



# HOW TO DEVELOP ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPTS

From FIRST IN ARCHITECTURE

I have had many people asking me for help with concepts in architectural design. I am asked how to develop your concept, how to come up with a design, how to justify your design. All of these things relate to a design process. Some projects require a more in depth process than others – but generally similar issues and design problems occur that you need to consider.



One aspect of the design process is the development of your concept. This is not an area that was covered all too well on my degree course. Of course we learnt how to develop our design, solve design problems and so on. But I have found for some students there is a heavy emphasis on CONCEPTS, and during crits there seems to be many questions of "what is your concept??"

So, I have done my research and come up with some ideas that will hopefully give you some help, but this is not my area of expertise so I'm sure you will be able to add to the information and develop it further.

## Architectural Concepts



### Concept: Definition

an abstract idea

a plan or intention

an idea or invention to help sell or publicise a commodity

idea, notion, theory, conviction, opinion

Architectural concepts are the designers way of responding to the design situation presented to them. They are a means of translating the non-physical design problem into the physical building product. Every project will have critical issues, central themes or problem essences, and the general issues of designing a building can come under the following categories:

- functional zoning
- architectural space
- circulation and building form
- response to concept
- building envelope

Obviously many elements and factors fall under these categories, with much consideration required to the broader general issues, along with the technical details.

# Design Philosophy



In order to develop your concepts first consider your design philosophy. Your philosophy is a set of values that you use to inform your design. Often this is considered to be the life values of the designer.

For example:

- artistic vs. scientific
- rational vs. irrational
- personal vs. universal
- visual vs. non visual
- needs vs. wants
- individual vs. society

Then you can go on to look at your values in terms of design. How do these values work with the design problems you face on this particular project?

- ordered vs. random
- structured vs. unstructured
- objective vs. subjective
- one answer vs. multiple solutions
- creative vs. conservative
- specific vs. general
- man vs. nature
- complexity vs. simplicity
- design for now vs. design for the future
- patterned process vs. random process

## Design Problem

So now you have identified your philosophy and your values you now need to identify your design problem. How will you interpret the design problems and use your values and philosophies to come up with the design solution?

How do you understand the design brief? What are your responsibilities as a designer?

Some of the factors you will need to consider are:

function  
form  
space  
geometry  
context  
human factors  
economic constraints  
enclosure  
limits  
opportunities

You need to break down the elements of the brief and give yourself a full understanding of the requirements of the project. Consider all of the above in relation to your project. Draw out diagrams. The following diagram is a reaction to the brief for a cancer care centre to be built in [firstinarchitecture.co.uk](http://firstinarchitecture.co.uk)

the grounds of a hospital. It addresses a few of the elements discussed above – it is not an extensive list but gives you an idea of the sort of things to be thinking about.

You will need to carry out a site analysis which will also inform your design.

So these are a lot of the methods, ideas and explanations for concepts in architecture, but now lets look at how you come up with your concept/design.

## Build Your Concept Early

As soon as you receive your assignment brief, start brainstorming. Write down any ideas you have, sketches if they help. Read through the main elements and requirements of the brief and consider how you will meet these requirements. Write it down. Start building your solution. These thoughts are crucial in building your concept.

## Break It Down

Go through some of the statements above and consider how they influence the design. How are you going to find solutions? Does the design require complexity or simplicity? What are the limitations? What are your opportunities as a designer? Consider the architectural concepts categories, and slowly extrapolate the elements that require a design solution.

## Establish Your Concept By Understanding the Problem

Make a diagram of the problems  
Make a diagram of the solutions or your ideas

## Sketch

Another useful way to develop your ideas, sketch out your concepts. Whether it is tiny elements of design detail, or general form of your building. Keep referring back to your sketches, as they may inspire a development of design.

## Study Your Precedents

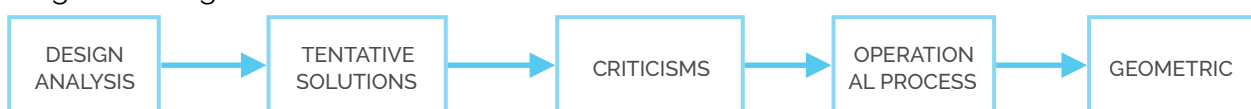
Carrying out in depth research relating to your design problems will inspire you and help you discover solutions. You can study how issues have been solved in other designs, and how they might direct you with your own. It is not copying, but using previous design innovation to inform your design solutions.

If you close your mind to anything that has been done before, you are starting from scratch, which is crazy.

Read more about precedent studies here.

<http://www.firstinarchitecture.co.uk/architecture-precedent-study-and-analysis/>

Stages of design:



Methodology ( systematic method of problem solving)

Problem statement

Information

[firstinarchitecture.co.uk](http://firstinarchitecture.co.uk)

Analysis  
Synthesis  
Evaluation

## Design Solution

Your concepts and solutions will begin to build as you explore the different factors required in your design and the values and ideas you can come up with. Hopefully these tips and pointers will help you to develop your concepts in design, and give you more confidence in presenting your designs.

<http://www.firstinarchitecture.co.uk/how-to-develop-architectural-concepts/>