Title entry: Building Blocks Business Card: Coaching Students in Simple, Effective Design Strategies

The teaching philosophy:

Chip Scanlan of the Poynter Institute says as an editor he approaches coaching journalists first with the question of, "How can I help?" Then he listens to the answer. He calls this style, "The Coaching Way." This is followed with open-ended questions throughout the writing process and a back and forth between editor/journalist (or teacher/student) that requires participation from both parties.

This is the guiding philosophy for the Introduction to Media Writing & Storytelling class. I was a student in this class in the late 1990s, and then I taught it as an adjunct from 2004-2005, and returned to teach it again as a full-time faculty member at my alma mater since 2013.

In addition to journalism writing, I have also taught media design courses off and on since 2005. I soon learned that applying "The Coaching Way" to *design projects* works just as well as it does for *written work*, especially when you have a class full of students starting at different levels of skill and experiences, ranging from "I have never opened InDesign," to "I do this stuff daily for my job."

The idea: To utilize "The Coaching Way" strategies more commonly implemented in media writing classes to coach students in a design class, at varying levels of competence, in a business card design project in the early stages of the course. Most recently I used this strategy in fall 2018 for a 1-hour special course I designed and offered to our graduate students in Gaylord College of Journalism & Mass Communication, called Graphic Design for Media Storytelling & Promotion.

The goals: For beginners: introduce and use basic InDesign tools. For intermediate: showcase use of InDesign skill within defined perimeters. For all: create a personal business card while considering these seven elements in the design: *dominance, balance, hierarchy, unity, color, space and gestalt.*

The assignment: The Building Blocks Business Card

Step 1: I begin with lectures and examples introducing students to the seven design elements previously mentioned. This is usually the first assignment. It's a small design project, not likely to overwhelm a beginning designer.

Step 2: To begin the project, they open an InDesign document I have set up for them, which looks like this:
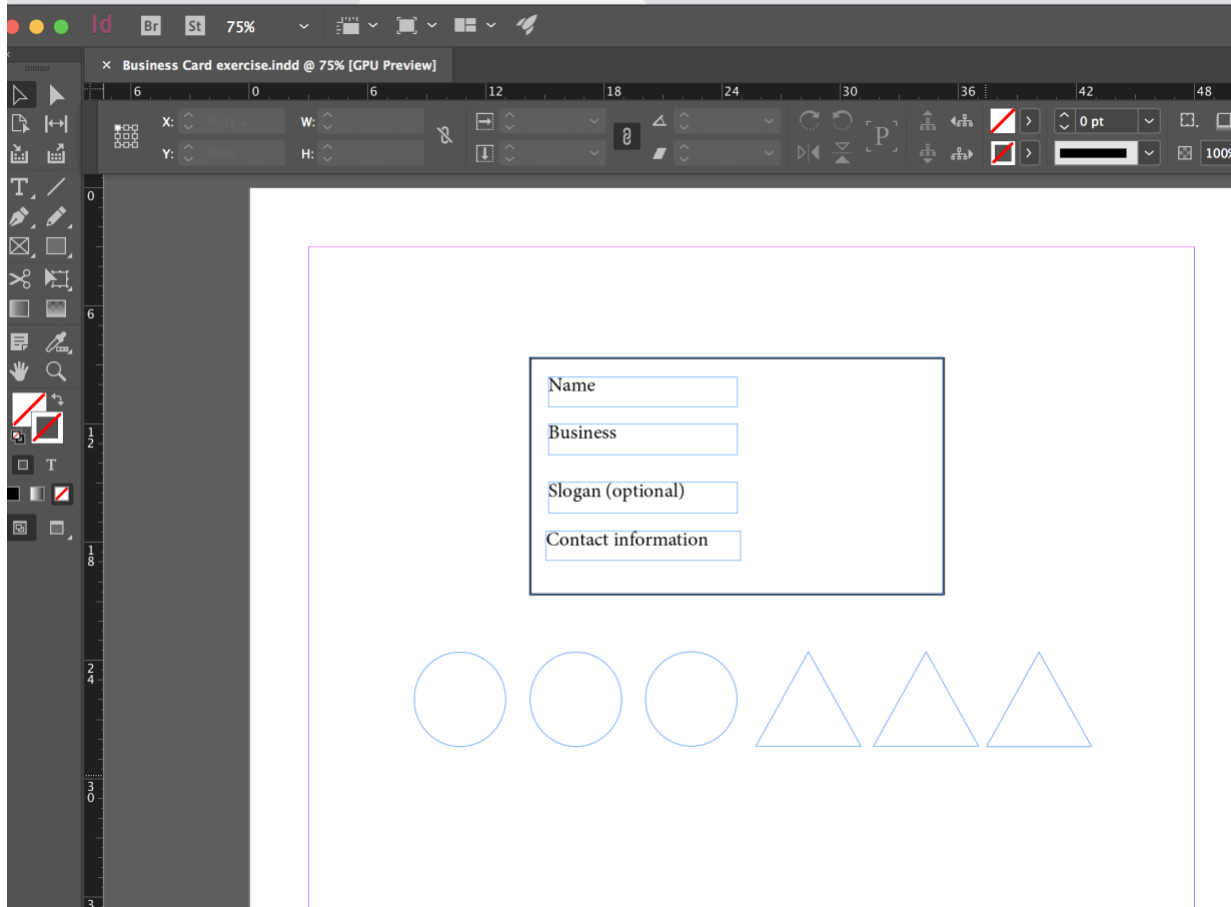
Step 3: I explain that they will design a business card with the text information they see in the document: name, business, slogan (optional) and contact information. And for the design elements, they may only use the shapes they see in front of them. They can, however, use any fonts and colors of their choosing, and they can distort and change the shapes in any way they see fit. They must use at least one circle or one triangle. They can delete extra shapes, but they cannot add any more.

Step 4: Students start working. For those who need more introductory software help, I get them in a group and show them how to use the basic tools to move objects, add and change text, change the size or color of objects and text, etc. For all students, I begin immediately with "The Coaching Way" tactics. I circle the classroom and start by asking them how I can help. For some, their first response might be about the software, and for others who know design well, it might be about utilizing tertiary colors. It's usually all over the place to start, and that is fine. People approach design in different ways.

Step 5: Once they have something partially designed, I can delve deeper into coaching. And just like when coaching writers, I ask the design students open-ended questions to get them thinking and participating in their own work and revisions, not just awaiting my instruction. For this assignment I might ask: What colors strike you and why? What are you trying to convey with your font choice? What do you think is holding you up at this point? What do you like/not like

about what you have so far?

Step 6: They finish the first draft, and I sit down one on one with them to discuss it. I have them tell me what they like or maybe don't like about the first draft. I ask them what was simple, and what was more of a challenge. We use a rubric that includes the seven elements of design from the first lectures, and I have them explain to me how they considered each element. They do most of the talking in this meeting. When they finish, I point out any inconsistencies in their understanding or use of the design elements and add any other advice I might have for revision for the final draft.

Student reactions/outcomes: Most recently, in the design class for the graduate students, there was quite the range in skill level coming in. It was not a graduate-level class for design majors, but a media design class for various tracks of graduate students. This assignment allowed for those who had little or no design experience to begin experimenting with the program and concepts in a basic way, but also allowed those with more experience to take the basic perimeters and stretch their creativity within the confines of the instructions. Below are three examples of the outcome of the students' work, the first being new to design upon entering the course, and the final two with quite a bit of skill beforehand.

Jensen Armstrong

Public Relations, Strategic Communication BMA
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jensen.armstrong@ou.edu
(940) 337-8502

Note: No outline on actual card; full bleed instead

Ludwig Dischner

Graphic Designer

ludwigdesign@ou.edu