

Instead of This, TRY THIS – Planning Your 2021 Coverage

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Editor's Note: The following is a sneak peek at a fall 2020 Idea File magazine feature. It was too good to make you wait until the fall, so we are sharing this now. See it and more great content in the fall issue.

Planning your yearbook coverage is a whole new ball game this year. Previous years may have allowed you to take last year's ladder and tweak it for the upcoming year, but some schools are completely reimagining their coverage approach. That may sound scary, but it's actually a great thing! There are so many stories to tell, and it's your job to tell it well. In fact, some schools are deciding to increase their page count to make room for student profiles and do justice to the historic story of the 2020-2021 school year.

Some of your previous spreads may not be as relevant this year. **Instead of** worrying about how you will cover the 2021 school year, **replace** those concerns with a **new coverage mindset for 2021**. There will be plenty of stories to tell, and your staff must be prepared to cover whatever might be interesting AS IT HAPPENS. That means over the summer too! Staffers must be READY to find a story and cover it. Everything may be in a state of change and flux throughout the year, so let's embrace the uncertainty and COVER IT.

Instead of covering **standard sections** – Student Life, Sports, Academics, Clubs, People ...

Replace the traditional structure with a **CHRONOLOGICAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**. This approach will allow you to capture the events of the year as they happen as well as force you to dig deep to really find what happens on any particular day, week, or month. In its purest form you can cover what happens during a specific week and mix up the standard topics on a single spread.

You can also do a looser version that simply organizes major events in a time order.

You can also do a hybrid approach where you gather some information chronically and then group sports in a more traditional way in one section. Depending on how the year goes, it might make sense to insert what sports you do have in the order they were brought back or just to gather them all in a traditional section.

Spring Coverage

Instead of starting your coverage plan in August because “We usually don't start our book until August.”

Replace with – extended **spring coverage** (8 pages +)

- Cap and gown pick up
- School-provided meals

- Graduation parades
- Popular lawn signs
- Yearbook distribution
- National and local protests, BLM

You may not have had the space to give this much to spring and summer and now you can.

Summer Coverage

Instead of devoting just one or two spreads to summer coverage

Replace with extended **summer coverage** (8-16)

- Fourth of July fireworks or events
- Social distanced gatherings
- Summer jobs
- Staycations and canceled vacations
- Creative ways to stay in touch with friends
- Video games
- Summer *then* summer *now*
- Last summer vs. this summer
- Stories on first flights as students start to fly again
- Involvement in national protests and movements
- Yearbook distribution after school was out.

Crowdsourcing Coverage

Instead of relying solely on the yearbook staff to gather all information

Replace with crowd-sourced photographs, story ideas and first-person accounts

We have always stressed that books should be 100% student created. This needs to change. Now is the time to solicit support from all groups in your school community. Build your social media presence so you can get as much content as you can from students and parents. By including their ideas and work, you will expand your readership and build new sales.

Instead of a traditional **SPORTS** section

Replace with

- Fall athlete profiles – those on the team last fall
- Reflection – what do you miss about not competing in your sport (athletes) or watching school sports (fans)
- Remember when – photos of students competing in the past with reflections. Use your photo archive.
- Memorable moments from the athletic career of top athletes – a three-year retrospective
- Sports you watch as they come back – especially with no spectators
- Video games and eSports – Reviews, throwback games and system

- Recruiting – How are students still being recruited
- Exercise – How you stay in shape. Running, cycling, lifting, etc.

Instead of a traditional **STUDENT LIFE** section

Replace with creative, new student-focused coverage

- Mask fashions
- Virtual spirit days
- New family traditions since the pandemic
- Expanded student profiles. Start networking possibilities now. Every book now could have 25-50 profiles or more.
- Online shopping – what are you buying online?
- New online passions – what you have discovered online that you love now?
- Offline passions – what you have discovered you love to do that doesn't require a screen?
- Reading – what books are you reading?
- At home fashion – what are you wearing every day? Online dress up days
- In the moment – things you are loving right now and things that are annoying you right now
- What you miss most – what have you lost that you miss?
- Glossary – new words (pandemic, distance learning, social distancing, etc.) Could be a humorous take on what this jargon really means.
- Election coverage – mail in ballots controversy, students who volunteer for campaigns, most important voting issues to students

Instead of a traditional **PEOPLE** section

Replace with

- Larger photos and increased number of student profiles
- Student profile section – 20 + individual profiles

Take on the challenge of covering as many individuals as possible. Everyone person on campus has a story. You just have to find it. Be sure to work closely with your administration and photo company as soon as possible to set up your class photo protocol and dates. Having these photos to work with as early as possible will be critical.

Instead of a traditional **ACADEMIC** section

Replace with

- What are you reading on your own?
- New academic schedule and how it works
- Days in school vs. online school
- Reactions of how students feel about each method
- Focus on teachers – lessons teachers have learned. How are they holding up?
- How students learn best
- What student like and don't like about what ever schedule they are on
- Academic student profiles – students as learners, their learning passions and subjects they love

- Learning in the pandemic – student analysis of how they are learning now
- Zoom or Google Classroom: Good and bad sides
- Creativity – things you are creating at home
- Project-based learning and science experiments at home
- Review of learning last spring
- Class sizes
- Are CDC guidelines really followed in classes?
- Full computer access. Access to internet.
- One to one. Does every student have the same technology?
- How do siblings learn at home – separate spaces or one room? Do they share learning materials? Get on each other's nerves?

Instead of cutting pages because of **POSSIBLE LOST CONTENT**

Replace lost coverage with **evergreen spread ideas** to fill in anywhere

- T-shirts – School t-shirts, concert t-shirts, college t-shirts, vintage t-shirts
- How did you stay in touch with friends?
- Favorite video games; rediscovering old video games
- Favorite restaurants – ones you missed most during quarantine
- Coffee – how much you drink, favorite types of coffee, favorite coffee shops
- Students who are neighbors/live close by each other
- Student pets – now that students are home more, do they have more time for interacting with pets, walking them, adopting new ones, etc.?
- School pride and rivalries from home – often expressed at sporting events and with body paint, how do you show pride from home

Get your staff together and brainstorm ideas specific to your school. You can come up with hundreds.

Replace lost coverage with other specific **CORONA COVERAGE** ideas

- How school opens
- Online vs. on-campus and whatever variation a district comes up with
- Easing back into a full traditional on-campus schedule
- How sports are brought back throughout the fall and spring
- Flare ups and unexpected changes in the schedule as the year goes on
- Comparing different school plan in your state, county, local area
- New normal
- Accounts of people you know with the virus
- Experiencing socially distant holidays and family get-togethers
- How has the virus touched you personally?

When you begin to change your mindset to embrace the endless possibilities for coverage, you'll find a new world open up for yearbook coverage. It may be chaos, but it's your year and it's your story. Students and parents will want a record of this historic year, and we have a feeling this just might be your best year yet.