

From David Kasdorf's "Intro to Digital Media" syllabus at Penn State

1. Art is one of the hardest and most uncertain paths you can choose in life. I think often, students choose to pursue Art in college because they think, and rightly so, probably, that Art is an easy path through college. It is after graduation that it gets difficult. Let's face it: You have no real marketable skills, few job prospects, and thus a very uncertain future.

2. As an artist, no matter what medium or media you choose to work in, be it writer, visual artist, actor, film maker, dancer, whatever, you are always at the mercy of other people's opinions. Rejection is something artists must get used to quickly. To be an artist you better develop a thick skin.

3. In most professions in life one learns, – and in order to succeed – masters a specific set or sets of skills. Visual artists, and that is essentially what we are in this class, need to invent their own sets of skills. No one cares if you can paint a "Picasso."

4. There are many artists who have had long and successful careers without ever learning how to draw.

5. These days, many visual artists change and move between media as easily as they change their socks.

6. The one thing that artists most need to learn is the one thing that is impossible to teach. That is rigor in the studio. Forget "Inspiration." To be successful one needs to work and work and work.

7. Work comes from work. Trust the process.

8. If you need to ask what your grade is you may not have the right temperament to be an artist.

9. When you go to New York it seems that everyone is an artist and it's almost true. As a result, no one in the business – collectors, dealers, curators, gallery owners – cares about your work. People are jaded; they've seen it all and have been pestered to death. For some this is very difficult to deal with. Others see it as liberating. Since no one cares anyway, take risks, do what you want.

10. You've all heard the term, "avant-garde." The only avant-garde left in this day and age is expression of self, what it is that makes you tick. We can call that "Personal Vision." That's what people want to see.

11. No one talks about how well things are done or the level of skill one possesses in any certain medium. That doesn't mean it's not important and we will talk about that in this class. It's important to understand, though, that it's just the first step.

12. No one cares either how an image is created. It's the image itself people care about.

13. I like to teach. I like students, at least most of them, and I care about them; I want students to succeed. I like to give students good grades and send them on their way happy. When students are absent a lot or late, or when they're not motivated and unprepared, I stop caring about them so much. It doesn't mean I stop liking them. It just means that I put my energies elsewhere.

14. Art is always a matter of choice. The decision to be an artist is yours to make. The decision of how hard you work is yours, too. It's your decision to sleep in and be late and it's really up to you as far as attendance is concerned. If you need me to motivate you, I encourage you to pursue something else in life.

15. Grades are a fact of life. I would prefer not to have to grade students but that's just not part of the equation. The grade you get in this class depends first and foremost on your level of engagement. That means that if you work hard, show up, be prepared, take risks, participate in critiques and discussions, you'll do fine. The quality of your work matters too, of course. Somewhere around the middle of the semester I'll tell you where you stand. You can talk to me anytime about your grade, although I realize that's not in keeping with #8 above. Don't worry, I didn't really mean #8 above. You can talk to me about anything, actually.

16. Computers are a tool. A very powerful tool but really, just a tool, like a pencil. And you need to know this: I do not teach software - I teach art. If you have enrolled merely to learn Photoshop, or to show a prospective employer that you have had college-level computer instruction, then you will doubtless be better served to purchase the software and sign up for a technical certification course.

17. I encourage deviation. If you don't like the assignment feel free to do something else. If you want to do Flash animations, or video, by all means, do so. It would help me, though, if you talked to me first.

18. I consider critiques to be the most important in-class component of any course I teach.