

CRITIQUE SCORESHEET

Newspapers & Newsmagazines

Publication name

School

HS JH/MS Private Public

City, State

Frequency of Publication

Welcome to your National Scholastic Press Association critique. This time-honored critical service focuses on student media in the 21st Century, with both traditional coverage and expanded coverage through social media.

How to use this critique scoresheet

This critique scoresheet is divided into sections that outline best practices for your publication.

Using the critique criteria, judges review the body of work, and compile both strengths and recommendations for your consideration. We ask judges to cite specific examples from your publications and apply them to their comments.

After compiling each section, judges assess a point total for that section. Total points are apportioned to match our priorities for best practices. For all publications, we recognize the value of student work, and, with yearbooks in particular, we reward staffs who meet their deadlines.

In addition to points in each section, a judge may award a mark of distinction with a citation for exceptional work. Marks of distinction are not tied to points, yet marks likely complement high numerical scores.

For nearly a century, the NSPA has provided staffs and their advisers with a constructive, outside view of their work — and advice on how to improve.

Best wishes for continued growth and improvement.

Judging at a glance

Who judges? Qualified professional journalists and past and present advisers of award-winning media.

An NSPA representative then reviews the work of all judges to check for consistency.

Who sets criteria? We consult with advisers, judges and practitioners on best practices for your publication.

What are the judges looking for? Judges look at what your readership sees — through the lens of the critique criteria.

When are criteria updated? Criteria will be reviewed each year by NSPA staff. Criteria will change as best practices change.

Why be evaluated? To help the staff improve. To give the staff recognition through ratings.

How to use the results? This critique is an educational tool. Review and discuss the critique scoresheet with your entire staff. Use the constructive criticism of the judge to review practices and set goals for

the current year.

Use this critique in tandem with NSPA's Best of the High School Press, an annual collection of award-winning scholastic journalism.

Consider signing up for a video conference with one of our consultants to address an overall or specific areas of concern.

Questions or concerns? Contact us. Share any concerns you have, and send us a copy of the critique at critique@studentpress.org.

A second evaluation is available for an additional fee.

ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

Coverage & content

Reporting:

Stories, features and visuals

Journalistic leadership reaches across the publication through stories, briefs, features, profiles, editorials, commentary, photos, illustrations and informational graphics.

Coverage encompasses the diversity of the student body, across grade levels, across gender and sexual orientation, and across socioeconomic, racial and ethnic status.

News judgment reflects a publication edited by students for students, with academic reporting on the school and district.

Local angles dominate any coverage of state, national and international news and events.

Reporting is objective, not editorialized, with opinions quoted from sources. Reporters do not inject their opinions into coverage.

Each edition strives to offer a lead story of significance that offers depth, enterprise and strong, local sourcing and background.

Print reporting on events focuses more on precedes, with restraint on news and events that are dated by the publication date.

Shorter reporting forms — briefs, infographics, secondary photos and mug shots — increase the publication's news value and relevance.

Infographics or data complement coverage by presenting information best told through a graphic.

Reporting: News currency

For print newspapers, coverage of past events should be built upon a current angle or news peg. Don't waste space with weeks-old coverage.

For print newsmagazines, coverage of past events offers

more depth, analysis and reflection, but with a current news peg.

Any online and social media offered should expand print coverage. They should break news, cover news and analyze news, within a spectrum of story forms, from briefs to long-form features. They also link readers to related coverage from the past with evidence of stories being updated as they unfold.

Reporting:

Sourcing and context

Reporting encompasses a range of relevant, reliable sources, preferably local, not from random websites.

Stories lead with the primary sources closest to the story. Source relevance and quotation context are clear, with secondary sources in secondary positions.

Editorials and commentary

Readers are informed, enlightened, entertained and challenged through commentary that is diverse and significant.

Commentary is clearly labeled by type — editorials, columns and reader feedback.

The editorial, produced by an identified editorial board on behalf of the publication, takes clear positions for the greater good of the student body.

Columnists, both recurring and occasional, are clearly identified.

All commentary offers a clear point of view within the first few paragraphs.

Opinions are built upon attributed research and credible sources. They acknowledge opposing viewpoints as they support their own viewpoints.

— *criteria continued on next page*

of 175 points in this category, and 500 total points

Mark of distinction (for the reason below)

Mark of distinction (for the reason below)

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Strengths

Judge: Provide at least five strengths, supported with specific references within the body of work.

ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

Coverage & content

Local perspectives are offered on local, regional, state, national and international news and events.

Columnists use personal experience only within the context of universal theme or the news of the day and with transparency.

Reviews of performances and pop culture engage and inform readers, even those unfamiliar with the genre. The reviewer's expertise, or the lack of it, is acknowledged for credibility with readers.

Sports

Coverage is journalistic, with no cheerleading or editorializing.

Sports content relies more upon features and precedes than dated post-game reporting.

Coverage and commentary offer a diversity of participants at a diversity of levels — varsity, junior varsity, clubs and intramurals.

Briefs and infographics update readers on a range of sports.

Visuals

Photos and illustrations introduce stories and commentary with visual-verbal connections. They link the content of visuals with the content of text.

Visuals, like text, offer diversity across the student body, faculty, staff and administration.

Captions describe both the event and the background. Captions identify all subjects in focus, and they share the relevance of the visual.

Opinion pages are anchored with staff-produced illustrations and/or editorial cartoons.

Visual content should be staff produced — specific to the content that it supports.

Visuals from other sources are used sparingly, only with

written permission and with credit given to the source. Avoid using visuals from random web sources.

Online and social media

If staffs produce content online and in social media, their print editions help readers navigate to it, with links and teasers.

There is no deduction of points if a publication does not have online or social media materials.

Ethics and law

Student editors exercise their First Amendment rights with maturity and responsibility as they serve their fellow students.

News, commentary and advertising are clearly distinguished from each other.

Plagiarism is unacceptable. When detected, it must be acknowledged for readers. All information, visuals and opinions from other sources must be attributed.

The publication avoids conflicts of interest, both present and perceived. Whenever possible, reporters do not cover or quote their friends and staff members in sports and clubs, do not report on their own organizations. If coverage comes from such situations, it is clearly labeled for readers.

The publication maintains a clear separation between news and advertising. The staff does not accept gifts, perks or special treatment that would influence journalistic integrity.

Watch for awkward juxtapositions of unrelated content, and be cautious with word play that doesn't match the tone of the story.

Respect the content integrity of photos and illustrations. Label all photo illustrations for clarity.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Recommendations

Judge: Provide at least five recommendations, with adequate detail to explain and support the recommendations. Please fill most of this space.

REPORTING, WRITING & EDITING

Text

All writing is free of the writer's opinions. The exceptions are in commentary, such as editorials, editorial columns, reviews and analysis.

Reporting follows a simple structure — a crisp, focused lead supported with adequate background, and then direct and indirect quotes, transitions and a concluding quotation, preferably a direct quote.

In stories and features, subjectivity appears only in direct and indirect quotations.

In editorials and columns, the point of view is clear, but the writer's opinion is supported with narratives, background and research that make the opinion credible.

Text is in third person. An occasional lead may use the second-person **you**. First person is limited to commentary, and is rare.

News leads offer the latest news or only the important news elements. Secondary news and elements do not clutter the first paragraph.

Direct-quote leads are avoided, and leads that launch with a time element do so only when that time element is the news.

Feature leads launch with the **micro** — someone or something that illustrates and introduces the **macro**, the larger story.

Narrative leads are common. They focus on a person and that person's experience to introduce the broader topic or issue.

Direct quotations (the precise words of sources) are used for the **why** and the **how** of a story, not simple facts or vague impressions. Indirect quotes are tightened and edited for clarity. All quotes are attributed to their sources.

Close attention is paid to consistency through journalistic style and mechanics. Meticulous copy editing and proofreading ensure correct spelling and punctuation, which are crucial to credibility. A copy style



of 100 points in this category, and 500 total points

Mark of distinction (for the reason below)



sheet and AP Stylebook are recommended.

The structure of paragraphs and sentences varies. Longer ones are only occasional. Short ones provide emphasis. The grammatical approach varies from sentence to sentence.

Writers steer away from clichés and generalities that aren't specific to the topic or event.

Text relies more upon specific nouns and verbs. It relies less upon adjectives and adverbs, which are less believable.

The tone of the text is appropriate to the tone of the subject matter. A conversational style can benefit features and profiles, and, when tailored to topic,

humor can be effective in commentary.

Headlines offer key words in **sentence style**, with a subject, present-tense verb and object. Some feature headlines apply a phrase or theme, supported with a secondary or deck headline, with key words in sentence style.

Captions are crisp, focused and detailed. The first sentence uses present tense to describe what's happening in the photo. Subsequent sentences use past tense to provide background and to link the visual to the text. It's OK to use a good quotation from a source to further explain a photo.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Strengths

Judge: Provide at least five strengths, supported with specific references within the body of work.

Recommendations

Judge: Provide at least five strengths, supported with specific references within the body of work.

PHOTOS, ILLUSTRATIONS & INFORMATIONAL GRAPHICS

Visuals

Photos

High technical quality is built upon focus, contrast, depth of field and the rule of thirds.

Color photos are toned to match the available printing quality.

Photo content is newsworthy, significant or unusual. Lead photos are worthy of large play.

Photos are cropped to emphasize a focused center of interest and to trim unnecessary background. Crops and photo shapes can be occasionally bold and dramatic, but only to enhance photo content.

Secondary photos support lead photos with secondary subjects, angles and crops.

Photos can apply distinctive angles, from above and from below, to enhance otherwise routine content.

Avoid computer-generated photo illustrations that compromise the integrity of the content.

Each component of a photo package tells a different portion of the story.

Mug shots put faces with names in stories, and environmental portraits enhance features. Otherwise, posed photos and group photos are avoided.

Photos are captioned and mug shots identified.

Stock visuals, clip art and low-resolution images are discouraged. Images acquired online are presented within fair-use provisions, with written permission and proper credit.

Manipulation of images, such as adding or removing people or objects in a photo is not allowed.

Illustrations

Illustrations introduce features and commentary with content that is both quickly recognized and easy to discern.

Illustrative styles match the tone of the topic, and they work within the parameters of

of 100 points in this category,
and 500 total points

Mark of distinction (for the reason below)

the printing process.

Editorial cartoons are both simple and concise, with well-edited text that quickly conveys the message.

Infographics

Infographics are consistent in their design and typography. They are not designed like advertisements, with varying styles and typefaces.

Infographics likely use a sans serif type face, to distinguish them from text type.

Some are sidebar graphics, with information complementing the accompanying story.

Some stand alone, presenting information or data unto themselves, sometimes with an image. They offer their own lead and adequate background.

All are consistent in type and presentation, with a headline, introduction (also known as chatter), data, source and credit.

Each chart applies the correct approach to its content. Pie charts are simple, with few pieces. Bar graphs and tab charts are tightly spaced. Fever charts or line graphs offer only natural progressions in numerical comparison. Maps offer recognizable geographic shapes and details.

Larger infographics include these elements plus a dominant image, with text on a consistent grid.

Boxes, rules, screens and typographical gadgets such as dingbats and bullets are gimmicks to be held in check.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Strengths

Judge: Provide at least five strengths, supported with specific references within the body of work.

Recommendations

Judge: Provide at least five strengths, supported with specific references within the body of work.

DESIGN, TYPOGRAPHY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Presentation

Front pages and newsmagazine covers introduce readers to content through a dominant image and lead headline placed on a grid. On front pages, a centerpiece package presents the lead story — with a dominant photo, caption, lead headline, secondary headline and text on a grid. Secondary elements are indeed secondary, not competing with the centerpiece package.

Newsmagazine covers are a showcase for the publication's best photo or illustration, in a bold presentation and lead headline that introduces the publication's most important story. Headlines and teasers are clean, simple and efficient.

Newsmagazines capitalize on center spreads for the cover story. The spread offers a magazine design, with a dominant image, lead headline, secondary headline and text block. Its design is simple, and there is a clear visual link between the cover and the center spread. The design offers ample white space.

Content isn't crammed onto it, and longer text forms may jump to inside pages.

Simplicity and consistency are the benchmarks of inside pages, with adequate white space between elements and headline sizes that show the priority of content. Tabloids should design facing pages as one design unit.

In general, avoid screened backgrounds, boxes, tooling lines. They distract from the content.

Typography

The publication's design applies the correct type tool for

each task. A design style sheet is recommended.

Headline type is in display and/or condensed fonts, intended for larger use. Headlines may be serif or sans serif or both, but in several sizes and weights, to build contrast.

Headline sizes vary in weight and size on the page to establish hierarchy, thus helping readers see the priority of the content.

On both front pages and newsmagazine covers, the lead headlines employ type contrast, with significant difference between the larger main headline and the secondary headline.

Text type is preferably serif, not condensed or kerned, in an efficient size appropriate for the readership, in a column width that's not too narrow and not too wide. Text type is efficient, without awkward linespacing or wordspacing.

Infographics use their own typography, likely a sans serif, to distinguish them from text type.

If text type is justified, with both margins aligned, then hyphenation is increased, for tighter spacing and better readability. If text type is flush left, then hyphenation is disabled, to avoid unneeded breaks between words.

Reverse type is used to create interest without sacrificing readability. A sans serif or serif typeface with sturdy or broad serifs are well-suited for reversing. Background should also be considered for legibility.

— criteria continue on next page



of 100 points in this category, and 500 total points

Mark of distinction (for the reason below)

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Strengths

Judge: Provide at least five strengths, supported with specific references within the body of work.

— recommendations on next page

DESIGN, TYPOGRAPHY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Presentation

Be watchful of how color background affects type readability. Avoid placing text type on a photo or illustration. If you place display type on a photo, consult with the photo editor and photographer.

Infrastructure:

Grids, white space and navigational tools

The publication applies a modular design, with elements packaged in rectangular shapes.

The format employs a grid, or column structure, in a consistent width that keeps text readable. Inside pages avoid random changes from the established grid.

White space sets off lead packages, with adequate space between all elements. Content isn't crammed onto the page, and more space is above headlines than below them.

Navigational elements, such as the nameplate and page folios, do not consume space at the expense of content.

The flag, or nameplate, offers a simple, effective brand for the publication. It is devoid of devices, type and color that would overwhelm content on the page. Its typography has consistent letterspacing.

If used, teasers or indexes can be relevant, vibrant and variable to news judgment.

Page folios are simple and helpful, with page numbers to the outer margins.

The masthead, or staff list, appears inside, likely on Page 2 or the opinion page. Its design and typography are also simple and efficient. Contact information should be included.

Print content offers links to any staff-produced content offered online or in social media.

Advertising

Student-designed advertising offers a clear message relevant to student readers, with complete information for reader service.

Ad design allows more flexibility in typography, but it keeps simplicity and readability in mind. Reserve news fonts for news content.

If students are used in advertising photos, make sure the publication has a signed model release form from student, if 18 or older, or parent/guardian if under 18 years of age.

If used as supplemental content or special section, make sure advertorial or native advertising is marked accordingly.

If a publication is not allowed to sell ad space for any reason, no points are deducted.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Recommendations

Judge: Provide at least five strengths, supported with specific references within the body of work.

Summary

Publication name

School

HS JH/MS Private Public

City, State

Frequency of Publication

STUDENT WORK

The adviser provides estimates on the percentage of student work. The judge applies the estimates to 25 possible points.

- ____% Writing and reporting
- ____% Editing
- ____% Photography
- ____% Illustrations, art and graphics
- ____% Design
- ____% Advertising sales
- ____% Advertising production
- ____% Advertising business practices: billing, account management, accounting
- ____% Cover and endsheets (magazines and yearbooks)
- ____% Pre-press production

Online & social media

- None offered
- None allowed
- Offered, at these addresses —

Site that complements print product

Stand-alone site

Twitter feeds

Facebook presence

Instagram

Other

SCORING

Coverage & content

 of 175 points possible

Mark of distinction
Mark of distinction

Text

 of 100 points possible

Mark of distinction

Visuals

 of 100 points possible

Mark of distinction

Presentation

 of 100 points possible

Mark of distinction

Student work

 of 25 points possible of 500 total points

RATING

All-American
400-500 points and
4-5 marks of distinction

First Class
350-499 points

Second Class
250-349 points

JUDGE'S OVERALL COMMENTS

Judge: Please provide an overall statement — several paragraphs that summarize your impressions of the publication, with a summary of strengths and recommendations. It's a final opportunity to offer praise, encouragement and constructive criticism.

Judge: _____



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