



Margaret Fletcher

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

FOR ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS:
constructing the persuasive presentation

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Visual Communication for Architects and Designers teaches you the art of designing a concise, clear, compelling and effective visual and verbal presentation. Margaret Fletcher has developed a reference manual of best practices that gives you the necessary tools to present your work in the best way possible. It includes an impressive 750 presentation examples by over 180 designers from 24 countries in North America, South America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Oceania and Africa. This book offers actionable advice to solve a variety of complex presentation challenges.

You will learn how to:

- Understand differences in communication design, representation design and presentation design and know how to use these skills to your advantage;
- Structure the visual and verbal argument in your presentation;
- Design your presentation layouts, architectural competitions, boards and digital presentations;
- Manage issues related to the presentation of architectural and design ideas;
- Present yourself professionally.

Your ability to communicate your design ideas to others is an invaluable and important skill. *Visual Communication for Architects and Designers* shows you how to develop and implement these skills and gain command of your presentations.

Margaret Fletcher is an associate professor of architecture at the College of Architecture, Design and Construction at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama, USA. She is the author of the companion book, *Constructing the Persuasive Portfolio*.



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To Russ,
Thank you. . . for everything.

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Introduction

Architectural and design presentations can take many different formats. They can be verbal, visual, analog or digital; they can include images, films, animations, models and anything else you can think of. However, the one thing they all have in common is the ultimate goal of conveying ideas to an audience. The audience may differ and the complexity of ideas may differ but universally this is the goal. The primary challenge with a design presentation is that the argument must be made visually. Simply delivering design ideas verbally allows each audience member to visually conceive of their own solutions in their respective mind's eye. This phenomenon entirely defeats the purpose of a good design argument!

For a visual argument to be successful, it must propose as many questions and its answers. The argument should challenge notions that are customarily accepted. The real question is, how do you do that? That's a tough question and one that can only truly be answered through practice. However, there are some straightforward graphic guidelines that can be followed and leaned upon to help with the conveyance of a clear message. This book aims to make these guidelines available to the designer. Once you add the complexity inherent in a visual, architectural argument, the real challenge begins.

Architectural solutions answer a vast number of design challenges and require multiple streams of representation to begin to address all of the issues that coalesce to generate a successful project. You must be able to identify all of the design opportunities and organize ideas in a hierarchical manner. Even though we understand that the design process is not a linear one, there has to be order to a solution or the reviewers will get twisted up in a complex argument and will never actually see the beauty of the solution. Therefore, it is important to separate the design process from the design ideas.

Focusing on the design ideas will allow order to prevail and will help you begin to organize ideas and divide them into digestible parts to be represented individually. There are opportunities within a presentation to

demonstrate the conglomeration of all of the ideas—this typically happens with the primary image(s). Just remember, it is also equally important to be able to break down concepts into understandable pieces so the audience can mentally build and comprehend the complexity that you have been working through.

Ideas and graphic strategies as first described in the companion book, *Constructing the Persuasive Portfolio: The Only Primer You'll Ever Need* are developed further in this publication. The first book in this pair deals exclusively with graphic issues and organizational strategies for portfolio development. As this second book on presentation design was being developed, it became obvious that students were struggling to translate what they understood at the scale of a book—the portfolio—to the scale of any type of larger presentation. Therefore, there are places where content categories deliberately overlap between books—regarding portfolio design and presentation design—and purposefully reinforce these ideas in an effort to make clear the overriding graphic rules that govern all representation objectives.

This publication attempts to elucidate differences and similarities in communication design, representation design and presentation design. As you work through the material, hopefully understanding these differences and similarities will make the dissemination of your own work more productive and powerful.

The visual content for this publication was selected from over 50,000 images submitted for possible inclusion. The final 750 examples offer a detailed view of the work happening around the world at the time of publishing. Students studying in the following countries are represented in the work found in this publication: Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, India, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Nepal, Poland, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Sudan, Taiwan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Margaret Fletcher

defining and integrating the systems

communication, representation and presentation

Many types of design processes go into the development of a successful and persuasive presentation. There is a lot to know and learn! Often, we hear the terms communication design, representation design and presentation design used interchangeably but these are distinctly different design devices. All are used to convey ideas but each relies on a different focus and dissemination of specific information. Understanding the differences will help you define what you are already doing and will help you determine what design processes are missing in the advancement of your work.

What is Communication Design?

Effective communication is the exchange of ideas that garners mutual understanding. Persuasive communication allows for the exchange of ideas with the goal of creating a new and authentic understanding.

It all sounds relatively simple. However, in actuality, communication is much more complex than it appears. The communication process involves the delivery of information (this can be designed and controlled) and the reception of information or how material is received and understood (this is not in our control). However, the more we work on the communication of our ideas, the more likely they will be understood as intended.

The ultimate reality is that the message sent may not always be the message received. While we can never completely control how our communication is received, through the understanding of basic principles of communication, it can be managed.

Principles of successful communication design:

1. Know your audience
2. Everything communicates something
3. Delivery matters: clarity is key
4. Complex information is better communicated visually
5. A system and process for feedback is necessary

Know Your Audience

For communication to be successful, it is vital to understand the audience. Imagine delivering a presentation in Spanish to discover the entire audience speaks Korean! While this is an extreme example, it makes a strong point. When you don't know who the audience is, it is impossible to develop your communication approach. It is always best to design your communication strategies with the idea that your audience is completely unfamiliar with your topic. This does not mean that you need to dumb down the material, it simply means that everything must be organized into a complete and clear argument. Do not leave anything out and assume the audience will

automatically know what you are talking about. This applies to written, verbal and visual information.

Everything Communicates Something

All images and words communicate. You can't prevent this. Everything conveys a meaning of some sort. The job of the communication designer is to ensure that images and words are communicating what is desired! Ignoring something or leaving something out entirely still communicates a message. But in that case, the designer has decided to relinquish control over the message being delivered and that's never a good idea.

It is also important to understand cultural or professional bias and assumptions when trying to communicate ideas. The understanding of color is a really simple way to master this idea. Everyone recognizes that green in an architectural plan implies landscape of some sort. The color green can also signify environmental issues. These are universal understandings. They will convey meaning whether you intend them to or not. It is important to be aware of these universal symbols and to use them appropriately.

Delivery Matters: Clarity is Key

The communication process relies on the clear and precise delivery of information in a manner that is logical. Start with broad topics and use them to organize the smaller details into a cohesive argument. Verbally begin by outlining what you are going to present and then use that outline as an orienting device throughout the presentation. This helps the person receiving your message to recognize what is coming. It allows them to watch for the very points that will make your argument clear.

It is also a good idea to repeat or relate information. This can be done verbally or visually. Use similar phrasing in titles and captions to relate concepts. Also relate drawings and images to one another visually so the audience can make the intended connections.



Strong yet ethereal quality of the images and delicate nature of the drawings support the design objectives as stated in the project title. Drawing selections from *Tranquil Fortress* by Nathan Chen and Andrew Hong.

Complex Information is Better Communicated Visually

Design solutions often generate a multitude of related design problems. The complexity can sometimes become overwhelming. Complex information is understood better if communicated visually. A paragraph verbally describing a spatial condition in the design proposal of an open, light-filled museum is not as compelling as a visual rendering of that space. This holds true for all information. Determine which pieces of your design argument would best be communicated visually; it is likely all of it.

Simply stated, it is easier for a reviewer to retain an image in their mind's eye rather than the image of a piece of text. Giving the reviewer an image to ponder while

they are trying to relate additional information will help them make visual and thus, ideological connections.

A System and Process for Feedback is Necessary

The only way to know if what you are trying to communicate is being understood is through feedback. The actual day of the presentation is too late for this type of feedback. Ask others what they think your drawings and images convey. Ask them to listen to your verbal argument and then tell you what they think they heard. Let others critique your use of written words with images to see if the relationships are as you intend. You get the idea. The real message here is. . . get feedback early and get it often. Focus this feedback specifically on the communication of your message.

What is Representation Design?

For the purpose of our discussion regarding presentations, representation design is the creation of visual components of an argument that convey primary ideas through the exploration of graphic portrayals. Project representations can have a variety of visual goals. Great representation design strives to achieve all of these visual goals. Representation design should:

1. Convey meaning
2. Contribute to the clarity of the message
3. Use systems of signs and symbols to represent ideas
4. Demonstrate the hand of the designer
5. Display the perceived truth

Convey Meaning

All project representations must convey meaning. A significant challenge with representation design is to know exactly what needs to be conveyed. For complex design work this can be especially challenging. While working through the design process, it is important to keep a running list of all of the ideas you are trying to develop through the project. Use this list as a guide to determine what ideas need to be conveyed in the representation stage of the project. Bundling design ideas around similar topics will help streamline this process. Keep in mind that a representation without intentional meaning behind it is wasteful. On any given presentation, you will only have a certain amount of space to convey all of your ideas. Don't squander it!

Contribute to the Clarity of the Message

This seems obvious but make sure that the representations you design actually contribute to the clarity of your message. To get this right you will need to enlist the help of some colleagues to give an honest opinion about whether or not what you show actually depicts what you mean. Do this review often and do it early! Remember that everything conveys meaning. Be careful that your graphic choices are not straying from your message.

Use Systems of Signs and Symbols to Represent Ideas

We have established that everything has meaning but certain things have very specific meaning. In the design profession, these systems of signs and symbols are related to things like conventions of architectural drawing—orthographic conventions for plan, section and elevation—or descriptive, graphic signs such as explanatory icons or diagrams. When using these signs and symbols, it is important to remember that they exist for a reason and that reason is so that large numbers of people can read the same drawings and understand them in a similar way. Using them in ways that are not standard can be confusing. Also, failing to use a normative symbol or sign when one is needed can be equally confusing to the delivery of your ideas.

Demonstrate the Hand of the Designer

We have just discussed the importance of using systems of signs and symbols to create universal understanding in representation design. It is equally important that the visual voice of the designer is apparent. There is an opportunity in representation design to develop the look and feel of a piece of representation such that it is uniquely yours. It takes time to establish your own signature representation style and frankly part of the fun of representation design is to explore multiple stylistic options as you are developing your hand. Look to pieces of representation design you admire and try to emulate it. It is impossible to make a direct copy of someone else's design. Your hand will reveal itself as you are trying to replicate the example. That's the beauty of each designer's potential; everything readjusts and is reworked through an individual design process.

Display the Perceived Truth

It could be argued that project representations should only convey the absolute truth. While in theory I am inclined to agree, there are situations in representation design where perceptual understanding is more important than the truth. This can happen when something is technically depicted incorrectly in the digital representation so that a more important idea can be conveyed. This idea becomes important in situations



Using systems of call-outs and image references strengthens the design argument by relating visual information. Drawing selections from *After Nature: Bridging the Grand Metropolitan of Havana* by Helena Rong.

where the designer is trying to convey the atmosphere or attitude of a particular space. It may be important to do something like remove a wall in a digital model to get the camera angle just right to show the intended quality of the space. While this is perhaps a view that could never be seen by an occupant, it is a vitally important view to convey the ideas of the project. There are many different ways to describe this idea of perceived truth; remember that the job of the representation designer is first and foremost to convey ideas.

What is Presentation Design?

Presentation design is the purposeful dissemination of complex ideas to an audience with the expressed goal of transferring information, ideas and knowledge. Successful presentations have many things in common but most importantly they should:

1. Convey confidence and enthusiasm
2. Demonstrate knowledge on the subject
3. Connect and resonate with the audience
4. Display logical organization
5. Rely on compelling graphics and words to convey meaning
6. Communicate a practiced message

Convey Confidence and Enthusiasm

It is important when designing your presentation to remember that even if you are not present for the presentation (a blind review) it is imperative that confidence and enthusiasm is displayed through the presentation. If you are doing a verbal presentation this has a lot to do with how you deliver the information verbally. However, the visual presentation must be equally confident and enthusiastic. Visual confidence can come from the strength of your graphic material and it can come from the thoroughness of the thought behind the graphic argument. The display of enthusiasm should hit these marks as well. It will show in the meticulous and comprehensive nature of your presentation.

Demonstrate Knowledge on the Subject

Design the presentation to be thorough. Do not visually skimp or skip material in hopes that you can cover it verbally. Give your ideas presence by having graphic representations there to support what you say or write. An idea that is only briefly mentioned, whether verbally or visually, is fleeting. The job of the presentation is to convey ideas that linger so that the reviewer can understand how the argument is assembled.

Connect and Resonate with the Audience

When giving a verbal presentation, speak from notes rather than reading your presentation. While it is

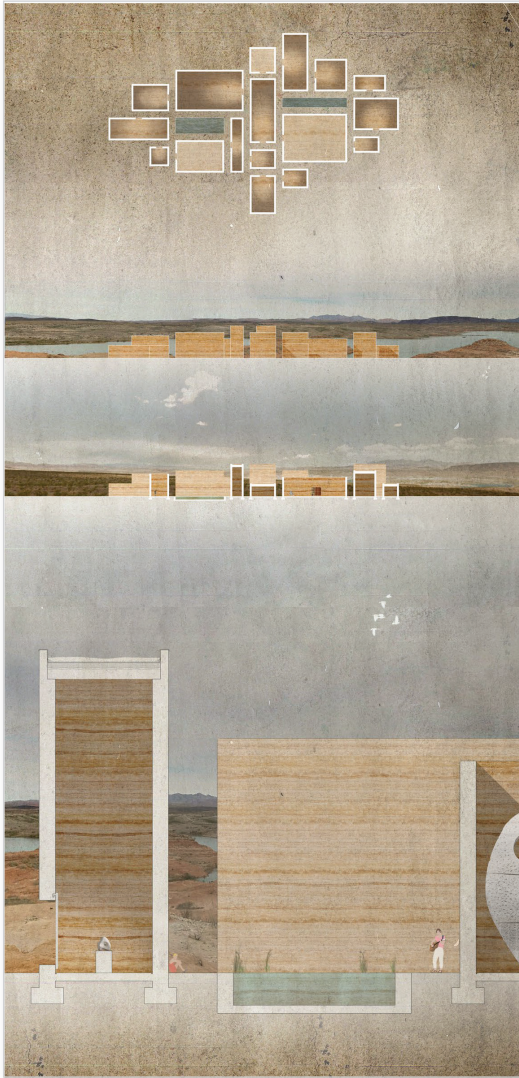
possible to read small segments of text, make sure that you let the audience know you are going to read a bit just so you get it absolutely correct. Then go back to a more conversational style. Keep yourself in the present by attempting to engage in a conversation with your audience. The word “presentation” shouldn’t always mean a shiny, polished regurgitation of facts and figures. Connecting and resonating with an audience in a visual way is similar. Use graphic annotations to remind the reviewer of visual connections you are hoping they will make in your graphic argument. Do not make the reviewer work too hard to understand your points either visually or verbally.

Display Logical Organization

Designing your presentation to be organized is a task that works its way up through the developing argument during the entire design process. Spending time trying to organize the order or manner in which you present your argument will help you understand it better. The better you understand your argument, the clearer you will be in the presentation. In both the verbal and visual argument, pack similar material into digestible segments. Relate verbal points to one another and relate visual graphics to one another. Use principles of visual order and visual hierarchy to structure your visual argument into packs of information that can be understood together and in the desired order.

Rely on Compelling Graphics and Words to Convey Meaning

This concept has been discussed in the representation design section of this chapter but is emphasized again here to reiterate the importance that a successful visual presentation is composed of meaningful graphics. It is also crucial to remember that at least some portion of your presentation must be visually compelling. There should be something that visually catches the reviewer’s eye and sparks some curiosity. It is an important idea to work some portion of the presentation into this category. Every visual piece does not need to be compelling; some graphics are meant to be visually supportive. Design your presentation such that the compelling graphic material is vital to the conveyance of meaning in your project.



*Subtle graphics connected visually within the presentation help the reviewer understand not only the orthographic relationship of the project but also the atmospheric quality of the designed space. Drawing selections from *Space for Art* by Julia Hager.*

Communicate a Practiced Message

Great presentations are practiced presentations. Testing out your argument both visually and verbally is imperative for a successful presentation. However, be very careful that you do not over-practice. Presentations should be designed to be delivered in a natural and conversational manner. Too much practicing can leave the presenter caught in their own head trying to remember where they are in their argument. A visual presentation has to be practiced just as a verbal one does. In a presentation that relies only on visual materials, practicing relies more on colleagues reviewing your graphic material and helping you determine if it conveys a message as intended. Do not ignore any of this practice. It is the process that will most inform you if you are on the right track with your design work.

How to Develop Your Visual, Verbal and Written Argument: Integrating Communication, Representation and Presentation Design

It is already apparent from the characteristic overlaps in the sections defining communication design, representation design and presentation design that these design processes have significant collaborative overlaps. So much so that it sometimes can be difficult to determine which design process you are working within. In truth, it's not really important to constantly be aware of whether you are designing the communication, representation, or presentation of your project. However, it is important to know the primary goals of each type of design process and to know that it is necessary to deliberately design within all three systems. To be blissfully unaware of what you are doing is counterproductive when you are putting your design ideas out into the universe in a bid to connect your ideas to the understanding of the audience.

It is certainly a challenge to keep the integration of communication, representation and presentation design in mind throughout the development of a design project. There are so many things to think about just in designing

your actual project. However, it is important to do so. Try this: take the principles defined in each of the previous sections on communication design, representation design and presentation design and consider them holistically. Work through an exercise of combining the lists so that you can package tasks that relate to one another. Then literally post this list in your work area so that you can see it regularly. Keeping a reminder visible at all times is a powerful tool in developing the skills to keep larger, meta tasks (such as these three design strategies) in mind while working on the day-to-day details that drive a complex design project.

When to Start Designing the Presentation

We've already stated that presentation design should not be considered separately from the actual design of your project. The project, whether it will actually be built or not, should be designed to exist primarily in the design presentation. It is here that all of the project ideas will ultimately be tested. If the ideas of the project are not successfully conveyed through presentation, it is as if the ideas—and therefore the project—don't exist at all.

So, how in the world can you design a presentation while simultaneously designing a project? It is simple, really, and will help you immensely in determining which elements of representation and which elements of your project actually need to be designed. Think of it this way, knowing you need to make a display—a presentation—of 2,000 cookies in two weeks helps focus your decisions and tasks. For instance, you won't spend a week and a half working out just how to get cake to fit into a cookie shape; you're not making cake! The same principle applies to design presentations; if you know you need four boards of explanatory diagrams to convey your ideas, you will better know how to direct your energy.

Some people will disagree completely with this method of working. They believe that a designer should thoroughly resolve and design all parts of a project before designing the presentation. In an ideal world,

where there is time to spare, this would be a fantastic idea! However, the truth of the matter is that there is never enough time to design a project fully or even to design what the authors themselves would like to resolve. There is just never enough time. It is very important that designers are realistic about what they can accomplish and are prepared to focus on those representational items that best explain the primary ideas of a project.

With all of that in mind, as soon as you start your design project, start your presentation. Lay out your boards with the basic assumptions of what you think you might need to convey ideas: diagrams, sketches, a large descriptive image, plans, sections, elevations and determine the size and scale these representations will be on the board based on simple math and square footage knowledge. Of course, in the beginning, this will largely be guesswork but week by week the boards can be updated as your work progresses with the representational material you develop. You simply can't know what to focus on if you don't have the end goal of the presentation in mind. There isn't enough time in a design cycle to leave the presentation to the end and, frankly, it makes absolutely no sense. In order to be efficient with design and production, the presentation must be understood from the beginning and undertaken as an integral part of the design process.

This simultaneous process of designing the project and the presentation isn't foolproof. It is entirely possible that everything progresses nicely and at the end you are still met with a design presentation that looks like it is missing some of the most important ideas. To manage this, it is imperative to maintain and develop a list of project artifacts and project ideas as the design progresses. Do your best to stay organized with your ideas, maintaining them in a hierarchical fashion so that you can make sound decisions about the size and placement of representational artifacts within your presentation. You can begin blocking out your presentation very early in the design process as you work through the three design narratives—presentation narrative, visual narrative and project narrative—simultaneously. Understanding how these narratives can impact your daily work is imperative and is discussed in depth in the next chapter

In order to really get started on your presentation early in the design process you do need to know what kind of review will happen. As mentioned before there are several different types of reviews with the primary categories being an in-person review or a blind review. For either of these situations, the presentation might be printed (boards) or projected (digital). If the presentation is a printed one, find out as soon as possible what the requirements will be. Look for information on size, number and orientation of boards. If the presentation is a digital one, find out if it will be a simple projection of design boards or a more narrative style presentation as can be designed as a slide deck through something like Microsoft PowerPoint.

The final mode of presentation matters. Plans resolved to 1/4" = 1' don't look the same smaller—the design may appear cluttered because of compressed lines and line weight issues—or larger—the design may appear unresolved due to lack of detail in the plan. Line weight and text hierarchy appropriate for print may not work projected or vice versa. In either case, how the presentation looks on a laptop screen is not anywhere close to how it will appear in its final output. Colors shift when printed or projected, line weights look different when printed or projected; even text styles look different. The presentation can only be evaluated if it is viewed in its true, final output form. Don't wait until the end to test the visuals. Test early, test frequently and test smartly.

Working with Tee-up Sets

A tee-up set is essentially a mock-up of your presentation. These are really easy to get started. Once the presentation format is known, simply set the layouts up digitally and block out the types of drawings or representations you plan to have for the project. Go ahead and print this set that just has boxes and words on it. Pin it up and use it as a backdrop to pin up drawings as they are developed. Seeing everything developing while placed together on the presentation tee-up set will really help you determine what needs work. It is ideal to have two or three presentation tee-up sets going at once so that one layout idea does not become the only one. It can be quite difficult to move

forward and consider different layout ideas if you've only been looking at just one option throughout the design process.

Working with Digital Slide Decks

It is very important to develop the order of the presentation narrative when preparing for a digital slide deck presentation. This order will ultimately become the outline of the presentation. The outline will shift and change as the project design shifts and changes but keeping this all in mind will eventually prepare you to develop your complete design argument as you move through the design process. A few things you should keep in mind while establishing your digital presentation narrative:

1. It is a good idea to storyboard your slide deck presentation. This storyboard process is very similar to creating a tee-up set to be used for a board presentation. In the case of a slide deck, the storyboard will help establish the order of the argument; a very important element to an argument presented through a linear slide deck.
2. When establishing your storyboard, keep it to one basic idea per slide. Anything more than this and the design argument could get muddy.

A Note on Software

Printed presentations should be designed in layout software such as Adobe InDesign or similar. Use programs such as Adobe Photoshop for editing image raster files (pixel-based), Adobe Illustrator for vector (line and tone) drawings and Microsoft Word for text information. Using the proper software for the appropriate job will make the development and refinement of the presentation a much smoother operation.

the design narratives

communication, representation and presentation

Beginning a design presentation can be a daunting task but it doesn't have to be! First and foremost, it is important to understand that the design presentation is an extension of your project and should be regarded as an opportunity to expose all of your ideas to the reviewers who will ultimately critique your work. Keeping this in mind can help you focus and connect your design intentions to your design actions.

Design presentations come in a variety of different forms. The process for designing each of the different types of presentations is very similar and can produce a wide variety of presentation outcomes. It is critical to know and understand up front the end goals of your presentation and most importantly to know what format your design presentation will take and how it will be reviewed. This will impact how you prepare for your presentation and ensure time and effort isn't wasted.

In an ideal situation, the presentation requirements will be determined and announced at the beginning of the design exercise. However, this is not always the case. In those situations, maintain some flexibility in the way design representations are developed and stay focused on the primary design objectives that need to be conveyed.

Ultimately the presentation will be the most important tool of persuasion to achieve the communication of your project. The design presentation is the only place the project exists if it is an unbuilt project and it is actually the only way to convey your design ideas. It is very important to get the presentation right!

There are several different types of presentations to be aware of. Any of them could be assigned and you should be prepared to address them all. These presentation types can be broken down into two primary categories: physical, in-person presentations—both printed and digitally projected—and blind presentations where the designer is not allowed to give any verbal argument. In this case, the visual representations must do all of the arguing on the behalf of the designer.

Are the types of presentations all that different?

While these two primary categories of presentation—in-person and blind—seem radically different, they really aren't. Often for in-person presentations a lot of ideation content is left for the designer to verbalize during the presentation without a visual representation of that idea. How many times have you heard from a reviewer, "What you are saying sounds really

compelling but there is no evidence of those ideas in the representations of your project in this presentation!” To hear these words during a review is a clear indication that you completely missed the mark on your representation and presentation opportunities.

To avoid this situation, it is best to design your presentation assuming you will not be there to verbally convey ideas. All ideas should be clearly, logically and visually represented in the design presentation; leave nothing in your head. If it is not visually represented in the presentation, it does not exist! Words—written or spoken—should act as support to bolster the legibility of your design ideas that have been visually represented.

An easy way to manage this process is to keep a running list of the design ideas that are shaping your project. As work progresses, this list will gain some ideas, lose some ideas and will certainly be reordered over and over again. It is through this fluctuation of design ideas that a concentrated project narrative emerges. As the content gets more and more focused, make sure that each and every important concept has a visual representation to explain the idea.

As you move forward through the design process, these ideas and visual representations—artifacts—will become more and more refined and more and more ordered. A hierarchy of both design representations and design ideas will develop that will direct you to the appropriate material for your design presentation. It is important to use this system to drive your work forward. Design representations without ideas behind them mean nothing; ideas without design representations to explain them also mean nothing.

Design Narratives for Presentations

There are three readily identifiable design narratives that must be addressed in the design of your project presentation. The three types of narratives are: presentation narrative, visual narrative and project narrative. All three of these systems should be considered as organizational systems for the presentation. Presentation narrative determines the manner in which the project is described or revealed in

the presentation. The visual narrative considers issues and systems of a visual nature and spans across the design of the entire presentation. Project narrative specifically refers to all of the parts and pieces within a specific project that are needed to properly describe it.

It's important to work on all three narratives—presentation, visual, project—simultaneously as the design progresses. The presentation design process is not linear, but is really a back and forth design effort between the interrelationships of these three narratives and in the case of a complex design presentation moves forward and backward across an often long design process. It should also be noted that for a design presentation to truly be successful, it is important to work on the presentation from the beginning of the design process. Gone are the days when the designer focuses on just the project design for a certain amount of time and then shifts focus to the design of the presentation. Architectural projects, particularly theoretical ones, are realized only through presentation. You must begin on the presentation the moment you begin on your project design.

To better understand the three types of narratives, let's look at the basic definition of a narrative. A narrative—in the context of presentation design—is a purposeful and composed relationship between elements that are constructed to be understood together.¹

Presentation Narrative: Goals and Purpose

The presentation narrative is ultimately the order or manner in which the designer wants their project to be revealed during the presentation. This narrative could be manifested through a verbal presentation where the designer essentially verbally “narrates” the design argument using the visual material as a reference to the design ideas that are being verbally described. Or the presentation narrative could be manifested through the order—both through hierarchy relationships and through adjacency relationships—of representational artifacts arranged physically on the presentation boards or in the digital presentation slide deck.



*This drawing reveals very little about the space of the surface and instead focuses on what spaces are beyond.
Unfolded Elevation by Meghan Quigley.*

Visual Narrative: Goals and Purpose

Working with the established definition of a narrative and integrating the notion of the visual—all things seen—think of the visual narrative as the deliberate, designed visual relationships between elements in the presentation composed to be understood together and used to clarify the understanding of the project.²

Ideas describing the detailed components of a visual narrative are written in subsequent sections of this book. For now, let the following topics give some indication about what types of elements fall under the purview of the visual narrative: grid and alignment systems, visual order, visual hierarchy, typeface usage, etc.

Project Narrative: Goals and Purpose

The project narrative in a presentation relates to the specific project. It is the unique visual and written representational material required to convey the thinking behind the work.³

When developing the project narrative for use in a presentation, care should be given to authentically address what you specifically found interesting through the experience of your own design work. It is important

to know what should be conveyed about a project.

There are many types of normative project components to consider: research, precedent studies, site conditions, basic representational artifacts, etc. It is also important to use the presentation as a place to convey the nature or atmospheric attitude of the project. This can be one of the most interesting parts of designing the project narrative and it ties directly to the visual narrative.

Make sure all of the thinking behind the work is overt; don't leave anything without visual representation and assume it will be obvious to the reviewer. To successfully do this, make a list of all the ideas that need to be conveyed for the project and make sure each of these ideas can be represented with a visual artifact.

Putting the Design Narratives to Work

All three of these design narratives play an important role in the development of your presentation. Keep them all in mind as you move through the process of designing your project. Elements and ideas from each narrative will overlap and blur the lines between the others. Don't worry about this. Design is a messy business; it will ultimately be impossible to keep things in such tidy narrative categories. This means you really are digging in and designing these narratives simultaneously!⁴

developing the project narrative

constructing a visual argument

There are many things that go into the development of a compelling design argument; some parts of the argument can start at the beginning of the design project and some things will develop as the design process moves along. Typically, the primary artifacts developed during the course of a design project are visual ones such as drawings, models, images and renderings. Knowing the ideas behind the visual artifacts that are being developed will help hone the representations into meaningful pieces of communication.

There are certain graphic standards that should be understood and implemented by all designers to prevent graphic calamities that can get in the way of clear visual communication. This section aims to help the designer sharpen and integrate both their verbal and visual skills while tackling the challenge of the visual argument.

One of the single most difficult things to achieve with a presentation is a true and powerful visual and verbal representation of design thinking and not just a display of project artifacts. Remember our definition of the project narrative: the project narrative in a presentation relates to the specific project and is the unique visual and written representational material required to convey the design thinking behind the work.

Time is precious during project development and often it is all a designer can do to just get the project visually described. Using design artifacts without thinking about what they are representing is never a good idea when it comes to presentation design. This method of presentation design is just a representation of production. It only demonstrates that artifacts were made, that there is a basic skill set. However, it is missing a radically important skill and, frankly, a more elusive skill to demonstrate: the skill of design thinking.

Often a project reviewer has multiple projects to review. They could even have hundreds of competition submissions to review that they need to narrow down to a short list. Every single project is from a competent designer who has the basic skills of all architecture students—they can build physical models, they can build digital models, and they can all produce a set of drawings. These are skills that are expected! But you are declaring that you are a designer and being a designer requires the demonstration of an inquisitive and robust mind! A designer creates; a designer strives to expose something previously unknown. It is a very specific set of skills to display.

The ultimate challenge in presentation design is to strive to uncover, reveal and explain the design thinking—the previously unknown—through the artifacts of the design project. As a result of successful presentation design, the designer can direct the reviewer to exactly what they want them to see and understand about a project—use this fact to your advantage. Don't simply rely on the material that is available. New visual representations to explain your project may need to be produced in order to explain the complexity of your design ideas.¹

Finding Gaps in the Project Narrative

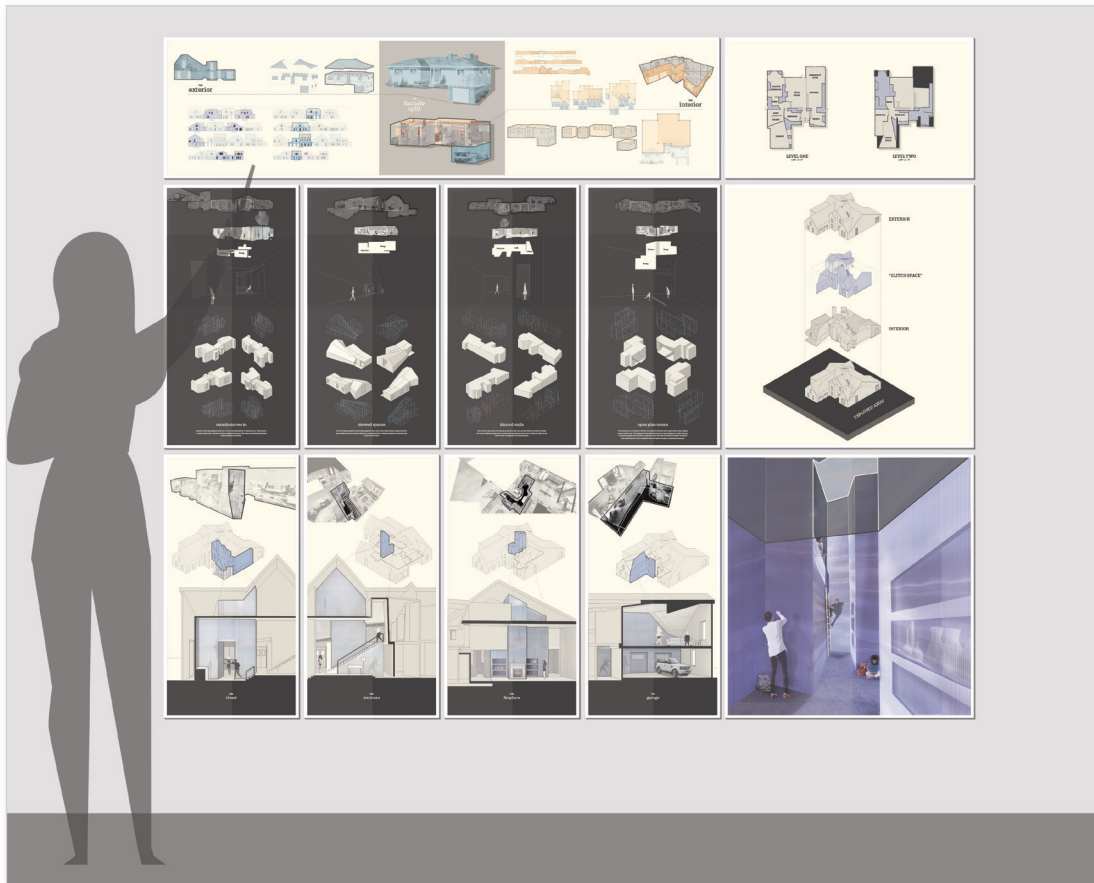
It is important to work diligently toward a cohesive and logical project narrative. It is a relatively straightforward process but one that needs to begin early in the project's development.

To get started at the beginning of a project, make a list of the kinds of project representations that should typically exist for a project. This is a list of artifacts that covers the basics: site plan, plans, elevations, sections, descriptive diagrams, etc. As the project progresses, this list will naturally develop and morph depending on the descriptive needs of the project.

Likewise, as the project develops, keep a list of all of the project ideas that are evolving that will ultimately need to be conveyed in the presentation. This list should include every idea that has been incorporated into the project, no matter how significant or insignificant. Do not leave any ideas off this list. As with the artifact representation list, this one will adjust and shift as the project progresses.

The goal with this exercise is to match important ideas to the artifacts that will best describe them. This is your greatest device in the development of both the project and the presentation. So, I will say it again: the goal is to match important ideas to the artifacts that will best describe them.

While moving through the design process, these lists will need to be organized and reordered to establish a hierarchy of design ideas. It is always better to communicate a few ideas and communicate them well than to try to express too much and risk the entire argument becoming unclear, that is why an idea hierarchy is needed. In the case of a presentation, the reviewer spends a relatively short amount of time with the work compared to how long the designer has and it is imperative that the design thinking is clearly conveyed. Prioritizing and acting as a curator to your own design ideas is a must. It is not enough to simply demonstrate your production skills. Design ideas must be represented. If they are not represented in the presentation, they do not exist.

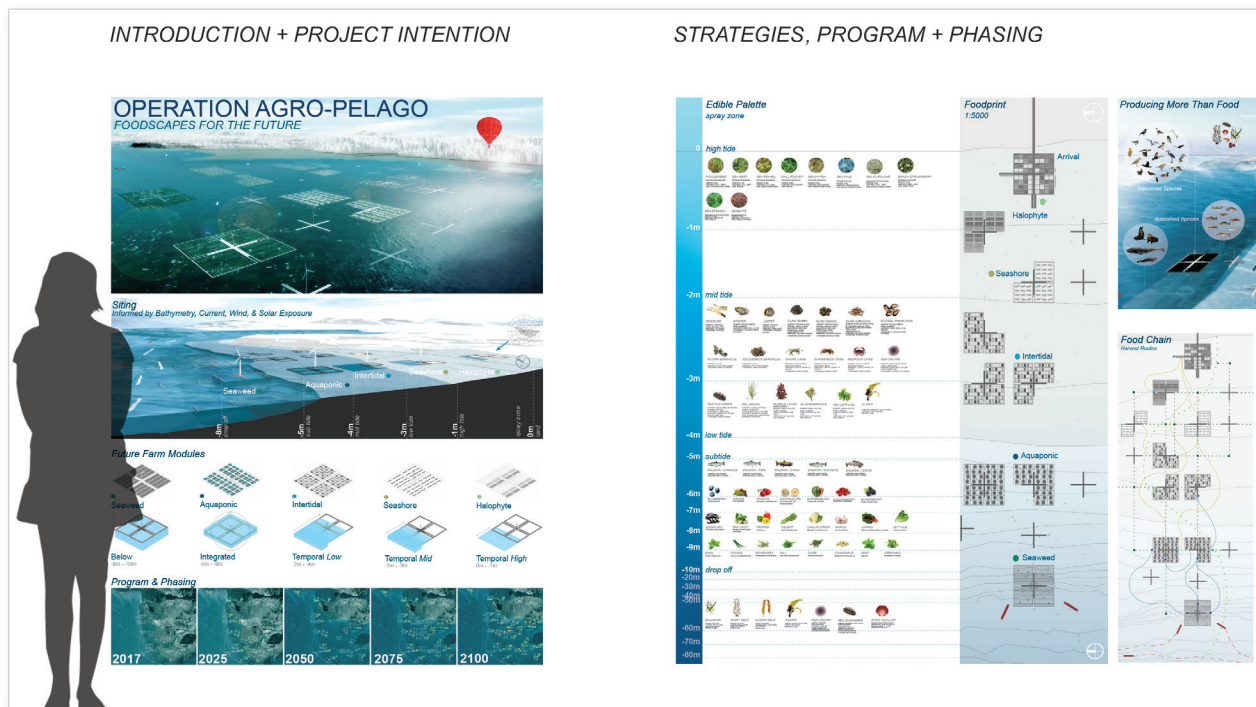


Clear image hierarchy supports the design argument in this printed presentation. Drawing selections from *The Glitch* by Neely Sutter.

It is entirely likely that additional material of some sort—drawings, models, diagrams—will need to be produced to flesh out your visual argument. It is a critical step in the clarity of your presentation to be realistic with yourself about what needs to be done. It is important to step back and be truly honest with yourself to determine if what you have to show actually delivers the message you intend. If you do decide that additional visual representation is needed, be careful and determine what you can actually accomplish in the time left. If time is limited, be focused and accomplish the work of absolute value to your argument.

Order of the Project Narrative

It is important to give some thoughtful reasoning to the order in which the project is presented. Your first instinct might be to organize the project narrative based on the order in which the project was developed and designed. This could be a reasonable strategy. However, it completely removes any opportunity to build a hierarchical and cohesive design argument. Instead, this method simply describes what you did and in the order you did it. This isn't always the best way to present your work.



Broad categories help organize the complexity of ideas embedded in this thesis presentation, *Agro-Pelago: Foodscapes for the Future* by Jaclyn Kaloczi.

Try this instead: review the lists generated earlier about project artifacts—existing and missing—and project ideas. From these lists, match design ideas to visual artifacts that best explain them and begin to combine and relate ideas to one another in an effort to streamline your thoughts into similar categories. Through this activity you can establish a hierarchy between the primary ideas and support ideas. Once you understand the hierarchy of ideas, it becomes clearer which representations should appear as the most visually prominent within the presentation—the ones that convey the primary ideas best! Keep in mind that this primary representation could be anything. It could be an exploded axonometric drawing, a plan or a section, a wire-frame sequence of views, a rendered or illustrated perspective view or even an annotated diagram. It could be anything really. The most important thing to remember about the order of the project narrative is that it should be considered and not just a retelling of the history of the development of a project—unless, of

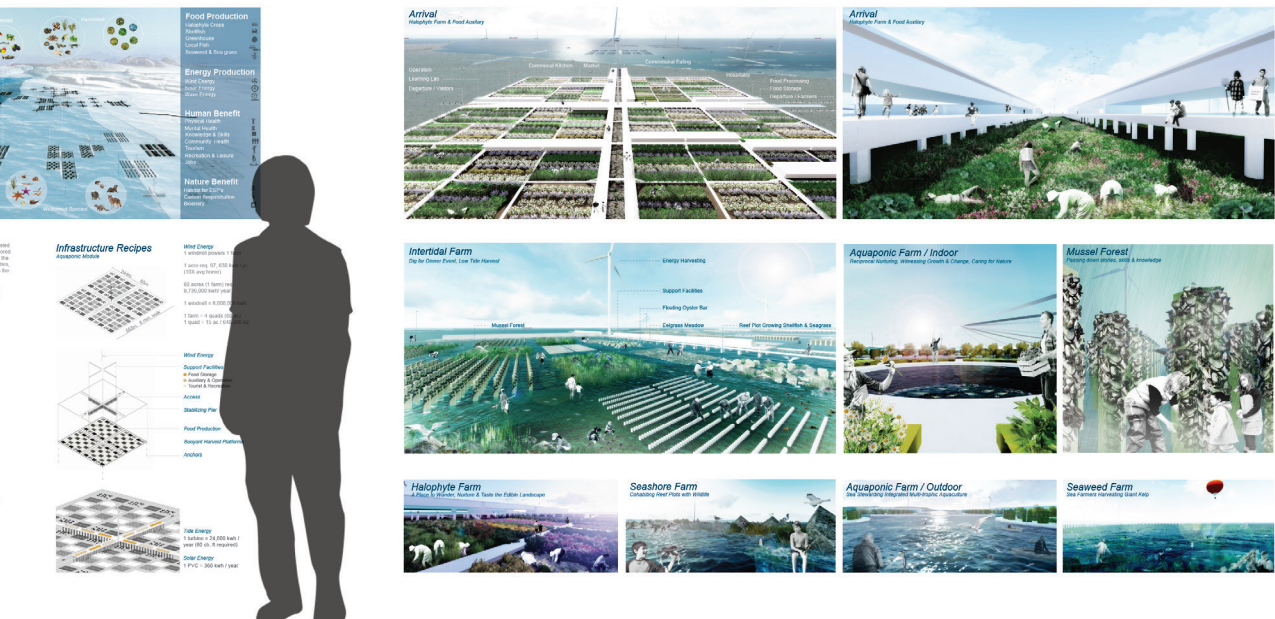
course, after careful consideration, you decide this is the best way to present your specific project narrative.

Keep in mind, as the designer you have full control of what the project reviewer understands about the work—absolute and complete control. Take advantage of this knowledge when developing the order of the project narrative. And remember, even though it is good practice to formally structure an argument, there is no way to absolutely control what a reviewer spends time focusing on. They will likely focus on what they, personally, think is the most interesting visual item in the presentation. Making sure to prioritize ideas and their respective representations increases the chance that the focus of the reviewer will go to the place you wish.

Primary Images and Support Images

It is important to establish a strong and pronounced visual hierarchy within the project imagery to determine

EXPERIENCE, MATERIALS + DETAILS



which project representations are most important to the design argument. Once this determination is made, it becomes much easier to make decisions about both the placement of other images as well as their relative size. As mentioned before, images that are most important to the design argument should lead the visual presentation and should be large relative to other artifacts within the presentation. This is a very simple but powerful strategy.

Once the primary images have been identified, it is time to determine which images should act as support images. Primary images are the images that best convey the main design objectives and are generally larger within the presentation. Support images are images that need other visual content to be fully meaningful or images that are purposefully subordinate to a primary image. It is important to understand this relationship between images, to identify the relationships early and to let this information influence the presentation layout.²

Begin Constructing Your Presentation

Development of the project and presentation narrative should happen almost simultaneously. In fact, it can be quite difficult to conceptually separate these tasks. This is a good thing! If a presentation is the final outcome of a design project, then the design of the presentation narrative is actually a primary component of the design of the project.

In truth, the evaluation of a design project and therefore the presentation is based on the clarity and conveyance of ideas through the presentation. It is imperative that the presentation demonstrates the designer's ability to think through and solve complex design problems. The presentation is ultimately the only thing being designed for. Your project does not exist anywhere else or in any other way. The presentation is essentially all you have. All drawings you make or models you build are representation tools. Keep this in mind and make sure the design presentation is a clear, compelling and focused message of your design ideas.