Lab Notes

How to Create a Language Center Newsletter

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How do you communicate your center's mission in a way that is not too costly, that is personable and timely, and that you can do yourself on your computer?—with a newsletter! The good news is that a newsletter can accomplish all the things stated above; the bad news is that a quality newsletter takes planning and a lot of effort. Happily, a professional newsletter is an attainable goal if you have some guidelines and a little help.[1]

Plan, Plan, Plan

Your first step in any production is to plan—plan everything from the budget to the editorial board down to the actual stories and layout. Taking the time to plan and really think out what you're trying to accomplish will save you many headaches later.

Is a Newsletter the Right Choice?

Since you're reading this article you've probably already decided that you'd like to have a newsletter for your center. Before you go any further, stop and think about whether a newsletter is really the best medium for you. Would regular meetings with your constituents be better—or perhaps articles in an already existing newsletter or magazine?

Newsletters by definition are timely. Readers expect newsletter items to be pertinent to what's happening now or in the near future. If a newsletter contains old information, readers may have already obtained it from another source. Newsletters are personable, friendly, intimate. Yours should make your readers feel at home and welcome—and provide them with information about your center which they could not obtain

elsewhere. It should not, however, be gossipy or contain fluff unless, of course, that's your aim. Anything that you can do in your newsletter to obtain that friendly feeling, while still conveying important information, will be a plus. (I'll discuss some of those things later in this article.)

Budgeting

The dreaded B word—budget. A newsletter costs money, no doubt about that. A newsletter doesn't, however, have to cost a fortune. Start small. A two-page, three-column newsletter on white, recycled paper can be just as effective as a longer newsletter with colored screens and photos. Sit down with your staff (if that's only you, set aside some time) and outline the following:

- **A distribution list**—possible audiences could include faculty, administrators, students, alumni, donors, or any combination of these.
- **Copying/printing costs**—a desktop published newsletter that's professionally copied is very close in quality to a typeset newsletter that's printed. Weigh the pros and cons.
- **Paper and color**—do you want to use white or colored paper, glossy or flat paper, will you use colored bars or screens (a box or other area shaded anywhere from faint grey to black or in varying shades of color if you have access to a color printer) in your newsletter? All of these items carry varying prices. You can investigate the differences with your printing or publications department.
- **Mailing charges**—are you mailing only on campus with minimal or no fees; or off campus, first class or bulk mail?

Define Yourself and Your Audience

Another important part of your planning process is to define your mission. Write down the mission statement for your center and then the one for your newsletter. For example, our center's mission statement is "to support the study and teaching of foreign languages and cultures through technology."[2] What is it that you're trying to accomplish through the newsletter—inform, inspire, promote? Our newsletter mission statement is "to promote ALTEC as a clearing house for ideas on teaching foreign language, to inspire faculty to use technology available at ALTEC for teaching, and to inform faculty of training opportunities." Once you've decided what your mission is, include in your newsletter only items that clearly support it. If you adhere to this policy, your newsletter will be very specific and pertinent to your audience.

Set goals and objectives that are realistic, obtainable and measurable. For example, if the mission of your newsletter

includes informing faculty of training opportunities that your center offers, one objective could be to include a training schedule in every issue. Measurable objectives will give you the statistics that you'll need to justify a newsletter, especially if your funding is questionable.

"It's easier to make your newsletter focused and intimate if your target group is small and has many things in common."

As mentioned above, you'll want your newsletter to be applicable to your audience—but who is your audience? A newsletter cannot be all things to all people. Narrow your audience. It's easier to make your newsletter focused and intimate if your target group is small and has many things in common. It will also help if you can define some characteristics of your audience—computer literate (or not), multinational, highly educated, progressive, etc. You'll refer to this list later on when choosing fonts, among other things.

Projecting Your Image

All the time spent planning the items above will be reflected in your newsletter and create your image. How do you want your audience to think of your center? A university experiencing a budget crunch will probably not think highly of a center that produces a slick, four-color newsletter on premium paper. Quality *can* be achieved through simplicity. Readers will decide within a few seconds whether your newsletter merits reading, so draw them in.

Dividing Duties

Even if you are the only staff member in your center, you needn't do all the work on the newsletter yourself. Here are some ideas for recruiting help.

- **Editorial Board**—Consider establishing an Editorial Board which includes as members people that you serve (e.g., language faculty, alumni, etc.). Those on the Board could be responsible for a portion of the newsletter—obtaining a feature article or a calendar, editing, etc.
- **Assistant Editor, Editorial Assistants, etc.**—If you don't want to contend with an entire board, select a colleague or even a student who works for you to help out.
- **Other Recruits**—Find people from among faculty, students, and technical departments (e.g., Computing Services) to be roving reporters who visit each department to gather information and conduct interviews with faculty/students or to supply guest editorials and articles.
- **Publications Department**—If your campus has a Publications Department, discuss the options available for them to design and lay out your newsletter. A Publications Department will usually have graphic designers

who could do the entire design and layout of your newsletter. All you'll need to do is supply them with the information.

- **Copying/Printing Services Department**—Arrange with your Copying or Printing Services Department for duplication of your newsletter. This will not only save you time, but their machinery is usually better than what's available in a language resource center. You should also compare their prices with similar services available off campus (if campus policy allows you to do so).
- **Mailing Services Department**—Arrange with your Mailing Services Department to set up a mailing list, be responsible for printing and attaching the mailing labels, and the actual mailing of the newsletter. Our campus mailing office charges a moderate fee to administer mailing lists but does not charge for campus mail delivery.

You'll need to make a list of all the tasks required for production of your newsletter and the person assigned to do each. Distribute the list to everyone involved.

Where to Find Copy and What People Want to Know Anyway

In addition to an editorial board and the other "helpers" mentioned above, there are other resources for finding material for your newsletter.

- **Public Relations Office**—The PR Office is an excellent source for press releases and photos. If you use your newsletter as a public relations tool, you'll want to keep donors and potential donors apprised of what you're doing and include tidbits about the donors themselves.
- **Faculty**—Which faculty members use your center to teach their classes? Ask them to write an article (or interview them and do the writing yourself) spelling out the benefits they and their students have experienced from the use of technology. Include quotes from their students.
- **Article reprints**—Peruse magazines, journals, and newsletters from related organizations for news information or technological advances, but be sure to ask the copyright holder for permission before printing. Our center has requested permission to reprint several short articles—only one publisher refused outright and the others gave permission without any charge (since we distribute our newsletter free of charge to a limited number of recipients). Obtain the permission in writing, keep it on file, and acknowledge the original source at the end of the article.

- LLTI—Subscribing to Language Learning Technology International (LLTI) and other network forums will give you an idea of the types of things in which others in your field are interested. (See page 107 for information on how to subscribe.)
- **Center director, college dean, administrators, lawmakers**—People are interested in any organizational or policy changes that will affect the center (and them too). Include in your newsletter information from department meetings, mandates from administrators, new policies or laws, etc.
- **Questionnaire, interviews**—In order to know that you're accomplishing what you want with your newsletter, you must poll your readers. Include a questionnaire from time to time asking specific questions. You could also interview various readers at different times of the year. Analyze the results and then incorporate them into the newsletter.
- **Tidbits & humor**—For filler information you could include quotes, definitions of jargon or humor. For example, our readers loved a collection of funny translations collected around the world by Air France employees.
- **Professional activities/personal news**—Include information on people involved in or related to your center: who's giving a conference/workshop/seminar and when, awards and degrees earned, marriages, births, birthdays, donations, projects, publications, etc.

The Production Schedule

You will aggravate your readers if they come to expect your newsletter at a certain time and it doesn't arrive. In order to avoid disappointing them and at the same time keep your readers interested in your center, set a realistic production schedule. Start from the end and work your way backwards to find your start date. For example, if you want your newsletter in the hands of your readers by October 1, subtract the number of days necessary for mailing, then the number of days for copying/printing, etc. Once the schedule is set, stick to it.

Writing, Editing and Review

The writing of your stories, editing, review, and approval are the stages of creating a newsletter that take the longest. Be sure to leave yourself plenty of time but also decide when enough is enough. You could spend weeks, even months, on these stages if you have several editors who don't agree on

style or who get approval from all contributors for every change. Here are a few tips to keep this process easy and short.

Improve Your Writing

This deceptively simple checklist can help take your writing from ordinary and boring to wow! The following guidelines are especially important in newsletter writing:

- **Be cautious in your use of jargon.** Appeal to both the novice and the more experienced reader. Define technical terms and spell out acronyms.
- **Keep your reader in mind.** You've already identified who your audience is. Keep that picture clearly in mind while you write. Do they know anything about the topic? How will it affect them? Include only those items that you know will interest your readers.
- **Define your purpose.** Why are you writing this article? What do you hope to accomplish by including it? Does it fit your mission and accomplish some of your goals and objectives?
- **Define the topic clearly.** Is your topic too broad? "Gender differences in foreign language acquisition," for example, is much too broad for a newsletter. Narrow it down so that you don't inundate your reader with information. The topic needs to be specific enough to be handled well in the short environment of a newsletter.
- **Start with pizzaz.** If it helps you to make some introductory statements before you get to the heart of what you want to say, go ahead and write it down—then consider deleting all or most of it. Evaluate your first sentence carefully—make it grab your readers and draw them into the story. If your first sentence is mediocre, chances are that your story will not be read.
- **Write with authority.** You are writing the story—you know the subject. Be willing to take the credit or the heat. You can't expect your readers to accept what you write if it's full of maybes, coulds, shoulds, perhapses and almosts which sound like you're dodging and hedging.
- **Appeal to the senses.** Don't say "hang gliding is fun," say "hang gliding is like being a seagull on the wind." Conjure up colorful images by using description, metaphor, and simile.
- **Avoid the verb "to be" and passive voice contructions.** This is the easiest thing to do that will spice up your writing immediately. The passive voice is blah and implies that things just happen—"the report was given by the administrators" vs. "Tom Henry summarized the

report for the Vice Presidents." Try to edit out uses of the verb form to be—tough, but worth it!

- **Use simple language, brief sentences and paragraphs.** Simple words are especially important in a newsletter, which is usually read quickly. Don't talk down to your audience by sounding pompous—using a ten-cent word when a one-cent word will do. Every word has a purpose. Why would you say "due to" when you mean "because" or "quite frankly" when you mean "frankly" or, even better, "truthfully." Ruthlessly edit out those words that serve no purpose but to embroider. Short sentences are easier to read and keep your reader from bogging down in the story, especially if it's technical or complex. Likewise, short paragraphs are visually more appealing. Long paragraphs in narrow margins are intimidating.

- **Be specific and clear.** Clarity is your goal. Be specific and get to the point. Generalities and abstractions make reading dull and boring.

"Simple words are especially important in a newsletter, which is usually read quickly."

Interviews

Conducting an interview is an effective way to obtain information for a story. In order for the interview to go smoothly and to get all the pertinent facts, keep the following tips in mind.

- **Define your purpose.** Why are you conducting the interview? What information are you after? You could share the answers to these questions with the interviewee.

- **Prepare beforehand.** Be considerate by arriving with enough information about the subject and the interviewee. Lack of preparation makes for a failed interview and wastes everyone's time.

- **Identify questions.** Make a list of subject areas and from this list develop the questions that you want to ask. Keep questions short and simple and save the tough ones for last.

- **Make it convenient.** Set your interview appointment at the convenience of the interviewee and establish a time frame. You might also consider a phone interview.

- **Relax.** Before diving right in to the interview, chat briefly with your subject about something other than the interview questions. This sets an informal tone and helps both of you to relax.

- **Be objective.** After completing the interview, write up your notes immediately while it's still fresh in your

mind. Recording the interview is also a good idea—be sure to ask permission first.

Editing   There are several types of editing that should be performed before the newsletter goes to press: issues editing, copyediting and proofreading.

The issues editing is a job that usually belongs to the editor. The editor will read each article and determine whether or not it meets the criteria stated in the mission and outlined under *Improving Your Writing* above. If it doesn't, the article should be rewritten or deleted.

The copyediting task could be done by the editor or one of the assistants. It involves reviewing each article for style. Select a standard style reference, for example, the *Chicago Manual of Style* or the *MLA Handbook* and establish a style specification sheet (or spec sheet) of your own for those little irritants that keep cropping up, such as—will you use e-mail or email, fax or FAX? The copyeditor will also correct punctuation and edit out sexist/racist language.

The easiest stage at which to do issues and copyediting, especially if you're changing content, is when your material is still in the word processing application. After you've imported it into a desktop publishing program, it will be much more time-consuming to change content, as this will also affect your layout. At this stage, you will want your proofreaders to point out typo's only, not to suggest changes (additions or deletions in wording).

Proofreading is the last step in the editing process and again, can be assigned to an assistant. The proofreader takes a last look at the newsletter in its final form to check for errors in keyboarding and layout—type, aligned columns, indents, etc.—all of which will be addressed in *Text, Type, Typography, and Typefaces*.

Review and Approval Process   The editor should establish an editorial policy to include such things as:
- the approval process and whom it includes, (e.g., your supervisor, chair of a foreign language department, dean of the college),
- the approval deadlines, and
- who has the final say-so on what items are or are not to be included in the newsletter.

The editor should then obtain approval of the proposed editorial policy from the most senior person in the approval process.

The editorial board may be, but is not necessarily, involved in the approval process (which you defined above). They exist to help obtain story ideas, editing, etc.

Communicate regularly with those on your approval list and, if necessary get their okay before running a story. Their approval will be easier to obtain if your newsletter is a quality production, follows your mission and is produced on time.

Design and Layout

The creative (and most fun) aspect of newsletter publication is the design and layout. Many of the items below, once decided upon, don't need to (and shouldn't!) be redone with every issue. However, you should reevaluate once a year or so to see if your design needs a facelift to meet changing needs.

Text, Type, Typography, and Typefaces

Text is a collection of written words put together to form a story or narrative. Type is text produced by mechanical means. Typography, on the other hand, is "the study of typefaces, and how to use them..." (Burke 1990, 3). What is a typeface you ask? Sometimes incorrectly refered to as a font, it's a collection of the actual mechanically drawn letters, numbers, and symbols used to create type. A font is a subdivision of a typeface (or face). For example, Optima is a typeface whereas Optima Bold and Optima Bold Oblique are fonts. (See Illustration 1.0 for examples of typefaces.)

As discussed in *Editing* above, text should be word processed before placing it into a page layout program as a story. Below are a few of my favorite word processing tips from Robin Williams (1990). These tips will improve the quality of your text—to take it from amateur to professional.

- A word processor is not a typewriter—there should be only one space after a period. Williams states, "On a Macintosh...the characters are proportional; that is, they each take up a proportional amount of space—the letter i takes up about one-fifth the space of the letter m. So there is no longer that visual need to separate the sentences." (13)
- Use smart quotes (" ") and apostrophes (') for quotations and contractions, and the foot (') and inches (") marks for measurements (15 – 16). (Microsoft Word® has a preference tool that can be set to do this automatically for you.)
- Place punctuation appropriately when using quotation marks. Commas and periods belong *inside* the

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Illustration 1.0
Comparison of Adobe typefaces: Bookman (bold), Optima, Garamond Light Condensed, Goudy Old Style, Palatino and Helvetica. All ex-amples are shown in 11 point type on 12 points of leading. Can you tell which fonts are serif or sans serif?

quotation marks, and colons and semicolons are placed *outside* the quotation marks (16).

- Use dashes and hyphens appropriately. A hyphen is used only to hyphenate words, for example **well-known** or **word-wrap**. Use an **em-dash** (a dash equal to the size of the letter m in whatever font you're using) to indicate a pause in the continuation of a thought—never use two hyphens in a row for this. Use an **en-dash** (longer than a hyphen but shorter than an em-dash) with spaces for dashes between numbers like 9:00 – 5:00 to substitute for the word "to" (19 – 20).

- Don't underline. Underlining is used on typewriters to give emphasis to something or to indicate a book. Since word processing programs are not typewriters *italics* are used for book titles, and either *italics* or **bold** are used for emphasis (29 – 30).

- Use all caps only on very rare occasions. IT'S VERY HARD TO READ A HEADLINE OR A PARAGRAPH WHEN IT'S TYPED IN ALL UPPERCASE LETTERS. USE ONE OF THE NUMEROUS CHOICES AVAILABLE ON A WORD PROCESSOR TO MAKE HEADLINES stand out such as **bolding** or increasing the size. **Outlining** is a possibility but not recommended as it is difficult to read (31 – 32).

- Eliminate widows and orphans from your layout (see Illustation 2.0). A **widow** is a word or words of less than seven characters left on a line by itself at the bottom of a column. An **orphan** is the last word or line of a paragraph that ends at the top of the next column. Ugh! This can usually be corrected by juggling text in your layout program or by deleting hyphens, but rewrite if necessary (43 – 44).

- Don't use more than two hyphens in a row at line ends and get rid of excessive hyphens in one paragraph. Again, rewrite if necessary (45 – 46). (See Illustration 3.0.)

I found choosing typefaces (or faces for short), to be the most perplexing part of designing a newsletter. Generally speaking, you should choose a **serif** face for body copy and a **sans serif** face for headlines. The characters in serif faces have little calligraphic strokes on the ends of the main body stroke and sans serif (from French) means without. Using more than two typefaces in a publication makes it look like a ransom note. Using the italics, bold, etc., of one typeface is acceptable. The ten most preferred typefaces, according to Fenton are: Bodoni, Futura, Stempel Garamond, Goudy Old Style,

The *IALL Journal* provides exposure to teachers, faculty, learning laboratory directors, and media specialists working to improve language learning through technology. Topics include feature-length articles dealing with the effective uses of technology (audio, labs, computers, television, satellite receivers, and interactive video) and with ideas and insights about lab management, design and use.

An example of a widow.

The *IALL Journal* provides exposure to teachers, faculty, learning laboratory directors, and media specialists working to improve language learning through technology.

An even worse widow.

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use.   **An orphan.**

Illustration 2.0
Widows and Orphans

Janson, New Baskerville, Optima, Trump Mediæval, Univers (all by Adobe), and Bitstream's ITC Galliard (1991, 32 – 41). All typefaces have a particular *look* to them. Some are modern, some are traditional, some look technical while others are easy to read. The typeface used for your headlines and the face used for your text should work well together. For example, the *IALL Journal* prints its text in Palatino (serif) and its headlines in Optima (sans serif). All the faces used in your newsletter should portray the image that you want. Be sure to select them carefully—many beginners err by using too many typefaces or faces that conflict with each other. Consult one of the references listed at the end of this article.

"All the [type] faces used in your newsletter should portray the image that you want.... Many beginners err by using too many typefaces or faces that conflict with each other."

The size of your type will depend largely on the typeface that you choose. A face that "looks" small will need a larger type size than one that looks big, so that it will be more readable. (See Illustration 1.0.) Leading, or the spacing between lines, is also important. There should be enough leading so that the descenders (the bottom part of a y or g for example) on one line and the ascenders (the top portion of h or f for example) on the next line don't touch. Kerning (the space between characters) may also need to be adjusted—especially in headlines. (As type size is increased, it causes letters to be spaced farther apart, which looks awkward.)

Another element that will set the style and tone of your newsletter is the way your paragraphs are aligned—justified or ragged right. Justified text aligns at both the left and right margins. Text that is set ragged right aligns only at the left margin. Alignment is a matter of preference, but generally speaking, justified text seems more formal and impersonal, and ragged right is more friendly and informal.

Justified text often creates other problems, such as words that are spaced too far apart in order to align text at the margins. The result is little rivers of white space zig-zagging through the paragraph—very amateurish. Get rid of the white rivers by hyphenating, using smaller margins or rewriting. Justification may also create words that are so close together the entire sentence looks like one word. Again hyphenate, expand your margins or rewrite.

Text set ragged right, on the other hand, may create very uneven lines in a paragraph—also very unattractive. Try to make your lines approximately the same length by hyphenating or rewriting. Ragged right text looks awkward when it's wrapped around a graphic. You may want to justify just that portion of the text so that the graphic is defined.

There should be at least two different sizes of headlines in your newsletter. The bigger headline will indicate your most

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Excessive Hyphens

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Justified Text

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Flush Left, Ragged Right Text

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Flush Right, Ragged Left Text

Illustration 3.0
Excessive hyphens, justified text, flush left, flush right text.

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Illustration 4.0
Rivers of white space and excessive space between words

important story and let people know where they should begin to read. Headlines that are all the same size confuse the reader and fight for dominance on the page. Be careful to avoid the tombstoning effect, headlines that are placed at the same height across a page or page spread (see Illustration 6.0). Subheads should also be used to help break up long passages of text and catch the reader's eye.

Pull quotes do just that, catch the readers' interest and pull them into the story. They can be placed in the margin or in the middle of the story. Make your pull quotes intriguing or readers will be turned off instead of interested.

Initial caps add an interesting element to your page. They are usually placed at the beginning of a story but can also be used at the beginning of several paragraphs in the story. Initial caps can be 1) designed as part of the paragraph so that the sentences flow to the side and underneath (called a drop cap), 2) set high so that the bottom of the letter aligns with the bottom of the first line (a raised cap), or 3) set out to the side so that the initial cap hangs in the air (a stand alone cap). Be careful that your initial caps don't spell out a word or line up across a page spread. (See Illustration 6.0.)

Layout Guides

To avoid confusion your layout should be based on a grid—invisible horizontal and vertical lines to which your text, headlines, graphics, etc., align. Page layout programs have movable lines to help you design a grid.

The first step is to decide the width of your margins. Begin by picturing the middle page spread (pages two and three) of your newsletter. One school of thought is to have progressive margins where the middle margin (between pages two and three) is the smallest, the top margin is a little bigger, the right and left margins still bigger, and the bottom margin the biggest. Or you could make the middle, left, and right margin the same width, the top margin bigger, and the bottom margin biggest of all. Be sure to make your right and left margins big enough for your readers' thumbs. Your readers will need to be able to hold your newsletter without covering up text. One last idea is to create a large band of white called a sink at the top of your page by starting text low. This creates active white space which is visually very attractive.

Next, how many columns do you want? A one-column format is easy to produce and conveys a "late-breaking news" feeling because of its simplicity. It's awkward to place graphics in a one-column format for two reasons:

- the graphic needs to be big enough to reach both sides of the column which makes it disproportionally big,

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My experience in government is that when things are non-controversial, beautifully coordinated and all the rest, it must be that there is not much going on.
—John F. Kennedy

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66

My experience in government is that when things are non-controversial, beautifully coordinated and all the rest, it must be that there is not much going on.
—John F. Kennedy

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Illustration 5.0
Examples of types and placement of pull quotes.

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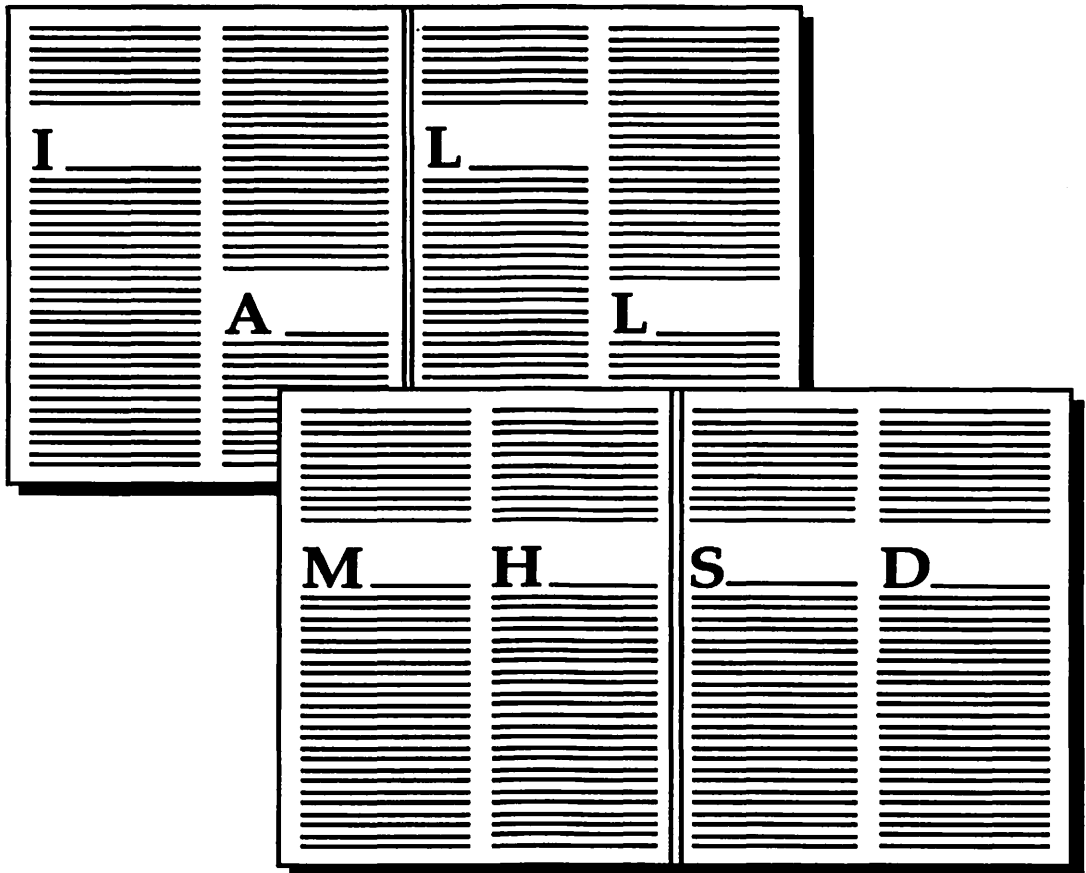
Illustration 6.0
Types of Initial Caps and Tombstoning

- placing the graphic in the middle of the column with white space around it wastes a lot of space.

One way to solve this problem is to make your graphic small and let the text flow around it on all sides. If this makes the text difficult to read, however, try placing the graphic toward one side of the column and let the text flow around it on one side only. (See Illustration 7.0.)

Two-column grids can be used effectively. They have a timeless look. Two problems to be aware of are:

- Too much balance. Two columns that are virtually the same are boring.
- Visuals have to conform to one or two columns which creates the same problems as the one-column format.

"White space makes information easier to process visually."

One way to remedy this problem is to make your left and right margins bigger, and place the two columns off-center.

Three-column formats offer more flexibility for placing graphics and pull quotes. Balance and symmetry may still be a problem, however, if the columns are all the same width and spaced equally across a two-page spread (pages two and three of a four-page newsletter). An effective use of a three-column grid is to use the outside column for white space, headlines, subheads or pull quotes. (See Illustration 8.0.)

Four-column grids offer much flexibility and are most effective when one column is left blank or is only used occasionally for a visual or pull quote. This format works well for a one-page, double-sided newsletter with short stories. (See Illustration 8.0.)

Five columns offer the most flexibility of all the formats described above. This format can accommodate graphics and other visuals, and short and long stories with ease. Be careful not to fill all five columns with text only—a two-page spread of ten text-only columns is daunting indeed! (See Illustration 9.0.)

A Note About Symmetry

While you are considering how many columns to use in your newsletter, keep in mind that an asymmetrical design, if handled appropriately, is dynamic and creates visual interest. Symmetry can also be beautiful but is considered to be more traditional and conservative. Asymmetrical layouts are easier to handle because you don't have to worry about balancing every aspect of your design. An additional plus for asymmetry is that it automatically creates active white space—that's good! White space frames the page, helps the eye to identify headlines or other items to which you wish to call attention. White space makes information easier to process visually.
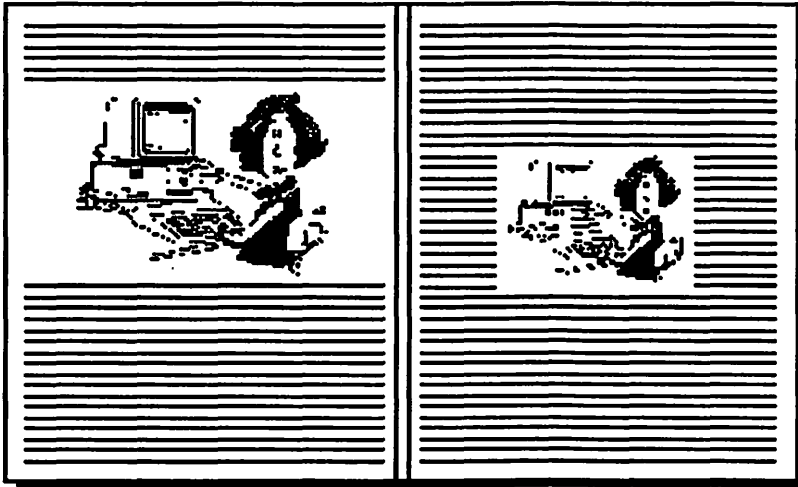
One column grid showing placements of a graphic. Notice how the left example is disproportionally big and wastes space.

Two column grid showing placement of a photo and asymmetry by making the outside margins large and placing the columns off center.
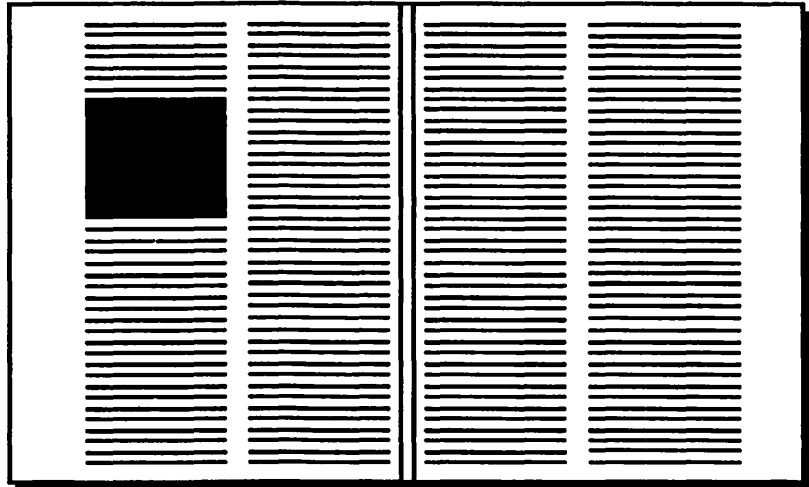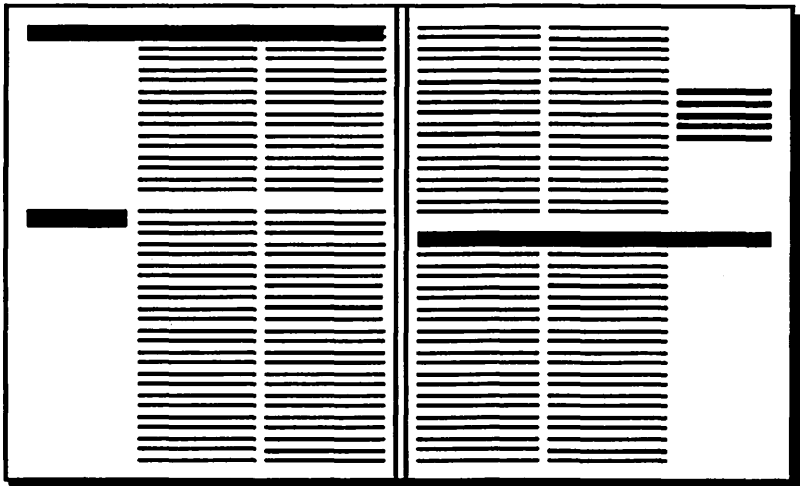
Illustration 7.0
One and two column grids.

Three column grid showing placement of headlines, subhead, and pull quote.

Four column grid showing placement of photos, head-lines, graphic and pull quote.

Illustration 8.0
Three and four column grids.

ALTEC *onnections*

Anderson Language Technology Center, Spring 1994

This large size shows that this is the most important article

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Illustration 9.0
Five column grid with nameplate showing ALTEC logo and newsletter name.

Choosing a Nameplate

"Our center held a contest for a logo and another contest for [a newsletter] name.... These contests produced some surprising results...."

The nameplate is the title of your newsletter as it appears on the front page. This important design element will give your newsletter identity, image, and unity; therefore, a lot of thought should go into its creation.

First, you need a logo or symbol associated with your center and an actual name for the newsletter. To choose a name, refer to your mission statement—the logo and name should tie into the mission. The name should be short and have strong symbolic value. Action words are a good choice. Our center held a contest for a logo and another contest for a name, with a prize to the student employee or staff member with the winning design or name. These contests produced some surprising results and also contributed to team spirit.

Contrast is also important in the design of your nameplate. Contrast can be created by using borders, screens, outlining for an important word, or emphasizing one or two words in heavy or black type, and placing less important words in small or thin type.

Your nameplate should be sized proportionally to the rest of the page. Don't make it so big that it overpowers everything else or so small that it's hard to read or gets lost. Edit out unnecessary words from the name such as the, newsletter, etc. Remember you may need to kern your letters in the nameplate. (See Illustration 9.0.)

Photos and Other Graphics

If you're not a photographer in your spare (!) time, a good source for photos is your Public Relations Office. They usually have photographers on staff who can supply you with a photo reprint (some campuses may do this free—ours charges a nominal fee) or actually take the pictures you need for a higher fee.

When selecting a photo, choose the eye-catching photo that conveys a message or shows action/emotion, and avoid the mug shot. Crop (delete unimportant items) your photos for content and for placement on the page.

Photos and other graphics add visual interest and break up long blocks of text. A terrific photo will draw a reader into the story. Visuals can be placed in your story with the text wrapped around it, aligned to a column edge with the text to one side or in an empty column next to your text. When using several photos, keep these guidelines in mind:
- The largest picture indicates it's the most important.
- Group photos together—not strung out across the page.
- Aim for asymmetry—use different shapes of photos and photos that have horizontal and vertical orientations.

- Every photo needs a caption—no exceptions here! According to Parker, captions are read second only to headlines and therefore are very important for pulling a reader into your story (1990b, 116).

Checklist for good design

If you can check off each of the items below, you'll be well on your way to an eye-catching newsletter.

☐ Balance unity and contrast. According to Parker, "Effective newsletters have page-to-page and issue-to-issue unity. This manifests itself in such ways as consistent graphic treatment of headlines,...subheads, pull-quotes, body copy, column widths, borders and visuals" (1990b, 21). Contrast can be added by distinguishing headlines from body copy, use of graphics, and other visuals.

☐ Keep natural eye flow. "Since raised from pups, we've been taught to read left-to-right, top-to-bottom of a page. Our eyes enter at the primary optical area (top left) and exit at the terminal area (bottom right). In between, we will most easily focus on optical center, an area 3/8ths down the page in the middle.... It is the eye's most natural rhythm, and any other use must be artificially simulated by visual and graphic magnets." (Morse 1991, 6).

☐ Use white space appropriately. Be sure to check your margins, headline kerning, text wrap around graphics, justified text, and spacing between columns.

☐ Asymmetry will help make your newsletter dynamic. A too symmetrical or balanced layout is uninteresting.

☐ Keep in mind the adage "less is more" when you design. In this era of technology we have the ability to use multiple fonts, clip art, borders, shaded boxes, etc. but that doesn't mean that we should. It's easy to get carried away and wind up with what Morse calls "lasercrud" (1991, ii). Be careful.

Here are some suggestions to help you refine your designing abilities...

- Collect samples of publications that you consider attractive and analyze them—what is it that appeals to you and why?
- Ask a designer on campus (Publications Department or perhaps a faculty member in the School of Fine Arts) to critique your work.
- Register for desktop publishing workshops or seminars on and off campus. Most of these offer the opportunity for colleagues to critique your work and for you to gain hands-on experience.

- Consult the references listed at the end of this article. These will give you a starting point. You could also peruse your local bookstore.

Desktop publishing your newsletter is fun! Learn from trial and error—what works, what doesn't. Experiment. Enjoy! ■

Notes

[1] Many of the concepts presented here are explored in detail in two seminars: "Newsletters from A to Z: Writing, Editing, Design, Production" and "Advanced Design for Desktop Publishing" by L. C. Williams & Associates. (The planning and production steps are those suggested by Betty Morse, 1991.) These seminars are well worth the time and financial investment. For more information contact:

L. C. Williams & Associates
Two Prudential Plaza
180 N. Stetson Avenue, #1500
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 565-3900

[2] The center referred to in this article is the Anderson Language Technology Center (ALTEC), established in the fall of 1990. ALTEC serves approximately 3,000 foreign language students and seven language departments with over 200 faculty members.

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