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1. Are you loyal to the people or the product?

Or to look at it another way, whose interest do you put first—the reader’s or your buddies’ at the publication? Managing the politics of a student publication—at which everyone is either underpaid or a volunteer—is tricky, but periodicals that put staff ego above reader interest are fundamentally weak publications.

2. Boredom is your enemy.

The most overlooked enemy of exciting design is boring writing and editing. Tedious, poorly explained, fuzzy and flat out dull writing is hard to make look like anything other than what it is. Designers, photographers and illustrators are just as responsive to exciting reporting as readers. In short, if the article is a snooze, the design will be too.

3. Build most layouts around a single dominant image.

This isn’t advice I would always give to a design student—design work that successfully juggles a lot of little elements can be breathtaking—but learning to juggle takes time and in the meantime you drop a lot of balls. To produce a rich variety of successful and inviting pages in a hurry in a production environment, let one image be the foundation of each layout.

4. Don’t be wack (most of the time).

Great design comes from exploration and experimentation. Nevertheless, fewer design hangovers hurt worse than seeing a failed experiment in print. Searching for just the “right” font, or playing with filter and effects can waste a lot of time that you may not have. Use one serif and one sans serif family (at least four weights each) for almost everything. Limit your flights of fancy to no more than one per page, one or two per issue.

5. Sketch.

Some designer work layouts out on paper with a pencil, but that’s not the kind of sketching I’m talking about. Before designing, it pays to flow out text into a layout, figuring out how much maneuvering room you have for display type, art and call outs. Don’t make anything too pretty until you’re pretty sure the text will all fit, you have adequate art, and the final article will pace well.

6. Design your pages, don’t decorate them.

The most important things in your newspaper or magazine are the words and the pictures. As a designer, your decisions should draw attention towards these assets, not distract readers from them.

7. Boredom is your friend.

You’re young, underpaid and bored—that’s probably part of the reason you’re involved in student media—instead of devoting all your time, love and attention to your calculus homework as your parents would have it. Odds are, there are lots of other bored students on your campus, some of whom have talents applicable to your needs, and all of whom are itching to contribute if only you would

ask. Get volunteer illustrators and photographers from your art department, write about, show and adapt student projects to your needs. Everyone likes to see their name and work in print—all it takes is a little shmoozing.

8. It takes 1/2000th of a second to take a Picture. Use that time wisely.

Compelling photography and illustration are the most important component of an attractive and inviting page. Unfortunately, many college publications fall short here.

- Don't get a picture of a subject, get a good picture that has the subject in it.
- Tell the whole story visually. Shoot the person in front of what they're talking about.
- Use pictures of, (and write about) students. Readers like to see themselves. (And incidentally, the ugliest student is likely better looking than your cutest administrator.)
- Avoid pictures of groups, meetings, podiums and people behind desks. If your campus has a famous landmark, avoid that too.
- Recruit good photographers, teach them how to be photojournalists.

9. Tame your advertising.

A poorly managed advertising program can undermine otherwise effective pages and lead to reader confusion. If you only get a few ads for each issue, limit them to a small number of standard sizes—don't accept columnar advertising. Have (and enforce) reasonable advertising standards.

10. Cultivate the fifth expertise.

You have writers, editors, designers, photographers, and maybe illustrators, but when it comes to dropping in a chart or graphic, well, maybe the page designer throws something together, or worse, someone plugs some numbers into MS Excel and you print a bar or pie chart. These days, every publication needs someone who can develop infographics, and ASFs (alternative story forms), a hybridized form of text and image that engage the reader and invite interaction. The infographic field is growing (there are a number of new academic programs) and younger readers in particular expect to see information in this form.