How to Become a Graphic Designer Without Going to University

Although going to university can help you pursue the creative career of your dreams, setting you up with the right set of skills and qualifications, it’s not for everyone. You can still become a graphic designer without going down the usual degree route.

With a good dose of diligence and patience, and a world of information at your fingertips (online tutorials, classic books, training videos), you can definitely teach yourself the profession.

But if you need a little reassurance that you’re on the right track, you could consider a fast-paced part-time or full-time course at one of our Shillington campuses. Yes, it’s an investment—but it’s certainly more affordable and less time-consuming than a four-year degree. You can learn graphic design with us nine months part-time or three months full-time. But enough about us—here’s how to get started in graphic design without going to university.

Understand the fundamental basics of graphic design

You need a solid foundation in graphic design history, theory and practical application if you’re going to make it as a graphic designer. This superb guide by Tuts+ is a must-read and should be your first port of call.

Next, check out this excellent class, Color for Designers: Exploration, Theory & Application by Richard Mehl, who has taught two-dimensional design, colour theory and typography at

the School of Visual Arts for over 12 years. It’s just one of many brilliant classes on Creative Live that will teach you the fundamentals of the craft.

If you’re pushed for time or want to learn “on the go”, then take a look at these best creative podcasts that we’ve put together.

Buy the right books and read them cover to cover

There are so many wonderful books on the subject of graphic design that it’s difficult to select a top six. However, the following titles come highly recommended and provide a decent overview to teach you graphic design.

For further inspiration, check out these 50 essential design books, one we put together earlier for Creative Boom. Or you can visit Shillington’s own Book Club with lots of recommended books added each month.

1. Grid Systems in Graphic Design by Josef Müller-Brockmann

From a professional for professionals, here is the definitive word on using grid systems in graphic design. Although Josef Muller-Brockman first presented hi-interpretation of grid in 1961, his book—Grid Systems in Graphic Design—is still useful today for anyone working in the latest computer-assisted design.

With examples on how to work correctly at a conceptual level and exact instructions for using all of the systems (8 to 32 fields), this guidebook provides a crystal-clear framework for problem-solving.

Buy the Book

2. The Elements of Typographic Style by Robert Bringhurst

Renowned typographer and poet Robert Bringhurst brings clarity to the art of typography with this masterful style guide, The Elements of Typographic Style.

Combining the practical, theoretical, and historical, this latest edition is completely updated, with a thorough exploration of the newest innovations in intelligent font technology, and is a must-have for graphic artists, editors, or anyone working with the printed page using digital or traditional methods.

Buy the Book

3. Logo: The Reference Guide To Symbols and Logotypes by Michael Evamy

Logo: The Reference Guide to Symbols and Logotypes by Michael Evamy is a comprehensive guide to logo design and a compendium of some of the most iconic logotype designs throughout history.

It includes a vast collection of over 1,300 symbols and logotypes from the work of past masters, such as Paul Rand and Saul Bass, alongside some of the most exciting work from contemporary designers. Containing work submitted by over 150 design firms from across the world, everything is categorised into 75 fields according to their most distinctive visual features or characteristics.

Buy the Book

4. How to be a Graphic Designer, Without

Losing Your Soul by Adrian Shaughnessy

Graphic designers constantly complain that there is no career manual to guide them through the profession. Design consultant and writer Adrian Shaughnessy draws on a wealth of experience to provide just such a handbook. (Check out our Shillington talk with Adrian from last year too.)

Aimed at the independent-minded, How to be a Graphic Designer, Without Losing Your Soul addresses the concerns of young designers who want to earn a living by doing expressive and meaningful work and avoid becoming a hired drone working on soulless projects.

It offers straight-talking advice on how to establish your design career and suggestions for running a successful business.

This revised, extended edition includes all-new chapters covering professional skills, the creative process, and global trends, including green issues, ethics and the rise of digital culture.

Buy the Book

5. Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Whole Branding Team by Alina Wheeler

This book is a best-selling toolkit for creating, building, and maintaining a strong brand. From research and analysis through to brand strategy; design development through to application design; identity standards through to launch and governance – Designing Brand Identity offers brand managers, marketers, and designers a proven, universal five-phase process for creating and implementing effective brand identity.

Enriched by case studies showcasing successful world-class brands, the book takes a detailed look at the latest trends in branding, including social networks, mobile devices, global markets, apps, video, and virtual brands.

Buy the Book

6. Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, and Students by Ellen Lupton

Thinking with Type is a straightforward primer that presents practical information about typographic design that can be immediately applied within the context of design history and theory. It is divided into three sections—letter, text, grid—each accompanied by an essay explaining key concepts, and then a set of practical demonstrations illustrating that material.

Thinking with Type is a state-of-the-art pedagogical tool, that will be essential reading for anyone who wishes to learn design skills.

Buy the Book

Acquire the right setup

I’m not going to sugarcoat it; graphic design can be expensive when it comes to setting up. You’ll definitely need a laptop, desktop computer, the right software (a subscription to Adobe Creative Cloud is a must), a Pantone colour guide and perhaps even a pen tablet, like a Wacom Intuos.

If money is tight, hit up eBay for secondhand gear or enjoy a one-year warranty courtesy of Apple and its Certified Refurbished products.

If you’re going down the digital design route, then Sketch is

an excellent affordable piece of software and one we teach at Shillington alongside Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. We also recommend Apple's Keynote instead of InDesign for many tasks, as it won't cost you a penny.

Learn how to use the tools of the trade

No graphic designer can live without software. That's why you need time to master what's available. Adobe's Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign are the obvious choices—and there are tutorials to help you get started.

These user guides and tutorials for Photoshop and InDesign are extremely useful, for example. Then there's Sketch, with its own documentation to show you the ropes.

Elsewhere, you could also try one of the many how-to tutorials, courses or eBooks courtesy of Tuts+. Or there's Creative Live or Skillshare which both offer seriously good design classes from some of the world's most respected names in the industry. Not forgetting Lynda where all courses are now also available on LinkedIn Learning.

There's really nothing holding you back.

Get inspiration from established designers

> *Start following the industry's biggest and best graphic designers. See what they're sharing on Twitter and read their own blogs. Get inspired by their work and career wisdom.*

At Shillington, we often invite leading figures from the industry to come and talk to our students. We recently welcomed Hey Studio founder Verònica Fuerte to our London

campus. She delivered a talk on her company's approach to design as well as their studio culture and creative outlook.

We've also interviewed and gained insights from Build, IDEO, The A Board Dude, Jane Bowyer and Studio Dotto.

Find out what's happening in your local area and go to as many talks and events as possible. If you're based in Manchester, for example, then there's PechaKucha each month. Or excellent annual festivals such as Design Manchester. At Shillington, we have our own handy events listings, detailing what's happening near our campuses in New York, London, Manchester, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Start your own online portfolio

Whether you use Squarespace or Wix to create your own website or make use of online communities such as Behance, an online portfolio is essential if you want to get that job in graphic design.

You'll want to showcase your best work and present yourself as professionally as possible, as you only get one chance to make a first impression. Read these tips on creating a successful portfolio.

Not got any work to show? Reinvent someone's logo or come up with a cool side project that showcases your skills. Don't be afraid to roll up your sleeves to produce some seriously nice work. Or read on for our next tip…

For extra reassurance, take a graphic design course

Yes, ok. The whole point here is to get you into graphic design without any formal education. However, at Shillington,

we’re different. Our innovative approach means you’ll achieve amazing results in a seriously short amount of time.

Study graphic design in three months full-time or nine months part-time in New York, London, Manchester, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, and graduate with a polished portfolio showcasing your best work, ready to land your dream job.

What’s more, we’re offering half scholarships for our September 2018 full-time and part-time graphic design course at all six of our campuses around the world. Go and [apply online](With a good dose of diligence and patience, and a world of information at your fingertips (online tutorials, classic books, training videos), you can definitely teach yourself the profession.) if you’re interested.

Double check you’ve ticked everything off the list

Aside from our incredibly helpful checklist on what you need to become a graphic designer, are you confident you meet the requirements for a junior designer?

Have you looked at job descriptions to ensure you meet the criteria? Graduate career site Prospects offers an informative graphic designer job profile to give you an idea of what employers are looking for.

For instance, it’s not just about being able to use Photoshop; you also need to have good presentation skills, accuracy and attention to detail, a flexible approach when working in a team—these are things you pick up in the workplace. So with that in mind…

…Get some work experience

Not only is work experience great for your CV; it allows you

to have someone as a reference, i.e. someone who can recommend you when it comes to the crunch. You might also gain some decent projects to add to your portfolio—or impress so much that you get offered a paid internship or job!

Wise up on the interview process and secure that dream job

Now that you're prepared for the next step, i.e. getting a job as a junior graphic designer, it's time to get ready for the working world.

First of all, you need to know where to look. Aside from setting yourself up on LinkedIn and announcing to the world that you're available, you should also regularly browse online jobs boards such as Design Week Jobs, Design Jobs Board or Guardian Jobs. Here are some more recommended job sites to add to your list.

Once you've secured your first interview, reading these tips beforehand will certainly help. We also recommend this wonderful class by leading designer Debbie Millman, who teaches you how to sell yourself and stand out from the crowd. (She's someone we've also welcomed at Shillington.)

> *With grit and determination, you can gain the valuable skills and experience you need to step onto that first rung of the ladder and enjoy a wonderful career as a graphic designer.*

Discover more about kickstarting your creative career in only 3 months full-time or 9 months part-time at Shillington in New York, London, Manchester, Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane –> www.shillingtoneducation.com

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