Path Unbound



Course Syllabus

Art Direction and Creative Leadership

Art Direction and Creative Leadership

Learn to turn ideas into clear visual systems, direct creative work across disciplines and lead the team that makes it. You art direct 1 brand from its first brief to its launch and finish with a portfolio case study.

12	6	6	4	6
Units	Projects	1:1 Sessions	Months to Use Your Sessions	Case Studies

WHO IT IS FOR

Move from Executing the Work to Setting Its Direction

Most designers know how to execute. Few know how to set the direction for a brand, a campaign and the team that makes it. This course teaches you how. It is built for designers who already have the foundations.

1 **Working Designers Who Want to Lead**

You design every day and want to become an art director or design lead, at your company or your next one.

2 **Design Students Who Want to Specialize**

You have the foundations and want to build your career around art direction.

3 **Professionals Who Work with Designers**

You brief and review creative work and want the language and process to do it well.

4 **Freelancers Who Want to Direct Campaigns**

You want to price, pitch and run art direction projects for your own clients.

WHAT YOU LEARN

Learn Essential Skills Every Art Director Needs

Think Like an Art Director

Turn vague ideas into clear direction and make the creative calls with confidence.

Turn Ideas into Visual Systems

Go from mood boards to an art direction that holds together across a whole brand.

Direct AI as Part of the Work

Run AI concept rounds, keep the output on brand and talk about AI with clients and managers.

Direct Across Disciplines

Guide photography, illustration, motion and short-form video through clear briefs.

Lead Projects, Teams and Clients

Run projects from start to finish, give feedback that helps and win buy-in.

Grow into the Title

Build an art direction case study and the case for your promotion or your first clients.

HOW YOU LEARN

Learn at Your Pace and Get Feedback from a Working Art Director

Read Self-Paced Lessons

Every unit is a set of lessons with real examples, templates and practice tasks, and each one ends with a short quiz. You keep the lessons for life.

Review Every Project 1:1

After each project, you book a one-hour session with your instructor, who goes through the work with you and tells you what to change.

Direct 1 Brand from Start to Finish

Each project builds on the one before it, so you never start from scratch and finish with 1 deep portfolio case study.

Use the Tools You Already Know

Work in Figma or Adobe. The AI units teach you how to direct any AI image tool, and the course resources list the tools working art directors use right now.

1:1

Choose the instructor who teaches you. Pick a senior working designer from companies like USA Today, Capital One and Microsoft, and start any day. Meet the instructors

CURRICULUM

Follow 12 Units from the Role to the Promotion

Each unit ends with a short quiz, and every project builds on the one before it.



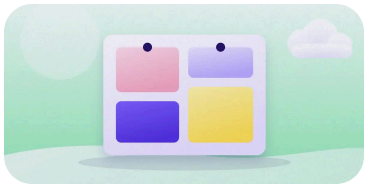
UNIT 1 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

The Role of an Art Director

See what an art director does and how the role differs from a designer and a creative director.

LESSONS

- What Does an Art Director Do?
- The Role of an Art Director vs. a Designer
- Important Job Skills for an Art Director
- Art Director vs. Creative Director



UNIT 2 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

The Art Direction Process

Run the process from the first client meeting and brief to mood boards and key visuals.

LESSONS

- Client Meetings and Communication
- The Creative Brief
- Creating Mood Boards
- Defining Key Visuals
- Visual Storytelling
- Working with Designers

Project 1: Choose your brand and create its art direction plan



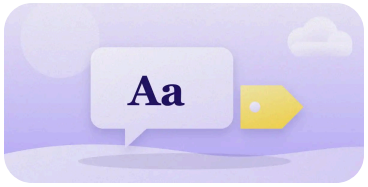
UNIT 3 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

AI in Art Direction

Run AI concept rounds, build style references and handle rights and disclosure.

LESSONS

- Where AI Fits in Art Direction
- Running an AI Concept Round
- AI Style Reference Sheets
- AI Rights, Licensing and Disclosure
- Talking About AI with Clients and Managers



UNIT 4 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

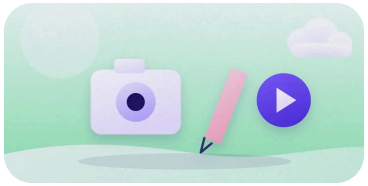
Branding and Messaging

Shape a brand's tone of voice, messaging, personality and customer personas.

LESSONS

- What Is Branding?
- Brand Tone of Voice
- Brand Messaging
- Brand Personality
- Customer Persona

Project 2: Create a brand book for your brand



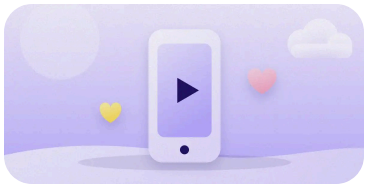
UNIT 5 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

Directing Across Disciplines

Direct photography, illustration, motion graphics and animation.

LESSONS

- Art Direction for Photography
- Art Direction for Illustration
- Art Direction for Motion Graphics and Animation



UNIT 6 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

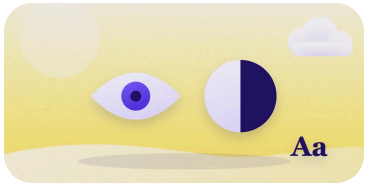
Short-Form Video and Social Media

Plan vertical video series and brief the creators who make them.

LESSONS

- Directing Vertical Video
- Planning a Short-Form Series
- Briefing and Directing Creators
- Adapting a Campaign Across Platforms

Project 3: Create a short-form video series and a creator brief for your brand



UNIT 7 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

Accessibility and Inclusive Design

Build accessibility into the brief, the design system and the casting.

LESSONS

- Accessibility in the Creative Brief
- Accessible Color, Type and Layout
- Accessible Video and Motion
- Inclusive Casting and Representation

Project 4: Create an accessibility review for your brand



UNIT 8 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

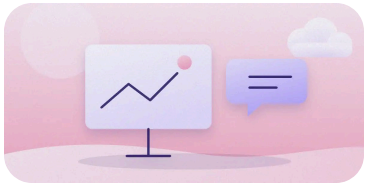
Team, Project and Budget Management

Structure a creative team, give useful feedback and manage budgets.

LESSONS

- Structuring a Creative Team
- Hiring Creative Talent
- Receiving and Giving Feedback
- Nurturing a Creative Team
- Creative Project Management
- Managing Budgets for Art Direction

Project 5: Create a production plan, budget and team for your launch



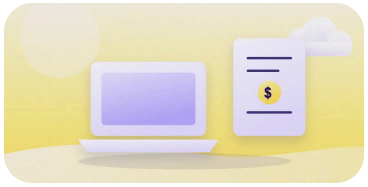
UNIT 9 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

Client Management

Ask the right questions, present your direction and manage expectations.

LESSONS

- Asking the Right Questions for the Creative Brief
- Presenting Art Direction to Clients
- Managing Client Expectations
- Managing Client Conflicts



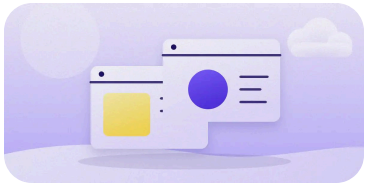
UNIT 10 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

Freelancing as an Art Director

Price your work, write proposals and contracts and find freelance clients.

LESSONS

- Freelance Art Direction Services
- Pricing Your Art Direction Work
- Proposals and Contracts
- AI Clauses for Client Contracts



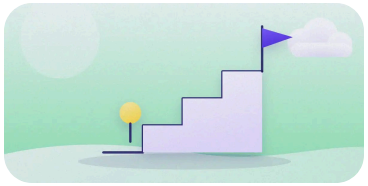
UNIT 11 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

Art Direction Case Studies

Study the art direction behind brands like Duolingo, Dove and Mailchimp.

LESSONS

- Case Study 1: Casper
- Case Study 2: Mailchimp
- Case Study 3: OkCupid
- Case Study 4: Duolingo
- Case Study 5: Dove
- Case Study 6: Microsoft Xbox



UNIT 12 ENDS WITH A QUIZ

Career Growth as an Art Director

Build your case studies, get promoted and prepare for art director interviews.

LESSONS

- The Path from Designer to Art Director
- Art Direction Portfolio Case Studies
- Getting Promoted to Art Director
- Art Director Interviews

Final Project: Design, present and write up your brand launch

PROJECTS

Direct a Brand from First Brief to Launch

You pick 1 brand at the start and direct it through a full rebrand and launch. In every project, the client gives you the same 2 limits: **a budget of $100,000 and a launch date 2 months away.**

A Real Brand with Outdated Design

A small or mid-size brand whose look has fallen behind its competitors.

Our Fictional Client

Halverson's Market, a family-owned grocery chain that wants to win younger families.

Your Own Work

A brand you have designed for, if you have permission to show it in your portfolio.

1

PROJECT 1

Plan Your Brand's Art Direction

Choose your brand, research it and its customers, write a 1-page creative brief, explore 3 named directions with mood boards and pick 1. Then define the key visuals and outline the launch story in 4 to 6 frames.

2

PROJECT 2

Create a Brand Book

Turn your direction into a brand system: messaging, tone of voice, personality, a customer persona, the updated logo, color, type and image style. Run an AI concept round and build an AI style reference sheet for the brand.

3

PROJECT 3

Plan a Short-Form Video Series

Take the brand onto TikTok, Reels and Shorts. Build content pillars and a named format, write beat sheets for 2 episodes, test 3 openings and write a 1-page creator brief.

4

PROJECT 4

Review Your Brand for Accessibility

Check every color pair for contrast, fix what fails, make a video beat sheet accessible and write a casting brief. Then add a 1-page accessibility section to the brand book.

5

PROJECT 5

Plan the Production, Budget and Team

Split a $100,000 budget across the launch, plan the schedule to a launch date 2 months away, staff the team and list the 3 biggest risks.

6

FINAL PROJECT

Design, Present and Write Up the Launch

Design the campaign's key visual and 3 finished pieces, present it the way you would to a client and write it up as a portfolio case study.

Your instructor reviews every project with you in a one-hour 1:1 session.

TEMPLATES

Keep Every Template for Your Real Projects

The lessons come with templates built the way working art directors run real projects, and you keep all of them after the course ends.

Concept Round Log
Record every AI image you keep, with the prompt, the tool and why you kept it.

AI Style Reference Sheet
Keep AI output on brand, whoever on the team is generating images.

Brand Character Sheet
Agree on who a brand character is before your team writes for it.

Short-Form Beat Sheet
Plan each video beat by beat, from the hook to the last line.

Creator Brief
Brief a creator on 1 page, with what you lock and what you leave open.

Campaign Toolkit
Hand over the files and rules other teams need to keep a campaign consistent.

Accessible Color Pairs
Show designers which color pairs work for text and which don’t.

Art Direction Proposal
Win freelance work with a clear scope, timeline and 3 options.

Sample AI Clause
Set approved AI uses, confidentiality and ownership in client contracts.

Art Direction Case Study
Structure every portfolio case study the way hiring managers read them.

CASE STUDIES

Study the Art Direction Behind 6 Campaigns

Casper
Why a mattress startup used playful illustration and soft colors on the New York subway.

Mailchimp
How strange, funny names got people talking about the brand across many touchpoints.

OkCupid
How picking 1 pain point gave a dating app’s campaign its focus.

Duolingo
How a character the audience already loved turned a social campaign into an event.

Dove
How a public decision about AI made the brand’s core promise stronger.

Microsoft Xbox
How working with gamers with disabilities shaped the product, the box and the ads.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

Finish in 4 Months at a Steady Pace

You set your own pace. This is one way to finish in 4 months, and you get a 1-month grace period on top if life gets busy.

Week 1	Unit 1: The Role of an Art Director. Start Unit 2.	Quiz
Week 2	Unit 2: The Art Direction Process. Work on Project 1.	Quiz, Project
Week 3	Review Project 1 with your instructor. Start Unit 3: AI in Art Direction.	1:1 Session
Week 4	Finish Unit 3. Start Unit 4: Branding and Messaging.	Quiz
Week 5	Finish Unit 4 and work on Project 2.	Quiz, Project
Week 6	Review Project 2. Unit 5: Directing Across Disciplines.	1:1 Session, Quiz
Week 7	Unit 6: Short-Form Video and Social Media. Work on Project 3.	Quiz, Project
Week 8	Review Project 3. Start Unit 7: Accessibility and Inclusive Design.	1:1 Session
Week 9	Finish Unit 7 and work on Project 4.	Quiz, Project
Week 10	Review Project 4. Unit 8: Team, Project and Budget Management.	1:1 Session, Quiz
Week 11	Work on Project 5.	Project
Week 12	Review Project 5. Unit 9: Client Management.	1:1 Session, Quiz
Week 13	Unit 10: Freelancing as an Art Director.	Quiz
Week 14	Unit 11: Art Direction Case Studies.	Quiz
Week 15	Unit 12: Career Growth as an Art Director. Start the final project.	Quiz, Final Project
Week 16	Present your final project to your instructor.	1:1 Session, Final Project

ENROLLMENT OPTIONS

Choose How You Want to Learn

Every option includes all 12 units and 6 projects. The difference is how much 1:1 feedback you get from your instructor.

Low Entry Price

Self-Study

$349

One-time payment

- Every lesson, quiz and project brief
- Book a 1:1 session for $80 whenever you want feedback
- Lifetime access to the lessons

Best Value

Full Program

$799

One-time payment

- 6 one-hour 1:1 sessions to review your projects
- 4 months to use your sessions, plus a 1-month grace period
- Lifetime access to the lessons
- A portfolio case study of your brand launch

You Save $100

With Portfolio School

~~$3,999 if bought separately~~

$3,899

or 5 monthly payments of $779.80, no interest

- This course plus Portfolio School
- 22 one-hour 1:1 sessions across both
- Add Visual Design Foundation and save $200 in total

Keep Your Sessions on Track

If you don't use all your sessions in time, you can restore your leftover sessions once for $60 and use them within 60 days. After that, single sessions are $80 each.

Ask Your Employer to Pay for It

Many companies cover training through a learning budget. Download the approval letter on the course page. After you pay, your invoice is in your dashboard, and you can add your company details, VAT number or PO number.

Path Unbound

NEXT STEPS

Start Directing the Work

Enroll in the course, try a few lessons for free first or talk through your goals with our team on a free call.

Enroll Now →

Try Free Lessons →

Book a Free Call →

Questions? Write to **hello@pathunbound.com** or visit **pathunbound.com**.

Path Unbound, LLC. Prices and details are current as of November 2026 and can change.