How To Create A "Works-Every-Time" Layout

The works-every-time [WET] works because of the order in which Westerners learn to read. We "enter" a page in the upper left-hand corner, and we "exit" the page in the lower right-hand corner. This reading pattern or "eye-flow" dictates the placement of visuals and type on the WET layout.

The 7 steps of the WET layout are:

❏ **Step 1: Margins**
Lay in generous margins on all four sides of the layout. The larger the layout, the bigger the margins. Think of your margins as a big "negative-space" border or frame that says, "Everything inside here goes together."

❏ **Step 2: Columns**
Establish column guides. Designing with columns not only helps you arrange items neatly on the layout, but also makes your copy more inviting to read. Make sure the "gutter" of negative space separating your columns isn't too small or to large. Your goal is enough space to keep columns visually separate but still cohesive. Bottom line, unless your layout is very narrow, don't make your copy span the width of your layout.

❏ **Step 3: Focal Point Visual**
Position the visual at the top of the page to function as the focal point that captures attention and evokes emotion. The visual is your tool for capturing the audience's attention. The visual becomes the eye entry point into your layout and is the starting point of a viewing flow that takes the audience from top to bottom.

❏ **Step 4: Caption/Cutline**
If applicable place the caption, known in news as a "cutline," under the visual. For your cutline use the same font you choose for your body copy or headline. Set the cutline somewhere between 9 and 11 points.

❏ **Step 5: Headline**
Position the headline under the cutline. After your visual, the headline should have the most impact on the layout. If you can't get the whole headline onto one line, then let the copy "tell you" where to break the line. Read the copy. It will guide you toward the least painful place to break up the headline into two or more lines of type. Never allow hyphenated words to break headlines into two lines. Never strand a single word all by itself in an additional line of a headline either.

❏ **Step 6: Body Copy**
Position the body copy into columns under the headline.

❏ **Step 7: Tags**
If applicable place tags in the bottom right corner, as the last thing the eye sees before exiting the page.

Check it:

✔ Margins, sometimes called thumb space, frame the design with negative space and buffer it from surrounding visual clutter.

✔ Because people are lazy readers, designing with columns tricks the eyes into reading more than it might otherwise.

✔ The visual at the top of the WET layout acts as the eyes entry point and focal point into the layout. Make the visual a welcome sign to the layout.

✔ In a WET layout, pairing two different fonts that play well together is best. Choose an interesting font for the headline and an easy-to-read font for the body copy. Then use one or the other font in the caption/cutline and/or tags.

✔ In the WET layout, the caption or cutline typically appears directly beneath its photo or visual. Set cutline type somewhere between 9 and 11 points. Position the cutline to sit flush left/ragged right, and match the width of the cutline to the width of the photo or visual.

✔ Headlines are the second most important visual component on a WET. Make the headline point size big so that it draws the eye down from the visual toward the body copy. Choose an interesting headline font to match the layout's tone. Let the headline's copy suggest where to break a long headline into multiple lines.

✔ There are some basic rules for setting up and positioning body copy:
a. Choose an easy-to-read font (a "transparent" font).
b. Set body copy somewhere between 9 and 11 points.
c. Keep the headline and lead together.

d. Never indent the lead paragraph.
e. Lay body copy into columns wide enough to accommodate 6–12 words per line.
f. Keep columns of type, called legs, taller than 2 inches but shorter than 10–12 inches.
g. Size automatic paragraph indents proportionately to point size and line length.

✔ If tags are required, as in advertising, be sure to include the logo, website URL, hashtag, social media icons, QR code.

✔ Just because the WET layout works every time, don't assume you must or should use it every time.