



ALL-COLORADO NEWSPAPER/NEWSMAGAZINE CRITIQUE

2010-11

Colorado High School Press Association

Offices

CHSPA, Colorado State University, Department of Journalism & Technical Communication,
Clark Building, Fort Collins, CO 80523

Jack Kennedy, Executive Director, 9253 Sori Lane, Highlands Ranch CO 80126 / 303-550-4755

www.chspaonline.org

evaluation guide

- This guide is designed to be an educational device to improve the quality of your newspaper or news magazine. Many thanks to the Kansas Scholastic Press Association, whose own evaluation guide is the basis for this document.
- This guide is intended to point out positive aspects of your publication as well as to point out possible deficiencies.
- Judging comments are designed as suggestions for improvement. Keep in mind that these comments represent just one individual's opinion.
- Comments should represent current trends in newspaper or news magazine production.
- Judge's comments may not apply to all school situations. Please understand that it would be impossible for your judge to be aware of the specifics of each school.
- Each of the five sections contained in this guide book has an overall evaluation where the judge must rate the section according to an overall set of criteria. The final evaluation is based on an average of the five section evaluations.
- Each section calls for a specific ranking with a (3) for strong work in the area; a (2) for being adequate, a (1) for needing improvement and an (NA) for not applicable.
- All five sections will conclude with a holistic narrative critique, an opportunity for judges to specifically note positives and suggestions for improvement.

Newspaper: _____

School Name: _____

School Address: _____

City & Zip Code: _____

Adviser: _____

School Classification: _____

Publication's URL (if applicable): _____

Judge _____

coverage evaluation criteria

Are the day-to-day activities of the student body packaged in a concise, to-the-point manner utilizing a news brief format? If not, do you cover those activities on your web site? Judge: enter url of newspaper site:

Does the news briefs column, while emphasizing future events coverage, also cover key past events items?

Does short-item coverage feature individuals and groups who have merited a certain degree of success?

Does news-feature coverage exhibit a wide variety of topics of interest to readers?

Does coverage place an emphasis on coming events without dwelling on stale past tense news?

Does publication cover timely issues of interest to student readers, finding ways to localize even national trend coverage?

Does the newspaper exhibit a blend of feature and news coverage?

Is feature coverage varied to include profiles as well as straight feature coverage?

Do reporters place an emphasis on the “why” and the “how” of the story, and is this reader service clear in your coverage?

Are all issues covered from a student perspective?

Does sports coverage place a premium on coming athletic events with an emphasis on feature angles?

Do sports writers emphasize local sports scene by minimizing coverage of college and professional athletics?

Does the sports page include a sports briefs column? If not, do you cover those activities on your website? Judge: enter url:

Is regular coverage of academics and co-curricular clubs and organizations included?

Does coverage focus on the school community, but also demonstrate student connections to a wider world?

Is there evidence that, given space restrictions, editors have exercised sound judgment in allocating space among all coverage areas?

coverage final evaluation

All-Colorado:

Coverage is complete and thorough and helps to tell the story of the school year in both words and photos. Staff indicates an obvious awareness of what makes news and presents that information in each issue to its readers.

Award of Commendation:

Coverage is generally complete and adequately serves the readership. Staff exhibits an awareness of unique coverage concepts and is generally capable of incorporating these concepts from one edition to the next.

Award of Merit:

Coverage tends to be a bit shallow and lacks that necessary creative spark to entice the readership. Staff needs to place more emphasis on news events with a featurized angle to enhance coverage.

Judge's narrative comments on coverage:

writing evaluation criteria

Does the staff show evidence of utilizing style rules?

Is writing typically in third person, active voice, precise and concise?

Do staff writers avoid editorializing in the news columns?

Are quotes the mainstay of most stories, allowing a variety of sources to have input in telling the story?

Do students avoid including quotes that state obvious facts?

Are synonyms for “said” as attribution avoided?

Does the staff emphasize leads that grab reader attention in the first three to five words?

Do writers avoid the use of quote leads?

Do writers avoid “when” and “where” leads?

Do writers use question leads with sophisticated restraint?

Are paragraphs generally limited to 35 words maximum and allow only one quote per paragraph?

Does writing attempt to show rather than tell?

Do stories follow a logical sequence?

Are features written in such a way as to draw the human interest out for the reader?

Does the staff avoid an overuse of the school name and mascot in reporting?

Do staff writers make effective use of narration when narration is called for in the story?

Do sports stories place an emphasis on upcoming sporting events or taking readers behind the scenes (to practices and off-the-field events)?

writing evaluation criteria

Do sports story leads avoid starting with the name of the sport in favor of an emphasis on people?

Headlines & Cutlines

Do headlines conform to an adopted style?

Are headlines written in present tense?

Do writers avoid becoming “cheerleaders” for their school in heads and cutlines?

Do writers avoid passive verbs, split phrases, complex verbs and split modifiers in headlines?

Do headlines create a mood and help inform the reader?

Do staff writers avoid the use overuse of any one stylistic device in headlines, e.g puns, inside jokes, dependence on school mascots, etc.?

Do cutlines avoid stating the obvious?

Do cutlines answer reader questions of who, what, when, where, why and how?

Are all cutlines written in present tense with a possible switch to past tense in a secondary sentence?

Conventions

Have convention errors been kept to a minimum, demonstrating effective proofreading, use of spell check, and mastery of punctuation?

Has the publication clearly established a mix of professional style (e.g. AP) along with local style rules to maintain some consistency in the voice of the paper?

writing final evaluation

All-Colorado:

Writing shows evidence of strong reportorial skills. Staff reporters understand the news concept and utilize quotes effectively. Writing focuses on the story concept and allows sources to tell their own stories. Writing is objective, varied and focused.

Award of Commendation:

Reporting is generally strong but lacks some essential aspects of strong story telling. Writing is generally solid but lacks that special spark that distinguishes quality writing from good writing. Leads tend to be rather mundane.

Award of Merit:

Writing lacks consistency and reporters fail to incorporate a wide variety of source quotes to strengthen their stories. Staff would do well to stress sources and lead writing that draws the reader into the heart of the story.

Judge's narrative comments on writing:

design evaluation criteria

Does the design contribute to a clear personality for the publication?

Is design appearance clean, uncluttered and organized?

Have consistent margins been maintained throughout?

Has the staff made effective and efficient use of white space?

Is the publication departmentalized as a reader service?

Are folios incorporated into the design of the newspaper and do they include the name of the newspaper, the page number and the date?

Are major stories given dominant positions in the flow of the design?

Do staff designers incorporate art and photos into related stories and are they positioned for reader convenience?

Has column width variety been used with sophisticated restraint?

Are short-item articles packaged into single, rectangular units?

Have staff designers treated facing pages (DPS) as a single optical area and maintained balance?

Does the front page design reflect the content without becoming repetitious and predictable?

Has the designer incorporated a dominant element for most pages?

Has balance been struck between horizontal and vertical placement of elements?

Is the nameplate clean and sophisticated, emphasizing the name of the publication rather than the school name or mascot?

Does the nameplate include the school, city, state, zip, date of publication, issue number and volume number?

design evaluation criteria

If teasers and other graphic elements are included in the nameplate, do they complement rather than detract from the nameplate's appearance?

Is the type used clean and readable and does it blend to create a total design package?

Are headline weights used effectively?

Do headlines use enough type style variety to be interesting without creating a circus-like atmosphere?

Is there some consistency used in display elements as nameplate, folios, masthead and standing heads to create a unified appearance?

Are headlines used as an element of design to communicate specific messages?

Are headlines written to fill the allotted space?

Is the natural fold (center spread or DPS) designed as a single unit rather than as two independent facing pages?

Does the center spread contain a dominant element that draws the pages together allowing content to move left to right across the spread?

Are stories and related design elements (photos, artwork, type, infographic) packaged to provide readers with a variety of ways into the coverage?

Is there some planned space separating text/content from the edges of boxes or screened boxes (keeping elements from running together)?

design final evaluation

All-Colorado:

Design shows staff understanding of visual communication. Designers effectively present information with graphic emphasis to enhance the story and to draw the reader to the page. Design is clean, clear, and appealing.

Award of Commendation:

Design is clean and appropriate to providing a personality to the paper. Design has some problems but these problems do not detract from overall reader communication. Design is generally clean and effective for reader appreciation.

Award of Merit:

Staff gives evidence of some serious design flaws where graphics tend to become self-serving and designs lack dominance and a sense of creativity. Designs tend to repeat themselves with little attention paid to reader needs for creativity.

Judge's narrative comments on design:

visuals evaluation criteria

Are photos carefully selected for maximum reader interest and reproduction quality?

Are photos cropped to the center of interest?

Has staff avoided the use of posed photos as well as photo clichés (people shaking hands, an administrator on the phone, teachers at a desk, etc.)?

Is subject matter in good taste and relevant to the audience?

Is the size of the photo relevant to the news value and to the technical quality?

Has attention been given to framing, contrast and focus?

Are special effects and graphic manipulations of photos used sparingly?

Have graphics been well planned and incorporated to enhance communication?

Has the staff avoided sacrificing content for the sake of graphics?

Are borders, reverses, screens, and mortises used with restraint and effectively?

Has color, if available, been used with sophisticated restraint?

Have designers considered white space as an element of design?

Has staff avoided: irregularly shaped blocks of copy, stretched type, excessive underlining, unequal spacing, and exaggerated leading, tabs and indents?

Have staff designers avoided over-using gray screens?

Do designers use artwork as part of a story package rather than as an element to merely fill space?

Has staff included the use of typographical effects such as copy starters, pulled quotes and informational boxes for reader appeal?

Are graphic techniques utilized that enhance the overall design concept?

Have staff designers utilized “quick-read” elements for the reader?

visuals final evaluation

All-Colorado:

This newspaper understands the need for readability and provides for such throughout. Visuals are intended to complement content and to enhance the overall appearance of the design. Staff designers pay strict attention to detail.

Award of Commendation:

Staff does an adequate job in providing reader service. Visuals are utilized within the design framework but lack a necessary spark. Designers need to pay more attention to consistency and detail.

Award of Merit:

Staff needs to place greater emphasis on this area of newspaper production. Little attention is given to reader needs for consuming the publication. Staff should place greater emphasis in this area.

Judge's narrative comments on visuals:

leadership evaluation criteria

Have opinion pages been created that indicate a strong editorial voice for the publication?

Do the editorial pages demonstrate breadth of coverage through strong editorials, columns, cartoons and letters?

Have editorials avoided trite and trivial topics as school spirit and senioritis?

Whenever possible, have staff editorials been based on a news story?

Do editorials stimulate readers to take action?

Is the lead editorial clearly distinguished by position and typography?

Does editorial staff exhibit an awareness that editorials may attack, defend, praise, endorse, instigate, advocate, entertain or predict?

Have a variety of editorials been included in the publication over the year (e.g. criticism, problem solution, praise, etc.)?

Do editorials show evidence of research?

Are editorials logical, rational and mature?

Are editorials generally written in third person or first person plural, and unsigned (as the position of the newspaper, not a specific person)?

Do editorials target a specific audience?

Does the general framework of the editorial include an introduction to the situation and provide a clue to the staff stance?

Does the body of the editorial persuade the reader with strong support for claims?

Do conclusions of editorials generally restate the stance or thesis and prompt the reader to action, or at least provoke thought?

leadership evaluation criteria

Has the staff included opinion columns, guest columns, opinion photography/art, ombudsman columns, letters to the editor and/or reader forums when appropriate?

Do columns exhibit a variety of writing techniques and a variety of tones?

Does coverage on these opinion pages provide a full range of student voices?

Are editorial cartoons of high enough quality to warrant space allocated to them?

Do responses to letters, when included, show respect and courtesy for dissenting points of view?

Do photo opinions, if used, deal with mature or newsworthy issues rather than just fill space?

Have staff writers included reviews of things of interest to student consumers, such as concerts, books, restaurants, and cinema?

Do reviews cover a wide variety of topics, appealing to a wide variety of readers?

Is entertainment coverage based on research and a wide range of topics?

leadership final evaluation

All-Colorado:

It is readily apparent to the reader that this newspaper leads rather than follows. It is evident in the content as well as the style of the opinion pages. A full range of offerings enhances these pages for the readership.

Award of Commendation:

Staff editorial coverage is strong but not thorough. Staff would do well to incorporate a greater variety of opinions for reader consumption. Each edition should carry a wide array of editorial opinion pieces.

Award of Merit:

This newspaper appears to follow without providing the reader any leadership. Editorial pieces fail to enhance each edition. Staff members appear to be going through the motions with little regard to the purpose of a newspaper.

Judge's narrative comments on leadership:

overall final evaluation

All-Colorado:

This is a quality newspaper that would compete well at any level. Staff demonstrates a solid understanding of the school newspaper and its place in the curriculum. The newspaper features solid reporting and writing skills. Staff designers are obviously aware of how to best enhance a news package and to present it to the readership in a most conducive manner.

Award of Commendation:

This newspaper represents a work in progress. Staff members indicate an awareness of what a quality newspaper should include but fail to consistently carry out that mission. There are flashes of brilliance in all areas of your newspaper but publication lacks a necessary consistency to be truly effective.

Award of Merit:

Too many flaws keep this newspaper from reaching the higher levels of recognition. Staff and adviser should concentrate on basic newspaper production concepts. This newspaper has obviously been produced as a “labor of love.” You need to place more emphasis on the basic production concerns. Your primary goal is to become reader friendly.

Judge’s Evaluation Summary

Coverage

All-Colorado
Award of Commendation
Award of Merit

Design

All-Colorado
Award of Commendation
Award of Merit

Leadership

All-Colorado
Award of Commendation
Award of Merit

Writing

All-Colorado
Award of Commendation
Award of Merit

Visuals

All-Colorado
Award of Commendation
Award of Merit