

Rocking the Rectangular Grid



Class by Linda Sattgast

Design Beautiful Pages

Lesson 06-01: Posting & Commenting: The Art of Gentle Critique

Design Beautiful Pages is all about getting better at creating beautiful scrapbook pages. Sometimes it helps to have input from others to accomplish that, because we're not always aware of things we might be doing that detract from best practice when creating a page.

To help with the learning process, our class gallery encourages honest feedback within certain guidelines. Some of you will feel comfortable receiving and giving advice, and others won't, which is perfectly fine. If you're not comfortable posting a critique, feel free to only post positive comments. Those are always greatly appreciated!

If you do decide to participate in receiving and giving honest feedback, here are the critique guidelines for this class:

Guideline 1

The person who posts the page is in control. If you want to improve your scrapbooking design skills and would welcome helpful comments, please type the letters CGA (which stands for "Critique Gladly Accepted") under your gallery image in the info section. Please put it right at the top with capital letters so everyone knows it's OK to give you suggestions.

Guideline 2

It's OK to post without asking for a critique. I don't want anyone to feel pressured into asking for a critique if you don't want it or feel like it might discourage you. Just going through the gallery and reading what people suggest to others is very helpful and may be exactly where you need to start.

Guideline 3

You won't get a comment from an instructor every time you post an image. That's why comments from fellow students are extremely valuable—often as valuable as the instructor's. Most of you can tell what would improve someone else's page, though it's much harder to look objectively at your own page.

In one of my previous classes I had several students comment that while they enjoyed the lessons, they felt they learned just as much or more by reading through the helpful suggestions in the gallery—many of which were from other students.

Guideline 4

When you post a page, give back by commenting on several other pages. Be especially on the lookout for pages that don't have any comments!

Guideline 5

If you receive a critique, feel free to make adjustments and upload your page again. It would be great if you mentioned what changes you made in the info below the image, and even better if you also link to the prior page.

Be Gentle With Beginners

All of us were beginners at one time. If you had artistic experience before starting scrapbooking, you definitely had an advantage that probably helped you learn faster, so please don't judge others who may take a little longer.

If you're just beginning, I applaud you! I don't ever want you to feel put down or devalued. Our pages tell the stories of our life and our family's life. I want you to feel confident and proud that you're creating great pages to pass down to your family, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and this class is all about helping you do that!

Common Beginner Design Issues

Here's an example page I made that could have been designed by a scrapbook beginner. It's not an exact copy of any page I've seen. I based it on pages I made when I first started scrapbooking, and pages I now sometimes see in galleries.



Here's how I know this page was made by a beginner.

- It has what I call a "random" design. Photos, type, and elements are placed on the page randomly to cover the entire area. And, yes, I made random pages like this when I first started, back before digital, so don't feel bad if you recognize some of these issues on your own pages!
- Photos are often tipped fairly steeply and often not connected with each other. Again, they're just randomly placed on the page.
- Drop shadows are high and bold. Beginners tend to use the default shadows in the Photoshop Elements without adjusting them, and that creates this kind of a shadow.
- Sometimes 3D elements won't have a drop shadow. On this page the gold bow is a 3D object that's over another 3D object. The bottom element has a shadow, but the bow does not, and that's a disconnect.
- Type is often a challenge for beginners, and, to be honest, it's not an easy skill to acquire. Your best bet is to pay attention to the titles and journaling of well-designed pages. Look to see what fonts they use, because they'll list them under their post. In general vertical type and bevels and drop shadows on titles or journaling aren't considered best practice. If you clip paper to a title, you can add bevels and/or drop shadows, but for regular titles try to avoid them.

Vertical and diagonal titles rarely, if ever, look good. It's better to rotate a horizontal title 90° and place it along an edge in your design. If a photo is tipped and you want to place a caption below it, then you can tip the caption to the same angle and place it next to the photo.

When I see all of these design no-no's on a page, I can pretty much deduce that the page designer is just beginning his or her journey. Again, I applaud you for getting started, and you're in the perfect place to improve your skills dramatically!

The Art Of Gentle Critique

Here's how you could gently critique this page in a class gallery.

#1: First of all, always look for the positive and mention that first

There's actually a lot of positive in this page. For example, it uses an appropriate paper for the background. It could have a wildly patterned paper that makes the page look chaotic, or it could have a patterned paper that doesn't detract from the design but has a theme that doesn't match the subject. The blue page with white squiggly lines, however, works quite well.

Here are some other good things:

- Winter Chill is a great title.
- The words are all spelled correctly.
- The photos are great—sharp with good lighting.
- The snowflakes are fun and appropriate elements for this page.
- There's a date on this page.

So there's almost always something good you can mention about a page.

#2 Don't try to give an exhaustive critique

Mention something good and encouraging and then give one, or maybe two suggestions using soft language. Here are some examples:

"What great photos! Makes me shiver just looking at them! I'd love to see the photos grouped closer together on your page so they feel more connected."

"I love your title—very appropriate for these photos. I wonder if the title would be more effective with both words horizontal and closer together next to the photos? You could still use two different fonts but maybe try it without any layer styles. Just a thought!"

"Nice job on your page—I love the snowflakes and feeling of winter chill! I noticed that the bow doesn't have a drop shadow, though, and wondered if you just forgot to add it."

If you're not comfortable giving any kind of negative feedback, just stick with the positive parts of the above statements or say something like:

"This brings back great memories of where I grew up. Thanks for sharing!"

or..."Love the paper you chose!"

or..."Terrific photos!"

#3 Avoid terse or blunt negative critiques

Here's an example of a blunt critique: "There's no shadow on the bow."

Take the time to soften your critique: "I noticed that the bow doesn't have a drop shadow and wondered if you just forgot to add it."

Or even: “I’d love to see a drop shadow on the bow!”

Soften your critique with phrases like:

I’m wondering if...

I’d love to see...

Not sure if this will work, but how about...

Here’s a thought—what about..., etc.

#4 Don’t try to “fix” the entire page

Remember, the goal of a gallery comment is first and foremost to encourage the person who posted the page. We all appreciate it when someone takes the time to view our page and post a comment. If a page already has one or two constructive criticism comments, don’t add anything, but feel free to agree if no one else has. You might want to say:

“I agree—the bow would look terrific with a shadow!”

There’s no need for everyone to agree over and over. One will suffice.

Of course, if there are a lot of positive things to say about a post, or if you love a particular page, do say so. The more positive comments the better!

To review, here are the main principles of posting comments:

- Mention the positive first.
- Use soft language when giving advice.
- Don’t overdo it.

And I might add one more:

- Notice when someone doesn’t have a comment and leave them some love.

By doing this we’ll all get better at scrapbooking! Here I used the same basic paper and elements to create a much more cohesive page. You’ll find the techniques I used in the Design Beautiful Pages training.

