



Memorandum



To: Dr. Karen Kuralt
 From: Rhonda L. Thomas
 Date: July 2, 2018
 Subject: **Portfolio -> Design Project 2 -> Thin Air Newsletter Redesign**

Dr. Kuralt,

You asked that I submit a design portfolio consisting of four design projects. As requested, I submit to you my final design for project 2 of 4 – Thin Air Newsletter Redesign. This memorandum explains my design process. I have included two alternative drafts for your consideration.

I would appreciate any feedback you can offer. Please contact me if you have any questions. You can reach me by email at rlthomas@ualr.edu.

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Introduction and purpose [\[↑\]](#)

This document is the first edition of a monthly newsletter for members of a student mountain club. Its purpose is to keep group members informed of club activities, upcoming events, and other topics of interest.

Description of the users/readers [\[↑\]](#)

The primary readers of this document are students; however, many outdoor enthusiasts may find it interesting. Students will be between the ages of 18 and 25 and have an academic background and probably some experience navigating the natural environment.

Description of the employer/client [\[↑\]](#)

The primary client is the president of the Student Mountain Club, Chris Jones. Jones will most likely have an academic background. He is possibly between the age of 30 – 35. He is an outdoor enthusiast and has experience navigating the natural environment.

Context and design constraints [\[↑\]](#)

Printing cost was a design constraint. I wanted a vibrant, visually appealing newsletter; however, I also wanted a newsletter designed to be physically mailed.

Another constraint was time. I have not created a newsletter in years and, at first, the thought of creating a four-page newsletter in one week was a daunting thought. Also, it would have been better to create this type of document in Microsoft Publisher or Adobe InDesign, but I lacked either access to or knowledge of these applications.

Readers of a newsletter expect it to be laid out in a particular way. I think they also expect a newsletter to consist of more than raw text. This could be considered a constraint, because in having to stick to this genre, I run the risk of laying out a newsletter design style that has been seen a thousand times and, as such, boring and unappealing.

Design rationale [\[↑\]](#)

The content of this newsletter was provided to me by the client in the form of plain text, Microsoft Word document. While the information might be of interest to its subscribers, in its original form the document was dull and unappealing. The document's look was in need of a colorful layout that was representative of the outdoors. I wanted to make the Thin Air newsletter appealing to its audience, who are outdoor enthusiasts – to have its visual rhetoric say, "Welcome to the great outdoors!"

This document represents the first issue of the student mountain club’s newsletter; it is assumed, therefore, that there will be future issues – possibly on a monthly basis. For this reason, I wanted to design a document that can be easily updated and reissued. I used text boxes and separated sections [Page Layout: Breaks: Section Breaks: Next Page] to make future revisions easier.

Method-of-delivery played an important part in the design rationale for this document. While I wanted the document to be readable as an email attachment and available online – for example in an archived newsletters section of a website, its primary method-of-delivery is via the United States Postal Service.

I used contrasting colors in the newsletter title to make things more interesting – ‘Thin’ is a red-brown RGB (102 0 0) and ‘Air’ is a teal RGB (79 133 154).

Design evolution [\[↑\]](#)

I created the Thin Air Student Mountain Club newsletter in Microsoft Word. I wanted to see how far I could get designing the newsletter from scratch in Word because I’ve worked for many companies where Word is the only application available, and also companies that did not allow me to peruse the Internet. Other than the Creative Commons images, I created all the design elements from shapes offered in Word. It was challenging, but now I can better gauge what I can produce in Word if I’m in a pinch and only have access to Word.

I also wanted to play around with creating a newsletter that was designed to be folded, sealed with a wafer seal, and mailed by the US Postal Service.

Version 1 (final draft) [\[↑\]](#)

In my initial version of the newsletter, I selected one of the Creative Commons images used in the newsletter and opened it in Adobe Photoshop to create a color palette to use when designing the newsletter: To do this, I used Photoshop’s Color Picker tool to pick out colors from the image.

Using Word shapes [Insert: Shapes (Illustrations group)], I created trees, mountains, and streams on the left and bottom border of the documents main page. I used a basic triangle shape to create all the trees and mountains, and ovals to create the river and river bank. I used colors from the color palette to fill, outline, and add other effects to the images. I wanted the mountains to become larger as the eye moved away from the bottom boarder and up to the top border. Once the mountains reached the top of the page, their peaks were in the clouds, up in the ‘thin air’.

I broke up the text from the original newsletter into digestible, readable chunks and changed around the layout from page to page to keep things interesting and engaging; for example

changing from single columns to double-columns of text. I reused the colors from the color palette on every page and maintained the typeface from page to page to create repetition.

I paid particular attention to proximity, alignment, and contrast. For example, in the original newsletter “Spring 2012” and “Volume 1, No 1” didn’t seem to have any relationship – even though both identify the newsletter issue. Adhering to the rules of proximity discussed by author Robin Williams, I grouped these items together and placed them in a visually logical location within the masthead (or newsletter flag).¹

Version 2 [\[↑\]](#)

In the second version of this document I removed all the images I created out of Word shapes (trees, mountains, streams, etc.). I thought it worth considering that perhaps my graphics might be making the document too busy – that maybe I couldn’t see the forest for the trees. I know it’s easy to fall in love with our little creations and I felt I needed to do this to ensure that this wasn’t happening in this instance, as this would not be fair to the client.

I also changed the background gradient color to include a shade of green on the bottom (to emulate grass, or the ground). The gradient color evolved as it went up the page, from blue to white (white being the ‘thin air’). I also added photo captions, which I failed to do in my initial version.

Version 3 [\[↑\]](#)

In the third version, I took into consideration the cost of printing and tried to strike a balance between creating a newsletter with visual appeal and one that could be printed economically. I removed some of the color intensive elements; for example the tree graphics and the gradient background colors.

Design assessment [\[↑\]](#)

I learned so much working on this project. Since I had not created a newsletter in years, when I first began laying out the design, it seemed as though every step of the way was a *re-learning* curve. However, I’ve come away with more confidence in my ability to layout an effective document than I ever imagined I would; especially given that this class has only been five weeks long!

If I would have had more time, I’d like to have played around with a mock database of addresses and used Word’s content control features to create a mail merge for this newsletter. I haven’t created a mail merge in so many years I’ve forgotten how to do it.

Notes [↑](#)

1. Robin Williams, *The Non-Designer's Design Book* (Berkeley: Peachpit Press, 2008), 19.