From Contest to the Convention

Designing an AKA logo / Presentation companion



A practical guide to thinking through a convention logo, from the first reading of the brief to artwork that can leave the screen and go into production.

This companion expands the examples from the live presentation. Animated comparisons become still images, and short explanations preserve the lessons behind the slides.

You can begin with paper and a pencil. The design decisions matter more than the software you use.

How to use this guide

Read through the examples, try the idea worksheet, then use the design checklist before submitting. The 2026 brief is an example for this session. Consult the official announcement for the contest you enter.

Every entry teaches something

Slides 2-3 / Selected and unselected entries

Four selected



My first entry and first selection came in 2018. Entering became a way to test my ideas among fellow kitefliers and learn how a design performs in actual use.

Four not selected



Selection is one outcome of the exercise. An unselected entry still gives you practice, an idea to revisit, and lessons to carry into your next design.

The assignment comes first

Slides 4-6 / Participation and the brief

Read the whole brief



Separate required content from creative opportunity. For the 2026 example, the slides identify the red AKA mark, 2026, and Muncie, Indiana. Read the current announcement for eligibility, wording, color limits, deadline, and delivery instructions.

Consider every intended use



The artwork needs to work in color and black and white, at small and large sizes, and across products. Fine details that look attractive on a monitor may disappear in embroidery or on a pin. These production conditions should shape the design from the beginning.

Four systems of hierarchy

Slides 7-10 / An intentional reading order



2018: Scale and contrast

Large yellow event lettering leads against black. The location banner follows, while the skyline supports the place and the AKA mark sits at the bottom.

2019: Color and placement

The red AKA mark attracts attention first. Blue location lettering and the tall format guide the eye down through the year and wave.

2024: Type styles and layers

White event lettering leads. Gold groups the location, year, and anniversary information. Script and overlapping layers help separate a large amount of content.

2026: Position and framing

Muncie anchors the bottom. The convention title forms a header, and a central frame contains the AKA mark, bell tower, and model aircraft.

There is no single correct hierarchy. Decide what should be noticed first, and make the arrangement support that choice.

A shape gives the idea structure

Slides 11-12 / Containers, research, and words

Start with the silhouette



The 2018 design began with three overlapping kite shapes. Repetition and offsetting created a container before the detailed artwork arrived. A clear outer shape gives the words and imagery somewhere to belong.

Keep ideas flexible



For Myrtle Beach, words such as surfing, palmetto, sunrise, ocean, wind, and kites suggest a shared story. The longboard provides a container, the palmetto suggests South Carolina, and the water brings movement. Every research word does not need to become an image.

Myrtle Beach, built in stages

Slide 13 / A design exercise using 20XX



1. Container

The longboard creates the vertical boundary.

2. Atmosphere

Sunrise and reflected light establish the setting.

3. Imagery

The palmetto, kites, and wave reinforce place and movement.

4. Information

Type and the AKA mark connect the scene to the event.

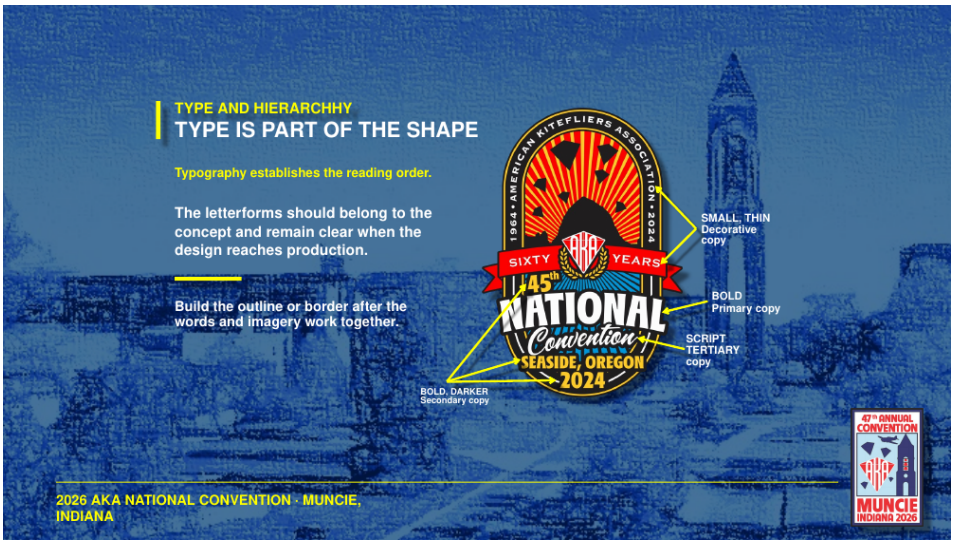
Each addition has a job. Let the wording identify the event and the imagery reinforce it. Watch the negative spaces as carefully as the filled shapes.

20XX marks this as a design exercise, rather than an announcement for a scheduled Myrtle Beach convention.

Type and size expose the structure

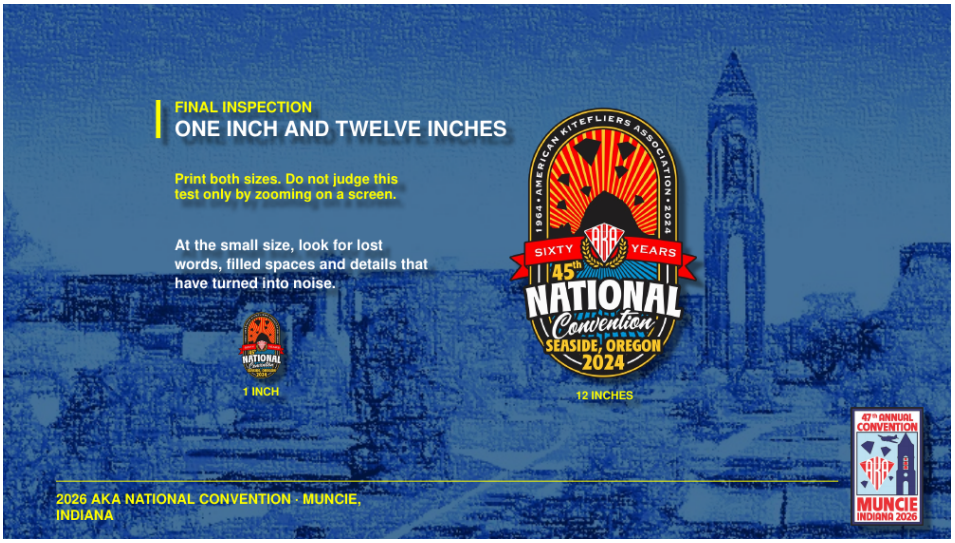
Slides 14-15 / Lettering and actual-size tests

Type belongs to the composition



Words occupy space before we read them. Weight, size, and style establish priority. Bold lettering provides stability, while script can contribute movement. Fit the type and imagery together before building the final border.

Print the size tests



Print a small version at approximately one inch and a larger version at twelve inches. Check essential wording, fine lines, and gaps that close up. View the larger print from a distance. The pictured examples in this guide are illustrations, not actual-size proofs.

Contrast and simplification

Slides 16-17 / Keep the message intact

Grayscale and black and white answer different questions



Different hues can have similar lightness. A grayscale conversion or photocopied color wheel helps reveal whether colors separate in value. A true black-and-white version tests whether the shapes remain clear without intermediate tones.

Simplification can change the story



The smaller anniversary alternate was easier to reproduce, but removing the surrounding design also removed context and reduced the impact of the sixty-year celebration. After simplifying, check what the design now communicates as well as how it reproduces.

Artwork becomes a physical object

Slides 18-19 / Production and presentation

Each process interprets the artwork



Thread, enamel, and laser engraving treat edges and details differently. The complete anniversary design reached physical production. Check that a logo still looks like itself after the material and process have interpreted it.

Make the submission easy to evaluate



My example package includes color and black-and-white versions, two sizes, and PDF, PNG, and JPEG files. A presentation page lets the committee see these together. Follow the current brief for the required formats and include the requested contact information.

Give the idea time

Slides 20-21 / A fresh view and the finished design

The door test



Print the design and place it somewhere you pass, such as the back of the door. Leave it alone for a day or two. Notice what catches your eye in a brief glance and what keeps bothering you. Time away helps you judge what constant editing can hide.

Decide when it is finished



Return to the brief and check content, hierarchy, scale, contrast, and production. Ask whether you like the result and whether another detail would help. When the design answers the assignment and feels complete, prepare the entry and submit it.

Your turn

Slide 22 / Begin with one workable idea

You do not need to know every production detail before you begin. Start with the brief, explore a few ideas, and test the one you choose. Ask for help when preparing the final artwork or files.

Use the companion handouts

Start With an Idea: Use the worksheet to capture the essential requirements, gather words and imagery, and explore six thumbnail sketches.

Before You Submit: Use the checklist to review the idea, hierarchy, size tests, contrast, fresh-eye evaluation, and submission package.

Resources and assistance

Visit the resource page for the companion downloads and examples. I can help with cleaning up artwork or preparing final files.

jimdes.com/aka-logo.html

Contest requirements can change. Use the official announcement for the year you plan to enter as your authority for eligibility, deadline, and submission instructions.