

# VA 201 Visual Language I

## Syllabus for Section A & Section B (Fall 2023)

**Teaching mode: Only physical**

**Meets in room SUSAM 1012**

**Section A:** Tuesdays 9:40-11:30 & Thursdays 12:40-14:30

**Section B:** Tuesdays 12:40-14:30 & Thursdays 9:40-11:30

**Instructor:** Meltem Işık

**Office:** SUSAM G015

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays by appointment

**Email:** [misik@sabanciuniv.edu](mailto:misik@sabanciuniv.edu)

When we talk about language, we really talk about a structure with -agreed upon- rules and codes. We use those codes and structure to convey and receive messages. All the students here at Sabancı University have learned to read, to write and to speak another language. Therefore, all of you know what it takes to learn to communicate in another language. You also know that people communicate at various levels of competency both in their native tongue and in a second language. Some of us are capable enough in English so that we can easily order a hamburger and coke in New York City. Others may have a level of competency that will enable them to read simple paperback novels or newspaper articles. Some can only read Lemanyak or Şamdan, but not manage to read Orhan Pamuk. Certainly, there may be the ones who have a particularly high-level capacity in a language that they have the ability and privilege not just to read but also to write novels, poetry and academic articles in that language. If we are attaching “visual” to the idea of language, it seems that we must be talking about an ability to read, decode, and communicate with nonverbal messages.

**What is a nonverbal message?** In reality, we deal with such messages more than one might imagine. We generally believe that a red cloth irritates the bull. By common agreement, we stop at red traffic lights and we go when it turns to green. We receive many and various silent messages about incomes, social status, class, taste and the like when we walk in Bebek and certainly a completely different set of nonverbal messages if we go walking in Sultanbeyli. Body language is supposedly an entire communication system, all silent. A smile means the same all over the world.

This course is mostly about basic reading in visual language, but it is not an art appreciation or an art analysis course. Just as in Beginning Spanish, English 101, Introduction to German and many other basic level language courses to be able to read in that particular language you will be asked also 'to write' very basic texts in this language. In this particular case, we will ask you to do very basic exercises in visual language. Since this course is part of a Visual Arts program you may be here thinking that you will create artworks, expressive masterpieces in a studio. If you were able to read Schiller and write like Gunther Grass in the Introduction to German Course without a doubt, there is a possibility to create a masterwork in this studio.

**So, is this another boring introductory language course?** Possible, if you think that language is boring. However, remember, language is also control. Language is power. Think of various uses of verbal language. How some people just use language to buy apples from the grocer? Think about how some other people can gather ten thousand people in a public square to listen to them. How they can use the same language to excite a huge crowd sometimes to topple governments, sometimes to lynch people. Think of the use of language in simpler human relations. How one can use the language to make another person so happy or so sad. (An “I love you” or an “I do not love you”) Think about poets, writers and actors that can make us laugh and cry at times using the same words that we use to buy apples.

Be it visual or verbal if you are competent and able in a communication process, if you know what to say, what words to use, how to pronounce the words, when to pause, when to scream, when to whisper you have a lot of power. You can convey ideas, feelings, emotions; you can activate or stop your listeners or viewers. You can make them be intrigued, disgusted or fall in love with you.

Both in verbal and visual language to have that sort of influence one must first learn the basic elements of a language (letters of that alphabet, words/vocabulary, rules of syntax/grammar). As you, all know we have to do a lot of memorizing, reading and writing exercises to master that part of a language only. Once we are able to read, write and speak in a language, to use that effectively we have to master the process of decision-making. This means we have to learn what words to use at a particular instance, when to pause when to scream, when to whisper. In visual language this process of decision-making is called designing.

- This course will start with some information and exercises about **seeing accurately and creating images**.
- It will move on to the **basic visual elements** and **their various characteristics**.
- We will look into how we see and perceive, discuss **basic principles of design**, focusing on the principles of gestalt, and **how visual perception informs design decisions**. (Such as closure/proximity/grouping/continuity.)
- Finally, we will get into **visual strategies**, through various basic design exercises to consciously **arrange various visual elements to achieve the particular effect we desire**.

## **COURSE STRUCTURE**

- The course meets physically in the studio, twice a week for two hours each session.
- There will be no exams but plenty of homework assignments / projects.
- Projects will be announced, and the project briefs will be available on SuCourse+.
- You will be given specific formats (paper sizes) for every home project. Presenting your work in these formats are crucial and critical!
- All homework/projects are to be presented on the walls of the studio **sharp** before the class begins. (Use Blue Tack / Patafix to hang your work)
- Sharp here means that the projects will be hung before the class begins and not after!!!
- **All homework/projects will have your name, last name, date and the number of the homework/project written, on back of the paper.**

You always have the opportunity to redo your projects, after the critique sessions in order to improve your results. This is called “sharpening” a design. In such cases do not forget to add a **capital “S” (meaning sharpened) next to the number of the project: your name-last name-project number S**

## MATERIALS

Materials and equipment that you should have are:

- A digital camera of one sort or another. A cellular phone camera is acceptable for the purposes of this class.
- A4 paper (regular white, plenty of it)
- Canson or Schöller white drawing paper. Start with at least two sheets 100 x 70 cm format. We'll hardly ever ask you to use that format, but it is cheaper to buy the large sheets and cut them to the required formats)
- Black paper (Fon kağıdı): At least 3 sheets
- Pencils: H4, H2, HB, B2, and B4
- Pencil sharpener
- Eraser(s): A white clean rubber and the blue malleable eraser
- Scissors
- Utility knives and spare blades (one large, one small)
- Steel ruler
- One sheet of thick grey cardboard (mukavva), or cutting mat (this one is critical to use to cut your paper into format, you do not want to cut your tabletop)
- Blue Tack / Tack it / Patafix
- Glue (Peligom or Uhu both liquid and stick)
- Black markers (One 0.5, one medium tip and one large tip)

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

- **Your grade predominantly will be based on the sum of these homework/projects that you submit.**
- There will be brief lectures especially in the first half of the semester, and some classwork/projects but the main part of every course session will consist of critiques. That means visual reading, discussions and verbal evaluation of your homework/projects.
- **Another major portion of your grade will be based on your participation and articulation. That means we expect you to be active and articulate participants in these critiques using your own words as well as the concepts and terminology of the lectures.** In a sense while you are expected to transform verbal homework/projects assignments into visual messages, you should also be prepared to "translate" visual language into verbal language in the critique sessions.
- Attendance will be taken regularly, but please note that that it is not enough to just show up for the class. **In order to earn 25% of your grade, participation in the class critiques and timely presentation of the projects are critical.**
- **Regardless of your project grades, if you miss 25% of the classes (that is 7 classes), you will fail this class and your grade will be NA.**

## GRADES

Projects:	50%
Participation:	25%
<u>Final Project:</u>	<u>25%</u>
Total:	100%

A weekly schedule consisting of a draft plan for this semester is below.\*

**Have a good semester!**

## FALL 2022

	Tuesday		Thursday
Week 1	Visual language as communication		Visual Hierarchy
Week 2	Emphasis	10-11 Oct Add-drop period!	Visual Balance
Week 3	Visual Balance of Figure & Field		Asymmetrical balance
Week 4	Grouping/Repelling		Visual Rhythm
Week 5	Sequence		Implied Motion
Week 6	Grid Module and pattern		Dynamic Design
Week 7	Order & Chaos	13 Nov-8 Dec Withdrawal period!	Comforting & Disturbing Design
Week 8	Object studies: Photo		Object studies: Line drawing
Week 9	Object studies: Silhouette		Object studies: High contrast drawing
Week 10	Visual Strategies: Boldness & Subtlety		Visual Strategies: Spontaneity & Predictability
Week 11	Final Project Initial idea sketches		Final Project Developing ideas
Week 12	Final Project Visual explorations		Final Project Visual explorations
Week 13	Final Project Bringing it all together		Final Project Critique Session
Week 14	Final Project Critique Session	Last week of classes	Final Project Submission

\*Course content, requirements and policies are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.