



The Design Process

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss how designers work
- ✓ Explore theme based fashion illustrations

The Design Process

How Designers Work

Generating Ideas in Context

Designers evaluate and selectively create appropriate designs by using their perceptions of the relationships between the garments, the styles, and the state of fashion at any given time. Designers also control the context, in other words, the sources of inspiration in their immediate environment, in order to deliver appropriate elements for these designs. Designers influence fashion. They provide new designs continually from which consumers can choose the ones best suited to express their individual lifestyles.

a) Memory and Generation of Ideas

Designers remember other designs that they have seen and these coupled with objects or images will provide the ideas for new designs. Creative thinking is influenced by their experiences, especially recent ones, and they assist designers in creating their work.

b) Strategies for Guiding Idea Generation

Generating new ideas and concepts comes from designers' memories and any other sources of inspiration. A lot of designers use these mental images to come up with even more ideas for designs, continually evaluating these ideas and discarding the ones they feel will not produce the desired results.

c) Fashion Research and Range Planning

As mentioned in earlier units, designers must always be on the look-out for what is or will be in fashion for an up-coming season. They must be aware of the constraints of the fashion area by understanding what the key looks are that define a specific fashion, what is not right, or their market sector at any given time, and what looks dated and, therefore, out of fashion.

This process begins with an awareness of current fashion trends which will indicate proportions, styles and overall appearance. Styles will usually continue to evolve incrementally for some years. The ability to spot trends and mentally transform them into garments is a necessary skill. Fashion research allows designers to fine tune their skills of perception and be easily able to recognize what is or is not fashionable at any time, any cultural undertones a garment may have, and also any ways in which a design needs to be modified in order to conform to fashion. In addition, it provides designers with more memories they can later fall back on in order to create new designs in the future.

Designers must be aware of what their competitors are doing and also what companies are designing for the next segment of the market. Whose looks are they imitating? This will assist designers to create garments within a similar fashion area.

As a new season approaches designers begin to sharpen their understanding of the fashion that's coming. Work on a new season can only occur after the forecasting materials have been published and the big trade shows have taken place. This would be around two years before their designs will appear in the shops. As time goes on the designers will begin to get more information from magazines, designer labels which appear in shops and precede high street garments by around a year, and trade shows featuring future seasons. They will also look at particular styles and features made by couturiers which are being embraced by commercial designers. Companies will assess their designs as all these elements are viewed together. Sometimes designs can be added at a later stage to prepare for any emerging trends they might have missed. This, of course, will disrupt the progress of other designs and also be a problem time-wise so it's always better to ensure their fashion research is correct and produce designs in larger amounts rather than having to discard those that won't sell.

Often, similarities will be easily seen in garments from different designers because they study the same forecasting materials, go to the same trade shows and check out what's selling in stores during specific fashion times.

Basic Requirements of a Designer

Fashion designers are also referred to as apparel designers. They come up with ideas for garments as well as accessories and therefore must be imaginative with a talent for designing clothing. Designers must have a genuine love of fashion, fabrics and beauty, and are likened to artists because they must sketch, understand elements and principles of art and are creative. The creation of a constant flow of ideas is a must as a designer, as well as knowledge and understanding of changing economic and social movements which will allow them to design for consumer demand. Trends in consumer lifestyles and attitudes must always be noted. Very importantly, designers must believe in themselves and their creativity.

Designers should have a good grasp of technical knowledge of fabrics, trimmings and fit and keep up with the latest art and fashion news. Any added skills a designer can have or develop such as pattern making, draping or sewing, will greatly enhance his/her ability to create. This will all help the designer to visualize the three dimensional garment before it is actually made.

The desire and the courage to experiment with new ideas, is imperative. Obtaining ideas and indeed, inspiration from anywhere in the world or any place such as museums, theatre, overseas travel, and especially past fashions, is something designers must be open to. A good sense of timing is also important. They must have new styles ready as the old ones begin to fade out.

Designers must also be able to work well under pressure as they often work in restricted working conditions. Enthusiasm and determination is as much as these qualities will assist the designer in succeeding in a career that is very competitive and demanding. Having good PR (public relations) skills is important as they will need to deal with a wide range of different people within the industry from fabric salespeople to management to publicity and production teams.

Theme Based - Designing Fashion Illustrations

Within the fashion industry the calendar is actually divided into only two seasons, these being spring-summer and autumn-winter. Spring-summer will be the first six months of the year and the last six months will be autumn-winter.

Fashion is also divided into line planning periods. This is a collection or range of garments which are in the same category such as formal wear, casual wear, bridal wear, lingerie etc. Designers must begin planning at least two seasons before the actual selling season in order to ensure the merchandise arrives in the market at the precise time.

Fashion has global appeal and with that comes a mass produced uniformity. Designers use the forecasting sources to create a range of garments with global appeal when they start the process of line planning. It begins as a vision in the designer's mind. There will be different numbers of collections. For example, in women's apparel 4-6 lines or collections is the usual. The release dates and the number of new lines depend on the segments but as a general rule the higher priced lines are released before the lower priced ones. The development of the lines is influenced by the size of the company, the type of apparel produced and the fashion orientation of the company. Merchandisers are the ones responsible for developing new lines. They plan the direction of the fashion trend for the coming season and direct the design staff regarding the seasonal themes, the types of items to be designed and the colours to be used.

Each line should give its focus to the kind of customer it is targeted towards. Failure will almost be certain if lines are not designed with a specific type of customer in mind. Each line begins by using a particular process and this process begins with the storyboard.

a) Story Boards

A storyboard is a visual form of expression which assists designers to create. Visual pictures taken from basically anywhere – magazines, the computer, photos etc. are collected and placed on the board in the form of a story. The name of the collection is decided upon and placed on the board as well including a brief description of the mood of the collection. All these conspire to help the designers create garments in keeping with a particular theme.

"A fashion storyboard is a summary of your collection's inspiration and theme. It's a design tool that will help you remain focused and consistent as your line develops. It's also a great communication aid when explaining your vision to others (retailers, media etc.) Magazine tears, fabric swatches, old photos, buttons, and ribbons; basically, any visual reference you desire, can be mounted onto a hard board. Be sure to give your storyboard a title, like a book or film."

The sketches on their own can sometimes look a bit dull or lifeless so a storyboard can help bring the creations to life, so to speak. Make sure that the layout is well-planned and that a strong theme is chosen. Keeping them commercially relevant and successful is a must. In order to enhance their artwork, designers must learn how to use different presentation techniques. Templates for a storyboard are included below.

Storyboards should include:

- A fashion figure, clothed in your designs on a flat working figure
- Swatches of the fabric you plan to use (all the fabrics)
- Colour palettes (all the colours that will be used in your designs)
- Any trims used
- Photographs of the garments.

Presentation Techniques:

When creating a fashion storyboard it must have a strong theme running through it. This will help create the mood. The presentation must also have a title, even if it is a rudimentary working title at the beginning stages. The theme and title can be later refined as they can be chosen by the fabrics (Natural Linens), the season (Summer Blues), or the merchandise (Metamorphosis), for example.

Stance: Select the most appropriate pose for the storyboard templates when starting to draw: classic, moody, sophisticated, funky, or sporty are all moods considered appropriate for a board.

Positioning: Ensure the fashion figure doesn't look like it's floating on the page by using shadowing and shading to create the illusion of structure. For some designers who are competent enough, drawing their characters in a scene where the clothes enhance the situation is a good idea and will help with creating the design.

Figures: When using more than one fashion figure on the fashion storyboard, you may vary the size of each figure. This creates perspective on the board and looks visually appealing. One large scale figure in the foreground and the rest in the background points out the importance of the clothing as well as giving the viewer a visual treat.

Fabrics: Using linking shears (zigzag cutting edged scissors) to cut the fabric will look professional and give the storyboard an interesting feature. Using double-sided tape on the edges will stop the fabric from fraying. Crumpling the fabrics into little, rouged balls and sticking them down with double sided tape will create a different texture and a layering effect for the fashion storyboard. At times it would be good if the fabric swatches can be felt with the fingers, so try to leave the storyboard open.

Heading: Using the computer for a heading design is smart especially if you are not very competent at numeral or font drawing. Time and effort will be saved. Keeping the font the same throughout the storyboard is a good idea as this will help to keep within the chosen theme.

Labels: Labels are a good idea to place on any specific areas or objects that need attention. An example of this might be “Extra Wide Jeans” or “Short Coat.” Using a computer to do this is better unless the designer is particularly competent in drawing font.

Collages: Finding images or words etc. that can add to the overall theme of your storyboard is usually easy. Magazines, newspapers, craft stores, fabric shops, your own garage or computer, are places to look. The trick is to make sure there is not an overload of material on the storyboard as this can make it look messy or unprofessional.

Borders: These will give the fashion storyboard a sense of perspective as well as finality. Use a contrasting cardboard frame and use different textures and colours and cut neatly with ruled lines, unless you prefer a free-flowing mood. Designers can use a range of different borders made from cardboard, a collage, hand drawn or made from different fabrics. Keeping things neat is the key though.

Backgrounds: A plain or lightly textured background/printed board can be used as a background. The clothing must always be kept as the focus so make sure the background does not drown out the garment.

Each fashion illustrator has his/her own style. These storyboard templates are only examples from the relevant illustrator’s portfolios off the internet. PLEASE DO NOT COPY these or try to make templates from their drawings. This would be an infringement of copyright law. Producing your own fashion templates is always better as they will be your own and bear your individual style which will translate to your designs.

Fashion storyboards are usually coupled with mood boards or inspiration boards which comprise a collection of pictures or colours, cards and fabrics that arouse a particular emotional response. Designers use mood boards to help them choose the right colours that arouse these feelings because the mood board helps them see the theme that runs throughout their selection. Make use of various means to create interest on the mood board such as ribbon, wool, buttons, sand, corrugated board etc.

Being creative and using the imagination as much as possible is imperative when developing a storyboard template. However, it is important to keep in mind the following:

- Always make sure the figure is positioned as the main focus: (Reference, Andrea Allen)
- Make sure the board does not become messy or disorganised. Keep it simple and focussed on the figure as well as the theme. (Reference, Cindy Chu)
- Make sure the correct template for the theme is used. If the theme is contemporary, use suitable poses. (Reference, Louisa Olivencia)
- Illustrate any accessories such as jewellery, belts, bags, and along with the garments. This will create a polished finish. (Reference, Angelo Russica)
- Present figures symmetrically when possible as it keeps the eye focused (See the fashion storyboard below). Using a larger figure amongst two smaller ones on the left and right can also work well. It will make the two smaller figures seem like they are in the background. Sometimes it's effective to use the same figure for all the different outfits, creating a repetitive tiled effect. (Reference Diptri Irla)

- Ensure there is always a main heading such as “Summer Trends” or “Black and White.” Choosing to date the board will often make the collection short lived because trends change quickly. (Reference Justin Gloston)
- Swatches that are cut out neatly but shaped irregularly will achieve a professional look on the storyboard. Sticky tape on the back of the fabric will stop it from fraying. Pinking shears will make a zigzag effect if needed. (Reference Theresia Fanda)
- Use colours that are related instead of too many unrelated ones, such as pastels with bright colours as well as neutrals; dirty and clean shades should be grouped together. Colours must complement each other and the clothing. This is a general rule so stick to this unless the look is specifically a multi-coloured design. (Reference Annie Kim)
- Paint sample swatches can be bought from paint stores or using a colour pallet is fine also but avoid having too many things hanging off the board as this will make it look untidy.
- Use as much detail as possible, draw in the texture, beading, trims, fabric print, and weave in your design. Use as much visual ornamentation as you can. Use shading and highlights for the skin and hair to give a more realistic touch to your designs: (Reference Sarah Louise Petty)
- Technical drawings may be pasted on the back of the board, or neatly on the front, taking care to ensure it doesn’t look cluttered.
- Computer printed headings and labels are ok and should contain colour coded headings with the theme. Using black & white headings may clash with the board so take care with these. Ensure the headings are as large as possible without interfering with the overall look. Small, floaty headings that are difficult to read tend to look unprofessional and can easily be overlooked. Use high quality paper if printing the design onto this medium.
- Foam with double-sided mounting tape to stick the figures down is a good idea. It creates a raised look for the figure. This looks professional and gives the board a three dimensional look. (Reference Christine Dauguet)
- Bits and pieces of material that go with the theme such as edging, feathers, beads etc. can be stuck on the board. Avoid material that flaps or hangs over the border as this looks messy and unprofessional.
- ALWAYS stick to the requirements of the brief ie. the due dates, number of outfits required, theme. Have the right sized board ensuring it is strong enough not to bend when making any additions. 1200 micron is often used but a little thinner is alright too. The general rule is that the board can rest up against a stand without folding or falling.
- Ensure all information needed is on hand or is clearly memorised. You may be asked questions about fabrics, which is the most important aspect to remember as you must be specific (i.e., viscose cotton or Lycra cotton), target market segments (i.e., sportswear and evening wear, etc.)



b) Colour Board

Once the storyboard has been done, a visual presentation of colours via swatches, a write-up (adjectives of colours can be used), pantone chips etc. can be done. Pantone consists of standard colours that are numbered. The numbers are indicated with the colour for accuracy in shade and tone.

c) Fabric/ Swatch Boards

Fabric or swatch boards contain fabric swatches, these being cuttings of fabrics which show which ones are suitable for the garment style. These swatches could include small clippings or larger ones to show print repeats, details or trims. They also allow a rough estimate of the garment drape.



d) Illustration Boards

After the storyboard has been done, the illustration board can be worked on. This deals with fashion drawings of figures of women, men and children. Depicting the garments on the figures creates interest, and it would be good if illustrations could be hand rendered or even computer generated using the latest software (Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator, for example).

There are several different kinds of figure formats: single, double or multiple. The designers choose the ones they need depending on the complexity of the designs. Front and back views of the illustrations are used for a complete visualisation of the garment design.



e) Flats

A Flat is a miniature drawing of a garment drawn out flat on a table. It is important to show flats or specification drawings on the design sheets. The specifications drawings (or specs) are small proportional drawings with the measurements of the styles supplied. They comprise details of the construction lines.

f) Client Board

This is where the designer will have specific details such as age group or target market or an approximate costing for the collection. These sheets can be altered by the designer as needed.



g) Tag Designing

The tags are designed with colour board, swatches, washing instructions, pricing, and, of course, theme.

h) Logos/Labels

A company's name can be designed and added as well as the tags that will be attached to the garments. A size tag might be attached with the label or might be separate.



Further Reading:

- ✓ *The Fashion Design Manual, (1996), By Pamela Stecker*
- ✓ *Fashion Design: The Art of Style, (2007), by jen jones*