

DRAFT

THINKING

LIKE A  
DESIGNER

**How to save money  
by being a smart client**

by Michael Brady  
©2009



Also in the THINKING LIKE™ series:

THINKING LIKE™ A WRITER

THINKING LIKE™ AN EDITOR

THINKING LIKE™ A PRINTER

Coming soon:

THINKING LIKE™ AN ARTIST

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Michael Brady Design

GENERAL  
THINKING

THINKING  
ABOUT THE  
PLAN

THINKING  
ABOUT THE  
PROCESS

THINKING  
ABOUT THE  
SCHEDULE

THINKING  
ABOUT  
DETAILS

THINKING  
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# THINKING LIKE A DESIGNER



Here's  
what I'm  
thinking...

"You know, I really like designing books. In fact, my motto is 'You can judge a book by its cover!' So, let's work together."

## You're thinking of writing a book . . .

If you have a publication you want printed, but you're a non-designer, this book is for you.

But it's not about making you into a *designer*. It's about making you into a good *client* for your designer . . . and for your pocketbook.

*Thinking Like a Designer* will prepare you to work with the designer, which will help reduce the amount of time and effort the designer will spend on your publication. Being a prepared client will make the designer quite happy and probably a bit surprised, it will increase the designer's opinion of you, and it will raise his or her confidence in you as a reliable partner in your project.

Good things will come to you.

Your publication will develop more easily in the direction you want, you won't feel like the designer isn't listening with both ears, the designer will think you know what you want and how to communicate it, the publication will probably undergo fewer revisions or "do-overs," and you will save yourself stress, aggravation, worry . . . and money!

How can this be done?

The best way to do this is to *think like a designer!*

But what does that mean, really? What do you need to do? Design something? Choose some fonts? Choose colors? Select the printing paper?

No, not that stuff!

That's the designer's responsibility. What you need to do is to learn the basics of what the designer will expect of you and then *focus on what you can do* and how to get it to the designer. You won't have to pre-decide things the designer will deal with or learn technical details you've never heard of.



# THINKING LIKE A DESIGNER

Here's  
what I'm  
thinking...

*"You're writing a book? Didn't know that. How's it going? Tell me more when you're almost finished. Ciao."*

At this point, the designer is probably not aware of your book! Or perhaps she does know and is just waiting for you to finish. There is little she can do at this point, so she won't invest too much interest or time in your book until you complete it.

## Thinking as the Author

First, ask yourself these three questions:

- What do I want my publication to accomplish?
- What should be included in it?
- Is my project ready for me to give it to someone else (you know, the designer)?

Then ask yourself three more questions:

- What did I hire the designer to do?
- What can I do better than the designer?
- What can the designer do better than I can?

We'll come back to these questions shortly, but for now, let's think about your publication.

## Start thinking

You have an idea for a publication—let's say, a book. You think about it, the pros and cons, the benefits and work involved, and you weigh the prospects of writing it. Eventually, you're ready to start. After all the time you spent imagining and sorting through ideas in your head, you actually sit down and begin writing. In a pent-up burst of activity, you generate two pages, three pages, maybe even a chapter or two.

If you're writing a non-fiction book, you might use diagrams, charts, or other illustrative matter to accompany the text. Perhaps you plan to include short, anecdotal stories—sidebars—to embellish the main narrative. Or your book is an academic text, with footnotes and reference lists.

As you are writing, you will probably begin to think of how it will look when it's printed. At first, your ideas will mainly be a lot of vague impressions, perhaps indefinite mental pictures

# THINKING LIKE A DESIGNER



Just a  
minute. I'm  
thinking...

of one or two 2-page spreads, or an image of the book's cover.

As you write and imagine what your book will look like, you begin to fill out the first vague impressions with concrete details, with fonts, with colors and borders and photographs.

These font visions, these images of the layout and how the parts will be assembled are temptations that pop into your head. But like any other temptation, they're often alluring and almost irresistible.

Resist them!

Let the designer contemplate them, and let him or her do it later. Stay focused on your written message.

## Keep thinking

When you are writing your book, you need to concentrate on what you want to say, on getting the words on paper, on preparing the diagrams, charts, and illustrations.

Sometime after you have produced a good portion of the text, you will probably get an urge to call the designer (if you've already retained one). Feel free, but just describe your project and your hopes for it.

Don't expect the designer to begin any productive work based on your partial manuscript. It's too soon. It is not realistic to believe that you can save time and get your publication delivered sooner if you give the designer only a part to work with. Unless you are working in a very time-sensitive business and with editors and designers in a very tightly integrated workflow, this is not a good approach.



Just a  
minute. I'm  
thinking...

## THINKING LIKE A DESIGNER

Channel your enthusiasm into describing to the designer how you feel about your project and what you want to accomplish with it. Talk in generalities. Describe your impressions and things about the topic that can make an impact on you.

Eventually, you'll finish the manuscript and be ready to meet the designer so you can start the production process in earnest.

### More thinking

But even at this point, there are still things that you must (should, ought to) do, mainly things like getting ready for the big first date:

- Circulate the manuscript to collaborators, colleagues, or sponsors to read and approve. Submit it for formal peer-review (if that's a common practice in your field).
- Get it edited—properly edited by an editor, not just by a staff member with an English degree.
- If you do not plan to use an editor, then proofread very carefully. That means, proofread *all* of the manuscript—including the diagrams, the maps, the tables, charts and graphs. Don't forget the bibliographies, references, and lists of cited works. Proofread and fact-check them.
- Double-check yourself by proofreading your manuscript on paper as well as onscreen.
- Make sure your manuscript is ready—*really* ready—for the designer.