



Wyoming Innovation Partnership - Graphic Design

Introduction

Graphic design is a creative process that involves visually communicating ideas, messages, or information through the use of typography, imagery, color and layout. Graphic Designers use various tools and techniques to create designs that are visually appealing, effective, and suitable for their intended purpose. Key aspects of graphic design are typography, imagery, color, layout, composition, hierarchy, and brand identity.

Graphic design can be applied across various mediums, including print (such as posters, brochures, and magazines), digital (such as websites, mobile apps, and social media graphics), and environmental (such as signage and wayfinding systems). Graphic designers often work closely with clients or stakeholders to understand their goals and requirements and then use their creative skills and technical expertise to bring concepts to life.

Graphic design can be used for a variety of purposes such as:

- **Branding:** Developing visual identities for businesses, products, or services, including logos, color schemes, typography, and brand guidelines.
- **Marketing and Advertising:** Creating promotional materials such as advertisements, posters, banners, flyers, brochures, and billboards to attract and engage target audiences.
- **Print Design:** Designing layouts for printed materials such as magazines, newspapers, books, packaging, labels, business cards, stationery, and promotional merchandise.
- **Digital Design:** Crafting visual assets for digital platforms, including websites, mobile apps, social media graphics, email newsletters, infographics, and digital advertisements.
- **User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX) Design:** Designing intuitive and visually appealing interfaces for websites, software applications, and interactive experiences, with a focus on usability and user satisfaction.
- **Environmental Design:** Creating signage, wayfinding systems, exhibition displays, environmental graphics, and interior or exterior branding elements for physical spaces.



- **Motion Graphics and Animation:** Designing animated graphics, titles, and visual effects for videos, presentations, motion graphics projects, and multimedia content.
- **Illustration:** Producing custom illustrations, icons, and graphics to enhance visual storytelling and convey complex concepts in a clear and engaging manner.
- **Packaging Design:** Designing product packaging and labels that not only protect the product but also communicate brand identity, product information, and value propositions to consumers.
- **Information Design:** Visualizing data and complex information through charts, graphs, diagrams, maps, and other visual representations to make it more understandable and accessible.
- **Game Design:** Designing Concept Art, character designs and environmental aspects of a video game.
- **Typography Design:** Creating custom typefaces, lettering, and typographic treatments to convey personality, enhance readability, and reinforce brand identity.
- **Corporate Communications:** Designing internal communication materials such as presentations, reports, newsletters, and employee manuals to inform and engage employees.

Hardware

There are only a few essential pieces of hardware that you need to get started as a graphic designer. The main one is a computer. You don't even have to own it necessarily; you can rent it or even use the computers at your local library or computer labs on campus at the University of Wyoming. If you are borrowing a computer or using one at your local library, it is also essential that you have a thumb drive or some sort of storage device to save your work on and take with you. If you own the computer, you can save locally to the machine.

Here is a list of hardware you will need to get started:

- Computer or tablet (+ stylus) that runs Windows, Mac, Android, or iOS
- Thumb drive (optional)
- Drawing tablet, such as ones made by [Wacom](#) or [Huion](#) (optional)



Software

Software is where you will be creating the designs you want to make. There are a couple of different options, some cost money and some are free. Additionally, there is software that is only for computers and others that are only for use on tablets.

The first types of software are ones you can use on your laptop or desktop computer:

- **[Adobe Creative Cloud \(\\$69.99/mo\)](#)**: A set of applications and services from Adobe that gives subscribers access to a collection of software used for graphic design, video editing, web development, photography, along with a set of mobile applications and some optional cloud services. In Creative Cloud, a monthly or annual subscription service is delivered over the Internet. Software from Creative Cloud is downloaded from the Internet, installed directly on a computer, and used as long as the subscription remains valid. The most important software for graphic design use is Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign, though many of the applications in Creative Cloud allow users to create on Windows or MacOS computers.
 - **[Photoshop \(\\$22.99/mo\)](#)**: A raster graphics editor that has become the most used tool for professional digital art. Photoshop can edit and compose raster images in multiple layers and supports masks, alpha compositing and several color models. Photoshop uses its own PSD and PSB file formats to support these features. In addition to raster graphics, Photoshop has limited abilities to edit or render text and vector graphics, as well as 3D graphics and video. It also has an integrated AI feature that supports the generative fill and generative expand tools.
 - **[Illustrator \(\\$22.99/mo\)](#)**: A vector graphics editor and design software. Adobe Illustrator uses a variety of tools to select, create, and manipulate objects or artworks. The files can be exported from Illustrator as a .png or .pdf and .svg and AutoCAD files are also supported. One of Illustrator's most important features is that the quality of artwork created using Illustrator is independent of the resolution at which it is displayed. This means that an image created in Illustrator can be enlarged or reduced without sacrificing image quality. Illustrator lets you create logos, icons, drawings, typography, and complex illustrations for any medium.
 - **[InDesign \(\\$22.99/mo\)](#)**: A desktop publishing and page layout designing software application. It can be used to create works such as posters, flyers, brochures, magazines, newspapers, presentations, books, and eBooks.



Graphic designers and production artists are principal users. It was the first Desktop Publishing (DTP) application to support Unicode character sets, advanced typography with OpenType fonts, advanced transparency features, layout styles, optical margin alignment, and cross-platform scripting with JavaScript.

- **[Affinity Creative Suite \(\\$164.99 for Universal License; \\$69.99 for individual software\)](#)**: The Affinity Creative Suite is a cost-effective and professional alternative to Adobe's software, offering three main programs that work seamlessly together. Affinity Designer (often compared to Illustrator) is a powerful vector-based design tool ideal for creating logos, icons, and illustrations. Affinity Photo (similar to Photoshop) provides advanced photo editing, retouching, and digital painting capabilities. Affinity Publisher (their equivalent of InDesign) is built for page layout and publishing projects, such as brochures, magazines, and books. All three programs feature non-subscription pricing, smooth integration with one another, and an intuitive interface designed to support both beginners and experienced designers. This makes the suite a strong option for those new to graphic design who want professional-grade tools without ongoing costs.
- **[GNU Image Manipulation Program \(GIMP\)](#)**: A free and open-source raster graphics editor used for image manipulation (retouching) and image editing, free-form drawing, transcoding between different image file formats, and more specialized tasks. It is an alternative to Adobe Photoshop. It can create similar items that you can create in Photoshop, such as icons, graphical design elements, and art for user interface components and mockups as well as manipulating images. GIMP can be used for GNU/Linux, MacOS, Windows and more operating systems.
- **[Inkscape](#)**: A free and open-source vector graphics editor for traditional Unix-compatible systems such as GNU/Linux, BSD derivative and Illumos, as well as Windows and MacOS. It is an alternative to Adobe Illustrator. It offers a rich set of features and is widely used for both artistic and technical illustrations such as cartoons, clip art, logos, typography, diagramming, and flowcharting. It uses vector graphics to allow for sharp printouts and rendering at unlimited resolution and is not bound to a fixed number of pixels like raster graphics. Inkscape uses the standardized Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG) file format as its main format, which is supported by many other applications including web browsers.
- **[Krita](#)**: A free and open-source raster graphics editor designed primarily for digital art and 2D animation. Originally created for Linux, the software also runs on Windows,



MacOS, Haiku, Android, and ChromeOS. It features an OpenGL-accelerated canvas, color management support, an advanced brush engine, non-destructive layers and masks, group-based layer management, vector artwork support, and switchable customization profiles. Krita is another alternative to Photoshop that can be used on tablets or computers.

- **Sketch**: A vector graphics editor for macOS. It is primarily used for user interface and user experience design of websites and mobile apps and does not include print design features. Sketch has more recently added features for prototyping and collaboration. Sketch uses a file format of its own, though files can also be opened in Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, and other programs. The designs can also be exported to raster or vector formats.
- **Canva**: An online template editor app for creating social media graphics, presentations, merch and websites. It is a graphic design tool that works to simplify the process of digital design. Canva allows for image editing and project-based learning using a simple drag-and-drop interface that works well even for younger students. Canva is web based so its easily accessible using any type of computer. You have to sign up using an email, Google account or Facebook account. Once an account is created, for free, you can pick if you're using it as a teacher, student or anything else to tailor the experience to your needs, making it simpler to search. Canva offers plenty of virtual templates so you can work with a design and add your own changes or start from scratch and make your own design. Not all designs or features are available for free; some require a premium account which costs money yearly. Canva is a great beginner tool to practice layouts and color theory.

Next, we will discuss software that you can only use on an iPad or Tablet but is beneficial for those who want to draw their own designs using a method similar to drawing with a pencil on paper.

- **Adobe Fresco**: A vector and raster graphics editor developed primarily for digital painting. Adobe Fresco was originally designed for Apple iPad; you can also download it to Windows tablets. The user interface contains different features including Live Brushes, basic photo editing, layering and more. Adobe Fresco can be downloaded onto a tablet or iPad for free.
- **Procreate**: A raster graphics editor app for digital painting developed for iOS and iPads. Unfortunately, it is currently only available for Apple products. Procreate has everything you need to create expressive sketches, rich paintings, gorgeous



illustrations, and beautiful animations. It offers hundreds of brushes, a suite of industry-leading artistic tools, an advanced layer system and the powerful Valkyrie graphics engine. Procreate has a one-time charge of \$12.99 currently.

Additional Materials

Starting out a project requires you to brainstorm ideas and potentially sketch out mockups for your design.

If you are just starting out with graphic design and want to see if it's for you, it would be most beneficial to try out the free software first. The most you need to get started is a computer. An iPad or tablet or drawing pad is recommended for those interested in digital painting, but it is not a necessity.

Installation and Setup

Once you've chosen your software, install it on your computer based on the type of system you have. For example, if you have purchased Adobe Creative Suite and have a Mac computer, you would download the Creative Suite software for MacOS. After your software is installed, open it and create a new document. That will look different for each piece of software.

Pitfalls

When starting out with graphic design, there are some common mistakes that new designers make.

Some common mistakes are:

- Using too many fonts in one design: It's important to remember graphic designers should avoid using too many fonts per piece and ensure proper kerning for legibility.
- Overusing icons or stock images: Overusing icons or stock images can detract from the overall design and should be used sparingly.
- Relying on trends: While it's important to stay current with design trends, they should not override client guidelines or the intended message of the piece.
- Choosing the wrong color scheme,
- Too many filters,
- Not proofing the final design, and,
- Losing patience.



Designers should always refer to the client's style guide to maintain brand consistency and effectively communicate the company's message. As a graphic designer, you should have patience to create your design and give it time to form. Sometimes working in a creative role can be challenging and it's inevitable that most graphic designers will make mistakes at some point during their careers. This doesn't mean that these mistakes have to impact these designers forever, as they are a great opportunity to learn and grow fundamental skill sets.

Projects

Fundamentals of Graphic Design

It is important to understand the different aspects that go into graphic design. Graphic design is more than just drawing a logo for a company. You need to think about the colors and line weights. To get a better understanding of these components of graphic design, I suggest watching the following YouTube playlist:

- [Beginners Guide to Graphic Design.](#)

Logo Creation

Once you understand the different components of graphic design, you'll want to start with some simple projects to get familiar with graphic design and the software you plan to use or even do the projects in different type of software to see which you like to work with more. The first project is creating a logo. Logos are the official representation of an organization or company. Creating a logo requires you to understand the needs, culture, and business position of the company.

- [Inskape for Beginners: Logo Design Tutorial](#)
- [10 Logo Design Tools for Beginners in Adobe Illustrator](#)

Business Cards

The next project should be making a business card. It's a great project to use after you make your logo because you can use the logo for the business card. Business cards still represent the professional face of a business entity. Designing a good business card is a perfect way to create something visually impressive.

- [4. Designing your Business Card in Canva | Skills](#)
- [How to Create Business Card in Adobe Illustrator](#)



Banners & Photo Collages

From there you can move on to creating banners and photo collages. Banners are not that different from social media covers and are the most standard graphic design for PR and marketing professionals. It might be beneficial to also design banners meant for YouTube visuals or social media graphics using the same techniques.

- [Create Stunning Banners FAST With Canva!](#)
- [How to Create a Photo Collage in Photoshop](#)

Icons

Then we move on to creating icons. Icons are used for pretty much everything. It is good for startup business owners to design their personalized icons to garner more attraction. Designing icons boils down to simplicity but can add to an entrepreneur or startup business look.

- [Create Simple Icons | Illustrator Tutorial](#)
- [How To Design & Prepare App Icons in Inkscape | Tutorial](#)

Brochures & Handbills

PR, communication and marketing professionals today design brochures for specific events or promotions. Once you figure out the brochure details, you can try out various color pallets and aesthetic choices that make the brochure more appealing to users.

- [How to Make a Tri-Fold Brochure InDesign \(Step-by-step\)](#)
- [How to Make a Brochure in Canva | Canva Tutorial](#)

Infographics

Lastly, creating a tool for communicating information practically and effectively, an infographic. They have become a staple element in modern blog posts and are highly favored by digital marketers for their ability to simplify complex information through data charts.

- [Inkscape Tutorial: Create an Infographic](#)
- [Create an infographic with minimalist designs in Illustrator CC](#)

And More!

Following these tutorials and creating different types of projects will help you get familiar with different software as well as expand your knowledge of graphic design. It will also help you learn what works best in terms of colors, lines, shapes, textures, etc. From there you



can go on to building your design portfolio. There are several personal projects you can consider building your portfolio:

- Branding and identity design for fictional or local businesses
- Packaging design for a new product concept
- Poster or flyer design for events or causes you are passionate about
- Infographic design to visualize data or information on a topic of interest
- Website or app interface design for a fictional or real organization
- Illustration series based on a theme or story
- Typography and lettering projects showcasing your skills
- Social media graphics for a hypothetical or real campaign

You should look at completing these projects using the software of your choice after you have done some beginner projects. It is best to start with small, easy projects and move on to more advanced projects that will look good in a portfolio.

Conclusion

Graphic design is not hard to get into; multiple free or low-cost software options makes the barrier to entry low. However, it takes practice to develop your graphic design skills. Learning about the different aspects of graphic design and working with the different software to figure out what works best for you is essential. After you figure out what software works best for you and you get the hang of creating logos and banners, you can start to build a portfolio to help you start a career in graphic design.

Additional Readings/Resources

Tutorials and Online Courses

YouTube is an excellent place to start, with thousands of free resources and tutorials on design principles, typography, branding, and software tutorials.

- [Graphic Design Basics](#) by Canva Design School
- [The Futur Academy \(YouTube\)](#) — focused on design theory, business, and branding
- [Adobe Creative Cloud Tutorials](#) — official step-by-step guides for Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign
- [Envato Tuts+ Design & Illustration](#) — step-by-step tutorials on design tools and concepts



If you have access to LinkedIn Learning, Coursera, Udemy, or another online learning platform, there are dozens of courses available. Some search terms you might look up are:

- “Graphic Design Fundamentals”
- “Typography”
- “Brand Identity Design”
- “Digital Illustration”
- “UI/UX Design”
- Or, any software you are interested in learning (such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Canva, etc.)

Social Groups and Learning Communities

- **Reddit** (e.g., [r/graphic_design](#), [r/Design](#), [r/Design_Critiques](#))
- **Dribbble** — a platform for designers to share work and get feedback
- **Facebook & Discord** — numerous graphic design groups focused on feedback, resources, and networking

Online Magazines and Blogs

- **Creative Bloq** — articles, tutorials, and industry news for design professionals
- **Smashing Magazine** — covers web and graphic design, UX, and front-end development
- **AIGA Eye on Design** — insights and stories from the professional design community
- **Design Shack** — inspiration, tutorials, and design trend coverage