People in pictures

I love it when people send me ideas for things they want to know how to do in Photoshop. It's such a challenge. Last week, I found a photo of a page taken with the adviser's cell phone at right (Figure A) in my e-mail inbox. The adviser who sent it simply said, "We want to do this kind of headline on our divider pages. What's the easiest way to do it?" After a little trial and error, here's what I figured out. Let me know if you can figure out a method that works better.

1. Open a file by choosing File>New that is the size of the space the headline will go into. Make sure it is 300ppi, has a transparent background and is RGB color mode. (Figure B)

2. Choose the font you want to use for this headline. Make sure it is something thick so that the photos will fit inside the letters. Type the word in black. All Caps is probably a good idea.

3. Now comes the hard part—finding photos that will fit inside or around the letters. If you can, take some, but you will more likely be using photos you already have. If you are taking new ones of posed students, shoot them against a high-contrast background. If I said to use a white background and one of your subjects had a white shirt on, that wouldn't work. The key is high contrast.

4. Whether you take new pics or use existing photos, you will now need to mask over the current backgrounds. To do this, use your favorite selection methods to select the background of each people picture. Then, choose Select>Inverse and click the Refine Edge button. When the dialog box opens, change Smooth to someplace between 5 and 15, Feather around 2 and Output To: to New Layer with Layer Mask.

5. Choose Image>Trim. When the dialog box opens, choose Transparent Pixels.

6. Choose Window>Arrange>Tile All Vertically. You should be able to see both photos (or at least parts of both). With the Move tool (dark arrow at top of tool box), drag the person you just cut out into the file with the headline. If it comes in too big, press Command (Control on a PC) T to enter free transform mode. You should now see handles on the corners. Hold the shift key to drag them to make the people pic larger or smaller, proportionally.

7. Position the people pics on top of the headline. Remember, if you are going to try and do what the example looks like, you will be putting some people in front of the letters and some inside. Since we aren't ready to do that yet, just position them where they will eventually be. (Figure D)

8. Now, let's put a few of the people inside of the letters. Hold the shift key and select all the layers in the Layers panel that you want to have inside the letters. (I chose the N, R and S.)Then, right-click and choose New Group from Layers.

9. Select your original type layer and choose Layer>Duplicate Layer. Drag that new type layer all the way to the bottom of the Layer panel.

10. Command (Control on PC) click the icon for your original type layer in the Layers panel. This will select it. You should see marching ants all around it.

11. Make sure your merged photo layer group is below your word layer and that the group is selected in the Layers panel. Create a layer mask by clicking the rectangle with a circle in it at the bottom of the Layers panel.

12. Your photos should disappear. Click the type layer and take the Fill (at the top of the Layers panel) down to 0%. Now you should be able to see the photos. (Figure E) If it doesn't look like that, make sure your Layers panel looks like the one at right. (Figure F)

13. At this point, you just need to add any closing touches you may want. For instance, I added a drop shadow to the bottom type layer. You can also move any of the people around to better position their faces.

14. Save as a PNG for YTO or as a JPEG or PSD for InDesign.