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## INTRODUCTION

Brainstorming is a well-known method of ideation and problem-solving, yet is often chaotic and inefficient without proper facilitation (Wilson, 2013).

Formstorming is “an act of visual thinking—a tool for designers to unlock and deepen solutions to basic design problems” (Lupton & Phillips, 2015, p. 13).

Students often turn too quickly to a software program to begin creating, bypassing the very important thinking part of the process, resulting in underdeveloped designs. The use of formstorming allows designers to elevate and extend design basics (Lupton & Phillips, 2015).

## HOW IT WORKS

A formstorming activity was used four times in a New Mexico State University introduction to graphic design in agricultural communications course (N=9).

Students were given 20-30 minutes and step-by-step directions designed to “trigger and tease out options and ideas that go beyond the familiar, prompting designers to find fresh new ways to illuminate subjects” (Lupton & Phillips, 2015, p.13).

The steps were:

- 1. On the sheet of paper, write the values, personality, or essence you want to communicate through your design to solve the problem.**
- 2. Using your phone or computer, gather at least five ideas from which you draw inspiration. Save them in some way.**
- 3. Returning to your sheet of paper, sketch out at least five completely different versions of you design.**
- 4. Reflect on your formstorming experience – what did you discover?**

Students kept their sheet of paper to use as a launch point when they began to create a design in a software program.

## RESULTS TO DATE

Students were asked during the anonymous, end-of-semester evaluation, “Did you find formstorming during class valuable to the development of your assignments?” and “Why did you, or did you not, find formstorming valuable?”.

All students indicated formstorming was an enjoyable process the they found valuable to developing their design assignments for class. A review of their explanations as to why formstorming was helpful revealed two themes: kickstarting the creative process and time to sit and focus.

## ADVICE TO OTHERS

Instructors who choose to integrate this activity into their class sessions should plan adequate time to allow the student to explore each step without haste. Students in this classroom enjoyed listening to soft orchestra-pop/rock music during the activity.

Formstorming activities, such as this and others mentioned by Lupton and Phillips (2015), could be used by professionals to deepen their creative process.

## COSTS / RESOURCES NEEDED

This activity can be executed at no cost to the instructor, students or professional. Each student will need to be supplied with, or provide their own, piece of paper and writing tool. Students will need a method of identifying inspiration, either via their phone, computer or through provided materials, such as magazines or other print publications.

# FORMSTORMING

## Deepening the Creative Process

*Student responses to formstorming activities:*

“I felt was helpful because it really helped **kickstart my creative process.**”

“Formstorming actually worked, even though I'm more of a "spur of the moment" designer, because I came equipped with a skeleton to work towards.”

“[I] found it valuable because it forced me to think creatively and start the design process, which I don't think I would have necessarily had the discipline to do on my own. My work was definitely better because of the formstorming.”

“[Formstorming was] beneficial as it gave me **time to sit and focus** on what direction I wanted to go with my designs.”

“It was nice to be able to sit still for a moment and just think about what I was doing without any other distractions. It felt like a safe space almost.”

“It guided my entire design process. It also saves time in the long run, because it is easier to sketch ideas on paper than it is to design in Adobe. I was able to eliminate options faster.”

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