

GALLERY EXHIBIT

YOU ARE HERE ●

GRADUATION

FILING TAXES

IP

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

HEALTH

NEW STUDIO

1M FOLLOWERS

PUBLISHED BOOK

INTERNSHIP

AFTER MOODLE ACCESS HAS ENDED
YOU WILL FIND UPDATED VERSIONS OF SOME OF THE READINGS THIS TERM
AT ROBINMITCHELLCRANFIELD.COM/STUDENT-GUIDES

WHAT NEXT?

At the end of this guide you will find a worksheet and a list of resources

What is “Professional?”

Let’s start with the point of “professional practice.” What does it mean? How can you tell when you are ‘professional’. I don’t believe the following are required: having an agent, being well known online, having awards, having a stunning portfolio, having a ‘professional’ TED talk-style vocabulary. If you have any of that, it’s fine, but it’s not a requirement.

Professionalism is gained by consciously developing a **process** which will positively reinforce your existing skills; allow you to pursue needed ones not yet acquired; support you emotionally and financially; and provide you with the ability to take on work and deliver it on time and to satisfaction. If you struggled this term with your project, this might point to an area of your process that needs strengthening. I have outlined some common difficulties graduating students face and some possible solutions. Perhaps I didn’t catch yours, or suggest a solution that works for you. But I hope I will put into your mind the importance of process and how you might identify problems and then go about solving them.

This term, you had the opportunity to observe your process, and of having other people to seek observations, advice, and inspiration from. Take advantage of this to shore yourself up, rather than chastising yourself for the areas which are challenging for you. The whole point of a course is to learn after all.

Thinking of yourself in relation to your cohort provides valuable opportunities. One is the opportunity to swivel the spotlight off yourself. How does your process *affect other people*? Are you a perfectionist who puts yourself down a lot? Are you stressed and disorganized? It might seem like bad habits only harm you, but considering how they affect other people provides a different perspective. When you are calm and encourage yourself, or when you help yourself to be healthier and more confident, this has a ripple effect on the people around you. Being the kind of person who makes projects feel more enjoyable, manageable, mutually rewarding, exhilarating, inspiring and so on is an essential part of developing your professional practice. It will also connect you with people who share your aspirations. No one can tell you *how* to do this, because your practice is unique to you. It’s what makes people want to hire you, work with you, and for you.



Heading into the last term

I have given you a series of readings on ‘professional practice’. This is a summary overview to encourage you to think about how you want to use the remainder of your time at school. The next time you embark on a project, your understanding of your process will be valuable in helping to create, maintain, evaluate, and put into production project goals which are attainable. The spring term will be a good place for you to test out some of the ideas that you have developed about your process this term.

It might feel hard to develop professional skills *on top of* all the technical skills you need to execute your work well. However, developing them not only pays off in the long term — by helping you avoid burnout, protect your health, and develop networks — but it pays off in the long term in the form of your reputation. Achieving a *good professional reputation* is not about being the best dressed, the life of the meeting, or angelically self sacrificing and sweet (and certainly not about being perfect) but about demonstrating consistency and integrity. I will talk more about developing these skills, but first: the basics.

The basics (Do these things)

- Refine and practice stating your primary professional goal in a few sentences and share it with people regularly.
- If you start your own business or do freelance work, get an accountant.
- Identify any complementary skills you might need to develop (e.g. if you want to develop an IP, being able to communicate, direct a team, presentation skills, and marketing know-how are all helpful) and begin looking for opportunities to develop those or connect with people who do. A good way to find out what these are is to study people who are successful at doing whatever you want to do. Find interviews, read articles, take notes.
- Integrity is key to all career success. Deliver things when you say you will. Don't over-promise. Be honest.
- Practice being kind to yourself (this isn't the same thing as being self-indulgent) for long term health protection.
- Keep an eye out for people who complement your skills as well as people who have the same skills and abilities as you. Cultivate relationships with mentors, peers, and colleagues. If you are shy, remember that integrity, kindness, organization, and skill speak for themselves.

Finding a goal

We started the term by establishing a goal. Some students had a clear goal in mind but others did not. Defining a goal can feel overwhelming, but a goal that you can state

clearly can be helpful not only in prioritizing your time, but in communicating to other people — who may be able to help you — what you want. Interestingly, many people aren't sure what they want.

If you feel unsure about what you want, avoid passively waiting for the thunderbolt containing this information to strike. Instead, think of it as *part* of your process. This also allows you to take advantage of opportunities as they arise and — importantly — turning down opportunities that don't serve you or simply don't feel right.



Sample goals

These are common goals that students have:

- finding an illustration-related job after graduation
- refining your career ambitions
- inclusion in a gallery exhibition
- refining or acquiring a technical skill
- completing a meaningful term project
- starting a studio practice or personal business
- getting a good grade/passing/graduating

Fuzzy goals

It's possible that you have peers who seem focused on goals that don't appeal to you. You know you enjoy illustration or that you are skilled at it, but none of the opportunities you hear about seem like a good fit. If that is the case, and *your first goal is to find a goal*, you can keep it fuzzy at first. This is a kind of detective work where you are

both introducing possibilities and ruling things out and observing your own reactions. You might think, 'I hate goals'. That's good to know. Do you feel bossed around? Do you fear committing to one path because you'll lose the possibility of another? You might think, 'I want to _____ but I could never do that because _____.' Ask around, you might have boxed yourself in based on a false estimation of your capabilities or the industry itself.

A fuzzy goal might be: 'I want to continue to work on my watercolours, but I can't see how I could support myself doing that right now. Somehow or other I want to continue to do that. I'd like to get paid enough for it to cover my base cost of living so I can quit my retail job.' OK, so if you go around saying that to all your peers or instructors, you would be surprised what kind of ideas that generates. It's not magic and it won't happen right away, but it begins a process that will reveal what barriers you are working against as well as what opportunities are out there. Let's say someone offered you a bit of money to paint a portrait of their pet. You might find that you can't capture animal faces very well. Could you develop this skill, or do you *not want to*? If you are already good at landscapes, maybe you can paint portraits of people's homes instead.

Let's say you choose a path like this, and get a few gigs painting people's pets or gardens, or whatever, you might be on your way. Or you might realize that you paint too slowly to make any money doing this. Are you good enough to raise your prices? Or can you learn to paint faster? Are your materials too expensive? Or maybe the problem is that you feel that you're not working on something that's meaningful enough to you. Do you need an art project to work on *as well as* or *instead of* this? Do you need to find a studio that's shared with other artists to help you pursue this, or to feel less isolated? And so on. This might sound obvious, but it's amazing how not-obvious career planning can be to the planner. The fuzzy goal is part of a dynamic process that you adjust until you are on a path that feels about right. You can always change your mind later.

It is often establishing the goal and making the transition towards it that's the challenge. In Marie Kondo's book, *Joy at Work*, she describes how her friend Souun Takeda finds no difficulty producing calligraphy, just 'burping' it out. It was leaving his first career in sales and finding his first clients that were the hard parts. These times are full of doubts

and uncertainties. That's why it's good to think of this task as a process of building your decision-making strengths.

Time

In the example I just gave, time was an important factor. It will continue to be one, no matter what you do. If you want to develop an IP, you might need to find an hour or so a day to build it. But you need to have a job to pay the rent. Is an hour a day compatible with a demanding job in your field? Should you find a less demanding, lower paying job to give you time? Or do you want to pursue work in your field to help you build connections and teach you how large projects are pitched and developed?

In every situation, you will prioritize in order to move forward. What frustrates some people is the dynamic and open nature of this process. The answer depends on you. One person might decide to take a job in their field, then push themselves very hard and get by on little sleep. Another might save up money or move back home to focus solely on the IP. Almost always, *what you are prioritizing is where your time is spent* and as you go you are checking in on your personal skills, limitations, wants, and current needs. The more clearly you understand these things, the faster you will be able to make decisions. Part of your early career is testing things out for yourself. If you're used to other people providing a metric of success for you, this might feel challenging, but it could also feel very freeing. Developing intuition and decision-making skills will help.

Intuition

Think of intuition as a skill and not a gift. If you dither a lot (you have trouble making up your mind, selecting items when shopping, for example) you may decide to develop your intuition. Intuition is an invaluable tool for an illustrator or designer to have. It will save you time and energy for one. Secondly, as *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron points out, a connection to your intuition is important for protecting your health, your practice, and your wellbeing from unscrupulous clients and bosses.

I haven't yet found a better method of developing intuition than Marie Kondo's *The Life Changing Magic of*

Tidying Up. I do not recommend her TV show for this, though. Tidying can be helpful for artists suffering from anxiety, overwhelm, or depression. But it's the practice of rapid decision-making and intuitive decision-making that I think makes her project special. If Cameron and Kondo are not your speed, look for another intuition mentor. If you know someone who is a good, rapid decision maker, for example, spend some time with them observing this skill. Work on a class project with them or pay attention to how they approach decisions. What do they do when they only have incomplete information or when things go wrong partway through a project?

You can't always research decisions until you have the right answer. If you put all your energy into *not* making wrong decisions, you will slow yourself down (and sometimes make 'wrong' decisions anyway). Try not to be harsh with yourself if you make a bold decision and it turns out poorly. You want to cultivate your confidence.

Priorities

An awareness of your priorities makes decision-making much easier, both for the short and long-term. I recommend strongly that you give 'health' a spot high up on your priority list. Also, please make space for friends/family/fun. Careers don't love you back. Be honest with yourself about money and notice when you prioritize it above other things or when you prioritize other things over it. It's easy to assume that money is or isn't a priority for you until you examine your behaviour. In the watercolour example, would you prefer to work with high quality materials that you love or cheaper ones which earn you higher margin of profit? How do you manage similar decisions with your art at the moment?

Money

Track your billable hours every day for a couple of months and check in with your time use based on that. The average person spends five hours on their smart phones with an average of 85 interactions. Each of these interactions takes time to transition in and out of. If you justify spending part of your workday on social media because it's R&D or promotion or networking, make sure you check

the math on it. 5 x 5 is 25 hours a week. If your hourly rate is \$125/hour, are you getting \$3,125 return on that time investment? If it's your leisure time, is it resting and energizing you? Make sure you don't accidentally donate \$3,125 a week to Instagram or a 40-hour week. (Of course, not all your hours are billable, please give yourself free time generously!)

What to Do Next

After determining a goal this term, you were asked to determine a metric of success. How you managed these challenges can give you some important information.

Ask yourself:

- did I enjoy being in control of my own goal and metric?
- did it frustrate, worry, or annoy me?
- did I have a goal already?
- if not, did I whip up one that was good enough to begin?
- did I assume the instructor had a goal in mind that I should figure out and meet?
- was I overwhelmed with a perfectionist metric?
- was I unmotivated? Too tired?
- was I focused on putting out fires in other classes and left this to figure this out later?

I think this last one is very common. For many students, the immediate — and massive — goal of graduating can make it hard to think too much about the post-graduation phase. Plus, the anxiety of graduating can make the anxiety of early career challenges seem overwhelming. So that is why I'm writing this out. You can look at this later. Or never look at it. Only you know what you need.

The workload in our class was low and flexible. If you struggled with overwhelm, you might be dealing with common issues of perfectionism: procrastination, anxiety, impostor syndrome, negative self-talk etc. But before we get to that, I suggest that your first step is simply to connect with your personal desire to develop a career which is enjoyable and meaningful. Your second step could be finding a way to break your identified big goal into bite-sized pieces. Your third step would then be working your way through those pieces.

1. Goals

As I mentioned, the hardest thing for many people is to determine their own metric of success. Part of the appeal of external metrics like awards is that they tell us if we succeeded or failed. Furthermore, established metrics let you quickly communicate your worth to others and yourself. But if you tailor your work to meet exclusively external goals, you won't develop the important skill of developing your own metric. This is why early success can cause trouble later in your career while early failures can pay off. For example, I would not suggest a student develops a portfolio with the chief aim of getting A grades (unless perhaps that student knew they wanted to get into grad school). At the same time, the grades you receive are valuable feedback, indicating to your instructor's evaluation of to what degree your work met assigned criteria, so I wouldn't suggest ignoring it either. In many cases, your instructor will have established a metric of success for you. Learning to recognize these metrics teaches you when to engage, ignore, or test them out. Outside of school you will be responsible for establishing your own metric. People who have developed a well tailored metric of success tend not to struggle with procrastination as much, because they are working on something they want to work on and have done the work of connecting to their project. Barriers to achieving your goals become more manageable once a personal metric of success has been established because there is an internal motivation to work on these barriers.

I have called this 'Step 1' even though it's not a perfectly linear process. You will likely return to this step throughout your career, each time with new information you've gathered by trying things out. I tend to think of this part of the process as developing your core muscles: the muscles which will support all other physical activities.

Do you have a goal, fuzzy, flexible, or otherwise? If so, you are ready for step 2. If not, you can try an active approach to build your foundation, just like you get strong muscles by *doing* and not planning exercise. Every project you work on is an opportunity to find out more about yourself and what is meaningful to you as well as what seems to come naturally to you. Interning somewhere can help, too. It's quite amazing what we don't know about our-

selves. You might be surprised what you find out about yourself and your capabilities..

Here are some questions you can start with.

- Do you find working in groups energetic or draining?
- Does a task which you would have otherwise enjoyed become a burden when it is assigned to you?
- Do you find it more appealing to come up with your own idea or to be presented with an idea around which you can creatively produce responses? E.g. are you motivated by storytelling or visually interpreting an existing story?
- What are your values? Avoid buzzwords, and go deep on this one. What provokes a strong emotional response in you (delight, anger, frustration)? What skills do you have to share with others?

2. Process

You have a goal, fuzzy or otherwise. Then what?

Unfortunately we get a warped impression of the process of 'dream achievement' from media portrayals and biopics. Stories of how people achieved their dreams are shaped into a narrative before they reach us. The 'dreaming' aspect of this is usually emphasized, along with achievements, a few clearly defined obstacles, and 'passion.' Unfortunately this conveys to young artists that the keys are *dreaming* and *feeling*. Maybe these are the parts of the process that are the most "dramatizable". In movies about new parents, key scenes are often where something *big* happens, like rushing to the hospital for the birth. Movies can't really convey, even through montages, the truly repetitive story of sleepy people making food, changing diapers, and going to the park. And yet parents are driven to do these repetitive tasks because they care so much about their child. Actually doing these tasks helps to bond parents to their children, so these behaviours are dynamically connected. And this everyday stuff is how babies survive to become kids. You can't stick a new baby in your desk drawer and then suddenly change 4,000 diapers the day before they turn two years

old. Babies very helpfully let you know that little tasks are imminently required everyday. And they will also throw a reward your way once in a while by saying a new word or just being cuddly and great. Your baby — your dream project — *will not do you the favour of wailing like a fire alarm until you take care of it*. But, just like babysitting, working on your dream project in small increments over a long time is going to make you tired and frustrated along with excited, pleased, and proud. That's *process*.

So, to me, dreaming and feeling shouldn't be considered a special part of your creative process. Dreams and feelings of creative satisfaction aren't more important than the everyday stuff. If you have a 'passion' for storytelling, this 'passion' takes the form of taking notes, bouncing ideas off other storytellers, trying out ideas that don't go anywhere, testing out stories on different audiences and so on. Once your story has been refined by this process, it will often look effortless to new observers. Ideation and execution is what you focus on in school. As a professional, you will develop an awareness of the steps *other than* ideation and execution that were required to complete any given project in your chosen area.

If you get caught in the dreaming phase of your goals and you find motivation to do those mundane day-to-day tasks is lacking, you could be suffering from not having clarified your goal (Step 1) or from being fearful of failing to achieve it. Lack of clarity and/or fear might prevent you from achieving a flow state, where you get hooked into working on your project. If you often get in your own way, check if you feel disconnected with your gifts. I will describe some common challenges related to this and some potential coping strategies.

Perfectionism leading to procrastination

This can happen if you have learned to engineer your work to please or impress other people. You might find yourself resisting direction, refusing to ask for help, or frustration working with others to your own satisfaction. Every project carries the risk that your work won't dazzle others so it becomes a lot of pressure. I think this is like having muscles that are so tense they can't function well. Relaxing tense muscles is just as painful as strengthening unused ones. Relaxing is hard work!

Child psychologists like Alice Miller and William Stixrud have argued that overprotective and overly prescriptive parents and teachers may be leaving young people feeling anxious and disconnected from their own wants and needs. Without the chance to find out that they are allowed to fail, still valuable and loved if they fail, and ultimately in control of their own lives, well meaning parents and teachers can deprive gifted youth of opportunities to develop resilience and self-knowledge. Although I find some of these arguments persuasive, they are often built around a central 'trauma narrative.' I have wondered if this leaves people feeling even further disempowered, but I'm not a therapist and so I leave that to the experts. If you struggle a great deal with this type of thing, you may wish to look into it further with a counselor or coach.

I think that doing craft work, including illustration, pushes perfectionism to the surface where you can get a good look at it. People rarely appreciate the work that a crafts-person puts into their work, so a person can only be happy making if it brings them personal satisfaction. I once heard this advice from a knitter: never knit people gifts for Christmas unless the knitted item was both requested and something the knitter would enjoy making. Her reasoning was that knitting for Christmas imposed a stressful deadline on a knitting project and put pressure on the recipient to love a gift they might not even want, leading to resentment. In such a case, she wondered, what is the point of knitting in the first place, because in this day and age it's a choice to knit. Well, exactly. Be generous with your time and skill (a) when you can afford to be and (b) when it's appreciated. If you find yourself not enjoying craft work, or other leisure making activities, this is a very good opportunity to peek inside your creative drive.

If you struggle with perfectionism, ask yourself, *when have you been in a flow state? When do you feel relaxed and productive?* If you've identified yourself as struggling with perfectionism, you could try radically accepting this instead of fighting it. For example, instead of saying to yourself, 'I shouldn't be so nervous giving this presentation because other people's approval shouldn't matter so much to me,' you could say, 'I'm really nervous giving this presentation because I feel that other peoples' opinions are important to me,' That's it. Feelings never listen to logic. Anyway, once you've established it's how you feel,

you can add other things like, ‘however, I need to get some work done on my other projects *in spite of* how badly *I feel* about my presentation not being perfect.’

in spite of

So the phrase, ‘in spite of’ is about to get a workout here. *In spite of not feeling* good enough, I will complete this *to the best of my ability*. *In spite of* the dishes being dirty, *in spite of* having had a bad night’s sleep *I will do my best*. *In spite of not feeling* satisfied with my work, *I will hand it in on time*. Practicing this in school is a good idea. Test it out. Also, keep reminding yourself that you are not your work. If you never drew anything again you would be just as valuable as a person as you are now. You are free to stop drawing and become a hairdresser or a plumber or an accountant or professor or whatever. You could work in a bakery making muffins at 5a.m. and go surfing in the afternoons. You *could*. (Notwithstanding other barriers and responsibilities of course, but you take my meaning.)

Languishing. Languishing is a state in which you are not connected to your creative drive. A person who is languishing is not burnt out, they have energy, but they have trouble moving forward and lack focus, feel joyless and aimless. People who went to school during COVID had the strange experience of experiencing a global languishing during what is normally one of the most frenetic chapters of our making lives: art school.

I take this term from organizational psychologist Adam Grant who wrote an essay on languishing in 2021 (there’s a TED talk online where he goes into it further). Grant defines languishing as a state right between depression and flourishing. Grant points out that this feeling is contagious, people languishing together reinforces that “meh” feeling. The antidote to languishing is transitioning into a flow state — the state of calm and focused immersion in what you’ve chosen to do.

The keys to leaving languishing behind are things we’ve

worked on all term. These are: (1) setting small, achievable goals that matter to you (2) developing your sense of meaning and purpose, noticing what is important to you (3) setting aside uninterrupted time (see the pomodoro technique on page _) and (4) connecting the different parts of your life together (not simply switching between fragmented tasks, like checking email).

Impostor Syndrome. So you feel like a big fake? You’re *not*, but your feelings are unlikely to believe me. I have three possible solutions, you can try them out and see if any of these work for you.

1. *Validation and positive self-talk.* This is an approach that therapists and life coaches commonly take. In this model, you overcome your feelings of inadequacy by reminding yourself of the reality of your abilities and achievements; developing a ‘growth mindset’; cultivating positive self-talk; and curbing negative self-talk. ‘I am not a fake,’ you can remind yourself, ‘or I wouldn’t have made it through four years of college’ or whatever you’ve achieved so far. This model can include: meditation, physical adjustment (improved posture), or a positive saying that you repeat to yourself. If this sounds good to you, and you really struggle with this, you may wish to consult a professional who can help you work on these strategies, or visit a web site like [PositivePsychology.com](https://www.PositvePsychology.com) which has worksheets.

2. *Embrace it.* A great postmodern poet (Rihanna) once said, ‘Maybe fake’s what I like.’ This is the ‘fake it til you make it’ model. When you worry, ‘What if I’m a fake?’, you could try shutting the whole conversation down by saying to your worry: ‘So. WHAT.’ If the trigger for your feelings of ‘imposterity’ is that your taste is outstripping your current ability (which is a potentially positive mindset *if it’s not driven by anxiety*) you will likely feel like a fake every time you begin a new phase of your career. Of course, if you *remain anxious*, you may want to seek help to manage that.

3. *Be a hippie and drop out of the race.* In this model, you just reject that anybody is more ‘real’ than anybody else. In the year 2000 Hillary Swank won the Oscar for Best Actress. Maggie Cheung, who starred in *In the Mood for Love* that year, was not even nominated. Was Hillary Swank more of an actress than Maggie Cheung in 2000?

Or a better actor? It's *absurd*, isn't it? You can't be 'fake' if you don't believe in fakeness. You can't be 'not good enough' if you develop your own evaluation of what is good or meaningful. This model embraces self-direction and rejects hierarchy. This isn't the same as rejecting *excellence*, it just rejects a black and white model of authenticity. For example, some people think that writing poetry for adults is more important or more impressive than writing a book for children. They might not see Ruth Krauss as being 'as much' of a writer as a 'real' poet like Ted Hughes. You can really blow these people's minds simply by not sharing that baseline assumption. (I just think it's quite a boring way to think, honestly.) Anyway, Maggie Cheung quit acting to become a film composer. She's working on a whole other level.

Difficulty withstanding discomfort. Another common pitfall for gifted young people is achieving early goals so easily that they don't develop the skill of patiently cultivating skills that come less easily. If you acquired the skill of drawing pretty effortlessly, you might struggle with learning how to develop complementary skills, (like writing, public speaking, financial planning) which you need in order to transition your creative work into a *professional setting*. Luckily, acquiring skills is itself an acquirable skill.

This challenge is like having muscles that are so weak they are not comfortable being used at all. I actually think physical exercise can really help here, perhaps surprisingly. A daily practice of doing something strenuous helps you cultivate self-directed discipline. This could be as little as ten minutes, but it should be a challenge requiring focus, not like a stroll to the shops.

Just like in the last example, I encourage you to identify that you *feel* discomfort and that you can persevere through it, because it won't last. 'I hate writing this bio because *I feel* so bored/anxious. *In spite of* how uncomfortable *it feels* to be bored/anxious, I will push through it for ten minutes.' This builds confidence along with endurance. Professional practices are close to impossible without developing this muscle. Like any previously unused muscle it takes time to develop these muscles of focus and perseverance. Notice your small improvements and cheer yourself on.

Difficulty with peer relationships and boundaries.

Letting go of your creative work as a personal and private space which is protected from other people can be very hard for some people. This can arise if you used your creativity to escape overwhelming situations (or even just boredom) as a child. You might resent granting people access to this space or feel unsafe doing so. This can make sharing or discussing your work challenging. Unfortunately, online life can make it easier to avoid developing relationships with peers where you can practice setting and adjusting boundaries.

One area you could look at here is your physical work space. If you have a very cluttered, overwhelming space that you occupy when working, then organizing your space can be one way to disentangle some of your feelings from your physical belongings and from your art. If you take this route, I recommend being as positive as possible about it and approaching it with curiosity, not scolding yourself as you go. The way you treat your belongings and your space can tell you a lot about yourself, which can help out with Step 1. As I've mentioned, I think *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up* is one good option for this process. But you could also do a drawing diary of some of your treasured items, or rearrange your space a few ways and find out what makes you feel not only good, but productive. Feeling comfortable in your external work space is a good step to feeling safe in your internal workspace, which will in turn reduce anxiety.

Another option is to take opportunities in class to engage with your peers as a listener or critique-er of their work. Ask yourself: what is this person trying to communicate? Is it working? How could I help them? *By focusing on another person*, you will take the pressure off yourself and gain some insight into how other people are attempting to relate to you and help you when they critique your work or offer you advice. By developing sympathy for them as an artist, you will develop it for yourself.

Barriers which aren't psychological or emotional.

Other barriers unfortunately exist, too. Some are simpler than others. Perhaps you haven't developed a skill that you need, and you need to take an extra course to refine it. Others might be larger: family responsibilities, physical disabilities, legal, or financial difficulties. I know

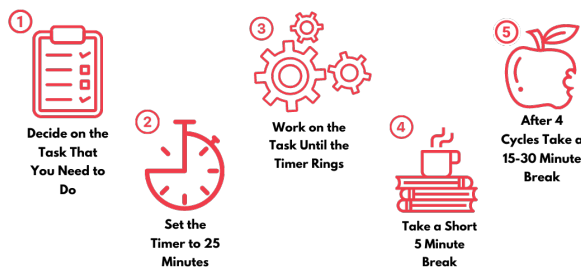
two highly successful illustrators who were single moms at early ages. This did slow them down, but it didn't stop them from making it. And their experiences have formed an important part of their work and their lives. I don't mean to downplay or romanticize these types of career challenges, but if you are dealing with a long-term challenge which slows you down, do remember that (a) you are learning from that challenge and developing strengths which may help you later in your career in ways you cannot foresee and (b) be genuinely kind to yourself. Find ways to reduce negative self-talk, cultivate friendships with people who are trustworthy and energizing, and treat your body well.

The pomodoro technique was named after an egg timer shaped like a tomato (pomodoro is Italian for 'tomato'). YouTube and the App store have pomodoro tools that can help with procrastination.

Images:

Luxfor.com + Forbes.com

THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE



Bite-sized progress begins by establishing a process.

The first four difficulties I described (procrastination/perfectionism, languishing, difficulty withstanding discomfort, and boundary management) will impact your process. If you struggled this term with procrastination, for example, then you might have developed some habits which are not serving you. Establishing new habits takes some time and progress is a cycle, not a straight line. Whatever your particular challenge, look for the least painful way through. I don't believe in no pain, no gain for this stuff. Besides which, as I've said, the motivation to make changes to your process comes from connecting to what you *actually want to do*.

If you can't find your path to happiness through self-scolding, try indirect action. This is why I suggest exercising, tidying, or pursuing other healthy habits that bring rewards over time. Let's say you do 15 minutes of yoga a day. You can't help but learn that small, regular investments add up. You can't help but feel stronger and calmer. You will bring that experiential knowledge to

other areas of your life. If you hate yoga, then don't do that. Do twenty push-ups a day or something. The point is just to practice this as a habit. Having felt a self-directed change occur is a specific form of knowledge that you can't acquire with theory, planning, or facts. If you are stuck, this is a good un-sticker. Your journal will have some information for you about what serves you (or doesn't) for you to draw upon.

3. Action



Now you have to swing into action. Either you love this part or you hate it, but if you have connected with what you want (goal) and begun supporting yourself with self-knowledge and healthier habits (process) then you will find that you can make it into phase 3 (action). Each time to have a success or recover from a failure, you will strengthen your ability in all three areas. This won't work perfectly, by the way, but it will carry you forward.

Here are some things which help you get into action:

For procrastinators (this is basically everyone), languishers, and anxiety sufferers:

- Pomodoros. These are everywhere now. I like the YouTube ones which have only ambient sound (I like gutsy study girl's channel). There are also apps, like Forest, or tools, like the Time Timer. I had to try several of these before I found the one that worked for me.
- Regular study or online zoom groups. This is especially

good for projects that require long term discipline. There seem to be many more of these for writers than illustrators, is that true? Maybe start one!

- In the book *Make Time*, the authors (former designers at YouTube and Gmail) suggest that you schedule some time at the beginning of your day for non-urgent projects that require time to complete, like making a graphic novel. The reasoning here is that you have energy and focus at this time. They also want you to know that apps are designed to dominate your time and be addictive and so their smart phones have almost all built-in apps removed, including the web browsers. Just FYI!

- Know that it takes about ten minutes to switch gears. If you are a hyper-focuser like me, then you will hate stopping work on one project to switch to another. This includes simple things like answering emails or completing small assignments that *you would rather do when you have perfectly completed what you're working on*. This is definitely an impediment to getting into action and getting out of it (resting or switching tasks). Try the following (a) say to yourself, 'I hate the feeling of switching gears,' as you do it — it's just a feeling and it will pass in about ten minutes (b) leave your future self a breadcrumb trail for when you return to your project. Like, if you know exactly what happens next in your graphic novel, leave yourself a little sentence saying what will come next. Then when you re-open the document, you aren't confronted with a blank page and you can get back into the flow with ease (this was Roald Dahl's anti-procrastination trick).

- Put things in your workspace that you find yourself jumping up for as you sit down to work. I find that I must get up to moisturize my hands, find a hair elastic, and get a drink of water at the beginning of my workday. I have things on my desk now so I don't have excuses.

- Know yourself: Get 'in spite of' handy. Right before I begin a big project I: find a news story extremely concerning and urgent; am 'starving'; feel 'exhausted' and need a quick nap; realize the floorboards could use a deep clean; urgently need to discuss something with my husband...you get the idea. I have so many more of these. 'In spite of' how untidy the sock drawer is and 'in spite of' the fact that I know I will do a terrible job, I will plug away for an hour. The hour always passes.

- Know yourself part II: If you are often late or behind despite working long hours, it's time to call Detective Pikachu. There are two likely culprits: (a) a very special form of procrastination in which you fail to switch into action when it's time for a supposed 'reason'. This often takes the form of 'researching', 'planning', or 'sketching' that goes on way too long. Or (b) you take on too many projects or spend too much time helping people around you on their projects instead of facing your own. Be especially wary when you hear yourself telling people how hard or long you worked on something.

Anxiety is the number one complaint I hear from students and it is a super-derailer. Luckily, it is manageable but it can feel insurmountable when it's in gear. If you suffer from panic attacks or experience frequent bouts of anxiety then ask for help from your health care provider.

I strongly encourage you to take advantage of the school counseling services while in school. To book an appointment, email counselling@ecuad.ca. They will respond to your email within 24 hours (Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm). Anxiety has a tendency to increase through negative self-reinforcement (your brain interprets your anxious thoughts as a real threat and sends signals to your body that you are in danger which sets off a cognitive spiral), so the earlier you develop strategies of disrupting it the better.

As well as seeking counselling, try these:

- Note the impact of delaying. Students are often offered deferrals if they are experiencing anxiety. If this is working, then by all means, use this tool if it serves you. Some people may find that delaying or avoiding stress can increase it.

- Instead of asking your instructors for deferrals, you might ask them to help you break down your work into manageable deliverables week to week. Practicing meeting small goals will reduce overwhelm and build confidence.

- Headspace is probably the best-known meditation app, but the DARE app is developed more specifically for anxiety and panic attacks. There is a free version.

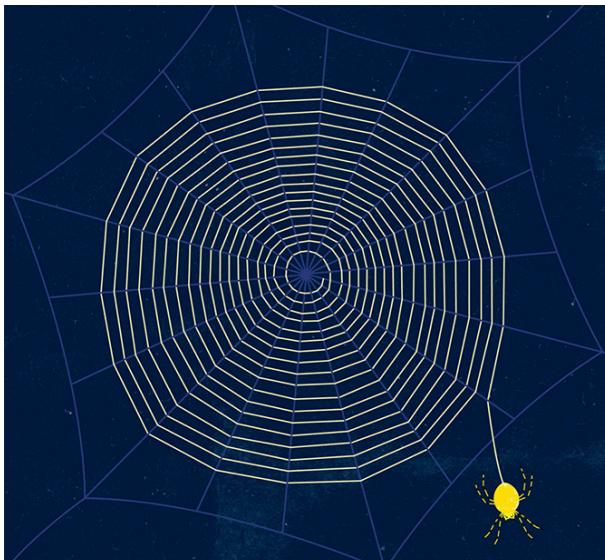
· Take care of your physical health: exercise, fresh air, enough sleep (or resting time if you cannot fall asleep), lowered caffeine and sugar, extra veggies, reduced blue light, time with friends or family all help. You may need to reduce your workload to get your health back on track. Trust yourself to take a break if you need one.

· After school, you may ask your doctor for a referral to an anxiety clinic as a low cost treatment plan. VGH offers Cognitive Behavioural sessions for example.

· Protect your brain. For decades after cars were available, seat-belts weren't mandatory and people rode around without much protection. When you get into an app these days, consider that it is a pretty new invention and is basically unregulated at the moment. If you are struggling with mental health issues, you may want to proceed riding in apps with caution. If you regularly feel drained or jumpy after using them, take a break.

For people who have had counselling for anxiety already, getting some of the stock advice can be frustrating, especially if you are already following advice, or even taking medication. For many people anxiety isn't something that goes away, but rather a tendency or habit which a person will learn how to manage and can then be diminished over time. Although this may sound disappointing at first, it is important to know that you're not doing anything wrong if the anxiety doesn't disappear immediately or completely with treatment. Secondly, anxious feelings will feel less uncomfortable and more manageable as you develop skills to manage them. What

Golden Orb weavers create spiral structures composed of lots of straight lines which, over time, form spirals. These are slow to build, but very sturdy, even though they are built with very fine material. When we build large projects we follow a similar pattern, of organized small increments



once took you a day to manage might take only a few minutes. Things like presenting, which seemed unimaginably scary are now something that you can do, even if you feel nervous. Don't overlook your progress.

Anxious thoughts spiral (a small anxious thought grows in size as it builds on its own logic), but building calm may also follow a spiral path. Just like a spider building its web who keeps passing the same points as it spins, as you develop skills to manage anxiety you will encounter it periodically, but that doesn't mean you are always back at the starting line. Big changes require patience.

When we experience anxiety, like any discomfort, it produces in us a strong desire to switch the feeling off immediately. Like any pain, anxiety *feels very bad*. But while bouts of it may take time to diminish, and may even return suddenly, they do pass. Panic attacks also form in a wave pattern, growing bigger and stronger, but will crescendo and pass within 20 minutes, and can even pass in as little as five. Simply knowing this, and even tracking or drawing or writing out your anxiety patterns, can make you feel more in control of your relationship with anxiety.

If anxiety is interfering with your professional life, then it becomes a professional problem. It can be difficult to show up on time, make a presentation, remain calm in a crit, and focus on your work if you are overwhelmed by anxiety. You may experience fight or flight: losing your temper with a colleague or freezing at a question at the end of a presentation. However, successfully navigating these situations —with skills you can build — is an important part of diminishing the anxiety. Knowing that you will be able to handle your anxiety when it arrives is really the essence of anxiety management. For this reason, having strategies in place in advance is empowering.

Finally, just as someone who struggles with reading and writing may need to begin an essay earlier in the term than someone who does not, if you are someone who suffers from anxiety, you may need to manage your daily activities to protect yourself from end-of-term anxiety. Daily changes include the ones I outlined earlier: less caffeine, more sleep, more veggies, and so on. By building (and re-building) these habits you will be better able to handle the stressful periods of presenting and delivering work at the end of the project.

Final note

Over this term we have looked at forming habits. Some of our habits will be 'better' than others, but the main thing is that we are aware of what we need to work towards our happiness. Being conscious of habits which hurt us is important so we can come up with better strategies. This doesn't mean changing our behaviour to be polar opposite to what it was. Actually, it's often better to look for the *easiest* good solution. If you sit hunched over a desk all day, you do need physical exercise for a long career drawing or designing. What's a good solution for you? Someone who enjoys reading on the couch in their leisure time may find walking with an audio book a much more appealing, and therefore sustainable, daily exercise than someone who loves being social and outdoors.

And while exercise, or any other growth activity you take on, ought to be a bit uncomfortable from time to time (e.g. get your heart rate up by choosing a hilly walk), it

can be fun (or at least fine) if you know your grain and work with it. That's the process of designing your professional practice. You decide what you need and you tailor your schedule to your preferences. Of course you will need to know *what you need* and *what your preferences are!* Knowing those parameters is the foundation of the design brief that is your professional life.

The driving force of your career goals should be something that fulfills you. This could be finding a job with a manageable schedule and pleasant colleagues that leaves you energy and time for your friends and family, or it could be developing a game that tells a story that you are driven to share despite the long hours required.

Whatever you do, I hope it brings you joy and that you remember that you can always switch direction when you're ready. Careers are made up of many chapters.



© Moomin Characters™

Worksheet

You can use this after a completed term. Asking yourself: how did I select a goal this term? E.g. intuition, selected a predetermined one, didn't select one, extrapolated from the brief, or etc.

Do I feel good about my goal? Any changes?

How did I select a metric of success?

Does this metric work for me at the end of the term?
If not, what would I change?

What obstacles, if any, did I experience over the course of my term project?

- decision-making or narrowing down my ideas
- technical skills
- overwhelm
- procrastination
- lack of structure
- too much structure
- feeling unmotivated
- having priorities outside of class
- feeling like I didn't have enough time
- other

Looking back on my time management so far this term, is there anything I would do differently?

This term in Professional Practices 411 we learned and discussed

- career planning
- strategies for managing creative output (journaling)
- the basics of portfolio item selection
- single page document set-up in InDesign
- basic typesetting
- preparing simple files for print
- using the DOC
- colour management for press
- basics for freelance financial management
- developing a process

Is there anything you would like to revisit in more depth?
Is there anything you felt you didn't understand or you now forget?

Going into next term, can you use anything from this class to your advantage? Can you clarify any support you might need or skills you feel you need prior to graduating?

What advice would you give to students beginning their fourth year based on your experiences so far?

Resources

Video Tutorials

My tutorials are available on YouTube indefinitely, but they're unlisted. Links are below.

Typesetting Lists in InDesign
https://youtu.be/8fRAKERf_as

Single page document set up for print tutorial
<https://youtu.be/8LHCMcaAzh0>

InDesign Tutorial
<https://youtu.be/FNKPvcgzCPE>

PDF set up
<https://youtu.be/q6sIYJEaTjg>

How to make an interactive PDF with hyperlinks
<https://youtu.be/rOM78t0qoWE>

Bitmap tutorial (for scanned line drawing or writing)
<https://youtu.be/Q8g5Q6zNsuc>

Business card pre-print checklist
<https://youtu.be/0cD86IPfEpc>

Colour Pt. 1: Colour Systems
<https://youtu.be/yomE2iBOGPc>

Colour Pt. 2: Managing colour in InDesign and Adobe Acrobat
<https://youtu.be/IDA5HHIqw-k>

Colour Pt. 3: Overview of colour separation
https://youtu.be/B_xi2pQ_YvY

Readings referenced

The Artist's Way
by Julia Cameron*

*There's a Word for the Blah Your'e Feeling:
It's Called Languishing*
by Adam Grant

Designing Design
by Kenya Hara*

The Obstacle is The Way
by Ryan Holiday

Making Time: How to Focus on What Matters Every Day
by Jake Knapp and John Zeratsky

Joy at Work and The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up
by Marie Kondo

What I Talk About When I Talk About Running
by Haruki Murakami

How to Create a Portfolio and Get Hired
by Fig Taylor

Print Resources

Managing Black Ink
<http://hundreds.ca/robinmitchellcranfield/2017/7/5/black-bitmap>

'Print Handbook'
<https://www.printheadbook.com>

Summary of Carlos' presentation on using the DOC
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1naw0W4TFpCkX-aW2rkdHORBieAuB-J55ouFUZix3mfW8/edit?usp=sharing>

This guide is not for sale or distribution.

©Robin Mitchell Cranfield, 2023