1 RESEARCH AND CONCEPTS

The first step toward becoming interesting is to be interested. The best artists of all kinds—painters, designers, writers, sculptors, musicians, playwrights—make the world their inspiration, and draw ideas and content from both experience and research. They make it a priority to stay aware of what is happening, not only within the world of design, but in the world in general, and this level of engagement enriches their work.

> "What you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing; it also depends on what kind of a person you are"
> *C. S. Lewis*

→ **Observe and collect**
Research should be specific to each project, but the process of observation and recording your impressions should be ongoing, and should become a part of your daily routine. When something catches your eye, document it; capture an image and put it into your notebook/sketchbook/device for reference later. Everything you come in contact with can inform your work, so make sure you have a great collection of objects and impressions for inspiration.

PART 1	PRINCIPLES
UNIT 1	RESEARCH AND CONCEPTS
MODULE 1	**Basics of research**

Modern media demands an increasing amount of visual information to illustrate its content in print, packaging, and motion graphics, in the built environment or online. Graphic designers are the conduits for all types of communications from multiple sources to specific audiences, and to be successful they must be well-informed, accomplished researchers with inquisitive natures.

Broaden your outlook
Designers who seek information from the greatest range of references are those who successfully communicate with people of all ages, professions, and lifestyles, and who properly contextualize their design work.

• Read about events from multiple sources. Change your sources daily, or read from several sources and compare stories, noting how information about the same events changes, how the language is used to target various audiences, and what type of imagery is used to support the text. Never rely solely on editable web postings for accuracy if you are reading facts. Check your sources!
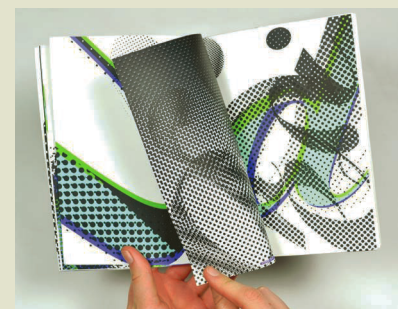• You can never read enough books, but don't limit

yourself to the kind you usually read. Reading only about graphic design can be particularly dangerous: although extremely useful for information and guidance, this may turn you into an armchair expert; you want to be an original practitioner. Expand your reading to include novels and plays, and books on sculpture, architecture, art history, cooking, sports, archeology, travel, and math—it really doesn't matter, as long as they provide you with a broad spectrum of knowledge.

• Be open to new experiences. Visit, galleries, clubs, retail environments, and museums you've never been to, listen to music you've not heard before, and eat food you've never tried before. Travel whenever you can, and learn about global issues and cultural treasures.

• Share ideas and listen to people. Whatever language they use, there is always a way to establish communication, if you try. Pay attention to what inspires them, and learn from others while also sharing your insights.

• Be responsible. Remember that the beauty of the world is the inspiration that touches the artist's soul, and it belongs to all of us.

⬆ **Experimentation reveals possibilities** The journey from a posted process board to a final design is always different, but the process itself is the teaching tool of design. In these images, you can follow the evolution of the designer's process and see how variation leads to discovery.

⬇ **Look closely at details** Through the simplification of the forms, the enlargement of the dot screen pattern, and the placement of layers, the enlarged and cropped letterforms become fluid, artistic subjects that are vibrant with color.

RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Primary sources/ Factual research	Secondary sources/ Factual research
• Previous knowledge/opinion/ memory • Observation • Conversation • Analysis • Role-play • Interviews: in person or by email, online chat, or phone • Questionnaires • Focus groups • Commissioned video/written diaries (first hand) • Ethnographic research ("deep hanging out")	• Museums, archives, collections • Newspapers, magazines, journal articles • Published interviews • Films, TV broadcasts, theater • Transcripts/recordings of film, TV, radio • Books • Music • Internet: blogs, websites, forums, magazines • Surveys • Statistics • Organizations, agencies, gatekeepers • Lectures, public debates, conferences
Primary sources/ Visual research	**Secondary sources/ Visual research**
• Photography • Drawing/sketching • Media experimentation: 2D and 3D • Rubbings/casts • Typographic experimentation • Compositional experimentation • Image manipulation • Photocopying • Video recording • Audio recording • Writing	• Exhibitions • Images/photographs from magazines, books, leaflets, Internet, billboards • Work by other designers/artists • Printed maps/diagrams • Ephemera (e.g. tickets, receipts, packaging) • Found or bought photographs, postcards, posters, drawings • Imagery taken from films, video, performances • Architecture

Other general work practices/approaches
• Put your own point of view into the subject
• Work in groups and respond to feedback from others
• Develop ideas by generating a number of visuals in response to one idea
• Explore the full capacity of your visual language

Record it all

Constant, direct observation is one of the most important tools a designer uses, and learning to look at anything as a designer requires attention to minute detail, and the inclusion of all things that surround the object of your focus. Consider your way of seeing as a kind of inner zoom lens that draws you in and away from a point of observation. As you learn to see with a designer's eye, ordinary things you may have seen before can become amazing sources of inspiration. It can be as simple as a pattern of lace juxtaposed against flat, wide stripes, or as unexpected as the geometry revealed by light and shadow in an architectural setting. Textures, patterns, colors, and visual relationships will begin to have a profound effect on the way you think about your design process.

With this in mind, every practicing designer should carry some form of recording device, such as a sketchbook, camera, smartphone, video camera, or whatever works best for you. Make time for observation and research, taking it seriously as an integral part of your work. Designers, artists, writers, and illustrators all frequently keep scrapbooks/sketchbooks/collections of material that interests them. These bits of inspiration need not have a clear purpose when collected, but the material will become an archive of ideas and inspiration from which to draw on at a later date.

If something commands your attention, sketch it, write about it, photograph it, upload it, or file it away immediately. Collect ideas and build upon initial thoughts by writing, drawing, or sketching. Not only will your drawing and research skills improve by doing this consistently, but over time you will have built yourself a "catalog of inspiration" that can be drawn upon at any point in your career, and will become especially useful when you are short of ideas. This kind of practiced research helps you to begin defining your own outlook, and to develop a distinctive visual voice.
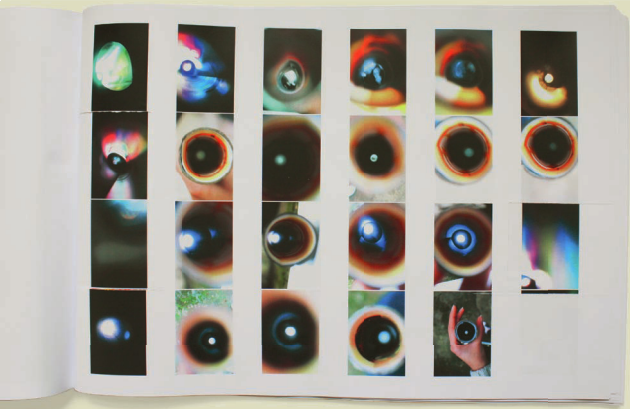
Multiply the possibilities Collect multiple images of every subject, and vary your techniques as you photograph. Each of these pictures captures a slightly different sensibility in light, color, shadow, and composition. When they are combined with deconstructed typography that echoes the abstract forms revealed in the photos, the results are striking.
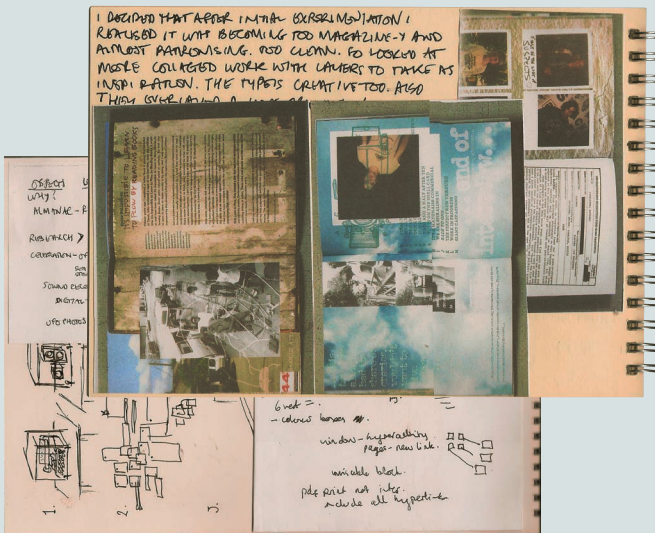
Ideas are organic They can grow from a single phrase, the sum of a series of images, or a combination of both. Record the evolution of your thinking process in whatever manner is meaningful for you. When you reference the sequence of your observations, they can become visualized as layers in a composition or simply lead you to the most relevant point in image or text.

#1 *Location:*
The Death of the High Street