

29 THINGS YOUNG DESIGNERS NEED TO KNOW

AND AREN'T ALWAYS TAUGHT IN DESIGN SCHOOL

No. 1 SWEAT the details	No. 2 PLAY NICE don't burn bridges	No. 3 DON'T FEAR TYPE become its master	No. 4 DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE communicate with purpose	No. 5 BE YOURSELF it's ok to tell your own story
No. 6 LEARN TO SAY NO sometimes you need to walk away	No. 7 COLLECT AND SHARE anything and everything	No. 8 BE A DESIGN AUTHOR the opportunities are diverse	No. 9 BUILD YOUR BOOK it's a beast you must feed	No. 10 CLEAN UP YOUR ACT employers read twitter too
No. 11 RE: SEARCH and destroy	No. 12 OBSERVE THE TRENDS then avoid them	No. 13 DEFEND YOURSELF practice makes perfect	No. 14 PAPER MATTERS print lives, rejoice!	No. 15 CONTENT IS STILL KING design is simply a plan
No. 16 REJECT PERSONAL STYLE difficult, but not impossible	No. 17 SAY NO TO SPEC WORK avoid like the plague	No. 18 BECOME INDISPENSABLE expand your talents	No. 19 JOIN AIGA a no-brainer	No. 20 BUILD relationships
No. 21 SEEK CRITICISM accept praise	No. 22 NEVER COMPROMISE you work too hard	No. 23 KNOW YOUR HISTORY understand design's cultural past	No. 24 VALUE YOUR WORK this is your livelihood	No. 25 MAKE MISTAKES take some changes
Many of the questions and concerns young designers share today are the same we had as graduating students looking to make our mark in the professional world—with only a résumé and portfolio of student projects to try and get our collective feet in the door. We've all been there and done that. There's nothing different in the design industry today that makes getting—and nailing—that initial interview or client pitch any easier than it has been in the past.	Throughout the years I've collected these questions and have tried answering many of them as an ongoing personal project. Here are 29 of these thoughts on how to approach and interact with our culture as a young designer, in no particular order.	Originally designed for the January 2011 issue of HOW Magazine, this poster was originally written and designed by id29's Doug Bartow.	Re: Designed by Matt Smith	
No. 26 KEEP A SKETCHBOOK in your bag or back pocket	No. 27 YOUR MAC IS A TOOL rock on unplugged	No. 28 RESPECT the environment	No. 29 TEACH OTHERS share your knowledge	

No. 5

Be confident in yourself as an author, designer, photographer, creative. Don't work in a particular style, rather develop a personal approach to your creative work. **Your commissioned work should never be about you, but it can certainly reveal your hand as the designer.** As your work becomes more well-known, you will get hired for exactly that. For your personal work, don't be afraid to tell your story. No one else is going to do it for you.

DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

No. 6

Some of your best design business decisions will ultimately be saying "no" to clients or projects. Unfortunately it usually takes a few disasters to gain the experience to know when to walk away from an impeding train wreck. Carefully measure the upside of a project, such as: creative control of your design work, long-term relationship building and gross billing versus the potential downside: the devaluation of the creative process, being treated like a "vendor" and ongoing scope creep (where the volume of what you're expected to deliver keeps expanding while the schedule and budget don't).

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No. 7

Find and save relevant and interesting things and pass them along to your friends, coworkers, followers and clients. Use the web and social media to share your own photos and work, as well as the work of others you find engaging. Be funny, serious, irreverent, businesslike, self-promotional, curatorial, whatever - just be yourself. For everyday inspiration, surround your workplace with the design ephemera you collect. (see #5)

PLAY NICE

No. 8

Develop ideas. Write them down, edit, share them, elicit a response. Poof! You're a design author. **Read the design blogs and participate in the discussions - have an opinion.** If you find yourself spending hours a week contributing to other designers' blogs, consider starting your own. The cost and effort for start up are minimal, and the opportunities are diverse.

COLLECT AND SHARE

No. 9

One piece of advice I give young designers looking to **fill out their portfolios** is to find the best local arts organization with the worst visual brand identity or website and make a trade. They get some great design work, and you get creative control and real-world projects in your book that other potential clients will recognize.

BUILD YOUR BOOK

No. 10

Manage your online profiles carefully and be sure to keep all your listings accurate, consistent and (mostly) professional. You can count on co-workers, potential employers and clients Googling you, so make sure what they find won't be too incriminating and sink your chances for that new job or project. **Employers read social media posts too - especially ones that include proper names** - so use common sense.

CLEAN UP YOUR ACT

No. 11

You'll never know as much about your clients' business as they do, but part of our job as designers is to try. Learn as much as you possibly can at the inception of a project about your client's business space, their goals, their competition and their history. **Dedicate a half- or full-day download session, ask a lot of questions, shut up and listen.**

RESEARCH

No. 12

Keep current on the state of our industry by reading books, the pubs and blogs and attending conferences. RSS feeds will allow you to skim design- and culturally-related content in your leisure time when it's convenient. Avoid design annuals as a source of inspiration, as they are a record of what has already been done. **Study the work of others to understand it, and not to duplicate it.**

OBSERVE THE TRENDS

No. 13

One of the biggest benefits of a formal design education is the lessons learned in the crit room defending your work in front of your instructor and peers. If you can articulate your ideas and explain your design process in the hostile environment, learning to do the same in client meetings usually come easy. (see #21)

DEFEND YOURSELF

No. 14

Contrary to what you might read on the blogosphere, print is not dead. The beauty and tactility of a well-printed page on quality paper cannot be appreciated or replicated on the screen, cannot be appreciated or replicated on the screen, tablet or mobile device. Paper manufacturers, merchants and printers are doing a terrific job helping designers make sustainable paper choices to minimize the impact on our environment. Become wellversed with the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification program, and use this knowledge to choose your papers wisely. Clients are demanding it. (see #28)

CONTENT IS STILL KING

No. 15

Technically, Elvis is still the King, but for the sake of this argument, let's put an emphasis on the message and consider design as the plan for delivering it. The most effective and memorable visual communication almost always has the right mix of form and content regardless of medium. **Good design can engage a viewer, but interesting content will keep them reading, and thinking, past the headline.**

MATTERS

No. 16

Picasso had his Blue and Rose Periods. Georgia O'Keeffe obsessed over flowers and animal bones. The difference between them and you? **They were artists solving their own personal communication problems. We are designers, primarily tasked with solving the communication problems of others.** Using one singular style or direction for multiple clients or projects will rarely be successful and, in retrospect, will look one-dimensional. (see #11)

RESEARCH

No. 17

What are you really good at? Contrast that to the skillsets that could help you advance at the workplace. Could your studio benefit from having an in-house photographer, web programmer, video editor or screen printer? Follow your bliss and get the additional training you need to expand your talents and, ultimately, your role at work. **Now, does the studio come to a grinding halt when you're home sick for a day? Congrats.** You're indispensable.

KNOW YOUR HISTORY

No. 18

Founded in 1914 in New York, AIGA is the professional association for design, and represents more than 21,000 design professionals, educators and students with 65 local chapters and 200+ student groups. AIGA supports our efforts at the chapter and national level through the exchange of design ideas and information, research, innovative programming and as a source of inspiration. **If you're missing that sense of design community you had in school in the professional world, AIGA will help reconnect you for life.**

JOIN AIGA

No. 19

What are you really good at? Contrast that to the skillsets that could help you advance at the workplace. Could your studio benefit from having an in-house photographer, web programmer, video editor or screen printer? Follow your bliss and get the additional training you need to expand your talents and, ultimately, your role at work. **Now, does the studio come to a grinding halt when you're home sick for a day? Congrats.** You're indispensable.

BECOME INDISPENSABLE

No. 20

Build personal relationships with everyone you work with, not just your clients. Get to know your delivery people, paper merchants, printer reps, local politicians and business leaders. Attend Chamber of commerce event, network and meet people. Get on people's radar - they will be impressed with your well-designed business cards that prominently feature your web site address.

KNOW YOUR HISTORY

No. 21

As a designer, listening to your ideas questioned and hard work ripped apart isn't usually very pleasant. **However painful, constructive criticism of your design work is the most effective way to grow as a visual communicator.** Remember this when you leave the crit rooms of design school for the board rooms of the corporate world. Build a network of friends, co-workers and mentors you can use to collect feedback on your work. Online sites (heavy with anonymous commentary) are not an acceptable substitute for this discourse.

SEEK CRITICISM

No. 22

Once you've built strong relationships with everyone you work with (see #20), strategically use them to get what you want. Convince your clients to use the offset printers or web developers you know that value design and will actively work with you on the final quality of your project. We work too hard as designers to accept compromise at any stage of a job, especially when it can usually be avoided with proactive planning. Timelines that detail every step of a project and outline responsibilities for everyone involved are required to accomplish this.

COMPROMISE

No. 23

Learn as much as you possibly can about the history of graphic design - its movements, terminology and important figures. **Understanding design's cultural past will help you design in the present and future.** Study typefaces and their designers, and share with your clients the significance and history of the particular faces you've chosen for their projects. In addition to being a go-to design resource, this knowledge will help position you as a trusted advisor moving forward.

KNOW YOUR HISTORY

No. 24

One of the most common mistakes designers make early in their career is undervaluing their work in the marketplace. The best design jobs aren't always awarded to the low bidder - even a client with the smallest budget often values work experience and compatibility over price. Set an hourly rate for your services, and take a close look at the number of hours a job will take to accomplish, including revisions. Your estimate is simply your rate x the hours. Make sure you have a firm understanding of the entire scope of work you are providing a price for. **Trade? Sure, but don't make a habit of it - this is your livelihood, not a hobby.**

KNOW YOUR HISTORY

No. 25

Take a measured break from your normal comfort zone and experiment with an approach you've never tried before. Force yourself to take chances with form - use a different technique or medium with text and image to create work you're unfamiliar and uncomfortable with. Save and display your best piece as a reminder to think differently.

MAKE MISTAKES

No. 26

You don't need to be prolific at drawing to benefit from keeping a small book in your bag or back pocket. Ideas tend to arrive at the strangest of times, and being able to record them on the spot will help you remember them later. When you fill a book, date, number and shelf it. **Soon your bookcase will be a library of your best thoughts and ideas.**

RESPECT

No. 27

Twenty years ago, many in our industry were sure that "desktop publishing" would be the end of professional graphic design as we knew it. They confused convenience of new technology with the skill and passion required to design with it. Take a good look at your design methodology and the role technology plays in your work. **Can you select "shut down" and still be an effective visual communicator?** Practice that.

YOUR MAC IS A TOOL

No. 28

Make the everyday effort to create a positive environmental impact by integrating sustainable alternative in your work. Start small by identifying the things you can do in your studio to save energy and resources, and build from there. Present a digital slideshow rather than traditional color output spray-mounted to matboard. Get creative with your consumables by investing in reusable kitchenware and cloth towels in place of disposable plastic and paper products. Consider adopting the Designer's Accord (www.designersaccord.org) - a global connection of designers, educators and businesspeople working together to impact the environment through positive social change.

TEACH OTHERS

No. 29

Regardless of your experience, get involved with mentoring younger designers - or students who may be interested in design as a potential career path. It doesn't require developing a curriculum to get involved. Find a local AIGA chapter, design program or arts center and volunteer some of your time. Participate in local student portfolio reviews, and share your knowledge and expertise with aspiring designers. **You'll find the experience rewarding for everyone involved.**

TEACH OTHERS

No. 1

You are a professional communicator, act like one. Carefully edit everything you publish: résumés, email, social media and blog posts, letters, text messages... everything. Get a copy of The Chicago Manual of Style and keep it handy. Most potential employers and clients don't appreciate text shorthand, so don't use it. They won't ROTFL, and you will end up SOL.

RE: DESIGNED BY MATT SMITH

Original Design by id29's Doug Bartow. Viewable at: <http://www.howdesign.com/design-career/29-things-young-designers-need-to-know/>