

# Thumbnail Sketches Usage in Organizing Idea for Typography Design

SRI KUSUMA WATI MOHD DAUD, FAUZAN MUSTAFFA, HANAFIZAN HUSSAIN

Faculty of Creative Multimedia

Multimedia University

Persiaran Multimedia, 63100 Cyberjaya, Selangor

MALAYSIA

[Kusuma.daud@mmu.edu.my](mailto:Kusuma.daud@mmu.edu.my), [fauzan.mustaffa@mmu.edu.my](mailto:fauzan.mustaffa@mmu.edu.my), [hanafizan.hussain@mmu.edu.my](mailto:hanafizan.hussain@mmu.edu.my)  
<http://www.mmu.edu.my>

*Abstract:* - Sketches have been used as design method for long time. Typography design project has been adopted thumbnail sketches as the beginning of the process in organizing idea as tool or skill needed in the design process. The role of using thumbnail sketches either as tool or skill has an impact on students' attention and creativity which associated with typography design. An experiment using sketching techniques will be used to provide the process of design typography as part of typography design portfolio. The findings of this experimental method can be seen on the process of thumbnail sketches which demonstrates a simplistic approach towards the overall idea and creativity of students' portfolio in typography design class. The creation of a design portfolio is an important part of the learning process, because it consists of milestones and process documentation that can be used as a way to examine and measure progress and guide the designer along the path to making design decisions during the completion of the task. Although software technology has an integral role to play in the production of designed products, it is an adjunct to the core content of courses which aim to allow students to gain an understanding of the knowledge and skills associated with design, their application to creative problem solving and to also gain a contextual/theoretical understanding of issues related to design and the broader field.

*Key-Words:* - Thumbnail Sketches, Typography Design, Ideation, Knowledge Capturing, Learning Approach

## 1 Introduction

One of the best ways to get these students attention is to use a visualization tool to draw the key messages, and by presenting data visually, they will react to uncover surprising patterns and observations that wouldn't be apparent from looking at their sketches' alone (Buxton, 2007).

As a tool or skill, sketching has its role in the design process. That role will vary depending on the end-product being created, the size and scope of the project, the individual designer's style, experience, and workflow, and the client's expectations. Find out more about how sketching is used in the design process within multiple design disciplines.

Thumbnail sketching can start loose, beginning with basic concepts. Then work on compositions or layouts. After those directions are chosen, the concepts can further be refined with detailed sketching. There are five usages for thumbnail sketching in typography design as shown below

### 1. Rapid Concept Development

Sketching is an excellent way to quickly explore concepts. The students can sketch for one or two hours and work out multiple possible solutions to the design problem at hand. This is an essential step in the design process.

### 2. Basic Composition or Layout

Sketches are a quick way to create the basic composition of your illustration. They are also used in typography design and graphic design to quickly evaluate layout choices. The students can make a series of thumbnail sketches, that are good enough that they capture the necessary elements, while drawing skill is unnecessary.

### 3. Client Communication and Approval

Showing sketched thumbnails or compositions, will potentially save the students' amount of time before they go on getting thumbnail approvals for the projects as also a common part of the illustration process.

#### 4. Visual Exploration

Sketching can be used as a journaling activity to record and explore your interests. It can also be used to explore multiple options you could take in a particular design.

#### 5. Refining Visual Solutions

The process of creating a design or illustration at later stages involves refinement. The overall concept and direction of the piece may be working great, but one element isn't. Often, this can be tightened up and corrected in further rounds of sketching. Of course, at some point a digital artist moves to the computer. The process of sketching then moves into digital drafts.

## 2 Thumbnail Sketches

One step of the design process which needed thumbnail sketches, most of the students felt the desire to skip sketching and jump straight to the computer or work out your solutions as digital sketches. Moreover, their thinking is not wrong but there is no quicker method for exploring multiple visual solutions than using thumbnail sketching as the advantages of sketching in regards to the project to be delivered.

Hand-drawn sketching plays an important role in the digital arts. During the process of 'thumbnail sketches', students are required to produce a minimum of fifteen hand-drawn sketches using either pen, pencils or marker in an A3 size of paper. Thus this will be as part of their portfolio I organizing ideas.

### 2.1 Organising Knowledge

The first step in brainstorm of the ideas between the groups of people in their area is to communicate their complex idea and creativity using conceptual model. However for the design, analysis and planning of new system, the mapping process is quite complex because all of the inherent ambiguity in aid creativity and ideation must be resolved to produce new product for meaningful sharing and communication in engineering context. According to Buxton (2007) the sketches is very useful in organizing idea that will be spearhead towards the selection of the design approval. It also will determine the mapping process in order to gain the best design for the next step.

### 2.2 Lateral thinking

Generally, 'analysis phase', was the first process on the creation of the design portfolio. It comprised of two components of process which were 'background research' and 'precedent studies'. These two components were analysed to see the impact on students' articulation of ideas and concepts chosen for this project. 'Generation phase/lateral thinking phase', was the third process on the creation of the design portfolio. It comprised of a component of 'thumbnail sketches'. This component were analysed to see how the students first acquires their ideas to solve the problem.

## 3 Typography Design Portfolio

Started from DP 1 progress of lateral sketches as shown in Figure 1, it is interesting to see a shift of thinking in the student's experiment of typographical play shown from the second week to the fourth week of the project.

As can be seen in week two, both (i a) and (i b) progress of sketch, demonstrated a simplistic approach towards the overall. At this point, the lateral sketch shows that the student was clear about the emphasis of the project (towards the artistic gesture) except does not sensitive on the anatomy of the letterforms.

This can be seen from the chosen of letters which were not carefully chosen. The rush for the gesture in this case has neglected the strength of the letters. This simplistic approach has failed to address the important matter of the project whereby all the letters has been lumps all at ones and forced to fit for the overall gesture which looks like a triangular and a swirl shape. Although the gesture was interesting but the lack of anticipation at the experimental level make the attempt fail.

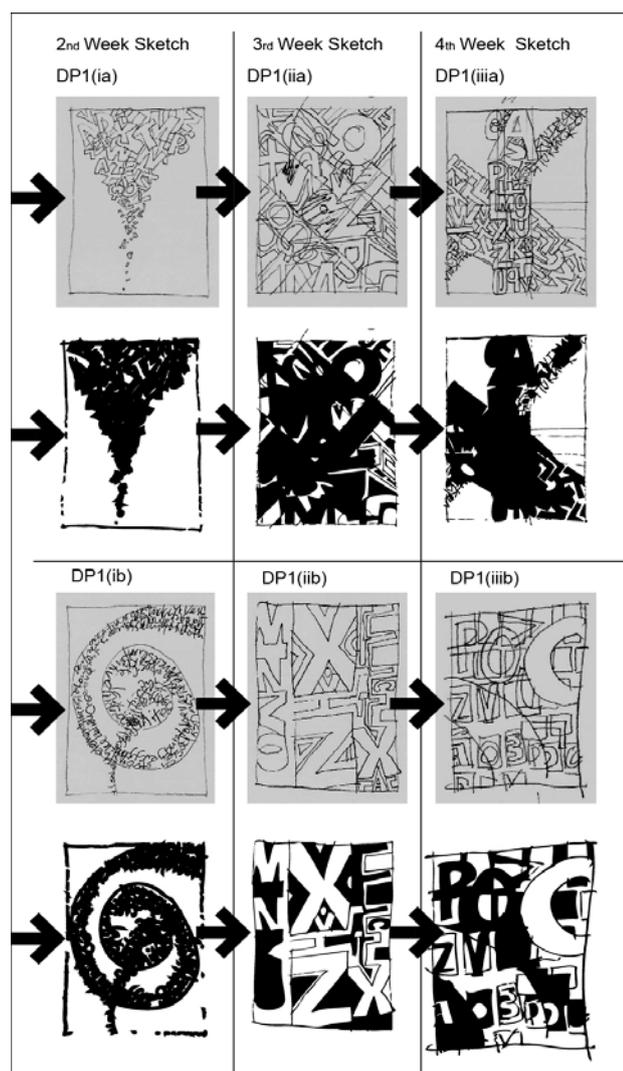


Figure 1: DP 1 Progress of lateral sketches

Followed up by the modification of the sketch done in week 3, DP 1 has made a better progress as shown in (ii a) and (ii b) progress, where the typical ideas have shifted to accommodate the character and strength of letterforms. At this stage, it can be seen that the anatomy of letterform has starts to emerge. In a way, the letters in its unique forms has started to stand out even though; there is no obligation to reveal the whole original form.

At this stage, it was found that both sketch reflect an 'over do'. The manner of which all letters were cramp on a picture plain resulted on less appreciation at the level of the letter form whereby the letters appear to be almost the same size which has makes it less interesting. As a result, big bulky rectangular which seems like struggling to survive are discovered. This can be relate to the type of art direction of which this expression can easily suitable but the problem is, it does not compute with

the project brief; specifically to address best 'appreciation of letterform'.

Further, in week 4, DP 1, has made much better progress as shown in (iii a) and (iii b) progress. It can be seen that there are better breathing space in the layout with the presence of the 'white areas'. However, as can be seen in (iii a) progress, the student bounds to make the same mistake when almost all letters was force to fit in the desired gesture. Although it is much organic and letters can be felt, but the letters were not merely explored based on its strength. This can be proven; if the letter was replaced with other letter it does not make any difference.

Therefore choice and strength of letters were not really capitalized. However in (iii b) progress, it is interesting to see the idea of shallow space start to emerge whereby the typographical play has seemingly experimented on two different plain on the idea of shallow space.

As a conclusion, SP1 has made a good progress on grasping various concept of typographical play over almost three weeks of the idea development. This includes the main emphasis of the project on the typographical gesture. SP 1 has avoided most past mistake but bounds to repeat a part of it. This seems that sketches are ready for further exploration using the chosen software for vertical thinking due to the design process.

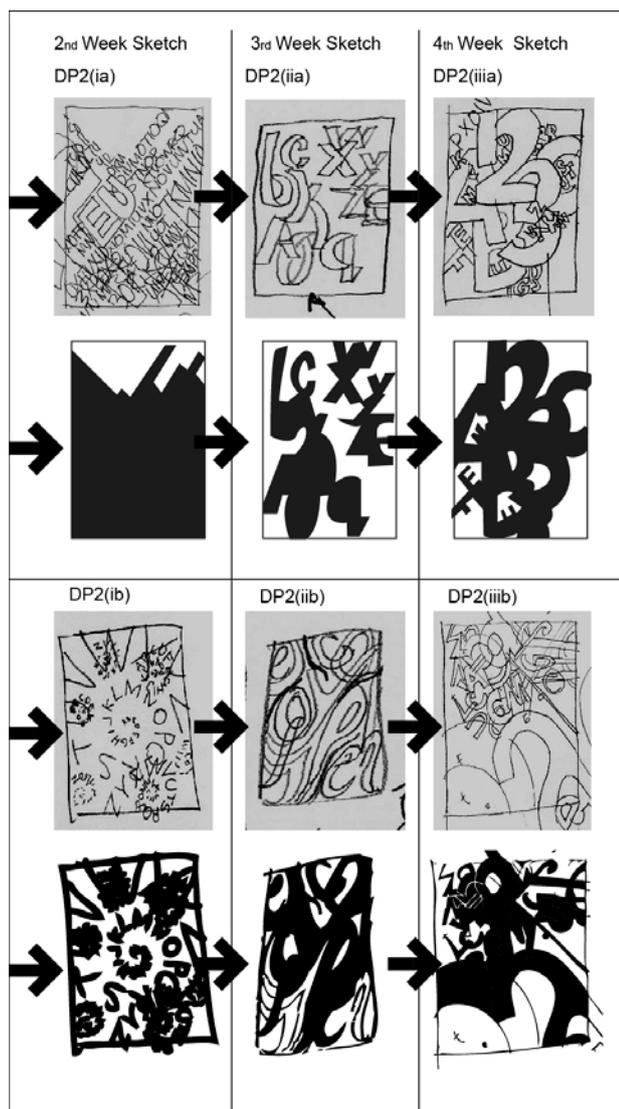


Figure 2: DP 2 Progress of lateral sketches

Followed by DP 2 progress of lateral sketches as shown in Figure 2, sample from thumbnail sketches of DP 2 has shown a wider improvement on various aspects from week 2 to week 4. Even though with fairly good precedents, DP 2 starts with poor sketches attempt especially in regards of the appreciation of letterform. DP 2 (i a) progress of sketch reflect too simplistic thinking putting forward only two level of contrasting point size in the play. Letters merely forced to fill up the blanks leaved by pre-determined shape. Although there is attempt for positive and negative interplay between typographical elements and the white space, it still ends up an uninspiring result with almost bulky rectangular shape. (i b) progress demonstrated a better attempt with formation of spiral flow, but still very less sensitivity in terms of capitalizing the strength of anatomy of letters. It can also be seen that (i b) progress try to achieved the illusion of 'z'

axis by the play of point size to make the attempt interesting, but failed to demonstrate the critical understanding and the appreciation of letters played. It is fair to say, at this stage it seems that DP 2 knows 'what' she needs to aim (gesture) but lack of the understanding on 'how' he needs to do.

Followed up by the modification of the sketch done in week 3, there is an obvious level of gap in between cluster. Two sample as shown in (ii a) and (ii b) progress is a demonstration of that nature whereby (ii a) progress demonstrate thinking and attempt to overlaps letter in some groups formation with no clear idea on the pursue of artistic gesture. This sample represents a large amount of doodles which doesn't seem to have a clear direction. It seems most of these doodles is one dimension in thinking; probably a play of single keywords in mind. When there is a play of one aspect (i.e. grouping) there is no strategic play of others like hierarchy, positive and negative interplay, white space or illusion of 'z' axis in a single sketch. However, (ii b) represent a group of sketches that is so mature featuring typographical persona, it almost giving a notion of a final comprehensive sketch. The sketch seems to have a wide consideration of typographical play which includes the manifestation and rendition of the project emphasis.

Further, in the fourth week sketches, DP 2 demonstrated by far a mature typographical experimental outcome although there were also marginalize some. A sample of (iii a) progress showed an average sketches which appears to 'just' surpass the requirements of the project. It does not reflect a rich digestion of typographical concept. On the other hand, (iii b) progress is a sample reflecting an excellent manifestation of project's ideals. The strength of letterforms were capitalized, lead by the lower caps 'a' largely determine the personality of the typographical play. The anticipation of letters in organic arrangement gave a notion of a movement which spontaneously creates an interesting incoming visual flow. There was creative creation of illusion of space capitalizing on the additional 'z' axis. There was also just enough white space for breathing to balance up the beautiful 'riot' of typographical expression.

In conclusion, DP2 has shown a dramatic progression reflected in his design journal. It is interesting to see the level of maturity of the sketches in week four in comparison with below average or poor attempt in week two. Researcher cannot but to suggest that this may not only reflect

the change of level of thinking upon time but also the change of critical craftsmanship which bring along the idea of mindset. Craftsmanship is definitely has a lot to do with the amount of time spent. In a way this suggests that there is change in terms of the amount of time spent on a sketch. It is also interesting to know what motivate the change and the learning curve. It is also interesting to highlight the mixture pattern of thinking reflected on week three where sketches contains single minded and marginalized sketches and all the sudden, there were 'A' band typographical sketches. It is more interesting to note that this pattern continue in week four.

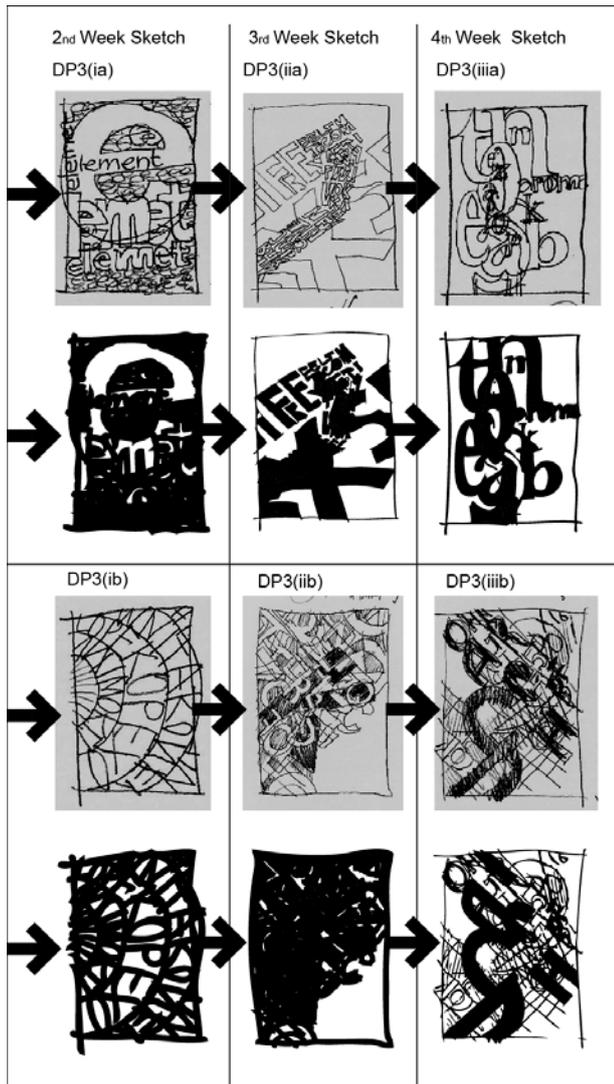


Figure 3: DP 3 Progress of lateral sketches

Followed by DP 3 progress of lateral sketches as shown in Figure 3, design process in regards of DP 3 design showed in (i a) to (iii b) has more and less reflect the same rate and pattern that is with DP 1. It starts with average scams in beginning with fairly good sketch outcome in week four. In week two (as

reflected in DP 3 (i a) progress, there are misunderstanding on the parameter of the project as clarified in project brief. Even though there is exploration of letter form lead by the lower cap 'e' but evidently there is word 'element' involved. The fact that formation of word can easily decrease the appreciation of letter makes the sketch failed in the context of the project. The present of word block has killed the prominent 'e'. It has turned the whole sketch to a rectangular block and makes the positive and negative interplay became meaningless. Design shown in (i b) progress reflect not a good attempt sketch because letters were forced into the multi-semi-circle neglecting the strength of the chosen letters. There is no way to unleash the character by the anatomy of those letters if it has to fit in the regime of the pre-cast shape. As the matter of fact, those letter has to cast the faith of its own gesture.

Whereas, in week three, DP 3 has make an interesting and sensible sketches. The diagonal orientation of (ii a) makes up a fresher idea on the attempt. It seems that the attempt applied the idea of shallow space when it applies the notion of perspective. There is different hierarchy on types reflected on different scale of letters. The dynamic of the diagonal orientation of the play also impacted on the positive and negative interplay. Even though the 'X' were largely felt (and perhaps the 'S') the rest of letters were still in the regimented path. It makes up a particular style but this sketch does not accurately reflect the idealism of the project. On the other hand, (ii b) progress, start experimenting on the layering of the typographical play. We can see the 'K' in the negative interplay with the overall type which is largely positive; in a way an attempt to cast two gesture but it does not so successful because of the prominent block.

Further, in week four DP3 has made a better attempt. In a way it complies with the requirement of the project at the same time made good progress in search of artistic typographical gesture. Progress shown in (iii a) is not too excellent example but clearly we can see all letters can be identified in search of the gesture. Not all gesture is good gesture. At least the DP 3 was clearly in the right track and upon focus, he can potentially hit more fruitful experimental outcome. In (iii b) progress, sketch demonstrated a better outcome when DP 3 fused his progress with the idea of shallow space instantly resulted on multi layering gesture; in away a more advance attempt.

In conclusion, DP 3 has made good development especially on the aspect of cognitive. This translated onto series of sketches where we can see that DP 3 able to make smarter choice in the context of fulfilling the requirement of the project. Just to note the context; maintaining the recognizable letter form at the same time exploring overall gesture capitalizing on the strength of those letters. However, smarter choice alone cannot lead to excellent outcome because ones must polish ideas and craft outcome.

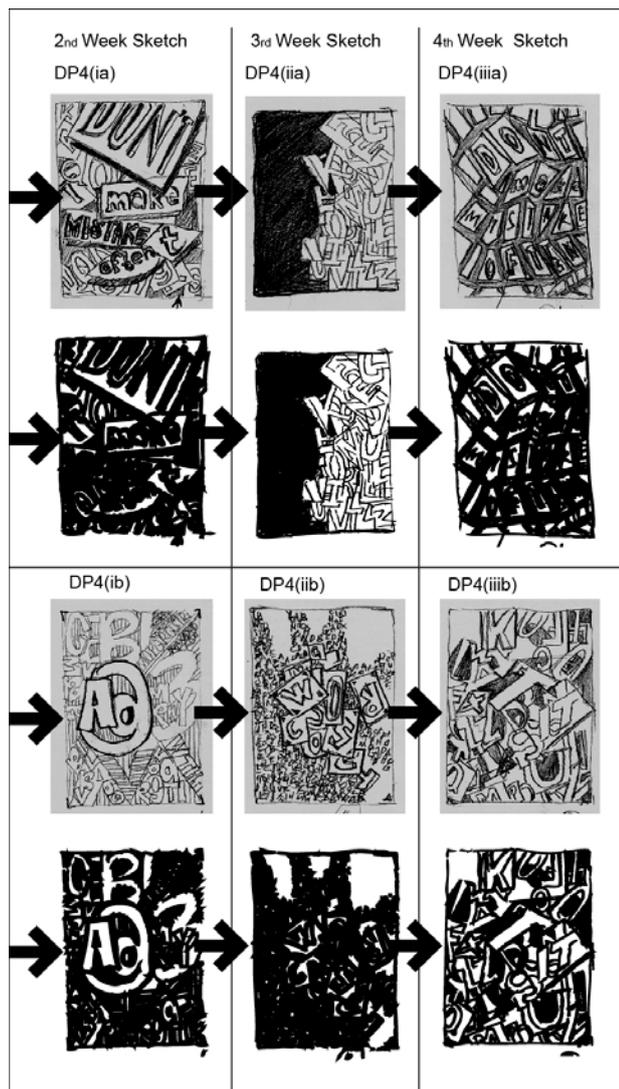


Figure 4: DP 4 Progress of lateral sketches

In a glance, DP 4 lateral sketches as showed in Figure 4, has made considerable development based on the sketches shown in (i a) to (iii b) progresses whereby (i a) progress is not a good start when the sketch clearly shown the used of words in the composition. The worst is the word was in rectangular block. However from the sketch we can learn that DP 4 was trying to attempt the project

emphasis which is the typographical gesture. The gesture was interesting except it was not comply with the appreciation of letterform. In (i b) progress, sketch was by far adhere to the requirement of the project. In fact, it was a higher attempt based on advance features; multi layering gesture. DP 4 tried to create sense of gesture by experimenting with visual flows and tried to enhance the attempt by rendering positive and negative shapes. The attempt was not successful because it was not done with good design flare. The lower caps ‘a’ which seems to compliment the capital ‘A’ was clearly not a good solution. It enhances the strength of lower caps ‘a’ but at the same time ‘kill’ the capital ‘A’.

Whereas, in (ii a), we can learn that the student has tried to experiment with positive and negative space by rendering the spaces. It involves a lot of letters. All letters can be clearly identified and forming a particular attempt for gesture. Again, it was not successful because it was not done in a good design flare. The design was too balance with almost equal segregation of positive and negative space. All letters were almost the same size and lumped in group at the right side of the picture plain. It was too heavy that the ‘K’, ‘T’ and ‘V’ couldn’t manage to contribute to an obvious overall gesture. In (ii b) however, sketch shown an obvious and organic attempt for gesture. The sketch was obviously fall on common pitfall that the rush for gesture can easily neglected the strength of letterform; letters were forced to fill in a pre-cast shape. In (iii b) progress, there was a good progress made where sketch shown much brave and organic typographical play. It was interesting to see the development of DP 4. The sketch was clearly shown a considerable increase of design flare as compared to the previous weeks. Researcher regards this sketch as more of a potential piece instead of work that has the overall package. This is because the sketch can be a great piece if only the students can push a different positive and negative interplay; that negative space may not necessary represented by the background. Some of the typographical elements can be the second ground and that makes it a multi layering play at the same time can be a multi layering gesture. The letters in various point sizes can enable this multi layering gesture.

In conclusion, DP 4 has made a good progress especially on the aspect of the typographical design flare. Even though he makes good development on some aspect, he tends to make similar mistake in the previous week. There are traces of him able to

digest advance learning object, he tends to make mistakes on the fundamental one. In the overall naivety progressing from one learning object to another, DP 4 is regarded as among student who makes a good jump at the overall performance because design flare is not an easy matter. Design flare is a generic mutual objective of any given design program and not state contractual objective in this project, Researcher obligated to report on this because design flare is a crucial criteria how designer try to make good sense in design.

Overall, we can see that all participants have the determination to try out several ideas of thumbnail sketch as stated in the project brief before beginning the project in which we can see quite detailed sketches had been produced by all the four participants. Despite the shortcomings, mistakes and comments here and there marked by the instructors during the consultation, overall these students were able to produce quality sketches and meet the requirements of the project. Techniques for organizing visual information were a strategy used to translate their ideas. Once students have well understanding of the objectives and requirements of the project, they will be prepared to put the theory into practice by generating their own ideas. This is important as designers are encouraged to do rough thumbnail sketches in the generation stages of a project.

## 4 Summary

Based on the portfolio analysis done on the 'thumbnail sketches', mostly all four participants have made good progress on grasping various concept of typographical play over almost three weeks of the idea development. From the level of maturity shown of the sketches in week four, compare to the below average or poor attempt of sketches in week two, there are patterns that the time student spent on their idea reflect on the change of students level of thinking upon time.

It can be seen that the change of critical craftsmanship which bring along the idea of mindset is definitely has a lot to do with the amount of time spent on the craftsmanship. What can be described from the change of the learning curve most probably reflected on the strategy played by the instructors such as making many 'touch-points' during the process, for example consultation, critic-sessions and peer discussion as mentioned by both

participants, in which has played a considerable role in the learning process.

## 5 Conclusion

Overall, modification and refinement occurs in this stage in which all objective criticism received during the consultation and the critics sessions were used to correct all the flaws and enhance the potential of the participants work from the original idea. These kinds of refinement were happened at several points within the overall process with further input came from the instructors. This can be seen from the remarks given by the instructors in a few of the artworks above. Generally, it can be seen that during this phase the groundwork such as style, colors and the choice of design software were being experiment and there were also executioner ideas extended from the original sketch. The activities for the third phase, "processing" the project, include reflection and follow-up on the projects. In this stage, the learners share their artifacts in a small group or with the entire class, obtain feedback, and reflect on the learning process and the project. Learners share each group's or individual's project and exchange feedback. This modification process is helpful for both the facilitator and the participants, as constructivism is geared to prepare learners with skills that will make them life-long learners

### *References:*

- [1] B. Buxton, (2007) *Sketching User Experiences: Getting the Design Right and the Right Design (Interactive Technologies)*. Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.