

DESIGN ... IN FOUR-LETTER WORDS

When we hear the phrase “four-letter words,” most of us call to mind words that are considered impolite or improper. That’s not always the case. In fact, there are many proper four-letter words that apply to graphic design. And these four-letter words deserve a special place on the designer’s desk. Or pinned to her wall. Or taped to his computer screen.

Path

Develop a design philosophy that clearly spells out your design goals.

Plan

A design that is unplanned is not a design. It is untutored experimentation. It is frivolous. Planning is the cornerstone of sound design because planning must occur for design to effect and reflect content.

Design must be part of the plan. A good idea for a story becomes a better idea when design is part of the plan for presenting the story. When content and design are linked, they achieve a force that propels the story. Planning doesn’t take time; it creates time. And time is the one element all newspapers—regardless of size, staffing and resources—possess in precisely the same amount. A solid plan helps us to prepare for those events we know occur on a regular basis. Christmas, for example, should never catch us by surprise.

Work

Even the best of plans will not create good design unless there is follow-through. Give the details the attention they deserve and avoid shortcuts that undercut.

Risk

Make your design take some chances. Search for ways to say something new in print—or you will surely say the same thing over and over again.

Allow yourself the courage to fail — or you will surely never allow yourself the courage to succeed.

Stop

Know when you have done enough with your design and avoid the temptation to add more elements.

Less is more. Simple is best.

Talk

We design to communicate. But we cannot communicate without design—and we cannot design without communicating with other members of our team.

Deal

Understand and use the art of compromise to achieve the best results for your reader. Be ready to accept the ideas of others—those ideas may just be better than yours.

Sell

Be prepared to convince others that your idea can work—for them and for readers..

Love

Do it for the love of it—or do something else.