

THE ROLE OF COPY & LAYOUT COMPONENTS

-from Art Direction and Editorial Design, by Yolanda Zappaterra

The terminology of copy can be confusing to a designer unused to the array of terms used in editorial design. It doesn't help that many of them have different names for the same thing (see image above), but it is important for the designer to know certain things when it comes to copy:

- the different terms for copy
- what these different forms of copy are
- how writing for editorial generally differs from other types of writing
- how this affects the designer

The Cover Line

These apply exclusively to periodicals. Newsstand titles will usually display a mass of these in a bid to show they have more and better content than the competition. The largest cover line, if the publication is using size to distinguish order of 'importance,' is nearly always related to the cover image.

The content, use, and placement of cover lines are generally decided by the editor and art director, but marketing and competition considerations drive this

process (they often appear on the left third of the cover, as this is the most likely to be visible on the shelves). But the look and tone of the cover lines — their color, how they stand out against competitors and each other, what their number, length, and words say about the magazine and its personality — are very much the responsibility of the designer.

Taglines

Taglines or slogans under a logo can add value to a publication. A well-worded tagline not only tells the reader what a title is, but also indicates tone and target audience.

Headlines

A good headline is as important in persuading a reader to read a story as the layout — it creates a strong bond between the publication and the reader. Therefore, appropriate size, positioning, and treatment is vital.

Kicker

The content of the kicker (a.k.a. standfirst, sell, deck, or intro text) is textually more important than the headline, for it sets the tone, after the headline, in informing the reader of the story's intention, and acts as the bridge or link, both textually and visually, between the headline and the body copy. As such, it must contextualize the headline, but also summarize and sell the story to the reader in an arresting way.

Pull-quotes

Pull-quotes are another very useful tool at the designer's disposal when it comes to orienting the reader and breaking-up copy to improve readability and make the feature more enticing. The content for pull-quotes is pulled directly out of the copy, or is a summarized excerpt.

Subheads (a.k.a. crossheads)

Subheads can break-up dense columns of copy and are most usefully employed in lengthy news items, where continuous copy can be off-putting or a reader may be looking for a particular aspect of a story. They are also useful for denoting a new section, chapter subdivision, or a subject change, and they will help readers find their place if not reading the article in one sitting.

Bylines and credits

The treatment and positioning of bylines and credits should be determined by the publication and the importance of these elements to it: a magazine will generally want to flag contributors and staff, particularly if they are using a wellknown writer, photographer, or illustrator.

Body Copy

On many titles, a publication's design will draw a readership in, but if the textual content or body copy does not match expectations, sales will fall, advertisers will stop advertising, and the publication could fold. The designer's involvement in body copy is twofold: he or she must deal with its main requisite and characteristic, using column and font selection to reflect and deliver the brand and the individual content of the story to the reader, but they should also contribute ideas and knowledge of cultural trends to the editorial mix, as this can lead to dynamic content.

Panels, box copy, sidebars, and infographics

Panels function as short news or adjuncts to lengthy articles, where they are used to impart data such as facts and statistics, a case study, or another element that is separate from but still relevant to the main article. Because of this, panel and box copy is usually snappier than the more discursive or in depth approach of feature writing. This is reflected in short sentences, a more factual tone, lots of snippets of information, and elements that break down continuous text into lists, points, and the like. The design should, of course, visualize this snappiness.

Captions

Just as kickers act as the bridge between headline and body copy, captions bridge the image and the text, and are therefore an important design element that requires a well thought-out design solution.

There are different approaches to designing captions and their placement, but their design will be dependant on the designer's knowing what the role and the tone of the caption is in the publication.

Folios

Consisting of a page number, the publication's title, and, in some cases, a section or chapter title, folios are an indispensable part of the page furniture, helping to orient the reader in the publication and strengthening the structure of the format, and therefore the brand. On a title where the content is straightforward and direct, folios will not usually be made into a design feature, but a publication whose readers are visually literate will use fonts, weights and positioning to make folios stand out as design elements in their own right.

PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS OF A LAYOUT

Templates

For newspapers and news pages of magazines, flexible templates will speed up the layout and production processes, and give the pages and overall design a cohesion that might otherwise be lost in the frantic days and hours before going to press. Templates simplify all aspects of page makeup, but they can also be restrictive in design terms, and care must be taken to ensure that they don't make pages look too alike.

Imagery plays an important role here; subject, crop, scale, and tension can all be used to distinguish pages from each other.

Headline and Heading

The title of the story is usually the largest type size on the layout, as its aim is to stimulate curiosity about the feature and tempt you to read on.

Kicker

The kicker is usually around forty to fifty words in length; any longer and it defeats its purpose, any shorter and it becomes difficult to get the necessary information in and can make the page look unbalanced. It is a good idea to construct a system – or style sheets – for displaying this kind of information rather than applying it on an ad hoc basis, but flexibility and the ability to deviate from the norm when necessary are important.

Byline

If the name of the author or writer is well-known, it often appears alongside a picture of him or her to form a picture byline.

Body Copy

Text as component of a layout can be handled in a number of ways. Columns of text are either justified, align left with ragged right, or align right with ragged left. Left-aligned text is the most common in editorial because text that is centered or aligned right can be tiring on the eyes when reading large quantities of print. Similarly, column widths should be narrow enough to read easily, but not so narrow as to create river of white space. Lengthy blocks of text can be broken up, making overall readability easier, but also making the page lighter

and more attractive to the viewer. Toward the end of the production cycle, when all necessary editing, cutting, and changing of copy have been completed, a good designer will manually fine-tune body copy to make it look as appealing as possible. Words may be kerned or lines tracked back to remove a single word at the end of a paragraph (widow), or a single word at the top of a column (orphan), soft returns added to create a better shape in the ragging of the column, or words taken over to improve line lengths and hyphenation inserted in the case of awkward word or line breaks. By looking at the line blocks as shapes, designers should be able to use such tweaks to make blocks accessible and appealing. It looks neater to have at least two lines of a paragraph at the top and bottom of a column.

During the 1980s and 1990s it was fashionable to see pages that were built purely around text and typography, and stories that were interpreted through typography.

Drop caps and Initial caps

As well as indicating where a story begins, drop caps and initial caps – the former drops below the baseline, the latter sits on it but is bigger than the rest of the body copy – can be put into paragraphs to break up copy and avoid a page of monotonous “gray blocks.” Drop caps and initial caps can sit within the body copy or outside; they can be enormous, and whole words, or symbols. Thought should be employed when choosing the font for a drop cap or initial cap to complement the rest of the body copy style. It could be a heavy cut of the body typeface or a completely contrasting typestyle, such as an elaborate italic juxtaposed with a clean, modern sans serif.

Crossheads or subheads

These small heading usually sit within the body copy but may be a larger size, bolder, “capped-up” (in upper case), a color, or set in a different typeface.

Quotes, pull-quotes, and sound bites

Quote marks from a focal point on a page, and can be used in varying ways to create extra interest. Either single (“”) or double (“ ”) quote marks can be used, as long as usage is consistent. When the quote is taken from the text but has not been made by an interviewee or subject, quote marks are not usually used. Ways of designing pull-quotes (with or without quotation marks) might include floating text in a box, running them in a separate column, running them as bands across a whole spread, or using them over pictures.

Straplines, section headings, and running headlines

These give structure to the various sections of a publication, identifying or emphasizing what that subject matter, section or feature is about. Graphics such as lines or rules, blocks, bars, and shapes can be used to give straplines an identity. A running headline is an abbreviated headline that may appear on further pages of an article, especially if the article continues over several, thus reminding readers which story they are reading.

Icons

If a story is to continue overleaf or elsewhere in an issue, it is helpful to let the reader know by employing either “continued on” and “continued from” lines or some form of directional arrow. This is called a jumpline, turn arrow, or, on a newspaper, a slug. Stories spanning more than one page should break midway through a sentence or paragraph, as a full stop at the end of a page might make readers think they had reached the end of the story. The end of a story should be made clear with an end icon.

Captions

Captions usually appear near or on an image, giving information about either that picture’s content, or the reason for the image’s presence and its relationship to the story. When there are a large number of images to caption, it can be useful to number each picture and relate it to a list of captions elsewhere on the page. Extended picture captions give additional text

information not included in the main body copy. Captions on newspapers are treated as factual matter and rarely stray far from their associated image.

Folios

Folios work as a navigational aid around the issue and so are usually in the same place on each page. If they are placed near the gutter, flicking through to locate a page can be hard work. Newspaper often put numbers at the top; book folios often incorporate the title and chapter, too. Here, navigation and swift location of stories is key to the reader’s experience, so folios must be clear to read and well placed, enabling the reader to flick to a particular story or to one continuing from the front page.

Picture credits

The credits for images normally run on the same page as their image, either running vertically up the side of the image or in the inside gutter of the page. However, if the photographer is well-known, his or her name is likely to be treated as a byline or incorporated into the kicker.

Boxes, panels, and sidebars

Rules, color tints, borders, different column widths, and sans serif faces (as opposed to the serif faces often used in the feature copy) are traditional ways of handling box or panel copy, either related to a story or being laid out as a stand-alone item.

Images

Images are key visual elements on a page and their relationship to the story is crucial to the design. Either the text is driven by the image or the image illustrates the story. In both cases what is important is to create an interesting dialogue between text and visual. Within these two simple functions there are many different ways to approach image use.

How an image is cropped and scaled, where it is placed in relation to text and other images, and its position on the page or spread all create expression and visual narrative for the viewer. Faces looking toward the spine create harmony, looking out they create tension; if two images face in opposite directions even greater tension is created. A large close-up of a banal image will draw the viewer in, while its contours or shape may create an abstract image that intrigues or surprises.