

Brochures and Newsletters¹

Ricky Telg²

This publication on brochure and newsletter design is the fifth of a five-part series on document design. This series also covers the [document design process](#), [principles of document design](#), [elements of document design](#), and [graphic file formats](#).

Introduction

Any document should be developed with the design principles and elements discussed in previous publications in this series. This publication addresses the particulars of effective brochures and newsletters.

Brochures

Brochures are small, usually folded documents used to inform, educate, or persuade the reader. They are commonly used to promote organizations, products, or events. Brochures attract attention through eye-catching design. Brochures must contain clear, concise, focused writing because they are so short. When writing and designing a brochure, incorporating the recommendations discussed below can contribute greatly to your document's overall effect.

Brochure Basics

Use strong headings (titles) and subheadings that lead the reader through the text. For example, the title may be "How to Grow Award-Winning Roses." The subheadings may be specific steps in the process. Subheadings also break up information into manageable chunks.

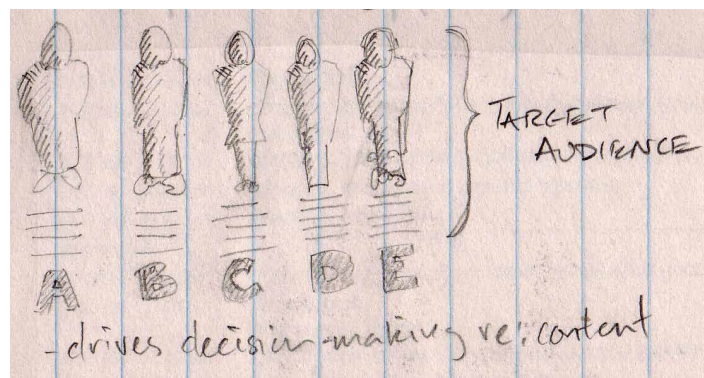


Figure 1. Target audience

Credits: Gever Tulley CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 <http://flic.kr/p/rcbnq>

Speak directly to the reader. "You" is the most important word in persuasion. The brochure should sound very personal, focusing on the benefits the reader gets from reading the information presented in the brochure. Put the emphasis on what the reader will gain. In other words, what is in it for your reader?

Use bullets to list information. Because brochures are so brief, bulleted lists are commonly used to highlight important information.

Keep the text short. Use short sentences of 20 words or less. Use short paragraphs of no more than three sentences.

Use document design elements effectively. Particularly for brochures, use these design element suggestions.

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2. Ricky Telg, professor, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, Institute of Food and Agricultural Services, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

- **Text:** Most brochures are written in a 10-point or 11-point font size. Single-space the text, but double-space between paragraphs. Paragraphs usually are not indented. Use bold and italic typefaces only when you want to emphasize a word or phrase.
- **Graphics:** Break up long stretches of text with lines. This helps to make the text easily readable. Use shaded boxes to emphasize points within the overall text.
- **White space:** Use white space to provide enough space where the paper folds. You do not want text in the creases where the brochure is folded.

Brochure Design

Brochures come in many styles and forms. You can design brochures with two folds, three folds, four folds, and more. Probably the most common style used by small businesses and organizations is the three-fold brochure, also known as a *trifold*. The trifold has six panels and can be printed on regular 8.5" × 11" paper.

- **Panel 1:** The panel that you see first—the cover—should “hook” the reader’s attention immediately. The reader should know what the brochure is about just by seeing the first panel. The cover panel, also called the “hook” or “eye-catcher,” usually includes the organization’s name, the theme of the brochure, and possibly a slogan. Rarely will in-depth information be presented on the first panel. If the brochure will be placed in a “brochure rack,” commonly found at tourist stops, it is important to put large, attention-grabbing text at the top of the brochure, because the bottom portion of your brochure may get covered by a brochure in the slot directly below yours.
- **Panel 2:** When you open the brochure’s cover panel, the next panel you see is the most likely to be read. This second panel should be where you present a stand-alone message that summarizes the content and message of the entire brochure. If you are promoting an upcoming event, this panel could be the highlights of the event and the event’s date, time, and location. This panel is usually self-contained, meaning the content does not carry over to another panel.
- **Panels 3–5:** These panels present the main message of the brochure. The panels are viewed as one three-column unit. The three panels often contain subheadings to break up the text.
- **Panel 6:** This is the back cover, which is the panel least likely to be read. Avoid putting important text on it. Use

this panel to include contact information (your organization’s name, address, phone number, e-mail address, website, or Facebook page, if applicable). The back panel also can be kept blank in case you want to put an address and stamp on it so it can be mailed.

Newsletters

A *newsletter* is a collection of stories and announcements that is sent on a regular basis to a particular group of people. Most professional organizations send newsletters to their members. A newsletter can be an easy way to keep members informed about your organization’s activities. The newsletter also can be sent to specific people outside your organization to inform them of what you are doing.

If you have never designed a newsletter before, you should look at the newsletters you receive for ideas on how others design their newsletters. Look for the kinds of designs that you think might work for you and your readers. As you look at other newsletters, consider how they address the following issues:

- How big the headlines are
- How easy it is to read or to skim an article
- How crowded the pages appear
- How colorful the newsletter is
- How photographs and graphics are used

Afterward, draw some rough sketches, either hand-drawn or mocked-up on the computer by laying out “dummy” text and boxes where photos will go. Create a prototype design that you and your organization are happy with. Make any alterations before developing the newsletter for real and consider your production budget. Determining how much your budget is will give you some idea about how many pages the newsletter can be, how many copies you can print, and if you can use color. When writing and designing the newsletter, keep the following tips in mind.

It’s All in the Delivery: Best Practices for Newsletter Writers/Designers

Write for the quick read. Newsletter stories usually are short. It is a “letter with news.” Most articles are between 100 and 600 words. A four-page newsletter generally will contain around 2,000 words.

Write about the right stuff. For example, people like recognition, so use as many names as you can in your newsletter. People like to read about themselves and people they know.

Put the best stories first. Put your best stories on the front page. For interesting stories on inside pages, use bigger headlines, shaded boxes, and other visual elements to draw your readers' attention to these important stories.

Use document design elements effectively. Particularly for newsletters, use these design element suggestions.

- **Text:** A good font size for a newsletter is 10-point for normal text. For headlines, use 18-point and higher. Usually, headlines will be between 20 and 36 points. Choose one typeface for headlines and another for body text. Paragraphs usually are indented about three spaces. Use fonts in bold and italics judiciously. As for justification, the columns of many newsletters use left justified (flush left, ragged right). This eliminates hyphenation. If you choose to use justified spacing, you may want to hyphenate words at the end of lines; otherwise, you create odd spacing between words and letters.
- **Color:** Use color as much as possible. You may only be able to print the newsletter in one color. That is fine. Print one version in one-color ink. You then can make a full-color PDF for electronic distribution.
- **Graphics:** Break up long stretches of text with thin lines. Use shaded boxes for short stories.
- **White space:** Do not crowd the pages with text, graphics, and visuals. Use white space to provide some breathing room, such as by having margins around the edges of the pages.
- **Visuals:** Use photographs and other visuals throughout your newsletter. People like to see photographs that pertain to the newsletter stories. Position photographs so that they guide your readers around the page without getting in the way. Try to make articles flow naturally around, below, or above each photograph. As a rule, do not put a photograph in the first column of a story, directly under the headline. Place the photograph in the second or third column. A photograph also can be put at the bottom of the story. If you use two photographs, possibly place them at opposite corners of a page. For photographs, always use captions. Photographs must be clear and well composed. Action shots are best.

Newsletter Design: What's Your Style?

As with brochures, newsletters come in many styles and forms. If they are sent to professionals, newsletters can have a more formal style and tone. Newsletters may have a more

informal style and tone if they are being sent to organization members.

Newsletters fall into one of three categories: bullet sheet, newsletter, and magaletter. The *bullet sheet newsletter* is usually one sheet of paper, printed front-and-back, and includes short articles of no more than a paragraph or two in length. Meant to be read quickly, the bullet sheet covers vital information. This style works for some electronic newsletters. The *newsletter* is the most common category. It is what we picture when we think of the word "newsletter." It is usually four to eight pages long and includes short articles. The *magaletter* is in-between a full magazine and a newsletter. Usually a magaletter is eight to sixteen pages in length, and the articles tend to be a little longer than a traditional newsletter.

Because most newsletters will fall in the "newsletter category," designing a four- to eight-page newsletter will be the focus of the rest of this section. The number of columns of text usually categorizes newsletters, the most common being one, two, three, or four columns. One-column newsletters are easy to produce. However, because they look like a composition paper for an English class, they appear less imaginative in their layout and design. If you use a one-column format, you must build in sufficient white space on the margins; otherwise, your pages will look crowded.

For a two-column newsletter, individual columns are about four inches wide. Articles can be positioned side by side on some pages. The three-column format probably is the most common and is similar in design to the two-column format. Most 8.5" × 11" newsletters use two columns or three columns. Many tabloid-size newsletters (11-by-17 inches) are designed with three columns or four columns. Use the number of columns that feels right for your publication.

Whichever column format you select, you will need to consider how the content will be presented on the pages. Use the recommendations that follow as you put content in your newsletter.

COVER PAGE

The first page is called the *front page* or *cover page*. The goal of the cover page is to grab readers' attention with attractive visuals (usually photographs), catchy headlines, and creative articles. The two most relevant stories for your readers should be placed on the cover page. The cover page usually contains the newsletter's nameplate, that has the title of the newsletter, and a table of contents or a "teaser box" that shows what articles are covered and what pages they are on.

INSIDE PAGE

The content of the inside pages is left to the discretion of the newsletter editor. Feature stories and news stories can be found throughout the inside pages. You may want to include some of these ideas as regular stories for your newsletter:

- *President's (or executive director's) letter* – a regular letter from the organization's president or executive director that describes something of importance for your organization
- *Announcements* – bits of information the reader may find interesting but are too short for a full article
- *Spotlight sections* – a feature story focusing on a member of the organization
- *Questions and answers* – questions asked by readers and answered by a member of the organization
- *Calendar of events* – usually a list of upcoming events: activities, dates, and times

BACK COVER

For a four-page newsletter, this would be page four. If the newsletter will be mailed, one-half may be kept blank, so mailing address information can be included. The other half of page four may include an eye-catching photograph or an interesting, brief article.

Standard Parts of the Newsletter

In addition to the design elements discussed earlier, any newsletter you design should have the components discussed below.

NAMEPLATE

Also called the *banner* or *flag*, the nameplate is the information at the top of the cover page indicating the newsletter's title, the organization's name, the newsletter's volume and issue number, and the publication date. The publication date could be a month and year (e.g., May 2012) or season of publication (e.g., Spring 2012). The title should be in large letters, across the top of the page. Keep the title as brief as possible. Avoid using "newsletter" in the title.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The table of contents or "teaser box" includes the major sections or articles, with their corresponding page numbers. This section invites the reader in, points the way.

HEADLINES

Headlines briefly communicate the major theme of the story. The goal of a headline is to get the reader to read the story. Headlines should have a subject and a verb, and they are extremely short.

MASTHEAD

The masthead is the place where the names of all who contributed to the newsletter are positioned (reporters, editors, graphic designers, and photographers) so that they get credit for their work. The masthead may provide subscription information or the newsletter's contact information (address, phone number, website, e-mail). The masthead is usually found on page two or three.

Additional Information

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