

Unit 4: Visual Communication in Art and Design

NQF Level 3: BTEC National

Guided learning hours: 60

Unit abstract

The ability to communicate ideas in original and innovative ways is essential for all art, craft and design practitioners. Potential audiences and clients are becoming increasingly visually literate and there is a constant requirement for fresh, creative ideas to replace known imagery. In every vocational field of the visual world, practitioners need to continuously review and update their knowledge, skills and understanding of new and more effective methods of communicating ideas.

This unit aims to develop the breadth and depth of the learners' visual communication knowledge, skills and understanding. Learners will be expected to study the many ways in which practitioners use visual imagery effectively to communicate ideas, messages and meaning. They will then apply this research to their own ideas, investigating and exploring the visual communication techniques they have studied.

The unit will enable learners to develop their understanding of how to communicate different visual meanings and messages, through the manipulation of formal elements in 2D, 3D or time-based media as a means of creating a range of visual imagery for different purposes. The form that images take and the media and techniques used to communicate visual meaning, will vary according to learners' specialisms but it is expected that they will gain experience across art and design disciplines.

In preparing to progress to professional practice, learners' must appreciate the need to create informed and stimulating presentations of their intended visual communication ideas to different audiences. Learners will apply their visual and non-visual skills in exploring a range of presentation techniques and methods.

This unit could be integrated with other core and specialist unit assignments, as the knowledge, skills and understanding required underpin all other units in the qualification.

Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand how media, materials and techniques are used in others' work to convey ideas and meaning
- 2 Be able to develop their own visual language by working with a range of methods, materials and media
- 3 Be able to compare ways in which visual language is used to communicate ideas and meaning
- 4 Be able to communicate an intended meaning to a specified audience by using visual language.

Unit content

1 Understand how media, materials and techniques are used in others' work to convey ideas and meaning

Media, material and techniques: eg use of colour and paint application, solarisation techniques in photography, contemporary advertisers' use of composition, web designers' use of interactive media, use of scale, contrast, texture

Convey ideas and meaning: eg give a sense of mystery, style, attract, provoke, sustain interest, sell, create mood, harmony

2 Be able to develop their own visual language by working with a range of methods, materials and media

Visual language: formal elements of image making, eg line, tone, texture, scale, colour, shape and form employed analytically or intuitively and based on expression or feeling; symbols; semiotics; creating impressions; compositions; pictures; visions; visual ideas; illustrations; bringing together elements into a synthesised whole; fashioning objects; 2D pieces; 3D pieces; time-based pieces

Methods, materials and media: appropriate to specialism, eg 2D media (mark-making, drawing, painting, photography, collage, printmaking, digital media), 3D media (object-making, use of materials, tools, equipment, processes and techniques, carving, modelling, constructing, fabricating, cutting, forming), time-based media (film and video, performance, multi-media), combinations of 2D, 3D, time-based (drawings, paintings, prints, photographs, sculpture, textiles, fashion, video, film, performance)

3 Be able to compare ways in which visual language is used to communicate ideas and meaning

Compare ways: using one or more examples; specific comparisons showing relative differences; within the same subject specialism; across different art and design practices; utilising researched material; using visual examples; noting what effects convey what impressions and why they are used; in others' work; in own work; working with a range of sources; using a range of methods and materials, eg annotated sketches and drawings, notebooks, photographs, photocopies

4 Be able to communicate an intended meaning to a specified audience by using visual language

Communicate an intended meaning: for a given activity or self-identified brief; that communicates planned and developed ideas; messages; particular information; expression

Specified audience: eg consumers, gallery visitors, fine art 'audience', readers, age range, class, cultural 'sectors', individuals, groups, special interests, needs or requirements, opinion formers, those familiar or unfamiliar with the subject matter, public, private, commercial

Grading grid

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all of the learning outcomes for the unit. The criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 explain how media, materials and techniques are used in others' work to convey ideas and meaning	M1 show considered understandings of how media, materials and techniques are used across a diverse range of others' work to convey ideas and meaning, whilst experimenting with a broad range of media, methods and materials to enable effective comparisons to be drawn	D1 independently synthesise understandings of others' and their own visual language to inform experimentation, and comparison, in the underpinning and development of sophisticated visual communication intended for a specific audience.
P2 develop their own visual language by working with a range of methods, materials and media	M2 extend and refine the use of methods, materials and media to develop and enhance individual visual language as a means of creating particular messages and meanings to specific audiences.	
P3 compare ways in which visual language is used to communicate ideas and meaning		
P4 communicate an intended meaning to a specified audience by using visual language.		

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

This core unit forms the basis for learners developing their understanding of visual communication and as such, underpins the whole qualification. It could be planned and integrated with other core and/or specialist unit assignments. The focus for delivery of this unit is through practical approaches to visual studies. It is essential that learners adhere to health and safety regulations in using media, materials and processes across the specialist areas. Learners will need to undertake a range of visual studies for the purpose of communicating meaning or information through visual language. From their visual explorations learners will develop focused work for communicating different ideas.

For learning outcome 1 learners will need to analyse others' use of visual language, specifically how formal elements have been employed to create effective visual language which evoke different audience responses.

For learning outcome 2, from the above research learners will extend their use of media, materials and technologies to generate and develop creative personal ideas. This will broaden their visual communication skills and provide the opportunity for focusing on conveying appropriate messages for specific audiences. Planning for this unit will include initial activities that explore media, materials and technologies designed to develop specific visual skills relevant to learners' specialist pathways. The form that the work takes will vary according to their specialism but may include 2D, 3D or time-based. Activities should be planned which develop learners' visual language skills through observation from primary sources, with a particular focus on mark-making techniques. These activities can be undertaken discretely, but briefs should provide opportunities for learners to integrate work across any of the learning outcomes, where possible.

For learning outcome 3 learners will need to compare ways in which visual language is used to communicate ideas and meanings. Critical analysis of the visual communication of others will form the basis of learner research. This could include visual communication methods of different cultures, contemporary culture and from wider historical sources. Ideally, learners should be exposed to examples of visual communication from all specialist pathways, but whatever is selected should be contextualised with learners' ongoing practical visual studies. Planned opportunities for viewing and discussing others' work could be through a series of slide shows, CDs, DVDs, film and video, visits to galleries, artists' studios, environmental exploration such as urban signs and symbols, billboards, advertising, leaflets, packaging etc. The purpose of learners' research will be twofold: to evaluate how effectively an idea, a meaning, a message or a piece of information has been communicated visually to an audience and to apply their knowledge and understanding to inform and inspire their developing visual studies. Learners might create interim presentations of how their studies have been influenced by others' work, to tutors, peers or others in order to explore the effectiveness of their visual communication skills.

For learning outcomes 4 learners will need to communicate an intended meaning to a specified audience by using visual language. From the previous learning outcomes, more in-depth vocational briefs should emerge, which could be given to, or negotiated with learners, to provide opportunities for extensive visual investigation. Here learners should be encouraged to work with media, materials and techniques across a range of disciplines to communicate analytical, investigative or intuitive visual qualities based on expression and feeling.

Briefs should be clearly structured with specific requirements on the ideas, meaning and messages or information intended for specified audiences where necessary, but also negotiated to allow the opportunity for learner development on an individual basis. Opportunities might be planned to develop learners' skills of communicating ideas to the public, including both commercial and private sectors.

The use of combinations of media and non-traditional materials should be encouraged to broaden learners' experience, extend visual thinking and develop their creative and imaginative faculties. Integral to the development of visual skills, will be an ongoing evaluation of learners' use of visual language. Planned critical reviews following practical activity could be of learner presentations, group discussions or individual tutorials. Learners will need to recognise strengths and weaknesses in the quality of their visual work, learn to make comparisons between results of their experiments and assess the appropriateness of images in conveying their intended message or meaning.

Assessment

To achieve a **pass** grade, learners will produce evidence that meets the required standard for all four pass criteria.

For P1 learners will undertake research that is appropriate to the intentions of a given brief which directs them to understand how media, materials and techniques are used in others' work to convey ideas and meaning. This could be a discrete activity and methods used will be appropriate for the task, including sketchbook and notebook work, with some use of different source material.

For P2 learners will work with some methods, materials and media, primarily linked to their subject specialism, in developing their own visual language, following the direction of a given brief.

For P3 learners will make direct comparisons showing how visual language is used to convey ideas and meaning in different ways. This may be within learners' subject specialisms only and connections and comparisons will be direct and obvious.

For P4 learners will produce work which demonstrates use of specific visual language that communicates an intended meaning appropriately to a specified audience. The use of methods, materials and media will be appropriate to the intended outcome.

To achieve a **merit** grade, the learner must achieve all of the pass grade criteria and the two merit grade criteria.

For M1 learners will take the opportunity of linking learning outcomes by demonstrating that they are developing their understandings of how others' work uses visual language to convey meaning and messages through the considered selection of a broad range of source material both within and outside of their subject specialism. This will show purposeful links to their own work, and direct and subtle comparisons of visual language (and the effects these achieve) will be made across a variety of others' art and design work, and their own practice. This will be through a variety of means including ongoing practice, discrete samples, and larger one-off examples. There will be indications of how both contextual and practical research connects, and evidence will be presented in different ways including research notes, selected annotated imagery from different sources, detailed worksheets. Other methods relevant to the subject specialism, for example refined maquettes, film clips with accompanying clearly annotated storyboards and planned audio visual presentations will also be used.

For M2 learners will show their ability to plan, construct and comment on formal experiments with a broad range of methods, materials and media in extending individual visual language. The boundaries between outcomes may blur as experimentation allows opportunities for learning to inform and develop practice across the assignments. Learners will propose ideas for final pieces which show clear indication of utilising their developing knowledge, skills and understanding to produce work that synthesises elements into specific pieces aimed at defined audiences. A range of methods will be used to record findings, research and practice throughout the assignment and to show explicit links to practical work produced.

To achieve a **distinction** grade, the learner must achieve all of the pass and merit grade criteria and the one Distinction grade criterion.

For D1 learners will work independently from negotiated briefs and show a complete synthesis of all elements across the learning outcome, in relation to developing their understandings of others' visual language as a means of extending their own practice. They will choose to a wide range of sources, relating to the subject specialism and to other related and non-related specialisms, these will be used as starting points, and on an ongoing basis, to inform original practice in the development of sophisticated visual communication intended for a specific audience. Clear comparisons will be drawn from sourced examples, and in their own work, across a diverse range which make explicit the contrasts and subtleties of particular messages and meanings conveyed through specific visual language. There will be an awareness of how to make direct connections and allow for chance possibilities to occur which will be further developed throughout assignments. All work will have a fluency and learning outcomes are worked on together to inform and develop practice.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit links directly with *Unit 1: Visual Recording in Art and Design*, extending the breadth and depth of some of the ways of working in that unit and with *Unit 3: Ideas and Concepts in Art and Design*. There is potential for delivering this unit together with most specialist units through integrated project work, in particular with *Unit 7: Design Methods in Art and Design*.

The unit provides essential underpinning knowledge for any study of art, craft and design and is relevant to all pathways. It aims to develop a clear understanding of visual communication and the ability to apply the different functions of visual studies. It links with *Unit 13: Art and Design Specialist Contextual Investigation* because it provides background knowledge and research skills that learners can then develop in their own area of specialised interest. This unit also has useful links with core and specialist units where learners research contemporary and historical work.

There are opportunities the development of for key skills in this unit. It also provides development opportunities for some of the underpinning knowledge and understanding for NVQ Design Level 2 (SFEDI) Unit 22: Develop and Communicate Design Ideas.

Essential resources

This is a core unit and it is, therefore mandatory across all specialist subject pathways. Essential resources include:

- *specialist workspaces*: eg studios, workshops, computer suites, video and film editing suites
- *materials, equipment and tools*: eg for 2D, 3D, time-based and associated materials, equipment and tools across all specialist areas
- *access to a learning centre*: eg for books, periodicals, journals, videos, CD ROMs, the internet
- *specialist staff*: eg for the different specialist pathways; this might also include technical support staff.

Visits to galleries, exhibitions, film reviews, plays, performance and live art, workshops, studios and advertising agencies could play an important role in assignments designing for this unit. Alternatively, bringing professional practitioners from art, design or media backgrounds in to talk about their work could help learners with the evidence requirements for this unit.

There must be sufficient access to audio visual and digital resources to enable learners to be aware of the range of possible presentation methods appropriate to their ideas and audiences.

Indicative reading for learners

Books

Arnheim R – *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (University of California Press, 2004)

Berger J – *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin Books Ltd/BBC, 1990)

Dormer P – *Design Since 1945* (Thames & Hudson, 1993)

Forty A – *Objects of Desire* (Thames & Hudson, 1986)

Godfrey T – *Drawing Today* (Phaidon, 1986)

Gombrich E H – *Art and Illusion* (Phaidon Press Ltd, 2002)

Mijksenaar P – *Visual Function: An Introduction to Information Design* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1997)

Pipes A – *Production for Designers* (Laurence King, 2005)

Poynter R – *Typography Now: The Next Wave* (Booth-Clibborn Editions, 1994)

Scharf A – *Art and Photography* (Penguin Books, 1990)

Sontag S – *On Photography* (Penguin, 1979)

Key skills

Achievement of key skills is not a requirement of this qualification but it is encouraged. Suggestions of opportunities for the generation of Level 3 key skill evidence are given here. Staff should check that learners have produced all the evidence required by part B of the key skills specifications when assessing this evidence. Learners may need to develop additional evidence elsewhere to fully meet the requirements of the key skills specifications.

Communication Level 3	
When learners are:	They should be able to develop the following key skills evidence:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participating in group discussions on the effectiveness of specific media, materials and techniques making a formal presentation to illustrate the concept of visual language researching visual communication methods employed for different art and design purposes synthesising information from research activity writing an analytical and evaluative account of the fitness for purpose of their own and others' visual language. 	<p>C3.1a Take part in a group discussion.</p> <p>C3.1b Make a formal presentation of at least eight minutes using an image or other support material.</p> <p>C3.2 Read and synthesise information from at least two documents about the same subject. Each document must be a minimum of 1000 words long.</p> <p>C3.3 Write two different types of documents, each one giving different information about complex subjects. One document must be at least 1000 words long.</p>

Information and communication technology Level 3	
When learners are:	They should be able to develop the following key skills evidence:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning research of a range of others' imagery, using ICT and non ICT sources • entering and combining information to appropriate software packages, using respective features to improve efficiency • developing their information in order to derive new information appropriate to their tasks • emailing a draft copy of work to tutor for feedback • producing a formal presentation to illustrate an understanding of how visual communication and meaning are conveyed • annotating work to identify any changes made. 	<p>ICT.1 Search for information, using different sources, and multiple search criteria in at least one case.</p> <p>ICT.2 Enter and develop the information and derive new information.</p> <p>ICT.3 Present combined information such as text with image, text with number, image with number.</p>
Improving own learning and performance Level 3	
When learners are:	They should be able to develop the following key skills evidence:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working with tutor to agree approaches to planning their project or learning activity • producing action plan or proposal with set targets • using their plans to produce work within the set time constraints of the activity • reflecting on and recording stages of their learning • reviewing progress with tutor • evaluating finished work at close of the project. 	<p>LP3.1 Set targets using information from appropriate people and plan how these will be met.</p> <p>LP3.2 Take responsibility for their learning, using their plan, to help meet targets and improve their performance.</p> <p>LP3.3 Review progress and establish evidence of their achievements.</p>