



Solutions Globali

Map of the Design School Journey

Five key areas to consider from first research to final decisions

This map is meant to be a calm, clear overview of the path ahead. You don't need to do everything at once. Instead, use these five sections below as waypoints you'll return to as you move from first questions to final decisions.

How to Use This Map

- Use **Section 1** when you're first exploring programs (with **Find Your Place in Design** and **Locations** kept nearby if helpful).
- Use **Sections 2 and 3** as you build and submit applications.
- Use **Sections 4 and 5** when decisions arrive, and you're comparing options across regions.

At any point, if you'd like a guide through this landscape rather than walking it alone, you can reach out to us for more structured support.

You can also pair this Map with the more detailed **Guides** in the Design Library—each Guide walks you more closely through one part of this journey.

As you read, remember:

- For deeper background, you can pair this Map with:
 - **Find Your Place in Design** – for design disciplines and paths
 - **Locations** – for countries, cities, and regional context
 - Our Homepage **Design Notes Reading Room** on **Applications & Portfolios**
- You are welcome to contact us if you'd like to talk through any stage.

1. Considering Undergraduate Design Schools (Research + Fit)

This stage is about understanding the landscape and noticing where you might belong.

If you're still figuring out which design paths even exist, it can help to read **Find Your Place in Design** alongside this section.

Program & degree fit

- Does the school emphasize your interests (graphic/communication, product/industrial, interaction/UX, fashion/textile, service systems, motion, architecture-adjacent, etc.)?

- What's the path to a BFA/BA (or equivalent), and how early do students specialize?
- Does the curriculum build from foundations to more advanced studios and labs?

Curriculum, portfolio, and learning culture

- What kinds of projects do students do? Do they teach transferable fundamentals (drawing, design thinking, typography, prototyping, etc.)?
- What do they typically ask for in a portfolio? Does their “success profile” look like your current strengths—or where you can realistically grow?
- What is studio/crit culture like? Are critiques frequent? Supportive? Public?

If you're unsure how to read a curriculum or portfolio brief, that's a good moment to share links with us so we can interpret them together.

Resources, faculty, and outcomes

- Are there studios, fabrication/production spaces, software access, labs, and critique spaces that match your interests?
- Who teaches—full-time faculty, visiting designers, practicing professionals?
- What can you see about internships, career services, and alumni outcomes?

Community, location, and lifestyle

- Do student projects and exhibitions look like the kind of work you want to make?
- Is the campus or city a place where you can imagine living and learning day-to-day?
- How might location affect access to design communities, industries, and your ability to keep up with studio work?

For a broader view of where design is studied and practiced, you can refer to the **Locations** page as you think about cities and regions.

Selectivity, logistics, and your current constraints

- What level of portfolio strength is typical for admits? Is an “art background” assumed, or do they welcome students who are building fundamentals?
- What are the deadlines, application components, and any required interviews or events?
- How much time do you have to build a portfolio? What are your work, family, travel, and language/format constraints?

Well-being, identity, and family alignment

- What support exists – and in what form - for mental health, disability, neurodiversity, or first-generation students?
- How do your family's expectations, finances, and risk tolerance shape what is realistic?

- If you're considering multiple regions (US, UK, Europe, Asia, etc.), what will you and your family be able to manage in terms of travel, visas, and communication?

If you'd like help weighing these questions with your family, that's exactly the kind of conversation we can host.

2. Preparing to Apply (Planning + Building Materials)

Here you move from "possibilities" to a concrete plan for portfolios, writing, and timelines.

Planning the year

- Create a master timeline: application deadlines → portfolio due dates → recommendation deadlines → any interviews.
 - Download the **Application Master Timeline** tool from our Design Library.
- Build a simple system to track each school's requirements and dates in one place.
 - There are tools in our Design Library designed to help with this.

If you're not sure how to sequence things, you can share your draft list with us and we can help you turn it into a realistic plan.

Understanding your current work

- Take inventory of what you've already made. What is strong? What is missing relative to typical requirements?
- Choose 2–4 core themes that describe the story you want your portfolio to tell (for example: systems thinking, brand and typography, human-centered prototyping).

Designing a gap plan

- For each theme, list the projects or fundamentals you still need to show.
- Decide whether you'll create new work, adapt existing work, or both.
- Set a realistic portfolio size target and keep it consistent across applications.

Building supporting materials

- Start drafting short reflections or artist statements that connect your projects to your interests and growth.
- Plan your resume/activities list with a focus on design-relevant experiences.
- Begin to think about recommenders who can speak to your creativity, work ethic, and growth, and give them clear information and timelines.

Regional and format differences

- Note where portfolio formats, writing expectations, or interview practices differ by country or institution.
- Decide where you can reuse materials and where you need separate versions.

If you're applying across several regions and feel overwhelmed by different systems, that's a natural point to reach out so we can simplify and prioritize with you.

3. Applying (Submission + Quality Control)

This stage is about assembling everything carefully and submitting with confidence.

- Our Design Library has guides and tools that can help you with all of this.

Bringing the portfolio together

- For each project, make sure the problem addressed, your approach, and what you learned are clear.
- Show process where it matters: sketches, prototypes, tests, and key decisions.
- Check image quality, legibility, and the overall flow from first page to last.

Aligning writing and recommendations

- Make sure your essays and short answers connect directly to your projects and goals.
- Keep your tone appropriate for each school while still sounding like yourself.
- Confirm that recommenders understand your timeline and what you hope they'll highlight.

If you'd like another pair of eyes on your portfolio story or writing, this is a good time to ask for a review.

Submission checks

- For each school, confirm that every required component is present and in the correct format.
- Test links and files on another device and browser.
- Check that names, program tracks, and prompts are all correct and consistent.

Managing risk and time

- Aim to submit well before the final deadline so you have room to fix any technical issues.
 - Keep copies, photos, or screenshots of what you submitted for your own records.
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4. After Acceptance Notices (Decisions + Next Steps)

Once decisions arrive, you shift from "Can I get in?" to "Where will I thrive?"

Understanding offers and options

- Clarify each outcome: acceptance, waitlist, or conditional offer.
- Read scholarship and financial aid details carefully, including any conditions.
- Note all deposit and response deadlines.

Comparing financial and practical reality

- Look at net cost after scholarships, not just the published tuition.
- Include housing, design materials, software, travel, and visa costs where relevant.
- Consider how each option fits your family's budget and comfort level.
- Download the **Design School Cost Planner** from our Design Library.

The **Locations** page can help you think about cost of living and practicalities at a high level. For more detailed comparisons, we can walk through offers with you and your family.

Re-checking fit with fresh eyes

- Revisit your original criteria: learning environment, specialization timing, resources, support culture, and location.
- Ask follow-up questions about curriculum, advising, and first-year experience if needed.

Planning your first semester

- Learn what your first-term schedule is likely to look like and how studio/crit culture works.
- Make a simple plan for managing time, supplies, and workload in the first month.
- If you're waitlisted at a school you still care about, understand what updates (if any) are welcome.

Committing and moving forward

- Make your final decision by the deadline and complete all required forms and deposits.
- Once you've committed, allow yourself time to celebrate and then begin preparing to arrive as a confident, and driven design student.

If you'd like a structured conversation to weigh offers and next steps, this is a natural moment to contact us.

5. Regional "Tweaks" (Studying Design Internationally)

Rules and norms vary more by institution than by continent, but there are some helpful reminders if you're applying across regions.

You can read this section alongside the **Locations** page for a broader sense of patterns in different countries.

Portfolio vs writing balance

- Some programs are almost entirely portfolio-driven in admissions; others place more weight on essays and academic records.
- Check how each school describes its evaluation process and adjust your effort accordingly.

Submission formats and expectations

- Some schools are strict about PDF structure and page counts; others accept websites or links.
- Pay close attention to file types, sizes, and naming conventions.

Interviews and assessment days

- Where interviews or assessment days exist, they often focus on how you think and talk about your work, not just the final outcomes.
- Be ready to explain your process, decisions, and what you want to learn next.

Visas, language, and support

- For each country, note language requirements, visa timelines, and any support services for international students.
 - For visas and immigration matters, your “go-to” is the international office at the schools you are considering.
- Consider how far from home you and your family are comfortable with, and what support network you’ll have in each place.

If you’re weighing several regions and aren’t sure how to compare them fairly, that’s a good time to bring your questions—and your short list—to us. We are happy to help.