



ALL-
KANSAS
NEWSPAPER
CRITIQUE
2008-2009

KANSAS SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION

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NEWSPAPER

Evaluation Guide

- This guide is designed to be an educational device to improve the quality of your newspaper.
- 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 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.
- A two-page critique should accompany this booklet.

Newspaper: _____

School Name: _____

School Address: _____

City & Zip Code: _____

Adviser: _____

School Classification: _____

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?
 - ___ 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 hard news coverage exhibit a wide variety of topics of interest to student 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 without becoming caught up in coverage of “fad” issues?
 - ___ Does the newspaper exhibit a blend of feature and news coverage?
 - ___ Is feature coverage varied to include profiles as well as straight feature coverage?
 - ___ Does coverage of issues and events provide readers with the most timely information?
 - ___ Do reporters place an emphasis on the “why” and the “how” of the story?
 - ___ Are all issues covered from a student perspective?
 - ___ Does sports coverage place a premium on upcoming athletic events with proper emphasis on the feature angle?
 - ___ Do sports writers emphasize the local athletic scene by avoiding coverage of college and professional athletics?
 - ___ Does the sports page include a sports briefs column?
 - ___ Are sports features included to liven up the coverage?
 - ___ Does coverage of issues and events provide readers with the most timely information?
 - ___ Is the subject matter significant and appropriate for the space allotted?
-

COVERAGE

Final Evaluation

All-Kansas:

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.

Comments:

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 each story 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 avoid question leads?
 - ___ Are paragraphs 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?
-

WRITING

Evaluation Criteria

- ___ 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?
 - ___ Do sports story leads avoid starting with the sport?
 - ___ Do headlines conform to an adopted style?
 - ___ Are headlines written in present tense?
 - ___ Do writers avoid becoming “cheerleaders” for their school?
 - ___ 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 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?
 - ___ Do staff writers avoid the use of “above” and “left?”
-

WRITING

Final Evaluation

All-Kansas:

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.

Comments:

DESIGN

Evaluation Criteria

- ___ Does the design reflect the personality of 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 to look into the page?
 - ___ Has column width variety been used with sophisticated restraint?
 - ___ Are short-item articles packaged into single, rectangular units?
 - ___ Have staff designers treated facing pages 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 each page?
 - ___ 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?
 - ___ If teasers and other graphic elements are included in the nameplate, do they complement rather than detract from the nameplate's appearance?
-

DESIGN

Evaluation Criteria

- ___ Is the nameplate positioned toward the top of the page without being deeper than two and one-half inches?
 - ___ 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?
 - ___ As a general rule, are headlines positioned flush left?
 - ___ Is the natural fold (center spread) 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 inside pages built around a center of visual impact?
 - ___ Are stories and related design elements (photos, artwork, type, infographic) packaged as a singular unit?
-

DESIGN

Final Evaluation

All-Kansas:

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.

Comments:

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?
 - Has staff avoided morticed photos?
 - 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 the use of irregularly shaped blocks of copy, stretched type, excessive underlining, unequal spacing, 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?
 - Have designers incorporated infographics where applicable to help tell a more immediate story?
 - Are graphic techniques utilized that enhance the overall design concept?
 - Have staff designers utilized “quick-read” elements for the reader?
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VISUALS

Final Evaluation

All-Kansas:

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.

Comments:

L LEADERSHIP

Evaluation Criteria

- ___ Have opinion pages been created that indicate a strong editorial voice for the publication?
 - ___ Do the editorial pages demonstrate leadership capabilities 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?
 - ___ Have a variety of editorials been included in the publication?
 - ___ 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?
 - ___ Do editorials show evidence of research?
 - ___ Are editorials logical, rational and mature?
 - ___ Are editorials generally written in first person plural?
 - ___ Do editorials target a specific audience?
 - ___ Do editorials generally offer a well thought out solution to a stated problem?
-

LEADERSHIP

Evaluation Criteria

- ___ 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?
- ___ Does the conclusion of the editorial restate the stance and prompt the reader into action?
- ___ Has the staff included opinion columns, guest columns, opinion photography/art, ombudsman columns, letters to the editor and reader forums?
- ___ Do columns exhibit a variety of writing techniques and a variety of tones?
- ___ Does coverage on these opinion pages show a full range of educational issues?
- ___ 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 issues rather than just filling space?
- ___ Have staff writers included reviews of concerts, books, restaurants, and cinema?
- ___ Do reviews cover a wide variety of topics?
- ___ Is entertainment coverage based on research and a wide range of topics?

LEADERSHIP

Final Evaluation

All-Kansas:

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.

Comments:

FINAL EVALUATION

Newspaper Evaluation

All-Kansas:

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 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.

Coverage

- All-Kansas
- Award of Commendation
- Award of Merit

Design

- All-Kansas
- Award of Commendation
- Award of Merit

Leadership

- All-Kansas
- Award of Commendation
- Award of Merit

Writing

- All-Kansas
- Award of Commendation
- Award of Merit

Visuals

- All-Kansas
- Award of Commendation
- Award of Merit