

(Cross) Making

Cross-Training as a Method
for Learning Through Making
by Graphic Designers

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First Edition (Interactive PDF Version)

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*P.S. THE NUMBERS
ON THE ENVELOPES
ARE CLICKABLE!*

Thesis submitted to: the Department of Experimental
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*Dear
(Cross) Maker,*

Dear Maker,

Letter:
1

Module:
Open letter

This text is being written and shared with the intention to bring out, reconnect with, and foster the forgotten, blocked, or hidden maker that already exists within you. It's a reflection and investigation on what I've encountered in my process as someone who learns through making, and I'm sharing this with you in case you happen to be on a similar journey so we can support each other in some way.

As makers, we process and synthesize information in a hands-on way that requires constant trial-and-error which can be exciting as it is frustrating. It can be a bumpy path to navigate, sometimes with nonexistent ones that need to be paved as we go, but I'm here to reassure you that it'll be a worthwhile journey despite the obstacles that we'll face. If this resonates with you, I invite you to join in, be it as an observer or a see-for-yourself-adventurer. It's a small gesture, but I hope that it can be an encouraging one that can empower you to (re)discover the urge to make (and break).

Together let's find out how being frustrated beginners in the learning process can be valued as a constructive stepping stone that helps us unlock insights and discoveries about our practice. How can we adapt to the frictional environments that we find ourselves in by embracing our pace, working with what we have, and leveraging them as tools that can help us break through the thresholds?

When you enter this frictional world, you'll find yourself in an interstitial space where the small things are magnified. Everything's slower and quieter, and for the first time, you can see and hear things that can get blurred into the background or muffled in the hustle and bustle of deadlines and deliverables. You may come across things that might not be visible to the naked eye or have voices of their own, but here, you're free to find or invent ways to communicate and interact with them. It's a moment to tune in with your surroundings and acknowledge your own ways of seeing and doing things so that you can finally let your freak flag fly.

We're not here for a smooth and seamless user experience—we're here to expand on and celebrate the friction and the bugs, the hiccups and the latencies—the natural part of the process that is tucked beneath clean, streamlined interfaces. Let's unlearn the things we've learned to quickly resolve as a reflex, and instead sit with it, understand why things are happening in certain ways, and try to understand it from wherever we are in our journey.

Let's get to making!



Your Future (Cross) Maker-in-Training Buddy

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Dear Maker,

Dear Future (Cross) Maker,

Letter:
2

Module:
Onboarding

I'm glad to hear that you'll be joining the journey!

Let's explore the exercise regimen of cross-training as a means to make. I'll be your Cross-Maker-in-Training Buddy, and I'll walk you through what to expect and accompany you along the way.

Together we'll find out if cross-training can be applied as a method for learning through making by graphic designers. As you read on, you'll be invited to try out the roles of kinesthetic and visual learners¹: an Athlete and a Graphic Designer. You can recombine and reconfigure their approaches in ways that contribute to your own creative processes, and by the end of your training, you'll unleash another facet of the maker that you already are: the Cross-Maker!

You'll receive parts of the training that will be delivered to you in the form of letters. First, we'll begin with warm-up and stretching sessions to unpack this metaphor of cross-training from the sports domain and apply it to a creative one. We'll familiarize ourselves with the terms, then read stories about how an athlete and a graphic designer deal with plateaus and in their training routines.

Then it's the kick-off of the Cross-Making sessions! Each day, you'll receive a suggestion for an exercise to try, along with entries from my DIYry/DIWOrY² to share my experiences related to that exercise, in case you need some inspiration or moral support.

In the meantime, here's the program overview:

Session	Module	Role
1	Warm-up	Athlete
2	Stretching	Graphic Designer
3	(Cross) Making: Orientation	(Cross) Maker-in-Training
4-9	Conditioning	(Cross) Maker-in-Training
5	Cool-down	(Cross) Maker

Don't forget, this program is created for makers like us, so feel free to customize, modify, or hack it so that it not only matches your pace, needs, learning and making styles, but also sparks your curiosities!

See you at warm-up!



Your (Cross) Maker-in-Training Buddy

¹ According to the VARK model by Neil Fleming, there are four sensory modalities that describe different learning preferences that reflect how students learn best (Cherry, 2023). Kinesthetic or tactile learners learn best by touching and doing, and have a preference for movement, experiments, and hands-on activities. Meanwhile, visual learners learn best by seeing and prefer to see information presented in a visual way (through pictures, movies, diagrams) rather than in written form (ibid).

² Just like a diary, but for logging Do-It-Yourself or Do-It-With-Others adventures!

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Dear Future
(Cross) Maker

Dear Athlete,

Letter:
3

Module:
Warm-up

Welcome to the first warm-up session!

We'll lay the foundations and set up a safe space where we can learn, experiment, and make mistakes together. We're just getting acquainted with concepts and approaches that may be unfamiliar to some of us, so let's also remember to be patient with ourselves and make time for these new inputs to sink in. Let's get started!

1. Plateau: a period of stagnation³ or regression of an athlete's performance (Stewart, 2022). A plateau occurs when the body begins to adjust to the demands of an exercise routine as a result of a particular training or goal, so when it becomes accustomed to the stress placed upon it, a periodic jolt is required to get things back on track (International Sports Science Association (ISSA), 2019).

2. Cross-training: an exercise protocol that incorporates several modes of training that are outside the athlete's main sport (Preiato, 2021). Rotating activities with different levels of impact will keep your body guessing, so not only will you overcome your plateaus and lower the risk of injuring or overusing a specific muscle or joint (American Heart Association, 2018), but also continue to see improvements to your fitness and health (Williams, 2020).

For example, if your sport of focus is running (high impact), you can incorporate cross-training in your training regimen by including activities like walking and yoga (low impact), or swimming (no impact). Essentially, you can choose any activities that won't interfere with your recovery and can mimic the requirements of your main sport of focus in order to maintain a well-rounded workout routine (ibid).

One key aspect of choosing the most beneficial cross-training activity is to go for ones that you truly enjoy so that it'll be easier for you to stick to it in the long run (Stewart, 2021). After all, they should be fun and not feel like a chore!

Next, we'll find out how graphic designers can benefit from cross-training and use it to break through plateaus in their practice.

See you at the Stretching session!



Your (Cross) Maker-in-Training Buddy

³ To look at it from another angle, it's also a positive sign you're making progress (American Heart Association, 2018). The fact that you're willing to take action and get yourself out of this standstill already shows that you have a growth mindset and are driven to push past hurdles—one which you can leverage as a method for tackling steep learning curves!

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Dear Athlete,

Dear Graphic Designer,

Letter:
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Module:
Stretching

Let's now find out how a method from the sports domain can be applied to a creative one.

⁴ Insert sport here.

Before we begin, I'd like to invite you to consider this:

⁵ Insert 'sport' of focus here.

An athlete's approach: I believe that there's an athlete in us all. After all, everyone has the strength, fitness, and flexibility to perform in whichever field they're in. Can we rethink athleticism as a mindset or a way of doing things that isn't limited to just sports?

Graphic Designer = Athlete: In the same way that athletes have their sports of focus, we're no different—like those who focus on [running], we focus on [graphic design]. Just like athletes, we also go through intensive training and face plateaus. That's why it's helpful to switch things up and train other muscle groups so that we don't burn ourselves out in the process. By doing so, we'll also develop wider ranges of motion so that we're prepared to deal with future plateaus and to adapt to foreign environments.

Read on to find out how a plateau led a fellow graphic designer (also a participant of the program) to discover that cross-training was the solution that she needed to expand from her sport of focus:

1. Training equipment: Like how an athlete uses specific equipment to train with, so do we. For some of us, we were trained to use a mouse, a keyboard, and Adobe from day one, and are expected to still do so as they're the industry standard equipment in both educational and working environments. For this graphic designer, she became conditioned to feel at home with the presence of such equipment, so whenever came the time to transition into new environments, she felt "safe" as long as they're in sight.

2. Muscle memory: This is developed from continuous engagement with a specific activity. In the case of this graphic designer who found herself deeper into the commercial field, her specialization looked like so:

(graphic design (digital marketing design (performance marketing design)))

This meant that her training also became more controlled through the use of specific muscles required for quick turnarounds for deliverables. As a result, keyboard shortcuts became the tool she relied on to facilitate this optimal workflow: finger gestures were paired with specific functions, and combinations were memorized through repetition and association with specific software.

Years into this routine, the flow was abruptly interrupted by a sudden moment of awareness and dissociation: she watched her fingers perform automated operations but was struggling to catch up with or make sense of the very action herself.



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Dear Graphic Designer,

Is flow a good thing after all, when you find yourself in a state of trance that leaves you feeling displaced? Has it been an orchestration of planned choreographies that are fixed to movements and leaves no room for other variations or alternatives all this time?

⁶ Building and experimenting with tools, technology, and materials as a way to create and explore new possibilities (Lang, 2015).

1. Plateau: When speed and quality were the most valuable assets in the working environment, creativity and quality were put on the back burner. With the only equipment she knew to use, she found ways to infiltrate or to “misuse” them as an attempt to break out of the so-called safe environment she felt trapped in.

She wondered: if developers can “imbue” an object “with the power to do something” and if interfaces can “define the roles computer users get to play,” (Lialina, 2018) is it possible to take on the roles of developers and interface designers in our own unspecialized ways?

2. Cross-Training: Despite the attempts, the limits of the mouse and the keyboard remained, and the urgency to escape this place she called home grew stronger. It was time to hit the road.

She found her first shelter in physical computing, and it was through this environment where she discovered that there are other layers that also exist behind and beyond these shortcuts and interfaces. For the first time ever, it was even possible to create alternatives of the equipment was trained with. Not only that, but this environment could foster the ‘awkward behavior’ that can help her get a better understanding of the interactions among skills, tools, and medium (Snelting, 2018).

Yet, something still felt out of place. While ‘making’⁶ enabled a more liberating way of working where the focus can be on the process itself for a change, its association to ‘fab labs’ and ‘makerspaces’ can also be intimidating for newcomers. Also, while ‘hacking’ and ‘reverse engineering’ were common terms within this space that somehow resonated with her way of working, it was more about applying these methods in broader contexts that are not limited to the field of hardware and electronics.

3. Cross-Making: Now going into the Cross-Making program, she learned about another term that she found more relatable: ‘critical making’ that “connects two modes of engagement within the world that are often held separate”—critical thinking and physical ‘making’ (Wesseling and Cramer, 2022).

How can we cross-train ourselves to develop tactics of an athlete and a maker to maneuver through the industry pipelines and standardizations and repurpose them as launchpads to explore alternative and more suitable and relatable ways to learn and make? Can learning from other environments help us re-approach the tools we’re expected to use in the environments we were trained in?

Let’s now put this to the test in the next session!



Your (Cross) Maker-in-Training Buddy

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Dear Graphic Designer,

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Dear (Cross) Maker-in-Training

Letter:
5

Module:
Orientation

Happy orientation day! Let's go over the program in detail:

How it works

1. Mindset: Learning is lifelong and can happen whenever and wherever, and anyone or anything can be your greatest teachers. With this approach, you'll begin to see that they are indeed always around you. You'll become more resourceful, adaptable, and independent along the way, which will come in handy because your maker journey will not always have company; the human teachers and your fellow makers will not always be there to hold your hands. There will be times when you're out there on your own, and sometimes all you have with you are objects that you have around you.

Sometimes the teachers you may need the most may not also be within the specialized field that you're in or are after, but rather in nearby or faraway fields you never considered visiting. What can be helpful is that you make the initial effort to get out there to explore, so once you're back home it's just a matter of putting the jigsaw pieces together and seeing what picture comes out of it.

2. Values: To make it a safe space for everyone to learn and make, let's keep in mind of the following:

2.1. Uncomfortable: Our program embraces friction, and we encourage you to get uncomfortable. Why? Because it's through being frustrated that reveals other sides of our maker selves that can actually help us understand how we learn and make.

2.2. Accessible/relatable: We'll be resourceful and work with what we have around us and make sense for us. It doesn't matter if they're open or closed source, or have high or low learning thresholds—as long as they "get" you and support your learning and making process, you make a good team.

2.3. Playful: Creativity is also a muscle that can be trained, and we can practice that by exploring playful ways to solve problems.⁷

2.4. Process-oriented: we're here for the process, where our efforts and experiments may not be present in the final outcome.

2.5. Versatile: This program is your portable playground. We like to keep things open and flexible, so you can bring your own coaches and exercises with you and train wherever you go.

⁷ P Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels refer to "problem finding" through open-ended or not-well structured problems as a way to cultivate creativity (Pringle, 2020).

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Dear (Cross)
Maker-in-
Training



3. Strategy: Everyone has their own take on what it means to make, and we'd love to see what you bring to the table!

If you get stuck and need somewhere to start, we suggest you to try out Brandt and Eagleman's strategies of bending, breaking, and blending (2017):

3.1. Bending: to remodel the source by altering an existing prototype (ibid., p. 58, 73).

3.2. Breaking: to take something apart and create something new out of the fragments (ibid., p.74).

3.3. Blending: to "combine two or more sources in novel ways" (ibid., 91).

4. Training: The key components that make up this program: an exercise, a coach, and a log. The best part: it's DIY (or DIWO)! You can customize it in a way that best suits your pace and preference, and source and assemble its parts as you wish:

4.1. Choose an exercise: This can be any type of activity, at any intensity level.

4.2. Choose a coach: This is an object that you already have around you or have access to.

4.3. Choose a goal: This can be anything you want to learn from your coach.

4.4. Choose a log: This is the homebase to record your obsessions, observations, frustrations, and discoveries in your training.

If you prefer to have guided starting points, you can follow along based on the program that I'm currently training with. Each day, you'll experience being an athlete with a different sport of focus and goal:

Exercise	Coach	Training objective
(Dis)Assembling	Soldering Iron	Build/take apart/fix/break your own tools.
Doodling	Pen	Observe how you interact with an unfamiliar tool.
Folding	Paper	Modify an existing tool that's not working for you to fit your needs.
Sculpting	Egg, Marshmallow	Find your own entry point in an activity with a high learning threshold.
Pushing	Skateboard	Find an activity that cultivates a self-motivating, stimulating, and enjoyable way to learn.
Clicking/Typing	Trackpad, Keyboard	Recreate an environment that boosts your optimal performance.

This is your moment to own it, go all out, and let your freak flag fly.



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*Dear (Cross)
Maker-in-
Training*

Ready to commit?

To receive the rest of the interactive PDF letters (#6-12) for free, or to inquire about purchasing the second edition/physical copy of the envelope kit (letters #1-12), please send an email to: crossmakertraining@gmail.com.

I hope to see you at the first training session!



Your (Cross) Maker-in-Training Buddy



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*Dear (Cross)
Maker-in-
Training*