MOD makeover

Instead of designing traditional spreads with five to seven photos, those traditional photo spaces now become modules, opening a host of storytelling options and greatly expanding the number of students and photos.

Is your staff ready for a MOD makeover?

"Modular design—it's not really about modules or design. Discuss."

At the risk of sounding like a 1990s *Saturday Night Live* sketch, the latest trend in yearbook journalism really needs a more accurate name.

In reality, modular design is about connecting with readers by telling simple, relevant and uncomplicated visual and verbal stories.

Perhaps "MODern storytelling" would be a more fitting description than "MODular design." Let's discuss.

Newspapers pioneered the modular approach to create highly organized pages quickly while on the deadline clock.

Large-city newspapers, publishing multiple editions, refreshed stories by quickly updating and replacing modules without redesigning entire pages.

Decades later, yearbooks and magazines embraced the modular approach to expand coverage while creating easy-to-design and organized spreads. The result has been diversified coverage and visually interesting presentations.

By Gary Lundgren

Photo boxes become storytelling modules

Rethinking the use of space, the modular approach allows yearbook journalists to take control of the amount of content and how it is presented on a spread. Instead of designing spreads with just five to seven photos, those traditional photo spaces now become modules, opening a host of storytelling options and greatly expanding the number of students and photos featured on the pages.

The modular approach also fosters teamwork on the yearbook staff by including more students in the reporting and designing process. A team of students plans the overall spread with different team members reporting, writing, photographing and designing individual modules. Each module contributes a different story to the overall topic.

When editors, writers, photographers and designers plan and report a story as a team, many good things happen. Readers get more complete and focused stories that appeal to them.
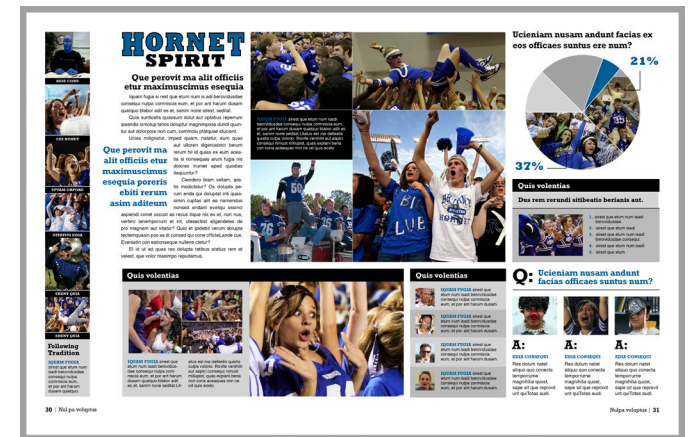

TRADITIONAL, YET SOLID

This traditional design is stronger than most yearbook spreads. It's packed with powerful, storytelling photography. The designer follows all the major principles of design including the use of a dominant photo, an eyeline and consistent use of spacing. A traditional feature reports the verbal story along with a primary/secondary headline and detailed captions. Let's do the math. This traditional design features:

26 faces
13 photos
1 feature story with quotes

IT'S TIME FOR A MOD MAKEOVER

By taking the traditional design and converting the photo blocks into story modules, storytelling opportunities are greatly increased along with the number of photographs and ultimately the number of students featured on the spread. Each storytelling module uses a different verbal and visual story format. The diversity of the modules in terms of design and content give the design energy and reader appeal. Let's do the math. This makeover features:

48 faces <an increase of 22>
24 photos <an increase of 11>
150 survey participants <an increase of 150>
10 storytelling quotes <an increase of 10>
1 feature story with quotes

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Focused storytelling results from a narrow angle

When planning yearbook stories, angles and topics are often confused.

A topic is broad and often vague. "Jobs" is an example of a story topic. The topic doesn't drive interesting visual and verbal stories. That's where the human angle comes in.

Possible angles on the topic of "jobs" might be laboring outside in the summer heat or working with children. Or perhaps the impact of the economy on the teen job market. The best angles focus on people and their unique stories.

A specific angle provides essential direction for photographers and reporters. Focused storytelling results from a narrow angle

Loudoun Valley High School [VA]

Glenbrook South High School [IL]

VERBAL STORY FORMATS

Writers should tell the story from different angles and present unique information in different formats.

FEATURE STORIES: Tell the five W's and H (who, what, when, where, why and how). In the most common yearbook form, stories begin with a catchy lead followed by short paragraphs featuring meaningful quotes and transitional paragraphs containing facts and figures.

QUICK READS/INFOGRAPHS: Tell figures, facts or opinions in a visually appealing way. They can be interactive formats or chronologies. They can be a series of anecdotes, descriptive paragraphs or quotes. They're often packaged with graphics. Select the format based on the content.

- **Figures:** table, index, listing, stats, chart, scoreboard, bar chart, pie chart
- **Facts:** fact box, listing, top 10, summary points, informational map, diagram, definitions, profile
- **Opinions:** quotes, question/answer, for/against, personal narrative, journal, advice
- **Time:** schedule, calendar, timeline
- **Interactive:** fill in, matching, connect the dots, color an object, check test, crossword puzzle, word search, quiz

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Basic design strategies apply to story modules and the overall spread

Whether designing the complete spread or the individual story module, a designer applies the same basic design strategies.

One of the story modules should be visibly larger than the others on the spread to establish dominance.

Use of an eyeline should be considered when arranging photos within a module and also when arranging the modules on the spread. A variety of modular sizes create contrast.

Following the vertical and horizontal column guides when positioning the content modules on the spread ensures consistent spacing.

Modules are merely mini-designs displayed together as a big layout

Designing story modules becomes less intimidating if they're seen as small layouts within a big layout. The strategies and rules used to design the spread are simply applied on a smaller scale to the modules.

Graphic techniques such as lines and tints might be used to lightly frame or highlight modules.

For unity, elements within a module should be spaced an equal distance apart. Tight spacing, generally 1 to 4 points, is often used within a module to conserve space. Consistency is the key.
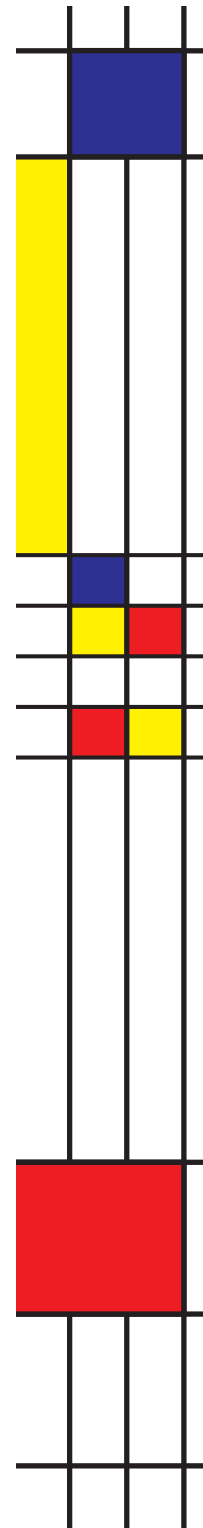
Round Rock High School [TX]

VISUAL STORY FORMATS

Images show emotion, action and reaction with great realism. Visuals can provide information in ways that words cannot.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Three styles of photographs communicate different stories.
- **Photojournalistic**: These photos tell stories, show action and reaction. They provide a variety of subjects and points of view. Each photo should have strong content and be able to stand on its own as well as work with other photos to tell a story.
- **Reference:** These are portraits and group shots that provide a visual record of school enrollment and group or team membership.
- **Scrapbook:** Although these photos feature posed subjects, and offer a more a casual way to document students' lives, they still tell stories.
- **Illustration:** If a photojournalistic image isn't possible, a photo illustration might be staged or created electronically depending on the topic. A photo illustration should always be clearly labeled so that readers are not misled.

TECHNIQUES: Yearbook spreads that used to include five to seven photos now might include 20 or more photos using different presentations:
- **Single shot:** One image used to tell the story.
- **Series:** Three or more photos showing a sequence of action.
- **Collection:** A group of related photos, each telling a different aspect of the story.
- **Cut-out-background [COB]:** Removing the photo background, leaving just the subject.
- **Mortise:** A smaller, related photo that overlaps or is inset into a larger photo.

Modular Design

# Graphics, typography unify story modules

Modules are unified from a content perspective. Through careful planning, each module presents a different visual and verbal angle to the topic.

The challenge, when designing story modules, is to maintain the unique look of each mini-design while making them look good together. Subtle graphic and typographic details repeated in different story modules visually link them together.

A dynamic headline package, with strong primary and secondary components, can unify a spread presentation by verbally introducing the content and visually introducing the fonts and graphics that might be repeated in the other story modules on the spread. Headlines within the story modules are often miniature versions of the main headline.

Modules made up of text are generally not appealing to readers as those with both photos and text. Photos are effective reader entry points into story modules.

Using a dominant photo and an eyeline increases the visual appeal of modules featuring photo arrangements. Captions or identifications still look best to the outside of the photo collections. Photos might be consistently numbered for easy identification.
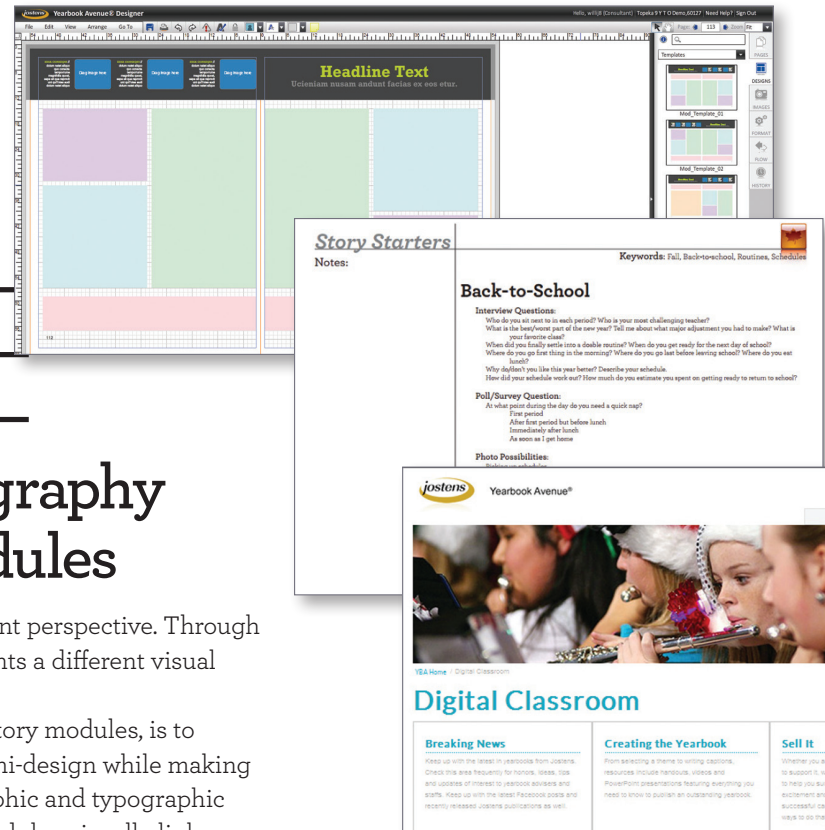
NEW COVERAGE TOOLS FROM JOSTENS

It's never been easier to expand your coverage using the modular approach thanks to new tools currently available to Jostens customers.

Visit the new Digital Classroom on Yearbook Avenue and check out the **STORY STARTERS** for a jump-start on planning relevant content for modules or spreads. Designed by John Cutsinger, there are currently Story Starters organized by season and sports for more than 125 topics with more being added monthly. Designed for all staff levels, the Story Starters guide the content planning process by providing: storytelling questions based on the five W's and H, poll/survey question, photo ideas and module angles.

After planning your content using the Story Starters, building dazzling designs is fast and fun using the new **MODULAR DESIGN TEMPLATES**. Building a great-looking spread has never been easier. Select from one of four spreads featuring color-coded spaces with pre-designed elements. It's as simple as dragging a green module onto the green space. The Modular Design Templates are available for both Jostens YearTech and Jostens YearTech Online.