



DIGITAL MEDIA DESIGN • BRONX INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

The Digital Path

A Photoshop & Design Fundamentals Study Book

By **Victor Pinnock** • 2026–2027 Classroom Edition • Aligned to **Adobe Certified Professional – Visual Design Using Adobe Photoshop**, exam version 2025 (v26.x)

• 5 chapters • 12 lessons • every term testable on the real exam

PREFACE

“The Digital Path” was written by a Digital Media Design teacher at Bronx International High School for his own students, and is provided to them entirely free of charge. It is a rewrite of an earlier classroom book, **“The Digital Way,”** rebuilt from the ground up against the current Adobe Certified Professional exam and modern Photoshop — the original book's structure and teaching approach are preserved, but every domain, tool, and exam detail has been checked, corrected, and updated where it had gone out of date. This book and the companion class website are both published online, free, for any other teacher or student who can use them.

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WHERE THIS MATERIAL COMES FROM

Every fact, tool description, and exam detail in this book was checked against a real, named source rather than invented — full citations for every chapter are collected in the Sources & References section at the back of the book.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This edition replaces an older Photoshop study book written for a 2013–2017 exam that no longer exists. Every chapter here is rebuilt against the real, current Certiport blueprint — and where the older material got something wrong or out of date (a made-up term for a Pen tool feature, a stale exam-format description, tools that didn't exist yet), this edition says so directly rather than quietly patching it. Chapters 1–2 are concept-only, no computer needed. Chapters 3–5 are hands-on: open Photoshop and follow along.

CONTENTS

01 Working in the Design Industry

Concept · no software

- 1.1 Purpose & Audience 1.2 Clients & Project Management
 - 1.3 Copyright, Fair Use & Licensing 1.4 Image Fundamentals
 - 1.5 Elements & Principles of Design
-

02 Design Fundamentals

Concept · no software

- 2.1 Design Principles 2.2 Type & Color 2.3 Behind the Image
-

03 The Workspace, Selections & Masks

Hands-on

- 3.1 The Workspace 3.2 Selections & Tools 3.3 Masks, Filters & Blending
 - 3.4 Chapter Project: Business Card
-

04 Building & Publishing Original Work

Hands-on

- 4.1 Starting From Scratch 4.2 Retouching & Nondestructive Technique

05 What the Exam Actually Looks Like

Exam prep

CHAPTER ONE

01

Working in the Design Industry

No software needed — everything here is concept and practice. It's also the first domain of the exam, and it matters more than people expect: a technically flawless Photoshop file can still fail a client, an employer, or an exam task if the thinking in this chapter is missing.

Before you open Photoshop, you're already doing design work. Every real project — a school club poster, a business's flyer, a client's ad campaign — starts the same way: someone needs something made, for a reason, for a specific person or group of people to see. Get that part wrong, and no amount of tool skill fixes it.

What is digital design?

Digital design is an **applied science** — a field of study that exists to solve real, practical problems, not just describe how something works. Specifically, it takes real research about how people see, read, and react, and applies that research to solve visual communication problems: making sure something gets noticed, understood, and remembered by the right person. What makes it *digital* design is simply the tools — a poster, a logo, a social ad, a magazine layout, a **UI** screen (short for **user interface** — the buttons, menus, and screens a person taps or clicks to use an app or website) are all built and delivered today as pixels and files, using software, instead of as ink and paper made by hand. The underlying problem hasn't changed since long before computers existed: someone needs something communicated clearly, to a specific audience, for a specific reason. What's changed is the toolkit, the deliverables (a file instead of a physical proof), and how fast a draft can be revised. A digital designer's actual job, day to day, is rarely just “make it look good” — it's understanding a client's need, applying real design theory to solve it, and executing that solution correctly in professional software, on deadline, in a file format the next person in the chain can actually use.

This book, and the exam it prepares you for, treats **Photoshop** as one tool inside that larger practice — not the practice itself. Chapters 1 and 2 are the theory and professional practice a designer needs regardless of which software they open; Chapters 3 and 4 are where that theory gets executed, specifically in Photoshop; Chapter 5 is the exam itself. Every chapter is written to do two things at once, on purpose: get you ready for the real Adobe Certified Professional exam, *and* build the actual, transferable skill of being a designer who understands digital design as a whole — skill that outlasts any one version of any one piece of software.

1.1

Purpose & Audience

Every image or design choice has a **purpose** — a reason it needs to exist — and a **target audience** it needs to reach. Before opening any tool, a professional designer answers three questions:

1. **Who is this for?** (the audience — described by **demographics**: age, location, gender, income, interests, and so on)
2. **What does the client need?** (the purpose — the actual problem this piece is supposed to solve)
3. **What reaction should the finished piece produce?** (the intended response — laughing, trusting, buying, remembering)

Skip these questions and you can still end up with something that *looks* professional — clean layout, good color, sharp type — and still completely misses the mark, because it wasn't built for the right person. A flyer selling luxury watches to retirees uses different words, images, and even fonts than one selling the same watches to 20-somethings on social media. The product might be identical; the design should not be.

KEY TERMS



Purpose

The reason a design or image exists — what it needs to communicate or accomplish.



Audience

The specific group of people a design is created for.



Demographics

Measurable traits used to describe an audience — age, location, gender, income, interests, etc.

THE CLIENT INTERVIEW: FOUR QUESTION CATEGORIES

Before starting any real client project, a designer runs an interview — a structured conversation that gets the client's actual needs on paper before a single pixel gets placed. Real client interviews cluster around four categories:

- **Goals & Target Audience** — What does the client actually want this piece to accomplish, and who exactly is it for?
- **Content** — What words, images, logos, or existing brand assets does the client already have — and what still needs to be created from scratch?
- **Design Requirements** — Required colors, fonts, or logos; anything the client explicitly does *not* want used; similar designs the client admires.
- **Distribution** — Where will this actually appear (print, web, video, a combination), and what size/format/resolution does that destination require?

Notice that “distribution” comes up in the *first* conversation, not at the end. A poster meant for a bus shelter and a graphic meant for Instagram have different size, resolution, and even color-mode requirements — finding this out on day one saves real rework later.

Worked example

A client tells you: “*I need a poster for my bakery.*” That's a purpose (advertise the bakery) but no audience yet. A real interview digs further: is this for people who already know the bakery, or people discovering it for the first time? Shop window (walk-by, weekly regulars) or a community Facebook page (scroll-by, first-timers)? The answer changes what the poster needs to say and show — a loyalty-focused “come back for your usual” reads completely differently from a first-impression “welcome, here's what makes us different.”