

## COMPUTER SKILLS FOR DESIGNERS

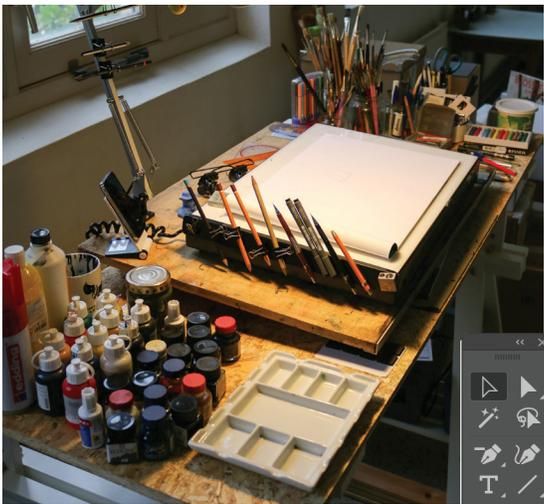
### Metaphor

**An operating system (OS)** is software that we use to operate the computer. It provides the features that allow programs to run and for us to interact with them. The ones we encounter most often are Mac OS X, Windows, or Linux. But increasingly, mobile devices running Android and iOS are defining our digital lives.

Computer software interfaces are built on metaphors. These metaphors link the digital interface to real life tools and processes.

Regardless of the operating system you are using, most share a few central metaphors such as document, folder, file system, and desktop. Before today's so-called "paperless office," office workers created documents on paper, filed them in folders, and organized the folders in cabinets near their desks. The most important or current project folders might have been sitting on their desktops.

Metaphors in Design Software



If the operating system is like your home office, **design software is like your studio.**

The metaphors of design software are built around the tools of the artist and designer: pencils, brushes, palettes, artboards, and photographic equipment. These tools do what you would expect: pencils make hard-edged lines, brushes make hard and soft-edged areas of color, colors are mixed in the Color panel.

These metaphors are consistent across the graphical interfaces of operating systems and design applications. For example, the panels and the tools look and behave in the same way — despite subtle application differences — in Adobe's Illustrator, Photoshop, and InDesign. Learning the metaphors and similarities among these application interfaces will be one of the fastest routes to mastering the tools.

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### Finding the Right Tool

The programs in Adobe's Creative Suite have different purposes, but the names of the software hint at the roles they are intended to serve. Knowing which tool to use can make your work more efficient. For example, Photoshop, InDesign, and Illustrator can all create simple vector graphics, but with the tools in Illustrator making simple and complex vector graphics is faster.

Broadly, Photoshop and Illustrator are tools for making different types of image assets, while InDesign brings those image assets together with text for making documents. Again, Illustrator and Photoshop can both make a document, but InDesign makes multi-page layouts and long-form typesetting fast and simple.

I've known professionals whose fear of learning new tools kept them from advancing, and you should avoid their mistake. They would create *everything* in Photoshop rather than learn a tool better suited to the job, and it would cause problems for print production because what you see on the screen is not always what comes out in print. In fact, without software trickery it would *never* come out the same. We'll talk more about print production topics like this later in the semester.

Finding the right tools and techniques takes knowing what is at your disposal. And the most important ones aren't the Creative Suite, they are your web browser and a search engine because self-learning starts with knowing how to find the information available. *A Short Guide to Research (for Designers)* by Meredith James is a small, short hand guide on doing just this. It is an inexpensive book, retailing for \$9.50, and I have placed my personal copy on reserve in the Art and Architecture Library. And finally, the greatest resource available to you is a librarian, an information-finding specialist who will freely work to help you.

