Software and Platforms—A Brief Overview
The Writing Center’s visual communication tutors focus largely on sharing basic design principles and strategies to support RISD students’ growing graphic design literacy. We do not offer comprehensive technical instruction in inDesign, website construction, and so on. That said, we are happy to speak generally about software and platform choices (outlined below) and to trouble-shoot technical issues on occasion. For more comprehensive technical instruction, we recommend lynda.com and Youtube.

Presentations
Mac users may want to use Keynote whereas Windows users might prefer PowerPoint. Google’s own Presentation application in Google Drive is also rising in popularity. All three have about the same level of functionality and follow many of the same interface patterns and metaphors. Prezi is another cloud-based solution. Its infinite canvas approach and ability to easily zoom in and out has gained a following. The most important thing with Prezi, as with all presentation software, is to not rely on its bag of tricks to impress your audience.

Portfolios
All software has a tone of voice, or at minimum contributes to the tone of voice of what it contains. This is especially true of portfolio platforms that have branded themselves to gain users. Behance feels appropriate for current students, but might not serve professionals. Tumblr is superb for artists and designers whose work is situated in and addresses internet culture and yet feels less appropriate for a newly minted architecture grad. These differences are subtle, shifting, and culturally conditioned. Cargo Collective has excellent templates that work in many different contexts and yet it too signals the kind of artist whose work resides digitally. Survey how portfolios “feel” on each platform when considering where to put your work.

Print
InDesign is the go-to software for print design. It is versatile and works well for both posters and books. Depending on your discipline you might also be at home in Illustrator, which can work reasonably well for posters, presentations, and multiples where page count is not too high. Illustrator lacks some of the typographic controls and other features that make working with text, especially text over a number of pages, much easier. Photoshop should not be considered as a typographic layout tool—use it only for photo editing.

Basic Design Principles


Aesthetic/Tone


**Type & Typography**


Highsmith, Cyrus. *Inside Paragraphs* (Boston, MA: Font Bureau, Inc., 2012). This small volume condenses a significant amount of knowledge about typography into its pages; it is most insightful on the importance of counters and negative space.


**Grid**


Color


Kuler: https://kuler.adobe.com

Paletton: http://paletton.com

Pictaculous: http://www.pictaculous.com

Rocket Design, Color Template: http://www.rocket-design.fr/color-template


Image and Text


Information Design
Baer, Kim. *Information Design Workbook: Graphic Approaches, Solutions, and Inspiration + 30 Case Studies*. Beverly, MA: Rockport, 2008. Offers a broad definition of the discipline, which is both the book’s strength (breadth) as well as its weakness (lacks depth). The case studies are a helpful addition.

Fry, Ben. *Visualizing Data: Exploring and Explaining Data with the Processing Environment*. Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, Inc, 2008. Specific to the Processing language most of the time, but its introductory material is excellent and generalizable. Offers both coding advice/tutorials and solid information design principles.


**Visual Identity**


**Publishing**

Paper Supplies: Paperworks, Pawtucket – paperworks.com

Color Laser Prints: Concept Link, Providence – concept-link.com

Large Format Prints: Iolabs, Pawtucket – iolabsinc.com

Custom Binding: Hope Bindery, Pawtucket – hopebindery.com

Online Publishing: Blurb – blurb.com

Lulu – lulu.com/create

Edition One Books — editiononebooks.com

Typography: Adobe Fonts – adobe.com/type