

# Best Practices in Teaching



*Visual*



*Communication*

**Sponsored by  
The Teaching Committee  
of the Association for Education in Journalism  
and Mass Communication**

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The Renaissance St. Louis Grand Hotel  
St. Louis, Missouri

## Best Practices in Teaching Visual Communication

This booklet contains the winning entries of the 2011 Best Practices in Teaching Visual Communication competition, sponsored by the AEJMC Elected Standing Committee on Teaching for the sixth year.

### Winning entries:

First Place: *The Visual Scavenger Hunt: Connecting Graphic Design Theory with Real-World Visual Communication*, **Tracy Rutledge**, The University of Tennessee at Martin

Second Place: *Visual Communication Rhetoric: Picturing Pop Culture*, **Mary Ann Allison**, Hofstra University

Third Place: *Investigating Art: Using Works of Art In Teaching Visual Communication*, **Nicole Smith Dahmen**, Louisiana State University

Honorable Mention I: *Reaching an 'Other' Through Visual Communication: Developing a Print Ad for Ikea*, **Brian Carroll**, Berry College

Honorable Mention II: *Teaching Writers and Graphic Designers How to Write and Produce Moving Visuals: Collaboration between Advertising Copywriting and Intro to Video Production Courses*. **Sandra L.M. Henry and Todd D. Evans**, Drake University

Honorable Mention III: *Visualizing Information through Infographics & Alternative Story Forms*, **Sheila Webb**, Western Washington University

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### **Best Practices in Teaching Visual Communication**

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[aejmc.com/home/2010/09/best-practices-in-teaching-booklets](http://aejmc.com/home/2010/09/best-practices-in-teaching-booklets)

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## FIRST PLACE

### **The Visual Scavenger Hunt: Connecting Graphic Design Theory with Real-World Visual Communication**

Tracy Rutledge, Tennessee at Martin

**Abstract:** The visual scavenger hunt was a collaborative, interactive activity that challenged students in an introductory visual communication course to connect graphic design theory with real world examples of visual communication. The activity concluded a lecture unit and provided an assessment of student learning. The students received a list of theoretical concepts and were instructed to identify examples of the concepts on campus. Each two-person team used a Flip video camera to complete the activity. The teams had 45 minutes to record examples demonstrating the theoretical concepts including a voice-over explanation of how the concept was implemented in the example.

**Explanation of the Visual Scavenger Hunt Activity:** The visual scavenger hunt is part of the *Principles of Visual Communication* course that includes an introduction to graphic design and visual communication theory. The first four weeks of the course include an intensive study of Gestalt principles, symbols and basic semiotics, color theory, typography, and visual and verbal interaction theory. However, the theory is only useful if students can apply it. Students often have difficulty connecting the textbook theory with practical application of the concepts. The visual scavenger hunt was developed to move students from passively learning the theory to recognizing and implementing the theory in practical applications of visual communication.

Students read assigned material and attended several lectures explaining the theories. The visual scavenger hunt was conducted in one 75-minute class period following the readings and lectures. Each two-person team was given the scavenger hunt list and a Flip video camera to use during the activity. They were instructed to explore campus to identify examples of concepts such as proximity, similarity, repetition, contrast, ground/figure, iconic symbols, indexical symbols, symbolic symbols, the use of color, the use of typography, interactive images, and visual-verbal redundancy. Each example could only be used for one theoretical concept. Students were instructed to capture the example on video and record a voice-over explaining how the concept was implemented. Every item on the list was worth two points—one point for correctly identifying the concept and one point for accurately explaining the implementation. Students had 45 minutes to complete the activity. The remaining 30 minutes of class was used to view the videos and discuss their examples.

**Rationale for the Visual Scavenger Hunt:** The visual scavenger hunt was designed to be

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a collaborative learning activity that allowed students to work together to identify tangible examples of theoretical concepts. This activity was designed not only to assess the students' understanding of graphic design theory but also to provide an interactive learning experience to help students recognize how the theory is used in visual communication. Students were required to not only identify the concept but to also explain the implementation. This approach was used to prevent students from simply guessing the correct answer.

**Outcomes from the Activity:** Prior to incorporating the visual scavenger hunt, a pen-and-paper test was used to assess the students' understanding of the material. The students consistently struggled to name and recognize the concepts on the test. Additionally, students did not apply the theory to their own projects completed later in the course. The visual scavenger hunt had at least two positive outcomes. First, the collaborative nature of the activity encouraged students to discuss and evaluate examples of visual communication. Students had to use critical thinking skills to evaluate visual communication they encountered every day. The activity required them to not just memorize a set of terms but to connect theoretical concepts with practical application. The scores on the unit test were significantly higher than in previous semesters. Second, students applied the theories to their own design projects with more proficiency than in previous semesters. The students indicated that they had a much clearer understanding of how graphic design theory applied to visual communication after completing the scavenger hunt activity. The outcomes suggested students developed a better understanding of graphic design theory and were able to put those theories into action.

**About the Author:** Tracy Rutledge is an assistant professor in the Department of Communications at the University of Tennessee at Martin. She teaches courses in visual communication, web design, advertising design, and public relations. Before teaching full-time, Rutledge managed publication production, public relations, and advertising for universities and non-profit organizations. She continues to consult with various non-profit organizations. Her research focuses on the influence of message design, especially visual elements, on the psychological processes involved in decision-making, corporate image assessment, and reputation management.

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## SECOND PLACE

### Visual Communication Rhetoric: Picturing Pop Culture

Mary Ann Allison, Hofstra University

**Abstract:** For the past three years, students in a *Media and Pop Culture* class have been using visual communication rhetoric to develop critical thinking skills. In this assignment, students assemble images to illustrate 13 concepts which assist them in analyzing popular culture. They practice responding to each other's presentations, honing their abilities to think critically about the communication images ever present in their lives. Qualitative analysis of work completed later in the class indicates that students are able both to apply the concepts appropriately and to make effective visual propositions as a part of more traditional oral and written assignments.

**The Assignment:** At the beginning of the semester, I give short lectures on 13 concepts that we use throughout the semester to analyze various aspects of pop culture. The concepts are: access, change, conflict, consumption, continuity, globalization, identity, ideology, influence, institutional power, media, mythology, and self.

I then assign a *Four Concepts* presentation. Each student creates a PowerPoint file in which he or she illustrates any four of the 13 concepts, without using words, one concept per slide. The illustrations are typically a collage. Each image slide is followed by a slide naming the concept being illustrated. The end of the PowerPoint file includes appropriate citations.

When a student presents, he or she displays each image and remains silent while the class studies it and guesses which concept is being illustrated. This can be a rich discussion and helps the students tease out definitions and relevant applications of each idea. After some discussion, the presenter labels the concept illustrated and provides insight into the process used during image selection.

**Rationale:** Because we are immersed in screens (computer screens, TV screens, mobile screens), we are moving from a text- and print-based culture to an image-based culture in which text is secondary. Students read less in traditional formats and more in images, illustrations, photographs, and video.

An historical perspective makes it clear that our immersion in the world of networked media and communication tools will change our thinking and communication strategies. Short of apocalyptic disasters or completely repressive governments, there's almost no chance that, in the coming years, most humans will go "back" to long-form reading. It isn't that we can't do long-form reading, it is just we won't do it often. People can memorize and recite long-form verse or use cathedral-style memory structures, but very few of us do.

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As society moves from medium- and long-form text to audio and visual media (along with short-form text), some of us—especially those of us who teach—worry about the effects of this transition. Will society be endangered if the critical thinking skills fostered by disciplined writing and reading are lost? Nicholas Carr is one of several prominent social intellectuals to address this concern with his recent book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*.

In raising this concern, Carr joins a long list of distinguished figures who, throughout human history, have forecast societal doom as a result of the introduction of new communication media. Our record of this pessimism begins, ironically, when Plato put words in Socrates' mouth about the dangers of writing *in writing*. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato "quotes" Socrates as saying about the newest communication technology, writing: "[It] destroys memory [and] weakens the mind, relieving it of...work that makes it strong. [It] is an inhuman thing." Others, in their turn, have been afraid that printing, radio, TV, or email, among other new media, would harm society. But we are a social species and almost nothing stops the spread of new media. Only crushing dictatorial power—in ancient China or modern North Korea, as examples—leads to the effective suppression of new communication technology.

I believe it is, therefore, incumbent on those of us who teach to experiment with new ways of teaching critical thinking. This assignment takes places in a *Media and Pop Culture* class. The course examines the relationships of the media, mass culture, and mass society. Among the topics covered in the class are theories of media, theories of popular culture, and distinctions between "high" and "low" culture.

**Outcomes:** Students like the assignment and often request other assignments in similar format. Their understanding of the 13 concepts for thinking critically about pop culture—as demonstrated in class discussion—improves dramatically during the week of presentations.

The students—who are not visual communication students—develop an idea of visual rhetoric and experiment with conveying meaning and arguments through images. Almost all of the presentations to date have been effective. Some are breathtakingly nuanced, for example distinguishing between self and identity. Others present compelling visual arguments in the areas of consumption, institutional power, and ideology.

In addition to practice in analyzing and applying concepts, the exercise provides me with a platform to lead a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of various media for expressing ideas and emotions. We talk about the differences between analogical and symbolic communication. The students develop a rich and practical understanding of this distinction.

With varying sophistication, students remain effective in applying these concepts throughout the semester in other, more traditional assignments. They develop a regular practice of applying these concepts to enrich their understanding of how pop cul-

ture affects their daily lives. This practice is demonstrated and reinforced in the class “openers”—used at the beginning of most class sessions—in which each student applies concepts and/or theory to an element of pop culture he or she recently observed.

Examples of student work are best viewed in color and will be available online by August 2011. Contact the author for the link location.

**About the Author:** Mary Ann Allison, teaches media studies at in the School of Communication at Hofstra University. She uses media theory, sociology, and complex systems theory to study the ways in which individuals, communities, and institutions are changing. Allison’s study of social change won the Harold A. Innis Award for Outstanding Dissertation in the field of Media Ecology. In addition to publishing numerous papers, articles, and a monthly magazine column, she has coauthored two business books and a murder mystery. Before joining Hofstra, she led worldwide emerging technology projects at Citibank. She is listed in *Who’s Who in America* and *Who’s Who in American Women* and is a New York City artist in residence for poetry.

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## THIRD PLACE

### Investigating Art: Using Works of Art In Teaching Visual Communication

Nicole Smith Dahmen, Louisiana State University

**Abstract:** This visual communication project integrates research, writing, and design skills to investigate a work of art. In addition, the project provides the opportunity for visual communication students to learn about one of the earliest forms of visual communication—traditional works of art. The project allows for creativity, but also ensures that students can apply basic design principles. The deliverable for the project is a publicity flyer, but the project could also be adapted for use as web or multimedia project.

**Explanation:** This project provides the opportunity for visual communication students to learn about one of the earliest forms of visual communication—traditional works of art. Students will use critical thinking skills to investigate a work of art and applied skills to design a related layout.

**Part 1:** To begin the project, students select an image of a work of art. The selection could be done in a number of ways; previously, I have spread a large collection of post-card sized images of works of art on a table and let students select an image that they find appealing. Students are then instructed to spend five minutes just *looking* at all aspects of the image. After five minutes have passed, students are instructed to spend 10 minutes engaged in free form *writing* about the work of art. Students can write whatever they want as long as it is about the work of art. The free form writing is not collected.

**Part 2:** Students are then instructed to spend time outside of class conducting research on the work of art. The research could involve the work's history, composition, or medium. Additionally, students should conduct research about the artist. After the research is completed, students are instructed to write a 100-300 word commentary about the work of art. Students may choose to write on any aspect related to the work of art or artist.

**Part 3:** The final part of the project requires students to create a one-page layout of their art investigation. The layout should be completed in a program such as Adobe InDesign. The layout should incorporate the student's written piece, an image of the work of art and related curatorial information (name of work of art, artist's name, medium, and date). Design elements may also be included. The design is at the discretion of the student, but it should *reflect* the aesthetics of the work of art and the artist. Additionally, the student should consider design and typography principles in developing the layout.

**Rationale:** The project is unique in that it requires students to incorporate research, writing, and design skills to develop a creative and accurate written and visual assessment of a work of art. The project allows for creativity, but also ensures that students can apply basic design principles. It is also unique in that it integrates traditional art works into the visual communication classroom, and thereby uses art to teach visual communication.

**Outcomes:** The deliverable for the project is a publicity flyer. The flyer must be a creative, yet accurate, promotion of the work of art. The design of the flyer must reflect the aesthetics of the art work and artist. The flyer makes a unique and attractive portfolio piece. The project could also be adapted for use as web or multimedia project. I have been teaching this project for several years, and students have done exceptional work on the project. Select examples follow:

**Examples:**



**About the Author:** Nicole Smith Dahmen is an assistant professor at the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University. She is the school's visual communication coordinator and the school's webmaster. Her research focuses on ethical and technological issues in visual communication. Dahmen also has a special interest in science communication, which was the focus of her dissertation. As a graduate

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student, she won three top student paper awards at the AEJMC National Convention, one of which was the Eason Prize in the Science Communication Interest Group for her work on media framing of stem cell research. Dahmen's research has been published in such leading journals as *Visual Communication Quarterly*, *Newspaper Research Journal*, and *Journalism Studies*.

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## HONORABLE MENTION I

### Reaching an 'Other' Through Visual Communication: Developing a Print Ad for Ikea

Brian Carroll, Berry College

**Abstract:** In lieu of a traditional midterm exam, students in my Visual Rhetoric course are asked to develop a print magazine ad for home furnishings retailer Ikea that targets or attempts to appeal to U.S. Muslims. The point isn't expertise with design software, but rather the thinking behind the decisions they make. In working on their messages, I want them also to wrestle with stereotype, with notions of "Otherness," with conceptions of "America," and with ethics in advertising, all while putting into practice the rhetorical strategies specific to visual media that we have been discussing and learning, especially symbolic meaning.

**Explanation of Teaching Practice or Activity:** The students are asked to design, however crudely, a one- or two-page print magazine ad (or spread) for Ikea that targets or otherwise attempts to appeal to U.S. Muslims. The visual exquisiteness of their designs, of their ads, is not the point. They can use whatever software they are comfortable with, or none at all, in order to communicate their messages. I make it clear that I will be grading the ideas, the conceptual behind the ad, what is being communicated, and not their proficiency with, for example, Illustrator or InDesign.

The students get to choose the product or item, as well as basically to make all of the aesthetic choices, such as whether the ad is seasonal or not, whether it is tied to an event or holiday, the typography, the dominant visual, color schemes, the ad copy, and even whether there is any ad copy. They are instructed to imagine their ads as appearing in in-flight magazines, such as Delta's Sky or United's Hemisphere so that they are thinking about a national audience.

The students are strongly encouraged to work in groups, and I emphasize that this type of project is almost always done in the "real world" in or by creative teams. Collaborative work can be a challenge, but I have found that the fun they have with the project mitigates the problems often associated with group work, such as what to do about the freeloader or how to handle interpersonal tiffs.

Each group submits a finished mock-up; any elaboration I might need to understand what is signified (such as, identifiers of color if the ad is penciled, or just what the dominant visual is supposed to be); and narrative rationales covering the six specific grading criteria described below.

**Rationale:** In designing an ad that attempts to engage U.S. Muslims, the students are

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actually being asked to think about diversity, about stereotype in media, and about ethics in communication. These are my higher level goals. I don't use the word "diversity" in the assignment, or any of our assignments. Rather, we use racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse examples, artifacts and case studies throughout the course. This is an attempt at diversity integrated throughout the curriculum rather than as a chapter or module add-on at the end of the semester. This midterm project is a centerpiece of that ongoing effort.

Prior to this project, we have discussed stereotype in media, including news coverage, advertising and, more generally, in popular culture. For one of our flash polls — a quick question, two minutes to furiously write down a response, then a brief discussion — I ask them to write about a time when they were 'The Other,' when they didn't fit in or were actively excluded. It's a safe way to begin a discussion about "Otherness" and stereotype. This project continues and expands that discussion.

Another motivation behind this project is to integrate a discussion about ethics into what we do all semester long. Given the potential power of mass media and of sophisticated advertising messages, we should be thinking about and putting into practice some of the approaches to ethics we've discussed, such as the Golden Mean or veil of ignorance. What does it look like in advertising home furnishings to, for example, treat no one class of people as entitled or as disadvantaged?

Also implicit in this project is learning the limitations of relying on Google for research on a people group the students know little about. (My cohorts are fairly homogenous, mostly white middle-class.) I ask them whether they could learn about a people group using only the Hubble telescope? They have to go into the inner sanctum, they have to care, they have to be curious, compassionate, vital, and alive, and they have to listen. I tell them they won't regret it!

My grading criteria, adapted from Paul Lester's *Visual Communication*:

- **Personal** (Does the ad work? Is it or would it be effective? Will it sell chairs or beds, or whatever it is the ad is designed to sell? What does the ad denote? Connote? What story does it tell?);
- **Historical** (Does the ad consider or take into account contemporary events and sensitivities, like 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Does the ad respect the long and rich history of Islam globally? Does the ad adopt or leverage a specific style popular in print advertising, such as cigarette advertising in the 1930s or Apple's i-series popular now?);
- **Cultural** (How salient is the ad to U.S. Muslim populations? In other words, does it speak uniquely to U.S. Muslims compared to anyone else, everyone else?);
- **Critical** (What is present at a semiotic level? What symbols are used, and to what effect? Which symbols are avoided or absent? How much thought went into the ad's symbolism or semiotic meaning?);
- **Technical** (This is a print ad, and any medium is an intrinsic part of the message. How does the ad acknowledge the message that is part of any print ad as opposed to TV or Web? How effective is the typography? The dominant visual? Color? Light?);

- **Ethical** (Does the ad avoid stereotype? Does it demonstrate sensitivity, cultural knowledge, care and respect for the audience? Does it treat everyone the same but acknowledge their uniqueness? Does the ad take a Golden Mean? Does the ad pass the “veil of ignorance”?)

**Outcomes:** After I have graded their work, we have a day of presentations. I first show them “Selling to Islam,” a video short produced by the *New York Times* that describes just how Ikea is in fact tailoring its message to U.S. Muslims, focusing on a Pakistani Muslim community in Michigan (<http://video.nytimes.com/video/2007/04/27/business/1194817100782/sellingto-islam.html>). We then go through the presentations, breaking down their decisions and, importantly, the ethical considerations behind their decisions. Why a group eschewed the sickle and star, for example, or opted for a mostly bright green and white color scheme with no geometric shapes. Why one group chose to use Arabic and another did not.

It’s my hope that among the outcomes are for the students to gain a better understanding of how images and their viewers make and communicate meaning; of the different modes of responding to visuality, or the practices of seeing or looking; of how cultural influences determine the type of visual messages used and how they are interpreted; of the importance of developing an ethics of and for producing visual messages; and of how cultural influences can determine the types of that are messages created and how those messages are interpreted. I also hope they better appreciate the size of the vocabulary of insults.

**About the Author:** Brian Carroll is an associate professor of journalism and director of the Honors Program at Berry College in Mount Berry, Ga. He teaches in the areas of journalism, media law, visual rhetoric and digital media. He earned his Ph.D. from the UNC Chapel Hill in the School of Journalism & Mass Communication and his master’s in political science and public affairs from UNC Greensboro. Carroll also is an adjunct professor at UNC Chapel Hill, teaching the online master’s course, *Writing for Digital Media*. His research interests include communication technology; law and policy; media convergence; online community; and the black press and the integration of professional baseball. He is author of the books *When to Stop the Cheering?* (Routledge, 2007) and *Writing for Digital Media* (Routledge, 2011).

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## HONORABLE MENTION II

### **Teaching Writers and Graphic Designers How to Write and Produce Moving Visuals: Collaboration between Advertising Copywriting and Intro to Video Production Courses**

Sandra L.M. Henry and Todd D. Evans, Drake University

**Abstract:** This assignment follows the creation of a web video from concept-to-completion. Given at the mid-point of the semester, this project requires advertising students who typically work with static images to write and produce video scripts in a situation mimicking the traditional advertiser-vendor relationship. Students learn the basic concepts of videography and editing through collaboration with video production students, seeing first-hand how the process of visual storytelling differs between static and moving media.

**Explanation:** This is a four-week assignment beginning approximately 6 weeks into the semester and involves collaboration between two professors and two classes: Advertising Copywriting and Intro to Video Production. At this point of the semester, the advertising copywriting students have a good understanding of the principles of strategic copywriting, while their counterparts in video production have a strong background in pre-production, shot composition, visual sequencing, and audio techniques. Advertising copywriting students develop a creative strategy for a real client chosen by the professor, then write a :30-:60 web video fitting the chosen strategy. After receiving feedback from the advertising professor, copywriters are paired with video producers from the Intro to Video Production class. As a team, the students analyze the script for appropriate details, such as shot selection, video sequencing and audio elements. They also evaluate the feasibility of the script, making adjustments where necessary. Scripts are rewritten and submitted to their respective faculty members for feedback. After receiving a second round of feedback from the advertising and production professors, the teams make final revisions and work together to develop a shot list, locate props and talent, and scout locations. Video production students take the lead, but advertising students are actively involved in supervising the videography and editing of the final video.

**Rationale:** This project is designed to expand the knowledge base of advertising students. Traditionally, these students study graphic design and photography, but are not always exposed to the techniques of video production. With the rapid adoption of web video (both paid and unpaid placement), students must have at minimum an understanding of the process. This project provides that opportunity, without increasing their required course load. Additionally, this project encourages students to develop mental flexibility. They are challenged to think outside of their usual constructs, not only in the initial writing of the script, but then again when they analyze the script from a produc-

er's point of view and produce the spot. This allows students to develop confidence in their ability to adapt their skills to evolving media, something history shows us is happening at an ever-increasing pace. Video production students gain the opportunity to reinforce the skills they have learned not only through direct practice, but also by explaining these skills to the advertising students.

**Outcomes:** This project provides two primary outcomes for the advertising students: an understanding of the thought process that must be used when writing for media employing moving visuals, and an understanding of the video production process itself. Additionally, both the advertising students and the production students develop an understanding of the collaborative nature of strategic visual communication. They witness first-hand how people with different types of expertise must come together to create a project, and they quickly realize that this type of collaboration happens most effectively when team members have an understanding of both sides of the creative process.

**About the Authors:** Sandra L.M. Henry brought 20 years of experience in advertising and visual communication to Drake's faculty in 2007. She shares that experience in the classroom, teaching print design, multimedia production, advertising copywriting and creative strategies. She is also an Apple Certified Trainer in Final Cut Pro and advises the Drake chapter of the American Advertising Federation. Her primary research interest lies in advertising and sport, having recently published a chapter in the Edwin Mellen Press book, *Why Do People Run? Competitive Sport, Daily Exercise or Community Event*.

Todd Evans has taught every course offered in the Radio/TV curriculum since arriving at Drake University in 1984. He also teaches popular music and culture, including seminars on the Lives and Times of Rock and Roll, The Sixties, and The Beatles. His research interests include digital audio for video production and post production, and new media for distributed learning. He is professionally active in both audio and video production, and his work has been recognized by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education and the Broadcast Education Association.

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## HONORABLE MENTION III

### Visualizing Information through Infographics & Alternative Story Forms

Sheila Webb, Western Washington University

**Abstract:** ASF is one of the fastest growing fields in communication. It is estimated that more than 1 trillion single pieces of infographics are published annually throughout the world. The reason: The media is responding to the demands on people's time and to the move to the Web, a platform which favors less text and more summary. Poynter Institute studies show that ASF provide the primary entry points to pages or websites, thus attracting readers. ASF can explain things visually that may be too tedious for words or incomplete using photographs alone. As our field moves more and more online, giving journalism students mastery of ASF is critical. One of five projects in an Intro to Visual Journalism class, this assignment is an examination of how to interpret photos; of the relationship among formal elements; of technical considerations; of interpretation and meaning; of typography; and of layout. Essential components: consideration of audience and the challenge of representing information from a selected text in graphic form.

**Explanation:** For this assignment, we begin with a lecture that asserts the importance of mastering the skill of visualizing information. We cover the history of infographics, note pioneers in the field, and make the case for the increasing importance of ASF in the contemporary news climate. Two essential references are the work of Edward Tufte and the EyeTrack studies of the Poynter Institute, which found that "Alternative story forms drew a higher amount of visual attention, compared to regular text in print." So they can explore their options, students conduct a "treasure hunt" – they find the 18 types of infographics outlined in Tim Harrower's *The Newspaper Designer's Handbook* from various news sources.

**Objective:** Students create a story package that illustrates a story provided by the professor, usually one with an accompanying study. The ASF should summarize / represent visually the material in the article and other sources students identify. Students may use whichever software they are most comfortable with – Illustrator, InDesign, or Photoshop. Required elements include title, subtitle, photo, captions, credits, pull quote, and at least one infographic. They are rewarded if they consider an infographic that provides interactivity, such as a poll or a quiz.

**Procedure:** Students are asked to read the article and study it carefully. To ascertain the best way to present material, they have 18 types of infographics to consider, all of which they found in the infographic treasure hunt. They fill out a Maestro Form, which helps them formulate an idea, and it also serves as an explanation of their creative

process. They do not need to include all of the numbers used in the story. I ask them to think of the graphics as complements to the story.

**Rationale:** ASF explain complex stories in unique ways. They satisfy journalism’s mission: to educate readers and viewers. Edward Tufte, the guru of the form, wrote: “Graphical excellence is that which gives to the viewer the greatest number of ideas in the shortest time, with the least amount of ink in the smallest amount of space.” His ideal infographic: “overly researched, clearly illustrated, concisely written, and inherently relevant to readers’ lives.”

Whether they seek jobs in print, Web, or broadcast, or whether they create the images or not, students need to be aware of the various kinds of ASF so they can collaborate with designers or produce them themselves. This assignment is designed to give them the chance to work creatively by carefully reading and prioritizing complex material and then representing it visually. As they move into their careers, they will find this helps them deal with that workplace demand and gives them a portfolio piece.

### **GRADING CRITERIA**

#### **Overall Design:**

- Does the design fit the goals of the assignment?
- Are the type, art, and overall design fitting to the venue and audience – a news magazine for the general reader?
- Did the student follow a clear hierarchy – type, placement, images?

#### **Type Treatment:**

- Did the student use size, weight, structure, form, direction, and color well?
- Did the student pay attention to kerning, spacing, and leading?

#### **Graphic Treatment:**

- Did the student choose the most appropriate format to represent the most important material?
- Do(es) the graphic(s) draw the reader into the story? Summarize(s) critical information well?

#### **Content Treatment:**

- Do the titles, captions, pull quotes, etc., accurately reflect the information?
- Did the student provide visuals that enhance the content?
- Did the student credit all information?
- Did the student do additional reporting to enhance the content?

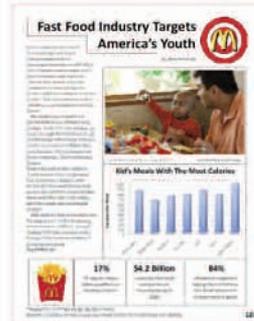
**Outcomes:** Each student produces an ASF on an “8 x 11” page. Based on the above criteria, in critique, we provide kudos and suggestions for improvement. Students then have the opportunity to produce a refined iteration. The project is challenging, as it requires journalism students to bring together writing, design, and interpretive skills. Because they all work on the same story, they are able to see more and less successful ways to handle the same material, which is a great learning tool. Their final project in this class is a website, and they apply this assignment to interactive materials in that platform as well. Thus, this assignment provides a primary project in our Visual Journalism Sequence.

## 18 | Best Practices in Teaching Visual Communication

**Examples:** In the following examples of ASF, students worked from an article by Kelly Brownell, “Are Children Prey for Fast Food Companies?,” from *The Atlantic Monthly*, Nov. 8, 2010, which was accompanied by a study from the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity.



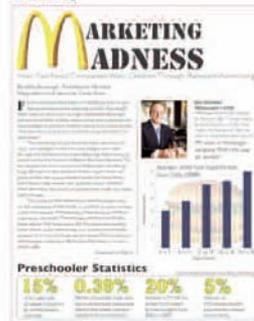
Ben Woodard



Shea Taisey



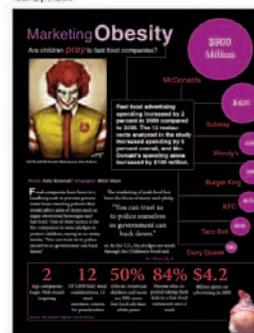
Sars Richardson



Carey Rose



Jen Sawyer



Mitch Olsen

Sheila Webb would like to thank her students Ben Woodard, Shea Taisey, Jen Sawyer, Carey Rose, Sars Richardson, and Mitch Olsen for sharing their work.

**About the Author:** Sheila Webb is an assistant professor in the Department of

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