



GRAPHIC DESIGNERS OF CANADA  
DESIGNERS GRAPHIQUES DU CANADA

# GDC/RGD CODE OF ETHICS

## Introduction

CGD Certified graphic designers (CGDs) and Registered Graphic Designers (RGDs) are committed to the highest professional and ethical standards when working for clients, as employees, and in service to the general public. Together, the GDC and RGD have created a unified Code of Ethics for their members to abide by in their professional practice.

In the interest of ensuring the Code of Ethics can be used by both GDC members and RGDs to promote their commitment to the highest professional and ethical standards to clients and employers, GDC and RGD have created a Code of Ethics that our members must follow. To support ease of use, the Code of Ethics have been divided into categories. The Rules are supported by a set of Best Practices. Rules are intended to be clear, objective and easy to follow; Best Practices are more nuanced guidelines for member behaviour.

If you have questions or concerns about anything outlined in the Code of Ethics, contact GDC's Executive Director, Melanie MacDonald, by email at [director@gdc.net](mailto:director@gdc.net) or the GDC National Ethics Chair at [ethics@gdc.net](mailto:ethics@gdc.net).

## 1. Responsibilities to the Organization

### 1.1 Rules

**1.1.1** As a member of my professional organization, I will uphold the GDC Constitution and obey all federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal laws relating to the practice of graphic/communication design.

**1.1.2** I will not authorize, permit, counsel, aid, abet, or acquiesce in the contravention of any such regulations by any individual.

**1.1.3** I will notify my professional association upon declaring bankruptcy, and on being discharged from bankruptcy under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act (Canada), and before making any proposal in bankruptcy for the benefit of my creditors.

**1.1.4** I will not authorize, permit, counsel, assist, aid, or abet an individual as holding a professional designation if the requirements for that designation, have not been met.

**1.1.5** I will abide by the terms and limitations of my category of membership as required by my professional organization and pay my membership dues in a timely manner.

**1.1.6** Within my full legal ability to do so, I will provide any document, record, or electronic data relating to an investigation or a proceeding in respect of my professional conduct or the professional conduct of another member, as requested by the Grievance or Discipline Committee.

**1.1.7** I will not disclose confidential information I have received as a director, officer, committee member, portfolio evaluator, or representative of my professional organization to any third party, unless and except when required to do so by law.



## **1.2 Best Practices**

**1.2.1** I will promote my Certification wherever possible, including by using my CGD Certification Mark after my name on professional and promotional material, displaying my Certificate in my place of practice or instruction, and request that it be included when published by others.

**1.2.2** I will review and re-affirm my commitment to this Code of Ethics annually with the renewal of my membership.

## **2. Responsibilities to the Profession and Other Members/Designers**

### **2.1 Rules**

**2.1.1** I will engage in the practice of graphic/communication design in an ethical and lawful manner.

**2.1.2** I will not misrepresent the qualifications or capabilities of myself or another member or individual.

**2.1.3** I will serve as an expert when asked, and properly retained in a judicial, arbitration, or legal proceeding, if I am qualified and able to do so.

**2.1.4** When practising graphic/communication design outside of Canada, I will observe the code of conduct of the graphic/communication design organization in that jurisdiction where it does not conflict with this Code of Ethics.

**2.1.5** I am committed to meeting the professional standards of the graphic/communication design industry, and working towards the betterment of the profession across Canada and internationally, as stated in the aims of my professional organization.

**2.1.6** I will not unfairly criticize any graphic/communication designers or their work in a way that might damage their professional reputation.

**2.1.7** I will not use unethical means to win work away from other graphic/communication designers.

**2.1.8** I will not solicit or accept a project from a client where there is reason to believe another member has been engaged or employed on the same project, unless prior to accepting such work I have received reliable assurance from the client that the other designer has been discharged or that all designers have been fully and accurately informed of the situation.

## **2.2 Best Practices**

**2.2.1** If I take on a project on which another designer has already been working, I will take reasonable precautions to ensure that relevant property rights belong to the client.

**2.2.2** I will set compensation at a level suitable to my qualifications and my practice.

**2.2.3** In the interest of improving standards in the graphic/communication design profession, I will continually strive to update my skills and keep them relevant to today's marketplace.

## **3. Responsibilities to Clients and Employers**

### **3.1 Rules**

**3.1.1** I will act in the best interest of my clients and/or employers, within the limits of this Code of Ethics.

**3.1.2** I will meet my financial obligations to employees, sub-contractors, and/or service providers in a timely manner.

**3.1.3** I will not work simultaneously on assignments that create a conflict of interest without the agreement of the clients or employers concerned, except where it is the convention of the trade to which the client or employer belongs for designers to work at the same time for various competitors.

**3.1.4** I will not prepare, authorize, or distribute any proposals, applications, self-promotion, advertising, or publicity that contain statements designed to mislead others regarding my or my firm's competence, experience, or professional capabilities.

**3.1.5** I will not publicly release any information regarding works in progress unless my client or employer has explicitly given consent to do so.

**3.1.6** I will not disclose confidential information received by my client or employer, unless authorized or obligated by law to do so. This includes, but is not limited to: business strategies, works in progress, organization structure, and production methods.

**3.1.7** I will not withdraw services except for reasonable cause and upon reasonable written notice, or as outlined in the provisions of a contractual agreement.

### **3.2 Best Practices**

**3.2.1** I will ensure that all contracts and agreements that I undertake with clients, employees, and suppliers outline what is expected from each party and the compensation to be paid, and include consequences and remedies for situations that may reasonably be expected to arise.

**3.2.2** I will discuss the terms of any proposal, including compensation, with those who I seek to sign an agreement, and strive to ensure we both understand all terms and conditions that apply therein.

**3.2.3** If I undertake a verbal agreement regarding provision of graphic/communication design services, I will follow up with written confirmation outlining all of the details agreed upon verbally.

## **4. Responsibilities to Society and the Environment**

### **4.1 Rules**

**4.1.1** I will strive to act in the best interests of my client's audiences, consumers, and society.

**4.1.2** While engaged in the practice of graphic/communication design, I will not knowingly do or fail to do anything that constitutes a deliberate or reckless disregard for the health and safety of the community in which I live and practice.

**4.1.3** I will not accept instructions from a client or employer that infringe upon human rights or involve the promotion of hatred, discrimination, or exploitation of any person or group of persons as outlined in the Canadian Human Rights Act and any relevant legislation in my jurisdiction.

**4.1.4** I will take responsibility for the respectful visual portrayal of people or persons in my or my firm's work.

**4.1.5** I will consider the environmental, economic, social, and cultural implications of my work and the goods and services offered by my suppliers, contractors, and manufacturers, and endeavour to minimize adverse impacts.

**4.1.6** I will educate myself and ensure that my clients are informed about accessibility standards in my jurisdiction and the role that design can play in giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in their communities and the world at large.

### **4.2 Best Practices**

**4.2.1** I will be informed about and specify or recommend goods, services, and processes that are the least detrimental to the environment and society.

**4.2.2** I will strive to contribute 5% of my time to projects in the public good, projects that serve society, and projects that help improve the human experience.

**4.2.3** I will donate my services as a graphic/communication designer to charities and non-profits that do not have the capacity to pay for graphic/communication design services.

**4.2.4** I will refrain from donating my services as a graphic/communication designer to charities or non-profits that have the capacity to pay for graphic/communication design services.

**4.2.5** I will issue comprehensive invoices, with a 100% discount, on all pro bono projects so that the value of my donation is respected.

## **5. Responsibilities Regarding Competitions and Fees**

### **5.1 Rules**

**5.1.1** When consulted, I will encourage procedures that support fair and open competition, based upon professional merit.

**5.1.2** I will refrain from engaging in, judging, or promoting competitions that require original creative (speculative work) unless all participants are compensated.

**5.1.3** With the exception of work done on a pro bono basis, I will not perform graphic/communication design services without receiving compensation.

**5.1.4** I will not perform graphic/communication design services on a speculative basis, either alone or in competition with others, for which compensation will only be received if a design is accepted or used.

**5.1.5** I may engage in a skills test without compensation as part of a job application process if I so choose, provided I understand and agree to the terms of the test in advance and none of the work I perform will be used in a commercial way.

### **5.2 Best Practices**

**5.2.1** Whenever I become aware that a Canadian company, government department or agency, or non-profit organization is requesting speculative work by graphic/communication designers, I will inform my professional organization and strive to educate that client on the dangers and drawbacks associated with it.

**5.2.2** If I am asked to advise on the selection of designers or other consultants, I will not accept payment from the designer or other consultant I recommend.

**5.2.3** I will strive to educate others about the dangers and drawbacks associated with spec work.

## **6. Responsibilities Related to My Intellectual Property**

### **6.1 Rules**

**6.1.1** When I have collaborated on work, I will credit other all other designers and firms involved and make clear what my responsibilities on the work were.

**6.1.2** I will not claim credit for having performed design services on a project on which I did not have personal and/or supervisory involvement.

**6.1.3** Where I have performed work for another designer or firm, if I wish to use the work for promotional purposes, I will seek permission, provided that the work is not protected.

### **6.2 Best Practices**

**6.2.1** I will ensure my clients understand the intellectual property rights accorded to the work that I do on their behalf and my responsibility to uphold those rights under the Rules.

**6.2.2** Where intellectual property rights are to be transferred to the client, I will consider seeking appropriate compensation.

**6.2.3** I will encourage my clients to publish design credits on work whenever feasible.

**6.2.4** I will consider exercising my moral rights when my work is used in a way that may damage my reputation.

## **7. Responsibilities Related to the Intellectual Property of Others**

### **7.1 Rules**

**7.1.1** I will respect the intellectual property rights of all other contributors or collaborators.

**7.1.2** I will not copy another designer's work without consent, or claim another designer's work as my own.

**7.1.3** I will not provide copyrighted material to my clients without ensuring proper licenses have been obtained.

**7.1.4** I will ensure that I have proper licenses for all copyrighted material that I and my employers are using.

**7.1.5** When downloading or accessing copyrighted material, I will check license agreements for correct usage.

**7.1.6** When using assets that license copyright and attribution under the "Creative Commons" model, I will:

- Make sure any derivative works I produce using such assets carry the identical license forward or further restrict the rights granted, in order to protect the original creator of the work.
- Clearly credit those responsible for the assets I have used.
- Provide links to the personal websites and/or blogs of the creators and modifiers of the assets, back to the original creator, if the information exists.

**7.1.7** If, after using assets labeled as "Creative Commons" or purchasing or finding clip art, I discover or am made aware of copyright infringement, I will:

- Come to an agreement with the original creator of the work to ensure adequate compensation is provided to him/her based on the usage.
- Make sure proper credit is given to the original creator of the work. If this is not possible (for example, if the product is already printed), I will try to the best of my ability to issue an erratum on my website or blog advising people of the mistake and crediting the proper source. I will notify any other users of the assets that I know of, and try to put them in touch with the creator of the original work. If the creator of the work is unable or unwilling to license proper licenses, I will stop using the asset immediately.

## **8. Responsibilities of Employers**

### **8.1 Rules**

**8.1.1** I will engage in the management of graphic/communication design in an ethical and lawful manner.

**8.1.2** I will not knowingly do or fail to do anything that constitutes a deliberate or reckless disregard for the health and safety of my employees.

**8.1.3** I will ensure I am knowledgeable of and compliant with all pertinent labour laws in my jurisdiction.

**8.1.4** I will not direct my employees to perform graphic/communication design services on a speculative basis.

**8.1.5** I will strive to create an inclusive, discrimination-free work environment and treat all my employees with respect and dignity.

**8.1.6** I will encourage diversity and equity in the workplace.

**8.1.7** I will refrain from asking job applicants to perform a skills test without first ensuring they have agreed to the terms of the test and assuring them that none of the work they create will be used in a commercial way.

## **8.2 Best Practices**

**8.2.1** I will ensure that I compensate all staff and interns at a level suitable to their qualifications and abilities.

**8.2.2** I will promote certification in the graphic/communication design profession.

**8.2.3** I will encourage my employees to keep their skills up to date and relevant to today's marketplace.

**8.2.4** I will provide time for my employees to contribute to projects in the public good, projects that serve society, and projects that help improve the human experience.

**8.2.5** Where a designer has performed work under my charge or for my firm, I will not deny them the right to use the work they produced for promotional purposes unless the work is protected.

**8.2.6** I will educate employees on these Rules and the value of being Members of a professional organization.

## **9. Responsibilities of Educators**

### **9.1 Rules**

**9.1.1** I will engage in the instruction of graphic/communication design in an ethical and lawful manner.

**9.1.2** I will strive to prepare my students for the realities of the graphic/communication design field.

**9.1.3** I will not knowingly do or fail to do anything that constitutes a deliberate or reckless disregard for the health and safety of my students.

**9.1.4** I will not unfairly exploit my students for my own private business interests.

**9.1.5** I will not give instruction to my students that infringe upon human rights or involve the promotion of hatred, discrimination, or exploitation of any person or group of persons as outlined in the Canadian Human Rights Act and any relevant legislation in my jurisdiction.

**9.1.6** I will not direct my students to perform graphic/communication design services on a speculative basis.

### **9.2 Best Practices**

**9.2.1** I will ensure my students are aware of the environmental, economic, social, and cultural implications of their work and the role that designers can play in minimizing adverse impacts.

**9.2.2** I will develop assignments that allow students to develop projects in the public good, projects that serve society, and projects that help improve the human experience.

**9.2.3** I will educate my students about their intellectual property rights and the rights associated with copyrighted material.

**9.2.4** I will educate students on this Code of Ethics and Professional Practice and the value of being Members of a professional organization.

**9.2.5** I will ensure my students are aware of accessibility standards in my jurisdiction and the role that designers can play in giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in their communities and the world at large.



**RGD**

### **Acknowledgement**

Written by Johnathon Vaughn Strebly CGD, Stüssy Tschudin RGD and Matt Warburton CGD, FGDC in collaboration with the Association of Registered Graphic Designers of Ontario (RGD), and thanks to AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Arts), Ico-D (International Council of Design), and the many individuals who contributed to the crafting of this Code of Ethics.

2019.05