broadly understand graphic design principles.

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## Course Structure

### Class as Community

I come into this class from a place of respect and trust, and I hope that you all do too.

**We are a microcosm** — of the department, the school, the university, and while small, we are still an incredibly diverse community. Our cohort includes students from all over the world with all sorts of backgrounds and experiences.

**Our class is inclusive and accessible** — We come from different places, backgrounds, and walks of life. We embrace the unique identities of each member of this community and commit to learning, growing, and understanding each other through historical contexts of race, gender, religion, sexuality, and other expressions of self.

**I understand that your trust is earned** — I am committed to helping you grow and learn and change or solidify your perspective and knowledge in design, and I am committed to learning from you. I will ensure that our class is a safe space to teach and learn, as I see all of us working in both capacities.

**We will explore diverse content** — I am working to ensure that this course represents a vast range of perspectives, ideas, topics, people, and cultures through what I will provide and what I hope you all will bring to the conversation. I will also strive to elevate your voices in this class through the project work and the conversation.

**We will be flexible, patient, and understanding** — I made a syllabus and a schedule of projects. I will shift and adjust the work and the due dates to adapt to our class. There is understandable uncertainty coming into this semester. Let’s commit to the experience and see where it takes us.

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## Projects

Over the next six weeks, you will be completing a series of micro-projects or investigations.

| WEEKS | THEME | PROJECT | CLASS DATES |
|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | Process of Making | Rigorous Form | 5/21, 5/22 |
| 02 | Interpreting Content | Place as Content | 5/27, 5/28, 5/29 |
| 03 + 04 | Visual Communication | Elements Poster | 6/3, 6/4, 6/5, 6/10, 6/11, 6/12 |
| 05 + 06 | Narrative + Storytelling | Collections | 6/17, 6/18, 6/19, 6/24, 6/25, 6/26 |

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# Assessment

## Evaluation Criteria

- **Engagement.** A class as a community depends on the engagement of the class members. Part of a designer's job is communicating effectively, on a design team, in a studio environment, or with clients. We ask that you attempt to be an active class member, particularly during critiques, as all feedback is valuable and essential. Discussion is a significant part of the design process. We want to ensure everyone has the opportunity to have their voices heard. My goal is to be flexible and accommodating, but you are required to attend class meetings. If you cannot participate in a class for some reason, please get in touch with me — in advance if possible — to ensure you stay connected with the community discussion. Time in the studio environment is crucial. Class discussion and critique are things not easily made up and happen regularly, and we will regularly try to offer you multiple perspectives to help guide your work.
- **Group Work.** Designers rarely work independently. Completed work is almost always the result of a team or collaborative effort of some sort, whether it be with other designers, clients, developers, writers, etc. There will be times when you will need to work as part of a collaborative group in this class.
- **Project Execution.** All of the projects in this course require your full attention and effort. Projects need to be submitted on time and completed according to the project brief. We will have a review at the completion of each project, though you will not receive an individual grade for each project. You will have an opportunity to improve upon each project following that project's final critique.
- **Project Process.** You should document the process of each of your projects throughout the semester. Save all sketches, writings, mockups, etc. Your documents will be given the same attention to detail as your design work. The process for each project will make up a portion of your grade.
- **Professionalism.** Professionalism means constantly practicing how you conduct and carry yourself in interactions with clients, employers, peers, etc. Practice humility, honesty, transparency, and respect. Pay attention to emails you send and things you say in class.

### Grading Structure

| WEIGHT | COMPONENT |
|---|---|
| 80% | Course assignments, from craft to final product |
| 10% | Conceptual and visual skills, risk taking, and personal development |
| 10% | Motivation and participation |

- **A** — You demonstrate an advanced understanding of concepts presented and are able to complete work above and beyond suggested parameters.
- **B** — You exhibit a more than competent understanding of concepts presented and utilize these concepts in an articulate and noteworthy manner.
- **C** — You demonstrate a basic understanding of the information studied and apply this information to assigned problems, meeting basic expectations but not going beyond suggested parameters.
- **D** — You exhibit limited understanding of the concepts and complete work below the level required for satisfactory performance.
- **F** — You demonstrate little or no understanding of course material, show little desire or motivation to complete the work, or turn in incomplete projects.

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## Calendar

Six weeks, May 21 – June 26, 2025, meeting Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Week 01 meets Wednesday and Thursday only. See Projects for the weekly sequence.

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## Materials & Tools

### Things You Need

Basic design kit for you to function in the class. This is my basic list. If you are a nerd about what tech and supplies people use, check out usesthis.com.

**The essentials**

- Laptop
- Flash drive
- Camera
- Sketchbook + something to write with
- X-Acto knife + extra blades
- Bone folder
- A flatfile drawer (may need to share drawers)
- A sense of humor

**Recommended**

- Music
- Coffee, tea, water, or other sustenance is welcome here
- A projector adapter
- A tripod
- Gaffer tape
- Bookbinding materials

## Recommended Reading

- Tejada, Ramon, et al. *The Decolonizing Reader (resources)*, collaborative (open) edition.
- *Extra Bold: A Feminist, Inclusive, Antiracist, Nonbinary Field Guide for Graphic Designers.*
- Monteiro, Mike. *Ruined by Design: How Designers Destroyed the World, and What We Can Do to Fix It.*

## Software + Services

It goes without saying that you will need to have access to Adobe Creative Cloud if you don't already. I don't expect this to be an issue but wanted to be sure. That said, I think it is obnoxious that our industry is so reliant on prohibitively expensive design software from one giant corporation so I encourage you to explore alternatives to the Adobe software. Experiment with something new. Here are some good tools: Keynote, Pixelmator, Sketch, Procreate, Cinema4d, Figma, Miro.

We will be using a project management tool used by professionals in the design industry called Basecamp, to consolidate class communications. You all will have access to our Basecamp site after the first class; this will act as a central portal for class discussion outside of class as well as a digital library of class resources, such as this syllabus, project briefs, certain readings as well as our class calendar.

You MUST have a backup solution in place after the first week. I recommend Backblaze.

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# Policies

## Assignment Completion & Late Work

You are responsible for completing course assignments handed out in class by the due date. Late work will be penalized; however, it is expected that work will be submitted as soon as possible even if it is late. Incomplete or missing work requires an individual meeting during office hours.

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## Resources

### Accommodations for Students with Documented Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at (617) 353-3658 or access@bu.edu to coordinate any reasonable accommodation requests. ODS is located at 19 Buick Street.