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Welcome to Issue #1 of the ARTSTHREAD: Guide to getting there...

The ART THREAD guide to getting there does exactly what it says—practical advice to get you exactly where you want to be.

Our pre-university guides are carefully timed through the academic year to help you deal with immediate issues, but also contain career features that are for longer-term consideration, from information on specialist design courses through to the best advice on work experience.

We ask a wide range of industry experts for advice in compiling these features, as well as consulting lecturers from the top schools of art & design—to make sure our advice is the best available.

We also ask undergraduates for their opinions and help too, so, after you've got into university/college, look out for our email requests for specific articles you might like to be involved in. If you would like to be included in providing advice for the pre-university guide or be one of our case studies, please email us at practicalguide@artsthread.com

Thanks to:

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DO YOU WANT TO BE A SPECIALIST?

There is an increasingly wide choice of specialist degree courses in art & design in the UK. Degree courses, as in any other business, are introduced to meet the changing needs of the art & design industry.

For example, over recent years, courses in computer games and 3D visualisation have grown considerably, as technology in these areas advances. Another trend is the growth in courses in sustainable design (product and transport) in response to the need to find green solutions to how we live. Similarly, courses in garden and landscape design have mushroomed due to the increasing interest in gardens as 'designed spaces.'

Accessories are one of the sectors of the fashion industry that has seen huge growth in the last five years and consequently, courses in footwear and accessories, such as handbags, are well placed for the future. Sports fashion is another increasing market, so look out for active sportswear fashion and specialist sports equipment design courses.

Design for children is another relatively new area, with courses in designing children's products and toys as well as illustration for children's publishing.

Finally, there has been a vast increase in the luxury yachting and speedboat industry. How about designing them?

Specialist courses include:

- Active Sportswear
- Architectural Glass
- Animation, Games & Visualisation
- Artist Blacksmithing
- Book Arts and Design
- Bespoke Tailoring
- Contour Fashion (lingerie)
- Exhibition Design
- Fashion Atelier (creative pattern cutting)
- Fashion Lifestyle & Events
- Footwear Design
- Garden Design
- Illustration for Children's Publishing
- Illustration for Graphic Novels
- Off-Road Vehicle Design
- Product Design: Children's Products and Toys
- Scenic Arts (theatre & film set design)
- Sport Technology
- Stop-Motion Animation and Puppet-Making
- Sustainable Product Design
- Transport Design
- Yacht Design

AUTOMOTIVE & TRANSPORT DESIGN AT COVENTRY UNIVERSITY

There is a wide range of options available within transport design, from cars and bikes through to public transport, yachts and boats. The Department of Industrial Design at Coventry University offers a wide range of courses in transport, automotive and vehicle design.

Key factors behind the department's success include the expertise of the professional staff, who, between them, have worked for over 40 different automotive manufacturers. This expertise is strengthened by a team of visiting professors, created by the department's strong links with the automotive design studios. These links enable the students to enjoy placement opportunities and collaborative projects with industry.

It is working with these design studios and consultancies where students can refine their creative flair and learn to work as members of a team within the framework of production reality.

Every year industry experts from around the world visit the university's degree show to see the graduate's quarter-scale models and 3D computer animations of concepts for the future.

European automotive design studios and consultancies, including Audi, Bentley, BMW, Citroen, Honda Mercedes Benz, Nissan, Porsche, Renault and Volvo, have all employed graduates from Coventry's industrial design courses, as have studios in America and Japan.

To read more on these courses:
www.coventry.ac.uk/cu/csad/
industrialdesign

FASHION FOOTWEAR & ACCESSORIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON

As footwear and accessories become an increasingly higher percentage of our total spend on fashion, brands will be looking for graduates with these skills.

The University of Northampton's fashion footwear course offers an ideal opportunity to study both the design and the technical aspect of the product. The town has historic links with shoemaking and the leather industries, with upmarket labels such as Church's (now majority owned by Prada) and Jeffery-West still based there. The University's onsite tannery, which teaches practical leather making is also available to the design students for sourcing and dyeing leathers.

Kayleigh Lubsey who graduated from the course in 2008 won an eight-week placement at Church's during summer 2007, which included the chance to design a 'bespoke service' for the sales team, offering individual colour combinations for special parts of the shoe.

The placement worked out so well that Church's helped Kayleigh with her final collection. She spent four days a week there, taking her shoes around the factory to be made and getting help with her pattern cutting skills Kayleigh says. 'The junior designer that I work with at Church's, Natasha Jackson, was actually in the same position as me. She did the footwear course at Northampton and did a work experience placement with Church's, and now she works there.'

To read more on this course:
www.northampton.ac.uk

D&AD A CAREER IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION

The Schools Day, at D&AD's New Blood graduate show, promotes a career in visual communication to a 14-18 age group

New Blood offers a showcase of work from graduates in visual communications from all over the UK. Grouped by university/college, portfolios range from graphic design and illustration through to advertising, packaging, photography and digital media. Set up by the not-for-profit organisation D&AD, New Blood's prime function is to create a subsidised space in central London for graduates to show their work to potential employers.

In addition to this, New Blood includes a Schools Day where D&AD invite teachers working in Art & Design, D&T and Graphic Design to bring along their A-Level and GCSE students to the show. This gives them the opportunity to talk to graduates, tutors and professionals about creative courses and career prospects.

The organisers of New Blood want the Schools Day to be a learning opportunity for both teachers and students to pick up prospectuses on a range of courses, make contact with tutors and be inspired and motivated by the portfolios produced by this year's graduates. Over 135 university/college courses take a stand at the show, exhibiting the work of over 2000 graduates.

D&AD also produce an Information Pack and a Schools' Trail for the show, allowing students to learn about different disciplines and what that really means on a practical level—what will I be doing every day at work? Read stories from recent graduates about how they got that all-important first job, plus hard facts on the visual design industry—how many people are employed in it? Is it a growing industry? (answer—yes!)

Schools' Talks by leading creatives will explain how to get that first job and how to be a success in a competitive field. Students can also review the Best New Blood winners, the work nominated for the D&AD Student Awards and work from international and UK courses.

For more information:
www.dandad.org/education/new-blood.html

UNIVERSITY INTERVIEW TIPS

TEXT: JOYCE THORNTON

Gaining a coveted place on a design course is the first step into a career in the creative industries. Many courses are 'over-subscribed' and it is quite common for some universities to have one just place for every ten applicants or more. To stand a fighting chance of gaining a place on a reputable course, ARTS THREAD offers the following tips.

THE PORTFOLIO

An excellent, well-presented design portfolio is, of course, essential and you should give lots of time and attention to compiling your portfolio. Get the advice of your tutors or someone well used to viewing portfolios. A key tip for compiling a great portfolio is to start and end with your best pieces of work and put your less successful pieces towards the centre of the folder. However, do not include work that you or others view as weak. Tutors are looking for quality not quantity—so an edited small but excellent portfolio is infinitely preferable to one stuffed with lots of mediocre work.

Another point to remember is to include some work which includes annotation – preferably in the form of reflective evaluation notes. Most likely, your portfolio will be viewed without you being there to explain your work (due to the time factor from the number of applicants for each university place) and so this annotation helps the decision makers understand your thought processes. Tutors will be looking for someone with an enquiring mind, who can communicate their ideas well. You should ensure your work is presented as professionally as possible—'dog-eared' pages with tears, stains or marks translate into 'sloppy and un-focused' in the mind of the viewer. Aim for your portfolio to be a joy to look through.

PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW: PREPARATION

Prepare by practising showing your portfolio to a friend or family member. Prepare some possible discussion points

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

Nowhere is this more relevant than in the image-obsessed design sector. In any interview, image and body language are said to count for a massive 70% of an interviewer's impression of a candidate and these judgements are made in the first five minutes of an interview. Plan carefully what you are going to wear, and aim to arrive early.

WHILE IN THE INTERVIEW

Listen carefully to the interviewer's questions and prepare to be asked, "Why do you want to study here particularly?" Ensure that you have done your research into the university and the particular course. Talk enthusiastically about why you chose it. Try to remain calm and recall your all-important preparation. If you have done enough preparation, it will give you lots to draw on for your responses in the actual interview. Relax, but don't be too relaxed, as this will lull you into a false sense of security. You should aim to create an impression of being keen with lots of energy and ideas, interested and informed about both your chosen specialism and also the broader areas of art and design.

Finally, don't forget the simple but really important things such as eye contact and smiling. Good luck!

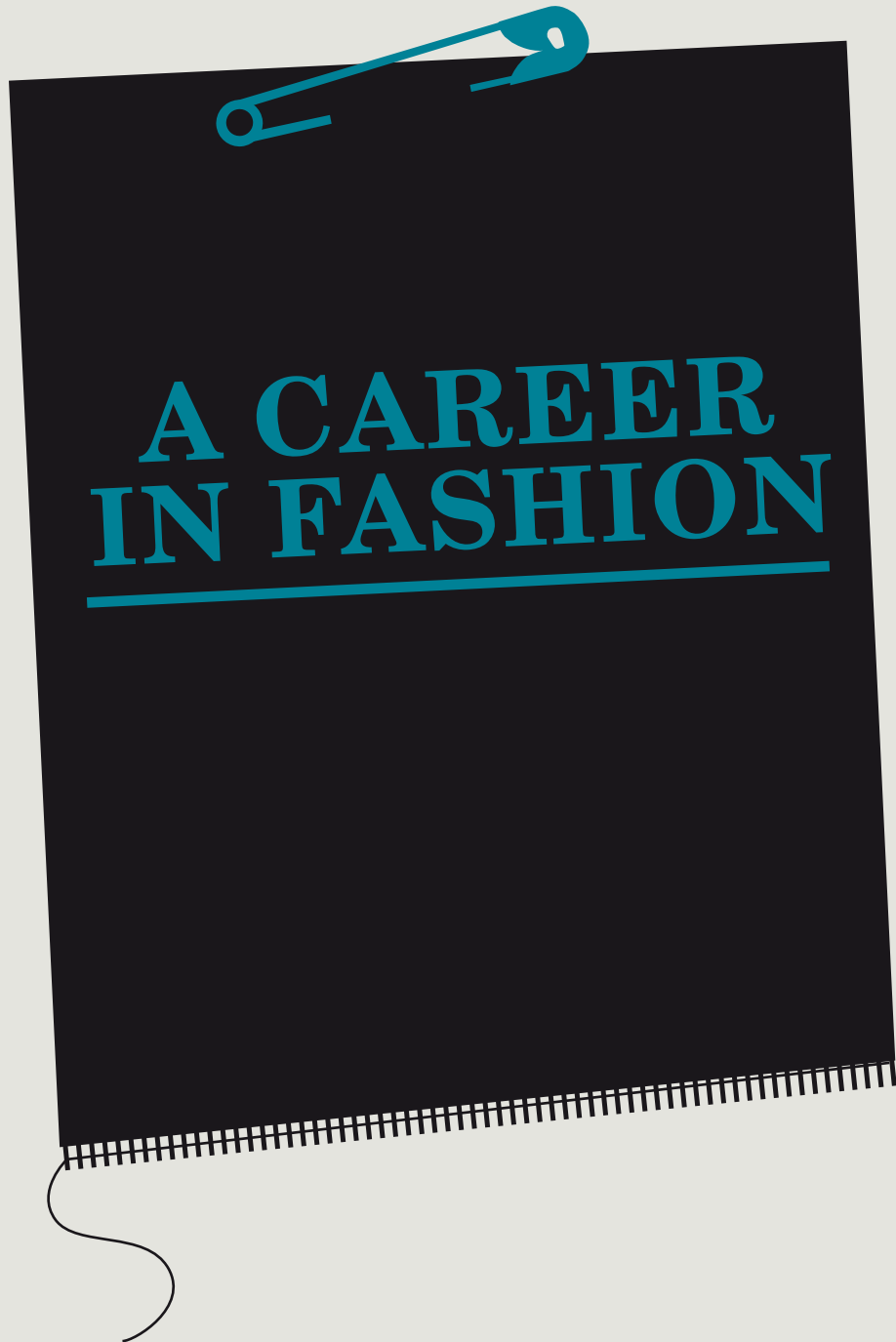
—scan the newspapers and trade press for current topics. Questions that you are likely to be asked include:

- What inspires you and your work?
- Who are your favourite designers?
- What are your aspirations for the future?
- Where would you like to see yourself in 5/10 years time?
- What would you say are your personal strengths?
- What would you say are your weakest points?

Be prepared for this last question particularly and ensure that you phrase your answer in a way that shows that you are self-aware and capable of improving and growing. Turn what could be a negative response into a positive one. For example, instead of "I leave everything until the last minute", say instead, "I have a tendency to leave things until the last minute, but I realise that by doing this, I often don't do myself justice and I'm really trying to rectify this by planning and pacing myself".

ON THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

Ensure you know exactly where you are going, plan your route and make sure that you have a contact telephone number for the university/college so that you can ring in case of unforeseen problems. Allow for the unpredictability of the weather and transport failures or delays. Have a 'Plan B' route. Remember that many university campuses are quite sprawling, so that even when you arrive, it may take you another five or ten minutes to get to the actual interview location. Don't leave anything to chance. Arriving late, breathless and agitated sets you apart for all of the wrong reasons.



The Education Day at Graduate Fashion Week focuses on fashion careers for its audience of 14–18 year old students.

This year, Graduate Fashion Week (GFW) not only included catwalk shows from 21 universities and showcased work from more than double that number, but also included an Education Day focused solely on providing information and advice to students aged from 14 to 18.

GFW encouraged students to visit through their schools or FE college and over 150 came to the event – a day packed with research, catwalk shows and careers education. Students were able to see graduate work on each of the university stands and talk to course leaders and the graduates themselves about the range of courses available and there were plenty of college prospectuses to take away and read.

Students could watch one of the three Gala catwalk shows staged throughout the day and also sit in on a Careers Clinic, designed to explain potential career paths within the fashion industry, from designing and buying through to marketing and PR.

Everyone who visited Education Day was given a free copy of Fashionista

magazine—a glossy magazine especially created for GFW's Education Day, designed to sum up all the excitement and glamour of the event and featuring interviews, news and advice from industry specialists.

One of the FE colleges at the education day was Cardonald College, Strathclyde. Tutor Janet Hansen explained: 'The Education Day this year at Graduate Fashion Week is an ideal opportunity for our first year students to see the work from a wide range of institutions offering a variety of different courses and give them the chance to speak to staff and students. The majority of our students will apply for degree places in December, so visiting the show helps them make a more informed choice.'

See the GFW website for admission prices for the 2010 Education Day. Tickets can be booked either in block by a college/school or by individuals; note under 16s must be accompanied by an adult.

For more information:
www.gfw.org.uk/education





TEXT: JOYCE THORNTON

The importance of work experience in gaining a foothold in the hugely competitive world of design cannot be over-emphasised. Although usually unpaid, work experience builds confidence, increases knowledge and skills, and offers an invaluable insight into the world of work. It is the best way to discover what sort of work you would find enjoyable and satisfying, and just as important, to discover what you don't enjoy.

Francesca Muston, Senior Editor for WGSN's 'Whats in Store' fashion retail directory told us, "Internships are often wrongly viewed as exploitation and cheap labour. In fact they're an invaluable opportunity for students and graduates to network, try out different career paths and most importantly, to really demonstrate to potential employers what you have to offer."

Today, many schools and colleges specialising in design integrate work experience into their course curriculum.

However, if this is not the case, how do you go about getting a work placement?

SECURING THE PLACEMENT

Find out all you can about your target work destination and its staff.

Enquire if they regularly take interns and work out the best person to write to about this. Never assume that the best place to start is the personnel department (HR), as general letters addressed here normally just generate a polite reply reading 'thanks for your interest and that they will "keep your details on file"'.

Find out the actual department head's name and work out why and when they might need some help—and, crucially, how you and your skills may be of use to the company. Armed with this information, **write a concise and enthusiastic covering letter and attach a CV which**

you have checked and perhaps amended to **ensure that it is entirely relevant** to that company.

You must ensure that the name of the person you are writing to (usually a manager) is correctly spelt and also that you have their correct job title—ie Head of Design, Design Manager, Senior Editor, etc... This sort of attention to detail is very important, and getting it wrong may mean that your letter hits the wrong note before it's even read.

Francesca agrees, she says, "When I screen CVs I immediately look for a professional covering letter which conveys a sense of genuine enthusiasm for the company and the position. I dismiss those which seem vague or don't have a professional tone. Spelling and grammar are also hugely important. A CV which is riddled with typos and grammatical errors gives the impression that the student is sloppy and careless in their work. Double-check everything before you send it."

Finding a link with your preferred company definitely helps—do you know anyone, (a friend of a friend perhaps) who

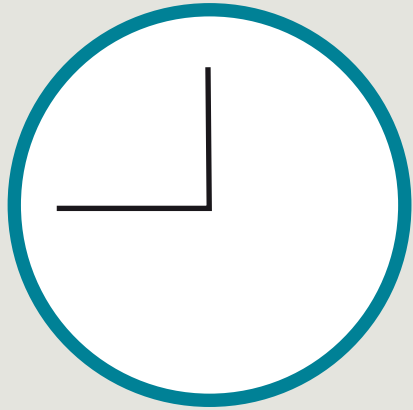


works there? Recommendations can go a long way when competition for placements is fierce. Most people use email these days—in which case your this email should replace the covering letter, but it is also worth sending a "hard copy" (printed version) of both the letter and your CV through the normal post.

Once you have done this, it's worth following the correspondence up with a polite phone call the following week to check that they have received it. Once you know that your letter and CV have been received then **DO NOT** call again—just wait for the company to get back to you in their own time. Calling again will be counter-productive and may well turn the impression you have made from being labelled 'keen' to that of 'pest'!

YOU HAVE THE PLACEMENT. WHAT NOW?

Prior to day one: it is a good idea to write or email a short note to say thanks for the work placement opportunity—and at the same time, this is your chance to clarify anything that you are unsure about. This may be simple things like clarifying

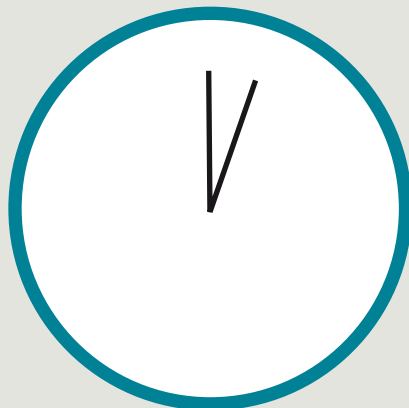


re-cap, and will add to the impression of organisation and efficiency that you should be striving to achieve.

In many jobs you will become a hands-on member of the team. Whatever happens—**be punctual, willing, cheerful and use your initiative.** Don't sit there waiting for the next job to come along once you have completed something, let the team or your line manager know and ask for something else to do. The experience is usually a great way to pick up new skills, experiences, ideas and broaden understanding.

WHAT MAKES A FANTASTIC INTERN?

Francesca says, “My most important factor for recruiting is attitude. It doesn't matter how creative or intelligent a student is, if they don't have the right attitude and work ethic they're no use to me. I expect students to be punctual, reliable, enthusiastic and able to use their initiative. Those who repeatedly call in sick or are late all the time are unlikely to be given a good reference or invited back. Nor are those who spend the day on Facebook or gazing

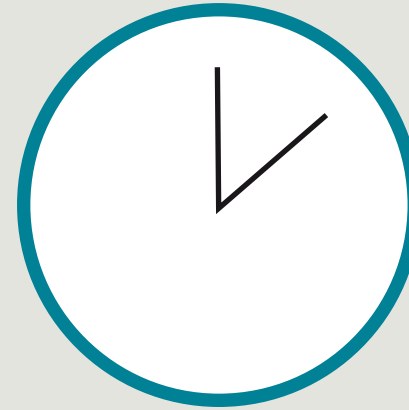


the **exact location of where you will be based and the hours you will be expected to work.** Hopefully, you will have already clarified the sort of tasks they will be expecting you to undertake, but if not, make sure that this is clear before you arrive!

You may also want to know what the 'dress code' is. Most design and media offices are very relaxed about what people wear to work—but if it is a “customer facing” position—they may wish you to dress more smartly, so it won't do any harm to ask before you turn up.

Day one: arrive early! Give yourself plenty of time to get to your destination—and then add on another 15 minutes just to make sure. It's never a bad thing to get there too early and you can spend the time waiting in a reception area, soaking up the atmosphere and composing yourself. Being late—especially on day one is just not acceptable.

Come prepared: always bring a pen and notepad, as you will invariably have to write instructions down (passwords to computer systems etc). Your own notes will ensure you don't have to bother people later for a



almost two years of unpaid placements in everything from graphic design, to catwalk styling and even a photography placement in New York. In February 2003 I began a two-week work placement with the graphics team at WGSN. Roll-on six years and I'm now a Senior Retail Editor; a position I largely attribute to the experience and contacts I gained as an intern. My placement, which lasted nearly six months, was an opportunity to work across all the departments of WGSN and really develop my writing, photography and trend analysis skills under the watchful eyes of the industry elite.

“I won't pretend that two years of work experience is an ideal situation; I funded much of it with dreary office temping positions. Once I had my foot in the door of a company I made the most of the free samples and press invites!”

Francesca is in no doubt about the huge benefits of work experience placements, she says, “An employer is far more likely to recruit based on personal experience and a proven track record than they are to take a chance on a faceless CV”.

absently into space waiting for instruction. Positive students who are bubbly and keen are a joy to work with. Those who ask lots of questions and offer to go the extra mile to help out are the ones we're likely to dedicate more time to helping out with further work placements, university projects and references. They're also the ones most likely to be rewarded with party invites and press gifts! The more an intern puts into the placement the more they will inevitably get out.”

One of the most valuable aspects of work experience is undoubtedly learning how to work with a team of people, as invariably at university you are usually working on your own individual projects. Take the opportunity to talk to people who are already doing a job you may aspire to—find out what they think about the work they are doing and apply any tips they may give you.

Francesca's own personal experience of interning was longer than most and money was very tight. Eventually, her determination paid off. She explains, “I began my fashion career with a mammoth stint of work experience—including my industrial placement year, I completed



PORTFOLIO ADVICE: TEXTILES

ARTS THREAD asks lecturers running the UK's top textiles courses for their top tips on the perfect interview portfolio

PORTFOLIO CONTENT

Drawing and painting skills from primary source material is important—both in large and small scale.

Demonstrate an ability and interest in colour, texture and pattern from a wide variety of work, looking at different scales, medium and subject.

Show how you develop ideas through sketchbooks—bring along a couple of your best to show how you record and develop ideas.

Diversity—show a range of different skills—from drawing with a range of different media, to photography, collage, mixed media and digital skills of all kinds.

Reflect your independent identity in the work you choose. It is important to show that you have an ability to develop your own individual ideas and concepts.

The interviewers don't expect you to already have technical skills in print, knit, weave or embroidery, as you will be learning these on the course.

PORTFOLIO PRESENTATION

Make sure your portfolio is presented clearly in a way that makes it easy to look through, with uniform paper as 'mounts' or as wrappers to contain groups of un-mounted work, such as drawings.

Present your work in easily identifiable sections, e.g. life-drawing or photographs.

Avoid plastic sleeves—textiles is a tactile subject and interviewers may want to handle your work.

Edit your portfolio and pick the strongest work, but don't be afraid to show ideas that are still developing.

Portfolio cases should be easy to undo and remember to add a name tag to your portfolio and label your work on the back.

PREPARATION PRIOR TO AN INTERVIEW

If possible attend one of the university's Open Day visits prior to the interview. The visit will enable you to tour the department and its facilities and find out more about the course and whether it feels right for you.

Research the course on the university website and/or prospectus and take note of how they describe the course—their strengths, facilities, what they look for in an applicant.

Compare it with similar courses so that you can answer knowledgeably the question, 'why have you chosen *this* course'.

Practice presenting your work and be prepared to be able to discuss it. Broaden your awareness of design issues by going to design exhibitions and reading textile-specific magazines such as *Selvedge* and *Crafts*, which are often available in colleges/libraries. Interviewers will ask for your opinions on design topics.

Have a few questions ready for the interviewers, more than *one* question—as they may answer your one question during the course of the interview!

This advice is general—you should always contact the university or look online to see if the course has its own special requirements for portfolios.

ARTS THREAD thanks the following lecturers for their help in compiling this article:

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