What They *Don't* Teach You in Design School*

A zine by AIGA Eye on Design x UT Austin's SDCT

*A Survival Guide to Life After Graduation

- ✓ Adobe CC subscription
- ☐ </HTML skillz>
- ☐ Min. 1,000 IG followers
- ☐ Designer IG story filters
- ✓ New mantra:
  "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's Instagram influence" (things are never as perfect as they seem)
- ☐ Personal website
- ☐ *Clearly labeled* digital archive of your work
- ☐ Emojis in your "about me" text
- ☐ *Did you run spell check?*
- ☐ MUJI pens and dotted grid notebook
- ☐ All the typefaces you stole in school
- ☐ A little money in the bank
- ☐ Recommendation letters from BFF professors
- ☐ Laminated notes from your visit to the campus career center
- Big dreams
- At least one good interview outfit. Wash. Repeat.
- ☐ Bookmarked job board sites
- ☐ Up-to-date LinkedIn profile
- ☐ Instant ramen bulk pack

- ☐ Statement glasses
- ☐ Coffee (well-designed energy drink is permissible)
- ☐ Apartment with 7 roommates
- ☐ Beanie. Rolled.
- ☐ All-white or loud statement sneakers—pick one
- ☐ Black T-shirts. Black pants. Lots of them.
- ☐ "Professional" backpack
- ☐ Active participation in at least three #DesignTwitter arguments
- ☐ Back-up alarm
- ✓ Back-up back-up alarm
- ☐ Ability to run on four hours of sleep
- ☐ Self-care pack (soy candle, raw manuka honey mask, something made with CBD)
- ☐ And remember, use at least one of the following phrases daily:
  "Is it too on the nose?"
  "What about the look and feel?"
  "We're not asking for feedback on visuals right now."
  "Don't forget to EMPATHIZE."
  "I appreciate your feedback."

What They Don't Teach You in Design School: A Survival Guide to Life After Graduation

Published by AIGA Eye on Design x The University of Texas at Austin's School of Design & Creative Technologies

Limited-edition run of 500 patiently hand-numbered copies.
Buy one for the designer in your life ➡ *shop.eyeondesign.aiga.org*

Written and designed by the students in UT Austin's Publication Studio class, run by UT's own James Walker and 2020 Designer in Residence + Eye on Design founder, Perrin Drumm. Additional design by Tala Safié.

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Have a question? ➡ *eodmag@aiga.org*
Found a typo? *Cool.*

check
this out!

The University of Texas at Austin
School of Design and
Creative Technologies
College of Fine Arts

A●GA Eye on Design

Quiet in the back!

Once school is out of session, the real work begins—so pay attention. When you leave the hallowed halls of your educational institution, ditch the cap and gown and throw that dumb mortarboard in the air (good riddance), but keep this guide close at hand. As your friends and classmates move away, this will become your new bestie. And like a true BFF, no matter how well (or poorly) prepared you are for what's next, we'll be by your side, no judgements.

Whether you're wondering how to nail your next job interview, curious about doing an internship, not sure what kind of company you might like to work for (or if you should just chuck it and go freelance), we're here to lend an ear, share some expert advice, and, if nothing else, remind you that you're not alone—everyone goes through this.

xoxo
Eye on Design's Perrin Drumm + the UT Austin design students

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"Failure often does what you can't do for yourself."

* Stephanie Halovanic is a copywriter and content strategist at &Walsh, a NYC creative agency with a freewheeling environment where she can flex her talents for writing, art direction, graphic design, VO, and sound design. "You know when you're just hanging out with your friends and come up with some wacky idea? We do that, and it actually gets made."

What I Wish I Knew Before I Graduated

Name: <u>Stephanie Halovanic</u>

Role: <u>Copywriter & content strategist at &Walsh</u>

Where to find her: <u>@oldstephanie</u>

Words by Lindsay Gallagher / Illustration by Paige Giordano

What's a lesson you learned early on?

There's value in recognizing that whatever task is at hand is important, even if you may not think it is. If you're given some bullshit spreadsheet to fill out and you think, "This is not in my job description. Why am I doing this?" Something about that experience is flexing a muscle that will help you later on.

What has been the biggest influence on both you and your work?

Being comfortable with the creative process. It applies to every single creative thing you can possibly do. It goes something like this: You have an idea, you do it fueled by fear, you suck, you keep doing it, you don't suck, you do it even more, you suck again, you try it a new way, you suck but you don't care as much, you try it an old way, you forget about sucking, and so on and so on. Process implies something that is not instant, and has many different phases before completion. It has given me the confidence to take creative risks and try new things because it's all just a process.

Have you ever suffered from imposter syndrome?

Yeah, absolutely. I think everybody does. I didn't study copywriting, and I'm a copywriter. I did a three-month program to become a designer and an art director. People get graduate degrees in that. So you know, I have this mindset that I don't deserve it, or everyone else thinks I don't deserve it. No. If you're doing something and you showed up somewhere, you deserve to be there. But I still catch myself struggling with that. I look back at things I had imposter syndrome for, and I just had no reason to.

Has failure ever led you to other successes?

Absolutely. Failure is like that scary teacher in middle school who you hated, but when you grew up you realized that they were actually the best teacher all along. Failure often does for you what you can't do for yourself. It shuts doors, so that you have no option but to go through a new one. It dilutes fear because failure doesn't hurt as much as the fear of failure. Failure contributes to every single idea I have today. I know that I can try something and if it doesn't work, I'll be okay. So fail. You have no choice. It's part of the process.

If there's one piece of advice you could give to your younger self, what would it be?

Shut out what you think you're supposed to do, and do exactly what you want to do. What you think is interesting. What you're curious about. And do it. And know that you're not supposed to be good at something when you do it for the first time. That doesn't mean you're not talented.

What is your personal mantra?

It changes everyday. Today, mine is "Everything falls into place if you let it."

What You Should Know About:

your portfolio

5 tips for making your design work stand out from the crowd

By Caroline Rock

The portfolio: an amalgamation of our best work. An embodiment of our college career. The magical, this-is-it, all-or-nothing, singular document that could land us a job and alter the course of our entire lives. As design students, we spend semesters laboring over it. We hear that in design, your portfolio is more important than your GPA, or even your résumé. But even if you're the best designer in your class, if you can't present your work effectively, your portfolio might not get you anywhere.

You could try Googling, "How to nail a design interview," and find results pages filled with advice. Wading through endless bullet points and "top 10 tips," you might wonder if it's even worth following these laundry lists of practical information or if it's better to toss out the rule book and do it your own way. While there's no proven method of presenting your portfolio, we can help you remove some of the guesswork while still staying true to yourself.

We asked Nick Hahn, InVision's director of design system consulting, and Meg Lewis, designer, career coach, and entertainer, to help students do exactly that.

"We use our portfolios to prove we can do *everything* so that we at least get hired for *something*."

① Sell yourself only on what you really love to do

Students often brand themselves as jacks-of-all-trades. We use our portfolios to prove we can do everything so that we at least get hired for something. If you really are a Renaissance person who can set type, use CAD, animate seamless motion graphics, juggle with your eyes closed, and handle front-end code—great. More likely, most of us are pretty good at a couple of things, and employers would rather see those take center stage.

② Tell them where you can add extra value

Don't let the job description limit what you bring to the table. "Chances are you're capable of so many more skills than those bullet points," Lewis says. "Can you animate as well as design? Are you great at making GIFs? Tell them that! Give additional specific ideas for ways you can expand the role that are unique to your skillset."

③ Be transparent about your strengths and pitfalls

Tell the hiring manager what your strengths are and where you'd like to grow. "Help me know where you're at in your career," Hahn says. "Are you super organized and someone who loves execution, or are you a creative ideas person who may struggle with the details? All that is great to be clear about."

④ Celebrate process, not just output

It's tempting to use a portfolio to showcase a grid of pixel-perfect final artifacts. Influenced by the over-saturation of these types of images from sites like Dribbble and Behance, we get the idea that the end product is the most important thing. "I don't really care what the end product looks like," says Hahn. "What actually ships is usually way out of the control of most designers." Instead, use the opportunity to show how you understood the problem, broke it down, and added value. The ugly, behind-the-scenes work is just as (or even more) important than rows of candy-colored app screens.

⑤ Your best self is your authentic self

Finally (and don't roll your eyes!), be yourself. No, really. If you walk into an interview without letting the panel really get to know you, they won't know what they're missing out on. "It's natural human instinct to assume you have to fall into the persona of a professional person who takes everything very seriously and is the exact candidate that can do everything the interviewer is looking for," Lewis says. Presenting a watered-down version of yourself isn't fair to you, either. You deserve to work somewhere you can be your authentic self, which will help you do your best work. "I look for individuality and personality throughout the portfolio experience," Lewis adds, "whether that's the copywriting in your 'about' section or the Easter eggs you have hidden throughout your website."

Should I…
Do an Internship?

By Huê Minh Cao

If you've ever had the sneaking suspicion that your studio classes aren't going to prepare you for life as a working designer—you were right. "Design in the real world is very different from design in an academic environment," says Alice Du, freelance designer and art director at FÖDA. "You can't necessarily teach the business side of things, or the client relationship side of things." With an internship, however, you get a glimpse of the real world without the pressure of committing to a full-time job.

Iris Lee, a designer at Google, likens a designer's first foray into the working world to sampling several different ice cream flavors before settling on a favorite. "I'm the type of person that likes to be exposed to a lot of things… I need to see the full spectrum before I can really decide on what I want." That's the great thing about internships—you get a short, concentrated amount of time to learn a range of skills and observe the inner workings of a company.

Julio Correa, a designer at frog, appreciates internships as trial periods. "The magical thing about internships is that they create these set periods of time for you to try on a job," he says. "You have three months to get a feel for a place and then get out. Once you go somewhere full time, you can't work for three months and then dip out. And you definitely can't do that multiple times in a row."

Internships are also an opportunity to develop your practice—and your perspective. "It's a time and place dedicated to your growth as a designer. Internships were as important to my design education as going to design school was," Correa says. Du agrees. "I try to be as well rounded as possible," she says. "Internships helped me gain perspective on different types of environments, different types of design, and also just working with other people. It's this nice little window into another world." Ryan Hicks, a designer at Fuzzco, recalls that his first internship at a startup was "lighthearted, low pressure, and a lot of fun."

"That's the good thing about an internship," says Lee. "It absolves you from a certain degree of pressure, because you know you're underpaid, you might as well make some crazy shit because they can't really get angry at you; you're still learning, and you're still at the very beginning of your career. I would not be nearly as prepared for the workplace if I didn't take on the internship opportunities that

"*It's this nice little window into another world.*"

Pros:

- [ ] Try out a different work environment
- [x] Try out different design fields
- [ ] Learn on the job
- [x] Real-world exposure
- [x] Build relationships
- [ ] Secure a job

YES!

I did." Correa emphasizes that internships helped him secure a job. "It 1,000% opened doors for me," he says. "The year that I got an internship at Uber, I also applied to a bunch of other places. I only got two or three callbacks. The next year, I applied for internships again, and every single one I applied to gave me an offer. It basically pushed my résumé to the top of a stack."

If nothing else, you're gaining experience for your future self. "Is there a reason not to do an internship?" Alice Du mulls this over. The most obvious downside is money—or the lack thereof. The law doesn't require companies to compensate interns, and while any reputable design outfit today will provide some level of payment, the reality is, you shouldn't expect to make a living wage.

"The first company I interned with said they couldn't afford to pay me," says Iris Lee, "and I was like, 'That's chill, I'll do anything.' That's what happens when you're in a desperate situation." Too often, when young designers are just starting out, they think they're lucky that anyone is giving them a shot at all, and they don't want to rock the boat by asking for even minimum wage compensation, and some people will take advantage of that.

But Alice Du emphasizes that interns should be paid. "I think it's crazy when interns are unpaid. If a studio is not offering a paid internship I would take a closer look at them and ask myself why? What does that say about their value system, and what does it mean for the value I put on my time and my work?"

It's also possible that the work environment, or the work itself, won't be the right fit for you. Depending on where you intern, you could be the only creative (like in a startup), or the only young person (like in an established, smaller studio).

Lee recalls feeling isolated in her internship because of her age. "It was tough for me because I was the youngest person in the office by about 20 years, and my day just would be 8-12 hours of silence." But this con could actually be a big pro. Doing an internship you don't like can help you clarify the work—and working environment—that you love. After this experience, Lee defined her priorities. "It's really important for me to be able to work with people my age, who I would actually want to be friends with outside of work," she says.

Hicks wasn't too precious about where he did his first internship, and it helped him gain skills and perspective that eventually led to his first post-grad design job. "I think I recognized—before, during, and after that internship—that it wasn't exactly the work I wanted to do after I graduated, but I got to do bits and pieces and find out what I liked and didn't like. It got me closer to where I wanted to end up," he says.

But no matter where you land, you only get to intern for so long. Let's face it—you're bright, you're shiny, but this liminal bubble isn't going to last forever. "When you're young, people are willing to help you," Du says. "These connections that you make honestly become much rarer as you progress in your career." If you do decide to do an internship, sample all the flavors. Know your worth, swallow the bad bits, and savor the yummy ones.

Cons:

- [x] Low pay
- [ ] No pay
- [x] Lack of power
- [ ] Lack of autonomy
- [x] Grunt work
- [ ] Working on projects you don't love

No!

What I Wish I Knew Before I Graduated

Name: <u>James Walker</u>

Role: <u>Associate professor of practice at UT Austin's Department of Design</u>

Where to find him:
<u>@jameswalker.design</u>

Words by Veronica Thompson / Illustration by Paige Giordano

Is there anything you've learned over the course of your career that you wish you'd known earlier?

Yes, the ability to articulate your ideas is so important. I've found that in both education and running my own design practice, my ability to communicate concepts and sell ideas can sometimes become more important than the design itself. Writing allows you to be critical of your work. If you're writing, you have to think about what you're saying, who you're saying it to, and be reflective of the work you've made. You begin to understand it on a deeper level.

If you could go back in time and give your post-grad self one piece of advice, what would you say?

To take more moments for reflection. Sometimes we get into these tight schedules and routines, and we stop thinking about what it is we're actually doing. We forget to respond thoughtfully and think conceptually about our work. Instead, we just react; we become more concerned about constantly pumping out work and moving on to the next project. We forget to take the time to actually look at what we've done.

How do you deal with being in a creative funk?

I walk away. Staring at a problem doesn't solve the problem. You have to let it process, allowing your brain to make those necessary creative connections. Take a walk, do some chores, go to the gym. Do anything but think about that problem. Looking at work for the sake of enjoying it and not to be instantly inspired really helps me shape an idea of how I want to design.

Have you ever suffered from imposter syndrome?

Absolutely. Part of a designer's process is finding inspiration, which often means looking at other designer's work, which can fuel feelings of inadequacy. As an educator, my colleagues are some of the best at what they do. Being surrounded by such smart people keeps me inspired to read more, challenge ideas, and add to the conversation. That being said, when you see some really great work coming out of a class, you immediately question the quality of your teaching style and projects.

If you're feeling the effects of imposter syndrome, that also means you've had some success and are questioning how it happened. How can you take a step back and appreciate the good? The bad news: It doesn't appear to go away with age, success, title, etc.

Sage Advice from Prof. Walker:

- When you're 19, don't wear shorts to a job interview.
- Don't hand-deliver your résumé on the hottest day of the year—sweat warps paper.
- Run spell check, then proofread. It might be spelled right, but it's not the right word.
- Take every job seriously, as that client might still be calling you 10 years later.
- Always get a 50% deposit when working with a new client, because they will absolutely take your work and not pay you.
- Make friends with photographers, printers, creative coders, and type designers.
- When collaborating, beware of egos.

"When you're 19, don't wear shorts to a job interview."

* When he's not teaching interaction design, James Walker, the associate professor and graduate chair of UT Austin's Department of Design, manages an active studio practice with a portfolio of branding and packaging work for clients in the arts, music, and beverage world. By which we mean beer, lots of beer.

6AM-8AM

8AM-10AM

10AM-12PM

12PM-2PM

2PM-4PM

4PM-6PM

6PM-8PM

8PM-10PM

😀 My four-year-old daughter wakes me up by 7am. I make her breakfast and we play games together until it's time to walk or scooter to school. Then I jump on the F train and head into MoMA. I usually stop for a macchiato at Joe and the Juice, and I try to take a few minutes to enjoy it and download the day ahead.

At our Monday morning meeting, each member of the 18-person creative team shares what they're working on and where they might need help. On Wednesday mornings, the design operations manager and I hold what I call Rob Reviews, where my team signs up for 5-15-minute slots to check in on their projects and get feedback. This really only takes up a small chunk of my day, but it's valuable time for me and my team.

I work across a lot of different departments, which means I'm in a lot of meetings. Design, as a discipline, is super horizontal. It's a service, and it cuts across everything we do at MoMA. We set the agenda to some degree, but most of the time other teams set the agenda and tell us what they need. We get to see into a lot of different teams that work more vertically. Lately, I've been working on growing and updating the museum's membership program—we rely on donations and member support to keep the doors open.

Since I eat my lunch during—yes, more meetings—I bring pasta. I'm Italian and I love to make pasta. It's the perfect office food: not too stinky and easy to eat in front of people.

By 3pm I'm usually in the galleries with my creative team doing scale tests of exhibition graphics to see how our work looks in the space. Generally, two designers are assigned per exhibition; they're in charge of the graphics, and I'm there to review the work and guide the conversation between the designers, curators, architects, and the development team. If a curator asks for something crazy and I'm not there, the designer can be kind of like a deer in headlights.

Before heading home at 5pm I hold office hours—30 minutes each for my four managers. I want to make sure everyone has the space to share any frustrations or concerns. I believe in a real separation of independent contributors and managers. A lot of my job is motivating the team to do their best work.

I try to get home before my daughter goes to bed. Once she's asleep, my wife and I make dinner, drink a bourbon, and watch a show. I try to say no to emails or other work—particularly as a father, and also just for my own mental health. Most things can wait until the next day, when it starts all over again. 🌙

A Day in the Working Life

👀 I wake up by 7, latest. I buy a $7 latte instead of making coffee at home and catch a yoga class before work. I enjoy the hour-long walk to the office in SoHo, but recently I've been taking the train so I can read on my commute. Thanks to all the yoga, I can stand up on the subway and read at the same time.

When I first get to the office at 10, I touch base with my team and check my messages. I do internal housekeeping (getting briefs, figuring out project timelines, working on budgets) and finish up any projects from the day before. When you work in-house, the work comes and goes in waves. You will have two months where you can't breath, and then a month coasting, waiting for the next tsunami to hit.

My schedule is different every day, but if I have the time I like to hit a few magazine shops by 11 to research photographers. I hire photographers for photoshoots and I'm always searching for someone who fits the brand. I think consumers are ready to call you out if you're not doing something with good intentions, something that isn't just a revenue driver. We have to make sure our brand is purposeful.

I shoot a lot of the brand photography myself. I'm scrappy; I set up the products in the conference room when there's bright morning light. (Pro tip: If you play multiple roles at your job, make sure to stand up for yourself when you're negotiating your salary and your job title.)

Every other day, we have an internal check-in where my seven-person creative team does a status update on what they're working on. If a new project is coming in, I have a content brainstorm. We also focus on analytics; we test specific colors, words, and images to see which perform best.

I spend about 50% of my time on strategy and 50% actually creating content. Right now, I'm focusing on a pitch for Target. The creative team is in charge of designing the deck where we explain our concept through mockups and sample Instagram posts.

Even though I've taken a step back from freelance photography, throughout the day I check my email to see if there are any new opportunities. I have a really amazing community of people in New York that I admire, so I also spend some time checking up on them on Instagram.

I leave work anytime between 4-7, but I only stay until 7 if I'm chatting with co-workers. A lot of my job is spent trying to figure out how to communicate with people, which can be frustrating and stressful, so I try to do some sort of exercise before heading home to make sure I leave my work at the door. 😊

6AM-8AM

☕ On weekdays I'm up by 7. Everyone in my family gets up around this time. I'm married and we have a kindergarten-aged child, so we're all getting ready. At 8 I take the bus to work and my commute is about an hour long. Google Maps always tells me it should be about 40 minutes, but it never is. The bus has pretty good wifi, so I do a quick email and Slack check to make sure nothing's on fire. It gives me a good sense of what I'm walking into when I get to the office.

8AM-10AM

My day is split between three main responsibilities. The first is working on my client projects and meeting with the team. The second is checking in with the other designers and making sure things are being delivered and worked on. The third is studio management, which means working with the directors in our other offices and making sure the designers have the best work environment. I'll also have one-on-one meetings with the studio director and chief design officer, both of whom I report to.

10AM-12PM

Right before lunch at 11:50, we have our Studio Standup. We physically get up and stand in a circle in the middle of our office. The last person to get there always starts first. We go around and summarize what we'll work on today, letting others know if we need help with anything.

12PM-2PM

One unique thing about thoughtbot is that we have lunch all together. Attendance can be 90% of the office, or 60%, depending on who's off working on-site with clients or working from home. It's a great way to interact with everyone in the office.

2PM-4PM

After lunch, I'll have meetings with my client project team and check in with designers on their projects. Once a week during the afternoon, we have standing design critiques where designers can present their work and ask any questions and get feedback about what they're working on.

SHUTTING DOWN...

We have an automated bot in our Slack channel that tells us when it's coffee-walk time. Some people might be in the middle of something and they might forego the coffee walk, but it's an opportunity to get out from behind your computer.

4PM-6PM

I leave work around 4:30, depending on when I arrived that day. Similar to my morning bus commute, I'll check my email and Slack to make sure that there's nothing I missed. I try to make my commute back home more about decompressing and setting action items for the next day.

6PM-8PM

When I come home at 6:00, one thing my wife and I try to do (with varying levels of success), is to stay off our phones when we're around our daughter. Instead, we talk about our day and take time to reflect. We'll also play games, whatever helps us to decompress and just be together. ☮

8PM-10PM

☕ Mornings are pretty typical: I wake up and get ready. It's really important for me to eat at home in the morning. I try to meditate for a few minutes each morning as well.

I live about 10 minutes away from the studio. The walk there is good for getting into my headspace and is one of my favorite parts of my day. I bring my dog, Charlie, and listen to music or podcasts along the way. It's a really nice walk through the neighborhood. I try not to look at my phone or emails until I get to the studio.

The coolest thing about running a small studio is that we get to make our own schedule and our own atmosphere. After I make a to-do list of what needs to get done, sometimes we just take a drive and check out some stores and galleries in the area for a couple of hours. I think it's really important for designers to have control over their day.

Part of the studio practice is that we provide free lunch for everyone who works here. Eating together is really important. Even figuring out what we want to eat is important. Sometimes we have an artist or musician stop by and we'll get lunch with them and hang out for a bit. We'll cook together once or twice a week and it's fun, like a little family.

Work fluctuates between design, sending emails, and posting on Instagram. We run about three accounts and it can be a good portion of the work—not good work, but it's something we do frequently.

Some days we have a couple of big projects due, which can make for a hectic week. Other days, when we have more free time, we print on the Risograph in the studio, look at books for research and inspiration, and dedicate more time to passion projects. We also have a gallery space that's open Friday through Sunday, and a portion of our work is managing that space, which includes hosting artists and greeting visitors.

We try to leave the studio by 6 every day. If there's any extra work, I take it home. My girlfriend is a copywriter and she often works from home at night, so sometimes we'll do an hour of computer work while watching garbage TV. Or I'll head to the painting studio in my garage.

Lately I haven't been taking extra work home because my laptop broke. It's a nice surprise actually, and it's contributed to me getting to the studio earlier since there's a computer there. I'd rather leave work at the office. 🌙

A Day in the Working Life

NAME:	**OCCUPATION:**
Zipeng Zhu	Freelance designer behind Dazzle Studio
LOCATION:	**INSTAGRAM:**
Brooklyn, New York	⃝ @zzdesign

6AM-8AM

8AM-10AM

◆ I'm not a morning person. My official office hours start at 10, but sometimes I don't wake up until 11. That's just how it goes. The first thing I do is so sad: I check all my emails on my eight different accounts—for myself, the studio, the Dazzle online shop, for AIGA/NY (I'm on the board of the New York chapter), for personal projects, and a few others. I usually have Stephen Colbert's show from the night before playing in the background.

10AM-12PM

Unless I give my intern and freelancers the "morning notice" that I've overslept, 10am is when they arrive and I give them their work for the day. Usually, we meet in my apartment in Williamsburg, but if I have a meeting in the city we might meet at Soho House or another coworking space. 11am is the most intense hour of my day. I post two things on Instagram at noon every day—one for the studio, and one for the studio's store. If I don't post them exactly at noon, my OCD kicks in and I kind of freak out.

12PM-2PM

I need the full hour to come up with the idea, make the design, and write the caption. It's become my creative morning exercise. My life is so chaotic otherwise, that having this as a routine helps me de-stress.

2PM-4PM

At 12, I check in with my intern or freelancer on their work. This could be anything from research for a new project, prepping files for production, or planning the next product drop for the store. This is also when they can pitch me any ideas they come up with and push back on a direction that I've set for a project. Once I've made up my mind about something, it's really hard to convince me otherwise, but I want everyone I work with to have an opportunity to put their own ideas forward, and I love when they push back and show me a different approach.

4PM-6PM

Food is very important to me, and lunch is a big part of my life. If my studio doesn't always have the most exciting work, one thing I can guarantee my designers is an amazing lunch.

Right now we have two clients on retainer: MCKL [Jeremy Mickel's type foundry and studio] and a handbag company called Minibag. We'll spend the bulk of the afternoon working on social, merch, and site design for them.

6PM-8PM

Before we head out for the night, we'll stage a small photoshoot at 5:30 for the latest product to hit our shop.

8PM-10PM

If we don't have an event, I'll give my team a quick prep for any meetings or client presentations we have the next day. But now that I'm on the board of AIGA/NY I go to a lot of design events, and I try to bring whoever's working with me so I can introduce them around and help them break into the industry. 👋
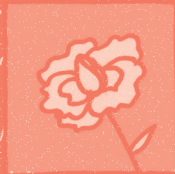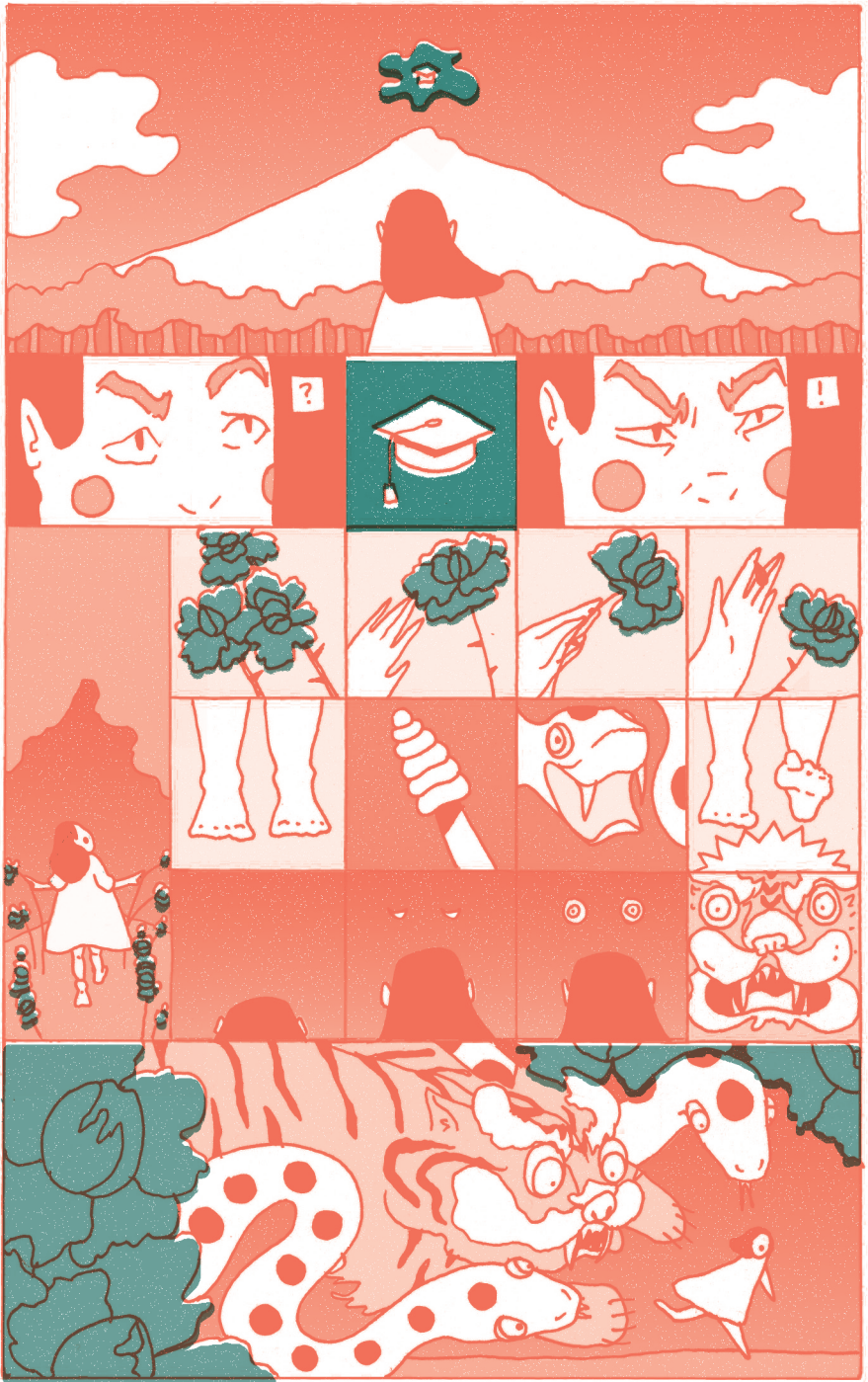
THE

PATH

TO

GRADUATION

BY HUÊ MINH CAO

Should I…
Get a Job or…

By Madeleine Morley

"Work with people who scare you, who you can learn from, and who are better than you."

"As someone who came to the field untrained and worked their way up from the bottom, I always say: Get that first job and learn, build a reputation, and establish future references," says Erik Brandt, founder of Typografika and educator at Minneapolis College of Art and Design. "It's an incredibly important experience and completely different from the classroom. It's not about you anymore, it's about the team, the company, the mission—how can you learn to contribute beyond yourself, and what does that mean to you?"

Freelancers can often feel isolated. If you like to be around people and feel like part of a team, then getting a job might be the best route. "There's a lot to be learnt from working within bigger teams or even in a corporate environment, as long as you don't lose sight of your personal interests," adds Wael Morcos, partner of New York-based studio Morcos Key.

Karin Fong, AIGA Medalist and director at Imaginary Forces, agrees that the company you keep is often more important than the company itself. "Whatever early opportunity allows you to sharpen your skills amongst 'A-level' talent is ideal. A staff or 'permalance' job can allow you to grow in responsibility and take more risks, if it's a healthy work relationship. Ultimately, the goal should be to work with people who scare you, who you can learn from, and who are better than you. Come to think of it, this goal doesn't change as you progress in your career. "

Last, but definitely not least, stability can be a precious thing. If the idea of paying your own medical insurance, planning your own finances, and chasing non-paying clients makes you break out into a cold sweat, then the security of a steady staff job may be exactly what you need right now.

Uber, I also applied to a bunch of other places. I only got two or three callbacks. The next year, I applied for internships again, and every single one I applied to gave me an offer. It basically pushed my résumé to the top of a stack."

If nothing else, you're gaining experience for your future self.

Get a full-time job

- ☐ Learn from successful designers
- ☐ Build a reputation
- ☑ Be part of a team
- ☐ Grow your responsibilities
- ☐ Observe how successful businesses run
- ☐ Reap the benefits of stability and security
- ☑ Contribute to something beyond yourself

Go Freelance?

If you really know what kind of designer you want to be, going freelance straight out of school lets you focus on tailoring your portfolio to suit your desired direction. Finding a part-time job, or a one-day-per week agency role can help you sustain yourself. Freelance work can be more lucrative than a full-time staff role if you stick with it long enough, but when you're first starting out the reality is that freelance commissions are often, if not always, less well-paid than salaried work, particularly with arts and cultural clients.

Freelancing full-time is for the bravehearted. A freelancer needs to learn how to tolerate uncertainty. You'll need to plan your finances, learn about medical insurance, and make space for your own holidays and sick days, but learning to do so early in your career can be a positive experience that'll prepare you for a future of flexible work. Working in your pajamas and living a laptop lifestyle is a cliché (because it's true),

comes with its own challenges.

"Different positions can be good for different times in one's life and career, and it's important to keep an open mind and not be hard on yourself," notes Shira Inbar, a designer who recently left Pentagram to go freelance. "Many people I know, including myself, combine full-time work, independent work, teaching, and more. For me, a diversity of projects is as important as a diversity of practice."

A young designer can embrace the best of both worlds. "Use your time outside of work to freelance. Establishing early relationships in both pursuits is key for long-term growth, learning, and, hopefully, a life in graphic design," suggests Erik Brandt. There's no need to jump into the deep end and freelance full-time from the get-go. You can start out by dipping your toe in, while keeping an eye out for other learning opportunities that come your way.

"*Freelancing full-time is for the bravehearted.*"

but at its most ideal, freelancing allows you to choose your own clients, projects, and collaborators, and it gives you space to experiment with your craft. Being your own boss can be infinitely rewarding, even if it

Go Freelance

- ☐ Establish your own voice and trajectory
- ☑ Be your own boss
- ☐ Work where you want
- ☐ Set your own office hours
- ☐ Learn to manage your own practice and growth
- ☑ Experiment with your craft
- ☐ Establish lasting client relationships

"Crippling self-doubt was a very cool feature I experimented with then and still like to try on seasonally."

* Will Bryant is a local Austin, Texas designer, artist, and, as he puts it, "professional goofball." His bright and exuberant prints and patterns can be seen in murals and on packaging around town, as well as in international ad campaigns for Nike, Nickelodeon, and national sports teams.
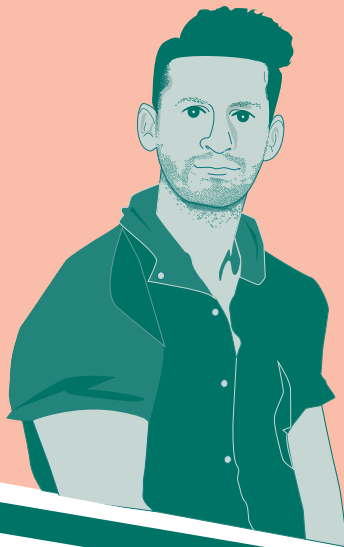
What I Wish I Knew Before I Graduated

Name: <u>Will Bryant</u>

Role: <u>Illustrator, artist, and designer</u>

Where to find him:
⊙ @willbryantplz | willbryantstudio.com

Words by Emma Hollingsworth / Illustration by Paige Giordano

Tell me about your favorite school project.

As part of my BFA in graphic design at Mississippi State, I did an independent study where I created a fake band called Castles to Mountains. I created a backstory, press photos, tour merch, and album art. I wanted to display the work, but there wasn't any available gallery space, so I rented a U-Haul, set up the show inside, and parked it outside the art department for a one-night installation.

What was your first job after graduation?

I worked for Clifton Burt and his wife Kate at the Public Design Center, a non-profit graphic design center in Starkville, Mississippi. They helped me set up my first website and provided the resources for me to teach myself how to screenprint (in their bathroom). That's when I started doing freelance work for small bands that I would reach out to on MySpace.

What was your job after that?

This one! I'm still making it up. But it means I've also had like 2,000 bosses and jobs.

What's one piece of advice you received from a mentor in the industry that you've held onto?

Don't wait on someone to give you permission to do the thing you really want to.

You went back to grad school after finding commercial success—why?

I really wanted to teach, to challenge myself, and to be able to talk about my work more effectively. It was wonderful, but at the same time I reached a level of stress that I didn't know existed; I became overly critical about everything in my life. Crippling self-doubt was a very cool feature I experimented with then and still like to try on seasonally.

You're represented by This Represents. How does that impact your working life?

I signed with them in 2015, just before moving to Austin. I knew I wanted help managing and approaching clients from the business side of things. I'm confident in the relating-to-people part of business, but talking money, usage, reading contracts, scheduling, etc. is not my strength. A friend introduced me to my agent, Natalie, and we hit it off. She has a great personality and is exceptional at all those things I just listed. She makes my days and weeks run much smoother and knows my worth more than I ever would have.

If you had unlimited time and money, what would you make?

Ohh, I like this question! Certainly a lot more paintings, sculptures, and my own apparel line so I could collaborate with people I really admire. I would focus on big public works, like a playground. I would also hope to be more proactive about using my time and resources to give other people a platform for their work—maybe through a gallery, or bar, or a basketball gym? That's very fun to think about.

What You Should Know About:

getting paid

5 tips on setting your rate, negotiating with clients + conquering your fears about money

By Liz Stinson

Getting paid can feel like playing a game of chicken with a client. What if you charge too much—or worse, too little? Is it okay to negotiate? What should be in the contract, anyway? For many designers, learning how to set rates and negotiate pay is simply trial and error. It can take hard-won experience to know how much an hour of your time is worth. We're here to remove the guesswork. Getting paid isn't a formula, but it's also not as scary or hard as it seems.

The first step is to free your mind from self-judgement, says Holly Howard, a consultant who works with creative companies through her business, Ask Holly How. "I think it's important to acknowledge that almost all of us have issues around money, whether we're creative or not. But I do think there are a lot of unproductive mindsets with creatives around money, wealth, and personal value," she says. "I notice it begins with a lack of clarity of their own financial needs or low confidence because someone has told them they're 'not numbers people.' I believe that everyone is a numbers person and that wealth can be cultivated when we get out of our own way."

We asked Howard and Jesse Reed, co-founder of Standards Manuals and the Brooklyn design studio, Order, their advice for getting paid fairly.

① Set a budget and use it to guide your work

"I teach business at Pratt to grad students, and the first exercise we do is setting a personal budget for right now, and for 10 years from now," Howard says. "That helps them understand what type of business or practice they need to create to fulfill their needs. It immediately changes the way they perceive their business income," Howard says. "Clarity builds confidence. A simple exercise in looking at your needs clearly makes achieving it more of a reality."

② Have a check-list for setting your rate

"Here's how I teach people to set their rates," Howard says. "First, consider your personal needs and do your budget. Remember that you're responsible for your own retirement, health care, self-employment taxes, and income tax. Second, know your business expenses, what's the business overhead you have to cover in addition to all of your personal needs? Third, do your research; poke around about what others are charging. Know the market rates. And lastly, recognize we pay based on perceived value. If you can't speak to the impact your work will have on the company you›re hired to create for, you›re not going to get what you're worth."

③ Negotiate, but be clear about why you're asking for more

"Educate yourself," says Howard. "I often see people ask for more money, but without a substantial understanding of the need they're filling and the impact their work will have on the client." Negotiating is also about being fair to yourself—and the client, adds Reed. "Negotiating can be a daunting task, but asking for more money if the circumstances warrant it is perfectly fair. Do you need more resources that merit additional funds? Can you think of a creative way to do good work but keep production costs down? Are you turning down more work because other jobs are taking longer than initially agreed upon? These are all valid, and fair, questions to help frame the conversation around money."

④ Don't design until you sign

"I wish someone would have taught me how to write a proper, but simple, project agreement early on," Reed says. "These things can still go sideways in the end, but having an agreement that clearly articulates the project and what›s involved will be your tool to frame any awkward conversations around expectations or disagreements that might arise during a project. My advice to students who are just graduating is to go work at an agency (of any size) and see how a design business is run. Absorb as much of this first-hand action that you can—how proposals are written, how they bill, who's involved, what's the chain of command."

⑤ Don't get too caught up on money

"At one time or another, anyone in the design profession has faced the 'how much do I charge' conundrum. I'm sorry to tell you that it gets only marginally easier as you grow," Reed says. "Eventually, you'll establish a 'value' that coincides with your skill level, either as an employee or as a business owner, and that will set a foundation for how you frame every new job that comes through the door. But then there's this existential space that never quite evaporates that can have you asking questions like: 'This job is awesome and I'd rather do it for the work than the money.' Or, "I bet they have a huge budget, should I charge more?' And you'll throw the dart and see what happens. Have fun!"

Life After School??

Julian Glander is a 3D illustrator and animator based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His clients include Adult Swim, Google, MTV, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, Nike… and tons more, so you can tell he definitely knows what he's talking about

glander.com | 📷 @glanderco

Illustrations by Ben Zerbo

Okay, relax. There are only so many options for what to do postgraduation. Here's illustrator and animator Julian Glander to walk you through them.

Work hard and be nice to people. Dress for the job you want. Stay hydrated. You've heard all the really obvious advice and you've followed it. Now how do you turn your creativity and your good manners into big piles of cash? There's no one-size-fits-all strategy for entering the workforce—there are precisely six. Read on to find your perfect post-grad path.

The Spy

Get a job or internship inside an ad agency or design firm. Junior designer, mailroom, admin— any position will do. Pay attention to your coworkers. You will see a hidden side of things: how companies find talent, how they negotiate, what they like, and what they don't like. I interned for a producer who needed to hire an illustrator for a huge budget job and I watched them literally type "good illustrators" into Google.

Leave the company after a year and use your knowledge of corporate culture to be a super appealing freelancer. This is the path I ended up taking, kind of by accident.

The Lifer

Get a job at a huge company and fly under the radar for 30 years. Find yourself a position that no one really understands, maybe something with code. Get a nice salary, do good work, and leave work right at 5 p.m. so you can work on your own projects at night or just have a life.

This is the old-school way your grandparents did things, but it's still a dream scenario for many people.
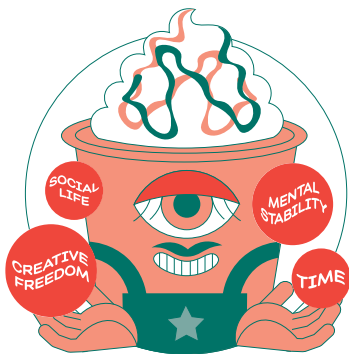
The Barista

Similar to the lifer, but less cushy and slightly more noble. Get a part-time job outside of your creative field—bartender, translator, dog walker. You won't leave work mentally taxed and you'll have tons of time to work on your own projects and get some freelance gigs going.

If I could do it all again I would do it this way. I recommend this path to students all the time, but no one wants to follow it because it's not glamorous. Glamour is overrated.

The Teacher's Pet

Crush it in design school, win a bunch of student awards straight out the gate, and have your professors introduce you to art directors who will give you a shot. In fact, go to your professors for advice all the time during your first few years out in the world. Design blogs will fall in love with you because you are young and precocious and also making great work. This path works best if you go to a prestigious design school and have tons of talent. If it's not immediately clear, I am resentful and envious of these people.
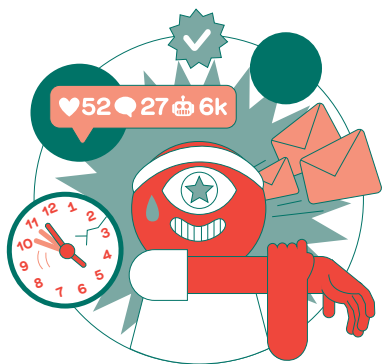
The Hustler

Start a design agency, or illustration collective, or branding company. Design all the accoutrements for it—business cards, merch, logo, fancy website. You can do it alone or with your friends, but I would recommend doing it with your friends. Populate your portfolio with student work, personal projects, and gigs you get from your parent's friends. Treat it like real work.

Buy fake Instagram followers. Buy fake Twitter followers. Tell yourself that bots are people, too. Go nuts on LinkedIn, sending your stuff to art directors and potential clients like crazy. For every 500,000 people you reach out to, one of them will email you back. I personally find hustler types kind of grating, but there's no doubt it's a powerful path for someone who has a ton of drive and self-confidence.

Grad School

Temporarily solves all your problems. You can only hit this emergency button once, so use it wisely.

good luck!

Contributors

Maya Coplin
mayacoplin.com
@mayacphotography_
WRITER: A Day in the Working Life

Lindsay Gallagher
lindsay-dawn.com
@linz_gallagher
DESIGN + WRITER: What I Wish I Knew Before I Graduated

Paige Giordano
paigegiordano.com
@p_aige_
ILLUSTRATION: What I Wish I Knew Before I Graduated

Victor Guo
@victorguodesign
DESIGN: A Day in the Working Life

Emma Hollingsworth
squashprincess.com
@squashprincess
DESIGN: Real World Readiness Checklist + Essential Resources
WRITER: What I Wish I Knew Before I Graduated

Linda Li
lindaadwenli.com
@advven
DESIGN: Editor's Letter

Huệ Minh Cao
minhcao.info
@minhcao
COMIC: After Graduation
WRITER: Should I… Do an Internship?

Valeria Olmos
valeriaolmos.com
@valeolmos
DESIGN: Table of Contents + What You Should Know About…

Emily Park
emilymiaepark.com
@emilymiaepark
DESIGN: Life After School??

Caroline Rock
carolinerock.me
@carolinerockdesign
WRITER: What You Should Know About: Your Portfolio

Hilda Rodriguez
hilda.myportfolio.com
@hilda.designs
DESIGN: What You Should Know About…

Moira Scrimgeour
bitchidiot.net
@bitch.idiot
ILLUSTRATION: Hand Lettering
WRITER: A Day in the Working Life

Anna Sing
annasing.com
@annasingsong
DESIGN: Cover, What I Wish I Knew Before I Graduated + Editor

Jacob Stutts
jacobstutts.com
@jacobutts
DESIGN: Should I… Do an Internship?

Veronica Thompson
vocus-vntdesigns.com
@veronica_thompson
DESIGN: Should I…Do an Internship?
WRITER: What I Wish I Knew Before I Graduated

Neesha Vakil
neesha.me
@mynameisneesha
DESIGN: Colophon + Contributions
WRITER: A Day in the Working Life

Ella Whitaker
ellarosewhitaker.com
@ellarose.jpg
DESIGN: Essential Resources + Real World Readiness Checklist

Kalissa White
kalissanw.com
@hellokalissa
DESIGN: Life After School??

Ben Zerbo
benzerbodesign.com
@ben.zerbo
DESIGN: A Day in the Working Life
ILLUSTRATION: A Day in the Working Life + Life After School??

DESIGNERS FOR HIRE
CONTACT ME @ XXX-XXXX

Additional Design

Tala Safié
@talasafie
@talasafie

Eye on Design Editors

Perrin Drumm
@perrindrumm
@perrindrumm

Liz Stinson
@lizstins
@lizstins

Meg Miller
@meggmillerr
@Megilllah

Madeleine Morley
@madeleinemorleyy
@maddymorleyy

FUTURE GRAD
THE "REAL WORLD" 101
ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

ADVICE
- "10 Commons Mistakes in Résumés + Cover Letters" (AIGA) → aigaeod.co/resumes
- "12 Pieces of Advice for Emerging Designers" (AIGA) → aiga.org/general/after-school-special
- "How to Build a Kick Ass Portfolio" (ADC) → adcglobal.org/how-to-build-a-kick-ass-portfolio
- "Dear Design Student" advice column → deardesignstudent.com
- "A Guide for Getting a Job in UX Design" → aigaeod.co/uxjobs

PRICING, PITCHING + CLIENTS
- Advice on pitching (ADG-FAD) → aigaeod.co/pitching
- Project pricing guidelines (HAWRAF) → aigaeod.co/pricing
- More advice on pricing + setting your rates (Intern magazine) → intern-mag.com/the-price-is-right
- "A Guide to Being Commissioned" → lectureinprogress.com/journal/creatives-guide-to-commissions
- Contract generator → freelancersunion.org/resources/contract-creator
- Jessica Hische's client response email generator → jessicahische.is/helpingyouanswer
- shouldiworkforfree.com
- wageforwork.com

Alternative design education
openschool-workshop.tumblr.com

BOOKS
cont'd education
- AIGA Guide to Careers in Graphic and Communication Design → aigaeod.co/careerguide
- Copy This Book: An artist's guide to copyright → copy-this-book.eu
- The Unofficial Design Portfolio Handbook → aigaeod.co/portfolios
- Don't Get a Job... Make a Job: How to Make it as a Creative Graduate → aigaeod.co/makeajob

HANDY DATA
- Eye on Design's Salary Transparency Survey results → aigaeod.co/salary
- Design Census results → designcensus.org
- Editorial + Illustration rates + wages → aigaeod.co/litebox

future Readings:
readings.design
thepoliticsofdesign.com

LISTINGS
- Job Boards → behance.net/joblist, creativemornings.com/jobs, designjobs.aiga.org/, ifyoucouldjobs.com/jobs
- wordsofmouth.org (newsletter)
- The Big Artist Opportunities List (Google Sheet) → aigaeod.co/opps
- Directory of environmentally conscious resources → abettersource.org

INTERNSHIPS
- Internal Affairs, graphic design internship project → internal-affairs.org
- NYC studios that pay interns → payinterns.nyc
- "Surviving Internships: a counter guide to free labor in the arts" → aigaeod.co/internships

FREELANCE LIFE
- For freelancers and designers feeling a tad precarious → Precaritypilot.net
- "An Artist's Guide to Financial Planning" (TCI) → aigaeod.co/financialguide
- Leading agency for freelancers → workingnotworking.com

TYPEFACES
- Font Licensing 101 → monotype.com/resources/articles/font-licensing-101
- Open source typefaces → velvetyne.fr, colllettivo.it, Open-foundry.com
- Sell your fonts-in-progress → futurefonts.xyz

Tips, Tools & Sage Advice

Your go-to-guide for:

- ☑ Perfecting your portfolio
- ☐ Landing your dream job
- ☑ Owning your internship
- ☐ $etting your rates + getting paid

As the sun sets on your college career and you look out across the horizon, you see something just over there. It's... your future! But how do you reach it? The road may be long, the terrain unsteady, but never fear—you hold in your hands everything you need to venture forth with confidence and pluck. Consider this guide your trustiest companion as you contemplate your next move. Remember, everyone goes through this—and we've collected wisdom from experts in the field so you don't have to go it alone.

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