The Olympus reached a first in 2008. Hercules High School's yearbook was recognized with an NSPA First Class rating with two marks of distinction, including one for design. The Olympus’ achievement did not happen overnight. In fact, it was a five-year process with five separate staffs. We took a disorganized book with spotty coverage to one recognized for its design and photography. So, how is it exactly that a yearbook goes from being a ‘zero’ to ‘hero’ in design? We followed seven basic rules for improving design:

1. **New year, new book.** You have permission to reinvent yourself each academic year. Avoid looking at your shelf of past volumes for inspiration. Just because you’ve done it that way before doesn’t mean you have to do it again.

2. **Look for inspiration all around you.** Incoming editors at the Olympus have been known to hang out at the magazine stand in the local Barnes & Noble. Somewhere in the crush of publications you may find something that works for your school.

3. **Consider your school.** What works in a suburban school with 100 years of yearbook tradition might not work in an urban school that is less than ten years old.

The 2009 cover introduces the theme “Where Everything Happens,” along with one of the major design features (the karats). The words “change,” “excellence,” “pride,” and “hustle” are the names of the sections within the book. The name of our town is spelled out in the falling letters, but we found that many students missed it.
4. **Find books you like.** One of the first things the Olympus staff did when it decided to get serious about design was to ask the publisher’s representative for copies of their best books. Find a few that you like. Take the elements that work and adapt them for your book.

5. **Close your eyes and jump.** Fear can hold you back. “Don’t be afraid to try something different. Try anything as long as it can be legally published,” said 2008 Olympus co-editor Patricia Mora in an online interview. “The inspiration will just come to you so don’t be afraid of the panic and procrastination...” While the inspiration will come, it doesn’t arrive in a vacuum; you have to do the leg work first.

6. **Editors: Model Your Work Ethic.** Improving or shaking up your book’s design takes work. Show your staff how you expect them to work by modeling a disciplined work ethic. Ask them for feedback on design and theme ideas. Take time to bond as a group.

7. **Advisers: Keep Your Suggestions in Check.** I will admit that I have strong opinions on this one. As much as I believe that the Olympus should follow the latest design trends and coverage ideas, I also know that this is not my book. It is the students’ book. Be careful about how far you go to guide your students to success. If I meddle too much, the staff doesn’t ‘own’ the book and quality drops.

What’s on tap for the 2010 Olympus? The editors have noticed books trending toward tighter copy and more white space. Together, we have taken a look at our last four books and decided the look is stale. It’s time for a major redesign and we’re looking forward to it.
Consistent spacing and style are important elements to consider when improving design. The Olympus uses one pica spacing between photos. Captions throughout the book generally used the arrows to point to the picture and all students were identified by first and last name, as well as grade level in parentheses.