



2023 Newspaper Critique Booklet

SCHOOL NAME: _____

PUBLICATION NAME: _____

YEAR: _____

ONLINE **PRINT**

ADVISER: _____

CLASSIFICATION: 1A 2A 3A 4A

This critique booklet is designed to be an educational device to improve the quality of your newspaper. It is intended to point out positive aspects of your publication as well as to suggest areas for improvement.

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 production. A 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 (+) for strong work in the area; a (√) for being adequate and a (-) for needing improvement.

An overall open-comment critique space is included on the final page of this document.

NEWS

+ √ - Evaluate how well news coverage helps to show the reader the uniqueness of this school.

+ √ - Evaluate how well news coverage avoids stale and over-used coverage ideas.

+ √ - Evaluate how well feature coverage helps to show the reader the uniqueness of this school.

+ √ - Evaluate how well feature coverage avoids stale and over-used coverage ideas.

+ √ - Evaluate how well coverage is selected: does it provide something for everyone in the audience?

+ √ - Evaluate how well standard school events such as homecoming, school musical and graduation are covered.

+ √ - Evaluate how enticing coverage presentation is to students.

+ √ - Evaluate how well sidebar stories or alternative coverage been included to enhance the overall coverage concept.

+ √ - Evaluate how well the coverage appeals to the diverse interests of the student body.

+ √ - Evaluate how well non-school news has a local and relevant tie-in.

+ √ - Evaluate the use of news briefs for concise reporting.

+ √ - Evaluate the coverage of accomplishments by the school community and other “good” news.

+ √ - Evaluate how well the staff covers subjects of controversy and impact within the school.

+ √ - Evaluate the coverage of upcoming events rather than dwelling on long- past news events.

SPORTS

+ √ - Evaluate if sports coverage is appropriate for the size of the publication and the size of the school.

+ √ - Evaluate how well the staff provides equal and adequate coverage for both boys and girls athletics.

+ √ -

Evaluate how well the staff supplements athletic coverage with coverage of intramurals (if offered) and non-organized and outside-of-school athletic involvement.

+ √ -

Evaluate how well sports coverage documents the highlights of the current athletic season.

+ √ -

Evaluate how well sports features are incorporated into coverage.

+ √ -

Evaluate how adequately all sports are covered.

+ √ -

Evaluate how well the sports page incorporates briefs.

+ √ -

Evaluate how well writers emphasize local sports scene by localizing coverage of college and professional athletics.

OTHER TOPICS

+ √ -

Evaluate how well the publication covers aspects of the academic side of school.

+ √ -

Evaluate the staff’s coverage of topics unique to this moment in news.

+ √ -

Evaluate how well reporting emphasizes individuals at the school.

+ √ -

Evaluate how well the coverage emphasizes the unique aspects of the school year.

ADS

Judge’s Note: Not all publications will incorporate advertising. Evaluate the publication on the basis of what advertising exists and do not penalize for the absence of advertising.

+ √ -

Evaluate the ads designed to sell a specific product or business.

+ √ -

Evaluate how contemporary staff created ads are in their approach.

+ √ -

Evaluate how appealing ads are to the teenage audience.

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

Golden Pony:

Coverage is complete and thorough and helps to tell the story of the current moment at the school using both words and photos. Staff showcases an awareness of coverage options with an emphasis on the factual, unique and compelling.

Silver Spur:

Coverage is generally complete and adequately serves readers. Staff shows an awareness of unique coverage concepts and is generally able to incorporate them throughout the publication.

Bronze Star:

Coverage tends to be a bit shallow, under-reported and lacks creative spark. The contemporary news publication should emphasize the factual, emotional and unique. Staff would do well to place greater emphasis on these elements of coverage.

Coverage Overall Comments:

REPORTING

captions • headlines • writing

CAPTIONS

- + √ - Evaluate how well captions supplement the action of the photos.
- + √ - Evaluate how well captions answer reader questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- + √ - Evaluate how well captions avoid stating the obvious.
- + √ - Evaluate the editing and clarity of captions.
- + √ - Evaluate the appropriateness in length of the captions.
- + √ - Evaluate how well captions identify all recognizable people photographed.
- + √ - Evaluate the attractiveness and effectiveness of the caption design.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the ongoing action of the photo is recorded in the caption: in present tense at the start and with subsequent information in past tense.
- + √ - Evaluate how well captions avoid road sign directions such as “pictured above” and “left center.”

HEADLINES

- + √ - Evaluate how well headlines draw the reader to the coverage.
- + √ - Evaluate how well headlines for news topics follow a S-V-O (subject-verb-object) format.
- + √ - Evaluate how well headlines avoid passive voice writing.
- + √ - Evaluate how well display (or “showcase”) headlines paired stories provide easy access to the reader for the copy.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the staff avoids label headlines.
- + √ - Evaluate how appealing headlines are to readers.
- + √ - Evaluate how well headlines conform to grammar conventions.

+ √ - Evaluate how well headline writers place emphasis on accuracy and summary.

+ √ - Evaluate how well headlines inform without overwhelming the reader.

WRITING

+ √ - Evaluate how well the staff demonstrates an obvious awareness of the need for sources in copy.

+ √ - Evaluate the use of third person, active voice, precision and concision in news writing.

+ √ - Evaluate how well copy “leads” draw the reader into the reporting.

+ √ - Evaluate how well writers avoid confusing or non-informative leads, such as “quote” leads and “question” leads.

+ √ - Evaluate how well the staff demonstrates use of a recognized style book for greater consistency.

+ √ - Evaluate how colorful the copy is, without being effusive.

+ √ - Evaluate how clear and logical the organization or sequencing of a story is.

+ √ - Evaluate whether the coverage relies on source quotations.

+ √ - Evaluate how well writers gather and select quotes that are colorful, opinionated and avoid stating the obvious.

+ √ - Evaluate how well writers obey the basics of quotation style with punctuation, paragraphing and use of the neutral “said” for attribution.

+ √ - Evaluate whether paragraphs are kept short for greater readability.

+ √ - Evaluate how well reporters remain objective and avoid including personal opinion.

+ √ - Evaluate how specific the writing of copy is in detail.

+ √ - Evaluate how tight and careful the editing is.

+ √ - Evaluate how well the staff has used subtle and smooth transitions.

+ √ - Evaluate how focused the writing is throughout the publication.

+ √ - Evaluate how unique and unusual the anecdotes and reporting are.

+ √ - Evaluate how well the publication incorporates alternative copy treatment.

+ √ - Evaluate how well feature stories describe and evoke emotion.

+ √ - Evaluate how well writers use narration and sequential storytelling.

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

Golden Pony:

Reporting is authoritative, trustworthy and clearly stated. Reporting demonstrates quality writing and research skills by student staff members. Reporting is free of typos, style mistakes, spelling errors and grammatical oversights.

Silver Spur:

Reporting is sound but could use more color and research. Copy may lack a spark that is essential to drawing reader interest. Writing is generally clear but may contain mistakes of style, spelling or grammar.

Bronze Star:

Copy is a bit flat, under-reported and at times unclear. Typos, spelling errors, editorializing and grammatical miscues are apparent and distracting to the common readers.

Reporting Overall Comments:

PHOTOGRAPHY

- + √ - Evaluate how well photographs demonstrate advanced planning by the photographer.
- + √ - Evaluate how well photos tell their own specific story.
- + √ - Evaluate how well photos reveal a variety of camera angles.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the staff attempted to avoid posed photos.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the staff made effective use of dominant photography.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the photos showcase a broad range of emotions.
- + √ - Evaluate how well photos have been planned to include people.
- + √ - Evaluate how well photos have been cropped.
- + √ - Evaluate how representative the selection of photographed students is for the student body.
- + √ - Evaluate how well photos show a technical quality.
- + √ - Evaluate the focus or meaningful use of blur in photos.
- + √ - Evaluate how the tonal qualities of the photos match real-life appearances.
- + √ - Evaluate the digital image processing of the photos.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the photos have been adjusted for proper contrast.
- + √ - Evaluate how well photos contain a thing or person of central visual importance.
- + √ - Evaluate the overall crisp appearance of photos by avoiding pixelation and distortion through stretching.
- + √ - Evaluate how well group photos have been cropped.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the size of the photo reflects the photo's news value and technical quality.

- + √ - Evaluate how well photos have been credited to staff photographers.

- + √ - Evaluate how well photos from outside sources are credited properly.

OTHER

- + √ - Evaluate how well relevant visuals are to the story.
- + √ - Evaluate how well designers have incorporated infographics to help tell a more immediate story.
- + √ - Evaluate how well staff designers have utilized "quick-read" elements for the reader.

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

Golden Pony:

Photography throughout the publication indicates staff has an awareness of the critical role quality photography plays in journalism. Sound composition and strong technical quality are apparent throughout the publication with few lapses. Photographers use exposure, reporting and camera skills to give readers an artistic portrait of the school's news.

Silver Spur:

Photography is generally strong throughout the publication. There are some technical problems but these are kept to a minimum. Staff shows evidence of appropriate photo selection and exposure knowledge.

Bronze Star:

Photography quality is low and hampers reader understanding of news events and issues. Technical quality, as well as composition of photos, tends to break down in the publication.

Photography Overall Comments:

UNITY & CONSISTENCY

- + √ - Evaluate how logically the publication is organized as a reader service.
- + √ - Evaluate how well folios are incorporated into the design of the newspaper and how well they showcase page title, page number and date.
- + √ - Evaluate how well major stories are given dominant positions in the flow of the design.
- + √ - Evaluate how well column width variety has been used, but also with restraint.
- + √ - Evaluate how well short-item articles are packaged into single, rectangular units.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the front page design reflects the front-page content without becoming repetitious and predictable.
- + √ - Evaluate the balance between horizontal and vertical placement of elements.
- + √ - Evaluate if the nameplate is clean and sophisticated: does it emphasize the name of the publication rather than the school name.
- + √ - Evaluate if the nameplate includes the school, city, state, zip code, date of publication, issue number and volume number.
- + √ - Evaluate how well teasers and other graphic elements are included in the nameplate or front page: do they complement rather than detract from the nameplate's appearance.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the nameplate, folios, masthead and standing heads create a unified appearance.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the staff has avoided the use of irregularly shaped blocks of copy, stretched type, excessive underlining, unequal spacing, exaggerated leading, tabs and indents.

TYPOGRAPHY

- + √ - Evaluate how well the typefaces blend throughout the publication.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the type helps to communicate to the reader.
- + √ - Evaluate how well typography provides effective contrast so that individual pieces of coverage are distinct.

- + √ - Evaluate how well the start of captions provide a function and attractive entry to captions.
- + √ - Evaluate how well type adds to the coverage by drawing in the reader.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the staff avoided the use of overly decorative typefaces that draw attention to themselves.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the staff utilized a consistent style for headlines.
- + √ - Evaluate how well headlines lead the reader to the coverage through effective placement.
- + √ - Evaluate how well typographical points of entrance such as large initial letters, pulled quotes and fact boxes have been incorporated.

GRAPHICS

- + √ - Evaluate how well graphics have been included to create an overall design concept for the publication.
- + √ - Evaluate how consistent the design pattern is from spread to spread, and section to section (such as news to sports).
- + √ - Evaluate how well the staff utilized consistent internal and external margins.
- + √ - Evaluate how well graphic devices are incorporated for accent without being overly effusive.
- + √ - Evaluate how effectively color and gray tones have been used.
- + √ - Evaluate how well each spread features a dominant center of visual interest.
- + √ - Evaluate the effectiveness of white space.
- + √ - Evaluate how well captions and reporting blocks are set in one consistent width within a spread.
- + √ - Evaluate how well the staff made effective use of logos to identify page information.
- + √ - For on-line publications, evaluate how well the staff used interactive elements (QR codes, hyperlinks, photo galleries, videos, polls/surveys) to enhance the content of stories.

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

Golden Pony:

News publication shows staff understanding of basic design concepts with graphic accent. Pages reveal unity of purpose with balance, dominance and perspective. Design helps communicate the message of the coverage without dominating that message. Design is clean, clear and appealing.

Silver Spur:

Design is clean and appropriate to the message of the stories and features in the publication. There are occasional problems with design elements but generally the design is simple, creative and effective for reader appreciation.

Bronze Star:

There are some serious design flaws noted here. Staff exhibits less than adequate understanding of basic design concepts. Poor quality of design tends to get in the way of reader understanding. More emphasis on design techniques is necessary.

Design Overall Comments:

LEADERSHIP

+	√	-	Evaluate is opinion pages indicate a strong editorial voice for the publication.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well the editorial pages demonstrate leadership capabilities through strong editorials, columns, cartoons and letters.
+	√	-	Evaluate how often staff editorials are based on a news story.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well editorials and columns stimulate readers to take action.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well the lead editorial clearly is distinguished by position and typography.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well the editorial staff exhibits an awareness of the many functions of editorials and columns: to criticize, defend, praise, endorse, motivate, advocate, entertain and predict.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well editorials and columns show evidence of research.
+	√	-	Evaluate how logical, rational and mature editorials and columns are.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well editorials and columns target a specific audience.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well editorials and columns offers a well thought-out solution to a stated problem.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well the staff included guest columns, opinion photography/art, letters to the editor and reader forums.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well columns exhibit a variety of writing techniques and tones.
+	√	-	Evaluate how well coverage on opinion pages avoids trite and trivial topics.
+	√	-	Evaluate the quality of editorial cartoons.
+	√	-	Evaluate the clarity of messages from editorial cartoons.

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

Golden Pony:

News publication demonstrates awareness and energy for using printed words and images to lead readers. Editors clearly value freedom of expression granted by the First Amendment.

Silver Spur:

Editorials, columns and story selection choices demonstrate elements of controversy within the school. However, student editors could do more to lead the school community with more specific opinions, deeper research and more sophistication.

Bronze Star:

The staff should take greater advantage of the power of the publication through editorials, opinion pieces and editorial cartoons. The First Amendment is a great tool to aid you in taking on issues of importance and local controversy.

Leadership Overall Comments:

IN SUMMARY
COVERAGE

Golden Pony

Silver Spur

Bronze Star

REPORTING

Golden Pony

Silver Spur

Bronze Star

VISUALS

Golden Pony

Silver Spur

Bronze Star

DESIGN

Golden Pony

Silver Spur

Bronze Star

LEADERSHIP

Golden Pony

Silver Spur

Bronze Star

FINAL EVALUATION

Golden Pony

Silver Spur

Bronze Star

Golden Pony:

This is a quality news publication that would compete well at any level. Staff demonstrates a solid understanding of the news publication and its purpose. Publication features well-written copy, attractive design and storytelling photography. This publication obviously was produced to serve a readership. Staff and adviser should be proud of their efforts. Staff goes above and beyond the typical to produce a publication reporting current and compelling news with both authoritative reporting, sophisticated use of visuals and cutting-edge design principals.

Silver Spur:

This publication represents an improving work in progress. Staff members indicate an awareness of what a quality news publication should include but don't completely succeed in carrying out that mission. There are skills showcased in many areas of journalistic production but this publication lacks a necessary consistency to be excellent overall. This publication is poised to break out and make its mark as a Golden Pony news publication in the coming year.

Bronze Star:

Too many flaws keep this publication from higher recognition. Staff and adviser should concentrate their efforts on news fundamentals and current production trends. This news publication has obviously been produced as a labor of love but lacks the essential ingredients for a quality publication. Strive to tell more of a complete story of the current events and issues at your school.

Letter from the judge - each school receives letter from its judge that is more free-flowing and open-ended than the rest of the critique. Judges may choose to use the same headings that are used in the critique booklet (coverage, reporting, etc.). Or, perhaps the judge has his or her format that would work well. This letter is intended to give judges more freedom in commenting than the "check, plus, minus" system in the critique book.

