An Introduction to Graphic Design

In the intro to their documentary The Universal Arts of Graphic Design,
(see Figure 1) PBS Digital Studios describes graphic design thusly:
“Though often overlooked, Graphic Design surrounds us: it is the
signs we read, the products we buy, and the rooms we inhabit.
Graphic designers find beauty within limitations, working towards
the ultimate goal of visually communicating a message. Utilizing a
language of type and imagery, graphic designers try to make every
aspect of our lives defined and beautiful.”

While this is a good “nutshell” description of graphic design, in
contemporary society, design has grown beyond only being a
means to organize a visually cluttered environment, or to persuade,
inform, and organize an audience to meet the needs of business and
industry. Design has become, as Richard Grefé, former Executive
Director of AIGA, defined it, “the intermediary between information
and understanding.” Properly applied, effective design—design
which solves specific problems—can influence individual and group
behavior, political policy, and even society.

While traditionally the term “graphic design” has referred to two-dimensional
surface design—the arrangement of text, images, and
color to express a message—the discipline has evolved to incorporate
three-dimensional objects and spaces, and time-based audio/
visual experiences. As graphic designers now find work in every
field from publishing to entertainment, the sciences to finance, and
are incorporating traditional media such as print and television with
new and emerging technologies such as smart phones and virtual
reality, now more than ever, design education is a lifelong endeavor.
By focusing on the visual communicative fundamentals of art and
design, in combination with creative thinking and problem solving
as opposed to technology, this curriculum aims to prepare students
to be lifelong learners able to thrive as the methods of information
communication and consumption continue to change.

In addition to design studios and advertising agencies, graphic
designers also work as in-house talent for companies, for
traditional and for new media content creators and publishers,
and even as individual entrepreneurs. The practice of design is
highly collaborative, and designers frequently work with writers,
illustrators, photographers, printers, advertisers, marketers and
other professionals.

A brief list of careers in graphic design includes:
⋅⋅ advertising (promotional) design
⋅⋅ book design
⋅⋅ book jacket design
⋅⋅ brand and identity design
⋅⋅ corporate communication design
⋅⋅ editorial design
⋅⋅ environmental design
⋅⋅ interactive (experience) design
⋅⋅ illustration
⋅⋅ information design
⋅⋅ motion design
⋅⋅ package design
⋅⋅ publication design
⋅⋅ retail design
⋅⋅ wayfinding design

Beyond these more traditional roles, designers are finding their
creative problem solving and communication skills in demand in a
growing list of industries, including government and public policy, insurance, health care, architecture, environmental services, and engineering. Graphic design is a competitive and ever-evolving
profession that offers an expanding and rewarding number of career
paths to the curious, determined, and hard working.