CHAPTER SIX
GRAPHICS

Newspaper graphics

▶ Newspaper graphics serve several functions: attract artistic volunteers, help to visually organize a page, provide editorial commentary in a fun and engaging manner.

Not everyone who walks through a newspaper office is interested in framing the perfect lede or learning about the intricacies of conducting an interview. Some volunteers are bound to be interested in drawing or production work. This is a positive thing. A paper does not start and end with the articles. Creative layout, provocative photos and entertaining cartoons are as important to a paper as a strong news story. So recruitment drives should not be limited to writers. A good newspaper staff will actively seek out artists in their school's fine arts department and across campus

As for the cartoonists themselves, here are some quick tips to help you draw a better graphic:

TRAINING THE PEN

▪ Complement the story by drawing a comic that contains the same theme as the article. Visual indicators of content make some people likely to read further.

▪ Simple is better. The story shouldn't be over-looked because of a really, really intricate graphic. A picture that symbolizes a small element of the story is great, and parts of the human body are always fun to draw.

▪ Graphics should draw attention to the story by leading the eye towards it. This can be done by the direction a figure is pointing, moving, leaning or looking in, or by the direction of the actual design.

▪ Follow your political and ethical principles in your graphics as well as your writing. Always avoid sexist or racist graphics, and try to use non-gender specific figures. For instance, show an equal number of females and males throughout your paper. Include as many different ethnic groups as possible as well.

▪ Keep away from really dark or really light images because more often than not, the results you get back from the printers are, well, less than beautiful.

▪ Draw an arrow pointing at the story if you have to. Another nifty effect is to use screens over large blocks of text. They make a page more interesting to look at.

▪ Screen darker colours — forest green, teal, purple, etc. — at 10, or maximum 20 per cent, for best readable results. Another thing to remember is that really small details on a screen can get tangled up with your text. So try to make sure the smallest details are at least bigger than your text's point size.

▪ To do screens in InDesign, go to the swatches tab, then change the tint to 10 per cent. If the screen is done in grey, 10 per cent is plenty. Any more, and chances are your text will be obscured. Same goes for colour: stick to the lighter hues. Yellow, pale green, pink and light blue all work well at 100 percent.

▪ Finally, experiment! Try spot colour, screens, colour washes over photos, headlines in colour, graphics on flags and section heads, and full front page graphics. Go wild and watch the paper become a friendly and collectable work of art.

PLANNING OUT THE CARTOONS

Some graphics, such as editorial cartoons, should be planned ahead. Aim for editorial cartoons that are intelligent and critical, not malicious. If you have really good ones, use them. Otherwise, don't bother.

Other graphics end up being done on production day to fill the holes you have, or haven't, dummied into the paper.

If you have an amazing graphics editor and/or a handful of talented scribblers, filling the graphics holes will never be a problem. Convince them to hang out on production night in order to fulfill last minute needs. Ask around in your schools visual arts department if you have one. There's bound to be some willing volunteers.

But even though on-hand cartoonists are a great way to create custom drawings and give your paper a more human touch, file graphics can also come in handy. So keep a graphics file, divided into subject areas, and use them whenever you can. ◀

With files from Alisa Gordaneer and Andrew Mori.

Editorial cartoons

▶ Most of the students reading your paper have just finished reading a few hundred pages of some textbook. So the thought of reading a thousand words detailing last week's board of governors meeting might just drive them one step closer to insanity.

This is where editorial graphics come in. A well done, strong political cartoon will catch the reader's eye, amuse them and pull them into the article. Moreover, it can make readers aware of a complex issue in an enjoyable and easy to understand format.

Artistic value

On an aesthetic level, campus news stories — especially about political or administrative matters — generally don't lend themselves to good photography. For instance, most articles on a student union meeting are usually accompanied by a blurry shot of people sitting at a table. Pretty boring stuff. Few people, however, can resist reading a cartoon. As well, editorial comics can break up news sections that are notoriously text heavy, improving the overall design of your paper.

Creating a good editorial cartoon involves more than drawing some goofy faces. For editorial comics on campus issues, it is important to place them in context. As well, placing an editorial comic in the midst of articles discussing the same issue is a must. That way, the sordid relationship between the College of Microbiology and the Society for Creative Anachronism (for example) will be as familiar as the daily behavior of the federal government.

Potential political fallout

Another consideration when including editorial cartoons in your paper is their effect on the campus community. A good editorial comic can be like a bomb dropping on campus. Editorial cartoons tend to be more potent in a school setting because universities are relatively small communities. Whereas a cartoonist for the Calgary Sun can take a hack at Paul Martin with no fallout for the newspaper, slamming the student government may turn out to be a difficult matter — especially if they are down the hall from the newspaper office. Criticizing a club, a residence or a college in an editorial cartoon tends to raise more of an outcry than an article doing the same. Of course, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Making the pen political

There are plenty of cartoonists on campus, the trick is to channel their talents to accommodate campus politics and to understand local issues. That is why the editors at the paper should keep in touch with the artists. The difference between the president of the university holding a chainsaw or a pair of scissors, may be key to your editorial stance. And yet, cartoonists are artists and cannot be programmed to churn out comics according to an editor's whim. An editorial cartoon is just that, editorial, and the fact that the artist may take a slightly different slant on the issue than an article is only healthy.

Pick a style

Be consistent in the dimensions of your panel. A proposed cartoon that varies in shape from vertical to square to horizontal, will make life very difficult for an editor. So make the job of the production staff easy by picking a panel shape and sticking with it.

You can also ask the production editor what size they need your comic to be in order to fit into their templates.

Distributing your cartoons

Forget about cover letters, resumes and long-winded pitches. You are not applying for a job, but attempting to distribute merchandise (your comics) to a prospective customer (student newspapers). Get the addresses or fax numbers of a whole slew of papers and start pounding them with product on a regular basis. If your work is clever, well drawn, consistent and timely, you're bound to catch an editor's eye at some point.

Don't write a novel

Do not clutter your picture with text. Editors will often jump at the panel with the fewest words. A comic's primary form of expression is the visual medium. If you throw out too many words, you might as well write an article. The cartoon, remember, should not try to repeat what a news story does. Rather, it should focus on summarizing campus issue through pictures. ◀

With files from Jack Lefcourt.