

Visual Display and Merchandising for an Ethical Fashion Industry

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1. Level	FE, UG
2. Pre-requisite knowledge required by educators	C. Some knowledge of discipline required.
3. Pre-requisite knowledge required by students	D. Specific knowledge required (specified): Colour and design
4. Number of students	12-100
5. Length of time required	Semester
6. Type of activity	Group work, Ideas for projects, assignments and briefs, Practical
7. Discipline	Marketing
8. Topics covered	Student / educator defined

OBJECTIVES / LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To develop skills in designing and implementing window displays and shadow boxes using a variety of materials, props and mannequins.
- To apply the elements and principles of design to the analysis and development of promotional windows, signage and/or displays.
- To critically assess, through a lens of social justice and responsibility, current advertising and promotional activities at our university, in our local community, state, country and world.
- To create a window display that silently sells an ethical issue related to social responsibility in our fashion industry.
 - Example Issue: To raise an understanding and awareness of current practices and conditions for garment industry workers including agricultural practices, dyeing and printing, cutting and sewing, finishing and packaging.
 - Example Issue: To raise an understanding and awareness of the ethical issues related to over-consumption and waste.
- To verbally and visually explain and take suggestions for a design for a visual display.

Window displays are considered silent sellers in retailing. Traditionally window displays are designed using seasonable merchandise with the primary objective to motivate the passerby to enter, shop and purchase. Traditionally, in visual merchandising or retailing classes, students are given assignments to create window displays using elements and principles of design to learn the skills of creating pleasing displays that will sell merchandise.

The focus of this assignment is for students to create window displays with the primary objective to motivate the passerby to stop, think and learn about some part or process of ethical fashion creation. The design of the display requires the same approach to planning and execution, yet signage often becomes more critical as the viewer initially will need more direction to grasp a concept, for example ethical fashion, rather than if they like the color, fit, style or look of a fashion item in a window. Uncomfortable issues are often difficult to read about, yet dynamic displays can instigate awareness and understanding that can actually motivate more intelligent sales. Students will still grasp an understanding of the interplay of the elements and principles of design, as they create displays that silently educate and stimulate the viewer to understand how social responsibility and ethical issues are woven throughout the fashion industry.

In a semester class, all students have the same learning objectives (see section below), yet each pair of students will approach the creation of their window in their own unique way. By the end of the semester, the 6, 12, or 20 completed window displays have mentally, emotionally and creatively changed the students and the viewers that pass by the windows.

ACTUAL MATERIALS PROVIDED

1. Students must be provided with the actual space to create the window displays in the department, library, bookstore or local merchants.
2. Most of the actual display materials are found, borrowed and/or created by the students.
3. Access to a computer lab is helpful to make effective signage.

READING/FILM LISTS

With clear objectives, students tend to be very resourceful in coming up with topics and ideas that they are curious to research and in determining how to design an effective display to sell their message.

STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS FOR LEARNING ACTIVITY

- a. Central to the themes of all window displays will be the promotion and support of activities and events relating to a socially responsible fashion industry, specifically themes of equity, diversity, social justice and/or sustainability.
- b. Students will choose a partner for the research, design and execution of each display.
- c. A detailed sketch of the display and a materials list will be presented to the instructor and the class one week prior to the installation. Each student pair will have 10 minutes to show their sketch and materials list, and interact with suggestions given by other class members.
- d. Window displays are up for 1 week. Students are responsible for all photos, signage and merchandise before, during and after the window is completed. Each pair is responsible for removing all items and cleaning the space in time for the next display installation.
- e. Displays must be checked throughout the entire week. This is a learning activity; students may continue to view, analyze, and make additions and adjustments throughout the week.
- f. Each student completes an evaluation sheet; it must be turned in after installation as it is the instructor's guide for understanding and grading the display.
- g. Students should make sure they photograph their displays; these will be included in their senior portfolio. Students are encouraged to spend the time to take several good photos.

Window Evaluation Criteria

Type or neatly write complete responses to each item below on a separate sheet and attach.

	Possible Points
1. What is the theme of the window? How does the viewer know the theme?	15
2. Effectiveness of display (rhythm, balance, emphasis, proportion, harmony/unity). Explain which you used, and how, in self-evaluation. Did you use length, width and height effectively?	25
3. Creativity/excitement - is it eye-catching, do people stop and look? Explain the most creative part in self-evaluation.	15
4. Use of props and materials - are they effective, do they overpower merchandise? Are materials clean, pressed, aids hidden? How is your name included in a professional, creative manner?	20
5. Display sketch and materials list – attach to this sheet.	10
6. What specifically did you view and/or read that inspired this theme?	5
7. Self-evaluation - what specifically did you do for the window? Describe how the creative process worked for you; was it challenging, smooth, invigorating? What will you do differently next time?	10
	100 points total

Feedback from Students

- *“This is much more difficult than I expected. It was tough to decide on an idea as there were so many ethical issues to choose from.”*
- *“This was a lot of fun. We got a lot of comments from people as we were installing our window about hemp. People still don’t get that you can’t get high from wearing it.”*
- *“My boss was really interested in the statistics I was finding about denim production in China, she wants me to do a window display in our store.”*

This activity has heightened the awareness in our university of how relevant and integral our fashion curriculum is in meeting the university’s mission of teaching social justice. Viewing the window displays is not always comfortable as topics chosen can be controversial, but the objective to motivate the passerby to stop, think and learn about some part or process of ethical fashion creation is achieved.

This is an excerpt from:

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Edited by Liz Parker on behalf of Fashioning an Ethical Industry, UK, and Marsha A. Dickson on behalf of Educators for Socially Responsible Apparel Business, USA.

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