Summary

“Persevere” (above) visually details the progression from preparation to dedication to celebration, proving the Brothers of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. true champions of Northeastern University’s StepFest Competition.
Inspiration

The basis of my final project stems from over 3 years since my initiation into Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Outside of our main objectives of uplifting the community socially, politically, and culturally all while maintaining high scholastic standards, we traditionally perform in live step shows, as a means to communicate to the public what we do and what we strive for. Although we have documented several of our performances, no one has actually seen the amount of work and effort it takes to putting on a show. SP.747 offered the perfect opportunity for me to give a “behind-the-scenes” peek at our preparation leading all the way up to the competition.

Methodology

When documenting progress, camera must always be in hand. At every practice, I was sure to snap a couple of shots of the team in action, both stepping and discussing the nature of the show. Candid photos allowed me to capture emotion, especially close-ups. I took both film and digital to enhance different moods. For practices that seemed to end up in arguing or tension, I was sure to use black & white film, as it leads to an even more dramatic image (something that can be difficulty to do with color photography).

Concept

Determining the format and overall setup of the image was a daunting task. I wanted to show progression but not simply lining pictures up next to one another. Finally, I asked myself the question: “What did we sacrifice the most during our preparation?” The answer to that was time! Being that we spent more than a couple of hours, rather months, I saw it fitting to use a calendar theme.

I came up with three calendar ideas to document this progression. The first was to have three calendar months with one photo above each describing a particular stage. However, this provided too much separation and was not dramatic enough. I then decided to use only one calendar month, and then place a picture in each day block. But this proved too complex to get my main point across. I then decided to use only three pictures highlighting three major points (preparation, dedication, celebration), but position them in a non-uniform, non-linear format, meshing them into a collage and crossing the confines of each block (see diagram below). With this idea, I proceeded in finding the right photographs.
Diagram: Concept Outline

**Images**

*Preparation*

This film print spoke volumes when I developed it. In each brothers’ face, there is a different feeling evoked. Tiredness, resentment, pain are all felt. Separation and non-uniformity all show we had a long way to go. The drab quality also enhances this notion of lifelessness matching the blank faces.

*Dedication*

This digital shot was taken during the competition. As one can see, all of us uniformly hold a very difficult position. A close up of our faces shows determination and no sign of tiredness. We are finally a team that will win together and it shows.

*Celebration*

Another digital shot was taken of us celebrating our victory with other brothers. I wanted a picture with motion and trophy held high. This was the perfect fit as it provided huge contrast with the first photograph.
Photoshop

Considering the stark differences in quality of photo between the first and latter two photos, Photoshop was necessary to smoothly merge them into one collage. Choosing the above photos allowed me to expound upon my initial concept; specifically, I wanted to denote change in each photo based on clarity. The film print provided me the inspiration to play with the graininess of each photo.

But first, I setup the calendar grid. I used April 2007 as a template and only numbered the dates up until the competition date. I used the show grid option to setup the rectangles uniformly.

Then, I took the three chosen photos, cropped them, and started to play with their clarity. I used the poster edges filter as it produced a graininess that aged the photos as well. Notice the differences below.
Within the poster edges window, I varied the **edge thickness**, **edge intensity**, and **posterization** slide tools to get the wanted effect. I changed these tools the most for the first photograph and changed them slightly for the second. For the last photo, I changed the mode to **grayscale** and barely touched the poster edges filter for maximum clarity but staying consistent with the materiality.

Once the photos were done I placed them in chronological order in a counterclockwise manner. I positioned the first and last in very close proximity to show how the team came full circle. All the pictures do overlap, providing a smoother transition. To connect all of them and provide some distinction from the calendar, I used the **linear dodge** layer property. This forced the picture within the confines of the date blocks forcing the lines outwards. Because they were overlapped, each picture “dodged” each other, providing nice contrast within each. The final picture I used the **exclusion** layer property to provide further contrast and make the trophy pop out even more. This produced the following:
To push this thought of determination further, I decided to add text. I replaced “April” with “Persevere” and superimposed a powerful, inspirational poem “Test of a Man” which describes that at times it is necessary to struggle, but we can get through with the help of a brother not showing signs of defeat at any point. As for the focal point, I thought it would be a nice touch to just highlight the date with the marker tool in color, just as one would see on any calendar with deadlines. Again, here is the final image. Enjoy!