Saint John
STUDIO



From Information *to* Intelligence

BOB SAINT JOHN

Ideas with a clearer direction.

VIP² connects the creative brief to a practical way of exploring ideas. Define the job, make the useful material visible, develop a response, and explain why it deserves to go forward.

This revised edition keeps the edited language and replaces the schematic artwork with concrete examples. The addendum provides a reusable brief, concept record, and review sheet.

VIP² means Visual Information Platform and Visual Intelligence Platform: two responsibilities in one practice. It is a working name for the method, not a measured gain in intelligence.

Publication and contact

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For author review. Named user anecdotes and unverified product promises remain omitted. New artwork is illustrative, not documentation of a delivered client campaign.

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Begin with the creative brief on page 11. See the evening-class example on pages 15–17 and the illustrated teaching comparison on pages 22–25. The reusable worksheets begin on page 36.

The evolution of visual communication

From marks on stone to intelligence in motion.



1

Marks on stone

The first communication.

2

Telling our stories

Images give meaning.

3

Capturing the world

Art records our vision.

4

Preserving reality

Images preserve our world.

Conceptual illustration of changing tools, not a historical timeline. Earlier forms continue alongside newer ones.

Human judgment gives it direction.

The tools change. The responsibility remains.



5

Designing possibilities

Digital tools expand our creativity.

6

Connecting the world

Networks connect us all.

7

Intelligence in motion

Human + AI: building a better future.

VIP² begins here: gather information, make relationships visible, and use human judgment to choose a direction.

Give yourself something to respond to.

An empty page can ask too much of you at once. What is the subject? Who is it for? What should it communicate? Which direction deserves the first mark? When every answer is still open, a modest constraint can help.

The practice in this book is simple: gather useful words, arrange them where you can inspect them, introduce a combination you would not ordinarily choose, and make a small response. Then judge that response against the actual job.

The combination is raw material. The idea appears when you establish a relationship between the pieces. A wheel can offer a subject and a setting; it cannot tell you whether their relationship is meaningful for your audience.

This is a way to start work and make your reasoning easier to discuss. It is not a complete theory of creativity. Ideas can begin in images, movement, sound, materials, memory, or conversation. Language is one useful handle among them.

Use a constraint to open the work. Use judgment to give it direction.

If words make the task harder for a particular person or group, try picture cards, objects, demonstrations, or a mixture of words and images. Keep the purpose clear while changing the form.

Two responsibilities. One practice.

Information: what is available	Intelligence: what you decide
Audience: adults new to drawing	Make the class feel welcoming.
Image prompt: an empty chair	Use the chair as an invitation.
Constraint: readable on a phone	Keep one image and short copy.

Visual Information Platform describes the arrangement of material: the vocabulary, references, relationships, and records you can inspect. Visual Intelligence Platform describes the judgment brought to that material: noticing, interpreting, choosing, and revising.

The draft uses VIP for both meanings. In this edition, VIP² holds them together without treating them as interchangeable. Information makes options available. Intelligence makes a reasoned choice among them.

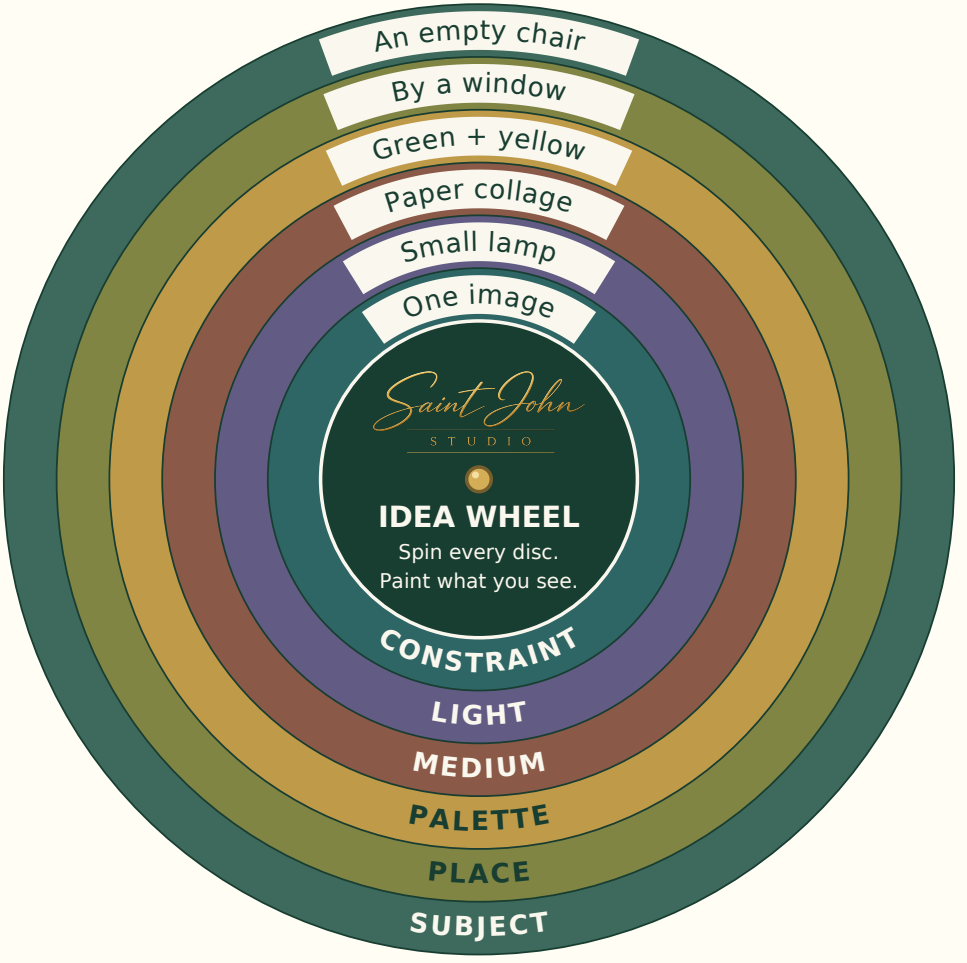
The distinction helps us ask better questions. Are we missing useful material, or are we avoiding a decision? Adding more references may solve the first problem and worsen the second.

Keep the two responsibilities distinct while working: check the material you have, then explain the decision you make. More information is useful only when it helps the next choice.

A name is a handle for the method. It is not evidence that the method works.

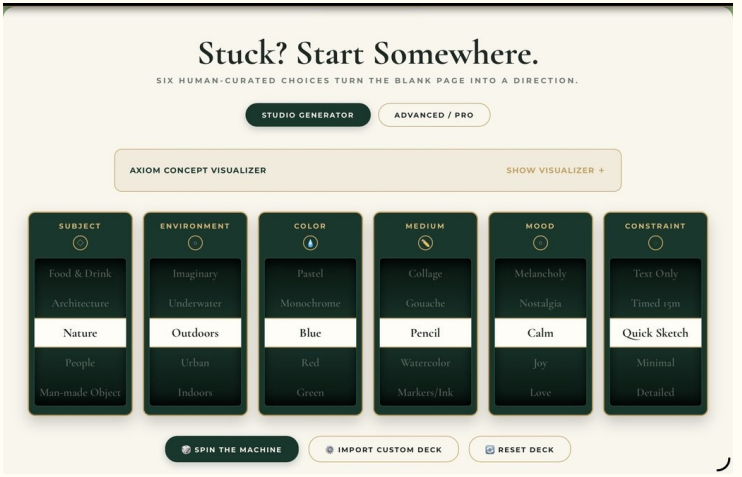
From classroom to practice

Teaching illustration at Montserrat College of Art helped shape my interest in the moment before execution: the point at which a person has ability and intention but still needs a direction.



Idea Wheel · new vector teaching illustration based on the portfolio layout. Prompts follow this book’s evening-class example.

The student makes the work.



Idea Machine · October 1 portfolio, page 6

A constrained exercise gives that moment a form. A few words drawn from a bowl, or selected by a wheel, create something specific to respond to. The student still makes the work. The exercise changes the starting conditions.

The Idea Wheel carries that teaching approach into a visible arrangement. Different categories can be brought into alignment so that familiar material produces an unfamiliar starting point.

That is the part worth carrying into professional practice: making a beginning available without taking the decision away from the person doing the work.

The digital version can make the arrangement easier to reuse. It is not what gives the exercise its value. A bowl, a set of cards, or a shared wall can serve the same teaching purpose.

The exercise changes the beginning. The student makes the work.

Author review: confirm the bowl-to-wheel chronology before publishing this account. Add an original classroom artifact or documented student response if one is available.

Make relationships easier to inspect.

A visual choice	What the viewer recognizes
Chair beside a lit drawing table	A place to sit, learn, and begin.
Short headline: A place to begin	An invitation to participate.
Details grouped in one place	When, where, and how to join.

A list is useful for collecting. A spatial arrangement can help you compare. Move a word, place two references beside each other, or group related choices. The arrangement gives the conversation something concrete to point at.

A visual interface is not automatically clearer. A crowded wheel is still crowded. A picture without a useful label may be ambiguous. Choose the format that helps this audience understand this task.

Use recognizable images, short labels, readable type, and deliberate space. Put detail where it becomes useful rather than loading every choice with an explanation.

The same principle applies to a classroom wall, a project board, a book spread, or navigation cards on a website. Make the next choice easy to find, then let the reader explore.

Words can clarify the intent behind an image. Images can make the choice easier to recognize. They should support each other.

Define the job before you explore.

A creative brief is the agreement that gives the work a purpose. It identifies the audience, the problem, the intended response, the evidence, and the conditions that must remain true.

Agree first	Then use VIP² to explore
Audience and situation	Images or terms that connect to their experience.
Single-minded message	Relationships that make that message visible.
Reasons to believe	Accurate facts and examples the work can use.
Required conditions	The remaining choices in form, tone, and execution.
How success will be checked	Small concepts that can be compared with the brief.

Keep audience, factual claims, accessibility, required wording, and delivery conditions fixed. Use the wheel, cards, or chart to vary possibilities within those boundaries.

After exploration, turn the strongest relationship into a direction sentence and a first artifact. Review that artifact against the agreed brief. Update the brief when the project changes, not merely to justify a favorite idea.

The reusable creative brief and decision sheets begin in the addendum on page 35 .

Build a useful vocabulary.

Gather terms from the brief, the audience, the subject, and the actual situation. Prefer words that can change a decision. A named place, a specific action, or a physical quality often gives you more to work with than a general approval word.

Loose term	A question that sharpens it
Modern	Which contemporary behavior or form matters?
Friendly	Welcoming to whom, and through what action?
Bold	Strong contrast, a direct message, or an unusual scale?
Simple	Which unnecessary choice can we remove?

Keep a broad word when it is useful, but explain what it means in this project. "Quiet" might mean few visual elements, low sound, or a restrained tone. Those are different directions.

Include one or two terms that could surprise you. A vocabulary made entirely of synonyms will produce little tension. A vocabulary with no connection to the brief will produce noise.

Begin small enough to inspect. Add terms because they offer useful differences, not because a larger list looks more professional.

Give the material a shape.

Category	Choose a specific possibility
Subject	Empty chair / open door / drawing hand
Place	Library / studio / work table
Medium	Collage / photograph / ink drawing
Palette	Forest green + warm yellow / monochrome
Light	Evening lamp / morning window
Constraint	One image / one sentence / small format

For an illustration exercise, six categories might be subject, place, medium, palette, light, and constraint. Put several possibilities in each category and select one from each. You can use separate bowls, stacks of cards, a chart, or a wheel.

The categories are a teaching choice, not a universal formula. A writer may need character, setting, desire, obstacle, tone, and change. A practical training exercise needs options that remain physically possible and relevant to the learner.

Keep required conditions fixed. Randomize the parts where exploration is useful. If the assignment requires a readable poster, do not randomize away readability.

This category chart demonstrates the exercise. Adapt the options to the brief and keep its essential conditions fixed.

A ten-minute practice

Time	Action
0-2 minutes	Write the audience, purpose, and one fixed constraint.
2-4 minutes	Choose useful terms and arrange them into categories.
4-5 minutes	Select a combination. Notice the relationship that interests you.
5-8 minutes	Make a thumbnail, short paragraph, or small demonstration.
8-10 minutes	Compare it with the brief. Keep, revise, or reject with a reason.

The time limit is an exercise design, not a promise of how quickly a real project will be solved. Shorten or extend it for the task and the people involved.

You may keep only part of the combination. You may replace a term that violates the brief. The important discipline is to explain the change and make something that can be evaluated.

Stop selecting when you have enough material to test a direction. Collecting combinations can become another way to postpone the work.

Choose. Make. Compare.

From words to direction

Illustrative demonstration · a brief carried into concept development

Creative brief: invite local adults to an evening drawing class. The audience is beginners. The desired action is to join the class. The message is that there is a welcoming place to start. The poster must work at a library and on a phone, with readable time, place, and joining details.

Category	Selected prompt
Subject	An empty chair
Place	A table beside a window
Medium	Paper collage
Palette	Deep green and warm yellow
Light	One small lamp
Constraint	Use one dominant image

The relationship worth developing is the empty chair and the lamp. The chair gives the viewer a place to imagine sitting. The lamp suggests an evening setting and a manageable space to begin.

Direction sentence: "Make the class feel like a welcoming place waiting for the beginner." That sentence gives the image a job. It also gives the designer a reason to reject clutter.

A place to begin.



Illustrative poster artwork · typographic application shown on the following page.

The empty chair gives the beginner a place to imagine sitting. Warm light suggests an evening setting; the untouched paper makes the activity specific.

The brief supplies the reason for the image. The selected prompts supply material. The concept is the relationship between them.

Test whether people recognize the invitation before explaining what you meant. The actual class details must be supplied and checked before this becomes a finished poster.

Carry the image into the message.

EVENING DRAWING CLASS / BEGINNERS WELCOME

A place to begin.



Learn to look. Make your first mark.

[Time] · [Location] · [How to join]

ILLUSTRATIVE APPLICATION / REPLACE DETAILS BEFORE USE

Short invitation. One recognizable image. Practical details together.

Choose with reasons.

Criterion	Ask this about your actual concept
Relevance	Does it invite the beginner into the class?
Clarity	Do readers recognize the invitation?
Feasibility	Can the image and details work on a phone?

A surprising option deserves attention, but surprise is only one quality. Choose a direction because it serves the brief, establishes a meaningful relationship, and can be tested within the constraints.

Describe your choice in a sentence: "I am keeping this combination because..." If the answer is only "I like it," ask what the liking is responding to. A clear contrast? An emotional association? An image the audience can recognize?

Separate the required conditions from preferences. A beautiful idea that excludes the intended audience has missed the brief. A plain idea that works may deserve more development.

Invite another person to describe what they see before explaining what you meant. Their interpretation can reveal whether the relationship is visible or only present in your own reasoning.

You remain responsible for the choice, including choices made with a tool.

Change the conditions.

What you notice	A useful response
Every selection feels similar	Remove duplicates and add genuinely different material.
A result is surprising but irrelevant	Check the brief; keep the useful relationship and change the rest.
You keep selecting without making	Set a stop rule and produce a small test.
The task remains unclear	Ask for the missing audience, purpose, or constraint.
The format is hard to use	Try picture cards, paper, a list, or a different arrangement.

A stalled session does not prove that the vocabulary is wrong. You may need rest, more subject knowledge, a clearer assignment, or a smaller task. Check those possibilities rather than forcing every difficulty into one explanation.

Try one change at a time so you can see whether it helps. Replacing the tool, the brief, and the entire vocabulary at once makes the next result difficult to interpret.

The method should help you work. When it becomes the obstacle, adapt it.

Teach the decision.

Give the class a shared brief and an appropriate vocabulary. Introduce a short selection exercise, then ask each student to make a response. The comparison becomes useful when different people interpret the same starting material.

Ask students to show their process: what they selected, what they changed, why they chose a direction, and what the first test revealed. This makes judgment visible without pretending there is one correct interpretation.

A practical session

Use two minutes to explain the task, three minutes to select and discuss prompts, eight minutes to make a first response, and five minutes to compare. These are suggested intervals; adapt them to the course and the students.

In the discussion, ask what the work communicates before asking whether it is good. Follow with: which part of the prompt helped, and which part had to be changed?

Offer different ways to participate. Students can use pictures, speak a direction aloud, work with objects, or write. A method intended to help people begin should not make one language or interaction style the gate.

Compare what students actually produce. Do not promise better learning outcomes without examining them.

Use a shared brief, not forced agreement.

A team needs shared reference points, but it does not need identical taste. Put the audience, purpose, fixed conditions, and available material where everyone can inspect them. Then let people develop more than one response.

Keep the first review concrete. Show the selected terms and a small artifact. Explain the direction in one sentence. Ask colleagues to evaluate the relationship against the brief rather than reacting to an unexplained mood.

If a colleague dislikes the method, ask why. They may have a better approach, an accessibility concern, or a valid objection to the vocabulary. Treat the objection as information rather than assuming fear or resistance to change.

A shared vocabulary should make disagreement more precise. It cannot remove disagreement, and a team that agrees quickly may still be wrong.

A useful review question

"Which part serves the audience, and which part only serves our preference?"

Try the practice on one contained task before making it a studio-wide routine. Keep what helps and leave room for other ways of working.

Same starting material.

PEACHES + PARIS

Peaches is the ginger cat in the portfolio’s visual trial. The subject and setting stay the same. The relationship between them can change.





THE SOURCE TRIAL

The cat is a character in a Paris café.

A NEW INTERPRETATION

The tower frames the face. Two familiar shapes become one focal image.



Paris becomes a place
the cat holds close.

The brief gives the picture a job.

ILLUSTRATIVE TEACHING ASSIGNMENT

Create a quiet, imaginative invitation to explore Paris. Combine a ginger cat with the city. The viewer should recognize the place and feel drawn into it.

WHICH RELATIONSHIP SERVES THAT JOB?



Café character



Framed portrait



City embrace

The café tells a story, but its detail competes with a quiet invitation. The tower is direct, but the face feels watchful. For this brief, develop the city embrace: the sleeping cat suggests calm, and Paris remains visible within it.

Before choosing it for use, ask someone what they recognize. Check whether the cat overwhelms Paris and whether the invitation remains readable at a small size.

Paris, imagined.



A different way to see the city.

The direction is a reasoned proposal. The reader test and final decision are still ahead.

Keep the method. Change the vocabulary.

Context	Useful categories	First test
Writing	Character, setting, desire, obstacle, tone, change	A scene or opening paragraph
Design	Subject, setting, medium, palette, light, constraint	A thumbnail or small layout
Practice	Task, position, action, pace, variation, constraint	A safe, feasible drill

These are illustrative category sets. They do not establish that one formula works equally well in every field.

In writing, a combination might suggest a conflict rather than a visual. In design, it might suggest a conceptual juxtaposition. In physical practice, it must remain appropriate to the learner and the activity.

The transferable move is to create a useful constraint, respond, and evaluate. The domain knowledge belongs to the person teaching or doing the work.

Avoid using randomness to make consequential choices that require expertise or factual verification. The exercise opens possibilities; it does not replace the standards of the field.

Keep the reasoning with the work.

Keep with the poster	A populated decision record
Brief	Invite beginners to an evening class.
Direction	A welcoming place waiting for you.
Rationale	The empty chair lets the viewer imagine joining.
Version	evening-class_poster_review_2026-10-09_v03.pdf

Ideation and file organization are related, but they are not the same job. A useful direction can give an artifact a clearer name. It cannot establish a version policy, recover a missing file, or decide who has authority to approve a change.

Keep a small record beside the artifact: the brief, the direction sentence, the selected material, the reason for the choice, and the version you tested. This makes later retrieval more useful than simply collecting exports.

A new collaborator should be able to answer three questions: what were we trying to do, why did we choose this direction, and which file should I use now?

That record is part of the craft of handing over work. It need not be elaborate. It needs to be understandable by someone who was not present at the decision.

A clear vocabulary supports a good archive. A good archive also needs explicit maintenance.

Make the next version findable.

Choose one active project and establish a convention the team can follow. Name the project, the artifact, the stage, the date, and the version. Keep approval status in a shared record rather than relying on the word "final."

Field	Illustrative value
Project	evening-class
Artifact	poster
Stage	review
Date	2026-10-09
Version	v03

Example filename: evening-class_poster_review_2026-10-09_v03.pdf. Use a convention suited to your environment; this one is an example, not a platform requirement.

Record the approved deliverable and its location. Preserve source files, references, and permissions that the next person will need. Avoid renaming old archives wholesale before checking their dependencies.

Test the system by asking someone else to retrieve the current artifact. If you need to explain the folder each time, the convention still needs work.

Give the archive a named owner. Good words help; consistent follow-through makes the system last.

Be precise about what the tool does.

A wheel that selects from supplied terms uses recombination. A generative model can introduce new text or images. Those operations have different implications and should be described separately.

If you use only cards or a random selector, say so. If you ask a model to expand the vocabulary, suggest concepts, or make an image, record that contribution. Do not describe an entire workflow as non-generative merely because one step is a shuffle.

The human remains responsible for checking facts, recognizing inappropriate material, choosing the direction, and deciding what may be published. A declaration of human control is useful only when the decisions are actually being made.

In a classroom, follow the applicable assignment and institutional rules. A short description of the mechanism is a starting point for discussion, not a substitute for evaluating the tool and the learning task.

This edition teaches a practice rather than a specific software release. Imports, saving, accessibility, collaboration, limits, and pricing need their own current documentation. The book should not quietly turn planned capabilities into promises.

Describe the operation. Show the contribution. Own the decision.

A two-week trial

Use the practice on a few comparable tasks. Keep the test modest enough to finish and clear enough to learn from. You are examining whether it helps in your circumstances, not proving that it works for everyone.

Record	Why it matters
Task and conditions	So you know what you are comparing.
Time to first testable response	So starting is an observable action.
Revisions needed	So speed does not hide weak work.
Response from another person	So clarity is not judged only by the maker.
What helped or hindered	So you can decide what to keep.

Include a task approached through your usual process. Notice differences in complexity, fatigue, and familiarity. A faster session on an easier task is not evidence of a better method.

At the end, ask whether the practice produced useful directions, clearer discussions, or better records. If it helped only one of those, use it for that purpose.

Write down failures as carefully as successes. They are the material from which a credible case study can be built.

A reusable brief card

Use a copy of this structure beside your first sketch, paragraph, or prototype.

Prompt	Your note
Audience and situation	_____
Purpose	_____
Fixed condition	_____
Selected material	_____
Direction sentence	_____
Reason for keeping it	_____
First artifact to make	_____
What another person saw	_____
Next change	_____
Current version and location	_____

Keep the card short enough to use. A record that takes longer than the exercise will rarely survive the next deadline.

The purpose is to carry the intent into the work and the work into its next use.

Useful does not have to mean unprecedented.

Combining alternatives within categories has a longer history than this platform. Tom Ritchey describes General Morphological Analysis, developed by Fritz Zwicky, as a method for structuring and exploring configurations in complex problems. Its systematic analysis goes beyond a random creative prompt. [1]

Research by Jiajie Zhang and Donald A. Norman examines tasks in which information is distributed between the mind and the external environment. That is relevant context for putting material where people can inspect it. It does not validate the particular VIP method or establish that a wheel is superior to another display. [2]

The value of this book is its practical teaching sequence: define a task, arrange useful material, introduce a constraint, make a response, and explain the choice.

Your contribution becomes clearer when the reader can see an actual example and try an exercise. A stronger demonstration is more persuasive than a larger claim.

There is no need to own the entire territory of creativity to offer a useful way through part of it.

Where the argument stands

[1] Tom Ritchey. "General Morphological Analysis: A general method for non-quantified modeling." Swedish Morphological Society, 2002; revised 2013. swemorph.com/ma.html

[2] Jiajie Zhang and Donald A. Norman. "Representations in Distributed Cognitive Tasks." Cognitive Science 18(1), 1994, pp. 87-122. DOI: 10.1207/s15516709cog1801_3.

These sources provide related context. They are not evidence of product performance, a measured increase in creativity, or a verified new category.

Source manuscript

This working edition was developed from the author-supplied, 55-page manuscript titled "VIP squared" in its PDF metadata. The source opens with the platform definition, then moves through language, an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, and an author section.

Editorial approach

Repeated explanations were consolidated. Universal claims were narrowed. Named anecdotes and quotations were omitted pending confirmation. Product tiers and uncertain links were removed. The worked example, brief card, and trial structure are editorial additions and are identified as exercises or illustrations.

The source remains unchanged. This edition is intended for author review before publication.

Artwork: the opening evolution spread, evening-class collage and Peaches + Paris illustrations are AI-assisted conceptual examples. The evolution image is not a historical timeline. The Idea Wheel is a new vector teaching illustration redrawn from the portfolio layout using this book’s evening-class prompts, not historical documentation. The Machine and café-cat images come from the October 1 portfolio, pages 6–7; the café-cat is identified there as an AI-assisted trial. New teaching brief and critique are illustrative additions; no classroom outcome or reader test is claimed.

Make the first useful mark.

Choose one task that has been waiting for a beginning. Write who it is for and what it needs to do. Gather a few useful terms or images. Put them where you can see them. Allow a combination you would not ordinarily choose.

Then make something small enough to judge.

The important moment is the one after the selection: when you decide what the relationship means and give it a form another person can understand.

A wheel may help you arrive there. A bowl may help. A conversation may be better. Keep the practice where it serves the work, and keep your attention on the person the work must reach.

Information gives you material. Intelligence gives it direction.

Bob Saint John

A working field guide to starting, choosing, and carrying ideas forward.

From agreement to direction.

Use this addendum at the start of a project, then return to it during concept review. The brief defines the job. The method opens possibilities. The review records the choice.

Stage	Action and output
1. Agree	Complete the brief with the requester or project owner.
2. Explore	Keep requirements fixed; vary prompts and make small concepts.
3. Select	Record the direction, its rationale, and the first test.
4. Review	Check understanding, factual accuracy, and requirements.
5. Carry forward	Record approval, the current file, and the next action.

One message

State what the audience should understand in one sentence. This is the message, not necessarily the final headline. Keep the desired action separate so both can be evaluated.

Using the worksheets

The next four pages contain fillable text fields. Type into them in a PDF viewer that supports forms, save a project copy, or print and write by hand. Each page also works as a stand-alone worksheet.

The job and the audience.

Type into the fields in a supported PDF viewer, or print and write by hand.

Project / organization / brief version

Requester / decision owner / collaborators

What problem does this project need to address?

Who is it for, and in what situation will they encounter it?

What should they understand, feel, or do?

The message and the conditions.

Type into the fields in a supported PDF viewer, or print and write by hand.

Single-minded message: what must the audience understand?

Reasons to believe: facts, proof, and approved sources

Required content, brand, accessibility, and other constraints

Deliverables / channels / timing / budget or resources

How will we judge success? Who approves, and when?

The choice and its reason.

Type into the fields in a supported PDF viewer, or print and write by hand.

Project / brief version / concept name

Selected words or images / conditions kept fixed

Direction sentence: how will the idea communicate?

Why this direction serves this audience and brief

First artifact to make / question to test / next action

What we learned. What goes next.

Type into the fields in a supported PDF viewer, or print and write by hand.

Project / concept / reviewer / date

What did another person understand before we explained it?

Brief, facts, required content, readability: what passed or failed?

Keep / revise / reject / rationale / approval or pending review

Current file and version / location / next action / owner

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Let’s give the idea direction.

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Creative direction · Design · Teaching · Publishing

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