

T-Shirt Design Guide

There are many ways to design a t-shirt. What we try to do here is outline some principles that should be considered when designing tees...from our perspective, but we might be wrong altogether :)

1. Theme

Idea, or theme is something we all start with. There are many trends out there and at times it might be difficult to select a subject or theme that will appeal to many..or should it anyway. An important thing to take into account is that this is a theme for a t-shirt, not a coffee mug, poster or canvas. You need to consider that you are designing for apparel and that at the end of the day someone will be wearing your design. The questions you should ask yourself is “Why would someone wear this” and “What crowd am i designing this for”. Each one of these questions would require an extensive analysis but we don't have time for this ..what is important is that you have considered them.

Avoid trying to tell too much. Successful t-shirts have never saved the world nor drastically changed someone's opinion. What they can do is influence someone's opinion or raise awareness in one way or another. People don't like to wear t-shirts with strong messages, well, some may , but be discrete, indirect, suggestive, considerate messages are always the best.

2. The Process

Start with sketching by hand, avoid working on computers right away. Computers can be slow and our creative process is a lot faster. Sketch up something by hand on translucent paper, sketch again, sketch over, until you are happy with it. Always keep your sketches and trust your instincts. Those first sketches, although may look bad can be great inspiration later on. Once you are happy with your design, scan you sketch, import it into illustrator, trace it, colour it in, thicken up outlines, etc..

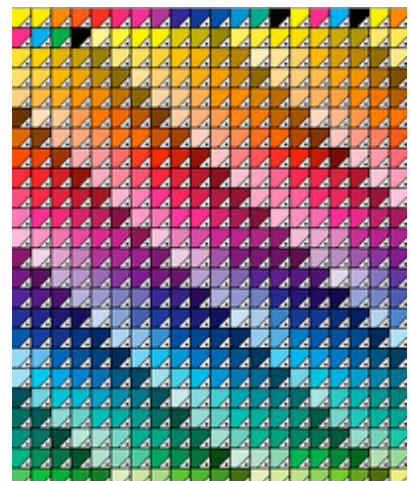
Here are few sketches by [Saman Bemel-Benrud](#) that show this process. You can find a lot more of his sketches on [his blog here](#).



[See these on the web at high resolution.](#)

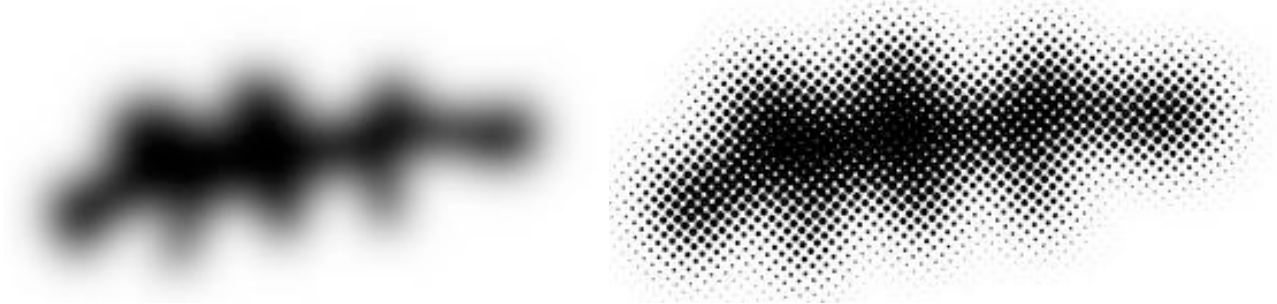
3. Colour

Allmightys asks their designers to use a maximum of 4 colour for the designs. This is 4 new colours plus the t-shirt background colour. In other words you have 5 colours to play with. Avoid large areas of single colour. If you design with a large area of single colour than you may ask yourself why am i not using the colour of the tshirt. This applies especially if you are putting a light colour over a dark background. To achieve a seamless colour one needs to lay a light layer over a dark background and then cover it with your chosen colour. This means that you will end up with quite a thick layer of colour that may not feel best when wearing it as the body will not be able to breathe through the t-shirt. If your design incorporates a colour over a large area then try to modify your design so the t-shirt colour is actually your large area of colour and you can isolate it as an object by providing outlines. Also try to use patterns that not only break up large areas of colour but also add detail to your design. The effect of the design should not be much different but the t-shirt will be a lot more comfortable and enjoyable to wear.



4. Gradients

We all love gradients but as you know already Allmightys asks you not to use gradients. There is a quick way around this to produce similar effect that appears on the t-shirt as a gradient; Make a vector halftone pattern: Convert it to Bitmap, output at 1200 ppi, Halftone Screen, Round Pattern (or play with other patterns), 2 lines per inch. Then you can use trace bitmap in illustrator to convert the pattern into vectors. Here a few images below to show you the result.



[See these on the web at high resolution.](#)

5. Detail

Different to print, coffee mugs, posters, your T-Shirt designs will be viewed from various distances. The best tees work on multiple scales...e.g. it looks great from far away as well as close up. Large areas of solid colour do not look as great close up as they do far away so think about patterns that you may use instead of solid colour to add that detail that can be appreciated from close up. Are there any extra special details in your design that only someone close up can see? All of this adds another just special quality to your design. Here is an example by [Joe Gonzalez](#)



6. Size of the design

The scale of the design is also a very important factor. You can not just do the design and slam it onto a t-shirt. We at allmightys ask our designers to create designs no larger than A4. This does not mean that the designs can not be printed bigger but its only a constraint of a kind because we feel if we said A3 then everyone would be making their designs as large as possible. We all know that some designs look better being small and some other look a lot better across the whole tee.

Think also about how large is your design on a XS t-shirt. For example a design may look great on a large T-shirt but if printed on a small T-shirt it may look too big. You need to find that perfect size that looks good on all size tees. We print using a single silk screen and we can not reduce the size of print for each t-shirt size. This would dramatically increase the production cost of each tee. So, when you design, you are designing for all size tees.

7. Positioning

We are used to putting the designs right in the middle of the tee. The question you should ask yourself is "what is the middle of the tee?". You may choose to put it right in the centre, a little higher up, a little lower. Also don't forget girls have larger chest than boys and some sections of your design might be greatly elevated :)

Designs can also go on the back, at the bottom left corner, right corner, towards the shoulder, etc. Keep your design off the seams. They are very hard to print over.

As you can see, designing a T-Shirt is a little more complicated then you might have originally thought...but, don't worry about it ...the most important thing is that you have fun! It's a wonderful process and at the end of it, other people will love it! What better way can your work be rewarded than by someone wearing it!

Now, get drawing and get those wonderful designs to Allmightys!