

Typography turns browsers into readers

One purpose of editorial typography is to lead a casual browser effortlessly from captions to headline to deck, and ultimately to the text, where the story really is.

Learn how to use a browser's built-in preferences and avoid their dislikes so they remain unaware of the planned progression of increasingly satisfying morsels they find.

- Defining terms: the elements may not be what you think
- Does effective design really manipulate browsers?
- How to lead a browser from element to element
- How to use editorial planning and art direction as visual and verbal tools

Defining terms: the elements may not be what you think

The purpose of editorial design is to *inform*. In contrast, the purpose of advertising design is to cause the reader to *do* something. Every magazine article tells a story and the story's *value to the reader* must be made evident.

Display type is all the type that is to be read before the text, *regardless of its size*. Its primary function is to indicate the content of the story so a browser can make an informed decision whether to commit to the text.

A caption is display type. It is often read first and must be written to increase interest and cause the browser to move on to the next typographic opportunity.

A headline is the most obvious and primary form of display type. It must be more than a label and must intrigue to move the browser on to the deck, or secondary typographic opportunity. Its job is to clarify or add to the meaning of the headline so the browser can now make an informed decision to commit to the first few paragraphs of text. The text contains the story. Everything done to this point has been chosen to cause the browser, or uncommitted page sampler, to become a reader, or browser who has discovered a reason to commit to the text of a story.

A breakout or pull quote is a primary typographic opportunity on turnover pages for browsers who are either reading back-to-front or weren't drawn in by the typographic hits on the opener. A breakout must be an effortless read by being very short and it must be provocative, causing a response of, "I didn't realize that was what this story was about!"

Browsers' built-in preferences

A browser's main characteristic is that s/he isn't committed to any story. Editors and designers must present *every* element to attract and inform.

Images must have related, descriptive words to allure. These may be in the form of captions or heads (a difference only of size), so long as they illuminate the meaning of the image and clearly "belong to" the image.

The words in the first two typographic opportunities (caption and headline, for example) must be compelling. Don't use "creative phraseology" or amusing puns at the expense of meaning. Browsers won't willingly be fooled into the text, and they'll skip out as soon as they become aware of your manipulation.

Browsers prefer information in a clear type progression. A balance must be achieved between visual similarity (to unify various bits of type) and contrast (to make hierarchy clear). Too much similarity and your type will look dull and skipable. Too much contrast and your page will look noisy and repellent.

Begin every design with elements alike. Then begin introducing the fewest contrasts necessary to make distinctions between legitimately different kinds of information. Starting a design with various contrasts at the outset encourages dissimilarity. It is easier to see lack of contrast than to recognize when you have too much, and it is much easier to know where to add contrast than where to reduce it.

Is browser manipulation a bad thing?

No, browser manipulation is not a bad thing. It's the most valuable reason for having imagery and display typography in a magazine. Display type was invented around 1500 to identify books that were being printed in greater quantity since the introduction of movable type in 1455. Be sure your display type is true to

its original purpose and accurately describes the information to which it belongs.

Yes, browser manipulation is a bad thing when a browser becomes aware of the act of being manipulated. Avoid the possibility by ensuring value at every informational “hit” your browser sees. Use every image, caption, headline, and deck as a way of describing content and explaining its value. Just as you check for typos and errors of fact, double and triple check your reader’s interests by revealing each story’s value in all display type and imagery.

How to lead a browser from element to element

Use image hierarchy as well as type hierarchy. But *use* type hierarchy, don’t just *have* it. Make informational opportunities count.

Be sure you are clear what order you want the browser to follow, then make that order an effortless progression. The natural order a browser will follow is picture-caption-headline-deck [decision point to enter the text] and then, maybe, the text.

Changing the order for a good reason, say, to make a point more clearly, is good, but the unusual order must be made clear. Use placement contrast (a tiny image set into a giant headline, for example) and decreasing type sizes as signals.

How to use editorial planning and art direction as visual and verbal tools

Avoid last minute “make it fit” scenarios that tend to fill space without considering your readers’ needs. Slipping files under art directors’ doors with a page count, though convenient, rarely leads to quality visual communication.

Instead, develop a new culture of weekly planning sessions to discuss the purpose of each story so the art director and editors can collaborate and agree on a compelling way to present each story and choose visual materials to use. Art directors should feel comfortable asking for a clear statement of a story’s purpose and requesting visual materials from the editor. Editors should feel comfortable pointing out how a preliminary layout doesn’t reveal the true meaning of the story.

Connectedness makes a story come alive

Crew teams that row those skinny boats are chosen for specific strengths and must pull together for maximum speed and efficiency. Anything less than perfect teamwork results in the boat going very slowly or even tipping over. Similarly, words and pictures must be chosen for specific purposes and must pull together to make the value of the story as interesting and as clear as possible. *Telling a story compellingly* is the primary responsibility of magazine makers.

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