

Design & Concept

Level: 2

Career Cluster: Media Arts

Program: Design and Digital Arts

Pathway: Graphic Design

Aligns with: MGD 2003 Design and Concept

Course Catalog Description

Develops students' skills in digital research, ideation, layout, typography, and publication design as they create concept-driven visual solutions for screen-based and interactive media using professional digital tools and workflows.

Summary

Focuses on advanced problem-solving and concept development in digital design. Students develop and refine skills in research, ideation, and visual analysis while creating digital publication-style projects such as interactive books, digital magazines, and multi-page screen-based layouts that integrate typography, layout, imagery, and visual identity systems. The course emphasizes interpreting client needs, defining project goals, and applying professional digital workflows to produce cohesive, audience-focused design solutions. Through iterative critique, revision, and presentation, students strengthen their ability to communicate design intent, evaluate effectiveness, and create polished, concept-driven digital work that prepares them for continued study and careers in graphic design.

Notes

The updated course reflects a shift from a traditional design fundamentals course to a more structured, concept-driven and industry-aligned program. The original course primarily emphasized foundational design skills such as basic layout, typography, and visual composition. In contrast, the revised course expands these foundations into clearly defined learning strands that focus on the full design process, including research, client-based problem solving, concept development, digital layout systems, publication design, and audience-centered design strategies. Additionally, the new version emphasizes iterative critique, professional presentation, and workflow practices while incorporating portfolio development, leadership, work-based learning, and a final assessment project. These updates strengthen alignment with current CTE expectations by emphasizing real-world application, digital production workflows, and preparation for advanced study and careers in graphic design.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Career Exploration and Postsecondary Opportunities

Objective: *Students will explore and analyze career pathways related to digital graphic design by examining professional roles, tools, software, work environments, ethical and legal expectations, certifications, professional organizations, and Colorado postsecondary education options to make informed academic and career decisions.*

- 1) Identify employment opportunities in various fields with a focus in the area of graphic design
 - a. Recognize the work typically performed, tools and technology used, and nature of work environments
 - b. Identify potential certifications within the careers
 - c. Find membership organizations associated with the careers
 - d. Understand the necessary education associated within the careers
- 2) Define professionalism within the context of graphic design
 - a. Criticism and evaluation
 - b. Presentation
 - c. Assessment
- 3) Recognize laws, regulations, and ethics significant to the fields of graphic design
- 4) Identify postsecondary opportunities offered in the state of Colorado
 - a. Technical college, community college, 4-year institutions
 - b. Certificates, associates, bachelor, and advanced degree opportunities

2. Research, Exploration and Design Analysis

Objective: *Students will analyze existing digital publication and layout designs by conducting research to identify effective visual, conceptual, and audience-centered design strategies.*

- 5) Research existing digital book, magazine, and publication designs.
- 6) Analyze successful design solutions based on layout, typography, imagery, and concept.
- 7) Identify visual patterns, conventions, and standards used in professional publications.
- 8) Explain how design decisions support content, message, and audience.
- 9) Evaluate design effectiveness using digital design criteria.

3. Client Needs, Content Specifications and Project Goals

Objective: *Students will interpret client needs and content specifications by analyzing project constraints to define clear design goals and outcomes.*

- 10) Analyze project briefs, content specifications, and client goals.
- 11) Interpret content requirements for digital publications, screen-based layouts, and online distribution formats.
- 12) Explain how design goals align with audience, purpose, and medium.
- 13) Document project requirements and success criteria.

4. Concept Development and Ideation

Objective: Students will generate and develop design concepts by using ideation techniques to explore visual solutions aligned to message and audience.

- 14) Generate multiple design ideas through brainstorming and concept mapping.
- 15) Develop digital thumbnails, wireframes, and rough layout concepts using design software or collaborative digital tools.
- 16) Analyze how layout concepts communicate message and hierarchy.
- 17) Select concepts based on effectiveness and project goals.
- 18) Refine ideas based on feedback and design constraints.

5. Digital Layout Design and Structure

Objective: Students will apply digital layout principles to structure content clearly and consistently across publication formats.

- 19) Create digital layouts using grids, margins, columns, and guides.
- 20) Apply layout systems to organize text, imagery, and white space.
- 21) Design covers, interior pages, and content sections digitally.
- 22) Analyze layout readability, flow, and hierarchy.
- 23) Revise layouts to improve clarity and usability.

6. Publication Design: Books and Editorial Layouts

Objective: Students will design cohesive publication layouts by integrating typography, imagery, and structure across multiple pages.

- 24) Design a digital book cover, back cover, and interior pages.
- 25) Create contents pages and supporting interior layouts.
- 26) Apply consistency of style across multiple pages.
- 27) Evaluate publication flow and visual continuity.
- 28) Prepare layouts for digital presentation, online publishing, or screen-based portfolio display.

7. Magazine Design and Visual Identity Systems

Objective: Students will develop magazine-style layouts and identity systems by applying branding, grid structures, and typographic consistency.

- 29) Research and analyze magazine design styles and audiences.
- 30) Design a magazine logo, masthead, and grid structure.
- 31) Select typefaces and imagery appropriate to a target demographic.
- 32) Create lead articles, review pages, and supporting content layouts.
- 33) Evaluate visual identity consistency across magazine elements.

8. Digital Design Execution and Workflow

Objective: Students will execute design solutions digitally by applying professional software workflows, cloud-based collaboration practices, and organized file-management systems.

- 34) Create layouts using digital design software.
- 35) Apply non-destructive editing and version control practices.
- 36) Organize files using professional naming and folder structures.
- 37) Troubleshoot technical and layout issues during execution.
- 38) Evaluate technical quality of digital design files for screen resolution, file organization, accessibility, and platform readiness.

9. Critique, Iteration and Design Refinement

Objective: Students will refine design solutions through critique by analyzing feedback and applying revisions to improve effectiveness.

- 39) Participate in mini-critiques and group critiques.
- 40) Analyze peer and professional feedback objectively.
- 41) Apply revisions based on critique and project goals.
- 42) Justify design changes using visual reasoning.
- 43) Evaluate design improvement across iterations.

10. Professional Presentation and Industry Feedback

Objective: Students will present digital design solutions professionally by communicating design intent, process, and outcomes through digital presentation platforms, portfolio tools, and collaborative review environments.

- 44) Present digital layouts and concepts clearly.
- 45) Explain design decisions, workflow, and research.
- 46) Respond professionally to critique from designers or clients.
- 47) Reflect on professional feedback to inform future work.

11. Audience Awareness and Design Strategy

Objective: Students will analyze audience and demographic considerations to inform strategic design decisions in publication and layout projects.

- 48) Analyze target audiences and demographics.
- 49) Compare design strategies used for different audiences.
- 50) Apply audience-appropriate tone, structure, and visuals.
- 51) Evaluate how effectively designs meet audience needs.

12. Completion, Reflection and Design Evaluation

Objective: Students will evaluate completed digital design projects by reflecting on concept development, execution, and communication effectiveness.

- 52) Complete a cohesive digital publication or layout project.
- 53) Analyze final work for clarity, consistency, and message delivery.
- 54) Evaluate personal growth and skill development.
- 55) Reflect on challenges, successes, and next steps in design learning.

13. Portfolio Development

Objective: *Students will develop and curate a professional design portfolio by selecting, organizing, and presenting work samples that demonstrate technical skill, concept development, growth, and readiness for future academic or career opportunities.*

56) Select portfolio pieces that demonstrate concept development, technical skill, and design growth.

57) Organize work samples in a clear and professional sequence for digital or print presentation.

58) Write brief descriptions, reflections, or rationales to accompany portfolio projects.

59) Evaluate portfolio presentation for quality, consistency, and audience impact.

14. Leadership

Objective: *Students will demonstrate leadership skills by contributing responsibly to collaborative design environments, communicating professionally, and participating in activities that build initiative, accountability, and service.*

60) Demonstrate responsibility, initiative, and accountability during collaborative design work.

61) Communicate professionally with peers, instructors, and project stakeholders.

62) Apply teamwork and problem-solving strategies to support group goals and project completion.

63) Participate in leadership, service, or CTSO-related experiences that connect classroom learning to personal and professional growth.

15. Work-Based Learning

Objective: *Students will connect classroom design learning to workplace expectations by engaging with authentic industry practices, feedback, and career-readiness experiences related to graphic design and digital media.*

64) Identify workplace expectations, habits, and communication practices used in design-related careers.

65) Analyze how professional designers use workflow, deadlines, and revision processes in real-world projects.

66) Apply career-readiness skills such as time management, professionalism, and constructive response to feedback.

67) Reflect on work-based learning experiences, guest speaker insights, or industry connections to inform future goals.

16. Final Assessment Project

Objective: *Students will complete a final design project that synthesizes research, concept development, digital execution, critique, and presentation skills to demonstrate mastery of course outcomes in a polished, audience-focused solution.*

68) Plan and produce a final project that responds to a defined design problem, audience, or brief.

- 69) Apply course knowledge and technical skills to create a cohesive and polished design solution.
- 70) Present the final project with clear explanation of process, design choices, and intended impact.
- 71) Evaluate the final product and process using course criteria, reflection, and feedback.

17. Career and Technical Student Organizations

Objective: *Using the CTSO Resource Document, chapter activities will provide some of the best opportunities CTSO members will have to learn by doing. A successful program of work creates a positive learning atmosphere in the classroom. CTSO members learn how to accept responsibility, work as a team, manage a budget, and handle success and failure. Per the CTE Admin Handbook, CTSOs are embedded into curriculum.*

Professional Development

Prepare each member for entry into the workforce and provide a foundation for success in a career. Becoming a professional does not stop with acquiring a skill, but involves an increased awareness of the meaning of good citizenship and the importance of labor and management in the world of work.

Community Service

Promote and improve goodwill and understanding among all segments of the community through services donated by CTSO chapters, and to instill in its members a lifetime commitment to community service.

Business & Industry Connections

Increase awareness of quality job practices and attitudes, and increase the opportunities for employer engagement and eventual employment.

Financial Leadership

Plan and participate in activities to allow all members to carry out the chapter's projects. Educate members on their own personal finance for current and future success.

Public Relations

Make the general public aware of the good work that students in career and technical education are doing to better themselves and their community, state, nation, and world.

Social Activities

To increase cooperation in the school and community through activities that allow CTSO members to get to know each other in something other than a business or classroom setting.

Academic Standards Alignment

Colorado CTE courses are required to integrate academic and essential skills into course content. The following academic standards have been identified as aligned to this course and should be integrated throughout instruction.

[CO CTE Academic Standards Resources](#) (Rubrics, integration strategies, etc)

[CDE Colorado Academic Standards Online](#) (Online standards lookup tool)

Note: Mathematics and Science standards will be added in the future. Visit the [Colorado Academic Standards](#) page for the most current version.

Reading, Writing and Communicating Crosswalk

Course: Design & Concept

Colorado Academic Standards – Reading, Writing, and Communicating

Standard	Prepared Graduate Competency	Description	Course Evidence / Alignment
Standard 1: Oral Expression and Listening	Prepared Graduate 1 – Collaboration	Collaborate effectively as group members or leaders who listen actively and respectfully; pose thoughtful questions, acknowledge the ideas of others; and contribute ideas to further the group's attainment of an objective.	Students collaborate during ideation, critique, and design development processes, actively listening and contributing ideas to shared conceptual goals.
Standard 1: Oral Expression and Listening	Prepared Graduate 2 – Oral Presentations	Deliver effective oral presentations for varied audiences and varied purposes.	Students present design concepts, creative rationales, and visual ideas to peers and instructors for feedback.
Standard 2: Reading for All Purposes	Prepared Graduate 4 – Informational Texts	Read a wide range of informational texts to build knowledge and to better understand the human experience.	Students read and analyze informational texts including design briefs, case studies, creative prompts, and professional design references.
Standard 2:	Prepared	Understand how language	Students use

Reading for All Purposes	Graduate 5 – Language in Context	functions in different contexts, command a variety of word-learning strategies to assist comprehension, and make effective choices for meaning or style when writing and speaking.	appropriate design and conceptual vocabulary to communicate ideas clearly for varied audiences and purposes.
Standard 3: Writing and Composition	Prepared Graduate 7 – Informational Writing	Craft informational/explanatory texts using techniques specific to the genre.	Students write concept statements, design rationales, reflections, and documentation explaining creative intent and problem-solving processes.
Standard 3: Writing and Composition	Prepared Graduate 9 – Writing Process	Demonstrate mastery of their own writing process with clear, coherent, and error-free polished products.	Students revise and refine written conceptual explanations and supporting documentation to produce clear, coherent, and polished work.
Standard 4: Research Inquiry and Design	Prepared Graduate 10 – Research & Ethics	Gather information from a variety of sources; analyze and evaluate its quality and relevance; and use it ethically to answer complex questions.	Students research design concepts, themes, and reference materials; evaluate sources; and apply ethical practices including attribution and intellectual property awareness.

Free Resource Links

1. Career Exploration and Postsecondary Opportunities

- ONET Online (career profiles, design skills, job outlook)
<https://www.onetonline.org/>
- My Next Move (career exploration, graphic design roles)
<https://www.mynextmove.org/>
- College Board BigFuture (postsecondary pathways, majors, careers)
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>

2. Research, Exploration and Design Analysis

- Behance (design research, portfolio analysis, inspiration)
<https://www.behance.net/>
- AIGA Eye on Design (design trends, analysis, case studies)
<https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/>
- Creative Bloq (design inspiration, industry examples)
<https://www.creativebloq.com/>
- Smashing Magazine (design analysis, UX/UI insights)
<https://www.smashingmagazine.com/>

3. Client Needs, Content Specifications and Project Goals

- SBA Project Planning (client needs, business requirements)
<https://www.sba.gov/business-guide>
- HubSpot Project Templates (client briefs, planning tools)
<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/project-plan-template>
- Milanote (project briefs, visual planning, organization)
<https://milanote.com/>
- Asana Project Management (task organization, workflow planning)
<https://asana.com/>

4. Concept Development and Ideation

- Pinterest (idea generation, visual brainstorming)
<https://www.pinterest.com/>
- Milanote (brainstorming, concept mapping, ideation)
<https://milanote.com/>
- IDEO Design Thinking (ideation methods, creative process)
<https://designthinking.ideo.com/>
- Canva Whiteboards (brainstorming, collaboration tools)
<https://www.canva.com/whiteboards/>

5. Digital Layout Design and Structure

- Canva Layout Guides (grid systems, layout design)
<https://www.canva.com/learn/layout-design/>

- Interaction Design Foundation (layout, hierarchy, usability)
<https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/layout>
- Envato Tuts+ (layout, composition tutorials)
<https://design.tutsplus.com/>
- Adobe InDesign Learn (layout, grid systems, design tools)
<https://helpx.adobe.com/indesign/tutorials.html>

6. Publication Design: Books and Editorial Layouts

- Blurb (book design, publishing tools)
<https://www.blurb.com/>
- Canva Magazine Templates (editorial layout design)
<https://www.canva.com/templates/magazines/>
- Issuu (digital publishing, layout examples)
<https://issuu.com/>
- Adobe InDesign Resources (editorial design workflows)
<https://helpx.adobe.com/indesign.html>

7. Magazine Design and Visual Identity Systems

- MagCulture (magazine design, industry examples)
<https://magculture.com/>
- Behance Magazine Designs (layout, branding systems)
<https://www.behance.net/search/projects?search=magazine>
- Canva Branding Tools (visual identity, layout systems)
<https://www.canva.com/brand/>
- 99designs Branding Blog (identity design, brand systems)
<https://99designs.com/blog/branding/>

8. Digital Design Execution and Workflow

- Adobe Creative Cloud Tutorials (workflow, tools, execution)
<https://creativecloud.adobe.com/learn>
- Canva (design execution, layouts, visual projects)
<https://www.canva.com/>
- GIMP (image editing, digital production)
<https://www.gimp.org/>
- Krita (digital illustration, design workflow)
<https://krita.org/>

9. Critique, Iteration and Design Refinement

- Behance (project feedback, critique, iteration)
<https://www.behance.net/>
- Dribbble (peer critique, design improvement)
<https://dribbble.com/>
- AIGA Resources (design critique, evaluation)
<https://www.aiga.org/resources>

- Interaction Design Foundation (evaluation, usability testing)
<https://www.interaction-design.org/>

10. Professional Presentation and Industry Feedback

- Canva Presentations (design presentation, visual storytelling)
<https://www.canva.com/presentations/>
- Google Slides (presentation tools, sharing work)
<https://slides.google.com/>
- Prezi (interactive presentations, storytelling)
<https://prezi.com/>
- Adobe Express (visual presentations, design storytelling)
<https://www.adobe.com/express/>

11. Audience Awareness and Design Strategy

- HubSpot Marketing Resources (audience analysis, strategy)
<https://www.hubspot.com/resources>
- Pew Research Center (audience data, demographics)
<https://www.pewresearch.org/>
- Interaction Design Foundation (user-centered design, UX)
<https://www.interaction-design.org/>
- Google Trends (audience interests, behavior insights)
<https://trends.google.com/>

12. Completion, Reflection and Design Evaluation

- MindTools (reflection, evaluation, improvement)
<https://www.mindtools.com/>
- CareerOneStop (career readiness, self-assessment)
<https://www.careeronestop.org/>
- SkillsYouNeed (reflection, communication, self-improvement)
<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/>
- Google Digital Garage (professional growth, skill development)
<https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalgarage>

13. Portfolio Development

- Adobe Portfolio (professional portfolios, showcasing design work)
<https://portfolio.adobe.com/>
- Behance (design portfolios, project presentation, industry examples)
<https://www.behance.net/>
- Dribbble (creative portfolios, layout and branding examples) <https://dribbble.com/>
- Canva Presentation Templates (portfolio presentation, visual organization)
<https://www.canva.com/presentations/templates/>

14. Leadership

- MindTools – Leadership Skills (communication, teamwork, decision-making)
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_LDR.htm
- SkillsYouNeed – Leadership (collaboration, conflict resolution, professionalism)
<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/lead/>
- TED Talks – Leadership (communication, influence, creative leadership)
<https://www.ted.com/topics/leadership>
- Indeed Career Guide – Leadership Skills (initiative, teamwork, workplace readiness)
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/leadership-skills>

15. Work-Based Learning

- CareerOneStop – Work-Based Learning (internships, apprenticeships, career exploration)
<https://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/learn/work-based-learning.aspx>
- Colorado Work-Based Learning (state guidance, employer connections)
<https://cdle.colorado.gov/work-based-learning>
- ACTE Work-Based Learning Resources (career readiness, employability skills)
<https://www.acteonline.org/professional-development/work-based-learning/>
- AIGA Career Resources (design careers, industry expectations)
<https://www.aiga.org/resources>

16. Final Assessment Project

- PBS LearningMedia – Media Production Projects (project ideas, assessment, rubrics)
<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/>
- Adobe Creative Cloud Tutorials (design projects, workflows, execution)
<https://creativecloud.adobe.com/learn>
- Canva Design School (design projects, layout, presentation)
<https://www.canva.com/designschool/>
- Rubistar (project rubrics, assessment tools)
<https://www.rcampus.com/rubistar/>



Technology Student Association – National Competitive Events

Promotional Design

Objective: *Students will design, produce, document, and present promotional materials that meet TSA Promotional Design requirements for branding, visual communication, production quality, and portfolio documentation.*

- Research the annual TSA Promotional Design theme, target audience, required products, and branding expectations.
- Analyze client or project specifications to determine the message, audience, format, and design goals.
- Develop thumbnails, roughs, and digital layout concepts that explore multiple promotional design solutions.
- Create required promotional items using typography, grid structure, imagery, color, hierarchy, and design principles.
- Revise designs through critique, feedback, and refinement to improve clarity, consistency, and visual impact.
- Document the design process through sketches, drafts, revisions, production notes, references, and required portfolio materials.
- Present the final promotional package and explain design decisions, audience connection, and response to the annual theme.

Resources

- Technology Student Association – Promotional Design competition guidelines
<https://tsaweb.org/competitions-programs/tsa/themes-problems>
- Adobe InDesign – Page layout and publishing tools
<https://www.adobe.com/products/indesign.html>
- Adobe Illustrator – Vector design and production graphics
<https://www.adobe.com/products/illustrator.html>
- Canva – Branding, layouts, and promotional design templates
<https://www.canva.com/>



Technology Student Association – National Competitive Events

Children's Stories

Objective: *Students will write, illustrate, design, document, and present an original children's story that communicates a STEM concept in alignment with TSA Children's Stories competition requirements.*

- Research the annual TSA Children's Stories theme and identify an age-appropriate STEM concept for the story.
- Develop a story concept with characters, setting, plot, vocabulary, and message appropriate for the target audience.
- Design the book cover, page layouts, typography, illustrations, and visual sequence to support readability and engagement.
- Create original imagery and page compositions that demonstrate visual continuity, hierarchy, and design intent.
- Revise the storybook through critique and feedback focused on clarity, age appropriateness, layout, and theme connection.
- Document the writing, illustration, design, revision, and production process.
- Present the story to judges and explain the theme connection, design choices, audience decisions, and educational purpose.

Resources

- Technology Student Association – Children's Stories competition guidelines
<https://tsaweb.org/competitions-programs/tsa/themes-problems>
- Adobe InDesign – Book layout and page design tools
<https://www.adobe.com/products/indesign.html>
- Adobe Illustrator – Illustration, page layout, and vector artwork
<https://www.adobe.com/products/illustrator.html>
- ReadWriteThink – Story mapping and writing resources
<https://www.readwritethink.org/>



Technology Student Association – National Competitive Events

Board Game Design

Objective: *Students will design, prototype, document, and present an original board game that meets TSA Board Game Design requirements for theme, gameplay, visual design, rules, prototype quality, and presentation.*

- Research the annual TSA Board Game Design theme and develop an original game concept.
- Analyze the intended audience, game purpose, visual style, component needs, and project constraints.
- Design the game board, cards, rulebook, packaging, player aids, and printed components using consistent layout and typography.
- Develop game rules, objectives, player actions, scoring, and win conditions that support clear gameplay.
- Create a playable prototype that demonstrates the game concept, printed components, visual system, and theme connection.
- Test the game with users and revise the design, instructions, components, and gameplay based on critique and feedback.
- Present the board game to judges and explain the visual design, gameplay decisions, design process, and response to the annual theme.

Resources

- Technology Student Association – Board Game Design competition guidelines
<https://tsaweb.org/competitions-programs/tsa/themes-problems>
- Adobe InDesign – Rulebooks, cards, packaging, and print layout
<https://www.adobe.com/products/indesign.html>
- Adobe Illustrator – Vector artwork, layout, and game component design
<https://www.adobe.com/products/illustrator.html>
- The Game Crafter – Board game prototyping resources
<https://www.thegamecrafter.com/>