

Illustration for Designers — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a hands-on production sprint. You will define a style, build flat and line illustrations, add texture, and package a small reusable system, ending with three portfolio-ready pieces and a documented house style. Work through one section per module and keep every file, since later sections build on earlier output.

Reading the Brief and Choosing a Style

Convert a real or invented brief into precise, defensible illustration coordinates and a curated reference set.

Exercise: Write the Plain-Language Style Sentence

Choose a brand to illustrate for (real or invented). Without using vague words like clean or modern, write one sentence that fully describes the intended illustration style in technical terms (form, line, color, texture, depth). Then list three competitor or category visual references you will deliberately avoid and say why.

- What is the single-sentence technical description of your target style?

- Which two or three references sit exactly at your target style, and what specifically are you taking from each?

- What three looks are you deliberately avoiding, and why do they pull against the brief?

Worksheet: 6-Axis Style Map

Score your illustration style from 1 to 5 on each of the six axes from the course. Then note any contradiction the map exposes (for example minimal detail but rich storytelling) and how you will resolve it in conversation before drawing.

Form (1 organic to 5 geometric)

Line (1 none, 3 uniform, 5 weighted-tapering)

Color (1 flat to 5 full rendering)

Detail (1 minimal to 5 dense)

Texture (1 clean digital to 5 heavy grain/paper)

Perspective (1 flat front-on to 5 deep dimensional)

Contradiction spotted and resolution

Checklist: Reference Board Readiness

- Built a style bucket of 5 to 8 on-target images and cut everything off-target
- Built a separate subject bucket of photo reference for things I cannot draw from memory
- Created an anti-board of 2 to 3 looks to avoid
- Annotated every reference with the one thing I am taking from it
- Wrote the one-sentence plain-language style description
- Confirmed the board narrows choices rather than listing everything I like

Flat Vector Illustration

Build a cohesive flat illustration on a grid with a disciplined palette and a clean, low-anchor shape language.

Worksheet: Flat Illustration Setup Spec

Before drawing, lock the technical foundation that will keep an entire set consistent. Fill in each value and reuse it across every flat illustration in this brand.

Artboard size in px

Base grid spacing in px

Single corner radius value

Stroke weight(s) if any

Palette swatches (list hex values, max 5 to 7)

Three values per family (base / shadow / highlight)

Exercise: Build One Flat Spot End to End

Pick one recurring brand concept (for example secure storage, support, growth). Thumbnail three versions small, choose the strongest, then rebuild it on your grid using only primitives and Shape Builder. Apply your palette and limit detail to one highlight and one shadow. Validate it three ways before calling it done.

- Does the illustration still read at UI size (shrink to 48 to 96 px)?
 - Does it hold together in grayscale, with shapes separated by value?
 - Does it match every axis of your 6-axis map?
 - Is the anchor-point count low enough that the art stays cleanly editable?
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Checklist: Flat Quality Gate

- Built entirely from primitives merged with Shape Builder, not hand-traced outlines
- One corner radius applied consistently across the whole illustration
- Capped at 5 to 7 swatches with a fixed three-value structure per family
- Passes the grayscale value test
- Passes the small-size legibility test at 48 to 96 px
- Saved as a layered, editable source file

Line Illustration

Produce controlled, intentional line art using a stroke-weight hierarchy and consistent corner logic, in both vector and raster.

Worksheet: Stroke and Corner System

Define your line system once and apply it everywhere. Record the exact values so a teammate could reproduce your line quality.

Outer contour weight

Internal form weight

Detail weight

Weight ratio (e.g. 3:2:1)

Cap style (butt / round / projecting)

Join style (miter / round / bevel)

Taper or uniform

Exercise: Same Subject, Two Tools

Redraw one simple object as pure line illustration twice: once as vector (Illustrator or Affinity) and once in Procreate using QuickShape and Streamline. Apply your three-weight hierarchy and corner rules in both. Then compare the control-versus-warmth tradeoff and decide which fits a given deliverable.

- Which version reads better at thumbnail size, and why?
 - Where did tapering help, and where did it look shaky or inconsistent?
 - For a logo or icon, which tool would you ship from and why?
 - For an editorial header, which would you ship from and why?
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Checklist: Line Intentionality Audit

- Only two or three stroke weights used in the illustration
- Outer silhouette is the heaviest weight
- Cap and join styles are consistent throughout
- Every corner is either cleanly closed or deliberately and consistently open
- Any overshoots are a single consistent length
- Silhouette still reads when shrunk to thumbnail size

Texture and Production-Ready Systems

Add reproduction-safe texture, document a reusable illustration system, and export and hand off assets correctly for every medium.

Exercise: Texture Without Breaking Reproduction

Add grain and optionally one halftone or paper accent to your finished flat spot, on a separate masked layer in a blend mode. Tune intensity for the real target medium, not your zoomed-in view, and verify it survives reproduction.

- Is the texture on a separate masked layer in Multiply or Overlay, with a clean version preserved underneath?

- Does the texture still read correctly at 100 percent screen zoom (not zoomed in)?

- If destined for print, did you keep 300 DPI and check a proof for grain or moire problems?

- Did restraint win, or is the texture overpowering the artwork?

Worksheet: Illustration System One-Pager

Document the rules that let your set scale and let others extend it. Complete each field; this becomes your portfolio centerpiece.

6-axis style summary

Palette with hex values

Stroke weights and corner radius

Grid and artboard standard

Texture treatment and where it applies

Reusable components built (characters / props / backgrounds)

One do and one do-not example

Worksheet: Export and Handoff Plan

Plan exactly how each asset leaves your hands so nothing gets upscaled, recolored wrong, or lost. Fill in the formats and color spaces per destination.

Web vector format and minification

Web/UI raster format and densities (e.g. 1x, 2x)

Print format, color space, DPI, and bleed

Source file format provided

File naming and folder structure

Revision rounds agreed with client

Checklist: Handoff Done Definition

- Exported SVG for web vector, PNG for raster/UI, and PDF or 300 DPI TIFF for print
- Confirmed RGB for screen and CMYK for print, with the conversion checked
- Included a layered, editable source file
- Delivered UI assets at the required densities
- Presented each illustration mocked into real context, not on a blank canvas
- Tied final approval back to the 6-axis style map

Your Action Plan

1. Pick a brand (real or invented) and complete its 6-axis style map and one-sentence style description.
2. Curate a tight style reference board and a separate subject reference board.
3. Lock the flat setup spec: artboard, grid, corner radius, and a 5-to-7 swatch palette with three values per family.
4. Build one flat spot illustration end to end and pass the grayscale, small-size, and style-map gates.
5. Define a stroke-weight hierarchy and corner system, then draw one line illustration in both vector and Procreate.
6. Add reproduction-safe texture to the flat spot on a separate masked layer and verify it at 100 percent and in proof.
7. Build two reusable components and assemble a third illustration from them to prove the system scales.
8. Write the one-page illustration system document covering style, palette, weights, grid, texture, and components.
9. Export one finished illustration in web, print, and source formats and mock it into a realistic context.
10. Assemble the three finished pieces plus the system one-pager into a portfolio case study.

