

## DESIGN THINKING

“The Design Process specifies procedures which seek creative success through providing a client with innovative and unique design solutions to a defined project, done on rational grounds, through an agreed-upon process.”

One of the things that Extreme Media Studies is about is Design Thinking: a process for practical and creative problem solving. I first heard the term from David Kelley, a founder of IDEO, one of the most successful industrial design firms of our era. David also is founder of the D School (for Design) at Stanford University, where he is a Professor.

### David Kelley



In contrast to Critical Thinking, which is a process of analysis and breaking things down, Design Thinking involves building things up. It is very practical and pragmatic and can be used on creative problems of all kinds. Design Thinking has received corporate and academic interest because it is recognized as a driver of innovation.

There is a big difference between Art and Design. Art changes the world. It is transformative. Design communicates information. It is attached to a specific topic or “problem” to be worked on.

Media Design has grown out of ideas and practices that have been nurtured for the most part by architects and graphic designers. Sometimes the products of media design are quite artful, just as sometimes artists will weave content “messages” into their work. What distinguishes the Designer from the Artist is his or her adherence to a special way of working. More than anything else, it is the process of design that unifies all the different design professions.

The hallmarks of design thinking include: curiosity, working within limited resources, project-based mentality, little fear of failure, ambidextrous thinking (left & right brain), input from all stakeholders, teamwork, end-user focus and orientation to the future.

The best way to unpack the design process is by thinking of it as steps that, in the real world, often happen simultaneously. The field at large recognizes seven steps: Define; Research; Ideate, Prototype; Choose; Implement; Learn.

My years as a media designer have yielded an eight-step process that I introduce here and will cover more deeply across this site's probes.

### **1. The Design Brief (due diligence)**

The initial step is one of intense intellectual scrutiny. The designer (or design team) must study the "problem" or "challenge" that has been given to them. Analysis is required, but so are lots of fact finding and deep interrogation of the project's client. The outcome is often termed "the design brief."

### **2. Ideation (coming up with ideas)**

The second step in the Design Process is the most overtly creative one. Elsewhere in this site you will find detailed discussion about techniques that generate creative thinking. Among them are Brainstorming, Creative Wordplay, Multi-Media Sketching and Directed Fantasy.

### **3. Multiple Approaches (always 3 pitches)**

It is always best to assemble and present a choice of three possible solutions. The reason why you'd want multiple ideas is so that you don't fall in love with one solution too soon. Plus, ideas tend to cross-fertilize one another and lead to yet other choices.

### **4. Treatment, Storyboard & Script (the paper proxy)**

The collaborative teams that make media require a unified vision. You're going to find it very difficult to forge just the right words to express intent. Abstract thinking requires clean writing, and vice-versa. Tools that make this difficult process successful include treatments, storyboards, flow charts and scripts.

### **5. Production Plan (logistics and wherewithal)**

The design process shifts into a new gear as you lay out the production plan. This is the phase of tactics. Regardless of whether your project is large or small, expensive or cheap, requiring lots of collaboration or not, the designer must prepare two obligatory documents: The Schedule & The Budget.

### **6. Execution (production, per se)**

In an ideal world, this is the phase where the design work becomes realized. While the basic idea/approach can continue to change, it is always expensive to do so.

Standard tasks will vary depending upon your medium. However in many media forms you will find work is commonly divided into three production phases: Pre-Production, Production, and Post Production.

### **7. Delivery (here it is, hope it works)**

This is the moment of judgment. You've done your best. Probably some things didn't turn out quite like you wanted. But the work is complete and your design chops will now receive serious scrutiny. At Delivery, the design process involves three tasks: Formal Presentation of the completed project; Delivery of Elements; and Archiving.

### **8. Evaluation (starting what is next)**

Smart "suits" and smart "jeans" at all production levels (execs to designers to writers to crew to producers to marketers) always find time to take stock of how a given project came out vis-à-vis what they envisioned in the Treatment and Design Brief. Was the effort worth it? Did I have fun? Did I meet and work with good people?

## **Design Thinking as a stepping off point**

Sometimes, knowledge can only come through active doing -- through practice. Media design requires grounded, practical knowledge. For example, you could read endlessly about editing a video, but would still be unable to create a gripping scene the first time you sit at the editor. You get the point. Mastery is achieved through practice.

In our lives as media artists, Liz and I are always prowling airwaves, galleries and the web for inspiring works. One gets good taste by tasting good things. So we will be doing our best here in Extreme Media Studies to select a wide range of varied and provocative examples of media design and media thinking as it exists in the real world. Today's real world. And not only will we show stuff done by top professionals. Some of the most interesting work is being created by ordinary people who are making personal media for use in their everyday lives.

This site, then, invites experimental thinking and design experiments by combining what we hope will be an incendiary collection of primary materials. It's as if we were chefs, concocting an exquisite menu of case studies, raw data, text, theory, design terms and examples. Consumed together, we hope our meal will ignite your appetite for contemporary media and provide nourishment that will sustain you when you enter the kitchen yourself.

--Kit Laybourne