GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENTS AS END-USERS

ABSTRACT

Typography is one of the distinguishing factors that separates graphic design from other disciplines. Teaching expressive typography to first-year graphic design students is valuable because it affords the students the space to learn the fundamental principles and systems of graphic design, while also enabling students to communicate a feeling through experimentation with letterforms bound only by legibility. IDEO defines the human centered design (HCD) process as a six-phase cycle: observation, ideation, rapid prototyping, user feedback, iteration, and implementation (User Testing Blog, 2018). One assignment of the first-year graphic design studio class was planned within the HCD framework. As a result, over the course of the semester, students participated in expressive letter workshops allowing for the application and adaption of the HCD cycle on the students' understandings and physical work before the summative expressive word assignment. This proposal seeks to answer what happens when an expressive typography assignment is developed through the lens of the HCD design process, situating first-year graphic design students as the "end-users"?

References:
User Testing Blog. (2018, December 5) *IDEO's Human Centered Design Process: How to Make Things People Love* [blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.usertesting.com/blog/how-ideo-uses-customer-insights-to-design-innovative-products-users-love/

HCD APPROACH AND BENEFITS

According to the Human Centered Design Society:
Human-centered design is an approach to interactive services, products and systems, research, design, development and management that aims to make them usable and useful by focusing on all the users, their needs and requirements, and by applying human factors/ergonomics and usability knowledge and techniques.

Many articles and studies have been written on how the HCD approach benefits end-users. Some examples of benefits using human-centered design methods improve quality by:

- increasing the productivity of users and the operational efficiency of organizations;
- being easier to understand and use, thus reducing training and support costs;
- increasing usability for people with a wider range of capabilities and thus increasing accessibility;
- improving user experience;
- reducing discomfort and stress;
- providing a competitive advantage, for example by improving brand image;
- contributing towards sustainability objectives

PROBLEM STATEMENT

HCD is often considered when designing products for clients, but less often when designing instruction of graphic design. Using IDEO's design cycle, the human-centered design process, I introduced typographic instruction that applied the cycle to three two-hour workshops, and one three-week summative assignment. The workshops and assignment introduced foundation students to fundamental principles of graphic design and provided their encounter with expressive and modular typography.

LETTER TO WORD WORKSHOPS

In order to prepare students for a final assignment, Letter to Word Workshops were conducted throughout the Fall 2020 semester. The two-hour workshops were framed by the HCD cycle and introduced typographic concepts and principles of design. As such, students' design processes were defined by the HCD process. Each workshop included a historical precedent lecture, followed by a prompt. Students in all three workshops began by working by hand and transitioned to the computer to iterate while creating a word.

The workshop objectives were for students to observe letters as forms, express emotion through a single letter's form, observation of objects through photography as letterforms, explore challenge legibility in order to understand letterform's essential parts, and finally extension of a single letter's characteristics into a set of letters (systematically).

BITMAP:
Observe the assigned lowercase Helvetica letter on the wall. Using a black marker fill in the squares of the gridded paper to translate the letter into a bitmap letter preserving its integrity as best as possible. Letter 1 on a 16 pixel-high grid, Letter 2 on an 8 pixel-high grid, Letter 3 open to create your own on a 16 pixel-high grid. Choose one of the three letters and create two more letters to create a three-letter word using Adobe Illustrator. The two other letters should share features of the selected letter (it should fit in its system). Print it in black and white on 8.5 x 11 inch paper.

EXPRESSIVE LOWERCASE "A":
Observe the lowercase double decker 'a'. Using black paper and scissors/an Xacto knife, create four As. One should feel sassy, happy, strong, and shy. Express these emotions through the form of the letter. Next create four letters of your choice, expressing emotions through the form of the letter alone. Choose your favorite A and create a three-letter word. The other two characters should share features of your original "a". The resulting word should feel like a family of letters.

QUARANTINE OBJECT ALPHABET:
Part 1: Each student has been assigned a letter of the alphabet. Observe the objects that occupy your space during quarantine. Can any object forms both express how you're feeling and become letters? Can they express or represent what you desire, your frustration, etc.? Photograph this object and translate it to solid black and white only. Embrace the unexpected and imperfect. Part 2: Make a one word composition from the letters you and your classmates made in class (attached .ai file). It should be something you're thinking, feeling, or noticing based on quarantine, and these times.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT: MODULAR & EXPRESSIVE WORD

GOAL:
Explore the meaning of a word through an exploration of its structure.

DESCRIPTION:
In this project you will be challenged to explore the underlying structure of letterforms as well as the impact of specific letterforms on meaning. Think about the letterforms, as well as the relationships of the letterforms to each other as a carrier of meaning.

For this assignment you will choose one four-letter word. You will explore this word in two ways, once using a modular system to create letterforms and once using random materials, experiments, and observations to "write" the word and refine it by pulling your "drawings" into Illustrator. Final 24" x 18" (horizontal only), must be legible, 2 colors + B+W.

OBJECTIVES:
- To design two coherent, yet unique typographic layouts which reinforce your word's meaning.
- To employ a process that occupies your space to explore many different tools and materials before resting on final outcomes.
- To demonstrate an improved ability to create visual relationships between the various elements of a composition.
- To explore experimentation outside of the computer and transfer it into the computer for visual and technical refinement as well as appropriately strengthen your word's meaning.
- To demonstrate excellent craft in project execution both digital (through illustrator) and by hand (craft).
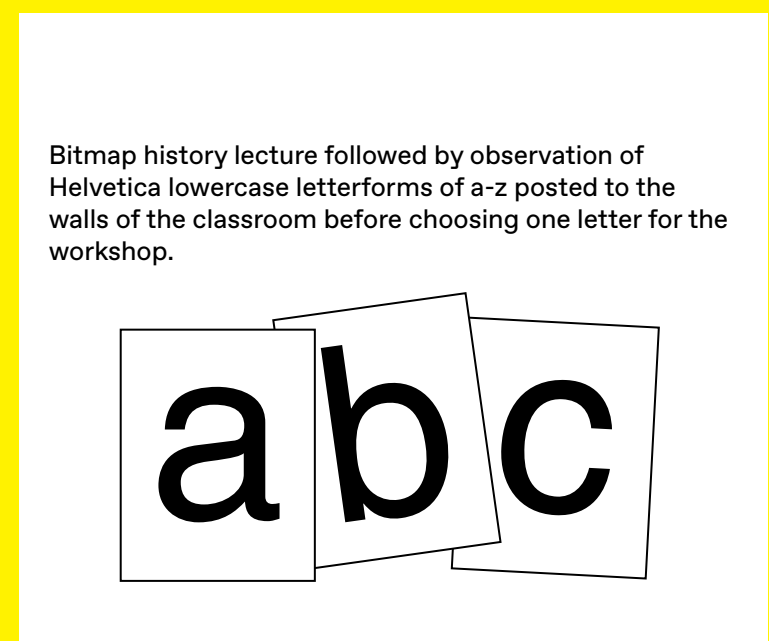
Previous design research that argues products founded by HCD benefit the end-user. Here, I am arguing that graphic design instruction framed by HCD also benefits the end-users, students, to have a stronger understanding of the design process and designed products.

**HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN PROCESS**

OBSERVATION
IDEATION
RAPID PROTOTYPING
USER FEEDBACK
ITERATION & IMPLEMENTATION

LETTER TO WORD WORSKHOPS

BITMAP
1/29 2020 (2 hours)

Bitmap history lecture followed by observation of Helvetica lowercase letterforms of a-z posted to the walls of the classroom before choosing one letter for the workshop.
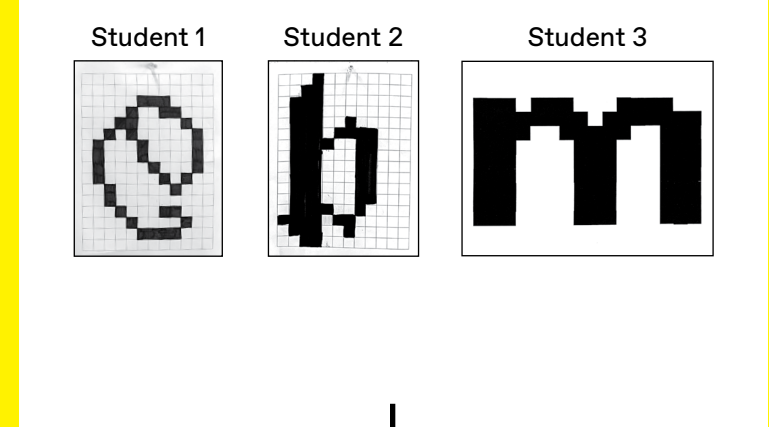

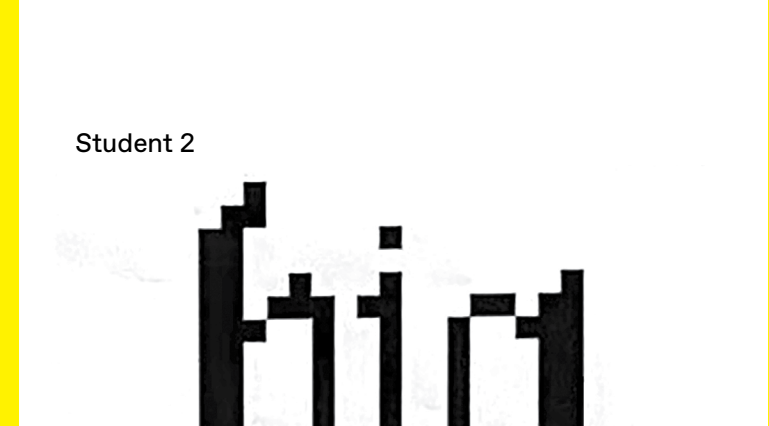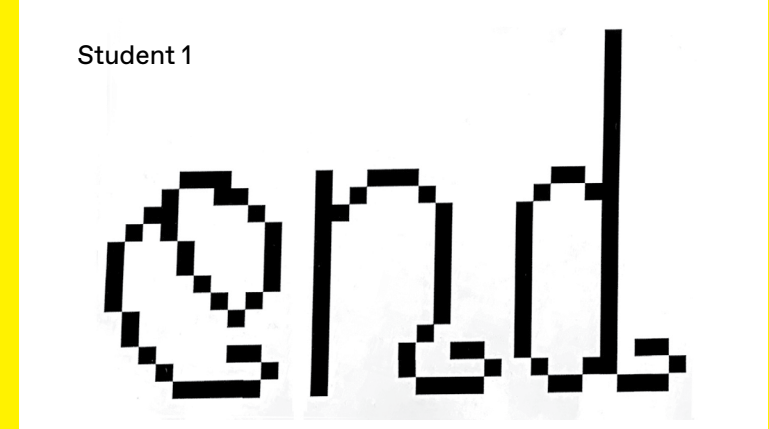Tracing chosen letterform to discover, understand, and think of ideas for future bitmap translation.

Translation of chosen letter to 16 bit and 8 bit letters, followed by as many "open" bitmap letters of one's choice.
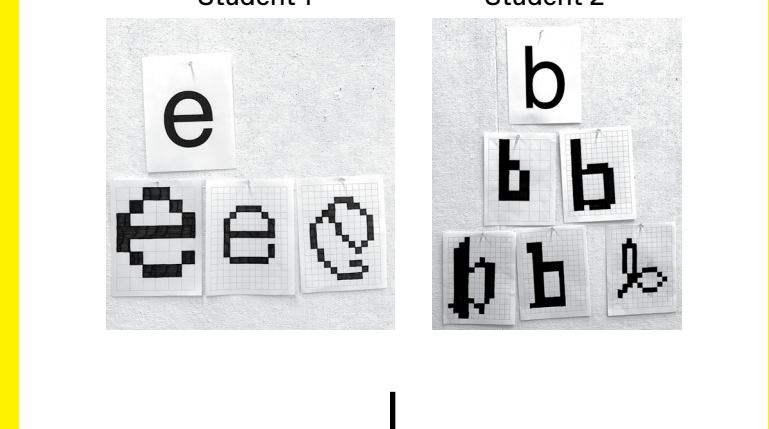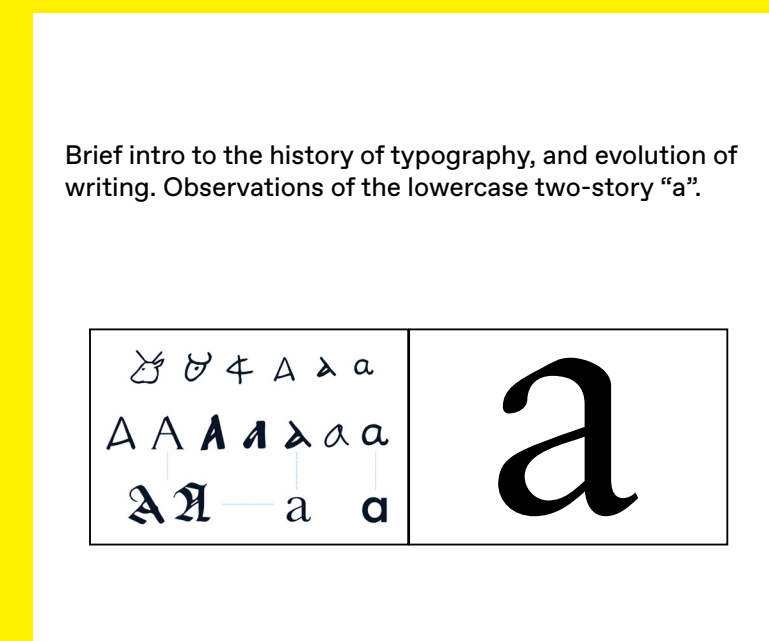
Student 1   Student 2

Group discussion and critique led to selection of one letter to expand upon.
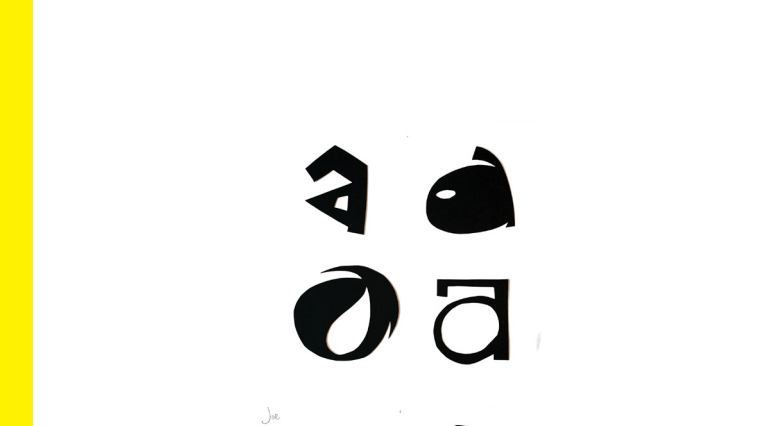
Student 1   Student 2   Student 3

First iterations considered final implementation based on workshop's two-hour in-class time constraint. Below are three students' resulting works.
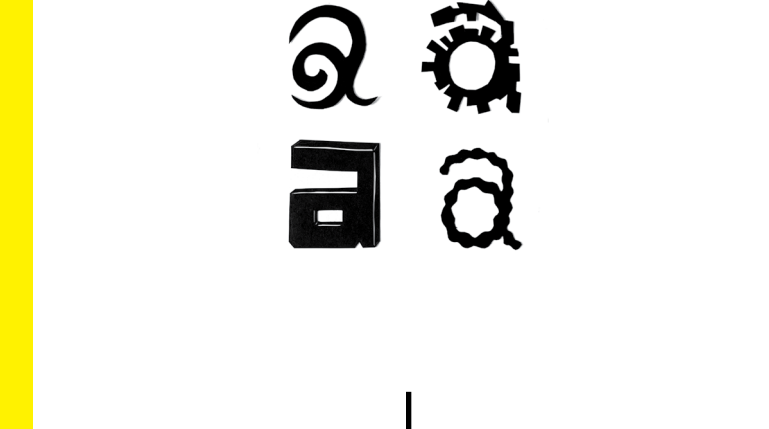
Student 1

Student 2

Student 3

EXPRESSIVE "a"
2/26 2020 (2 hours)

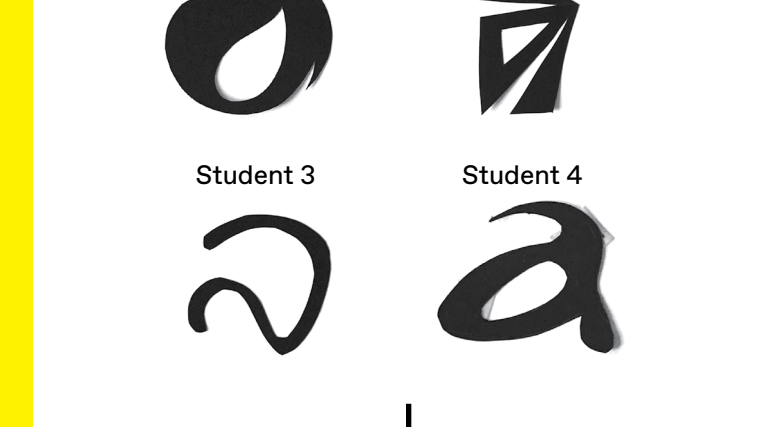Brief intro to the history of typography, and evolution of writing. Observations of the lowercase two-story "a."

A combination of ideation and rapid prototyping. Creating "a" letterforms cut from black paper. Focusing on conveying emotions through form.

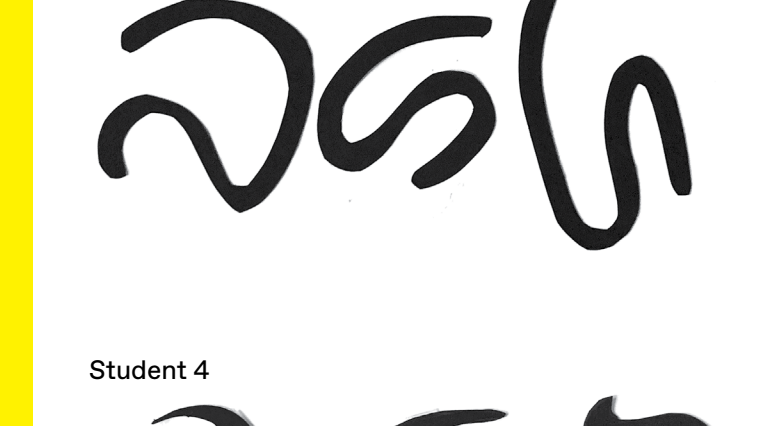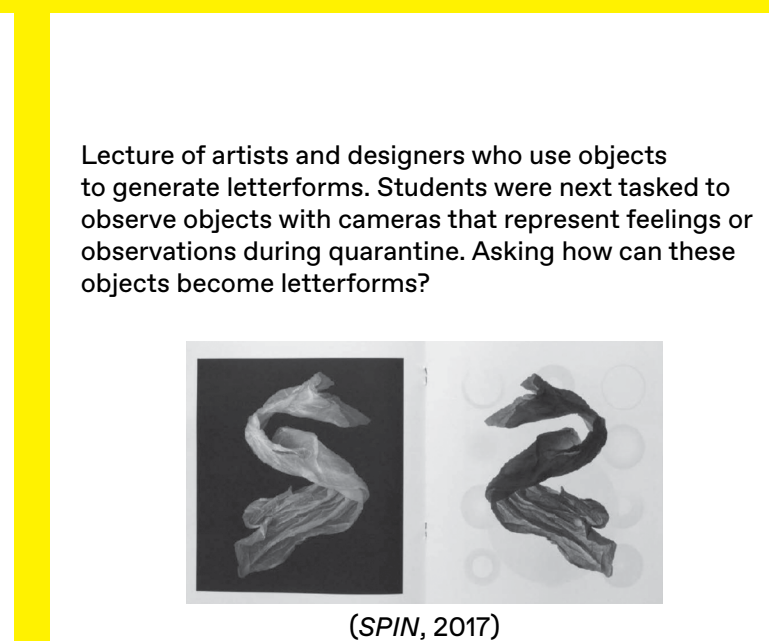Group discussion, critique, and feedback led to selection of one letter to expand upon.
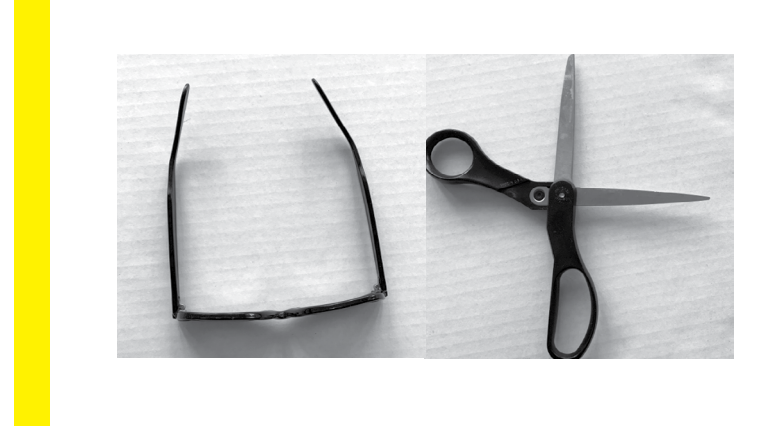
Student 1   Student 2

Student 3   Student 4

First iterations considered final implementation based on workshop's two-hour in-class time constraint. Below a selection of four students' work.
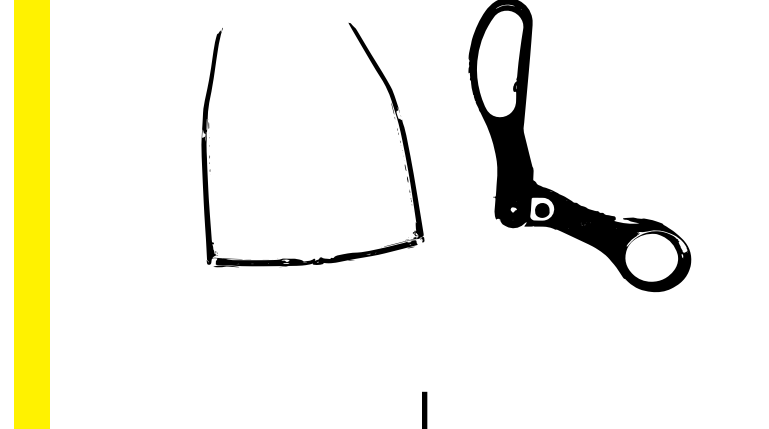
Student 1

Student 2

Student 3

Student 4

QUARANTINE ALPHABET
4/6 2020 (2 hours)

Lecture of artists and designers who use objects to generate letterforms. Students were next tasked to observe objects with cameras that represent feelings or observations during quarantine. Asking how can these objects become letterforms?
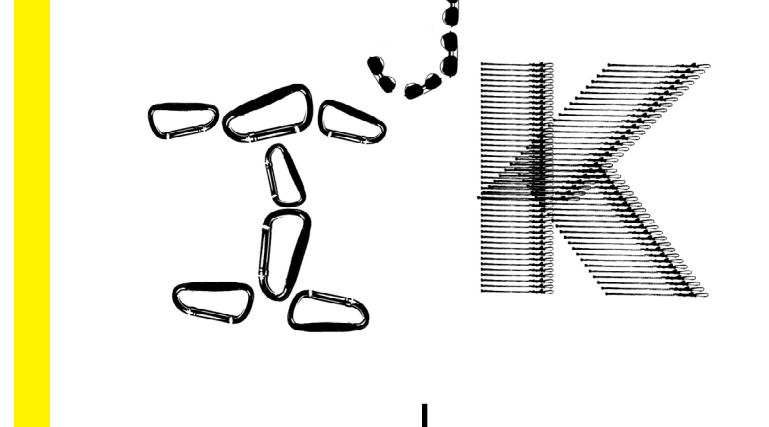
(SPIN, 2017)

Photos of objects, assessing potential of letterform possibilities.
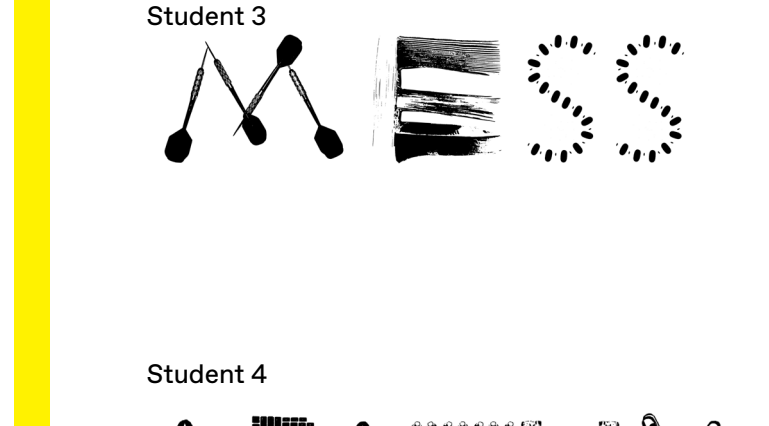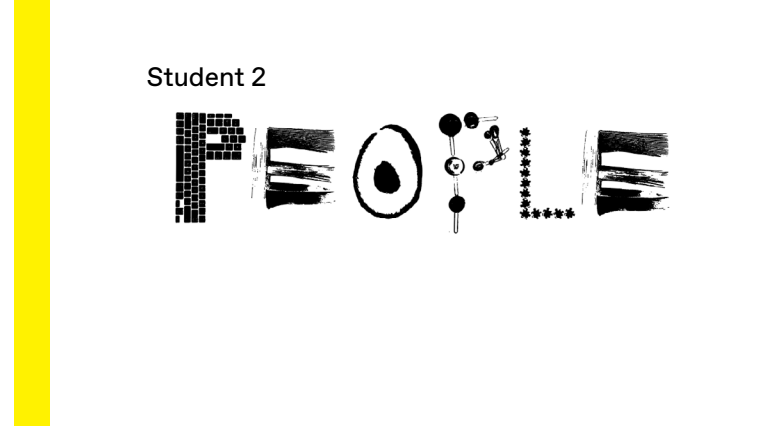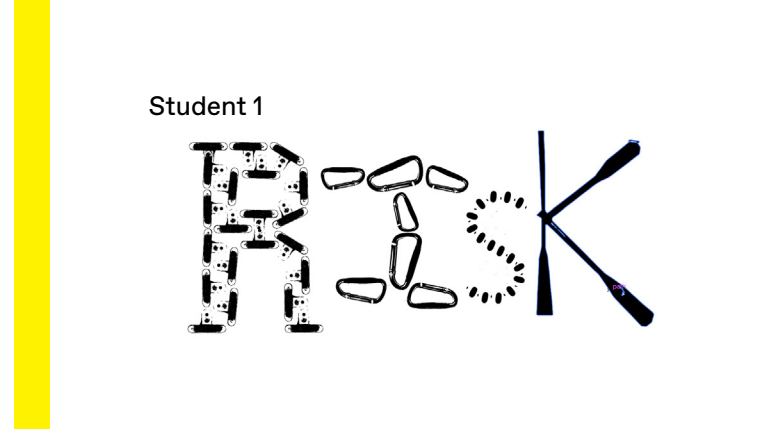
Translated to solid black and white forms.

All object letters made by students edited down to best A-Z selections to make a full alphabet.

First iterations considered final implementation based on workshop's two-hour in-class time constraint.

Student 1

Student 2

Student 3

Student 4

FINAL ASSIGNMENT

MODULAR & EXPRESSIVE WORD
4/8-4/30 2020 (22 days)

OBSERVATION

Historical and contemporary precedents for modular and expressive word lecture. Mark making and tools and techniques.

Mark-making techniques   Ariane Spanier   Bruno Munari *The Shape of Words*   Josef Albers *Bauhaus Lettering Set 1926-1931*   Alex Trochut

IDEATION

Photographs or drawings as a way to generate and discover approaches to influence later letterforms.

RAPID PROTOTYPING

Selections from a wide assortment black and white modular and expressive visual brainstorms.

USER FEEDBACK

Group discussion and critique led to discussions an selections of what ideas are worthy of exploring for ideations.

ITERATION

Introduction of color and a selection of the many iterations experimented with before settling on a single choice to pursue.

IMPLEMENTATION

Final pairings of four students' Modular and Expressive Word letterforms (modular top, expressive bottom).