Anatomy of a Magazine Layout

Page elements can be divided into two basic categories: **architecture** (grid, margins, standing heads, folios, typographical style sheets, etc) which stay consistent issue to issue and **content**, which changes with each page and each article. This handout looks at both, introducing students to the basic vocabulary of publication design. While much of periodical design concerns style, which may seem trivial by definition, a consistently style is necessary, helping to create a magazine’s **brand** or **identity**. Readers rely upon, even when they do not notice the design decisions that make an isolated page function as part of a larger whole.

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**By Josh Goodman**

John Shea, of Nelson, New Hampshire, For many years, he has wanted a seat on the five-member body that has veto appointments. He ran in 1996 and lost, 2004—and lost both times. In 2006, was something of a liberal about his Church. And while he disapprove of campaign donations, or spend much time fundraising, it’s all “art.” This feature is organized around a single large photograph—an easy to parse, reader-friendly design strategy. Every extra element you throw into a layout has the potential of adding clutter and confusion unless carefully structured.

**Headline**

Democrats hold power now in places where they have been on the outside a long time. The question is what they will do with it.

**Byline**

It can be here or at the end, but don’t forget it. “By” is capitalized here, **l.c.** at the end.

**Art**

Almost every photo needs a caption (or pull quote) to help make the image meaningful to the reader. This one is designed, but most captions are tightly formatted.

**Deck**

Not all articles have a deck but most features do. When used, they usually are longer and provide more specific information than the hed.

**Spread**

The unit of magazine design is often not the page but the spread. Even when there is no interaction across pages, spread pages should be designed as a unit.

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Anatomy of a Magazine Layout (continued)

Opening spreads are billboards, coaxing readers to tuck into the story to follow. However, subsequent pages must keep the momentum going—offering the reader visual interest, intellectual stimulation and entertainment. Readers will put the magazine down or flip to something else if they don’t perceive value.

Larger than captions, pull quotes are used to explain a photo or put words into the mouth of the person shown. Pull quotes, decks, subheads and captions all fall under the broad category of points of entry—call-out text that invites the reader into the story.

Subheads are used to break up large chunks of text and help the reader understand what will follow. Drop caps, line returns, and dingbats are also used to subdivide text.

Most text in a magazine is in a single size, style and leading referred to as body or text.

Infographic

This page is laid out on 3-columns, a common grid for magazines. You must follow a regular grid, though it can vary with section.

The Nation in a Nutshell

Democrats made historic gains in state legislative seats in 2006—51—depending on which narrative you consider. The total gain in legislative seats for the Democrats, around 50, was among the biggest on record—the parties matched more seats throughout the 1990s, 1980s and 1970s. Even the 1970 figures in orientation amounted to the shift in the state Democratic advantage.

Deeper Blue

Legislatures with the greatest Democratic gains, 2006?

State

New Hampshire 42.4

Massachusetts 13.4

Washington 8.8

Oregon 5.5

Arkansas 7.7

Ohio 7.5

Alaska 6.8

Iowa 6.6

Vermont 6.4

Ohio 6.4

Colorado 6.0

South Dakota 5.7

South Dakota

*These are adjusted for proportionate representation of races that may not have been accurately reflected in the source: National Conference of State Legislatures.

Lynch, a political newcomer, came to the Senate by promising cooperation and bipartisanship. When a conflict emerged with a more conservative Senate Republican who opposed some of his proposals, he flexed his legislative muscles to pass laws ranging from education to health care, winning over several Senate Republicans in the process.

Sidebar

A small story that relates to the main text, this Sidebar is set off by a colored screen, and is on a two-column—rather than a three-column grid.

Presenting information in ways other than columnar text makes any magazine more scanable and more accessible. This table is (a very) basic infographic, but still adds visual interest to the page. Most infographics credit the source of the information at the bottom.

All art, with rare exception, should be credited. Some magazines place credits at the bottom, others next to the image. If there are several images by one person, there may be a larger “Photographs by…” credit in one spot.

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Typographical Design & Vocabulary—mind the details

You know many of these terms from typography class, but may have trouble applying them to your own writing. However, it’s critical to use vocabulary correctly and consistently for clarity of communication. This guide is by no means exhaustive, see Bringhurst or another good type reference for a more complete list.

City Beat

LA Labor’s Myriad Troubles

Los Angeles is home to one of the best-organized and most politically sophisticated labor movements in the nation, and the ordinance, calling for a wage floor of $9.39 per hour with health insurance or $10.64 without it, had easily passed the city council the month before. It had the public backing of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, himself a former union leader. The hotel owners had launched a drive to overturn it by referendum, arguing that the city had no business imposing a living-wage requirement on companies that weren’t directly doing business with local government.

On the last afternoon of the protest, Villaraigosa put in an appearance with the workers, to express his support and hand out

The trouble with the word “line” is it can be a line of type or a line like this one. When discussing rules, be sure to describe them—thick, thin, length, color, texture.

A label or short deck above the head is a kicker.

Literally “without ‘serifs’” (the little strokes that finish letters), these fonts are defined by what they don’t have. Note that, by itself, serif or sans is not a very good description. Compare Officina extra bold (used above) to Franklin #2 used here. Both fonts are Extra Bold Sans, but have little else in common.

Auto lead, and default indents (which are usually too large) are two of the surest signs of incompetently and indifferently set type. Designers pay attention to, and care about the details.

or line length. The width of a column of text described in picas and points, never inches. This text is fully justified, most lines to the full width. The headline is flush left.

The first paragraph in a story or after a subhead often doesn’t have an indent—it’s obviously the start of a new “graf” and it allows a neater start.

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Measure

Indent

or line length. The width of a column of text described in picas and points, never inches. This text is fully justified, most lines to the full width. The headline is flush left.

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Ascenders go to or above the cap height

Ligature two stuck-together letters

Serif

x-Heights
can vary, different fonts are differently proportioned.

Serif

Descenders go below the baseline

Old-Style #'s

Old-style numbers have ascenders and descenders, which blend into text more gracefully than lining numbers, which are all the size of capital letters.

Color

typographic color—the overall tone and consistency of columnar type, has nothing to do with chromatic color. Don’t use the word color without being clear about what you mean.

Color

Leading

is the space between lines of text. This type and the grayed text have the same lead even though the size of the fonts are different. Generous lead can go a long way to making a page open and inviting. Tight leading feels newsy and serious.

Old Style (looks hand-drawn, bracketed serif)

Transitional (precise, bracketed serif)

Modern (fine strokes, unbracketed serif)

Slab serif (as thick as body weight)