

MAKE THINGS

Making It Say Something

Clean work that communicates nothing is the commonest self-taught failure, and it is fixable.

First edition, September 2026

Addaly

Series editor: Dr Mustafa Mun

Draft, open for academic review

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Written by AI models to a written standard, with Dr Mustafa Mun as series editor. Exam keys checked blind by a second model: 3,665 of 3,666 agreed. Academic review invited.

The manuscript was drafted with the assistance of a large language model and was edited and published under his name. That is stated plainly here rather than left to be discovered, because a reader is entitled to know how a book they are trusting was made.

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Free to read, free to download, free to print, and free to teach from. There is no paid edition and there never will be.

Every diagram in it is drawn from data by code, not generated as a picture, so the numbers on the page are the numbers in the argument. The answers to every check, test and examination question are at the back.

8 modules · 64 lessons · 26 figures · 8 case studies · 52,031 words · about 9 hours

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1

MODULE 1

Before you open the software

Turn a vague request into a written brief naming one specific viewer, their belief before and after, the seven constraints the work must survive, and an agreed measure of success — and defend a design decision by pointing at that document rather than at taste.

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Lesson 1 · 8 min

Nice work. What is it for?

THE ONE THING TO KEEP

Before you open any software, write one sentence naming who sees this and what should be different in their head afterwards.

The most common failure is not ugliness

The piece that gets no response is usually not ugly. It is a well-spaced poster with a good photograph, a competent typeface and nothing to say. The colours agree with each other. The alignment is honest. And a person walks past it without one thought changing in their head.

This happens to self-taught people more than to people who came through a studio, and there is a reason. Craft is visible in other people's work. You can see the kerning, the grid, the grade on the photograph, and you can copy it. Effect is invisible. You cannot look at a poster and see the eleven people who called the number. So you practise the part you can see, get good at it, and stay stuck.

The fix is not more craft. It is a habit of asking one question before you open any software.

The sentence that closes the gap

Write this before you design, in your own words, in your own language:

After seeing this, [a specific person] should [think, feel or do] [a specific thing], because [the reason they would believe it].

Most of the value is in refusing to be vague at each bracket.

Weak: *raise awareness of our café*. Awareness is not a thought a human has. "A specific person" is not "everyone".

Stronger: Someone walking to the bus stop at 8am who currently buys instant coffee from the petrol station should think this place makes proper coffee and is open right now, because they can see the machine and the word OPEN from six metres away.

That second sentence has already made design decisions for you. It tells you the piece is read at six metres, by someone moving, in the morning. It tells you the machine matters more than the logo. It tells you OPEN is the largest word. You have not chosen a font yet and the layout is half decided.

Figure 1.1

What each sentence has already decided for you

Raise awareness

- Names no particular viewer
- Names no belief to change
- Sets no size and no distance
- Decides no order of elements
- Cannot be tested on anybody

The bus-stop sentence

- One person, walking, at eight
- Buys instant from the petrol station
- Read at six metres, moving
- OPEN is the largest word
- Testable in three seconds

Both sentences take about the same time to write. The second one has made four design decisions before a typeface is chosen, which is why it is worth refusing to be vague at every bracket.

Three tests you can run this afternoon

The three-second test. Show the piece to a real person for three seconds, take it away, and ask what they remember. Do not ask if they like it — people are polite, and liking is not the variable. If the answer is "it looked nice", you have craft with no message. If the answer is "coffee, and something about being open", it works.

The removal test. Cover the most beautiful element with your hand. Does the message survive? If yes, that element is decoration. Decoration is allowed — but you should know which parts of your piece are load-bearing and which are furniture. Now cover the message instead. If the piece still feels finished, you never had one.

The distance test. Stand back three metres from the screen, or shrink the image to the size it will actually be seen. A flyer held in the hand, a post at 400 pixels wide in a feed, a thumbnail at 150 pixels. Almost every beginner design is composed at the size of the artboard and consumed at a fifth of it.

Where this advice is wrong

Not everything carries a message in words. A record sleeve, a textile pattern, a title sequence that is pure mood — these communicate a feeling and nothing else, and that is a complete job. The failure is never "no sentence". It is no intention: making a choice because it looked nice in someone else's work, with no answer to why it belongs in yours.

And the opposite failure is just as real. A sharp message rendered badly still fails, because people infer competence from surface. A flyer with a brilliant line set in stretched Arial with a drop shadow tells the reader this business does not check its work, and they generalise from the flyer to the plumbing. Both halves are required. If your craft is the weak half, design foundations is the other side of this course and they are meant to be taken together.

There is a third failure worth naming because it looks like success: the piece that communicates perfectly, to nobody. Technically clean, message clear, aimed at an audience that does not exist or does not care. That is not a design problem. That is the next lesson.

Do this today

Open the last thing you finished. Do not change it. Write its sentence after the fact — who it was for, what should have changed in their head, and why they would have believed it. If you can write that sentence easily, you have been

doing this instinctively and the rest of the course will sharpen it. If you cannot, you have found the reason the work did not land, and it was never the typeface.

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

A designer shows a friend a café flyer for three seconds. The friend remembers a nice photograph of coffee but not the name of the place or that it opens at 7am. What does this most likely reveal?

- A. The photograph is too high in quality relative to the rest of the piece, so it should be replaced with something plainer.
- B. Three seconds is too short a window for anyone to take in a flyer, so the test result carries no information.
- C. Nothing in the piece was made more prominent than the photograph, so the only thing available to carry away was the photograph.
- D. The friend is not the target audience, so their reaction should be discounted until a real customer sees it.

The answer and why: p. 373

Lesson 2 · 9 min

Nobody is going to hand you a real brief

THE ONE THING TO KEEP

A request names an object; a brief names who sees it, what they believe now, and what should be different afterwards — write it down and get it confirmed.

What you will actually be given

You will be given a sentence. "We need a poster for the launch." "Something for Instagram, modern, make it pop." "A logo — you know, professional but friendly."

None of that is a brief. It is a request for an object. A brief tells you what the object has to do. The gap between the two is where most unpaid revision rounds live: you make the thing that was asked for, the client says it is not right, and neither of you can say why, because nobody ever wrote down what right meant.

Extracting the brief is a skill, it takes about fifteen minutes, and it is the single highest-paid quarter hour in the job.

The seven questions

Ask these out loud, in a call or in person if you can, and write the answers down where the client can see them.

1. **Who exactly sees this?** Push past "everyone aged 18 to 45". Push until you get a person: "shop owners on this road who already know us but think we are expensive."
2. **What do they currently believe?** This is the question people skip and it is the most useful one. You are not writing on a blank surface. You are editing something already in their head.

3. **What should they believe or do afterwards?** One thing. If you are given four, ask which one they would keep if the other three were deleted.
4. **Where will they see it?** On a phone at a bus stop. Printed A5 and handed over at a counter. Projected in a hall. This determines size, contrast, and how many words are possible, and it is often the answer that kills the client's original idea.
5. **How will you know it worked?** Phone calls, walk-ins, sign-ups, a full room. Even an unmeasurable answer is useful, because it exposes disagreement between two people on the client's side who thought they agreed.
6. **What must not change?** Legal text, a registered mark, a colour the founder will not give up, a photograph of a person who has given permission for that photograph and no other.
7. **Who signs it off, and when?** If the answer is "the team", find out whether one person can say yes. A piece that needs four yeses is a different job and should be priced as one.

Add money and rounds to the same document. "Two rounds of revision included, further rounds charged at X" prevents a specific argument, and it prevents it in writing.

Write it back

Send the answers back in your own words, in a shared document, and ask them to confirm. This is not bureaucracy. It converts a vague conversation into a thing you can point at three weeks later when someone says they wanted it blue.

A brief that fits on one screen:

FOR: Shop owners on Kandivali market road, 30-55, who know us but assume we are expensive.
NOW: They think a service contract costs 8,000 a year.
AFTER: They think it starts at 2,400, and they call.
WHERE: A5 handed over the counter. Also one 4:5 post.
SUCCESS: Twenty calls in three weeks.
FIXED: Logo, the phone number, the GST line.
SIGN-OFF: Priya only. Draft Thursday, final next Wednesday.
ROUNDS: Two included.

When the client genuinely does not know

Sometimes there is no hidden brief to extract. The client has not thought about it, and interrogating them harder makes them defensive and makes you look like an obstacle. When you hit that, stop asking and start proposing.

Show two directions — not two layouts, two *premises*. Write one sentence above each: "Direction A says we are the cheapest. Direction B says we are the ones who turn up." Keep them visually rough so nobody argues about the shade of green. People are far better at reacting than at specifying, and a wrong direction rejected in five minutes has taught you more than an hour of questions.

The honest limitation: this only works if the two directions are genuinely different. Two versions of the same idea with different corner radii teach you nothing, and clients can feel when they are being offered a fake choice.

Briefing yourself

Personal work needs this more, not less, because there is nobody to argue with. The questions change slightly: who is this for, what do they already assume, what is the one thing I want to be different, and how will I know I got there. Written down, in a file, before you start.

You will fail this test constantly. Everyone does. But an unfinished personal project usually died because there was no way to tell whether it was finished, and a sentence written at the start is how you tell.

Do this today

Take a job you are working on now, even a small one, and answer the seven questions in a plain text file. Where you cannot answer, write "unknown" instead of guessing — then send those specific unknowns to the client as questions. Three unknowns sent on day one costs you one email. Three unknowns discovered on day nine costs you the weekend.

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

A client asks for a poster and cannot answer any question about who it is for or what should change. Repeated questioning is making them irritated. What is the most productive next move?

- A. Show two rough directions built on visibly different premises, each with a one-line statement of what it claims, and let the client react.
- B. Proceed with your own best judgement and present a single finished piece, since the client clearly wants to be led.
- C. Send the seven questions in writing so the client has time to think properly before answering.
- D. Present two polished layouts of the same concept so the client can pick the execution they prefer.

The answer and why: p. 374

CASE STUDY · MODULE 1

The donor poster that answered the wrong objection

An illustrative case, built from documented patterns.

A district blood bank in Nagpur, preparing a fortnight of college drives after two years of falling repeat donation.

The brief arrived as one sentence from the director: a poster to raise awareness of blood donation. There was a budget for 2,500 A3 sheets, a week of visits to four colleges, and a target of 900 units.

The designer asked the seven questions and got through five of them. Question two stopped everything. What do they currently believe about donating here? The director said people did not understand that donation was safe. The communications officer said people were busy. Neither of them had asked anybody.

The second source cost one conversation

So she went to the counter and asked the two attendants what people say just before they change their mind and leave. They could recite it without pausing, because they hear it every day: how long is this going to take.

The register supported them. The bank's own arrival and discharge stamps put the median donor in the building for one hour and fifty minutes. Almost all of that was waiting for the medical officer, who screened between eleven and one because that was when he was free between theatre lists.

The before state was not ignorance about safety. It was a specific memory held by people who had already donated once: I lost an afternoon. Awareness posters are written for people who have never heard of you. These people had heard of the bank and had decided.

The decision, and what it cost on each side

The honest line the brief now pointed at was a promise about time. Booked slot, forty minutes, out by ten past. That line could not be printed unless the bank changed how it worked on the two drive days: the medical officer screening from nine, a second counter staffed, and donors given a slot rather than a queue number.

That was two extra staff shifts and an argument with the pathology head, who said moving the screening earlier would collapse the sample-processing queue behind it and that the medical officer had a theatre list nobody could move.

The alternative was cheap and safe. Print a poster that said donate blood, save a life, over a photograph of a smiling donor. Nobody in the building would object to it. The designer could also predict its result, because it was approximately last year's poster and last year's result was the reason she had been called.

And there was a third option that was worse than both, which was the tempting one: print the forty-minute promise without making the change. That version would work once. The fastest way to destroy a claim is to get a lot of people to check it, and 900 people checking a false forty minutes would cost the bank the donors it still had.

Agreeing the measure before printing

Before anything went to press they wrote one line into the brief. Success was repeat donors, counted as arrivals whose donor identification number already existed in the register, over four weeks. The diagnostic measure was the gap between the arrival stamp and the discharge stamp, which the bank was already recording and had never looked at. A separate helpline number was printed on the poster and nowhere else, so a call could be attributed.

The designer also wrote the sentence she expected to need later: this fortnight also contains a college festival and a newspaper appeal, so we will not be able to separate the poster from either, and we are accepting that as rough. A

limitation named before the fact is a professional position; the identical sentence afterwards is an excuse, and the difference is entirely in the date at the top of the document.

The forecast went into the same line, deliberately rough. The bank had been seeing about 40 repeat donors a fortnight. If the change worked, expect something in the region of 60 to 80, not 300. Writing that down cost a minute and put everybody's expectations in one room before any money moved, which is also where the conversation about arithmetic happened: 2,500 posters reaching roughly 9,000 students at four colleges cannot produce 900 units on any conversion rate anybody has ever measured, so the drive needed the staff canteen and the two mills as well.

YOUR ANSWERS

1. The director's brief named a destination and no starting point. Why does that make a poster hard to design rather than merely vague?

2. Why did she ask the counter attendants rather than pressing the director for a better answer?

3. Printing the forty-minute promise without changing the process was the cheapest option available. What is the argument against it that does not rely on ethics?

STOP HERE

Write your answers before you turn the page. How it played out starts on p. 46.

This page is blank so that how it played out stays out of view until you turn the page.

CASE STUDY · MODULE 1

How it played out

The pathology head was brought into the room rather than told afterwards, and turned out to have a workable objection and a workable fix: screening could start at nine on two named days if a second technician handled samples those mornings. The bank ran one drive with the change and the forty-minute promise, and one without it, on the safe poster.

The drives produced 71 and 44 repeat donors against a normal fortnightly figure of about 40. Two drives is not evidence and the designer said so in the report. The diagnostic measure was not noisy: median time in the building was 46 minutes on the changed days and 108 on the others. That number is what the bank acted on, because it is a fact about the bank rather than about one poster.

The helpline attributed 19 calls. Three of them said, unprompted, that they had come back because of the time.

The questions, discussed

1. The director's brief named a destination and no starting point. Why does that make a poster hard to design rather than merely vague?

Every piece of work is the distance between what the viewer believes now and what they should believe afterwards, and the same destination needs completely different work depending on where they are standing. Reliability aimed at someone who has never heard of you is noise; aimed at someone who was let down once it reads as a lie. Without the before state the designer cannot tell which of four different pieces is required, so the choices get made on taste.

2. Why did she ask the counter attendants rather than pressing the director for a better answer?

A discovery meeting finds what the client knows and can say, and every answer in it comes from the same source, so there is nothing to disagree with. The objection log held by whoever answers the phone or faces the queue is a

second source, it costs one conversation, and it records what people said at the moment they decided not to act, which is exactly the before state the brief needed.

3. Printing the forty-minute promise without changing the process was the cheapest option available. What is the argument against it that does not rely on ethics?

Specificity is what makes a claim believed, and the same specificity is what makes it checkable. A vague claim that fails disappoints one person quietly; a precise claim that fails is contradicted by nine hundred people on one afternoon, and each of them now discounts everything else the bank says. The campaign would have spent an asset the bank cannot rebuy in order to buy one fortnight.

MODULE 1 TEST

Check what stuck

6 questions, one right answer each. This one is for you, not for a record. The answers, and the reason behind each, are in the key on p. 372. If two go wrong, re-read the module before the exam.

- 1 A supplier's flyer says SAME-DAY DELIVERY. GUARANTEED, set large and spaced well. Customers who were let down by a previous supplier ignore it. What is the mechanism of the failure?
 - A. The guarantee is a legal commitment, so readers discount it as boilerplate they cannot enforce.
 - B. The typeface is not distinctive enough for the claim to be remembered a day later.
 - C. It announces the after state, and a belief arrives as a rival claim from an interested party.
 - D. Beliefs shift only after a message has been repeated enough times for a reader to recognise it.

- 2 A client genuinely cannot say what their customers believe about them now. Pressing the question harder is producing invention rather than information. Which move is the most reliable?
 - A. Ask them to write a full creative brief document before any design work begins.
 - B. Decide the message yourself and confirm it once there is something to look at.
 - C. Keep asking, in different words, until an answer that can be used emerges.
 - D. Write the brief as you understand it in six lines and send it for correction.

- 3 A brief describes the audience as women aged 25 to 40 in tier-one cities. Three hours in, you have two headlines: one dry and specific, one warm and general. Why does the demographic not settle it?
- A. Demographics are usually guessed at by the client and are therefore too inaccurate to design against.
 - B. Design decisions are about whether one person would stop and believe, and a category can do neither.
 - C. Age bands that wide are useless; a five-year band would have answered the question.
 - D. Demographic data is expensive to obtain and is rarely current enough to trust on a live job.
- 4 Two days go into a poster built on a full-bleed photograph with white type reversed out of the dark half. The print budget bought one ink on kraft stock. Which constraint would have rejected the idea on day one?
- A. The production route, because one ink on an uncoated stock cannot hold that image.
 - B. The budget, because a photographic poster always costs more than a typographic one.
 - C. Format and quantity, because 200 copies is too few to justify a photograph.
 - D. Where it will physically be, because a corridor is too dark for a dark poster.
- 5 You have built a piece from a reference board. Which test tells you whether you took surface rather than structure?
- A. Whether you changed more than thirty per cent of the elements you borrowed.
 - B. Whether the reference carries a licence that permits commercial reuse and adaptation.
 - C. Whether the original is old enough for its copyright to have expired where you publish.
 - D. Whether a viewer who knows the original would recognise it in yours.

- 6 A shop had 11 enquiries the week before a flyer and 15 the week after. The client calls it a success. Why is that not yet evidence?
- A. Enquiries are a vanity measure and should never be used as an outcome measure.
 - B. Fifteen is too small a number for any statistical test to be run on it.
 - C. A normal quiet week and a normal busy week already differ by about that much.
 - D. A flyer's effect cannot appear until at least three months of distribution have passed.

Lesson 9 · 8 min

A design that says four things says none

THE ONE THING TO KEEP

Rank every element into three levels and check by blurring the design — if more than one thing survives the blur, nothing does.

How a piece ends up saying nothing

Nobody sets out to make a flyer with six messages. It arrives one addition at a time. The client wants the QR code. Then all three social handles, because the intern set up TikTok. Then the discount. Then a photograph of the shopfront so people recognise it. Then, at the last minute, the founder's quote.

Every one of those additions is reasonable on its own. Together they produce a surface where nothing is bigger than anything else, and here is the mechanism that matters: the eye needs a single entry point. It finds one by looking for the strongest contrast — in size, in weight, in colour, in isolation. When six elements compete for that, the eye has no reason to prefer any of them, scan order becomes arbitrary, and an arbitrary scan is uncomfortable. The reader resolves the discomfort by leaving.

This is not a taste judgement. You can watch it happen with the three-second test from the first lesson.

Three levels, and only three

The workable structure is almost always the same:

- **One thing** that is unmissable in half a second.
- **Two or three things** that are found in the next two seconds.
- **Everything else**, which is there for the person who has already decided and is now looking for the address.

The discipline is not "remove things". It is "rank things". The GST line and the opening hours can stay — they just go in level three, at 9pt, and they stop fighting.

Figure 2.1

Three levels, and what belongs in each

Level one

One thing, unmissable in half a second

Level two

Two or three things, found in the next two seconds

Level three

Address, hours, GST line, at nine point

The discipline is ranking, not removing. The GST line and the opening hours can stay; they move to level three and stop competing for the entry point.

Making a level-one element is not about size alone. Contrast comes from difference against its neighbours: one heavy word among light ones, one saturated colour on a muted page, one element with air around it while the rest is packed. Isolation is the most underrated of these and costs nothing but restraint.

The blur test, done properly

Squinting works. Actually blurring works better, because it is repeatable.

In Photopea — free, runs in a browser tab, opens PSD files — flatten a copy and apply Filter, Blur, Gaussian Blur at around 15 to 20 pixels on a 1000-pixel-wide design. GIMP has the same thing under Filters, Blur, Gaussian Blur. On a phone, take a screenshot and pinch it down to the size of an app icon.

EXAMINATION

Making It Say Something — final examination

This paper covers the whole course:

- extracting a real brief and naming the viewer's before state
- ranking a design so one message survives a blur
- joining beats with but and therefore
- gathering material with consent and a licence you can point at
- writing words that carry the picture
- choosing type, colour and image for what they say
- delivering into the surface and the system that carries it
- taking a piece from private judgement into public responsibility

56 questions, the whole pool. The site draws 25 for a sitting, pass mark 70%.
Work any 25 under your own conditions. Answers from page 420.

1 Module 1 · Before you open the software

You cover the most beautiful element of your own poster with your hand and the message survives intact. What have you learned?

- A. That element is decoration rather than load-bearing, which is allowed but should be known.
- B. That element is redundant and has to be deleted before the piece can be finished.
- C. The hierarchy is broken, because covering any element at all should damage the message somewhere.
- D. The message is too simple, since a single element should not be able to carry it.

2 Module 1 · Before you open the software

After a discovery call you type the answers back in your own words, in a shared document, and ask the client to confirm. What does that step actually buy?

- A. It satisfies the professional requirement to keep written records of client instructions.
- B. It slows the project down enough for the client to reconsider a weak request.
- C. It turns a vague conversation into an object you can point at three weeks later.
- D. It transfers responsibility for the outcome from you to the person who confirmed it.

3 Module 1 · Before you open the software

Writing one eighty-word portrait sharpens your decisions and narrows your sight at the same time. Which pair of defences addresses that cost?

- A. Write the portrait in the client's words, and confirm it with them before designing.
- B. Write two portraits when the audience splits, and name in one line who it is not for.
- C. Widen the portrait until it covers the whole audience, and check it against the demographic.
- D. Test the portrait on three customers, and update it after every round of feedback.

4 Module 1 · Before you open the software

A campaign is not moving anybody. You can spend the week on layout and language, or on evidence. Which stage of failure does better layout never fix?

- A. Attention, because a viewer who never took the piece in cannot be reached by any argument.
- B. Comprehension, because language and hierarchy are the only levers that act on it.
- C. Distribution, because no design decision changes how many people are shown the piece.
- D. Belief, because they saw it, understood it, and did not accept the claim.

5 Module 1 · Before you open the software

A client sincerely tells you their customers buy on craftsmanship. Reviews of their competitors say people are buying on price. Why does the discovery meeting not catch this on its own?

- A. Clients understate price sensitivity because it reflects badly on their own product.
- B. The questions were asked in the wrong order, so the answers were rehearsed.
- C. Every answer came from the same source, so there is nothing to disagree with.
- D. Discovery questions ask about the future, and buying behaviour is a fact about the past.

6 Module 1 · Before you open the software

A mood board of forty beautiful images tends to drift into copying even when nobody intends it. Which habit prevents the drift?

- A. Keeping the board to work from outside your own field and country.
- B. Writing under each item the one thing you are taking from it.
- C. Restricting the board to material that carries an open licence.
- D. Removing anything a client might recognise before you present it.

7 Module 1 · Before you open the software

Which of these has to be decided before production rather than after, if the campaign is to be attributable at all?

- A. Whether the outcome measure will be enquiries, walk-ins or bookings for the client.
- B. Whether the client considers the result good enough to commission a second piece.
- C. Which vanity measures the platform will report once the piece has been published.
- D. A separate phone number or code word, so a call can be traced to the poster.

Module 1 • Before you open the software

The module starts on p. 9.

MODULE 1 TEST

Module 1 test, Q1, p. 48

A supplier's flyer says SAME-DAY DELIVERY. GUARANTEED, set large and spaced well. Customers who were let down by a previous supplier ignore it. What is...

Answer C: It announces the after state, and a belief arrives as a rival claim from an interested party.

Why: The viewer already holds a belief with their own experience behind it. Your claim arrives as a competing one from a party with an obvious interest, so it loses. What moves a belief is evidence the viewer can check without trusting you first: a photograph of the dispatch board, a named customer with a phone number, a missed-delivery figure published against your own interest.

Module 1 test, Q2, p. 48

A client genuinely cannot say what their customers believe about them now. Pressing the question harder is producing invention rather than information. Which move is...

Answer D: Write the brief as you understand it in six lines and send it for correction.

Why: People who cannot author a brief are excellent at correcting one. Proposing converts an unanswerable question into an editing task, which is a thing busy people can do in two minutes, and the correction you get back is usually better than any answer the questioning would have produced.

Module 1 test, Q3, p. 49

A brief describes the audience as women aged 25 to 40 in tier-one cities. Three hours in, you have two headlines: one dry and specific...

Answer B: Design decisions are about whether one person would stop and believe, and a category can do neither.

Why: Almost every decision you make while working has the same shape: would this person stop, and would they believe it. A category cannot stop or believe, so it has nothing to say. What decides the question is a written portrait naming the device, the posture, the state they are in, and the past disappointment your work has to survive.

Module 1 test, Q4, p. 49

Two days go into a poster built on a full-bleed photograph with white type reversed out of the dark half. The print budget bought one...

Answer A: The production route, because one ink on an uncoated stock cannot hold that image.

Why: Each of the seven constraints is a filter that rejects whole classes of idea in seconds. The production route carries its own list of impossibilities: the laser printer cannot do full bleed, the plotter cannot do fine gradients, one ink cannot do a reversed-out photograph. An idea that fails a constraint is not a good idea you cannot afford; it is an idea for a different job.

Module 1 test, Q5, p. 49

You have built a piece from a reference board. Which test tells you whether you took surface rather than structure?

Answer D: Whether a viewer who knows the original would recognise it in yours.

Why: Structure, mechanism and constraint are yours to take: where the emphasis sits, why the piece works, that it was made in two colours. Surface is not. The recognition test is the practical version of that line, because taking structure produces work that looks like nothing in your reference pile, while taking surface produces a copy with new words.

Module 1 test, Q6, p. 50

A shop had 11 enquiries the week before a flyer and 15 the week after. The client calls it a success. Why is that not...

Answer C: A normal quiet week and a normal busy week already differ by about that much.

Why: Small campaigns produce small numbers, and small numbers are noisy. A difference of four sits inside the ordinary week-to-week spread, so it is not evidence about the flyer. You need either a larger volume or a longer period, and the honest move is to say in advance which of the two you are relying on.

THE LESSON CHECKS

Lesson 1, p. 13

A designer shows a friend a café flyer for three seconds. The friend remembers a nice photograph of coffee but not the name of the...

Answer C: Nothing in the piece was made more prominent than the photograph, so the only thing available to carry away was the photograph.

Why: Before you open any software, write one sentence naming who sees this and what should be different in their head afterwards.

A The photograph is too high in...: Treats an imbalance in emphasis as a problem with the strongest element rather than with what was left unemphasised.

B Three seconds is too short a...: Assumes the reader will give the piece more attention than a real passer-by does.

D The friend is not the target...: Uses audience mismatch to dismiss a result about prominence, which would show up with any viewer.

Lesson 2, p. 17

A client asks for a poster and cannot answer any question about who it is for or what should change. Repeated questioning is making them...

Answer A: Show two rough directions built on visibly different premises, each with a one-line statement of what it claims, and let the client react.

Why: A request names an object; a brief names who sees it, what they believe now, and what should be different afterwards — write it down and get it confirmed.

B Proceed with your own best judgement...: Mistakes a client's lack of vocabulary for a delegation of the decision, leaving nothing to point at when they reject it.

C Send the seven questions in writing...: Assumes the obstacle is time pressure rather than the client having no articulated position to retrieve.

D Present two polished layouts of the...: Offers a choice between variations rather than between premises, which produces a preference but no brief.

Lesson 3, p. 21

A designer replaces "men 18–34" with a portrait: "Arjun watches on a phone at 1am in bed, sound off so he doesn't wake his brother..."

Answer B: It gives each design choice a predicate you can check: sound off rules out a voiceover opening.

Why: Replace the demographic with one written portrait naming the device, the posture, the emotional state and the past disappointment, because those four facts decide real design questions and age never does.

A It makes the work more emotionally...: Mistakes the benefit for the reader when the benefit is for the maker: the portrait's job is to settle the designer's decisions, not to appear in the piece.

C It narrows the audience, so the...: Confuses the imagined viewer with the targeting: the portrait guides the making and does not change who is served the piece.

D It replaces guesswork with data, since...: A portrait is still partly invented; the gain is decidability, not evidential strength, and treating it as data is how teams stop checking it.

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