Top 10 for teaching design

Written by Mike Taylor, CJE

Basic design knowledge is necessary to creating a strong yearbook. Teaching students how and why design is important is a worthwhile exercise. It may seem to take forever, but once students grasp the basics, they will soon be able to use those skills to create a sophisticated spread.

You can start here with my Top 10 Design Rules for teaching basic design to students.

1. **Teach students the basics** using the "Understanding Why Design Matters" unit of Walsworth's *Yearbook Suite.* Order the workbook versions at walsworthyearbooks.com/yearbooksuite.
2. **Work on paper first.** Students will grasp the columns and spread format quicker when doing all practices on paper.
3. **Always, always use columns and grids.** My suggestion is to use as many columns as possible. Remember the rule of never starting or stopping in the middle of a column? Well, when you give a student lots of columns, they won't try to stop in the middle.
4. **Incorporate an eyeline into all of your spreads.** An eyeline unifies the left and right pages, allowing for creation of the spread as one document.
5. **Design from the inside out.** Yes, we still want photos centered in the middle of the spread. Then we work with copy and finally negative space.
6. **Create internal margin consistency.** This used to be fairly easy as it was always a one-pica separation of all elements. Nowadays, schools are reducing that space to sometimes nine or even six points. For basic design, always use a pica.
7. **Incorporate a dominant photo, copy area and headline** into each spread as the first or most important focal point.
8. **Use strong photos** with various forms of composition, such as single person, couples and small or large groups in addition to long shots, close ups and a variety of angles.
9. **Make sure every photo has a caption.** If you can only give the reader the name and grade of a person, it's better than no info at all. Sometimes you may use just the name and grade of a person up to three people. You may also use the name of a group: trumpet section or JV cheerleaders. Go to walsworthyearbooks.com/yearbooksuite and get the "Completing Your Copy with Captions and Headlines" unit of the *Yearbook Suite*.
10. **Use graphics and colors sparingly.** You are designing for readability, not decorating a cake. Think about those lines around things; do you really need them? Can a block of color be lightened to allow for some interest or contrast? Can the use of a rail work to isolate an element?
11. I know I said 10, but I have 11. The final rule is to **work on the design**, check it for readability, and finesse the spread until you have exactly the look and feel you are going for.