

Ferment-Ed

Visual identity & brand system for ferment-ed.app

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Domain	ferment-ed.app
Category	Interactive learning site (edutainment)
Vibe	Spider-Verse acid meets Duolingo warmth

This document defines the visual identity, voice, and design principles for Ferment-Ed. It complements the build brief (which covers implementation) by focusing entirely on how the product looks, sounds, and feels.

1. Brand pillars

Three things Ferment-Ed always is, and three things it isn't. If a design decision doesn't reinforce one of the pillars, it doesn't ship.

Always is

- **Playful.** Every interaction has a small joyful beat. The jar shakes, the lid pops, bubbles erupt. Characters comment. The product should feel like a toy someone left on the counter that turns out to teach you something.
- **Additive.** You leave lighter than you came. No streaks, no guilt, no reminders. Learning happens because it's fun, not because you owe the app.
- **Crafted.** Every animation is hand-tuned. The chromatic split is off by a few pixels on purpose. The ink lines wobble. Care shows.

Never is

- **Corporate.** No "Module 1 of 3 complete." No progress bars pretending you owe something. No certification voice.
- **Pushy.** No emails. No push notifications. No "we miss you" copy.
- **Generic.** Nothing on Ferment-Ed should be transplantable to any other learning site. The characters, the palette, the motion are ours specifically.

2. Positioning

"Duolingo for your gut, hosted by Ed the microbe and his crew."

Ferment-Ed sits at the intersection of three familiar things and one new one: the mascot-driven micro-lesson format (Duolingo), the Spider-Verse comic aesthetic, the science-communication tradition of Michael Pollan and Sandor Katz, and the growing cultural fascination with the gut microbiome. It is the only product I know of that lives at that intersection.

Audience

Curious adults, food-interested, hobbyists or hobbyist-curious. No prior microbiology required. They read Anthony Bourdain, listen to Ezra Klein, have started a sourdough starter at least once, may or may not have kept it alive. They are there for fun, not credits.

3. Voice & tone

Imagine Duo the owl, but he got really into kombucha and started reading microbiology papers. Friendly. Slightly cheeky. Excited about the science but never preachy. Direct like Terry Real — calls things what they are, no softening. Warm like Anthony Bourdain — genuine curiosity about the people and food.

Do write like this

"Hi. I'm Ed. Full name: Lactobacillus. I'm the reason yogurt exists."

"Pick whichever trip looks fun. There's no right order."

"Two percent salt by weight. That's the whole rule. The rest is taste."

"The Natufians were brewing beer 13,000 years ago. Before they grew grain. Think about that one."

Never write like this

"Unlock the science of fermentation with our expert-designed curriculum."

"Complete all three modules to earn your Fermenter Certificate!"

"In today's fast-paced world, gut health has never been more important."

"Discover the transformative power of your microbiome."

Rules

- No em dashes. Ever. Rephrase with commas or separate sentences.
- No AI-isms: no "delve," "navigate complexity," "testament to," "it's worth noting."
- No exclamation points except from characters mid-panic (Skim only).
- Contractions are welcome and expected. "You're," "it's," "we've."
- Short sentences are welcome. Fragments are welcome. Long sentences are also fine when they earn it.
- Curse sparingly and only when it lands. Never as decoration.

4. Color system

The Ferment-Ed palette is loud on purpose. Neon-green dominates as the page background — it's the constant against which everything else pops. Hot-pink, cyan, and neon-orange are the three click flashes and the primary psychedelic accents. Ink and cream are the constants that hold it together.

Token	Hex	Role
neon-green	#b4ff00	Page background. Also the jar glass (color-matched).
hot-pink	#ff2d95	Primary accent. Jar lid. Click flash 1. Ed's cheeks.
cyan	#00e5ff	Secondary accent. Click flash 2. Buzz's body.
neon-orange	#ff6b1a	Third accent. Click flash 3 / pop moment.
violet	#8a3cff	Background drifting blob accent.
ink	#1a0b21	All outlines, body text, comic ink stroke.
cream	#fdf8ec	Ed's body. Card backgrounds.
terracotta	#c98a3a	Crock's body. Ancient ceramic warmth.
amber	#e8c98a	Scoby's body. Kombucha mother tone.
off-white	#f4f0e0	Skim's body. Harmless yeast cloud.

Usage rules

- **Neon-green stays as background.** Do not use it for text, buttons, or icons — the contrast fails on both sides.
- **Ink is the only text color.** Anything readable is ink on cream or ink on green. Do not put text on hot-pink or cyan.
- **Chromatic split uses pink and cyan.** Every headline gets pink-down-right and cyan-up-left offset ghosts.
- **Character bodies own their tokens.** Cream is Ed, cyan is Buzz, terracotta is Crock, amber is Scoby, off-white is Skim. Don't cross-color.

5. Typography

Use	Font	Notes
Display / headlines	Arial Black	Heavy weight, tight tracking, chromatic split active.
Body copy	Georgia	Serif for warmth and readability. 16-18px.
Tech / stamps / counts	Courier New	Wide letter-spacing for system feel. 11-14px.
Character speech	Georgia italic	When a character is talking, italicize.

Chromatic split (the signature move)

Every headline wears the same off-register print effect. The original text sits on top in ink. A pink duplicate offsets 4px down and right. A cyan duplicate offsets 4px up and left. All three animate on steps(3) easing so the ghosts jitter in place, never smooth. This is Ferment-Ed's most recognizable visual signature and it never appears anywhere else.

6. The characters

Five characters share a visual language: chunky ink outlines with varied line weight, simple shapes built from ellipses and beziers, exaggerated expressions, stepped poses on twos (12fps). Each is built from few enough shapes that they can be redrawn quickly in different poses.

Ed — Lactobacillus, the lead

Rod-shaped body (capsule silhouette) in cream, tilted at a jaunty angle. Halftone dot texture inside the body. Chunky ink outline with varied line weight — thicker top-left, thinner bottom-right. Two eyes, one bigger than the other. Jagged half-smirk instead of a clean curve. One pink cheek dot below the bigger eye. One stubby arm gesturing. One flagellum tail whipping off the opposite end. Ambient specks floating around him.

Personality: quiet wise-guy. Knows he's a big deal. Never leads with it. Terry Real energy — direct, no fluff.

Buzz — vagus nerve, gut-brain guide

Long stretchy rubber-band body in cyan, thicker at the head end, tapering down. Two eyes, one bigger. Small concerned mouth. Hot-pink electric spark lines zap off him in three places, animated on twos. Can stretch from gut to brain when needed.

Personality: jittery, twitchy, fast-talking, loves trivia.

Crock — ancient vessel, history guide

Round terracotta body with a narrow neck and rolled rim. Two big painted eyes on the front. Two stubby legs. Hairline cracks across his body (he is old). Sometimes wears a tiny scarf.

Personality: gentle, slow-talking, quietly proud, 13,000 years old.

Scoby — kombucha mother, recipes guide

Flat, squishy, pancake-shaped body in amber with a darker rim. Two small dark-dot eyes set close together. Wide, calm smile. No arms or legs — scoots or floats. Slight wobble at rest.

Personality: chill, knowing, cooking-show host energy.

Skim — kahm yeast, the running gag

Tiny egg-shaped body in off-white. Four small black-dot eyes scattered across the face like a confused crowd. Always slightly worried.

Personality: anxious. Constantly mistaken for mold. He's not mold.

7. Motion principles

Ferment-Ed moves on twos. All character poses update at 12fps against a 60fps render, giving the site a hand-drawn cadence. This is the second most distinctive brand signature after the chromatic split. Do not smooth.

Motion vocabulary

- **Stepped pulse.** `scale(1) → scale(1.06)` on `steps(8)`, never smooth ease. Every heartbeat-important element uses this.
- **Chromatic split animation.** Pink and cyan ghosts jitter 1-2px in random directions on `steps(3)`. Continuous, subtle.
- **Hue cycle.** Slow 9-second linear filter:`hue-rotate(360deg)` on the CTA labels. Constant acid shimmer.
- **Posterization.** Toon materials with a 4-step gradient ramp. No smooth gradients on 3D or SVG objects.
- **Comic ink outlines.** Inverted-hull technique for 3D. Chunky black stroke.
- **Blob drift.** Background chromatic blobs drift slowly (30s cycle), out of phase with each other. This is the only smooth motion allowed.

8. Sample applications

The jar (entry)

Color-matched green glass jar with pink lid on the neon-green page — the camouflage effect is a hero moment. Three shakes with pink / cyan / orange click flashes. Bubbles erupt on the third click, jar disappears within the swarm, lid flies out the top of the frame. Welcome text fades in with the chromatic split.

The shelf

Wooden shelf against the neon-green page. Three smaller jars (static SVGs) with label bands: GUT-BRAIN, HISTORY, RECIPES. Guide characters peek out from behind each jar. Ed stands in front, one arm gesturing.

A module sheet

Full-height overlay sliding up from the bottom, cream background so text is readable. The trip's guide intros from the top-left with a speech bubble. Four to five horizontally-scrolled cards, each with a headline in the chromatic-split style and body copy in Georgia. The last card is the curiosity check: single multiple-choice question with the guide's reaction on any answer.

The crew-complete moment

Ed at center, Buzz stretched around the edge, Crock and Scoby flanking, Skim peeking from a corner ("Bye! Still not mold!"). Confetti in brand colors. One line of copy: "That's the crew. You're up to speed. Go make something bubble."

9. Do this. Not that.

DO Chromatic split on every headline.

DON'T No un-split headlines. Ever.

DO On twos for every character animation.

DON'T No smooth 60fps character motion.

DO Ink outlines on all illustrations.

DON'T No un-outlined shapes floating on the page.

DO Neon-green as the constant background.

DON'T No white backgrounds. No dark mode.

DO Characters comment in speech bubbles.

DON'T No system-voice narration. Everything is in-character.

DO Curiosity checks are optional and un-graded.

DON'T No quiz gating. No score. No streak.

DO Warm irreverence in voice.

DON'T No corporate voice. No preachy science voice.

DO Ed is *Lactobacillus*, always.

DON'T Don't rename him. Don't turn him into a generic microbe.