



Introduction to
Graphic Design
Methodologies and Processes

Understanding Theory and Application

John Bowers

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Understanding
Theory and Application**

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Introduction

Background

Most graphic designers I know are cautious of graphic design methodologies and processes. They believe formalized approaches are akin to formulas or gimmicks that require little thought, hard work, or regard for the problem at hand. Little has been written on the subject for graphic design students. Yet we all have our own processes and benefit from advancements that are the result of research and methodologies.

Understanding, developing, and applying methodologies and processes can expand possibilities, develop your ideas, and better utilize your abilities. This can lead to work that is original, appropriate, inspiring, and responsible.

My formal education was largely based on developing my intuition through a simple problem-solving approach. While that has served me well, early on I benefited from exposure to design approaches from the Design Management Conference proceedings. Later professional experience at Landor also expanded my interest and understanding. There, I worked alongside consultants who researched specific audiences to achieve desired responses. Since then, I've learned on my own by reading, attending lectures, talking with others, and paying close attention to my own processes.

Profound technological and social changes require designers to be fluent in a variety of approaches to solving problems. As audiences diversify and as information is increasingly accessed and communities shaped by digital means, designers must be able to confront the interconnectedness of problems and society. Methodologies

and processes can aid in the understanding of the connections and relationships.

Focus

This book demonstrates and explains how design is shaped by research methodologies and processes as applied to understanding audiences, organizing and using content, developing strategies, and defining purposes. To do this, it emphasizes not only client-associated and user-centered work but also non-client-associated, self-generated work, making a case for the latter as a way of informing the former.

The discussion begins with a section on problem seeking and solving presented as the underlying framework. Chapter 1 takes a broad look at research and introduces the book's issues, while Chapter 5 culminates the discussion through an in-depth focus on select designers' methodologies and processes. Chapters 2 through 4 cover the basics of how research methodologies and processes are applied (interpreting), function (targeting), and execution (creating).

Goal and Usage

Some methodologies and processes are common to all human activity and are used subconsciously, while others require study, practice, and reflection to be used effectively.

Many graphic design methodologies and processes originate or are widely used in other disciplines. For example, Gestalt psychology (the study of how humans perceive form) is the domain of psychology but applied in symbol design. Ethnography research (the study of user patterns) is the domain of anthropology but commonly employed in web design. These methodologies, along with

others explored in this book, contribute to defining design as a discipline.

This book will help you:

- Recognize, interpret, and articulate the primary graphic design research methodologies and processes
- Understand, develop, and assess your own methodologies and processes
- Design more strategically, critically, collaboratively, ethically, and creatively for specific audiences, contexts, and responses

Even the best methodology and process cannot ensure good design. Success still depends on your ability to be engaged, to effectively draw from your experience, and to rely on your intuition and innate abilities. Like a well-designed and appropriately used grid, a methodology provides guidance through its conceptual framework.

Problem Seeking and Solving

Humans by nature are seekers of meaning and solvers of problems. We are in a constant search to improve our lives and those of others, and to exercise a degree of control over our interactions and experiences. We have the capacity for reasoning and logical thinking, and thus can make associations, comparisons, and judgments that aid this search.

In the broadest sense, this describes problem solving. A problem in this context is viewed as a challenge and an opportunity, not something to avoid. It is a question raised for consideration and a solution.

Four basic problem-solving phases are learning, identifying, generating, and implementing. These phases can branch in different directions or be linear or branching—or a combination. Most graphic design activity moves in a branching manner; rarely is the path linear. Reflection, analysis, and evaluation occur at every step.

The four problem-solving phases overlap and may be repeated. Moving backwards is as common as moving forward. The goal is to consider carefully the problem at hand and not reach a solution prematurely.

The problem-solving process diverges and converges, expands and contracts. Divergence is the process of identifying, creating, and developing multiple ways of solving a problem. Convergence is the process of selecting and developing concepts from the previous step's multiple pursuits.

In the learning phase, the process diverges and expands as information is gathered, then contracts as information is analyzed in the identifying phase. The process then again expands in the generating phase as multiple concepts are developed, and contracts in the evaluating phase, in which

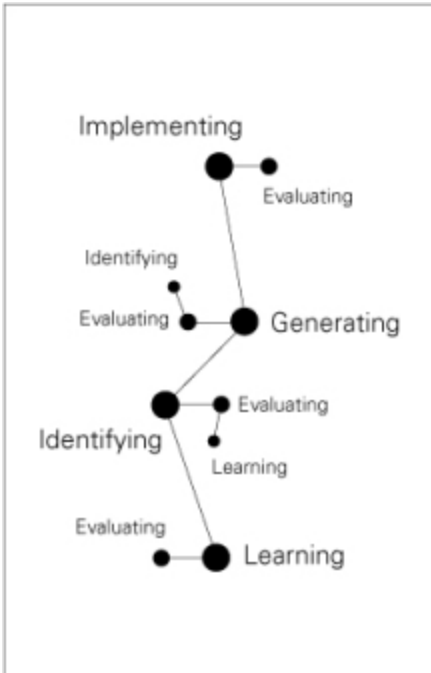
a single concept is refined, chosen, and implemented. Although each phase has its unique aspects, they can overlap.

0.1 *Planet Earth*



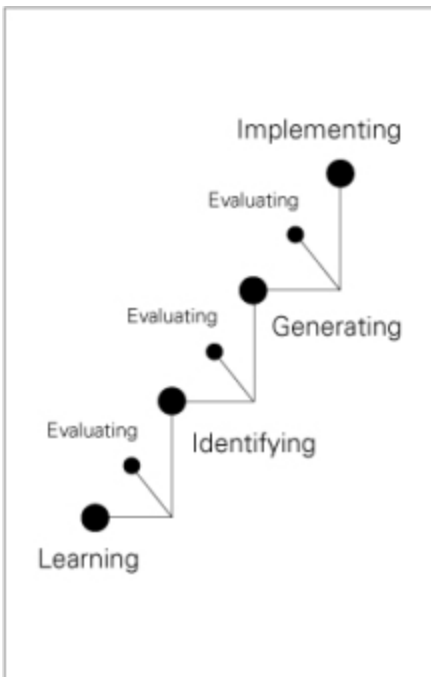
0.2 *Branching approach*

A solution is found by revisiting a problem's conditions.

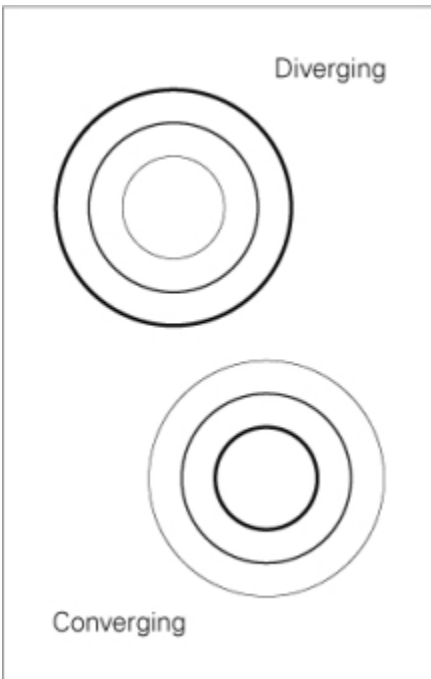


0.3 *Linear approach*

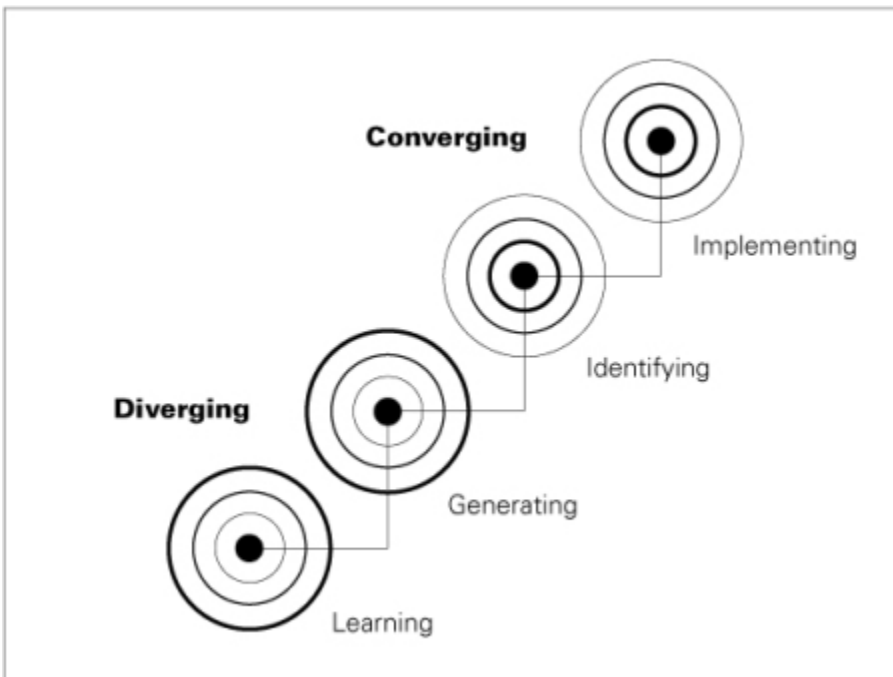
A solution is created through sequential development.



0.4 *Divergent and convergent thinking*



0.5 *Divergent and convergent thinking and problem solving*
Divergent thinking (discovering, predicting, identifying, and considering) blends with convergent thinking (prioritizing, generating, refining, and making) during the design process.



Problem Seeking

Increasingly used in education, problem seeking describes non-client-associated, often community-based engagement of an issue (such as sustainability) with an undetermined end form (e.g., from an informational poster to a neighborhood recycling program).

Problem Solving

Problem solving is the cognitive process of engaging an issue or set of conditions for the purpose of transforming it.

Problem-Solving Phases

The basic problem-solving phases of learning, identifying, generating, and implementing can be labeled in different ways.

- Discover
- Invent
- Launch
- Extend (Doblin Group)

- Look
- Learn
- Ask
- Try (IDEO)

Learning

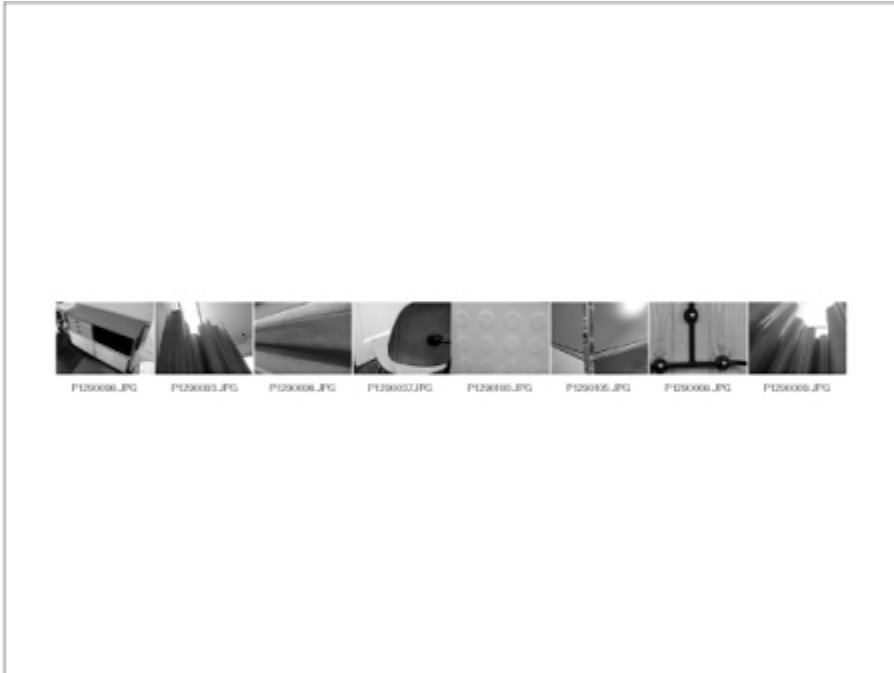
Learning about the conditions that underlie and define a problem is the first step to solving it. This phase is largely conducted with the client and members of a design team. Activities include the following:

- Talking and listening to the client
- Reading about the subject
- Visiting a physical space
- Talking with others informally
- Assembling a design team

- Reviewing and presenting information gathered

0.6 *Photographs of Eames Furniture Collection Kiosk, 2003* *John Bowers*

In the initial phase, primary information about the project was sought.



Read more about this in Chapters 2 and 5.

Identifying

Identifying the purpose of a project and its different parts, sensibly grouping the parts, and prioritizing them constitute the next step. Goals are established and an underlying concept developed. Activities include the following:

- Interviewing select members of the targeted audience
- Making visual audits of entity and peer groups
- Creating positioning matrices
- Writing a design brief
- Writing, receiving, organizing, and prioritizing content
- Reviewing and presenting information gathered

0.7 *Project brief components*

Project Brief

- Problem Summary
- Goals and Strategy
- Target Audience
- Deliverables
- Deadlines
- Resources and Participants
- Feedback Paths
- Evaluation Methods

0.8 *Conceptualization for Eames Furniture Collection Kiosk, 2003*

John Bowers

A project brief was written that outlined the project's components and objectives.

4. **What is the desired user experience for each? (behaviors/actions)** *the*
To experience the simplicity, playfulness and connected nature of Eames work; to access information in individual and multiple ways; *to compare and contrast work*

5. **What were the project parameters or constraints you were working within? (integration with existing site, technology requirements, limited budget, etc.)**
The project was done pro-bono, there was no budget. No digital or print experience (e.g.: catalog) documenting and cataloging collection, previously existed.

6. **What process and/or methodologies did your team use during the project? (usability research, wireframes, etc.)**

> Usability: *and there was no budget!*
Because the project was pro-bono it was not subject to formal/commercial usability testing. Usability was assessed by students and colleagues (experienced programmers and designers) at The University of Arizona Treistman Center for New Media. Audience navigational abilities determined through experience with audience (working with colleagues and teaching students).

> Process/Methodology: *at USU*
Conceptualization
Visual Audit/Positioning Matrixes
Functionality Listing
Wireframe
Architecture/Interface
Production (Photoshop/Flash)

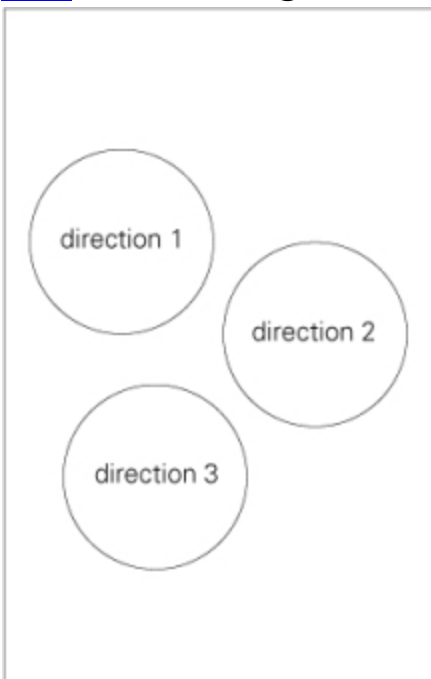
Read more about this in Chapters 3 and 5.

Generating

Generating ideas that could become possible solutions comes next. The goal at this point is to give form to a concept. The visual and verbal components are established, and multiple visual expressions (directions) on a single concept are created, from which a single direction is chosen. Activities include the following:

- Making thinking maps and visualization matrices
- Generating attribute lists and concept statements
- Creating off-computer sketches, images, and material studies
- Creating on-computer color, font, grid, and typography studies
- Doing on-computer design iterations
- Reviewing and presenting work

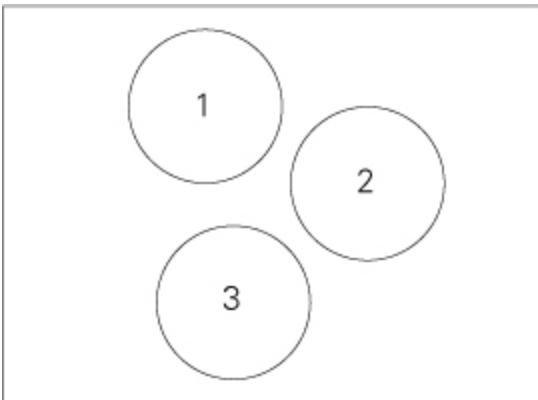
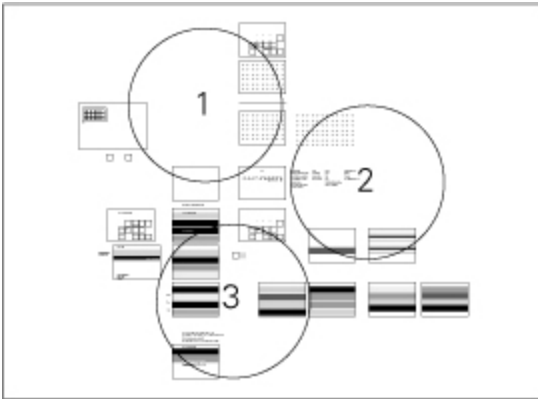
0.9 *Direction generation*



0.10 *Ideation*

Eames Furniture Collection Kiosk, 2003

John Bowers



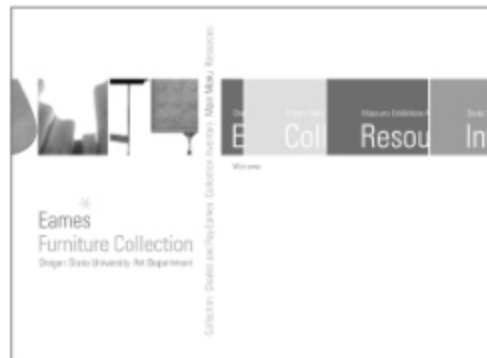
Read more about this in Chapters 4 and 5.

Implementing

Implementing and evaluating a solution is the final step. While refinement and evaluation of the solution to meet the project's goals take place throughout the design process, they culminate here and hopefully reinforce earlier decisions. An internal assessment may be done to better understand studio practices. Activities include the following:

- Conducting focus group testing
- Holding usability testing
- Seeking informal feedback
- Placing work in context
- Doing project assessment
- Reviewing work

0.11 Pages from
Eames Furniture Collection Kiosk, 2003
John Bowers
A single direction was chosen and refined.



Read more about this in Chapters 4 and 5.