The Process of Designing a Magazine Article

A step-by-step visual essay.

By P. Kachu

When staring at the blank slate of a document that you need to start designing, it can be intimidating to know where to begin. Follow this guide the next time you need some creative direction!

A white text on a black background

Description automatically generatedA close up of a text

Description automatically generated

1. Read the article, understand what it is about and the overall tone of it – is it satirical? Serious? Playful? These are important as it will determine how your design will turn out.
   1. In the Bewitched article, there is a relatively serious tone as it is a sincere review of the songs
   2. The acrylic nails for newbies is more playful, and lighthearted, though it is also straightforward as it is more of a “how to”

A couple of women walking on a grassy field

Description automatically generated

1. If you didn’t write the article yourself, talk to your author: they may have ideas or certain photos they would like to have displayed in the design
   1. For the nail art article, I asked the author if there were any specific images (of their art or otherwise) that they wanted pictured. They didn’t give anything specific, but I did scower their Instagram to understand the kind of art that they produced

A collage of hands with painted nails

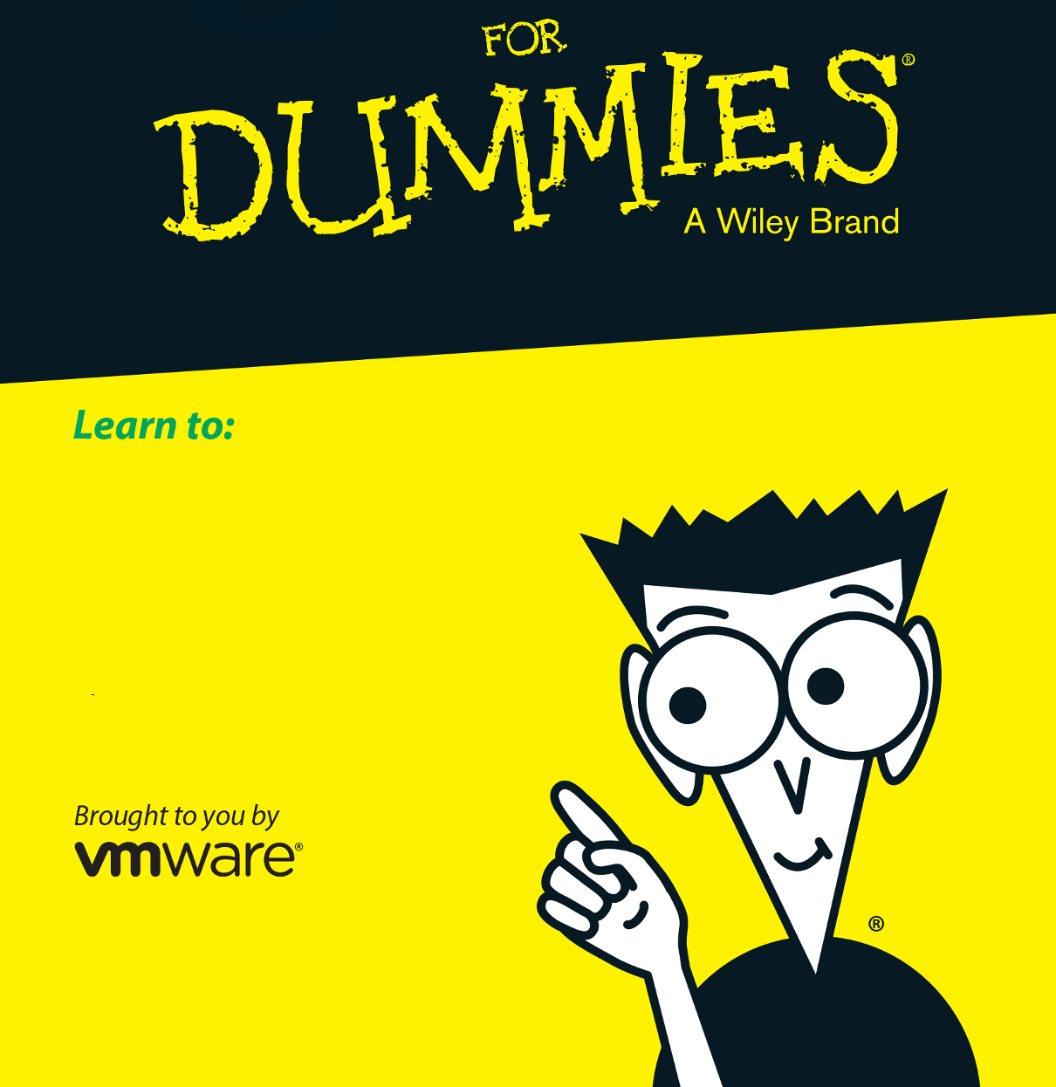
Description automatically generated

1. Google, pinterest, and search everywhere for topics related to your article. This can help develop ideas of formatting, color schemes, and more.
   1. For the laufey article, I made sure to look up a lot of content related to the album and the artist. There was one album in particular, bewitched (spooky edition) that I absolutely adored the design for. It was simplistic and elegant, much like the written article was.
   2. For the nail art, I really tried hard to find licensed imagery of nails and products related to the reading and the author’s style. I found one pair of hands/nail sets on adobe stock and pictured a really basic yet effective design for it.

A screenshot of a computer

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A close up of hands with long nails

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1. FONTS!!! Fonts are *extremely* important when it comes to designing an article, because it is the thing you will actually be reading. You have to make sure that while the font should be eye-catching, entertaining, or match the vibe of the rest of the design, that it is LEGIBLE.
   1. Lets look at Bewitched again. I knew (based on my googling) that I wanted to have very similar fonts to the one shown on the album cover. It takes some digging and research, but I eventually found two fonts on Canva that matched the originals pretty well. However, it is important to keep in mind that these fonts are what I would classify as “display” fonts. Theyre great for titles, headings, and anything you need to stand out, but they’re a no-go for the actual paragraphs. So, I decided to find one more font to add to the design; something sans-serif because I felt that a serif might clash with the rest of the vibe. Sometimes, you just need to go with your gut. I chose Rugrats Sans, because it is very legible, but slightly rounded and soft which adds to the lovey tone of the songs and album I was reviewing. Stick to 3 fonts MAX! If you have too many fonts, your eyes will notice. Oftentimes the design will just look busy and quite ugly if there are too many fonts used. To get around this and provide variation, utilizing bolds and italics are a great way to maintain consistency while breaking up the design. For example, for the song title headings, I used the same font as I did for “bewitched”, but slanted it to keep it different from the title and the un-italicized paragraph fonts.
   2. For the acrylic nails, I struggled a bit. I couldn’t quite figure out what would fit the theme – all I knew is that I wanted the “for newbies” part to look handwritten and childish to mimic the iconic “for dummies” book series. As I scrolled through fonts and mulled it over, I had the idea to make the “acrylic nails” almost look like a neon sign one would see outside a store front. So, I took a thick, rounded, serif font and put a neon effect behind it. I felt that the juxtaposition between the two title fonts would also enhance the playful feel of the article. For the paragraph font, I wanted something similar to the bewitched one to keep it clear and modern, so I went with Red Hat Display.
2. Color scheme. Much like fonts, you want to limit your color palette to avoid distractions and overwhelming your reader. Finding a color palette on websites such as Coolors.co or perhaps taking colors from a specific image you want to use can help to unify your design.
   1. With bewitched, I knew that I wanted to take the colors from her album and incorporate it into the design. So, I found a dark, somewhat desaturated indigo and a light, creamy yellow. Because I still needed at least one another color to stand out against both of these, I chose a bright lilac (which I utilized throughout the headings). I chose white for my body text for legibility, though the creamy yellow could have been an option too.
   2. For the how to, I previously mentioned that I found an image of a pair of hands that I really wanted to use. To have the rest of the design flow, I color-picked from the image to obtain soft pinks for the background, title, and stars in the back. Once again, I chose to incorporate white (and also black) for the text itself to enhance visibility.
3. Added details. Details and extras can make or break an article design. Sometimes articles are begging to be extremely minimalist, while others desperately need a little push towards glamour. Once again, assessing the written content of your piece, the colors and fonts, and more can help decide how over-the-top the article should be. This is also dependent upon whether you are designing just one article, or for a whole magazine that needs to be unified.
   1. For the laufey article, everything just felt very flat to me once the colors were in. I knew that I wanted to add the artists’ image into the design as well, however I had to be smart about spacing and font size to make sure that it would all fit within a reasonable number of pages. The first thing I did was make the background subtly space-themed, with a slight gradient and sparkling stars. It went perfectly with the moon (and the theme of our magazine, moonstruck), and it wasn’t *too* much to where it would distract the reader. I also added in some images of the artist like aforementioned, and dawned her with a yellow border to make her stand out and really glow. The last thing I decided to do was add a very subtle grain to the background and the additions. It added just the touch of dimension I was looking for, and made the article feel just a bit more retro (as many of the artists’ songs reference jazz, something started in the early 1900s).
   2. For the nail article, it also felt a little flat, so I wanted to find something close to glitter to potentially put in the background. I believed that glitter can definitely be related to nail art, and so the glitter would be a nice subtle touch to the background. However, I couldn’t find any glitter png that I thought would work, as it was all very realistic and I preferred something less “in your face.” I eventually found a png of tiny stars that I thought could be representative of glitter but more approachable and simple to match the “for newbies” theme. I colored them pink to make sure they blended in with the background and weren’t too distracting. The second page also felt pretty boring because it was so basic, and I had loved the dramatic hand in the first page. However, I was short on space because the text filled up most of the page, so I needed something small to fit. I had the idea of adding tiny polish swatch along with an open nail polish bottle. Originally I wanted the bottle to be spilling and creating the swatch, but that proved to be too much work. In the end, I just put them side-by-side, and added the nail polish brush to the top as if it were about to drip into the article. After everything was said and done, the design did feel a little youthful, but I think that because the target audience is for beginners, it hits the nail on the head.

Some extra notes:

* Adobe Stock and the free Canva gallery are great resources for finding elements related to your design
* When it comes to fonts and font sizes, make sure to pay attention to