

Sketch Phase:



Applied to Book Cover:



# Applied Imagination: Manipulative Verbs

by Ellen Lupton

One of the most influential design educators of the 20th century didn't teach in an art school. Alex F. Osborn was a Madison Avenue advertising man who invented a collaborative thinking technique called "brainstorming." Today, pretty much anyone involved in creative practice knows how to brainstorm: pose a question and create a big, uncensored list of ideas.

Brainstorming, however, is just one of many ideas that Osborn considered in his bestselling 1953 book, *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Thinking*. Another Osborn technique is known as "Manipulative Verbs," an exercise that's used to refine a core idea and then create variations on it. Here's how: Starting with an initial concept, modify your idea by applying different verbs to it, such as *magnify*, *minify*, *rearrange*, *alter*, *modify*, *substitute*, *reverse*, and *combine*.

I tried the exercise here by updating a common proverb: "going to hell in a handbasket." Like many proverbs, "hell in a handbasket" is a metaphor that quickly conjures a mental image. I changed it to *Hell in a Handbag*, a hypothetical chick-lit novel. I took the first and most obvious image that came to mind (hell) and then applied different verbs to it to find more interesting alternatives: looking at the bag from a different angle, giving it a devil's tail, making it tiny, or zooming in on the contents rather than on the bag itself. "Manipulative Verbs" is a handy starting point for designing posters, book covers, logos, op-ed art, and more.

