

## The Design Process

An astute graphic artist follows a series of steps before (s)he can begin the actual design work. This system, standard procedure, process, series of steps, or whatever you coin it is a way to ensure that you are delivering exactly what the client needs. A design for a client must fit a specific set of requirements, so it's only natural that the process to figure out what client needs to produce an effective output is based on a logical flow.

### **Briefing the Project with Your Client:**

The first critical step to a well-thought out design process is a briefing. The client is going to give you a “brief” overview of what he needs. At this point, a graphic designer is expected to gather as much information as (s)he can about the client’s expectations, their company's mission, vision, and goals, as well as their products or services. It's worth noting that designers need to go beyond the surface level of *what* the company does and dive into the benefit for their customers so that this critical component can be translated in the resulting designs. A good designer will research the client before the first meeting, but asking questions and listening to the client is the focus during this step.

### **Researching Your Client's Ecosystem:**

Once you have received a brief overview from the client, you can dig into every possible material you find and start researching. During this phase, an expert designer would seek information on the competitors, point of differentiation (POD), market, audience, trends, and prospects.

The idea behind researching the client’s competitors is to ensure that you don’t copy or make anything too similar. The objective is not to steal a competitor’s idea, as this takes away from any differentiation the company may offer in their market, rather, to understand the lay of the land. Once you have insight into their market and point of differentiation, you can begin to dig into their current and potential customers to understand who you are designing for.

### **Brainstorming on the Message:**

The combination of the briefing and research will open a path to producing relevant ideas. So, put the pen to paper start brainstorming design ideas.

It's important to remember that each element of a design is sending out a message to viewers, from colors and typography to the tagline and symbols. Each element should be given considerable thought before making any hard decisions. The brainstorming process should allow for a creative exploration of how these different elements can work together to support the message. Generate a list of ideas that can be used in the next step, the sketching phase.

### **Sketching out Mockups:**

At this step, you can start drawing rough sketches of your ideas. The method you use to capture your sketches depends on the tools you are comfortable with. I highly recommend starting with a paper and pencil, as you'll be able to quickly iterate on rough designs. Once you feel comfortable with your progress, take your mockup to the computer. Remember, you don't want to make anything final or perfect at this point. In this stage, you are just beginning to materialize the ideas in your imagination.

Once you have finally quenched your creative exploration, you can start sharing your sketches with the client. Although this process might seem lengthy and unnecessary, it is extremely important! It saves you an immense amount of time resulting from redo's and rejections *after* you have completed the design on the computer. Providing these early sketches gives you a fair idea of whether you are headed in the right direction.

### **Building the Design:**

Now it's time to get cranking with your designs! This is where the meat and potatoes of graphic work comes into play, so it's time to have fun.

Get busy with your design software and start creating several versions of your selected sketches. Creating several variations of the design will allow you to present options to the client so they can pick the most suitable design. Try mixing and matching color palettes, typographic pairings, and a grid structure to create variation.

At this point, it is important to receive client feedback as you work. Show your "draft" designs to the client and ask for his feedback. It isn't uncommon to try several rounds of this step before finalization.

### **Presenting and Refining the Work:**

With a final design in hand, you can start the implementation phase by presenting your final piece. A printed graphical work would require a print-ready file format. A design intended for a website should take the use case into consideration when choosing the right file type.

Give the client another chance to review the product and provide feedback. If it aligns with the brief's objectives, you should be good to go, however, don't be surprised when the client sneaks in one final request. As the expert, you can mitigate these requests by ensuring you have taken the brief into account. Don't be afraid to defend your decisions.

**Putting the Design into Production:**

Finally, the design has been approved and you are all set to deliver the design! At this point, a designer will hand over the final product to the client or a third party, like a printing press. Be sure to include any special instructions that the client or third party may need.