



The Student Guide to the  
**Creative**  
**Studio**  
in the Digital Age

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**Denitsa Petrova**  
**Doug Specht**



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# Introduction

Welcome to this book on becoming a creative student in the digital age. You have probably picked up this book because you are considering going to university to study a creative subject, or you have already accepted your place and are planning how to get the most out of your studies. You might have even already started your course and are wanting to enhance your skills and embrace new technologies in your practice. This book is about more than just your time at university, though. Throughout these chapters we will be introducing you to a wide range of concepts and skills that will aid you in first applying to university (if you haven't done so already) and also when you complete your studies and enter the world of work, be that freelance or for a company. Of course, along the way we will help you navigate the exciting world of university study, paying special attention to the skills you need to become a creative student and artist in the digital age.

We will be joined throughout the volume by experts, students, practitioners and lecturers, who have all kindly provided their tips, advice and thoughts to help you in your studies and career. Part 3 of the volume introduces you to many of these people and their ideas, working as a sort of encyclopaedia of advice for different subject areas and topics. You will also find tips and advice from contributors to the book throughout all the chapters.

We will start the book by looking at what it means to work in a creative studio. We take a broad view of the concept of *studio*, which for us can really mean any creative space that exists in the real or digital world—so this could be your studio at the university, a space or table you have at home, or a digital environment such as Miro where you work alone or with others. The whole of Part 1 will help you set up a studio space and think about how to get the most out of solo and collaborative work within that space. We will look at some practical elements, such as hardware and tools

you might need, and also some soft skills, such as time management, that will help you in your work.

In Part 2 of the book, we look at some very specific creative skills that cross multiple disciplines and ways of working. We will look at creating portfolios, including those that are needed to get into university, those you might produce while at university, and also ones that might be used after you complete your studies. We will also look at how to present your work, both in person and online, synchronously and asynchronously. Related to that, we discuss crits and how you might use and respond to feedback provided by your lecturers and peers. We also discuss group work and how the digital age can help facilitate exciting collaborations even when you are working remotely from your colleagues.

Part 3 is where we get deeply into different subject areas. As noted above, we welcome some exciting and very helpful contributions from students and academics from across the UK and beyond to provide you with first-hand advice for the subjects you are interested in.

We finish off the book with some more big-picture stuff. We challenge you to ask, what is next? To think about the career you would like that will engage in creative practices. To think about how the creative studio might differ in the world of work, and how you can ensure you keep your creative energies going. We provide you with some ideas and thoughts on applying what you learn at university to the rest of your life, and provide some advice on how to ensure that as you wrap up final projects, you are ready to promote yourself and your work to the world.

We hope that you will find this volume a useful companion from the moment you start thinking about applying to university, all through your studies, and then onwards to the rest of your life.

See you in Part 1!

*Denitsa and Doug*





1929  
April Grace Collins  
90%

*PART 1*

***The Creative Studio in the  
Hybrid Environment***

*It is good for the artist to understand conflict and stress. Those things can give you ideas. But I guarantee you, if you have enough stress, you won't be able to create. And if you have enough conflict, it will get in the way of your creativity. You can understand conflict, but you don't have to live in it.*

David Lynch,  
*Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*



# The Creative Studio Space

Being creative can be challenging. If you are a creative practitioner or a student studying a creative discipline, you would know that the process of coming up with something original and satisfying, arriving at an idea that responds well to the creative brief or your own creative pursuits, can be joyful but sometimes also frustrating. There are all sorts of things to think about, issues to overcome, and relationships to consider. There is you, and then you have your space, your creative practice, your classmates, or others whom you collaborate with, your tutors and instructors. And all of the above maintain relationships with you and with one another as part of the creative process that you are involved in, no matter if it is a course assignment or an independent project. These relationships can become even more complex when you must suddenly change the way you do things. Having to move towards studying online or presenting work in this way can be difficult. If you are pushed out of your normal routines and the space you use to create work, it can be daunting and get in the way of your creativity. If you are a student, it can affect your progress and marks.

Many students find that being creative in a digital and online-only studio is a liberating and joyful experience, but others can find themselves struggling with very real challenges of isolation, separation, losing boundaries and managing their time. Trying to recognise and understand new or different ways to work in an online-only or hybrid environment can help you worry less about these changes, and it can focus you more on the actual creative process. In this section, we will have a look at your studio and how you can make it an even more efficient and enjoyable place to be.

The studio is more than a physical place,  
even more than a mental space; it is a necessity of being.

Mary Jane Jacob, *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists*

In an interview, the American film director and artist David Lynch talks about the space where ideas come from. He says that, for him, they exist in ‘another room’ and he must try to pull them close to him. And this can be a difficult process, but once you have a good idea, or once you catch the ‘big fish’, this can be extremely satisfying. Similarly, the curator, historian and art critic Robert Storr (2010) describes the studio as ‘the place where lightning strikes.’ It is the space where one goes to develop ideas, a place one returns to. But what does a studio look like? How does it reflect you and the work that you do?

### **What Is a Studio Space?**

The studio is a space to work and create. It is the physical environment that you occupy for such activity: your house, your room, the desk at your work or your student flat. However, your studio can also be immaterial—a place that only exists in your mind, where you go to imagine and come up with ideas. It can be a virtual space on the computer or in the online cloud. It is the space that is just for you but also a space that you sometimes share with others. These locations—physical, imaginary, or virtual—are extremely valuable. They are our sacred and safe spaces, in which we can explore our creative side. And it is essential that we maintain them and look after them. It is important that we nourish them and understand them, as they are part of who we are as creatives.

The French post-impressionist painter Henri Matisse said that another word for creativity is courage. It takes courage to be creative. It also takes time, effort, patience, and love. The same could be said about your creative space, no matter how large or small. Your studio is your temple. It is the temple of your ideas; it is the gallery of your work. It can also be a private place for yourself or a place that you may share with a small number of people.

Apart from courage, it also takes strength to maintain this space and to respond to how it may be changing. It is important to remember that, in the end, you are the owner of this space. Despite external influences, you are responsible for keeping it in the condition and shape that works for you. The American modernist artist Georgia O’Keeffe said, ‘To create one’s world in any of the arts takes courage.’ O’Keeffe lived and worked in New Mexico, USA, at her studio at the Ghost Range, which is now a museum.

The space that you create in can be organised or messy or somewhere in the middle. Depending on the type(s) of creative work that you do, in your studio we may find paper, pencils, pens, pastels, canvases, paint, clay, brushes, sketches, coloured paper, paintings, notebooks, magazine cuttings, or all sorts of other artistic materials. They can be on the walls, on the floor or on tables, well organised or randomly placed. Sometimes such spaces can be the place where you spend time with friends or colleagues for entertainment or discussion. So, they can also have a social purpose. We will talk about that and about the ways of working with others in the online and hybrid studio later in Part 1.

Before we started using computers and creating work digitally, the typical graphic designer's studio was, to a point, similar to the one of the painter. Designers had to do everything manually. The screens you use today to view and edit your work were then angled drawing tables, where the designer performed various activities. To cut, move, and paste elements, designers used scalpel-shaped knives. For smaller assets, tweezers would also come in handy. Rubber cement was the typical adhesive to



**Figure 1.2** Picture of an artist's studio

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ann\\_Gollifer%27s\\_studio.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ann_Gollifer%27s_studio.jpg)

make things stick in place, and the solvent was used to clean surfaces and make the work appear smooth. The most used pens were the Rapidograph pens because they offered clean and precise lines. There was tracing paper that would allow for drawings to be traced and reproduced. All this was very time-consuming, and it wasn't until the middle of the 1980s when digital desktop publishing appeared that the design industry took a turn toward digitalised creation and publishing.

As we've already established, creativity needs space: virtual, physical, and cerebral. In a world that is becoming gradually more mobile, you need to be able to maintain your work no matter where you are. This is even more important as a student, as you would normally be travelling from home to the university and between buildings and lecture rooms. You would be working or studying in cafes, alone or with your friends. Having a well-organised online space can be a valuable asset for the creative process. Looking back somewhat, this might involve setting up careful filing systems of folders and subfolders, developing a method of naming files so that they can be easily found and getting into the habit of saving different versions of work so that you can return to past iterations of ideas without having to keep using the undo option. An organised digital space should



**Figure 1.3** Designer studio from the 1960s  
Permission granted by Briar Levit, director, Graphic Means,  
<https://www.graphicmeans.com>

also be one that is backed-up regularly either to the cloud or a hard drive to ensure you don't lose any work.

If you already are a creative digital practitioner or if you had to swiftly adapt to a hybrid or online way of working and communicating with your peers, classmates, or tutors, then your studio will probably look different from the traditional creative studio. You may keep working on your phone, laptop, iPad, or computer. It could be in your own online space or on the university server that you are using for your assignments. Some of these spaces are shared with others (if you work on group projects) and some are open to a wider audience (such as your website, where you showcase your work). Working or studying within an online studio is obviously different from the traditional notions of creative space that we discussed earlier. However, it has its own benefits and, of course, some limitations, which we will explore in the forthcoming sections.



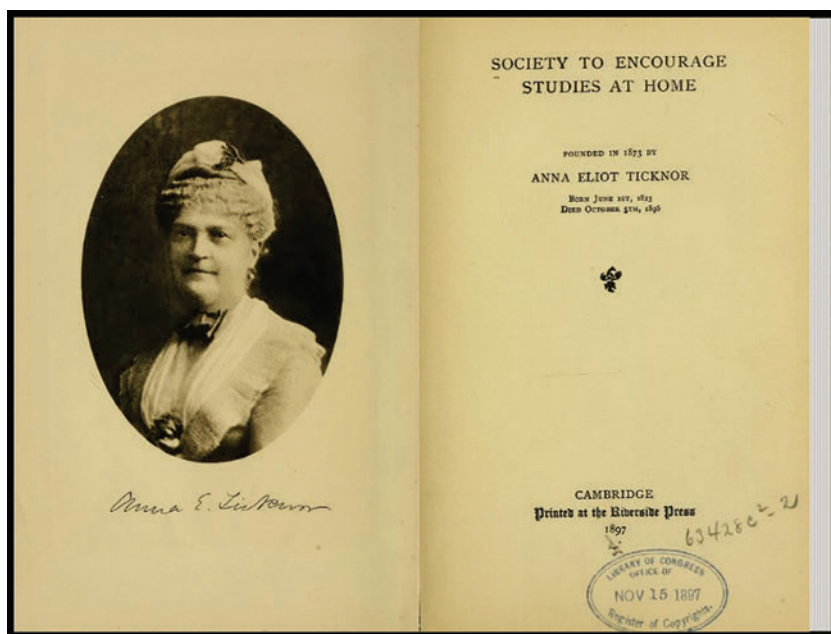
# Navigating the Types of Digital Learning

## Studying from a Distance

Learning from a distance is not a new concept, and when it first started it was facilitated by letter writing. The first documented example of learning by correspondence was a 1728 advertisement in the *Boston Gazette*, where the teacher Caleb Phillips offered his services for ‘persons in the country desirous to learn this art, may by having the several lessons sent weekly to them, be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston’ (Sleator, 2010). With the development of the postal service in the nineteenth century in America, a structure was in place to support this type of learning. Some of the first courses offered shorthand and stenographic skills, and there were other more advanced correspondent courses, such as the one from 1890 from the Colliery School of Mines, teaching Mine safety.

Worthy of mention would be the efforts of Anna Eliot Ticknor, whose passion for education transcended into opening the Society to Encourage Studies at Home in 1873. This establishment paved the way for more than seven thousand American women to access higher education, regardless of their personal circumstances, as they were able to study by correspondence (Caruth and Caruth, 2013). In 1892, the University of Chicago established the first major correspondence programme in the United States to be offered at university level, and the emergence of new technologies in the early twentieth century, such as radio broadcasting and television—new tools for distance learning such as radio and televised courses—were in place (Sleator, 2010).

Since the early 2000s, universities around the world have experimented with all kinds of digital learning. Some of this has helped to create distance



**Figure 1.5** *Society to Encourage Studies at Home* by Anna Eliot Ticknor  
 Permission granted by Boston Public Library, Boston, USA (<https://www.bpl.org>)

learning courses, where students never see a physical campus at all. Other innovations have helped enhance the on-campus experience by implementing tools such as virtual learning environments (VLEs) to support student learning. Along the way, lots of different models of teaching and learning have been developed—for example, hybrid, blended, flipped, distance, online, digital, virtual, and remote learning have all been used to describe different ways of working in and around the university. These terms might be pretty hard to get your head around as a student, but for a long time the number of courses that were being advertised as one of these modes of working was rather limited. Indeed, if you wanted to work mostly away from campus and mostly online, then you would have to go looking for courses that worked in this way. You wouldn't find many, and those that you did find would often have very clear expectations about what it would mean for you to study in that way.

In the late 2010s, many universities were starting to diversify, offering more options regarding the ways in which you could study as a student.

Online distance courses started to become more mainstream, although they still required some work to find them. Then, when the world was hit by the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, universities around the globe were forced to shut their doors and move everything online for all their students. Although this was a far from perfect situation, and there were many students who didn't like this change in teaching mode, it also became clear that many students did. They liked the flexibility and the ability to work alongside their studies, look after family or loved ones, or engage in serious academic thinking at a time of day that suited them best. As the pandemic receded and universities were able to open their doors to students once more, many of them decided to keep some of the good parts from the emergency teaching they had been forced to do during the crisis. Now you will find thousands of courses that call themselves blended, hybrid, digital, or a host of other names. But with the rise in the number of courses comes confusion as to what they might be offering. As each course and university tries to stand out by using unique—and to them, futuristic-sounding—names, it becomes much harder for you, as a student or prospective student, to know what kind of teaching and learning you might get. Given this problem, it seems like a good idea to explore some definitions and to share with you how you can work in any of these modes.

## **Online Learning**

Online learning is a bit of a catch-all. It most commonly refers to courses that are one hundred percent online and which could be taken by students living anywhere in the world. Things like massive open online courses (MOOCs) often spring to mind when we think of online learning, but there are also much longer online courses available these days, with some that might see you gaining a whole degree fully online. Online learning can be fully asynchronous, as many MOOCs are, requiring you to be self-directed in your learning. Some are fully synchronous, requiring you to log on at a specific time. Many, though, use a combination of these styles. This book is less concerned with fully online courses such as this, but online learning is also sometimes used as an umbrella term to cover the aspects that we are more interested in and which can be more easily confused: those are blended and hybrid learning.

## **Synchronous Learning**

Quite simply put, synchronous learning means that you, the teacher, and your classmates will all be in the same space at the same time learning and discussing the same topics. This could happen in a classroom or another space on campus, or it could happen online. Either way, though, it is live, and you will be expected to be engaged and ready for the learning as it happens according to your timetable. This kind of learning is great for adding structure to your learning and ensuring opportunities to talk and debate with others from your class, as you will all be present and up to speed on the same topics and ideas. It can be difficult for people with jobs, health issues, or other responsibilities, but there are ways around it through some of the other possible methods described hereafter.

## **Asynchronous Learning**

Asynchronous learning is essentially the opposite of synchronous learning. This is learning that happens on your own time and at your own pace. This is sometimes simply being asked to do some reading or watch a prerecorded lecture video at a time that suits you (although with a deadline for completion). It can be a much more complex range of interconnected tasks, involving watching, making, doing, writing, and group work—again, normally with a series of deadlines to ensure the pace of work matches that of the course but with considerably more flexibility around when you undertake the work. This can be really good for people who have to work around other things in their lives or those who, like one of the authors of this book, prefer working in the early hours of the morning. Asynchronous working, though, requires a good deal of self-motivation to keep things on track and to avoid rushing things at the last minute.

## **Blended Learning**

Blended learning takes advantage of both asynchronous and synchronous learning, but unlike pure online courses, blended learning involves the use of both digital and in-classroom teaching. This is perhaps the most common type of digitally enhanced learning you will come across. It can be

as simple as having some of your lectures recorded and available to watch any time on your virtual learning environment, combined with being on campus for seminars in a classroom where you discuss the topics covered. There are also much more complex models of blended learning, where online and offline activities work together to enhance your learning and university experience. Blended learning offers a certain amount of flexibility, but all students will be required to undertake both the online and in-person aspects of the course, meaning that you will normally be living close to the university, even if you are accessing some of the materials and learning online.

### **Hybrid Learning**

Hybrid learning is a little different from blended because different students have different experiences and will learn in different spaces. Hybrid learning is an approach in which some students are in the physical classroom and some students are joining virtually or remotely. All students, though, whether they are on campus or off campus, are taught together at the same time. Everyone learns together, regardless of where they are in the world. If you are working on campus, you might find yourself doing group work with someone off campus, perhaps via a laptop at that moment or through other digital tools (we will come to those) outside the formal teaching hours. In a hybrid learning environment, some students might be learning remotely all the time and others might always be on campus. It is more common that students might flex and change the times during which they are on and off campus, and it is a good idea to check on how flexible your course is about this before you start. The key thing is that throughout the course everyone works together, and digital and classroom-based learning happens seamlessly. The ultimate aim is to provide the best of both the online and offline learning experiences for each individual student.



## Working Online

We've already discussed the creative studio as an environment that transcends the traditional physical location to a space that navigates the vast possibilities offered online. Before we continue with the ways we can work within this space, it is worthwhile exploring some of the key terms and definitions that you may come across as a student, such as *virtual*, *hybrid*, and *online*. You may find them combined with a variety of other words, such as *studio*, *space*, *learning*, *environment*, and many more. Within the context of this book and your creative practice, it is important to understand their interpretations. You may find that on many occasions, not just in this book but elsewhere, their meanings may overlap. What is important for you is to recognise the subtle differences and, thus, understand better the context in which they are used.

The word *virtual* may be understood through a variety of perspectives. At the dawn of what we now call the digital age, the American critic, writer, and teacher Howard Rheingold, in his book *The Virtual Community* (1993), refers to the early internet as:

The virtual village of a few hundred people I stumbled upon in 1985 grew to eight thousand by 1993. It became clear to me during the first months of that history that I was participating in the self-design of a new kind of culture.

During this period, the use of the word *virtual* referred to what we now call *online*, *the cloud*, or simply anything that exists on the internet. Rheingold discussed the notion of computer-mediated communications and the rise of virtual communities, noting that users in these communities would do similar things within the communities to what they would do in real life, the only difference being that they leave their bodies behind, as 'thinkers

and transmitters of ideas'. At this point in time, the phrase 'virtual community' became popular, and it mostly referred to a group of people who meet online and share similar ideas and views. Rheingold called the technology that allowed that, 'cooperation-enhancing'. The phrase *virtual environment* also became popular as any environment that exists via the internet, or as we now refer to it, online. It is worth mentioning a related term: *virtual reality* (VR), coined by Jaron Lanier in 1987, which refers to immersive environments that are accessible with specialised equipment such as VR glasses and data gloves.

Virtual creative work may be described as the creation and manipulation of digital content within an entirely digital environment. In this virtual space, the canvas is limitless and allows for experimentation and manifestation of ideas that might be difficult to realise via traditional creative means (as we mentioned earlier discussing the analogue studio of a graphic designer). Historically, *online* and *offline* refer to devices that are connected or not. So, when we talk about things being online, we essentially mean the same thing as virtual.

We already discussed hybrid learning as a way of learning where some students are in the physical classroom and some are joining online. If we examine the origins and meaning of the word *hybrid*, we will find that it refers to a mix of two different things that are working in the same way. In the post-pandemic environment, when people returned to work, and universities and schools restored their in-person teaching, it became even more apparent that the advantages of a mixed or hybrid way of working or studying should not be neglected.

The hybrid studio can be an immensely collaborative, creative, and flexible space that incorporates the best parts of different digital models of learning and teaching to allow you to explore creative and practical subjects that were previously thought of as only possible to do on campus in a classroom.

Working in a blended or hybrid set-up will likely mean you are engaged in using a wide range of learning technologies. Some of these might be very familiar, and others might be very specific to the course you are taking. Getting the most out of your course, though, will require you to quickly get to grips with a range of tools and online resources. It would be impossible for us to discuss the specifics of every technology used in the online studio here. Each university and course will have its own ideas about what works best, and this is also a fast-growing area of technology, which means

things change rather quickly. What we can do here, though, is point you towards some of the key things you should consider as a student who is thinking about taking a course that utilises the online studio, or how to get the most out of the course you are already taking.

The online studio is built around online working. Whether you are the kind of student who is mostly on campus or one who is working remotely, the online studio is where much of your work will be taking place. It is a collaborative space in which you and others from around the world can work together on projects, learn together, and showcase your work, both before and after the course. The backbone of your online work will be your university VLE. We will talk more about that later.

## Virtual Learning Environments

In the most basic terms, a VLE is a content management system that allows your lecturers and others from the university to share content with you that you can interact with as part of your learning. VLEs are not new or exclusive to online courses. They have been in use since the early 2000s and are now used on almost any course in almost any university you might attend. The way they are used has also grown and changed, moving from a place to check documents and submit work, to being fully interactive online spaces with video lectures, discussion forums, and collaborative workspaces that are built in. There is a whole range of different VLEs out there, such as Moodle, Blackboard, and Brightspace. The important thing for you, though, is to ensure you quickly learn your way around your university's VLE—where can you find teaching materials, where are the recordings of sessions, how do electronic reading lists work, and how can you contribute to discussions? You should also examine how to set up notifications from your institution's VLE, finding a balance between receiving alerts about what is going on and not having your phone pinging all the time.

The VLE is a crucial part of your studies, and for many of you it will be the main way in which you interact with your course, classmates, and tutor, so it is important that you understand how it works and seek support in understanding things that you are unsure about. The online studio, however, is likely to need more than just the university VLE and will almost certainly use a range of other online tools and collaborative spaces,

especially for portfolio work and larger creative works that you might be sharing with others. As with the VLE, it is going to be important that you familiarise yourself with this platform as soon as you can. Although your course will almost certainly provide some training on how to use them, consider looking up additional tutorials to help you get the most from the platform. If you know what platforms you might be using for your course before it starts, consider (when possible) starting a free trial to get some practice in before your first class even begins.

Getting to grips with the online tools your course will use is really important at the start of your learning, but there are also some considerations about what to do with these online platforms at the end of your course. We are going to talk much more about launching your career as you leave university later in the book. However, it is worth us also noting here that when your course finishes, you will lose access to many of the online tools your university has provided. It is worth considering early on in your course how you might capture your creative outputs in a way that means you can keep hold of them long after the course has finished—perhaps ensuring you regularly upload to the cloud, download materials to a hard drive, or perhaps open a blog or private online space with your personal email address for storing experimental work as you progress. Online working provides a wealth of opportunities, but do keep in mind that your subscription to some tools will end with your course. Knowing this from the start can reduce frustration and disappointment later.

## Software

Similar is true of software. Like the online platforms, you should try and get to grips with specialist software as quickly as possible, taking full advantage of in-class tutorials and additional learning that you might find online. Your university will provide you with access to the software you need for your course, but, if possible, it can be well worth installing free trials before your course starts so you can begin to play and experiment with packages that are unfamiliar to you. As with online tools, some of the software you use in your learning will stop being available when you finish your course. However, unlike online tools, because much of your work will be stored locally, you are less likely to lose this when the licence ends. Also unlike online tools, most software packages can be purchased under

individual licences, meaning that although they might still be expensive, they will be available to you after graduation. You could also ask your alumni association if they provide access or discounts for any of the packages you hope to use following the completion of your course. In some cases, you might be able to start a subscription or purchase software at a cheaper rate while you are a student and then continue to use it after you graduate—it can be worth looking at these options in your final months of study as you can get some real bargains this way that will help your transition from student to professional.

## Hardware

Although the nature of the virtual studio means that much of your work will be online, including, at times, remote accessing high-performance computers on your campus, it is also important to consider the hardware that you will need for your course. There is no definitive answer here, and your tutors might give you some specific guidance. Here, though, we will share some things you might like to consider. Budgets are often tight when undertaking a degree, so you might want to first think about how you are working and engaging with your course. If you are a student who is mostly on campus, you might be able to use the university facilities most of the time, meaning a less powerful laptop for use in the classroom might be acceptable.

If you are working fully remotely, you might need to think about investing in a more powerful computer that will allow you to use with ease the tools required for your course. If working from home, is a laptop or a desktop computer more suitable? Might you want to connect a monitor to make working on projects easier? Perhaps two, so you can video-call and work at the same time? Assets like a webcam and a good microphone will be essential whether you are on campus or not. Do you need a drawing tablet or a specialist mouse? It is worth checking with your tutors about this before spending lots of money. They might even be able to provide some kit.

A good internet connection is also key for a lot of studio work. Although the quality of the connection to your home is often outside your control, it is worth shopping around for a good deal on the fastest possible connection, then working to get the most from the connection by

placing the router near your workstation or even connecting to it via a cable, which can provide a more stable and consistent online connection. A good internet connection will be important to ensure you can keep your work backed up in the cloud as well as on physical drives—this is a good safeguard against your computer breaking or being lost or stolen and taking all your hard work with it.

Finally, consider the role of your smartphone. A smartphone can be a really important and useful learning tool, with a wide range of apps that will help you stay connected and up to date with what is happening at the university. Installing the app for your VLE and university email client will help you stay on top of deadlines and messages. Do consider, though, that this can also make you feel like you never get a break from your studies, and breaks are important for the creative process. So, use your phone wisely, perhaps reducing the periods of the day when push notifications from the university come through. This will help ensure some good, quality downtime that ultimately will help your studies more than being tuned in 24/7. Your phone is also likely to be too small for much of your more creative work (aside from using it as a camera and scanner), so while it can be useful as a way of keeping in touch, it should be used in tandem with other things such as a desktop computer to help you achieve a good balance—as with most things, the right tool for the right job makes life much easier.





# Studying Within the Online Studio

When you are live, online, sitting in the classroom [...] it feels completely normal. The teacher will say hi to you. You are very involved. That is a really exciting and comforting feeling, just to feel like you are not only online but you are really there, present in the classroom!

Tara Spirow, digital media design student

While thinking about a creative studio, some may picture a lonely artist, working strenuously in isolation. This can't be further from the truth in today's connected world, supported by technologies of many kinds. The studios of digital practitioners could easily be described as virtual, online, or digitalised. The art historian Lisa Wainwright (2010) describes the studio as a space but also as a process and a discourse where creative play and progressive thinking yield results. She also suggests that the studio can be a state of reflection on where we are and where we may go next. But how can you ensure that all this is possible in the overwhelming presence of various digital platforms, software tools, and learning environments? How can you create and maintain a comfortable workspace that fuels your creativity and helps you be productive?

The aim of this section is not to advocate for the best tools and technologies, as they are ever-evolving, but to provide you with a picture of what spaces, platforms, and models of teaching are available and help you get the best out of them for yourself and the work that you do. We will, of course, mention some of the current and evolving technologies, but you are the one to decide what works for your computer set-up, assignments, and projects.

Simply put, an online design studio can be described as a space that is an extension of your physical studio into a digital or online environment.

In a typical physical studio you would be working alone, but you would also be sharing work with peers and tutors. You will receive feedback and use it as a space for discussion. You can think of the digital studio space in the same way, only without the physical aspect and presence. These facets are replaced by online show spaces, online lectures, discussions (live or asynchronous), and even online group work (we will talk about group projects done online later).

Earlier, we established the differences between online and hybrid modes of studying, where the latter allows for courses to be taken by online and campus students working as one single group and where the aim is to bring both campus and online students together. When it comes to your creative studio work, there are a few important aspects that you need to take into consideration when you are working online or in a hybrid mode. They concern the lectures and discussions with your tutors and peers; the virtual learning environment of your university; the spaces for storing, sharing, and presenting your projects; and the documentation and organisation of your work. There are also online studio visits, and they are a bit different from those done in your physical space, of course. The presentation of your work online, in front of a camera and a screen, is not the same as presenting in the lecture room with a live audience. When you have project reviews and tutorials that take place online, the experience is altered by the lack of physical presence, and we will discuss how you can get the best value from these online sessions too.

We will also mention some digital hardware tools (cameras, digital pens, pads and so on) and how to get the best value out of them for your online studies. What you need to consider here is that this is a dynamic market, and there will always be something newer and better, but we will focus more on how to make these simple tools work best for you, regardless of their cost or brand. We will discuss some of the challenges and benefits of doing group work with your peers online. All of the above points are, of course, valid to a degree in a physical studio environment, but when it comes to working online, things look a bit different.

## **The Online (Flipped) Classroom**

When studying online, one of the most common experiences that you may have is a lecture. Often this is a broadcast from a live lecture room that you

can watch online, or a prerecorded video from a lecture, which you can watch on your own time.

Below are two possible scenarios for such an interactive experience. The first one concerns the hybrid type of learning, where the cohort is a mix of campus-based and online students. The second one is a fully online experience for the whole student group. In both cases, you may be asked to participate in discussions and interact with the lecture material, and there is a degree of preparation before you join the session. You may come across this type of experience being described as the 'flipped classroom model'.

The flipped classroom requires you to engage with the lecture materials before you join the live session (on campus or online). During the live session, you would normally be asked to discuss the contents of that lecture with your classmates. Your tutor would have prepared in advance a video and other materials such as papers, online articles, or reading lists on the lecture topic, and you would find them in the VLE of your course. Apart from viewing the video and reviewing the other supplementary information, you may be required to do other activities, such as writing down questions or points of discussion in advance of the live session.

At the beginning of the session, your tutor would normally provide a short summary of the lecture. Then, it is possible that you will be split into groups to work on a specific topic related to the lecture. If you are on campus and engaging in such an experience, you may also be joined by your colleagues studying online via a video or a chat. Such interactions can be awkward at first, especially if you are an online student. However, you would normally have either a teammate or a tutor to facilitate the connection between you and the rest of the group. Often you will not be the only online student joining the flipped classroom from a distance, so this is an opportunity to meet others from the online group and have a discussion with them too.

You should be confident that your tutor is aware of the challenges of participating in a discussion from a distance. It may not be always possible to speak to the group via your microphone, but there is the chat facility. You may be on your lunch break from work and watching from a cafe, the park, or the library. In such cases, your interactions might be limited, but being a part of the chat discussion is still a way for you to engage with the material and connect with your peers.

If you are an online student, you might not always be able to join live sessions. For this, there is normally a recording available in the VLE of

your course, not only of the lecture but of any discussions that have happened in the class or the online setting. You can watch them in your own time and stay on top of the requirements of the course, as far as lecture content is concerned.

## **Benefits of the Flipped Classroom**

The model of the course is original to me, and the presentation part really made me more confident to express myself. Video made by teachers provided me with useful knowledge. I really appreciate it.

Digital media design student from the University of Edinburgh

What to remember when you are a part of a flipped classroom, regardless of being in the lecture room or watching online, is that this is an opportunity for you to dynamically engage with the material, not just by listening to a lecture but by discussion, by asking questions and listening to what your classmates are saying. Often, they would have struggled with some aspects of the study materials just as much as you. You may also find answers to some of your questions from them rather than your tutor. And you may also discover that the process in which you are understanding and engaging with the topic of the lecture is actually easier because it is shared with others. You can choose your pace when participating in the discussion by just listening or being an active speaker or by asking questions. There is also the added benefit of listening not only to the lecture but to the views of your classmates, their opinions on the topic, and the challenges that they have come across while they are investigating it. This can make learning a much richer and more enjoyable experience for you.

## **The University Virtual Learning Environment**

As discussed earlier, your virtual studio can be a combination of spaces, technologies, platforms, and digital tools. The VLE can be one of these spaces. Normally, your university VLE is maintained by course organisers, tutors, and instructors. This is the space where you would find important information about the course, its learning outcomes, and brief and

## Meet the Expert

### Being a Student in a Blended or Flipped Learning World

*Gunter Saunders, head of learning innovation and digital engagement at the University of Westminster shares his thoughts on how to get the most out of being a student in the flipped classroom.*

In 2019 a final-year student working on a mini project for me told me that she was so surprised when she came to university for her first year of study and found that so many of her classes involved her sitting and listening to an 'expert' talking about a topic. As we explored her views of teaching further it became clear that she was an individual who liked to be and learned best through being active. I was able to tell her that many years ago education research had established that people learn best by doing things, rather than always learn by listening to an expert give a lecture.

For some years now it's also been known that technology can help to drive more active learning through replacing at least parts of lectures, with short video recordings that students engage with online before they come to a face-to-face class. This can lead to there being more active student group working in a classroom, building on the information in the recording(s). This approach to learning, also well proven through research to be effective, is a form of blended learning called flipped learning.

There are a number of factors that contribute to successful flipped learning. Most critical, however, is the role that you will have, as a student, in the learning process.

One of the single most significant factors in the success of flipped learning is student engagement. If you, as a student, do not engage with the work or activities that you are tasked with prior to coming to a class, then the whole thing is likely to be something of a disappointment both to you and your teachers.

Flipped learning is an opportunity for you to take greater control of your own learning. For a flipped face-to-face class your tutor might ask you to write notes as you engage with the pre-class recording(s)

or to complete an online quiz, and through this monitor your comprehension of the concepts or ideas presented in the recordings. Alternatively, they may ask you to post online your thoughts and views on specific aspects of the recorded content, or to record online, typically in a space shared with your fellow students, questions of clarification in relation to the content of the recordings. Whichever approach or combination of approaches they seek to have you follow, it is vital for the subsequent face-to-face class that you engage and do the required work before class.

The guidance your tutors will provide to you should explain fully how the pre-class work you do will relate to and integrate with the work that you will do in class. Within the flipped face-to-face classroom, you will build on the knowledge and ideas presented in the recordings. You may be expected to apply some of what you learned from the recording to solve problems or create new ideas or to undertake tasks that mimic work you might do in the workplace after graduation. During the face-to-face session you will probably work in small groups, collaborating with fellow students. As you do this you will practise and develop key skills such as problem-solving and critical analysis. Due to the group-work nature of many flipped classes, you will also have the opportunity to develop key collaboration and communication skills that will serve you well in future employment.

Above all else, flipped learning is about being active and learning by doing. The approach places responsibility on you as a student to engage at all stages of the process. If you do, then you will enhance your learning of your subject and also develop key skills for your future.

assessment requirements. Generally, the university VLE is the first and most important platform that you need to consider. University VLEs are valuable spaces, not just for text-based content but for audio and video material. When studying in a hybrid or online mode, you will often notice the variety of rich video content that is available there. This content may vary from general welcome greetings at the start of a course to longer

video lectures, recordings of discussions and workshops, video tutorials, and video feedback. Do not underestimate the value of this content. Take time to watch it, make notes, and write down any questions. This process should be a major segment of your study time, and the best part is that you can watch it from home, in a cafe, or while travelling. It is a valuable asset to have access to, without having to be present in the lecture room. When taking notes from these resources, you can use the wide range of tools available to you in the digital environment. For example, take screenshots of key ideas and information. Review transcripts of lectures and search for keywords. Many online lecture and video platforms allow you to save bookmarks or snippets in your personal online library so you can come back to them easily at a later time; you should take advantage of this alongside perhaps more analogue note-taking. Remember, however you are keeping notes, being organised is a key part of working in the creative arts, and good record-keeping will make your studies much easier to navigate and ultimately more enjoyable.

You would also normally be given the opportunity to show work on the course discussion forum, and post questions and get answers back from your tutors and peers. This option is not to be underestimated. Because the course VLE is monitored by your tutors, you should consider it a space for valuable information and constructive feedback.

## **External (Non-University) Spaces**

When it comes to external platforms for documenting, presenting, or sharing work, they can either be suggested by your tutors or they can be spaces that you are familiar with and use in your everyday practice for mood boards, presentations, gaining inspiration, and collecting ideas. It is important to remember that because you control these spaces, you should make sure that you allow access to them for your tutor and teammates when necessary. There are a variety of online settings that you should consider when studying, not only as an online but also as a campus student. We already discussed that your course VLE is the place for course materials and recorded lectures, but you may have to use external (non-university) platforms for meetings and for presenting work.

You will sometimes feel lost in the endless sea of applications, media sharing platforms, servers, and blogs. You may be overwhelmed by the

amount of information that you need to learn to access them and make them talk to one another. This is perfectly normal, and you must remember that they are there to work for you and not the other way around. A strategic approach that may help you in that process, and one way to look at these technologies, is through their affordance properties.

Affordance is a quality that defines how easily something can be used or what possible uses it may have. If you consider this in terms of hierarchy, a chair, for example, has a high affordance because it is pretty easy to figure out how to use it. Ideally, people should easily be able to figure out how to use an object, physical or digital. Another example would be if a button on a mobile application is designed well so it can easily be recognised as such and be pushed.

So consider the levels of affordance of a platform or a digital tool when it comes to spaces for documenting, storing, and presenting online. You should expect that a variety of platforms will come your way when studying. They may be required by your university, suggested by your tutor, or recommended by classmates. Such tools and platforms will have different capabilities, based on the types of activities they facilitate. They will also have different levels of affordance, and this will partially depend on you and how experienced you are with technology. Sometimes it will be very easy for you to get used to them, and sometimes it will take time to figure them out. Think about a chair for example: it has a number of affordances, some that are obvious and others less so. Some that are creative, and many that are very boring. The obvious and less creative thing you can do with a chair is to sit on it. But you can also use it to reach high things; you could use it as a place to store your clothes; or you could hang lots of chairs on a wall to make a shelf of sorts. Digital technologies have similar ranges of use: there will be the ‘out of the box’ uses that might be straightforward and relatively simple to do, and then there will be other ways of mashing together tools and software to create new ideas and ways of working. A smartphone could become a VR headset, a digital photo frame, or be used as a simple mp3 player. A tool like Photoshop can be used in a huge range of ways to create effects that the programmers hadn’t even considered—see the fifty ideas by Brendan Williams Creative, for example.<sup>1</sup>

1 Brendan Williams, ‘50 Creative Things You Can Do With Photoshop (Must-Try!)’, Brendan Williams Creative, 6 March 2024, <https://www.bwillcreative.com/things-you-can-do-with-photoshop/>

Remember to also trust your tutors in this process because they are normally testing a variety of methods to help you learn, especially when it comes to learning in an online setting.

Apart from specific assignment requirements where you may be asked to upload work on a specific server or on a particular digital platform, you can decide which ones to focus on. It is up to you to select spaces that will benefit you and platforms that will provide the best value for the work that you do. In the following sections, we will discuss in a bit more detail how such spaces can be useful when it comes to presenting work and preparing for an online studio visit.

## Preparing for an Online Studio Visit

Just as in a traditional studio setting, where you meet your tutors and peers to view and discuss work, you can do the same online. And because of the lack of physical contact, it is even more important to prepare for this visit. You need to carefully consider the organisation of your design assets and how you will present them in front of your visitors.

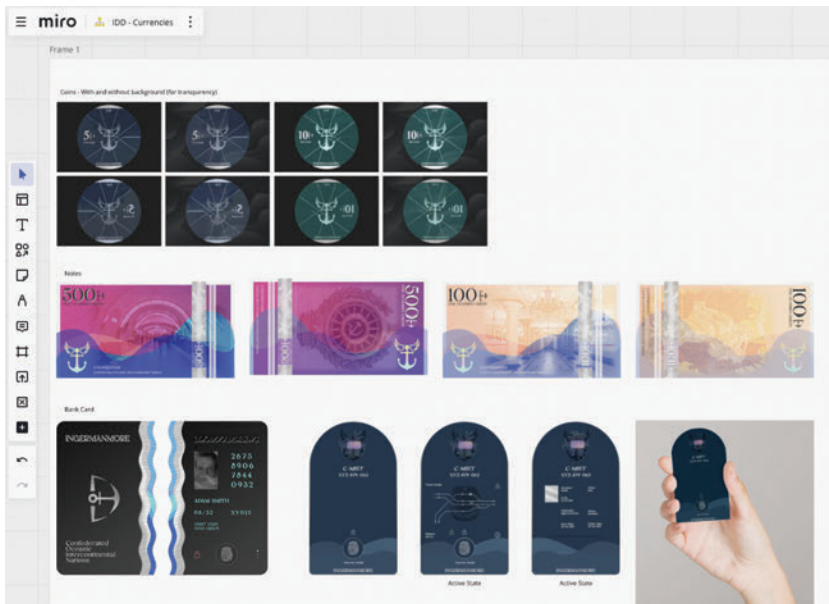
Normally, a single tool or platform would not be enough to support an online meeting, an online discussion, or a studio visit. You should try to get accustomed to using a variety of methods at the same time. There is a degree of patience required in the process of understanding these technologies, but remember that once you get used to them, they will help you to organise and present your work in the best possible way.

Let's have a look at some more specific options for storing and organising work, platforms for inspiration and curating creative projects, tools for meeting and interacting with others, and technologies that can help you keep in touch with your peers. Note that although some specific names will be mentioned, the purpose of this section is to allow you to think strategically and make them all work for you, regardless of their brand or affiliation. Most commonly, these can be split into a few categories depending on their purpose:

- **Servers for uploading work** such as websites, games, and other complex, web-based projects that require a database set-up. These servers could be external or provided by your university.
- **Storage drives for uploading large files.** These can be very useful for transferring data from you to your tutor or classmates when working on

a project or preparing for a tutorial. You would normally have a dedicated storage space as part of your university set-up, but platforms such as Google Drive, Dropbox, and other cloud storage can also be useful. Remember that you will need a good internet connection to access large files from the cloud, so you need to check speeds at your university as well as at home if you are planning on presenting work directly from the cloud.

- **Meeting platforms**, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Blackboard Collaborate, and others. These spaces are mostly used for live meetings but can also be used for ongoing chat discussions and sharing files.
- **Image-sharing and storing platforms**, such as Miro, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Instagram. These can be very useful for creating inspirational mood boards, uploading work in progress, and preparing for a presentation (in the lecture room or online).
- **Blogs or your own website.** Using external blogs or your very own website, you showcase your projects, document your progress, or present a portfolio. The most common of these is WordPress, which can be used free of charge straight out of the box; but, of course, there are many other sites and options out there.



**Figure 1.8** Design work presented at a Miro board by Shruti Sundar, a digital design student at the University of Edinburgh. Permission granted by Shruti Sundar.

The above spaces are just a few of the numerous options that the digital world offers today. Often, your classmates or your tutors will suggest something new that you have never tried before. What is important here is to be open-minded and to try anything when it comes to technologies that might help you study and develop as a creative practitioner. Think of these spaces as opportunities for you to show your work to others and as possibilities for you to expand your creativity.

We already mentioned that it helps to be rather overprepared for an online studio visit, because it is generally more constrained compared with a discussion in a traditional studio, even if you are a digital practitioner. Because we've already examined some of the possible types of platforms that can be useful to help you in the preparation process, let's have a look at further points that can help you.

- Depending on the type of work you must show, you should document and present your work properly. If you must photograph it, make sure that you use good lighting. When you prepare images, crop any unnecessary white space and organise multiple images on an image board so your visitor can access the whole lot without having to click too many times. Miro or Pinterest can be very useful for this process. Miro, for example, will allow zooming in and out of the board, which can be very useful when you have to look at the small details of a particular image.
- If you are showing a game, an animation, or a video project, then you should record a screencast of the game or a short version of the video and upload it on a sharing platform before the meeting. For such projects, sending links in advance would allow your visitor time to view the work before the meeting. This way, the time spent during the actual studio visit can mostly be used for discussion rather than viewing.
- If you are preparing a presentation, use text sparingly. A selection of key words rather than full sentences is better suited to draw attention to a particular topic or aspect of the project.
- When presenting, be ready to shift platforms quickly, depending on the type of media you are showing. Load links, software, or presentations in advance so your viewers don't have to wait for you to open them.
- When you are speaking, keep it brief, and try not to read from prepared notes. Even if your viewers are not focusing their attention on you, often an experienced tutor can tell if you are reading or just speaking about your work. It is better to say fewer words in a simple manner about your project than to read long pages of information. This approach will

keep you focused on the work on the screen and what your viewers are watching at that particular moment, which is the most important thing. Remember that during online presentations, the screen and the microphone are the only ways through which you are connected with your audience.

- Allow time for comments and questions from your visitors (tutors or classmates). Normally, virtual visits have set times, and you need to make sure that the majority of this time is used for feedback. What you don't want to do is to use most of the time for presenting and not get enough useful information about how to improve your project and about ways to go forward with it.
- Make the experience interactive. If possible, allow visitors to interact with the work you have done so far by either asking them to comment in the chat while you are presenting, or to use the interactive properties of the platform that you are on to contribute directly to the work. Miro, for example, allows users to edit assets presented on the board, and this could be a very useful way for you to receive feedback and get more hands-on help. You may want to record the session so that you can collect this feedback and review it later, but be mindful of your university's policy on recording and informing those who visit your online studio that they are being recorded.
- Last but not least, check your Wi-Fi connection, camera, microphone, and audio speakers in advance. Make sure that the link to the online meeting works prior to its start time. Test the links to the platforms you will be using and have them ready to go. This will save you valuable time.

Embrace the online studio visit as one of the ways through which you can stay connected with your peers and tutors. It is not a replacement of a discussion in a real-life scenario but just another way through which you can get feedback and progress further with your work. Embrace the technologies that facilitate this visit. They are your tools and helpers in this process. Get to know them and get comfortable with them, so when it is time to use them, it all happens without much effort. Your attention should be focused on how to present your work in the best possible way and how to get valuable feedback. We will discuss some of these ideas in greater detail in the Part 2 when we look at crits and sharing creative ideas in an online space.

## Online Tutorials

Apart from a visit to your studio, which is mostly focused on you showcasing work, when studying, you will get the opportunity for a more detailed review of your work either through crits or individual and group tutorials. We will discuss crits in detail in Part 2, where the collaborative process of crits is examined further, but first let's have a look at tutorials, which tend to be more tutor-led.

Such sessions can be a very good way for you to pulse-check your progress compared with the work of others. When done in an online setting, tutorials can either be prerecorded sessions where your tutor reviews work in progress and posts the videos and screen recordings in the course VLE, or they can be a live meeting between tutors and students. Normally, the live sessions are also recorded, and you can refer back to them in your own time.

We already discussed some of the ways through which you can prepare and handle an online studio visit. Perhaps the biggest difference between such visits and tutorials is that for the latter, your tutors take the leading role in discussing your work and the work of others. One simple way of thinking about the tutorial is as specific instructions on how to improve your work. It is a demonstration of particular techniques, approaches, and methods to help you understand how things can be done and by doing so, help you progress further. Some additional benefits of tutorials could be summarised in the following points:

- You receive a detailed review of your work from your tutor.
- If in a group tutorial, you get to see the work of others, and you hear the feedback that your peers receive, and this can be extremely valuable information.
- You learn about new platforms and tools that your tutors and peers may be using.
- If the tutorial concerns a specific course project, in a group tutorial you will be exposed to numerous approaches to one single brief—and this can expand your horizons for further exploration of this project.

Being a part of a group tutorial has immense benefits because of the added value of learning by watching others and experiencing the work that they have done. You will also gain a lot by listening to what improvements are

suggested, not just for your work but for the work of others. This is not only possible but sometimes even more effective when the tutorials are done online. You may not always have the opportunity to join a tutorial on campus, but when it is run online, you can watch it from a cafe, a library, or during your lunch break at work. There is normally a recording, and this can be very useful way of understanding the feedback given—you can rewind, pause, take notes, and spend as much time as you like in the tutorial setting. You can skip certain parts or examine others in more detail. This allows you to learn on demand when it is convenient and in a way that is suitable for you.

In an online tutorial, time and effort can be saved, because everything normally happens from one screen space: the one of your tutors. Even if you have to shift the presentation quickly back to your own screen, this is not as time-consuming as being in the physical studio space with everyone running their own laptops, tablets, and screens and waiting for people to set them up.

For some of you, an online tutorial may be a less intimidating way to share work and receive advice, compared with being in the physical studio. The lack of physical presence when it comes to receiving critique and feedback in this case can work better. You can pause the recording or step back from the screen if you wish, take time to think for a bit, and then return to the session. It is a flexible and more relaxed way of learning, which can suit some students more than the traditional classroom review setting. Likewise, an online tutorial can feel a lot more daunting, and they can at times feel much more formal than face-to-face interactions. Most digital platforms still don't cope well with 'crosstalk', where more than one person is speaking at a time, which means the conversation tends to be more formalised and can also feel like an interview—and having a little image of your own face doesn't help often. Remember, though, this is an affordance of the technology: you can always stick a Post-it note over your own image if it bothers you and try embracing the forced, slow, deliberate conversation as a way of seeking clarity of ideas.

When it comes to group tutorials, there is also the possibility of receiving feedback from your peers. As tutorials are tutor-led, they may ask you to comment on the work of others. This is easily done online through simply talking on the microphone or through the instant sharing of links, projects, and ideas via chat. Not everyone is comfortable speaking and using their cameras, so the chat facility, in this case, can be extremely

useful. Getting the opinions of your peers is a way of improving your work, but it also has the added benefit of making you feel like a part of a community of creative people. In some cases, you may be asked to collaborate on a particular task or work on a course project as a group. We will discuss the benefits and some limitations of working together from a distance in the following section, and in the next part we will discuss crits, which are an even more collaborative way of working than group tutorials.

## **Working Together from a Distance**

Unlike most traditional artistic practices, design work is predominantly collaborative. As a designer, you will consult with clients and collaborate with co-workers, such as programmers, UX designers, account managers, copywriters, creative directors, and others.

When studying, you may have to work on a group project as part of a course assignment or collaborate in a more informal manner. Teamwork can often be challenging owing to all sorts of factors, such as difference in opinions and approaches, lack of trust between team members, different levels of engagement with the project, poor communication, not enough commitment, and many more. And when you have to work together online, these issues can get even more complex. There are a number of things to consider, such as different time zones and locations around the world, various cultural backgrounds, different levels of familiarity with a topic, or different experiences with a particular software required for the assignment. Some team members may have other commitments if they are not studying full-time, and organising meetings and setting up tasks can become very difficult. Also, some of your peers would simply prefer to work alone.

Having a shared studio environment in which students from various locations can collaborate is indeed a challenge. One of the first steps to help you overcome such challenges is to recognise problems or be aware that they may occur while you are working. Being prepared in advance to face challenges is much better than being surprised and as a result losing motivation in the project.

The other thing to remember is that group work is an important aspect of the learning process, and there is much value to be found in being a part of a community, especially if you are a creative practitioner. Try to

### Extract from “Collaborative Learning in a Shared Digital Studio” by Denitsa Petrova and Sabina Savadova (2021)

*Views shared by students on the master’s programme in design and digital media from the University of Edinburgh, as part of CollaboratED, a research initiative exploring the opportunities and challenges for collaborative work between online and on-campus students.*

*It appears that the behaviour of on-campus students changed when they worked with an online colleague. They shared that they would have to work quickly as the time an online student had available is often limited. This view was mirrored by an online learner, who indicated that their study pattern was disturbed when the collaborative work started:*

*“...actually, on the first semester, everything was going smooth, everything was fine, and when this collaborating thing happened, that’s when I felt the stress of the course.”*

*Such behaviour could be interpreted as natural in a professional working environment, where social conversations are less common, in contrast to the lifestyle of an on-campus student whose social connections with peers are an integral part of the university experience. The biggest motivators for group work for both on-campus and online cohorts appear to be focused on sharing resources and ideas, receiving feedback from peers and the inclusion of the community.*

recognise the value of sharing resources—they may be learning materials, digital tools and software, or tips about how to approach a particular task.

When you are working in a group, there is so much information that is shared at a high speed, and you should take advantage of this process by learning from your peers, asking for and giving feedback, and actively engaging with the work of others. Remember that sharing ideas with others is a valuable and quick way to get instant reactions about the direction that your project is headed.

We already discussed how you can prepare for a studio visit, and much of this information can be considered when you are running group meetings with members of your team. You should schedule regular virtual

visits to brainstorm, discuss, or even collaborate on a task at the same time. Miro, for example, allows a large group of people to work on the same board by adding a variety of design assets, images, photos, text, and links. All this can happen in real time, and apart from being fun, it is a very good way to get to know one another and what each of you can do.

Take advantage of a variety of platforms for meeting and sharing work. We mentioned some of them in the previous section. You can either use your university VLE or set up a meeting point completely independent from it. Use social media to connect and maintain informal chats, even if they are not related to the project that you do.

Last but not least, value the time spent with your peers as a way to socialise and feel less isolated. Your meetings don't always have to be formal and focused on a particular project. Make time for virtual coffee rooms and informal get-togethers. You may find that in a more relaxed setting, your teammates are willing to share that they might be facing the same issues as you while studying. Sharing such experiences is an important part of building trust, and it adds value to the overall concept of working together.

Below are a few things that students with master's degrees in digital media have shared about their experiences with group projects, which may motivate and inspire you to see the value of such collaboration. The views shared are by students on the master's programme in design and digital media from the University of Edinburgh, as a part of CollaboratED, a research initiative exploring the opportunities and challenges for collaborative work between online and on-campus learners (Petrova and Savadova 2021).

The research findings from CollaboratED suggested that the challenges for students who are studying online are determined by the balance between their work commitments and their university workload. Further barriers to overcome were related to teamwork in general but also cross-cohort work (working as a group of campus and online students), as well as overcoming cultural differences and managing meetings from different time zones. Nevertheless, both campus and online students recognise the benefits of working as a team, where the most valued aspects are sharing resources with their peers and the feeling of being part of a community. Additional motivations lie in brainstorming ideas and receiving feedback from fellow learners, which adds even more value to the social aspect of being a student, especially when you are studying remotely (Petrova and Savadova 2021). Below are some thoughts collected from the students taking part in CollaboratED.

**Student thoughts on...**  
**HYBRID LEARNING**

*'Pretty easy to collaborate when we know each other.'*

*'Group work is an amplifier.'*

*'Any course has a chance of being collaborative.'*

*'Better to start the collaborative work from the start of the course.'*

*'It is all right when one or two of the group members are online students.'*

*'Being in contact with other online students helped to feel less isolated.'*





## Summary

It would be difficult to dispute the value of working in the physical studio, regardless of the type of your creative practice. Sometimes, however, for a variety of reasons, you have to be able to turn on to the virtual space. This is just another way to connect with the world, and it is the hybrid way of being creative. It is not a solution or a replacement of the physical studio. It is simply another way of studying or working.

To get the most out of hybrid learning, you will need to make some adjustments to how you learn with classroom-only or remote learning-only courses. Assuming you can make these adjustments, adopt the right state of mind, and obtain the necessary equipment, hybrid learning can be extremely advantageous.

When embarking on a course that takes advantage of hybrid or blended learning as part of the virtual studio, you will need to shift your mindset a little and you should avoid thinking about your classes as a direct translation of your face-to-face teaching. To truly get the most out of this kind of learning, you will need to make sure you adopt the right approach, get in the right mindset, have access to the right tools and equipment, and steer clear of some of the potential pitfalls. When this is achieved, hybrid and blended classes can provide the benefits of both remote and in-person lessons at the same time, bringing your education into a new and exciting age.

As a student, if you can get the most out of hybrid learning, you will be able to obtain the structure and social experience associated with classroom education while also benefiting from the flexibility and sense of independence that distance education courses are able to provide. Nonetheless, there are certain things you will need to be aware of and steps you will need to take before you can benefit fully. Here, we examine some of the actions and approaches you can adopt to maximise what you get from hybrid learning.

## Embrace the Flexibility

The first step towards ensuring you get the most out of hybrid learning is to make a conscious effort to embrace the flexibility it affords you. This flexibility is arguably the single most attractive feature of the hybrid approach, allowing you to learn remotely or in the classroom, based on your own preferences, as well as external factors such as jobs, family, and other commitments.

Many learners will have a clear preference between remote learning and in-person learning, but the decision between the two is not always straightforward. For instance, there may be situations where you would rather be in a classroom setting, face to face with your teacher, in a shared space with other students, and able to embrace the social aspect of learning. Yet there may be other points in time where the convenience of remote learning holds more appeal. One of the truly great things about hybrid learning is the fact that it negates the need to make a one-off choice between these two approaches to learning and then stick rigidly to it. Instead, you will have the option to make an informed and flexible decision, depending on your personal circumstances, what you are expecting from that particular lesson, your physical location, your well-being, and a range of additional factors. It is always a good idea to check with your tutors on any course about how flexible they might be. Knowing how many students will be physical and remotely present each week has knock on effects for things like choosing room sizes, so in some cases you might need to have a little more of a discussion about changing and swapping than in others.

## Obtain the Right Equipment

Next, you are going to need to get hold of the right equipment to help you through your course. This will probably include a combination of things you will use to help you study remotely and things you will use in the classroom, but it may be that you are able to use the same basic equipment in both situations. As a starting point, if you intend to study from home, you will need to think about more than just the software and hardware discussed above. You should, if possible, invest in a desk and chair, which can serve as a workstation—or if this isn't possible, try setting aside a space you already have and dedicating it to your studies.

A dedicated space can help get you into the right mindset for when you begin classes and work and also means you can relax once you leave that space. If space is limited where you live, consider using a tray or box to keep all your work together. You can move this to a kitchen table or counter during work hours and then hide it away when you want to chill out. This, again, will help you separate work from leisure, leading to a happier work–life balance.

As noted above, in most cases, you are going to require a laptop, which will be used when you are in the classroom. Depending on what equipment you have access to at home, you may also need to use this laptop for the remote learning component of hybrid learning. For convenience and the ability to interact with other members of the class, it is also recommended that you invest in some high-quality, noise-cancelling headphones with a built-in microphone. You are likely to need things like a smartphone, as well as word-processing software, like Microsoft Word or Google Docs. However, you also need to give some thought to any course-specific tools and equipment you may need. For example, for a graphics design course, it may be beneficial to obtain a graphics tablet, and if you are studying computer programming, you may need the relevant software to learn a specific programming language.

## **Steer Clear of Social Isolation**

With hybrid learning, one of the potential traps some students may fall into is the temptation to treat it like distance education by relying entirely on the remote learning component. Although that is a perfectly viable approach—and it may be ideal for some students—it could also lead to feelings of social isolation. It is important to acknowledge at this stage that while remote learning offers numerous advantages, it is also an approach that has some negative aspects. For instance, according to a 2017 study, remote learning is more likely to lead to high student attrition rates (Sorensen and Donovan 2017). It is believed that one of the key factors in this is a lack of social interaction. Fortunately, hybrid learning does offer some solutions here that can make all the difference. The aforementioned study from 2017 found that occasional physical attendance can help to reduce attrition rates, and this is certainly possible with a hybrid model. Try to break up any extended periods when you learn remotely by

attending the classroom from time to time. When you do, talk to your classmates and collaborate with them.

\* \* \*

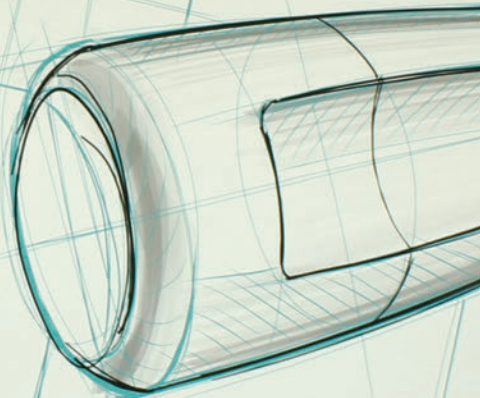
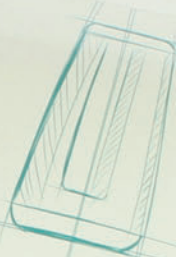
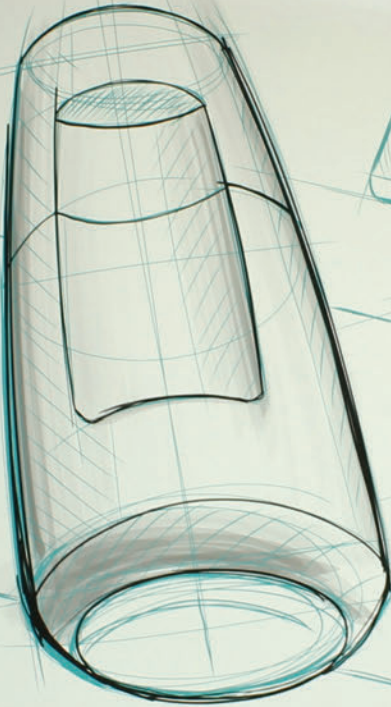
Learning to navigate between the physical and the online studio can be a very valuable asset in today's digitalised and ever-changing environment. You may even find that you will transfer skills that you learned in the online setting back into the physical one. Knowing how to steer between the two will help you work comfortably in both spaces. Embrace the hybrid way of doing things, as it will enhance your creativity and make you a more successful student and a competitive digital practitioner.



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## PART 2

# ***Portfolios, Crits, and Projects in the Hybrid Environment***

*Creative courses require students to master the skills of putting together portfolios, responding to crits, and becoming independent project managers. In this part of the book, we will look at all these aspects of being a creative student, and we will examine how these skills have evolved in the digital age. New technologies provide us with amazing opportunities to expand on the work that we do in our studios and how we can share this with the world. These opportunities also come with new challenges for creativity!*



## Putting Together a (Digital) Portfolio

A portfolio is most commonly used to describe a selection of works that feature the most successful aspects of your creative practice. A portfolio can be digital—on a website or as a digital brochure—or it can be a physical folder containing your work. It can also be a mix of formats (text, images, sounds, videos), but the key is that the portfolio should feature your best achievements over a period of time. This could be the time of your studies, previous employment, the time when you were freelancing, or simply the time when you were making work for your creative pursuits. Portfolios are a sort of calling card—a snapshot of you. According to the graphic and interactive designer Jacob Cass (Jani 2016), ‘A designer’s portfolio is the linchpin of their success as it shows potential clients what you’re capable of.’ In this chapter we are going to discuss how to put together a portfolio for your application to university and also for assessments during your studies. A lot of what we will discuss here is also useful for thinking about the kinds of portfolios you might need to produce when looking for employment or going freelance at the end of your studies, but we will talk about that in much more detail in Part 4.

The portfolio can come in useful on a number of occasions. For example, you could use it when you have to apply for a university degree. You may be asked for a selection of work samples or a portfolio, depending on the type of creative discipline you are applying for. Portfolios are also required when applying for a job, but they are useful for maintaining your general creative profile online. Portfolios can be presented on a website or social media such as Instagram, Behance, or similar platforms.

The title of this section contains the word ‘digital’ in brackets. This is because portfolios nowadays are normally in a digital format. Even if on occasion you are asked to present work in an analogue way, this section still contains a wealth of useful information about considering your

audience, the presentation and the format of the portfolio, and how to make the most impact with your work.

Your initial motivations for putting a portfolio together may vary. You might be creating a coursework portfolio, or you might have to do it for a specific job. You also may want to maintain your general profile online and have a place where you share your work with others because you are proud of it. To a great degree, these types of portfolios are similar.

You might come across a variety of points about what to focus on and what to consider when you are putting together a portfolio. You may also find some conflicting advice on how to approach the selection of work samples. For instance, in some cases, a portfolio would be described as a way of featuring a *variety* of creative skills and processes that you have undertaken in your creative work. On other occasions when discussing portfolios, you would be advised to put only a *small selection* of the best and most polished work that you have. Both ways are valid. We will emphasise one or the other as we go along, but the thing to remember is that often advice and definitions overlap and really depend on the motivation for the portfolio and your main target audience. Your portfolio might be trying to focus on the skills and background required for a particular university programme or by a potential employer. Most commonly, creatives maintain a portfolio for the general public that targets all potential audiences. There are other things to consider too, such as the format and presentation, and how to make an impact and tell the story of your creative work. Let's look into these aspects in more detail.

## University Application Portfolio

When applying for a university degree and asked for a selection of works, you may feel that the requirements of such a portfolio are too vague. Since the idea is that you will study and improve your skills, there is no expectation that you are an expert who needs to demonstrate accomplished work. You may find that you are asked to submit 'samples of work', in which case you can put a selection of assets in a PDF and submit them. Or you may be asked for a 'portfolio', in which case you should focus on a more formally structured presentation. You can focus on one particular aspect of your work, but showing a wide range of creative skills, experiments, and ideas is beneficial. Unless specified otherwise, you can select a variety of work, such as graphic design, drawing, photography, video, sound, or even creative writing.

Unless there are specific requirements for the number of works, you should include at least three samples. Another way to think of it, if you are showing different directions of your creative practice (for instance, drawing, photography, and graphic design), is to include three or four of each. The idea here is to demonstrate the breadth of your skills, which you can then polish during your degree. Don't be afraid to show work that isn't fully complete. Including a section on how you are developing ideas and showing your approach towards a particular creative task would provide a glimpse into your thought process. Try to demonstrate the diversity and range of creative skills that you have. If you are using a website or another digital way of putting the portfolio together, organise the works into categories for more clarity.

**Tip:** If you need inspiration on what type of work to submit, you should check the website of the degree you are applying for. Normally, there are student testimonials and samples of student work, and these should give you an indication of what the programme offers and also a direction of what projects would help your application.

### Meet the Expert

## Preparing Your Portfolio for Applying to University

*Caroline Baruah, a graphic design lecturer at the University of Westminster, shares her advice for preparing your portfolio for a university application.*

There will be many opinions, and dos and do nots, about how you should prepare your portfolio, so the following is aimed to help you confidently make those decisions for yourself!

Knowing *what* your portfolio is being reviewed for is a good place to start. First, find out what the course you are applying to is asking for in the way of applicants, and do follow any given instructions on how you should prepare and format your portfolio. Consider the following as complementary to those instructions.

So, you have researched the course you are applying for, and you see they want applicants who are 'learning-motivated individuals'

with ‘creative potential’. What does that mean? Essentially, you are applying to be a learner in a wider community of learners. That’s what university is! How you show you are eager to learn will be discussed a bit later. Creative potential is your ability to generate interesting ideas and outputs. You will be taught craft, techniques, and production methods when you go to university, but showing what you can bring to the course or *how you think or make as an individual* will stand out to reviewers. How you, yourself, think or make may not be immediately apparent to you as the thinker/maker. Do some reflective thinking: start by describing to yourself (or anyone willing to listen!) in detail what you did and what happened in a project, and then think about (or get someone to question) why and how you made the many and various conscious or unconscious decisions as you went through the project. This includes how you reacted to any given project feedback (note that down). This reflective thinking will help you see and be able to talk about your own creative process, help you to select and order your work into the portfolio, and will also prepare you for any live interview—handy when nerves may interfere with your thought process on the day.

You may have thought that the portfolio shows only your most finished and perfectly executed work. Now think again. Your portfolio is a demonstration of *how* you learn as a motivated creative individual. Include work in your portfolio that shows the different stages in your creative process. How you actively produce work will include initial inspirations and ambitions, how you generate or imagine ideas, and developmental experiments and exercises. Include short notations next to your work of your response to any given feedback (from that reflective thinking you did earlier). Reviewers will see how you feel about your work and how willing you are to listen and learn. The portfolio reviewers are also looking for a candidate who is enthusiastic and not afraid to be experimental, so show a range of projects, exercises, media, processes, and subject matter. What you think is ‘embarrassing’ or ‘not good enough’ will demonstrate to the reviewer your raw but honest creative process. Remember, this is a presentation of *you* as a *learning* creative individual.

The best work for an applicant portfolio is work that shows an individual’s creative journey. Creative courses are looking for

someone who has ideas of their own, so work that copies another artist's style or work does not do that. Think about your work as an autograph of you—that which identifies you as an individual. Reviewers are practised at seeing your enthusiasm and potential in whatever methods, media, or software you use to make work. Finally, make your work easy to get to and easy to view. Reviewers will thank you for this consideration. With that, all the best for your endeavours!

## Portfolio for a Job Application

In contrast, when putting together a portfolio for a particular job, the focus when selecting work should be more on the type of job you are applying for. During your studies, you would have taken a number of courses and produced a variety of projects. For instance, if you had studied a digital media design discipline, you might have graphic design work, web design samples, interactives, 3D models, animation, or sound projects. It is good to keep a selection of high-quality work from all these courses, but if you are applying for a particular job then there are a number of things you need to consider.

The audience is, again, one of them, but this time your audience is your potential employer and their team.

When preparing a portfolio for a job, you need to make an instant impact on them in order to stand out from the rest of the applicants and to be selected for the next stage of the process.

**Tip:** When applying for a job, do not show work you didn't love doing. Instead, include projects that you really enjoyed working on. Whatever you show in your portfolio, this is an indicator of the direction you wish to develop in the future. If you include something you didn't like working on, you may still get selected for the job. Naturally, you will receive projects that are relevant to your portfolio, but this means that you will continue to work in an area you are not passionate about. This can be a strong demotivator for a creative person. The portfolio is a way to show your passion but also a statement of your desired career direction.

Compared to a university portfolio, which can be more open and elaborate, the key here is to focus the selection of projects that are most suitable for the position that you are applying for. This means that you need to be a lot more selective, first with the type of works you are presenting, and then with the quality of the collection.

While for a university portfolio you are demonstrating *range and diversity*, when applying for a job you need to show *focus and expertise* that is suitable for that job. Show your strongest work. Make a selection of high-quality examples that you are proud of.

## Telling a Story with Your Portfolio

Make it speak with the style and quality of the artist, designer, and person that you are. If you are a creative person, you would know by now that art and design careers are not just jobs but also a way of living. In such professions, you don't forget about what you are doing after you leave the office. Make that show in your portfolio—who you are as a creative person, what your passions are and how you express them through the work that you do. The portfolio should tell the story of your creative pursuits.

In some cases, just as when you are submitting a portfolio for a university, it might be good to demonstrate how you think. Portfolios are not just about demonstrating your technical skills but also how you approach a particular creative process. Here you might want to show the different stages of a project, from the brief to inspiration, concepting, and proposed solutions. Creative work often requires revisions, so don't be afraid to illustrate that you are able to come up with a variety of options for one particular project.

## Presentation

Regardless of the aim of the portfolio, for applications to university or assessment, you have to consider the presentation. The key here is to keep the focus on the work and provide a simple, clean, and seamless experience for the viewer. This may be on a website, social media platform, or interactive brochure, but the way you design the framework that features your work is also important. Keep text to a minimum. You need to show,

**Meet the Expert****What Kind of Work Do You Want to See in a Portfolio for a Job Application?***Chris Davey, head of creative at Dentsu Creative, UK*

I want to see work that makes me take notice. Work that is born out of insight and demonstrates an idea that solves a challenge or problem. Other things I look out for are work that demonstrates innovation and craft and is brave or new. I also want to see work that reflects your personality. Your work can tell us a lot about who you are. Format-wise, a website or well-considered PDF is good. Though don't get lazy and share the same version with everyone. Tailor it to who you are sending it to. Work in progress is fine, especially when we see how you are starting to approach a brief.

In terms of length, I would say anywhere between six and twelve projects is enough. An example of a folio that wowed me was when a creative team pitched me themselves. The work they had done was tailored to me, and they even made up a proactive brief for one of our clients and pitched their ideas to me. I wanted to hire them on the spot. They are now working for a global agency doing killer work. I just knew they would get snapped up immediately. I was genuinely gutted we could not take them in.

One thing to avoid is not putting in the original brief/insight and just showing the finished work. Build up the work by telling me the brief first. And NEVER use those massive A1 or A2 portfolio things with those plastic sleeves. So '90s...

Have a positive mindset and make your own luck. What I mean by that is that nothing comes to you on a plate, so don't let that get you down. You have to be prepared to work hard and create good luck. It takes time. Look for opportunities and grasp them with both hands when you find them!

not tell with words, the story of your creative pursuits. Unless you are a web designer and you can deal reasonably well with constructing simple and uncluttered websites, you could use pre-made templates or presentations. Try to avoid overpowering backgrounds, flashing buttons, pop-up windows, and sound that plays automatically.

If your work is online, do frequent updates. Even the best portfolios may look bad if they have not been updated for a while. If you are a designer, this is particularly important as your portfolio has to demonstrate that you are keeping up with the newest developments in the design industry. As an artist or photographer, you have to show that you are maintaining your creative passions and

keep displaying your latest achievements. When necessary, consider pushing older or irrelevant projects into an archive or remove them completely.

Let's have a look at some examples of student portfolios submitted as part of a university application. Note how students here do not only show finished work, but show how the work has developed and progressed. The prospective students have all added explanations of their thinking process to help the reviewer understand the thought process behind the work. All of these students went on to complete a degree at university!

**Tip:** Highlight your best work. In time, you will build a wide selection of samples from university coursework or from client projects during your employment. If the project has been praised by a client, include a testimonial. If you received a student award, put a small note that describes it.

These are excerpts from my sketchbook, a place where I often experiment with mediums and materials.



Letting my creativity run free whilst also thinking about and developing ideas for future art pieces and illustrations.

I have been using this sketchbook through the entirety of the project as an outlet for such works.

**Figure 2.2** Work by Leah Mansfield, BA Illustration student at the University of Westminster. Permission granted by Leah Mansfield.



**Figure 2.3** Work by Mike (Chenglin) Wu, BA Illustration student at the University of Westminster. Permission granted by Mike (Chenglin) Wu.



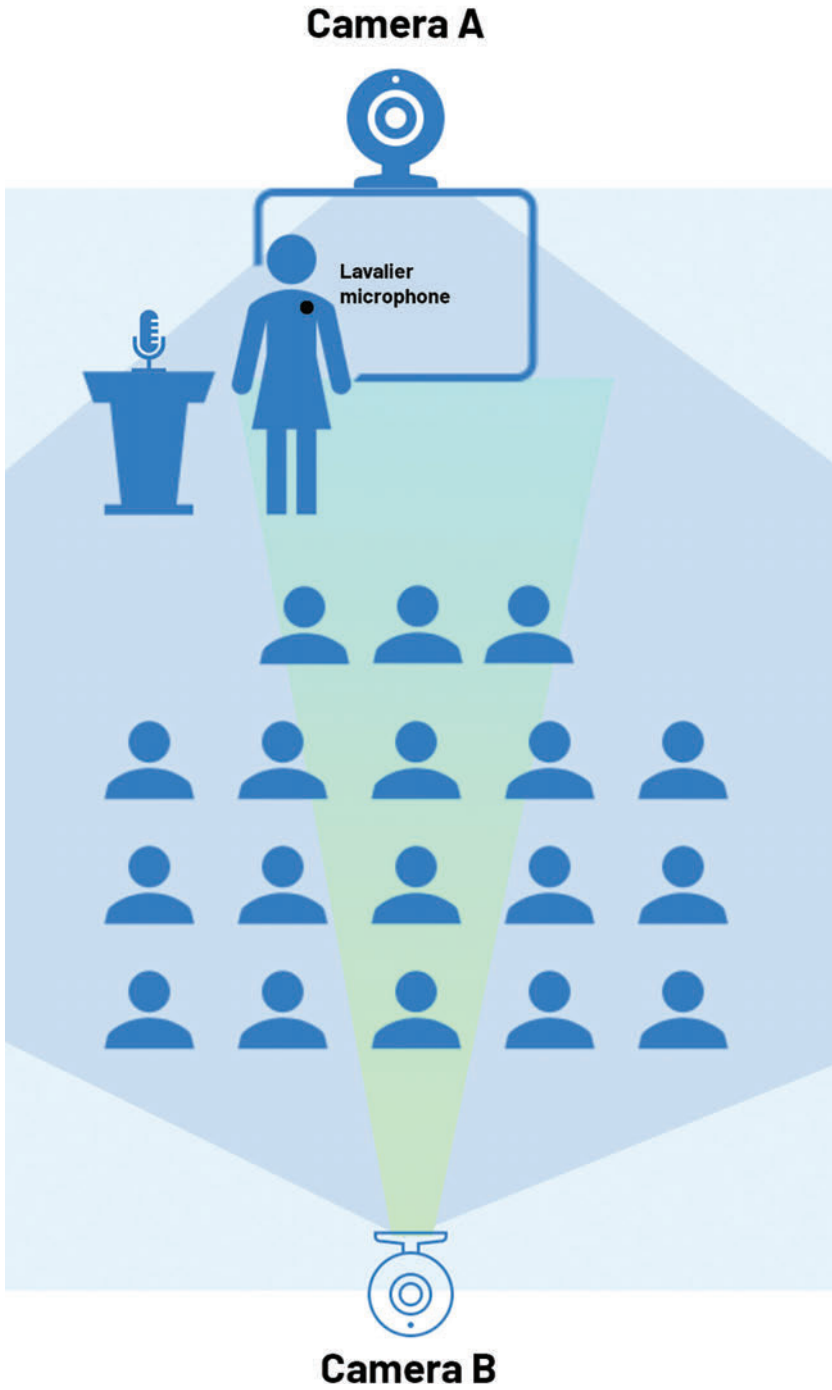
## Presenting in a Hybrid Environment

In the Part 1 of this book, we examined the online studio as a combination of spaces, technologies, platforms, and digital tools. We discussed how to prepare for an online studio visit and how to use this as an opportunity to show work and get feedback from your tutors and peers. We considered virtual spaces that allow such visits—meeting platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Blackboard Collaborate, and others. We also mentioned some image-sharing and storing platforms that can be helpful in creating inspirational mood boards, uploading work in progress, and preparing for a presentation (Pinterest, Instagram, Miro). We went into further detail on how to prepare for such presentations and the benefits of these meetings, such as getting a review of your work, getting to see the work of others and compare it with yours, learning about new platforms and tools for presenting, and being exposed to a variety of responses to one single creative brief.

As you already know, hybrid learning is an approach where some students are in the physical lecture room, and some join virtually. It is also possible that some of the tutors are joining remotely too, but the point is that everything happens at the same time, and everyone works together regardless of whether they are online or in the lecture room, and learning happens seamlessly in this way.

Before we examine how to best present and take part in the hybrid classroom, let's examine what this space might look like and who is part of it. In terms of participants, you would normally have a teacher, lecturer, or instructor; then you will have your classmates in the room and those watching online. In order for these different groups to be able to see and speak to one another, there are a number of technologies that need to be in place.

You need to consider the course learning environment where the lecture materials and any activities related to the session are available from.



**Figure 2.5** Diagram of a lecture room with a hybrid teaching set-up, courtesy of the authors. Permission granted by the book authors.

Generally, it is a good practice to check these materials prior to the session, regardless of whether you are joining in person or online.

Then you have the set-up in the lecture room, which normally consists of a computer or the instructor's laptop connected to a projector, which projects on the large screen. You have a microphone that covers the room, but typically your instructor would also wear one, as this is the microphone that would be recording their voice clearly. Depending on how elaborate the room set-up is, you would have at least one camera pointed at the presenter. You may also have another one pointing towards the attendees in the room (this one is good for people who are joining online as they can better experience the atmosphere of the session).

All these technologies are normally connected through recording and broadcasting software that allows all of you to see and talk to one another. Even if you are only an attendee and you are not presenting, you may also be asked to use your device (laptop, tablet, or smartphone) to connect with the online broadcast and conduct particular activities as a whole hybrid group. More often than not, nowadays students are expected to bring a digital device into the class and this is becoming a common practice in universities. In this way, you can quickly get access to the learning materials, connect with your peers instantly, and participate seamlessly in a group task if required. By doing so, you can learn from one another, learn together, and feel more integrated with the student community, regardless of whether you are online or in the room.

If you have to present, you should be aware of this set-up and the technologies that support it. This will help you be more confident when you have to speak to a microphone and appear on the camera, irrespective of your location.

## **How to Be a Successful Hybrid Presenter**

Now to the presentation, what to expect, how to prepare, and how to be a confident hybrid presenter!

While we will mention some points related to presenting and pitching in general, we will mostly focus this section on how to manage the presentation in a hybrid environment, how to address multiple audiences, and how to deal with the technology when presenting in a hybrid mode.

Whenever necessary, we will also consider the difference between presenting online and presenting in person to a hybrid audience.

The word *pitch* has several interpretations and one of them refers to throwing something so it falls at or near a mark. Another meaning relates to having to present and promote a particular idea for consideration. In the creative industries, companies are often pitching ideas for a particular project to clients. Quite often, the creative team is also presenting and testing ideas internally to see if they would gain any traction with potential customers, and if there is a value that can be developed further.

As a student, you may be asked to present or pitch an idea for a project based on a course brief or a particular activity. This is a useful way to test if your idea is valuable and relevant to the course brief or a particular activity. This is an opportunity to get feedback from your teachers and your classmates, and it is a way to practise your presentation skills, which can come in useful later on in your career.

There are various techniques for presentation and pitching that can be valuable for you when you have to put a certain idea forward. It is worth mentioning the difference between a pitch and a presentation: the latter is more focused on providing facts or giving statements, whereas a pitch is more of a persuasive argument or a statement of why a certain idea is worthy of pursuing. In both scenarios, you have limited time to work with, which needs to be used wisely in order to put your idea across.

There are some very good approaches to try when pitching, such as the 'elevator pitch', where your idea statement should be short and concise enough to be presented during a brief elevator ride. There is an extensive number of useful presentation tips you can find out about easily on the internet or from your tutors. Here we will not focus so much on specific pitching and presentation techniques but rather on how to put them across when presenting in a hybrid environment. We will consider how you can approach presentations so they suit the different audiences involved in such a setting, how to get your message across and keep the connection with the audience members alive. Last, but not least, we will discuss how to deal with the variety of technologies involved.

Just as in an in-person presentation, one of the key things you need to consider is the audience you will be addressing. As a student, the majority of the audience members would normally be your classmates, but you also have to consider the purpose of the pitch or the presentation and that your tutors will be there to evaluate your talk (formally or not) and to provide feedback.

When presenting in a hybrid setting, you need to consider two other types of audience—in person and the online audience. Your aims should be to create a similar experience for both, but you need to keep in mind that the ways you address them should be different. If you are presenting in person, obviously you have live eye contact with people in the room, but make sure that at the start of the talk you acknowledge and introduce the online attendees. Make a point of greeting them specifically and try to make them feel as important as those in the room. Let them know that they can use either the chat facility or their microphone to ask questions or make comments. It is always good practice to mention that you will try to make them part of the experience in spite of their remote participation. Continue to address them during your presentation and, if possible, designate a specific time to speak to them directly.

Regardless of where your audience members are, try to engage with them. Encourage them to use the ‘reaction’ icons built into the presentation platform, and prompt them to ask questions by raising the digital hand icon. If you are giving a longer and more elaborate presentation that requires participants to be divided into groups, encourage hybrid collaboration by mixing the online and in-person attendees together.

When presenting to a hybrid audience, you should embrace the technology that will help you to do so. The most important thing is to be familiar

### **Presenting in Person to a Hybrid Audience**

What to be mindful of here is that the online attendees can only see you from the camera, so you should try to keep within the same space that the room camera can access you. Normally, you would be given a handheld, lavalier, or headset microphone; the last two are good if you are the type of speaker who uses their hands while presenting. During your presentation, you would normally use slides or share your screen, which is connected to the large screen in the room and to the live broadcast software. Be mindful that when juggling between these screens, sometimes the technology might not respond in the way you expect. It is good when changing a slide or playing a video to check occasionally if all (in-person and online participants) can see and hear everything OK.

## Presenting Online to a Hybrid Audience

What to be bear in mind here are things such as the position of your camera, lighting, and the quality of the sound that you are broadcasting. Ideally, your eyes should be at the level of the webcam. Make sure that the lighting in your room is sufficient so your face can be seen clearly on the screen. Most online presentation platforms now offer the option to choose virtual backgrounds: if necessary, take advantage of that. If possible, invest in an external microphone that provides a better sound experience for the attendees. Remember that your computer or laptop has a cooling fan that can interfere with the internal microphone, and if you have to participate in the chat, the sound of your typing will be way stronger when using an internal mic.

with the presentation tools and the broadcasting platform (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Blackboard Collaborate, or others). Prior to the presentation, take time to familiarise yourself with the tools for managing the presentation and the live broadcast, check the chat facility, and test your camera and the microphone. If necessary, do a test run with a friend or a colleague who is not in the same space as you. This will help you be more confident with the technology and with the actual content of the presentation.

In terms of content, the requirements for a successful hybrid presentation would be similar to those of an in-person one. However, you should remember that the clarity of your statements becomes even more important for attendees watching online. Use well laid out slides and make sure your voiceover follows them properly. If the software allows, set up the screen so your face and the presentation take equal parts of the screen.

**Tip:** Be mindful of online fatigue. Online attendees can get tired or disengaged from the presentation more easily than those attending in person. Try to keep the talk short and to the point. If you have to speak for longer, use breaks where you can ask questions, ask to get questions back from the audience, or suggest that everyone takes a short break.

## Designing Your Presentation

Whether you are presenting online, offline, to a digital audience or a live one, it is important to think about the design and layout of any presentation materials you might use. While the visual aspects of your presentation are going to be hugely important, you must also consider the ‘story’ you are trying to tell. In most presentations you will not just be simply showing work, but instead will be explaining concepts, ideas, history and, importantly, why the audience should buy into what you have designed, developed, or proposed.

The whole point of a presentation is to leave your audience changed in some way: a change in their feelings, their ideas, or their way of thinking. That is your main goal. To give a good presentation you need to consider where your audience is starting (that is, what they might be thinking at the beginning) and where you want them to be when you finish speaking (how you want them to think and feel at the end of your presentation).

For example, in a presentation about a project or creative exercise that you are planning, your audience starts knowing a great deal about the medium or the subject materials and, often, about the topic you will discuss, but they know nothing about why your new intervention project is a good idea or how you plan to do it. You need to move them from being knowledgeable about the subject and the practice, to being interested and excited about the new things you will be contributing to the subject and area.

Once you know the journey you want to take them on, you should write it down as a bullet-pointed story. Don’t open PowerPoint or any other presentation tools yet; instead, work through step by step the point(s) you need to get across to get your audience to the goal—and keep in mind the time given for your presentation. Nobody likes someone who runs over their time limit!

Now you have your story drafted, let’s look at making slides. Your slides should be designed to support your talk, not the other way around, so it is important that you know what you want to talk about before you even open your computer to make a presentation. When you are ready to start making your slides there are five simple rules to preparing a good slide deck.

***Rule 1: The Rule of One!***

Each slide should contain no more than one idea. It might be a big idea or a small idea, but there should only be one. This helps both you and your audience focus on one thing at a time; it means you can give clear information about the one idea; and the audience will be fully immersed in that idea, not thinking about other things on your slide.

***Rule 2: 1+1=0***

This links to the above. Our brains can't read and listen well at the same time, so if your slides are different to your speech, your audience won't get the information from what we say or from the slide—they add both bits of information together and get nothing. So make sure that the one idea on your slide is the same as the one idea you are talking about.

***Rule 3: The Rule of Three***

Our brains try to count objects subconsciously, but they aren't very good at this and can generally only count to three before we have to use some of our brain power to start counting. If there are lots and lots of objects on your slides (text, images, titles, backgrounds, and so on), then your audience will not be using their full brain power to understand your ideas. Limit the number of objects to a maximum of three per slide. This allows the brain to concentrate on the presentation.

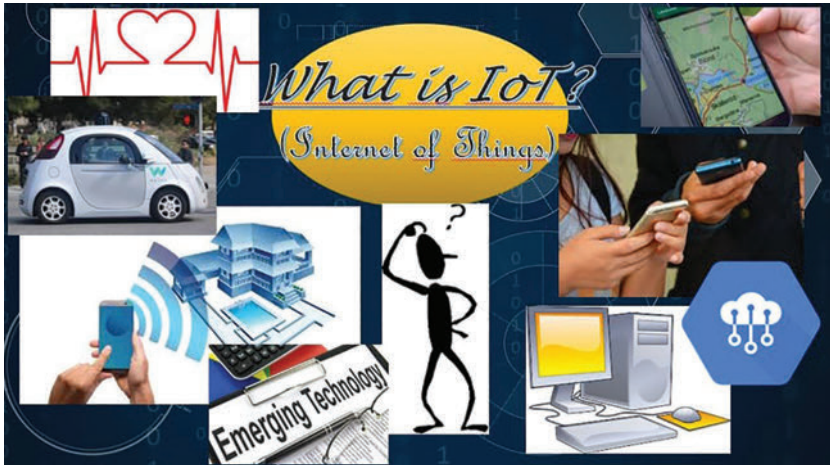
***Rule 4: Contrast***

Our eyes like contrasting colours, but avoid using pure black and white. Instead, use dark text on light backgrounds and avoid juxtaposing green and red/pink tones to make your slides accessible to all, including those with visual impairments. And remember, when you are presenting to people online, they might have different display settings on their monitors, which means not everything will look the same. Check in early with your audience to make sure they can see everything on your slides properly.

### **Rule 5: Size Matters**

Eyes really like looking at bigger objects, so consider making the most important information biggest, not just the title. Indeed, your slide might not even need a title. Think carefully about what the slide is trying to show and then make this the biggest, or perhaps only item (see rules 1 and 3) on the slide. Remember, too, that people online may be viewing your slides on a much smaller screen than you, so it is important that they can see everything you are trying to include.

These five rules might mean that you need more slides. But this is OK in our book. The important thing is to practise the presentation to ensure it runs to the right length of time. Even a one-slide presentation can run over time if not rehearsed, and a forty-slide presentation can end up too short when you're nervous. Use as many slides as you need to follow the rules above, and then time yourself practising to ensure you stick to time.



**Figure 2.6** This slide breaks all our rules. There are too many objects, no clear ideas, contrast makes it hard to read, and many of these images will be too small to look at on most screens.

Source: Carla Albinagorta, 'Bad PowerPoint Examples You Should Avoid at All Costs', 24Slides, 19 September 2019, <https://24slides.com/presentbetter/bad-powerpoint-examples-you-should-avoid>



**Figure 2.7** A better layout. This one is a bit better, the text is generally clear and of a good size. But the slide contains lots of different ideas and has lots of visual distractions that will be using up your audience’s brain power instead of them using it to listen to you.

Source: Capucine Pelletier, ‘On veut un PPT qui claqué’, LinkedIn, 12 December 2024, [https://fr.linkedin.com/posts/capucine-pelletier-876057b1\\_on-veut-un-ppt-qui-claque-on-a-tous-activity-7272875349368045569-EJMj](https://fr.linkedin.com/posts/capucine-pelletier-876057b1_on-veut-un-ppt-qui-claque-on-a-tous-activity-7272875349368045569-EJMj)

## Pitching Ideas Online

Not many people enjoy giving presentations, but doing them online can throw up a whole load of additional issues and worries. For an overview of how to give great presentations, we recommend again taking a look at the media and communication student study guide—but that will only take you so far. When working online, there are a few other things to consider.

### *Up the Energy*

In an online setting, it takes extra effort to convey the energy and passion you would naturally demonstrate during a face-to-face pitch. You need to

work that much harder to keep someone's attention; if it isn't engaging, people naturally find it hard to watch something online without being distracted. This may also mean covering less content than you might normally include during an in-person pitch meeting. Pick what is crucially important and nail it. Leave the nice-to-have for Q&A or another meeting. Use your facial expression, tone of voice, eye contact (look right at the camera), and words to inject energy and emotion into your pitch.

### ***Stand Up (If You Can)***

Just as you'd stand when pitching in person, stand when pitching online. Standing up will allow you to breathe better as you speak and engage your body, which will add to the energy you put forward.

Set up your computer so that the camera is slightly higher than eye level; this is a more attractive angle for your face on camera. Be sure the lighting in your space is good—you don't want to be in the shadows, but you also don't want to be squinting at a bright light as you present.

### ***Check the Technology***

You should become very familiar with the technology you are using. Try practising with a friendly audience to make sure you can seamlessly move around it. Connect to the internet and session early on the day of the pitch to test the microphone and video camera, so there are no technical glitches to slow you down or make you feel flustered. We'd also recommend getting an external camera and investing in a better mic—neither are very expensive but can make a world of difference in sound and picture quality. You should also consider turning on auto-captions to aid those who might have hearing needs or who are watching you on devices with poor audio quality.

### ***Think of Your Visuals***

Exceptional visuals are always paramount to a great creative pitch, but they can be even more significant when you are working in the online studio. It has been estimated that people can process visuals sixty thousand

times faster than text. When you pitch online—where many people find it harder to listen—your visuals will do a great deal of the talking, so it is worth spending time to ensure your presentation has top-notch design.

### *Keep Things Simple*

Remember to take your presentation and KISS it! (Keep it short and simple.) Avoid using additional complex technologies if they will make it hard for people to join the session or might distract you from your main message. Consider a shorter presentation with more Q&A if you are allowed to set your own timeframes. And always make sure you keep just one idea per slide so people can follow along easily.

#### **Student thoughts on...**

#### **PITCHING IN THE HYBRID ENVIRONMENT**

*Chloé Keeble, MSc Digital Media Design, University of Edinburgh*

Having been on both the giving and receiving end of hybrid learning styles over the past few years, I feel in general that the pros of hybrid learning outweigh any cons—the key, as in most cases, is simply how to prepare for it. Mostly, it can be a very convenient method when you're dealing with multiple locations and time zones, and it's ultimately a fun way to explore commonalities and engagement regardless of physical location.

Here, I'd like to share some observations, tips, and even insights into how to best maximise the hybrid environment as an online presenter or facilitator.

#### **1) Be aware of the 'etiquette' surrounding hybrid environments**

It sounds much like common sense, but by nature we tend to fixate on our immediate surroundings rather than build awareness of what's happening via all platforms (online and offline). Presenters in a physical room will tend to fish for responses or reactions from those physically in front of them, and at times can simply forget

about the online audience present. Similarly, for online presenters where there's a channel to a physical group of people, they can at times feel disconnected from the space that group occupies, especially if faces are not visible on the screen. Simple yet important things, such as maintaining and alternating eye contact with both the camera (for online) and physical audience (offline), projecting your voice clearly for both platforms, alternating between calling on both offline and online names from the audience, allowing sufficient pause for digesting content on both ends, conducting activities that can involve both channels simultaneously—all of these aspects can contribute to the engagement level of a hybrid audience. At times, it even helps to remind the audience (and yourself) prior to commencing the content of your presentation that we are all participating in a hybrid environment, so to be aware of our space and channels of connectivity. This can be a helpful scene-setter for hybrid setups.

## **2) Make use of interactive tools to create a connection**

Since the idea of a hybrid learning environment consists of different platforms and spaces in which the audience engages with the content, it helps to introduce ways to interact. Particularly, introducing a platform or method that can be used the same way and at the same time by both the offline and online audiences. Avoid activities that create a larger nuance of separation, such as 'paperwork' for those physically present and an alternative digital method for those online, for example. These days, most of us carry an electronic communication device of sorts (smartphone, iPad, secondary computer, etc.) and these are great tools to use supplementary to, and regardless of, the physical location or medium in which we engage in a presentation. Albeit potentially a cause of distraction—since opening a mobile device can also coincidentally open an array of notifications pulling you from the present moment—if the task at hand is monitored, given a time limit, or even considered entertaining (a poll or quiz, maybe), the engagement level will no doubt increase.

Occasionally in my experience of presenting in hybrid mode, some of the physical audience members have even opted to log in to the online channel of the presentation as a way to engage or interact with

peers online. If the technical set-up allows, this can also be a great way to interact across all channels. However, again, the act of introducing more devices and thus more alternative screens may prove a risk in maintaining audience concentration on the topic at hand.

### 3) 'Keep calm and carry on' if there is a technical difficulty

Technical issues in some shape or form are bound to happen at some stage of your experience with presenting in hybrid environments. In fact, it's best to assume that they will most likely happen and allow time or even a backup activity (or method) to substitute in case the planned programming doesn't go as expected. I've experienced so many instances when a presenter has panicked or actively complained to an audience because of a software malfunction, file error, choppy internet connection, or other lack of desired technical functionality. Rather than complain to your audience or appear in a state of distress (as hard as it is sometimes to control the frustration of a technical issue), shrug it off and go into some preprepared alternatives: for a PowerPoint meltdown, have a presentation ready in Keynote or even Google Slides in a cloud environment; connect to backup internet (such as phone tethering, if achievable; or move to different channels to regroup (online boards, chat rooms, and so on). Additionally, pending the presentation or activity, it can help to assign a support moderator in each location (one for the online group and another for the offline group) who can support in case your connection is cut short or you need assistance in getting the audience together on a given task. Even if you don't use your backup plans, at least you would've had the practice of going through the content various times and through a range of potential formats, contributing to your ongoing fluency in hybrid operations.

## A Campus Without Borders

One way to think of your hybrid education is like a campus without borders, supported by various technologies and innovative methods of teaching. Hybrid education is a way of responding to a wider student demographic and means to supply knowledge in a flexible way to students who have

family or job commitments. At the same time, it is a way to connect those studying on campus with peers from all over the world, an opportunity to work with diverse groups of people without having to travel. Having the option to review lecture recordings, recorded discussions, or course materials at your own pace and as many times as you wish is another added benefit of hybrid learning.

**Tip:** Apart from hybrid learning, you may come across another model called the hyflex model. This is a combination of hybrid and flexible learning, where the students can choose how to take part in the activity, online or in person, depending on what works best for them. Just as with the hybrid model, all course materials are available for online and in-person students and learning happens at the same time for all. This type of model has its own benefits, extending those of online and hybrid learning. You can choose the option to engage with the live lecture that is most suitable for you (online or in person). Regardless of your choice, you would receive the same materials, and you can interact with your peers synchronously; you can also reuse, rewind, and refer to recordings and notes before and after the live sessions; you would have easy access to the course through the variety of technologies that are available to you, either through the university or through your own devices.



## Crits and Critique

In Part 1 we looked at online studio visits and tutorials. Here we will now explore one of the key aspects of this kind of working, that is the crit—a critical review of work. Most creative courses have at least one crit, and that makes them quite different to other degrees. Depending on your course, you might undertake a crit very frequently or perhaps just once, but for many students, and even many experienced creatives, the idea of a crit can be quite terrifying. However, once we look more closely at what a crit is, why you are undertaking one, and how to get through them, you will see that not only are they not all that scary at all, they are in fact one of the most useful and formative experiences you can have during your degree. And not to get too far ahead of ourselves, they can also be fun, whether online, offline, or hybrid.

It is understandable that many people find crits to be very stressful—after all, you are expected to justify, defend, and explore your work in front of your peers, tutors, and invited practitioners. It can also be a confusing time. You may be exposed to conflicting views, you might not fully understand what is being said, or you might be showered with praise and offered a job. Every crit is an intense opportunity to develop presentation skills, expose your work and thinking to new people, and to test ideas in a public forum.

It's not only a valuable part of your education, but the situation is also great preparation for professional life. In this chapter we are going to help you focus on what is required in a crit, how to remain relaxed, how to deal with confrontation, how to say 'I don't know' if need be, how to be comfortable and confident in talking about your ideas, and how to make all of this happen in a hybrid environment where you or some of your peers may be present online.

Something that is very important to understand is that everyone involved in the crit is just as important as everyone else, and to get the most out of them you need to put as much effort into being a member of the audience as you do to being the presenter.

## What Is a Crit?

A crit is a collaborative process in which you and your peers work together to discuss a piece of work to help it develop and move it forwards. Unlike the tutorials we discussed in Part 1, at a crit, all those involved are there on the same terms and share in the experience as equals. Crits are moments of syncing and alignment when you sit down with your peers, teachers, and others to grow ideas and gain feedback. As a presenter, you will provide a clear explanation of the problem and proposed solution, and ask for feedback on specific parts of your design process. You may be asked to share work at different stages of completion, and that can feel very unnerving if you are sharing something that you know isn't finished and could be better; but sharing anything early and often is good practice, and those around you will also understand the crit process and will know that much of the work is in progress. One really important thing you can do is think about the kind of feedback you want, and let your peers know at the start of the presentation—the whole point of a crit is for you to get information and advice, not to prove things to others, so we can use our own presentation skills to make the crit what we want it to be, and to get others as excited about our projects as we are.

Crits provide a great opportunity to expose what everyone is working on to newcomers and one another. They provide visibility to ongoing work, all the way from problem defining, mock-ups, designs, prototypes, and research results. They can help make sure the rationale behind your designs is solid and convincing, and get input and ideas from peers to improve the quality of your work. What is important is to not shy away from sharing your work at any stage of your design process. There is nothing like 'It's too early to get feedback'. Getting comfortable in sharing your work early and often is a good rule of thumb. Also, always try to be open to all the feedback rather than be defensive about your work.

**Meet the Expert****Crit Your Crit**

*Professor Neil Mulholland, chair of contemporary art practice and theory, MA Contemporary Art Theory programme director, University of Edinburgh*

The critique is a live peer-review method of learning. Crits are active rather than passive forms of learning, they require learner *and* audience participation and, often, a degree of improvisation. A crit is, therefore, reliant on what the participants bring to the process; which is to say it is a form of a *social learning network*.

**Who Is Involved in a (Hybrid) Crit?**

We have already alluded to who might be involved in a crit, but let's look a little more closely at who is involved and the roles they have, and how a crit works in a hybrid setting. There are generally two main parts to a crit, the presenter and the audience. It is likely that during the crit process you will play the part of presenter for some of the time, but you will also be the audience for your classmates' work. Your audience may also include people from outside your course, who might be other members of staff, students from other disciplines, or even people who work in your industry. Your lecturer will also be part of the audience, and will often wear a second hat as the facilitator of the process and event. Let's look at each of these roles in more detail and how each deals with the challenge of hybrid crits.

***The Presenter***

This is the scary one, the one that gets people most worried. It is important to recognise that your role as a presenter in a crit is a bit different to the role of being a presenter discussed earlier. In a crit, your job isn't to

give a full presentation to a passive audience but is instead to start the conversation by sharing key points about your work, including where it is up to and how you got to that stage. But don't stop there. You also need to look to the future and drive the conversation and feedback you are provided to help move your project forwards.

As you prepare your presentation of work you should think about how you will define the stage you're at and the input and feedback you're looking for. If you do very regular crits on your course, then try to keep building up your case and update everyone step by step so that you don't have to mention the previous stages again (which takes up unnecessary time). As part of your preparation, also prepare questions that you want to ask your audience, ready to minimise the silent periods during feedback—this also means you are in charge of the kind of feedback you are getting, meaning it will be even more useful in moving your project to the next stage.

The way you present your work will differ by discipline. You might be using Keynote or PowerPoint, a text document, drawing live on a whiteboard, showing a movie clip, presenting a

**Tip:** Starting these kinds of conversations online can be extra challenging and require you to think carefully how to facilitate the discussion. You should resist the temptation to talk to the audience at length and instead should leave lots of spaces for people to interrupt, and regularly ask your classmates and tutors for feedback.

**Tip:** As a hybrid presenter you should consider the duality of the process—your work should be accessible to a hybrid audience. One way to deal with that is to put the work on an online platform that you and your audience can view simultaneously during the presentation. This will enable you to highlight specific areas of your work during the presentation elements of the crit but also enables your audience to explore your work on their own terms, leading to feedback on areas that you may have not considered. You can use approaches similar to those discussed earlier in the section 'How to Be a Successful Hybrid Presenter'.

model, or doing a live demonstration. Whatever your discipline and mode of delivery, though, during your presentation you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What problem are we trying to solve?
- How do you know it is a real problem?
- Who are we solving for?
- How will we know if we have solved this problem?

You should also be able to explain the following:

- I am at the stage of...
- These are the steps that I took...
- I am looking for feedback on...

During the process itself you will also need to be ready to answer the questions that weren't addressed before, and to be honest and open about the ideas and previous processes. You will be expected to explain thoroughly the decisions and rationales behind your direction of approach and the designs you made, as well as being open to feedback rather than being defensive about your work.

Remember, this is not a formal presentation session but rather a discussion and open feedback session, so stay calm and relax. Your project is something you are hopefully excited about and is looking for innovative and interesting solutions to real-world problems, so let your motivation and excitement be contagious, and make it a fun and exciting discussion session.

**Tip:** One other thing you might like to consider is asking a friend or classmate to take some notes for you. It can be really hard to keep up a good conversation about your work and to also take detailed notes about ideas and questions, so having someone else do this for you will mean you have more to work from following the session. In some cases, you might be able to record the crit, but be warned that this can also reduce the amount of feedback you get as not everyone likes to be recorded, so a good friend might be more useful than a recording.

## Meet the Expert

### Presenting Your Crit

*Professor Neil Mulholland, chair of contemporary art practice and theory, MA Contemporary Art Theory programme director, University of Edinburgh*

When you are presenting in a crit, it helps to locate your own development within shared learning contexts. But how might you narrate such a story? Well, one approach that often works well is to start with a broad perspective, then move inwards: from the macro to the micro. A way of visualising this is to imagine you are using a telescopic lens to zoom in and out of the work you are presenting. Sometimes a telescopic lens will reveal granular detail, sometimes it will pan back and allow us to see the project in a panoramic vista.

The macro would comprise the broader discipline in which you are working and the contexts that it is situated within or in relation to; this is the implicit context and can be very broad. What is that macro context for you? Can you present it in such a way that you are able to situate your own work clearly within it? As you zoom in, you might start to discuss more micro concerns. The explicit context would become more visible and important as you zoom in. This is where to address the brief, common inquiry, or 'problem narrative', placing it in relation to that broad vista where you began. As you zoom in more, you start to address your own contribution—what are you doing in this space? Pan around the work you are doing and show in detail what is emerging. Having done this, you can start to pull back again, moving out from the micro to the macro. In so doing, you should be able to see and demonstrate how your own contribution impacts and changes the contexts within which you are working.

Once you have painted a rich picture of the contexts you are dealing with, the question of how to present or facilitate your crit is so much easier to answer. Feeling that you are starting to master your domains should lead you to acknowledge that the presenter actually has a great deal of control over the direction that a crit could take. Being aware of the power bestowed on the presenter-as-facilitator is vitally important when your work is the subject of a crit. The crit really should function in a way that is useful to you in terms of your

own learning and development. With this in mind, it's helpful to carefully plan for your crit and to give some consideration to how you host the critique and focus the attention of your peers on what you want them to address. You can do this implicitly—by using 'teasers' that will encourage them to ask more about things you really want to discuss in more depth—and explicitly—by simply stating clearly what you would like to address in the discussion. The more frequently you present, the more skilled you will become at implicitly structuring call-and-response with your peers. This is a key facilitation skill that takes time to develop and will come with practice.

When it comes to learning, a vital thing is to think not only about how and where you place your own work, but equally about what sort of field you are generating. The context of your work is akin to a habitat; habits develop in relation to specific habitats. If we want to change our habits, we need to also change our habitat. Changing the context by making your own contribution to it is a higher learning goal that's always vital to keep in mind.

### *The Audience*

You are likely to spend much more time as a member of the audience during any crit session, and knowing how to be a good audience member will not only help you to support your peers, but also give you confidence in presenting. Your participation as a supportive audience member will also add to the positive atmosphere at the crit session, making it a more enjoyable experience for all involved.

**Tip:** When attending a crit online or in a hybrid setting, you need to make a little bit of extra effort as a member of the audience. Because it can be tricky for the presenter to see everyone's faces, you should make good use of the chat functions, raised-hand tools and other emoticons, such as the clap icon. This will help the presenter to feel more connected to you and will make it a more collaborative experience. If you are provided with tools such as online whiteboards, then be an active participant in using these.

While it might seem that the most important job of the audience is to ask questions (and it is very important), before you can do so, you must first be open and willing to listen to the presentations in an active way—not half-looking at smartphones or laptops but fully engaging with and being respectful of the presenter and their presentation. Even without asking a single question you can learn an awful lot that might support your work by understanding what other people are working on and the challenges they might have faced—even if the topic (and even discipline) are quite different.

**Tip:** If the presenter provides you with additional content either before or during the crit (this might be in the form of links to follow or documents to look at) then you should take the time to explore these and view the whole work of the presenter, not just the bit they are actively showing you—you will gain more insight to their thinking and will be able to provide even more constructive feedback.

### ***Providing Feedback in a Design Crit***

Following the presentation—in most cases, questions and comments are taken at the end, though in some specific cases a presenter or the facilitator might ask for interventions part way through—you should be prepared to provide feedback and ask clarifying questions in an appropriate manner. The presenter might have laid out clearly the areas they would like feedback on, or they might have left things more open for comments across the whole project.

The first thing to remember is that crit is short for *critique* not *criticise*, so all feedback should be something that is constructive and helps to move the project forwards and to develop ideas. You should ensure that you are always talking about the work not the person—if you're giving feedback, don't make it personal.

**Tip:** Say things like 'This could be...' instead of 'You haven't done this'. Likewise, avoid talking about your personal opinions, so avoid sentences that begin 'I don't like this'. Every piece of feedback should be specific and have a reason, and you should be able to clarify what you mean and, where possible, give examples.

### *Being a Supportive Audience Member*

As we have already mentioned, everyone in the crit is as important as everyone else, but how you behave in the crit can make a world of difference. Being a supportive audience member will not only help your classmates to relax, enjoy the process, and learn from your feedback, it is also one of the best ways for you to learn from the crit yourself. This is because the process of asking questions and making comments about the work of others can lead to new insights about your own work and ideas.

In fact, many people learn more from being an active and supportive member of the audience than from being the presenter. For example, you could try structuring your feedback using questions such as:

- What were your motivations for this work?
- How did you come up with these ideas?
- Why did you choose  $x$  instead of  $y$ ?
- What inspired you to do this work?

These are reasonably open questions that allow the presenter to give quite a big answer, but you might want to try and start a new discussion or debate that goes wider than the presenter and brings in other people in the room—or to prompt a shyer presenter to say more about their project and ideas. In these cases, using fully open questions can really help to get things going. Try using some of the following to support a friendly and more open conversation:

- Could you tell us a bit more about...?
- Please clarify this point a little further...

Generally, we would look to avoid using closed questions as part of a crit (the kind of questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no), and they can really close down a conversation and stop the whole crit process in its tracks. If you are struggling to turn your closed question into something more open, try a ‘why’ or ‘how’ question at the end. For example:

- Did you consider using a different style/element/process here? If so, why didn’t it work? And how did you make the decision to not pursue that direction?

The final thing to think about here is whether you need to ask a question at all. I don’t mean sitting in silence, as that can be very unpleasant for all involved, but part of a crit is about offering compliments about

specific parts of a project or its process that you like. There is a tendency to always be looking for the negative or problematic areas of the work, but you should also look to give feedback on the things the presenter has done well. Consider some of these phrases:

- I like how you highlighted that option. It totally makes sense to me.
- Your clean layout and well-proportioned typography make the page really legible.
- I think how you approached this problem is very creative. And the fact that you explored a lot of different options clearly demonstrates that you are passionate about solving this problem.

### The Difference Between Criticism and Critique

Criticism passes judgement — Critique poses questions

Criticism finds fault — Critique uncovers opportunity

Criticism is personal — Critique is objective

Criticism is vague — Critique is concrete

Criticism tears down — Critique builds up

Criticism is ego-centric — Critique is altruistic

Criticism is adversarial — Critique is cooperative

Criticism belittles the designer — Critique improves the design

### Meet the Expert

#### How Are Crits Structured?

*Professor Neil Mulholland, chair of contemporary art practice and theory, MA Contemporary Art Theory programme director, University of Edinburgh*

Crits (in art at least) are notorious for being unstructured; which is to say, the agendas of a crit are often emergent, stemming from the discussion points raised by students and tutors. For many, the

experience of this kind of crit is highly frustrating. Crits can meander around subjects and go down rabbit holes that appear to have little to do with what the presenter is attempting to focus on. While crits might have a chair or facilitator whose job is to pull the focus back to what is being presented, this isn't always achieved!

The unstructured version of the crit has its ancestry in the European Enlightenment coffee house model, and resonates with Khairudin Aljunied's (2014) concept of Southeast Asian coffee shops from the 1940s to the 1960s as 'domains of contentious publics'. Unstructured crits can be better understood using the coffee house metaphor, which is to say that they are intentional spaces/times for 'agenda-free' discussion.

### **Advantages of Coffee House Crits**

Coffee house crits are intended to support 'openness'; they do so in the sense that they are nominally improvisational: a conversation takes place and there's a 'natural' ebb and flow. In this, we have something resembling an open system (rather than a closed system).

Within the broader church of higher education, coffee house crits are often presented as marginal sites for more informal learning, opening access to students excluded from whatever the dominant modality of learning might be at a given time. This makes coffee house crits a form of open access (perhaps), at least in comparison to otherwise enclosed learning environments (the 'walled gardens' of lecture theatres and firewalled VLE.) In Europe, educationalists tend to favour such open systems over closed systems—so this makes conversation = 'good' (open).

But it's never that simple, is it?

### **A Few Disadvantages of Coffee House Crits**

Since coffee house crits are informal and lack the more formal reporting systems of, say, written feedback, they can actually generate opacity rather than an open approach. In coffee house crits, conversations happen without trackable (minuted) accountability.

This is the nature of improvised speech, of course—it is so frequently private. It shouldn't be minuted or recorded, should it? But since it's not documented, the coffee house crit's voices are not (democratically) accountable. Moreover, the underlying assumption that open structures and self-directed forms of learning are 'good' is Eurocentric; it doesn't take into consideration educational modalities based on different philosophical systems (Confucianism, for example).

It's important to recognise that such coffee house crits tend to be driven by what is being presented for discussion. In art, there are forms of critique that only allow for discussion to filter through or revolve around the work presented. The silent crit, for example, prevents the presenter from speaking. The presenter must remain silent for the duration of the crit and listen to what's being said about what they have presented for critical scrutiny. The idea here is to make the crit structure perform as a type of 'authentic learning', mimicking what is perceived to exist in the 'professional world'. In a gallery, the artist is not present to discuss what they exhibit; so, the rationale goes, the work should be able to 'speak for itself' in a crit situation. Of course, this is something of a misnomer. In the professional world, works of art are never presented apart from some form of interpretation or educational intervention—signposting the idealised conditions for reviewing the work. We need to recognise that crits are educational practices: practices that do not have, nor need to have, an exact equivalent in the professional world. The primary purpose of the crit is to support learning.

There's an underlying assumption in the coffee house crit model that learning is foremost dialogue. In art and design, we know all too well that this is not true! There is, of course, a wide array of sensual elements involved in learning—so why privilege dialogue? In doing so, the coffee house crit may exclude some participants more than others. In this, linguistic assumptions underwrite coffee houses in ways that are all too often not addressed; the dominant language used (for instance, English) will enable those that speak that dominant language and disadvantage those who do not.

Ableist assumptions also underwrite the coffee house crit model regarding its emphasis on interpersonal interaction. This doesn't stop to take account of neurological disabilities, specifically deafness, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), that make it really difficult to talk to more than one person or cope with coffee house 'noise'.

Finally, given that coffee house crits are live, we really need to consider who can and can't take part in something that is, essentially, synchronous (automatically excluded if they can't make the time set).

## After the Crit

Hopefully you will have found your crit useful, and will have either been able to take a lot of notes yourself or have had a friend take some for you ready to use in the next stages of your project. It is important that you use these notes to help inform how your project will develop, and even how you will present at the next crit if you are on a course that uses them regularly.

However, more than just this, you need to ensure you keep some perspective on the process and are able to hold on to the positives. While a crit is an amazing opportunity for you to bring your work or proposal alive for others in your class and communicate your enthusiasm and passion, if you endure a difficult review with critical feedback, it can be easy to lose heart. You might well find yourself agonising over negative comments from the review, blowing them out of proportion. While it is important to evaluate criticism received and adapt your design accordingly, it is also crucial that you pick out the positive aspects from your review—these can help you pinpoint the most successful elements of your scheme, which can then be developed and expanded to great effect in the future. Try to learn everything you can from the experience and keep it in mind as you move forward into professional practice.

**Tip:** Remember that if you are doing an online or a hybrid course, normally these sessions are recorded and you can revisit the recording for further observations.

Your presentation skills will be called on many more times in your career, so there is always another chance to improve.

## Responding to Crits Online

We have talked a lot about crits already, but there are a couple more things to be said. First, ensure you read the section above on doing online presentations before you start your crit. Once you have presented, you will also be met with two things unique to the studio—online Q&A and then turning off your computer.

Doing an online Q&A can be quite daunting. Running the Q&A online might require you to unmute people, respond to something in the chat box, or go back to the presentation to address a slide in more depth. Or maybe the questioner wants to share their screen with you. Get comfortable with these functions so it feels seamless to the audience. Be prepared to use your active listening skills to demonstrate that you are hearing your audience and any questions asked—nodding, taking notes, summarising what you heard before answering, showing both physically and mentally that you are listening to the questions and being thoughtful about answers. There may be more silent pauses in an online conversation—don't let this throw you off. And where possible, keep your camera on, even if others might have switched them off; this way you can use body language to convey interest in questions and comments.

Once the crit has finished you will find yourself in the position of turning off the computer and perhaps being on your own. If you have had a particularly challenging crit, this can be quite a hard moment as you might not immediately have someone to talk to, and the comments made in the crit can seem bigger or more unpleasant than they really were. First, as we noted above, while it is important to evaluate criticism received and adapt your design accordingly, it is also crucial that you pick out the positive aspects from your review. Second, if you know when your crit is going to be, consider arranging a social activity after it finishes. This doesn't have to be with people from your class; it could be with other friends or family. Give yourself a chance to digest the comments, and then give yourself a break from working on your project with some well-deserved social time. You will come back to the work refreshed and ready to take on board any comments to improve your work and take it to the next level.

**Student thoughts on...****BEING AN ONLINE STUDENT**

*Nikolai Jónasson, student on the Masters Programme in Digital Media Design (Online Learning) at the University of Edinburgh*

Having no prior experience of being an online student and coming from outside Scotland (I'm an Icelandic citizen from Finland), I wouldn't say that I had any prerequisite of what to expect, realistically. I started my master's in digital media design at the University of Edinburgh in September 2022, and my overall learning experience thus far has been positive.

First and foremost, I have been pleasantly surprised that there is no separation between campus-based students and those studying online. In practice, we can see the live video feed of the lecture and actively partake in written and voice-based discussions through Microsoft Teams alongside it. Another platform of note is Miro, which helps exchange ideas creatively via mood boards and easily present ideas during initial review and feedback sessions to our peers and tutors. I found this visual approach quite beneficial in the long run as we all could improve the clarity and presentation of our ideation processes, which also allowed for more constructive feedback from the tutors. There is also the invaluable opportunity to learn from one another during each live feedback session, as we all come from different professional and cultural backgrounds. I found a lot of inspiration during these sessions, namely the various approaches to design, which (in turn) helped me improve on aspects of my designs. Listening to the feedback tutors gave to other students allowed me to fully recognise, in practice, the required building blocks for great design work; for instance, the appropriate use of colour, composition, spacing, and overall presentation of said project deliverables.

I'm always interested in hearing what others say about my work, as this is a valuable insight into how people perceive what you do, your ideas, and your vision. In terms of having your work examined online, I believe that the online format adds more focus and objectivity to this process.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that the communication between students, teachers, and tutors is splendid. The presentations are structured well, and the tutorials are available to everyone live and as recorded material. It's essential to take note of the provided course materials and content (presentations, tutorials, feedback sessions) and be open to asking for help whenever there is an issue or question, as everyone is ready to provide a helping hand to those in need through Microsoft Teams, Outlook, and Learn.





# Working on Your Final Project

Your final project is the culmination of your studies. It is the moment to bring together all the skills you have learned and the ideas you have had. It is an exciting moment, but also something that is highly challenging. It can be even more challenging when working in a hybrid environment. This section will look at how to approach the main aspects of your final project and how to negotiate the additional opportunities and challenges thrown up through working online.

However your final project module is structured, the projects themselves are designed not only to test how well you have learned skills and are able to apply them, but they also give you a very real piece of work that you can use in job applications, portfolios, and interviews. The work you produce in your final project will serve to launch your future career entering

**Tip:** While final projects might differ a little depending on your course, with some being a year-long piece of work, others being just one semester, some responding to specific live briefs, and some coming from your own research into a problem area, they do all have a great many things in common that we will discuss here. Always be sure to check your own module and university instructions related to your final project, though, as each will have its own quirks and requirements. On some courses, your final project might be closely linked to a dissertation; on other courses you may find yourself submitting both a dissertation and a separate creative final project, or other combinations. We are most concerned here with creative practice in any way it fits within your assessments.

professional work whether in a commercial context, such as freelance illustration, or to continue your research and studies at postgraduate level.

Another defining feature of your final project is that a large part of your study and learning will be self-directed. You will have to be your own motivator and your own planner of your time and workload—again emulating many aspects of working in the industry and especially those of being a freelancer. Don't worry, though, you won't be completely on your own. You will normally be allocated a supervisor who you will meet regularly to discuss ideas and progress—you could think of these meetings as mini crits for which you should prepare in just the same way as above. You will probably also have some quite formal crits with your classmates, peers, and people from the field you are working in, and these will be crucial to the development of your project—so if you skipped straight to this bit of the book, go back a section and read about how to get the most from crits.

Many courses will also give you the opportunity to hear professionals from your field give talks or workshops on problems and solutions that are cutting-edge. You may also have the opportunity to gain work experience through your final project by working closely with a real client. Take as

### Setting Up Meetings in a Hybrid Setting

When working on a final project in a hybrid or online setting, you can take advantage of the additional flexibility in things like setting meetings with your supervisor. While being online doesn't mean your supervisor will be available twenty-four hours a day, online meetings can be easier to arrange for both of you as the need for travel is eliminated. This might mean you can have more frequent but shorter meetings. Be warned, though: online meetings might require you to do a little bit more preparation than face-to-face ones, especially when you are showing work or discussing techniques. You are much more likely to need to share images and ideas before your meeting to give your tutor more time to review things than might be required in an in-person meeting. The ideas from the section on preparing for an online studio visit will be helpful in thinking about how to prepare for these meetings.

many of these opportunities as you can! We know it isn't always possible to attend everything, especially if they are extracurricular and you have work or family commitments, but where possible, try to attend, view later if recorded, or have someone take notes on your behalf so you can get the most from these extras.

## What Makes a Great Final Project?

To start with, all great final-year projects are based around an interesting problem—and that doesn't just mean interesting for you, it means interesting for the world. OK, maybe not the whole world but enough of it. You should be considering problems that when solved will have a wider impact than just on your learning, that would contribute to society, a company, or a wider creative issue. To do this, a good project needs to be well defined, with carefully thought-through aims and objectives informed by background research (even when you have been given the brief, you will need to do further research). You will also be trying to make something novel. That doesn't mean it has to be totally new—completely new ideas are rarely possible—but looking at novel ways of bringing together creative elements, or novel ways of using these elements to create a solution or intervention not seen before, are sure-fire ways to move towards the highest marks possible.

One of the most important parts of a great final project is its rationale, the reasoning behind what you did. Some courses might have a very specific way they want you to include this—perhaps as a separate reflective report or presentation—but you should seek to show your journey and rationale through the whole process. If you are working on a portfolio, include notes on your thinking and processes. If you are submitting just a final artefact, consider how you will also present a rationale for this work, be it through a description of the item on display or other

**Tip:** If working in a hybrid setting, take advantage of any available prerecorded presentations from your supervisor on how to approach your idea, how to conduct research, and how to structure your writing. Often, recordings on these topics are available together with project examples from students in previous years.

documentation that is linked to the final works—a QR code that takes you from a live sculpture to a narrated video of its production, for example, could be a powerful thing.

## Choosing a Project

As noted above, some courses might set you a particular range of briefs to choose from. These might be given by real clients from real companies or could be imagined by your tutor. Other courses might ask you to find your own final project from scratch, by doing research into your field and finding a gap in the market, or identifying client needs or social needs. Whether you are selecting from a list or going it alone, there are some key things you should consider when choosing your project.

What interests you and which areas you enjoy working on.

Of course, one of the best ways to choose a topic is to choose something you already enjoy working on and which links to an area that interests you. This will certainly help you get enthusiastic about your project right from the first moments. Be careful, though, to still ensure you look at an area that will have wider interest and appeal.

Your strengths and current skills or skills you want to develop.

Your final project should really play to your strengths. Choosing an area that is completely new to you could present you with unknown issues and problems and little time to fix them. However, while we recommend that the majority of your work is based on your strengths and current skills, this might be the final chance you have to include a new skill within your portfolio before you head out into the world beyond university. Think carefully about the balance you are trying to strike between pushing your limits and playing it safe.

Area, industry, future employment.

One really good way of thinking about which project you want to undertake is to think about how the work you are doing in your final project might link to a future career. Whether you are looking to work for a specific company or as a freelancer, having some work that leads towards this can really help. Be careful, though, not to make your portfolio too narrow to keep your options open.

Evolving areas.

Looking at what is hot and new in your area can also help stimulate ideas and help you to find innovative solutions. Look through magazines, journals, and websites related to your field and see if you can identify the big issues of the day and the emerging trends you might want to borrow from.

Available resources and time.

Now for the practical thoughts. While it's all well and good being super excited about your final project and how it links to your desired future work and plans, you also need to consider the resources you have at hand to complete the project. Do you have access to the right materials? Software? Equipment? Storage space? And most importantly, do you have enough time to complete your planned idea? Deadlines at university tend to be very strict (as they often are outside the university), and an unfinished or unsubmitted final project is never going to score well. Consider carefully how to plan your time (see more on that below) and how to manage your resources when choosing your final project.

## Having New Ideas

As noted above, some places will give you topics and projects to work from, other places will expect you to come up with your own. The tips on choosing a topic above will help with developing an idea from scratch, but let's look in more detail about how you might generate new ideas.

It is usually simple to identify a theme or a general area of interest. However, the process of arriving at an idea that goes beyond your own questioning of the world and developing the final form of a project is more difficult and requires you to narrow the area of general interest, making it more specific. First, let's look at how to have an idea for a theme, and then we will narrow it down. Start by thinking about your interests and motivation. This could be related to your future career, the most interesting book or article you've read, or perhaps a media company, type of content, technology, or platform you love. You may also want to consider your own knowledge—perhaps about a company you are with or have worked at, a job you have done, or a business, or a place you know well. Go back to look at what inspired you to join the programme. Another way to think of

a research topic is to think about your question as a problem. This means considering a problem where the solution is something that is debatable and to which there might be a number of different solutions, but which is also something that the wider research community (not just you) might want to know about. Once you have a bit of an area to look at, try one of the techniques below to start developing the topic and then use the checklist to ensure your idea meets all the criteria.

One final way to think about new ideas is to think not about the idea first but to think about the potential audiences or what might be called stakeholders. The main audience for your final project is of course your tutor, but the way you develop your ideas should take into account the

### **Make It, Break It: Try This Technique**

Start by spending one to two hours *making it*; that is, putting as many ideas as you can down on a page or on a digital workspace. Sketch designs, draw ideas, perhaps even cut and paste from other places. Visualise your ideas quickly and spontaneously and, most importantly, without judgement. Doodle, draw, sketch, collage, make. Pour all your thoughts and possibilities onto a page or screen, no matter how half-formed they are. Once your time is up, make sure you record this in some way—save your document or take a photo if you are working offline.

Now it is time to *break it*. Visual play allows you to discover new and surprising ways of presenting imagery and information. Take an idea or image produced in your ‘make it’ time and turn it on its head—cut it up; put pieces together in different ways; redraw elements; collage, combine, and juxtapose other imagery or visual reference; experiment with different media; make visual connections and discover coincidences. Now you can start to bring in some judgement: what works well? What doesn’t? Why do these things work? Who do they work for? You? A wider audience? Your lecturer?

Make sure you keep a record of both your making and your breaking, and use these as part of telling the overall story of how you reached your final project ideas.

### Free Writing: Try This Technique

Free writing is a prewriting technique in which you write continuously for a set period of time without thinking about spelling, grammar, or topic. It is really good for getting ideas going and to draw out thoughts from deeper in your mind. To do free writing:

1. Get a pen and paper.
2. Set a timer for two minutes (you can set it for longer, but start with two minutes).
3. When the timer starts, write everything that comes into your mind. Don't stop writing until the alarm sounds, don't censor yourself, don't worry about spelling, and don't stop to make corrections.
4. Once the time is up, take a breather.
5. Now look back at what you have written and pull out any useful ideas.

audience (or stakeholders) who would be involved if this was a project happening in the real world. This is not only good practice, but considering these audiences will also help you focus your project and ensure that it is grounded in real-world ideas and situations. This audience can be anyone from your client, customers, people interacting with your design work through packaging or branding, or those attending a gallery or show. It could also include project sponsors, project team members, vendors, resource owners, government officials and regulatory bodies, research supervisors, sponsors, and so on. Considering the stakeholders as a starting point can help focus your work on something that might have real impact and be linked to real work situations. Consider who will be affected by your project, or how they might affect the project from the outside. And, of course, don't forget that while your final project is looking at real work applications, you will also have to satisfy the academic stakeholders who are assessing your work; that means your supervisor, the university, the academic community, and any sponsors or invited guests that might be involved.

### ***Final Project Idea Checklist***

- My project is something that I, and other people, will care about.
- My project tries to solve a problem or puts a new spin on old ideas.
- I have enough time to undertake this project deeply and properly.
- I have enough resources to carry out this work (money, time, people).
- I am able to measure the outcomes of my project.

### **Working on the Project Itself**

How you work on your project itself might differ slightly depending on the topic, artefact, portfolio, or design you are creating, but there are always some key things to keep hold of throughout your working. The first of these is to ensure you keep your problem statement firmly in mind—that is the problem the project intends to solve or challenge. Try writing this on a coloured piece of paper and sticking it to your wall or laptop so you are reminded of it regularly. This will help to keep your focus and ensure that your project remains well bounded and focused. You might also like to add—perhaps in smaller writing—the aims and objectives you are trying to achieve. You should also keep a careful eye on your resources and access to specialist equipment—will you need to book things well in advance to ensure you have the software or tools you need when you need them? You don't want to be in a queue of students all trying to borrow or access the same tools in the week before submission. Careful planning of when you will do different aspects of your project and booking things well in advance will avoid a lot of frustration and worry. Coupled with this, you should ensure you know when any interim deadlines might occur. These might be crits, meetings with supervisors, or times when you are expected to submit parts of your work.

With a clear focus on what you are trying to achieve with your final project, and a good idea of when interim deadlines occur and when you need to access specialist equipment, you are well on your way to having a good plan of how to manage your time. However, a huge task like this can't be easily completed in one sitting—nor should it be—and seeing the final project on a to-do list is not only intimidating, but can also sap motivation from even the most enthusiastic of students. So alongside knowing your

**Tip:** There is a whole section on how to plan your time in another University of Westminster Press book called *The Media and Communications Study Skills Student Guide* (Specht 2019). This is available for free download too, so we recommend you go and take a look at that. In short, though, the key thing is to work out when you work best. People all work a little differently and at different times of the day. And different people have different levels of commitment. Some of you might still have taught classes alongside your final project, some might have sports clubs, families to look after, or jobs that you need to keep up in order to pay for your degree. There are plenty of things that can get in the way of working, and it does us a lot of good to identify them. In the study skills guide you will find a daily planner. We recommend downloading this and adding on all of your ‘can’t move’ commitments.

overarching timeframes, it is also important to manage your day-to-day time to ensure you can complete everything you set out to achieve with the final project.

## Challenges

### *Building a Routine*

Once you have established when you can’t work on your project, you should think about when you will work on it and try to build up something of a routine. You can work 24/7 so think about when you work best. Are you an early riser or a bit of a night owl? Will you need to be on campus for some days of the week or can you work fully remotely? Do you need to visit galleries or exhibition spaces that are only open at certain times? As you think about these things, add your working time to your planner. Perhaps a couple of hours each Monday, Thursday, and Friday when you work from home, coupled with a half day on Tuesday in the studio, on campus, or at an archive, and so on. Once you have worked out this plan, you should

stick as closely to it as possible. This will help ensure that every week you add something to your project and move creative ideas forwards even at times when you might feel a little tired or uninspired. This is also the first step in staving off procrastination and self-doubt.

### ***Expectations***

We all start our projects with very high expectations of what and when we will achieve things. These high expectations for ourselves, though, can actually get in the way of our work. Giving so much importance to the work you are about to do can make it much harder to get into the flow—or to stay there. You can become too self-critical, and this can stop you from working. One way to try and overcome this is to use the two-goal approach. When our expectations are too high, we don't feel comfortable setting realistic goals; we might feel we are not pushing ourselves hard enough. To solve this, we should set ourselves two sets of goals for each milestone of our work. A milestone might be 'by the end of the day' or 'by the end of the week' or even 'by the next crit', but they should have a deadline. One goal is a realistic one, the other is what we might call a stretch goal.

For example, the realistic goal might be to draw three ideas (or write one thousand words, or edit five minutes of video). The stretch goal might be to draw six ideas (or write fifteen hundred words, or edit eight minutes of video). So, if you manage to draw three ideas, you get that great feeling of achieving your goal and can rest easy. If, however, you manage more, that is a bonus—whoop!

This little psychological trick you play on yourself can help you manage the balance between high expectations and achievable goals. Not managing this balance can lead to your passion waning, because not meeting your own high expectations leads to disappointment. To deal with this, we succumb to other ideas and start doing things we know we can achieve—like watching a whole boxset in one sitting. This is something that can then become a habit. To avoid this, it is important to remember why the project interested you when you started it; and even when the topic isn't so interesting to you, it is important to keep going, to push through the desire to stop the project. Look back at your thoughts on your motivations to help you regain that focus. Pushing through the desire to stop and instead keeping on track with your work (and here comes the science part) actually

changes the neurological pathways in your brain, and repeatedly finishing projects rather than dropping them builds up good neural habits that will mean it gets easier and easier to stave off procrastination (Duhigg 2012).

### *Dealing with Isolation*

Perhaps one of the biggest fears and one of the realistic issues you have to face when working remotely is isolation. When it comes to things like your final project, you may well find yourself not speaking to people from your class for weeks at a time. Some of you might relish that idea and really enjoy working on your own; for others it can be a very unpleasant experience. Wherever you fall on that spectrum between wanting to work alone or with other people, it is important that you maintain contact with your course and your studio colleagues. Throughout the main part of your studies this will ensure you are engaged with the work set by lecturers and that you are involved in 'studio practice': that is, the way in which you spend time immersed in your creative work within the online and real studio spaces. This kind of studio time allows you to work individually but also collaboratively, with the guidance of teaching staff. Studio practice is designed to help stimulate new ideas, challenge old ideas, and advance your skills and competencies through informal discussion, feedback, and critique of your own and your peers' creative work. This is known as experiential learning or learning through making. It also offers the opportunity to meet and share with students from

**Tip:** One of the most awaited moments of making immersive experiences is when your project is ready. If you have to exhibit this online, there are a number of things that you should consider. Below are some tips from our colleagues at London College of Communication, and you can read more about their MA Virtual Reality degree show below.

1. Choose a platform that supports diverse content types.
2. Inform your audience as soon as possible about hardware, software, and access requirements.
3. Create a map of the world, just like in a regular gallery or museum.
4. Do advance testing.

other year groups in a safe and creative environment and is a highly important part of the process of making and doing. Later in your course when you are working on individual works, it is just as important to engage with your classmates as a sort of ongoing informal crit that helps ensure you are heading in the right direction with your work and plans. We have, of course, talked already about working together at a distance, and it is important to keep those ideas in mind and to take advantage of the opportunities this working style affords to also help overcome feelings of isolation.

### **Meet the Expert:**

## **How to Plan for an Online Showcase**

*Ana-Despina Tudor, course leader for MA Virtual Reality at London College of Communication.*

One of the most awaited moments of making immersive experiences is when your build is ready and you're able to play that experience for someone. But it is not always possible to get people into a single space to experience the immersive show you have curated for them.

One way to address this when we did our MA VR degree show at London College of Communication at the end of 2020 was to organise the showcase in virtual reality. What better way to demonstrate immersive and curatorial skills than make VR speak for itself? Our degree show team, led by Despoina Zachariadou, launched a mission to find ways to make student work accessible via commercial VR platforms, so that people could look at the work remotely. After considering various options, we decided on VRChat, a well-known social VR platform that allows users to create (private or open) interactive worlds themselves.

Below is a summary of what we've learned and believe is relevant when making a virtual showcase.

### **Choose a platform that supports diverse content types**

Some of our students created games, others art experiences, and others created open world-like experiences full of interactions with characters and assets. We asked students to decide as early as possible what elements from their experience they'd like to bring into

the VRChat world. Some chose to bring in 3D assets that could be closely inspected. Others chose to bring 3D characters that visitors could use as avatars while exploring the show. Others chose to show game captures that we displayed on large 2D screens inside the virtual world.

**Inform your audience as soon as possible about hardware, software, and access requirements**

We decided to use the most known social VR platform because it can be used on a desktop and on all major headsets. To simplify access, we created a guide on how to download and install the app, how to register, and then how to access the world. We chose to keep the world private to avoid unwanted interactions on the evening of the event.

**Create a map of the world, just like in a regular gallery or museum.**

At the spawn point in the world, we had a map of all exhibits, and we assigned someone on our team to be the host and ensure that all guests would be welcomed and shown around. We opted for a relatively open space, with very few walls, so that all projects were visible all the time.

**Pretest the world in advance.**

Like any other immersive media project, a VRChat world can fail to open or work as intended. Our team leader spent a good deal of time pretesting and trying out various combinations of student assets that would make the world just about the right size to load and function optimally.

Despite a lack of face-to-face interaction, virtual worlds like VRChat allow users to speak to each other and interact seriously or in fun ways by dancing or embodying diverse avatars. This was a plus for our exhibition, where we had the chance to enjoy ourselves and be silly while being very serious about the VR projects that were presented. On top of this, the VR world remains there, accessible on demand even now, which is another plus compared to any other physical exhibition.



*Christmas Eve*

## PART 3

# ***Case Studies and Advice from Students and Staff Working in the Hybrid Studio***

*In this section of the book, we call on lecturers, technicians, professors, and industry experts, as well as former and current students to share their experiences and tips for working in the hybrid studio and being creative in the digital world. These tips and ideas come from those working at the cutting edge of online studio work, and will help you understand the ways different people, subject areas, and universities might operate. They will also help guide you through thinking about what you might like to do after you graduate and how you too can stay at the cutting edge of technology and hybrid creative environments.*

## From Hybrid Student to Hybrid Life

*Emily Fraser,*  
*design director, Edinburgh*

*In the first of our contributions, we are going to hear from Emily Fraser about how her experience of undertaking a hybrid course at the University of Edinburgh has transformed the way she works and manages a large team of creatives in the hybrid world. Emily completed her master's degree in 2020, studying part-time while working. Emily is a design director based in Edinburgh with thirteen years of experience and wanted to pursue her passion for innovative digital design, branding, and motion design, while also continuing to work.*



I have been hybrid working for a number of years now. Like many, this change in work pattern was thrust upon me during COVID-19. Before this, working from home always came with issues: concerns over productivity and whether work could be done from home.

While many were sceptical about the move online, as someone who had studied in a hybrid environment, I knew it could work. What's more, for creatives, a blend of working locations I can only see as a benefit. There are definite requirements for face-to-face contact, and you are always going to benefit from serendipitous moments being in the same room as others. However, for focused time to think, research, and ideate, being in a different location and working in a hybrid way can be really beneficial and help with lateral thinking!

I have now progressed into a leadership role, which means more influence over the business as well as leading a team of creatives. Again, there are benefits in meeting face to face with the rest of the leadership team, but equally, we're able to communicate regularly using Teams and Zoom. I think the main thing is keeping some sort of communication open. You can have focused time while working from home (or from a cafe!) but as long as you are able to communicate with your team you can maintain productivity.

It also has had a huge benefit on how staff can work around their personal lives. We have adopted a flexible work pattern at my agency that means you can work your full-time hours any time between 7am and 10pm, Monday to Friday. This adaptable work pattern means we can work our hours when our clients need it, and also we can work around our personal commitments too. Largely this has led to happier staff who have more autonomy, more flexibility, and more time to be creative!

I believe a key benefit to this has been the ability to make the whole company a lot greener! Nature seems to be increasingly in the forefront of people's minds, whether that was from people appreciating woodlands and beaches near them more so than ever (given that was the only thing you could do for a while!) to scientists being able to hear for the first time the nuances of whales' communications to one another in the sea with less noise pollution from boats and ships. A deeper connection to nature has come to fruition.

Not being forced into an office at the same time as all the other people in a city has meant less unnecessary pollution, less frustrating commutes,

less travelling to meet clients, and more time learning about your local area, perhaps giving more to local businesses and cafes rather than buying a Tesco meal deal every lunchtime because you're never *that* organised to prepare lunch the night before!

Another great thing has been online events. I attended a few webinars on design and leadership, and through this met an incredible designer who has become a friend, mentor, and someone I visited last summer for two weeks in Amsterdam and worked with in her studio. It feels like more opportunities, more inspiration, and an openness to more possibilities has come from this more flexible way of working.





## Hybrid Group Working: Plus ça change...?

**John Lee,**

*professor of digital media, University of Edinburgh*

*In the previous contribution, Emily talks about the importance of working in teams in her professional practice. We all know that working in teams can be really tricky, especially when working in a hybrid way. As we have seen throughout this book so far, though, group work is a really important part of the creative process, especially when working in the online studio. Group work forms an important part of crits, of design thinking, and of being part of a cohort of students. In the next of our expert contributions, Professor John Lee provides some thoughts on what it means to be a student undertaking hybrid group working, noting some of the challenges and drawing on his experiences to offer some advice and tips for getting it right, and also enjoying both the synchronous and asynchronous group work approach.*

In many learning contexts, group working is important. It can help develop skills in communication and coordination with others, in cooperative planning, working to deadlines and understanding how the strength of a team depends on the effective combination of the strengths of its members. These are critical elements of education, because in real life, outside the academic setting, working in groups and teams is pervasive. However, in online and hybrid learning, group work is often neglected, perhaps because it appears to raise significant and special difficulties.

Some of the difficulties are practical. Simply communicating can be an issue: students may be widely separated in space and hence also in time. We are now accustomed to tools such as Zoom, Teams, FaceTime, and so on, but these are tools of synchronous communication and may need to be supplemented. However, this need also arises from the need to coordinate work on a joint task, which typically exists in group work: the creation of a joint outcome such as a design project or simply a document. It's important to have some means of tracking changes and contributions. Tools to help with this are also now commonplace, whether the collaboration features of Microsoft Office or version-control systems like Subversion and GitHub, but the challenge is to use them effectively. This presents a two-dimensional learning task, where one dimension is the functionality of the tools themselves, and the other is the ability to break down complex goals in a way that can exploit the tools effectively. The second dimension is the more difficult, and this reveals that group work in hybrid learning is actually not so different from the fully on-campus scenario.

Students working together in person are able to meet and discuss problems and approaches, but then they need ways to track and enact the decisions they come to. Also, they often turn out to be working much of the time in their individual flats or residences and communicating online. The tools and techniques needed are the same. The Miro board (or Google Workspace, and so on) tends to supplant the sketchpad. If some students in the group are at a distance, in time or space, the practical difference it makes may be quite minimal. If some of the students have, perhaps, very different working schedules—needing to work mainly in the evening and at weekends—this will impact on in-person working probably even more than on online working: different working patterns need to be considered, independently of whether students are online. The central learning task for all students remains that of fitting the project, whatever it is, to the capabilities of the team and the tools.

The problems here may be great and are well known. Differences of temperament, skill sets, culture and language, working schedules—all these can derail the working of groups. They are the principal causes of failure in group working, especially when groups break down altogether. They occur commonly enough whether or not groups have an online element. Exercises in fostering team spirit, identifying and exploiting leadership skills, negotiating activity patterns, developing a strong commitment to the success of the project, and understanding the implications of group assessment may all be valuable, but there is little evidence that they require a substantially different approach for online or hybrid groups.

In the contemporary world, essentially all communication makes extensive use of technology, whether between family members, friends, classmates, or workmates. Group working is a crucial skill, or collection of skills, relying in any setting on effective use of a variety of technologies. Hybrid learning can be arguably an even more effective framework for acquiring these skills than direct in-person learning. The undeniable difficulties it presents are not at all unique and are better seen as important learning opportunities with applications in all areas of working life. All group work is challenging, but also rewarding: it should be seen as a natural context for bringing in-person and online learners together into a hybrid environment that offers profound enrichment to both.



A photograph of three people in a meeting. On the left, a man with glasses is partially visible. In the center, a woman with glasses is smiling and looking towards the right. On the right, another woman is looking towards the center, holding a pen. They are sitting at a desk with a laptop, a cup, and some papers. A large window in the background shows a cityscape.

## Teamwork: Communities of Inquiry and Collaborative Inquiry

**Professor Neil Mulholland,**

*chair of contemporary art practice and theory, Edinburgh College of Art*

*In this expert contribution, we are going to hear from Professor Neil Mulholland on the meaning of community of practice, online and blended learning, and the creative blending of physical and virtual space. Professor Mulholland has been working on developing a community of inquiry (CoI) model for his courses for some time. A community of inquiry begins when peers form a community of practice. Such a community comes into existence to establish and complete a programme of propositional, practical, experiential, and presentational collaborative inquiry. The process of collaborative inquiry may be integrated around any research method or theme that a community can agree to focus on. This will often be a composite of the group's personal learning projects.*

In my degree programme, we use the term ‘collaborative inquiry’ rather than Heron’s (1985; 1996) ‘co-operative inquiry’—which is a term you might have already heard. I use collaborative rather than cooperative, since collaborative is more commonly used in art than cooperative (Mulholland n.d.-a). Community of inquiry, however, is an equally apt way describing what we are aiming for.

In a community of inquiry, peers pool learning resources and their research. As part of a community of inquiry, it is important to share learning resources that you encounter as much as possible. Share with your group (where relevant) and share with the whole programme cohort (where relevant). Pooling and sharing such resources help to support collaborative inquiry.

### **Scaffolding Communities of Inquiry: Learning Sprints**

I provide support, facilitation, and scaffolding for students in online and blended learning environments by creating ‘learning sprints’ (Mulholland n.d.-b.). The learning sprints are for blended learning on the degree programme I run, but they can (and sometimes do) function entirely online.

I applied some of the lessons I learned as the founder of Shift/Work to create my own model of the learning sprint for art education (rather than design thinking), situating this in relation to ‘Clean Coaching’, Australian ‘agile schools’ (Breakspear n.d.), and the Open Domains movement. My learning sprint model combines organisational learning with learner-centred approaches (such as the jigsaw classroom, peer-to-peer production, and problem-based learning). The jigsaw and problem-based approaches have proven to be invaluable as a means of decolonising the curriculum.

I wanted to craft my own learning sprint model to rapidly ideate timely disciplines that are open to different ways of thinking and new ideas. For example, in October 2021 I composed a learning sprint called ‘Weird Studies’—an open educational resource (OER) on a speculative ‘scholarly field that doesn’t and can’t exist.’ Imagining an (impossible?) discipline enabled students to gain kaleidoscopic views of accepted ‘research’ cultures within the academy. The idea here was to investigate non/knowledge boundary formations and gain insight into where and how forms of anti- and counter-knowledge—such as current conspiracy theories (Berkowitz, 2020)—are produced, disseminated, and challenged.

The Weird Studies OER hosts a nascent Weird-o-Verse of potential forms of weird study or weird subject matter. Indeed, the whole Weird Studies sprint is a collage of materials that might enable the field to materialise (or not). For example, the bookends of the OER incorporate elements of live action role-playing (LARP) workshops by the Inter-Actions research unit (LUCA School of Arts) and the augmented reality game (ARG) designer Reed Berkowitz: *The Wonder Machine* and *Guided Apophenia* from *Blend&Bleed: On Transreality and Pervasive Play*.<sup>1</sup> Both workshops serve as contemporary examples of weird practice that we can all experience through participating in them. It also incorporates a number of writing workshops that I had created. The writing workshops are focused on forms of *fabulation* and *fictioning* that I use in my own work.

### From Blended Learning to Bleeding Learning

Now, the ‘blend’ aspect of Blend&Bleed is clearly related to how we use *blend* in relation to learning, but for me at least, *bleed* is more important. The *bleed* between meatspace and hyperspace is what we should be focused on when it comes to learning design in art. For me, that means trying to create a post-studio programme that is open (OER) yet is able to mix analogue and digital in ways that don’t just lapse back into augmented reality or skeumorphic *soup du jour*. Speculative play is crucial, and bleeding invites this.

The online symposium Blend&Bleed was committed to showing the fragility of that boundary and to understanding collective dynamics in the construction of real and fictive worlds. Hosted by the Inter-Actions research unit of LUCA School of the Arts C-mine, it linked to their research on the hybridisation of performance and online gaming. The workshops and conversations conjured synergies among the fields of game design, performance, LARP, and media theory. With a strong focus on interactive formats, Blend&Bleed presented playful experiments around digital

<sup>1</sup> Carina Erdman, ‘Classroom: Blend&Bleed: On Transreality and Pervasive Play’, e-flux Education, 6 August 2021, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/411750/classroom-blend-bleed-on-transreality-and-pervasive-play/>

presence as well as the psychological, social, and political implications of distance. It looked at the critical use or abuse of game-like structures to sketch the world we live in—now reconfigured as ‘Gamespace’.

My aim is to keep developing my own collections of sprint learning and making tools that we can take out of the classroom or studio and keep working with at home and away. There’s not much point in working with tools that are only ever available in the campus classroom or studio if you want to figure out how to integrate art with the wider world around us (a *transreality* that is bleeding). Moreover, a post-studio practice is one that has to be able to function without (over)relying on the studio/workshop environment (Mulholland 2020).

# The Fashion Studio in the Hybrid Environment

**Juliette MacDonald,**

*chair of craft history and theory, Edinburgh College of Art*

*Marisa Giannasi, co-founder and director, Method Studio, Shanghai International College of Fashion and Innovation*

*Anika Hoppel, lecturer in fashion (SCF/ECA), Edinburgh College of Art*

*Will Nolan, architect, interior designer, tutor, and lecturer at Glasgow, Dundee, Edinburgh, Hong Kong, Wuhan, Beijing, and Shanghai*

*We have heard some really useful and exciting information from experts who work in a hybrid studio environment. It is important, though, to remember that not all subjects work in the same way. Different disciplines will have slightly different ways of working and understanding the online studio and will have different expectations of you as a student. Over the next few contributions, we are going to hear from lecturers and teachers from different subject areas about how they approach the online studio and the tips they might have for their students. Even if these aren't the subjects you are studying, they are worth reading to help get a feel of different ways of using the hybrid studio and the amazing things that can be done when the creative and online come together.*

*The first area we are going to look at is fashion, with a case study that brings together experts from Shanghai International College of Fashion, Edinburgh College of Art, and those working in architecture and fashion design.*



Shanghai International College of Fashion and Innovation (SCF) is a joint institute between the University of Edinburgh and Donghua University. In 2020, flying academics from Edinburgh were unable to travel to the Shanghai campus where all the students were located. In 2021, flying academics and some of the international students were unable to travel to Shanghai. From March 2022, the on-campus students were unable to attend classes in the studio and had to work from their dormitories. So all our teaching has to be suitable for a wide range of time zones and locations, as well as hybrid, synchronous, and asynchronous teaching.

Some of the key priorities in nurturing creative thinking in the design studio involve diluting student inhibition and supporting self-confidence and expression, creating a forum for student development to thrive through the encouragement of self-critical experimentation by embracing challenges.

For fashion, this involved a wide range of design development workshops. Where there is studio access on our Shanghai campus, a session often begins with a short lecture, followed immediately by a corresponding workshop asking students to produce physical work in real time, such as an abstract 3D paper model inspired by their visual research. This can be followed by a sketching exercise based on this model. This style of delivery requires an engaged team of experienced teaching assistants on-site in Shanghai, who help with language issues (which at times are exacerbated when using online delivery) and facilitate students showing their work to UK-based staff on camera, or alternatively sending images via WeChat for immediate feedback.

During Shanghai lockdown, teaching focused on digital outcomes, with workshops that brought dorm-bound students together online, in one instance encouraging them to exchange visuals and build potential portfolio pages for each other—thus providing social interaction and a fresh look at their own work as seen by others.

For interior design, online screen-sharing successfully brought students in more direct communication with the teacher's field of vision, effectively guiding the student's hands through overdrawing their sketching. This process helped students to feel they were working to individual benchmarks rather than gauging their progression against the rest of the class. As a result, conversations became notably more open and often tangential. Using screen-sharing to open access media platforms like YouTube proved to be an effective illustrative tool, as it is far easier to make a point about effects like diffused or chiaroscuro lighting by showing a video of

Billie Eilish or clips from Indiana Jones films. This helped complex ideas to be readily understood.

To bond and motivate the first-year class in lockdown, we also used Miro as an online collaborative workspace so the students could view and interact with the work of their peers. At the start of each class, we would set a sociable question on Zoom such as ‘What is your favourite film?’ The students would answer using the chat feature to show attendance. This encouraged group chat, and feedback reflected that they enjoyed feeling connected with their class group and teacher.

The students had limited materials and a small amount of space in which to complete their work. We encouraged them to develop hybrid techniques of their own: embracing the use of digital or hand-drawn grids where there were no scale-rulers, or iPads when there was no space to draw. To ensure submission requirements were achievable for every student, regardless of circumstance, we adjusted the final deliverables to materials that were readily available to everyone. For example, using simple paper models with Procreate tablet drawing tools to produce final presentation-quality imagery.

Feedback from all the students at SCF has been good in terms of attendance, the work produced, and their comments. We are looking forward to developing our ideas further.





## **Animation in the Digital Studio**

***Eleonora Asparuhova,***

*lecturer in animation, School of Digital Arts,  
University of Manchester*

*Animation is the art of telling stories in ways live action has yet to achieve, even in the era of mind-blowing visual effects and virtual worlds so beautifully used. But not to see filmmaking and animation as intertwining media is to disregard the importance of knowing how to walk before you can run. We now hear from Eleonora Asparuhova on what it means to be an animator.*

To be an animator is to be knowledgeable in all aspects of media production—from storytelling, concepting, and directing, through editing and post-production. This renders animation a complex craft. However, it accurately summarises the lifelong journey of learning animation.

Being an animator means using craft and imagination to tell powerful stories. Often, animators say that if you can grab a camera and film something, then why animate it at all? In other words, if something can be told well in live action, why make it an animation? This is an exceptionally valid question each novice animator needs to keep in mind when delving into the world of animation.

Studying animation is a continuous journey—we learn through doing and improve by making mistakes. Like any other skill, improvement comes with practice. The difference in animation is that, depending on the technique chosen, refining one's skills varies significantly from one animator to the other. Therefore, a set of what I refer to as 'animation must-have' skills needs to be developed, as these become handy in your training regardless of the technique.

**Being curious** is more than just watching animations. Curiosity develops our critical thinking, which in return enhances the way we question and analyse what we see and how we apply that knowledge when developing our own work. There is no better way to get your colour scheme right than to look at colours in nature. To enhance the feeling of a shot, observe the way light passes through the leaves of trees or how the sunset reflects off the windowed surface of a skyscraper.

**Watch films.** Film language is crucial in animation storytelling. Knowing the rules helps you to break them. Cinematography in film-making is a wonderful reference resource for layouts. Animation borrows a lot from film—through framing, angles, and light (German Expressionism to Tim Burton), to performance and pace in action, and vice versa (Hayao Miyazaki to the Wachowskis).

**Engage in life drawing.** Drawing from life develops our observational skills and sharpens our attention to detail. In addition to refining your craft skills, life drawing develops patience, muscle memory, and anatomy knowledge. From simple thumbnailing in pre-production to final composition in post, observational skills help to interpret influences and visual references into your own work. Knowing body proportions and human and animal anatomy helps with the process of character stylisation.

**Read books.** Reading develops our imagination. When reading (as opposed to watching) we create pictures in our minds. Allow your brain to question how and why a specific image is formed when reading—be aware of the context, as understanding and acknowledging this helps to enhance the meaning of your story and character backgrounds. Being curious leads to recognising relevant references, which observational and craft skills (when developed well) help visualise strongly.

**Combine your storytelling with technical knowledge.** Always keep up to date with animation software through training and practice. It is not enough to watch and take notes. The best way to learn new technical skills is to set yourself a project. A common mistake students make is to get too comfortable with a specific software—as much as the final vision and story matter, it is crucial to explore how new technologies and software can push your story and visuals further, which in return stimulates your imagination.

Animation is never really mastered—the beauty of it is that it is a never-ending source of learning and inspiration. The earlier animators understand this, the sooner they become critical animators, advancing their craft.

Knowing the difference between what makes animation ‘animation’ and how this is used to our advantage as storytellers is what starts the journey of your training in this craft. Because everything is possible in animation, right?





## The Digital Clay Studio

*Professor Clare Twomey MBE,*

*University of Westminster*

*Even where animation projects take a more traditional approach, using drawings and models, the hybrid environment allows for increased global collaborative work, digitisation of films, and more rapid distribution. An area that might be harder to think about in terms of the online studio is working with 3D objects, although this is a question for animators too. The sculpting and crafting by hand of artefacts seems to be something that would be hard to enhance through the online studio. However, as we will see from the comments by Professor Clare Twomey MBE, the online studio can be a vital part of helping in the design, development, and sharing of 3D objects. Clare works in clay but also in other visual media and creates exciting site-specific work. Let's hear how she uses the digital studio to enhance her practice.*

Clay is a hugely versatile material that you can make small or large sculptures and objects with. It can be fired and glazed, or it can be used as an unfired material for artistic and development uses such as 3D sketching ideas.

Clay has a history that spans millennia of use and is highly accessible either at home or in the university, and the digital age has opened up even more possibilities. Even when embracing these new digital possibilities, one of the main practical aspects of using clay is what kind of clay is best for your project. Do you need a clay that you can hand-build easily with, such as a grogged clay, which is gritty and sandy to help with structure, or do you need to use a fine porcelain to create delicate surfaces and forms? Terracotta clays have a long history of use in tile-making as well as domestic ware.

Once you find a clay that is good for your project, then making is the fun part, as clay responds so easily to your hands, and you can start straight away on any tabletop! You will need some basic equipment to help you make your work over a few days or weeks, depending on the project. Let's start by taking the example of a portrait or bust of a friend. You will need a board to make on; this can be a wooden board, which traditionally offers a good surface to work on. If you are making your 3D portrait life-size, you could use a technique called *coiling*, which is where you build up layers of rolled clay much like you can build a vase. Once you have the basic shape made, you can start to build on the surface to create the shape of the face in detail. You can use your hands to model, or you can use simple tools such as a spoon and the end of a fork for details. If you are working on the 3D portrait over several days, remember to cover your unfinished work loosely with a plastic sheet (a recycled carrier bag will do) at all times you are not working on it, to allow the clay to stay moist and not crack due to fast drying.

Once you have finished the clay work, you have a couple of choices: you can allow it to dry slowly or fire it in a kiln. Firing the clay allows it to become stone-like and strong. From this point, you can then either paint it using acrylic paints or you can glaze it. If you decide not to fire the clay work, it can be painted but it will remain very fragile.

We often think of clay as being a material that can only work if we are using our hands, and we might wonder how we can use clay in a hybrid and digital environment. The work of artist Rodolfo Fanti, a London-based Italian artist and professional digital sculptor for the film industry,

challenges this preconception. Fanti's work explores the nature of clay, but does this through the use of digital tools to create models that possess many of the visual characteristics of clay but entirely in the digital world.

From the alternative perspective, when you have finished creating clay objects with your hands in a physical studio, it is possible to use 3D scanning technologies to make digital replicas of these objects. This is something the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has done extensively to help preserve rare and delicate objects for future generations. You can consider using similar techniques to allow you to insert your real, handmade clay objects into the digital world, or to share them in a 3D portfolio.

Clay can be used to make your ideas real, so, experiment and enjoy this material. One of the biggest joys of clay is how much you can experiment with it, recycle it, and do it all again!



A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a light blue sweater, is focused on adjusting a white fabric garment on a mannequin. The mannequin has a wooden head and is marked with '12' and 'K'. The background shows a well-lit fashion design studio with several other mannequins and racks of fabric. The scene is captured in a soft, natural light, emphasizing the textures of the fabrics and the concentration of the woman.

## Digitally Communicating the Tactile Properties of Textiles

***Dr Lucy Robertson,***

*assistant professor of design and programme director of studies, MA Fashion and Textiles Design, MSc Fashion and Textile Management, School of Textiles Design, Heriot-Watt University*

*Grace Smith, teaching technician, Textile Design (Print), School of Textiles Design, Heriot-Watt University*

*Clay isn't the only medium that can be adapted to the hybrid environment. Working with textiles is also an area that has been transformed by the digital age. We now hear from Lucy Robertson and Grace Smith from Heriot-Watt University on how we can embrace the hybrid in textile-making.*

Digital portfolios have become increasingly important over the last ten years, and many textile design courses, including the long-standing Bradford Textile Design Competition, have moved from physical to digital submissions.<sup>1</sup>

Textiles invite you to touch them to understand their tactility and handle. This presents a challenge for students to convert them from their multisensory physical state to an engaging and exciting digital representation. This requires good photography, clear contextualisation, and evocative surrounding information. We have provided a few recommendations for students to consider when capturing their work:

- Natural light: set up a small photography studio with whiteboards/walls and natural light.
- Use plain backgrounds to avoid distracting from your work.
- Clear photography: a phone camera can take detailed images and help keep your file-size down.
- Set up a makeshift tripod to keep your camera still.
- Show them being handled. You can show elements of the handle by showing them in your hands.
- Contextualise your work, pin on mannequins, drape on chairs, hang in spaces.
- Add key words to communicate your idea and tell your design story.
- Combine physical with digital: create a physical board or physical elements and combine with your digital work.
- Embed or link to videos of your work moving, scrunching, and being handled. Include the sound to give full sensory experience.

A digital portfolio can sit alongside social media to enhance the student's professional communication and provide access to a global audience. Students can communicate to a wide range of audiences through the use of well-shot photography and videos of work in progress, as well as sharing final outcomes focusing on communication of key elements such as scale, tactility, and end use. This sneak peek inside the students' 'studio' highlights their design process. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic inspired the creation of several programme-led Instagram accounts, which in turn added to the digital community and sense of belonging at university (Stommel 2020).

1 Bradford Textile Society, <https://bradfordtextilesociety.org.uk>

Work can also be presented on digital platforms such as Miro. Miro boards can be used as digital degree show spaces or areas for design crits echoing real-world studio spaces. The Miro platform (like others out there, such as Padlet) provides the chance for feedback via digital 'Post-it notes', bringing the human touch back into digital communication, subsequently creating community (Morris 2020) and a sense of belonging (O'Keefe 2013) for student and educator that can be easily lost when working digitally.

This digital representation has never been more important for students to consider giving them a global reach. Textile design programmes now expect a mixture of physical and digital submissions, allowing the student to learn additional skills that may not have been part of courses in the past. In addition, we are witnessing more digital degree shows alongside physical displays of work, not only providing skill sets in digital and physical presentation and communication but also the chance to promote to local, national, and global audiences simultaneously.





# M E M O R I A L R A M E S S E U M

## Reflecting on a Digital Project and Hybrid and Online Learning

*Mingli Ma,*

*master's graduate, University of Edinburgh*

*While some students push the boundaries of traditional media through the use of digital, others are pushing even what digital can itself do. Let's hear from Mingli Ma, a digital media design student, about a cutting-edge experimental exploration with lidar and the experience of hybrid learning.*

Linear Experience

The theme of the inevitable decline of rulers in Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias', inspired by the Ramesseum, inspired me to focus on the decline of civilisation. To commemorate people who suffered and civilisations destroyed by war, this immersive interactive work displays war-related death data since 3000 BC through the dynamics of the Ramesseum with the technologies of lidar scanning and a point cloud. I hope this work can visualise through digital means the destruction of mankind and civilisation brought about by war, so that people can intuitively feel the disaster caused by war through seeing the changes in the components of the Ramesseum and thus reflect on war.

Lidar technology can rigorously transform a physical building into a digital model, which can accurately restore the appearance of the original building. This makes the project more convincing. At the same time, this increases the efficiency of the entire working process. I do not need to spend a lot of time on measurement and modelling. In addition, the file format formed by this technology can be connected with a lot of different software after conversion and is highly editable, which is convenient for me to change and control it on the software I am familiar with. I also used point cloud technology, converted it into editable particles with CloudCompare, and used Unity's VFX technology to change the material, colour, and movement of the particles, and use the mouse to control the interaction.

Lidar can create editable digital models. This inspired me to cut and piece together different models in the same digital space. At the same time, its editability makes me think of changing the colour and shape of the model, which reminds me whether different colours and shapes can have different symbolic meanings related to the theme. The main challenge I faced was how to connect the model scanned by the lidar with the interactive software (Unity VFX) so that various parameters of the model could be controlled in real time to achieve the purpose of interaction. Also, in terms of vision, what I expected was not just to change the overall shape and colour of the digital model, but also to enable it to move, such as converge, disperse, or float like waves. In addition, I needed to convert a large amount of war-related death data into specific parameters, such as particle number, colour, and intensity of movement. I needed to do some trial and error to find the most visually appropriate criteria and convert them uniformly.


I am happy to say that I achieved the desired effect. I collected a lot of war-related death data and found a plug-in that can combine lidar scan files with Unity, which allows me to control the visual parameters of the model. I hope that lidar can be further optimised in terms of docking with interactive programming. At present, CloudCompare, software that generates point clouds from lidar scanning, does not have the function of creating interactive functions. Therefore, I needed to generate a point cloud model in CloudCompare first, then export the file and transfer it to interactive programming software such as Unity for complex editing and interaction, and they are connected by plug-ins. It would be much more convenient if the point cloud generation and editing interaction could be completed in one application.

Advanced technologies helped me to enrich the method of digital production. For example, with regard to lidar technology, I don't just draw a sketch first and then start modelling, but can directly get an editable model with accurate dimensions. At the same time, advanced technology can quickly give me visual inspiration. I can easily change the colour of the model, and I can quickly make various attempts and compare the results of each attempt to find the optimal effect.

As a way to share my work with others, the choice of advanced technology means that there are more possibilities for the creation and expression of works and more opportunities to gain attention. For creative people, especially those related to digital media, the way of creation is very technology-dependent. Nowadays, technology is developing very rapidly, so the newer technology represents more novel works. In addition, it has to be admitted that advanced technologies are often more eye-catching because of their freshness. When searching for how to use new technology, you should always think about how to add new ideas to create unique and original works.

As a student who graduated from a hybrid programme, I can share that being able to see students from all over the world in real time through broadcasting software is stimulating and inspiring. The teachers can share different resources and links with us in real time through online teaching software, and we can view them synchronously at any time. In addition, the content of the class is often recorded, which is convenient for us to check after class.



A hand is holding a black smartphone over a desk. The phone's screen displays the iOS home screen with various app icons. The desk is covered with several sheets of paper containing hand-drawn sketches and notes. One sketch shows a mobile phone interface with a yellow circle around the home button and the text 'ADD ACTION' written in green. Other sketches include a 'VIDEO' interface, a 'WHEEL' interface, a 'KEYBOARD' interface, a 'SEARCH' interface (circled in orange), a 'LISTS' interface, and a 'HEADER' interface. There are also some handwritten notes in yellow and black ink, including 'Mind/People & Inside The' and 'Info' circled in yellow.

## Design for Meaningful Collaboration in an Online Environment: A Choreography of Hybrid Activities and Digital Platforms

***Diony Kypraiou,***

*Ro Spankie, and Alastair Blyth, University of Westminster*

*Something that is special about working in the hybrid environment is the opportunities that it can present for collaborative work with people from other disciplines. You might find yourself working with historians, geographers, or scientists to create new ways of sharing ideas and information. Let's hear about an exciting project where different groups of students have come together to use the hybrid environment to create some amazing results.*

The story you are about to read reflects on a unique cross-disciplinary collaboration that explored the relationship between design, mental health, and well-being, by enabling 640 students and 40 tutors from the medical school at Imperial College London and the School of Architecture and Cities at University of Westminster to co-produce in a shared online environment. Three years in the planning, the project consisted of two one-day workshops, during which sixty-four cross-disciplinary groups of students studied four mental health conditions and proposed solutions for the design of existing NHS healthcare sites. Drawing on both its planning and delivery, this case study discusses how online hybrid activities and digital platforms, when choreographed with care, may deepen students' understanding of meaningful collaboration, while positively reframing their individual agency in becoming 'experts by experience'.

To facilitate the project's ambitious scale and enable a genuine, shared experience of co-production, each workshop was planned around a series of tangible collaborative tasks that aimed at stimulating discussion and highlighting the importance of 'hands-on skills' in both disciplines involved—medicine and architecture. To enable organisation in terms of delivery, each group of 160 students were assigned to one of four mental health conditions (dementia, stroke, neurodevelopment, family therapy), subdivided within functional groups consisting of ten students from both institutions and supervised by two teaching teams made up of clinician and architecture tutors.

During both the planning and delivery phase of the sessions, a choreography of scales, degrees of interactivity, and a multiplicity of digital platforms were required to enable participants to work remotely across multiple time zones and collaborate synchronously within their design groups. More specifically, students were challenged to co-create word-clouds of what co-production meant to them, produce image mappings of their emotional responses onto different sites, and represent in modelling clay what an ideal mental healthcare space should smell, feel, sound, and taste like. The diverse and hybrid nature of the pre-planned activities and the coordination of a wealth of digital platforms, available to students in the digital environment, generated discussions on the power of co-creation and co-production. The workshops involved degrees of interaction with stakeholders that supported the exchange of knowledge from both disciplines by providing online archival resources as well as feedback in a timely manner, including keynote speakers presenting live, pre-recorded

interviews with clinicians, patients, carers, service users, and plenaries and Q&A panels offering advice from architects, clinicians, and patient advocates.

The variety of online platforms and educational tools deployed enabled different layers of interaction and participation at a larger scale within each mental health condition and at a smaller scale within each group of ten students. This translated in each health condition having its own Zoom plenary space, each group its own Zoom break-out room for individuals to discuss, and each group co-creating using their dedicated online collaborative whiteboard (a Miro board).

Designed with a provocative mix of text and images to signpost the timetable of each session, the order and instructions on activities, and links to pre-recorded videos of keynote speakers, as well as video tours of the sites, the Miro boards enabled participants to work remotely across multiple time zones and collaborate actively within the sixty-four cross-disciplinary design groups. While individuals in each group could share ideas, work out solutions in text, images, and diagrams in a rather organic and intuitive way, parallel WhatsApp groups were set up for individuals to have informal conversations akin to physical body language, compensating for the lack of physical presence. Finally, a wealth of other digital platforms was used during sessions, such as Panopto to redirect participants to pre-recorded audio-visual resources, as well as Mentimeter and Wordcloud to provide immediate participation and allow for the collection of answers to questions raised in real time.

Following reflections from students and staff involved, this online partnership between the two universities transformed existing pedagogies in both disciplines and was identified as an extremely rewarding experience. As an online co-design paradigm, it offered an immersive learning experience and supported students to develop complex transferable skills relevant to future practice. After all, if 640 ambitious, inquisitive, and talented young architects and medics go out into the world with an enhanced knowledge of collaboration, creativity, and communication that reaches across disciplines, time zones, and digital and interactive platforms, they will be better placed to address the issues of tomorrow.





## Deliberately Working Online

***Professor Sarah Kettley,***

*chair of material and design innovation,  
School of Design, University of Edinburgh*

*We have seen a few specific examples now, but understanding how the courses you might take are developed can be very useful in helping you consider which course you might like to study. In this next expert tip, Professor Sarah Kettley, who is chair of material and design innovation in the School of Design at the University of Edinburgh, talks about designing courses around working deliberately online.*

I have most recently been involved in two courses, designed to be delivered either entirely online, or through a 'fusion' model. The first of these courses, Design Identities, has been designed to fit into a flexible curriculum in a school of design in Scotland, in which students can arrange their own work placements in Year 3 (the degrees are four years long here). If a student successfully arranges a placement outside the city, they need to be able to make up twenty credits remotely—this course offers that option.

This course introduces undergraduate design students to skills in service design and design thinking. For the students I have been teaching, these ask for new forms of practice. Students are enrolled on degrees in, for example, fashion, graphics, interior design, or textiles, and are more accustomed to elective courses being lecture- and seminar-based (the school's version of contextual studies). This course is different in that it asks students to build new skills through practice in online shared studio spaces such as Miro, responding to small weekly tasks and building towards a small research project that will support their employability in the creative industries. Students who do well are those who start the new practice early on, who accept that they have autonomy, and who treat the online space as a sketchbook or a physical studio. I have taught across various creative disciplines over the years and often find it surprising when sketchbook and studio practices are themselves new to students—I very much recommend building these skills whether online or on-site; having to develop them online when learning a new discipline is very challenging.

The second course is only ten credits, and is delivered over five weeks, with an intensive two-day studio/workshop period in the middle. This is Internets of Material Things, developed for the cross-disciplinary Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) postgraduate curriculum. The EFI is experimenting with quite different models of education, with lots of short courses and a very flexible, student-led approach to learning (which may or may not lead to a full degree). The key thing to note here is the 'fusion' model—students can opt to enrol on an online or on-campus version of the same course, but will work together with one another as a whole cohort (and a student can choose different options for different courses). Learning and teaching are supported by a wide range of technologies to support tutors and students working across modalities and time zones.

Internets of Material Things involved some making and offered the EFI an opportunity to explore the opportunities and challenges this raised for the fusion model. The first two and the final two weeks were planned

entirely online, with only the two-day workshop in week three involving on-site activity. Weeks one and two introduced students to the design of electronic textiles and IoTs (internets of things), and the workshop days brought these together with guest speakers and a live creative brief. Packs of e-textile materials and tools were prepared for all students so they could learn through making—these could be collected on campus or were sent out to remote students. The IoT design work was organised on Miro using digital card decks. In both cases, the activity was supported by scheduled tutorials online. The students who did well were those able to navigate the different online platforms (we used PebblePad to host the teaching material and Miro to do the activities), and worked through the material provided. Feedback suggests that there were simply too many platforms for such a short course—it was confusing for everyone, and we will be re-designing this. Miro allows the teaching material to be in the same place as the activities, and it is likely we'll focus on this platform in future.

In both courses, full engagement was only possible if students switched their cameras on, and took part in the online chat. But in addition, when making is involved, it seems to be important to take a leap of faith and just get going, even if it is not clear at first why you are doing it. Taking this leap in a different online/fusion model of learning can feel worrying, as you might feel like the safety of the usual studio environment has gone—but academics are working to create a new version of the studio, and when students bring their exploratory work, it can succeed brilliantly.





## PART 4

# What Next?

*As we draw towards the end of this volume, there are a few more things that it is worth us thinking about and considering. While you might only be at the stage of considering university as an option, or perhaps getting towards the end of your degree, it is worth thinking now about what your creative practice might look like after you graduate. Likewise, the fast-paced nature of digital technologies leads us to think about what the future might hold. How might the creative studio change in the next ten or one hundred years? It is nearly impossible to predict, but by thinking about these things we can begin to think about the future of our own practice.*

*In this concluding chapter we will first look at post-university creative work. We will also explore what is involved in starting your own business and working as a freelancer. You might continue exhibiting your creative work and polishing your portfolio, and we provide a short discussion on that. And we also have some advice for those of you who are considering moving into academia. Finally in this chapter, we would like to give you some words to head into the world with.*



## Post-University Creative Practice

For some of you reading this, the idea of life after university is one you can't wait to embrace; for others of you, it might be something you are worried about. You might already have a job or internship lined up that fits perfectly with what you would like to do in relation to your creative practice. But more likely than not, you are wondering how you will be able to balance being creative with other aspects of your life, and how to get that job you desire.

We have talked about how to develop your portfolios with an eye on the job market in previous chapters, but what if that perfect job doesn't come along right away? How do we stay creative? How do we keep our portfolio growing and up to date while also working or undertaking caring responsibilities? The online studio is a vital part of this process. By its very nature, we can continue to have our own studio space even as our connection to a university ends. We can continue to develop ideas, to collect them, remix them, add to them, and grow our body of work in a space that transcends physical and digital. Finding time each day, or perhaps every other day, to engage in your creative work helps to keep a hand in. Just sketching or writing a little keeps building your portfolio. Avoid falling into the trap of feeling you do not have the right space for this, as the online or the hybrid studio is any space you need it to be. If you feel yourself losing your way, return to the top of this book, remind yourself of how you build that studio and how you make the connections to others.

When the jobs come along, be that the first week after graduating, or perhaps several months or years later, you will find that much of your work continues online. Your job might require you to work in a real physical space, but as you continue to grow your creative practice you will also

continue to add to the body of work on the desk in your digital environment. You will continue to grow your networks both inside and outside the job you have taken. If working more freelance, your hybrid studio becomes the showground for your work: a continuous grad show, if you will.

The most likely thing to happen as you leave university is for you to find yourself in a wide range of different settings and experiences that are all loosely held together. These will evolve and change through the years, both as your practice evolves but also as the world around us changes.

## Freelancing and Starting Your Own Business

One of the great things about the concept of the online studio is that it doesn't need a physical space, so even as you leave university to go on to pursue your creative career, you can continue to inhabit and work within the same studio. You might need to adapt a few things that previously your university would have looked after, such as considering financing and business models to ensure that as well as being creative you can pay the bills. In the first of our expert contributions for this chapter, we turn to Elena Höge, CEO of Yaldi Games Ltd, for some ideas and tips on how to move from university into the world of work and taking ownership of your own creative space.

### Meet the Expert

## Design and Business

*Elena Höge, CEO of Yaldi Games Ltd*

Many artistic people are studying design and other creative disciplines because they live and breathe the art. Passion for your discipline is a tremendously important factor, but often people overlook the importance of business skills. If your dream is to start your own business or become self-employed, you should not underestimate the value of business skills. Generally, these are skills neglected by modern education: how to do tax, how to form and manage a company,

how to employ people, how to manage them, how to plan your milestones, how to recruit people, how to build a culture, how to pitch your product, and how to raise funding or investment. Especially by creative people who have, at any given time, dozens of ideas for potential products. And yet they are the ones with the least knowledge of business administration. If innovation is to flourish, every person needs to be handed a toolkit for building a business, which includes information on tax, human resources, finance, and strategy.

You can register your company easily online, and you will need a business bank account. You will also need accounting software where you synchronise your bank account and register any spending. If you do so, calculating your corporate tax at the end of the tax year will be no problem. You should get an accountant to look over your data and prepare your tax return. Also look out for government schemes that support creatives!

You can create an account with Miro or Mural and then plan your business canvas. This will help you think about your product's unique selling points (USPs), audience, market, and revenue model. Never underestimate the importance of knowing your market! The best thing to do is to create a value proposition, a short text detailing the product and the value for customers, and then conduct qualitative research—so go out there and ask people what they think and, most importantly, if they would pay for it.

There are a number of grants and accelerator programmes: Edinburgh Innovations from the University of Edinburgh runs a summer accelerator, AccelerateHER; Female Founders; and Creative Game Changers are examples. Innovate UK, Scottish EDGE, Converge, and the UK Games Fund are great sources for grants, so read up on them and look into their application deadlines.

Finally, never stop networking! Making connections is the most important way to fill knowledge gaps, find funding opportunities, or get your first customers. So look into Creative Edinburgh and Startup Grind—they regularly host events and have a lot of connections. Sometimes they also offer mentoring services—if so, definitely take the opportunity to take part. A mentor will always add value to your business.

No two readers of this book will take the same path as you finish university, but all of you can take the lessons of the hybrid studio with you as you venture into the world. What the studio will look like, what tools it will provide you, and what challenges it might also throw up are discussed in the next section. What is clear, though, is that through following the advice in this book, the hybrid studio remains a place of creativity and sanctuary that, when held on to, will continue to provide you a key working space long after your studies have finished.

To see just how much working in the current creative industries can ask us to adapt change and overcome different creative, industry, and personal challenges, we look to Philip K. Good, an award-winning director, animator, and motion designer. Philip has directed and created animations for feature films, television, brands, and bands. His animated work includes the feature documentary *Betty: They Say I'm Different* (BBC, ARTE) animating the vocal performances of Betty Davis, the funk legend. He creates title sequences and graphics for TV. He has also helped the fine artist and non-fungible token (NFT) champion Robert Alice, the leading AI company Alethea AI, Channel 4 News, CNN, Vice, Casio, Honda, Deutsche Bank, and a host of global brands. As you can see, Philip has had an extremely varied career, but as we turn to his expert tips, it is also clear that he had had to negotiate far more than just which projects to work on.

The benefits of the virtual studio for Philip and his work are clear and have not only helped him to continue engaging in creative practice but have also helped to ensure he has a good work–life balance that includes family, friends, and other activities.

## Continuing in Academia

By its nature, academia is a place for exploration and collaboration, and an environment where creativity is encouraged. If you choose to carry on your journey in a university through a postgraduate degree such as a master's degree or a PhD, your creative work would be challenged even further by the academic standards.

Pursuing a PhD, for example, would require you to push your limits in discovering and sharing something new and novel that has not been explored before. This could be an approach towards creative practice, new

## Meet the Expert

### Remote/Hybrid Working as a Freelancer

*Philip K. Good, an award-winning director, animator, and motion designer*

In 2021 I left London, after eighteen years of living in Hackney and Tottenham, for a new life with my family in south Devon. This was very much the culmination of several years of dipping into remote working and the realisation that now the rest of the working world will finally accept the way I want to work without question.

Over the last five years I've felt that email is dead, or at least it should be dead, as a messaging tool for work. The formality of an email, the hello, the 'all the best' sign-off, the expected etiquette that harks back to traditional letter writing and the repetition of your email signature over fifty times at the bottom, make this a tedious and wasteful format. Messaging within WhatsApp, Slack, or Webex can be brief, to the point, and much easier than email to search to find a message or a past shared asset.

My film production company has long been communicating internally and with most of our clients via Webex Teams and Slack, both for messaging and video calls. Typically, we would have two messaging threads per job: one internal for all our staff and our freelancers, who mostly worked from home. This was to discuss the nuts and bolts of the process and occasionally throw scorn at our clients privately! The other was to connect us to our client to update them and allow them to feel on board throughout the creative process. Most new clients were still on email at this time, but we did manage to convince most to adopt our new way of communicating.

We then introduced the use of Google Drive internally for sharing assets with our freelancers. This would be logos, fonts, music—small files, initially, that we all needed. We then started using it to share edits of our films with clients, as you could create a separate folder in your drive that was private or public, meaning you could easily share a file with anyone outside the company by just sending them a link.

During 2020, with us all now locked down at home, we took this a step further. We were asked to create a ten-minute character animation for Warner Media in Los Angeles, as a pitch for an Afrofuture science fiction feature film. When choosing a team, I no longer felt the need to just look at people in London. We ended up working with an illustrator based in London, a 2D animator based in Lisbon, and a 3D animator based in Amsterdam. The nature of the project meant that we would all need to be working on the master After Effects project files each day. We took the leap and placed all the assets, video clips, textures, illustrations, music—you name it, we put it in the cloud. For this project alone we had over 400 GB of assets on our Google Drive. All our animators around Europe could then open the After Effects projects from anywhere and it would load in the latest assets from us all, without any duplication or reconnecting files. The only thing we had to be careful of was not working on the same After Effects project file at the same time.

Adobe Premiere has now taken this a step further with Team Projects. We use this to be able to work simultaneously, remotely within the same Premiere Pro project as it allows you to periodically share your changes with other members and does an excellent job of reconciling your work.

The final thing I'd like to share is what I came across while filming for IBM in Oslo. They work with remote coders across the globe and are very proud of the fact that this enables them to find the best global talent and not be restricted by any geographical borders. The interview, the onboarding, and the job are all done without ever actually meeting the employee in person. But the best bit was that they work with a concept called 'Always On'. Essentially, it's taking Zoom or Google Hangouts and being constantly video-connected to your entire team globally. So, permanently, on a separate screen to the side of their desk are around twenty people all in different locations working on the same project. They all stay muted and just unmute to ask each other questions or discuss an issue. The point is, they are always connected. So, if you go to lunch or to the toilet, you leave it connected and people just see your empty seat. Messaging takes the formality out of email, Always On takes the formality out

of a video call. Once you relax into it, these people might as well be in the room with you.

I've worked remotely from my spare room in Devon all year making title sequences for TV, NFT fine art for a leading British artist, edits for the British Army, promo films for an AI company in San Francisco, and much more, without anyone ever needing to meet face-to-face or courier me anything.

I get to see my children from the moment they finish school. I get to see my wife all day as she works from home too. I get to look at the beautiful countryside rather than the dirt and noise of the city. I love London, but this is freedom and it's much less stressful.

methods or ways of investigating creative work. Such journeys are often challenging also because in this process your work would be a subject of vigorous peer reviews from academic experts.

In this process you have to assume the roles of both a judge and a warrior for your creative practice. You have to be able to reflect and be a critic of your own work, which in turn will help you develop it further. At the same time, you should be able to defend your position and approach when questioned. In order to be able to do this, your creative space needs to be fully equipped with the tools that you require. Just as when you were a student, if you want to pursue being an academic, the digital tools can help you research, document, present, and create work.

If you are doing a practice-based PhD in a creative topic, working in a hybrid mode becomes extremely valuable as it helps you widen your span when reaching out to audiences or participants who may be involved in testing your work. At the same time, maintaining a digital presence would be helpful when you have to attend annual reviews of your work in progress, or when you are discussing the next steps for your work and research with your PhD supervisors. As a PhD researcher, you may be required to present and share your project at public events, symposia, or conferences, and having a well-organised and -presented body of work that is easily accessible can be a valuable asset for maintaining your public profile.

One of the challenges when pursuing a postgraduate degree is that you can sometimes be lost in the vast amount of data that you come across

when doing research. Being familiar with and maintaining your records of variations of text or creative work via digital tools is a good way of keeping track of where you are, retracing your steps, or looking for ways forward. Should your academic project require use of primary research and working with participants or doing user testing, the digital tools and platforms are your friends! There is various software for recording research sessions, transcribing text, storing and sorting large amounts of data, and, even more so today, AI tools that can help you with tedious manual activities in this process. We will talk about the benefits of AI and how it can help us be creative in the next section.

## Artificial Intelligence and Creativity

We cannot conclude this book without addressing the profound influence of artificial intelligence tools on us as creative individuals. In the first chapter, we talked about the studio of the graphic designer prior to the use of computers and digital tools, where everything was done manually with the help of drawing tables, tweezers, glue, and various other manual tools for arranging the assets on the design board. In today's digitalised environment, the time we would have spent doing things manually is now minimal thanks to elaborate design software that helps us with tedious tasks but, even more so, enhances our creativity by offering us options of editing and image manipulation that are not possible in a manual setting. In this line of thought, we can consider the opportunities provided by AI platforms—that are still in their infancy today—as ways of helping us to be creative. Instead of thinking of them as a threat, we could consider them a powerful ally in our creative journey. Creative work now may evolve beyond that of visual artist or a designer into a more complex conductive approach. We have to consider ourselves as creative orchestrators of moments that transcend the limitations of the physical and digital realm. Such thinking is not necessarily novel. The Dutch modernist painter Piet Mondrian (cited in Cameron 1992) once said that 'The position of the artist is humble. He is essentially a channel.' In this statement, Mondrian is underscoring the idea of the creator as a conduit for inspiration and creativity, rather than the sole originator of work. This kind of thinking emphasises the importance of interconnectedness of the sole creator with a larger, collective source of inspiration. This may then transcend into

interpreting how we, as creatives, build a relationship with AI tools for crafting work.

In a short video, the American researcher and innovator Don Norman (Interaction Design Foundation 2023) discusses the value in using AI, noting that we have to first consider the word ‘artificial’. He notes that most of all, such tools are pattern-matching and the way to think about using them is as a collaborative effort and a dance of back-and-forth instructions and refinements. Norman prompts us to consider that the value of AI, first of all, lies in task execution and in testing design durability and functionality. By sharing the technical workload, AI helps us to spare more time to be creative. Furthermore, in this mutual exchange, it can help us expand our perspectives by introducing unexpected approaches and unconventional directions. In this process, our thinking can transform, pushing our creativity further. In the past few decades, we have witnessed many technological leaps and Norman reminds us that this one, just as those already established, holds immense promise in pushing the boundaries of what is possible.



## Final Thoughts

The Austrian artist and architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser, who lived and worked through the twentieth century, believed that everyone should have the right to create individual structures or at least have a ‘window right’, where each person should be able to paint the exterior of their building within arm’s reach of their window. This attitude towards architecture is unique in its understanding of creativity and the contribution that anyone can make towards their environment. These ideas resonate even further when one considers the opportunities presented to us, as creative people, through the virtual ‘windows’ as a way to extend our creative spaces.

Undoubtedly, the speed at which new technologies emerge will have a great effect on the possibilities for creating, presenting, and sharing work. The Metaverse, for example, could be one of the potential spaces that could foster collaboration, exchanging and remixing work, which may open new forms of creative formats. Artificial intelligence image generators could be a potential channel for creative exploration, despite their questionable remixing of the works of others and whether this could be considered original production. Regardless of what technological advancements bring us in the future, the virtual ‘window right’ would always be one of the significant ways to extend the studio space into the world.

At the beginning of this book, we spoke about the challenges of creativity and the challenges of being creative in a hybrid or an online environment. Nowadays, the idea of the studio being extended beyond the physical limitations of space into digital environments is not uncommon. A variety of social media platforms have become well known for exhibiting work in progress and portfolios, and sharing creative pursuits with peers and the public. The media scholar Kylie Budge discusses the implications for creativity in using social media tools. She suggests that virtual studio

practices extend creative capabilities due to the social dimension they involve in the process of opening and sharing. ‘The ability to understand the process through the eyes of other artists’, peer learning, and collaboration are the most obvious benefits of working in an open and shared online environment (Budge 2013). Furthermore, the social and shared aspects of creativity have been discussed widely in academic and wider settings, where technology has allowed for new forms of creative interaction. The Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich, known for his book *Deschooling Society* (1971), criticises the traditional models of education as ineffective and suppressing the ability to think independently and think creatively. Instead, he suggests a system that helps people to learn from one another and to share with and empower each other. Illich develops his ideas further in his next book, called *Tools for Conviviality*, where conviviality is about relationships and the ability to interact with the environment in a creative manner. It is about actively taking part in what is going on around us and leaving a unique and valuable contribution to the environment. And the convivial tools are those ‘which give each person the opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision’ (Illich 1973).

Similarly, in his book *Where Good Ideas Come From* (2010), the American writer Steven Johnson refers to the research of the Berkeley physiologist Charlan Nemeth, who has investigated the relationship between noise, dissent, and creativity in group environments. Nemeth’s research reveals a paradoxical truth about innovation—good ideas are more likely to emerge in environments that contain a certain amount of noise and error, and noise-free environments are too sterile and predictable in their output and, therefore, not places where creativity can thrive. Your hybrid studio could be described as such a space. Don’t be afraid to make it messy sometimes and to experiment with the various ways of making and showing work. The technologies that surround us today are here to also help push our limits in that process of experimentation and discovery, which can foster our creativity. David Gauntlett (2011), who discusses the connection between creativity and the social media platforms, notes that ‘creativity refers to a process which brings together at least one active human mind, and the material or digital world, in the activity of making something which is novel in that context, and is a process which evokes a feeling of joy.’ Furthermore, Gauntlett describes creativity as a social glue and as a desire to leave our mark, shape our environment, and thus increase our feeling of embeddedness and participation in the world.

The hybrid studio serves to extend our ability to make such a mark and to participate creatively in the world around us.

Hybrid work, converging at the physical and virtual realms, prompts us to consider how immersive technologies may impact the learning landscape. A compelling illustration of this trend is the emergence of cutting-edge wearable devices like the Apple Vision Pro. These devices seamlessly overlay digital assets onto our physical surroundings, blending the boundaries between the tangible and the virtual. In light of these advancements, it is imperative that we explore the opportunities that may unfold for creative learners and professionals and raise questions about how our creative processes and studio environments might evolve. For example, using the immersive capabilities of such advanced technologies, the virtual studio visit would transcend conventional screen-based interactions. Through these innovations, we can immerse ourselves in the studio environment, experiencing a heightened sense of presence as if physically present.

By using the hybrid studio to bring together not only the digital, but also the physical and cerebral aspects of our work, and through embracing increasingly mobile modes of working, we are able to tap into a truly global network of creative practice. The world becomes our studio, and our studio becomes the world. We can share different creative practices in such a way as to create new and wondrous interventions that will shape not only our local communities but the global community. Our hybrid studio becomes a point of experimentation and intervention for some of the world's most pressing human questions.

The hybrid studio is your connection to your inner self and to the world. Embrace it. Enjoy it. And get creative!



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