

Design tool ideas

Ways to develop an eye for visuals



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Publication staff members and advisers are always looking for new design ideas. The graphic portfolio and the Columbia Scholastic Press Association Crown Winner CD are excellent design teaching tools and helpful for developing a sense of what determines visual appeal.

The CSPAA Crown Winners CD, which all CSPAA members receive each year, features the top yearbooks, newspapers and literary

magazines at the college, high school and middle school levels. There are numerous slides presented as PDFs for each Crown publication with the judges' commentary for each page/spread. This invaluable teaching tool addresses everything from paper choices, theme, use of fonts and colors, to photography tips and the latest in design trends.

Publication designers can use this CD for inspiration when trying to come up with that "perfect design." Advisers find the CD to be invaluable in teaching the elements of good design and current trends. The commentary explains why the design is good and cites examples to illustrate each design concept. Students can critique the slides as well and develop their critical thinking skills.

Another valuable design tool is the graphic portfolio. Publication staffers look at various types of magazines and select five to 10 examples of each item listed below, label them, and explain what they found appealing. All elements must be shown in context on a page. Staffers learn the elements within a design as well as developing an eye for visual appeal.

Graphic Portfolio Ideas

RULE LINES Black, gray or colored lines which are used to box or outline a page, feature or photos. Show in context with photographs, copy and headlines.

SPOT COLOR A single color used in or on parts of a page/spread. It can be shown as a background, a geometric shape, with copy or as an image pulled out of a photo.

CAPTIONS The copy for a photo. Find different type styles. Look at what information is included in the caption. Were they written with one or more sentences? Do they have titles with rule lines or other graphic effects included? Is there a photographer's credit at the end?

VARIETY OF HEADLINE AND SUBHEAD STYLES Find examples with the head printed in one type style and the subhead in another. Which ones are punctuated? Which type style was used for body copy and captions? Find examples of both serif and sans serif fonts.

QUOTE BLURBS – PULLED QUOTES A quote pulled out of the copy and printed in a larger or different type with and without a photo of the person quoted.

LARGE INITIAL LETTERS The first letter in copy or a headline, which is in a much larger type face (point size) than the rest of the copy. It may be raised, dropped, scored or done in script.

SCREENS A background of color, gray, black or textured screen, although it can also be a spot color. Show behind copy, a photo, as a shadow box, with a headline, and used to set off an open grid.

GRID LAYOUT All layouts are planned first in certain numbers of grids. Find layouts that have visual appeal.

MISCELLANEOUS Where and how do they credit the writer, designer, photographer? How do they present their table of contents? Does it contain graphics? Have graphics been added to the folio treatment; where is it located? Look for the creative use of Photoshop tools.

The publication editors pull the best examples for inclusion in the production staff portfolio. Any time designers need inspiration they can refer to this portfolio of design ideas.

Strong visual appeal is needed in all publications to "pull" readers in and then hold their attention and guide their eyes around the page. Try these tools, the graphic portfolio and the CSPAA Crown CD and other image CDs and goods, to develop your publication's visual style.

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