

C O M 3 5 3
Applied Visual Communication
Fall 2025 course syllabus

Chris Funkhouser
funkhous@njit.edu

campus office hours Wednesdays 3-5 p.m. Cullimore 425 & by appointment

course description: This course explores information structuring using traditional and contemporary techniques and introduces students to the principles of visual communication and provides hands-on practice in document design. The focus is on preparing and presenting information in both professional and popular contexts. Students learn about and work with concepts that enable effective use of graphics and text.

Note to students: Contents of the syllabus for this course will be incrementally presented, on a weekly or bi-monthly basis, in order to keep you focused on work required at the time. Below is an abbreviated version of the syllabus, which indicates all of the major areas of study and assignments. If you need to see syllabus details for the entire semester, please let me know and I will furnish a copy. —cf

* Essential reading materials will be made available on Canvas. As of 9/9/25, several books, including Exploring the Elements of Design (Third Edition), Poppy Evans & Mark A. Thomas, eds., and The World of Zines: A Guide to the Independent Magazine Revolution will be held on reserve in the NJIT Library.

* To create work for this course, access to a computer with document layout and design software is required. All assignments can be completed with software accessible via NJIT labs and you should be able to access and download Adobe CC software (PhotoShop, Illustrator, InDesign) via this link <https://njit.instructure.com/courses/8519/pages/adobe-creative-cloud>.

* Unless instructed otherwise, your Assignments and Projects must be hard-copy compositions (i.e., printed).

* Class meets on Wednesdays, 6:00 p.m., PC MALL 40

* Regular office hours are 3:00-5 p.m. Wednesdays, or by appointment.

* You are required to complete a course evaluation at the end of the semester.

Required Work / Assignments:

1. Students must complete 8 Assignments listed on the syllabus [80 points total].
2. Course Project: Students will design and construct a 2025 monthly calendar (in print) [20 points].

Note: Attendance will be taken during every session: Unexcused absences and/or failure to participate in classes will not be tolerated and will lower a student's final grade (5 points for every two unexcused absences).

September 3: Course Introduction

Student introductions, course overview, software instruction (Photoshop basics).

Download and carefully read COM-353_Reading-1 (PDF posted on Canvas).

Assignment: Decide the topic of your Zine. Draft a Press Release and bring to class next week.

September 10: Language of Design

Discussion 1: Review of the Principles and Elements of Design. Following up on the reading material, be prepared to discuss how the concepts introduced in Ch. 1 are reflected in things we see in everyday life.

Discussion 2: Introduction to Zines and zine culture, review student ideas for Zines.

Potential resources: "How to make a zine" (Rona Akbar/Somnath Bhatt); "How to Make a Zine: A Beginner's Guide" (Aisling Twomey).

In-class exercise: Photo cropping. Use inferior photographs to complete the assignment--images that enable you to eliminate parts of the image that do not contribute anything to the composition.

Software instruction (Illustrator basics).

Assignment 1: Prepare a one-page Press Release for your Zine, including its name, scope (and purpose), and editorial contact information. Page design/layout matters. Use concepts you have absorbed from Reading 1 while composing this document. Post to Canvas by 9/17. [5 points]

Begin developing a logo for your Zine, as well as other iconography and content.

Reading for next week: COM-353_Reading-2A, COM-353_Reading-2B (PDF posted on Canvas).

September 17: Zines and Typography

Zine Press Release (Assignment 1) is due. Post to Canvas before class.

Discussion 1: Reading 2A & 2B.

Discussion 2: Zine development.

In-class exercise: expressive type.

Software instruction (InDesign basics).

Reading for next week: COM-353_Reading-3 (PDF posted on Canvas).

Assignment 2: Zine #1 [10 points]

For Zine #1 create a single-page (with any folding technique) "zine" of your own design. Approach to construction/structure and subject matter is entirely up to you. (Later issues can be in a different format). Countless types of designs and layouts are possible. Work with color only if you wish to do so. Zines must include a title, brief statement of purpose, contact information, and a word-of-the-issue component. You must give credit for any appropriated work. Due on 9/24.

September 24: Typography

Assignment 2 is due in class. Students will briefly present and discuss their work.

film screening : Helvetica, Gary Hustwit (see <https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/2874825?vp=njit> and login with UCID)

In-class group exercise: "Letterform Grid". You should USE ONLY ONE TYPEFACE in this exercise.

Reading for next week: COM-353_Reading-4 (PDF posted on Canvas).

October 1: Language and Image

Discussion: Reading 3 & 4.

In-class group exercise: use software to produce "Type Collage".

Assignment 3: Zine #2 [10 points] is due next week. Selected students will present and discuss their work in class.

For Zine #2 create a single-page (with any folding technique) "zine" of your own design. Title and subject matter should be the same as #1, but approach to construction/structure is up to you, and can be in a different format than #1. Work with color only if you wish to do so. As before Zines must include a title, brief statement of purpose, contact information, and a word-of-the-issue component. You must give credit for any appropriated work. Due on 10/8.

Reading for next week: COM-353_Reading-5A & 5B (PDF posted on Canvas).

October 8: Color and Design

Zine #2 [Assignment 3] is due in-class.

Discussion: Reading 5A & B.

In-class group exercise: "Color and Season" (p. 166). Follow directions in the book: TRIAD WITH ONE ACCENT COLOR + name of season should appear. No Photos (unless they are reduced to one color) or use of gradients.

October 15: Design Management

In-class exercise: "Word and Type Mix and Match" (one word per page) (pp. 80-81).

Zine #3 [Assignment 4, 15 points] is due next week. Selected students will present and discuss their work in class.

For Zine #3 create two copies of a single-page (with any folding technique) "zine" of your own design. Title and subject matter should be the same as before, but approach to construction/structure is up to you, and can be in a different format than previous issues. Begin to work with color. As before Zines must include a title, brief statement of purpose, contact information, and a word-of-the-issue component. You must give credit for any appropriated work. Due on 10/22.

October 22: Output Management

We will review outcomes of selected exercises and assignments in class.

Zine #3 is due. Prepare two copies. Submit a note (on Canvas) describing rationale and process in designing this project (including any unique techniques or methods used to create it). Please note what

design concepts are influencing your approach to constructing your layout(s). Conclude by adding commentary regarding how you expect to approach designing the next two editions.

Assignment 5: Use the template provided (Canvas) to prepare an evaluation of one of your classmate's Zine #3 [5 points]. Post to Canvas, due on 10/29.

In-class exercise: Using PhotoShop (or Illustrator or other graphics program), prepare a 3' x 5' flag. Horizontal (landscape) orientation recommended though not required. TEXT ONLY. Example below will be shown in class. Print your design (in color, large format) on 8.5 x 11" paper and bring to class; due on 10/29.

October 29: Design and Composition Review

Assignment 6: Zine #4 is due next week [15 points]. Selected students will present and discuss their work in class.

For Zine #4 create two copies of a single-page (with any folding technique) "zine" of your own design. Title and subject matter should be the same as before, but approach to construction/structure is up to you, and can be in a different format than previous issues. Work with color. As before Zines must include a title, brief statement of purpose, contact information, and a word-of-the-issue component. You must give credit for any appropriated work. Due on 11/5.

In-class exercise: Prepare a.) a "Photo/Hashtag Composition"; and, b.) "Selfie/Hashtag Composition". Using pictures taken with your phone (or other camera), add a #hashtag caption (layer text on top of image); choose an example for discussion.

November 5: Multipage Production

In-class exercise and Discussion: Using Photoshop or Illustrator (or other graphic software), create a Flyer (8.5 x 11" or 8.5 x 14") for a fictitious or real event. You will be required to present and describe your rationale and process in designing the flyer.

Assignment 6 [Zine #4] is due in-class. Submit a note (on Canvas) describing rationale and process in designing this project (including any unique techniques or methods used to create it). Please note what design concepts are influencing your approach to constructing your layout(s). Conclude by adding commentary regarding how you expect to approach designing the final (expanded) edition.

Assignment 7: Use the template provided (Canvas) to prepare an evaluation of one of your classmate's Zine #5 [5 points]. Post to Canvas, due on 11/12.

November 12: Course Project Introduction

Assignment 8: Zine #5 is due next week [15 points]. Selected students will present and discuss their work in class.

For Zine #5 create a multi-page "zine" of your own design. Title and subject matter should be the same as before, but approach to construction/structure is up to you. Work with color. As before Zines must include a title, brief statement of purpose, contact information, and a word-of-the-issue component. You must give credit for any appropriated work. Due on 11/19.

Course Project introduction.

Course Project: Calendar [20 points]

Create a bound (stapled, ring-bound, or other fastening) Calendar with unity and cohesive theme, preferably using InDesign. Due 12/10.

Students will determine the theme of their calendar, which should contain text and images, as well as reflect effective use of the design principles we've explored during the semester. Students must create a printed and bound hard copy of this project, and submit both the computer files used to output the publication as well as hard copy of the calendar once complete. Images used in the Course Project may be appropriated, but providing credit and source for them is required. Please avoid use of templates. Final Project must be submitted on or before the last night of class.

Homework: After spending time considering the theme for your course project, and begin to compile design ideas (and images). Make a sketch (on paper) of your potential page design.

November 19: Project Studio

Assignment 8 [Zine #5] is due in-class.

In-class exercise: Bring the Homework sketch and and your images to class in order to create a calendar page prototype.

Course Project studio.

November 26: NO CLASS MEETING / THANKSGIVING EVE

December 3: Project Studio & Prototype Review

Bring your Project files to class. By the conclusion of class tonight, you should have much of your Course Project prepared (in "draft" form) and ready for preview.

December 10: Conclusion

Course Project Due / Students will present and discuss their projects in-class.

Incomplete grades (IN) will not assigned under any circumstance. Final grades will be based on works completed by this date.

ALL WORK FOR THIS COURSE MUST BE COMPLETED BY 12/10/25

OTHER COURSE INFO:

Generative AI Policy: Use of Generative AI writing is not permitted in the course. Use of AI imagery is limited to Assignment 6, Assignment 8, and Course Project (if appropriate). If the thematic focus of your work requires use of AI, we can discuss making exceptions to this policy.

This course is designed to ensure NJIT's Communication and Media program successfully provides its students with a foundation in a range of forms of communication. The course's overall objectives are designed to promote each student's competence or mastery of visual communications, using a graphic design as an expressive tool. Through project development and completion, students build practical skills in developing and creating design projects using print media competently and artistically. In the process of preparing assignments, students acquire the ability to effectively produce and edit more

elaborate course projects. The course will improve a student's flexibility in communication by using contemporary media , thus advancing their general skillset and delivering content via professional media formats.

Students in this course will: 1.) Gain firsthand understanding of a communicative genre; 2.) Explore the practical and creative implementation of digital tools and applications; 3.) Develop individual technical practices using software; 4.) Use peers to develop ideas, and cultivate production of original work; and 5.) Foster printed artifacts for publication.

Learning outcome 1: Engage in critical thinking and reflection regarding use of text, image, and other communication strategies.

Learning Outcome 2: Gain a practice-based introduction to understanding processes and tools of visual communication in print.

Learning Outcome 3: Gain a practice-based introduction to methods for preparing printed documents and making decisions that enable efficient communication with others.

Learning Outcome 4: The course will expand a student's conceptual perspective of communication, thus improving his or her skills in both quantitative and qualitative reasoning, critical thinking, information literacy, and project management.

Core competencies addressed by the course include: Student awareness of, and engagement with, communications strategies; building perception of contemporary communication(s) environments; performative practice with communication tools; critical thinking on the subject matter; cultivation of communication literacy.

Instructional objectives / evaluation:

Students will be evaluated on the basis of their production's:

- (1) Real-world relevance; design qualities
- (2) Sustained investigation; development of materials (process over time)
- (3) Use of multiple sources and perspectives; originality
- (4) Creating polished products; aesthetic products

Integrated assessment (feedback from multiple sources) will be used in evaluating assignments and projects produced in the course.

Scale converting number to letter grade

A = 90 - 100

B+ = 85 - 89

B = 80 - 84

C+ = 75 - 79

C = 70 - 74

D = 60 - 69

F = 59 or less

Course prerequisites: HUM 102 with a grade of C or higher, and one History and Humanities GER 200 level course with a grade of C or higher

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at:
<http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu