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ALL-KANSAS

NEWS WEBSITE CRITIQUE BOOKLET

This guide is designed to be an educational device to improve the quality of your news website program. It is intended to point out positive aspects of your program 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. 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. However, comments should represent current trends in online journalism.

Each of the 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 total of the five section evaluations. Each criteria calls for a specific ranking with a (+) for strong work in the area; a (✓) for being adequate and a (-) for needing improvement.
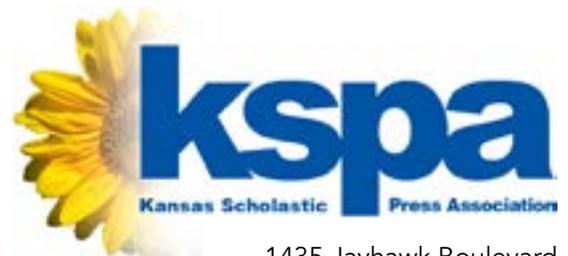
An overall open-comment critique space is included on pages 7 & 8 of this document.

SCHOOL NAME:

NEW WEBSITE NAME:

YEAR:

ADVISER:

kspa
Kansas Scholastic Press Association

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COVERAGE & CONTENT

+ ✓ – Does the site include web-exclusive content, including blogs, interactive elements, video, audio and breaking news coverage?

+ ✓ – Does the staff use blogs to update breaking news, provide coverage of often-overlooked stories and add perspective to news and feature stories?

+ ✓ – When used, are video and audio the best method for telling those stories?

+ ✓ – Do stand-alone video and audio pieces reflect the value of the medium or do they just look like warmed-over TV and radio packages?

+ ✓ – Do complementary video and audio add value to and complement the coverage they accompany?

+ ✓ – Do interactive elements add value to and complement the coverage they accompany?

+ ✓ – Does the staff use the site for special reports and in-depth coverage?

+ ✓ – Do students use multimedia components to add breadth and depth to those special reports?

+ ✓ – Does the staff understand that its website has a readership beyond the school and its students and staff?

+ ✓ – Is this a site that will keep "accidental" readers attention by offering stories that have a universal appeal?

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

All-Kansas Coverage & Content:
Coverage is complete and thorough, and it includes several digital and multimedia elements that enrich readers' experiences.

Award of Commendation Coverage & Content:
Coverage is generally complete and adequately serves a broad readership, but it may not fully take advantage of multimedia elements to enrich readers' experiences.

Award of Merit Coverage & Content:
Coverage tends to be somewhat shallow, and the staff needs to place more emphasis on using digital media to enhance readers' experiences.

Coverage & Content Overall Comments:

WRITING & EDITING

+ ✓ –   Does the staff understand how readers gather information online: by scanning the page for relevant words and other information?

+ ✓ –   Do writers and editors avoid simply "shoveling" the content from their print product onto the website?

+ ✓ –   Are stories easily readable because they are divided into chunks or sections?

+ ✓ –   Are paragraphs kept short and relevant?

+ ✓ –   Do sentences begin with keywords?

+ ✓ –   Are headlines written using specific words so that search engines easily find and recognize keywords?

+ ✓ –   For longer stories, do writers and editors make use of other key visual elements in the stories, such as bullet points, sub-headlines and highlighted keywords?

+ ✓ –   Do writers provide valuable hyperlinks (either embedded into stories or listed elsewhere) to stories that provide the reader with immediate depth?

+ ✓ –   Do scripts for multimedia elements (audio and video) follow the basic guidelines of "writing for the ear" that broadcast media follow?

+ ✓ –   Are multimedia elements accompanied by at least some text that allows readers to gain some context before listening to or viewing the multimedia?

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

All-Kansas Writing & Editing:
The staff understands that writing for online media is different than writing for print media and not only edits content before it puts it online, but stories are crisply told and feature all the hallmarks of good Web presentation.

Award of Commendation Writing & Editing:
Writing and editing show that the staff understands a bit about how Web writing differs from print writing, but there are still a few stories that simply appear to be "shoveled" from a print product.

Award of Merit Writing & Editing:
Writing and editing show little or no understanding that Web writing differs from print writing. Staff needs to work much harder on editing stories so they are more accessible to online readers.

Writing & Editing Overall Comments:

BREAKING NEWS

+ ✓ – Does the staff report on import-ant news, sports and features in a timely manner?

+ ✓ – Does the staff seek to include new content as often as it can, possibly daily or even more often?

+ ✓ – Is breaking news verified and updated as new information is learned?

+ ✓ – Is the news accurate, even if the story is incomplete?

+ ✓ – Does the staff follow breaking news stories for as long as the news changes and is relevant?

+ ✓ – Does the web staff take advan-tage of the site's immediacy to cover sports as it happens or shortly thereafter?

+ ✓ – Does live sports coverage re-main objective and accurate?

+ ✓ – Does the staff use multiple me-dia to report breaking news?

+ ✓ – Does coverage include useful information readers, such as notification of school closings for inclement weather or other emergencies?

+ ✓ – Does breaking news coverage also include news from other sources that may have an im-pact on the students, staff and community?

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

All-Kansas On-Air Breaking News:
Staff uses the immediacy of the Web to inform readers about important news in a timely and accurate fashion.

Award of Commendation Breaking News:
Staff only occasionally uses the immediacy of the Web to inform readers about important news in a timely and accurate fashion.

Award of Merit Breaking News:
Staff rarely, if ever, uses the immediacy of the Web to inform readers about important news in a timely and accurate fashion.

Breaking News Overall Comments:

INTERACTIVITY & MULTIMEDIA

+ ✓ − Are readers able to interact with the publication in a number of ways, including comments, discussion boards and polls/surveys?

+ ✓ − Does the staff use social media tools to market its own work, but also to provide readers with valuable information?

+ ✓ − Has the staff created online directories and reader services so that the website becomes a one-stop-shop for the community's information needs?

+ ✓ − Do games, polls, quizzes, interactive maps and other interactive tools engage readers with the news?

+ ✓ − Does the staff embrace "Citizen Journalism?" Are readers invited to submit photos, stories, blogs and other content that can be used for a stand-alone page or as complementary material to go with the staff's work? Does the staff use that material?

+ ✓ − Do reporters and editors use "crowd-sourcing" to not only develop story ideas, but to enhance and enrich stories that have already been published?

+ ✓ − Do useful hyperlinks add value to a story by directing readers to other stories or sites with vital information?

+ ✓ − For photo and video stories, does the staff use a variety of shots and adequate graphics or captions to tell a coherent story?

+ ✓ − For audio reports, does the staff record clean sound and use VOs, natural sound and sound bites to tell a coherent story?

+ ✓ − Does the staff not only understand but follow copyright laws, using only original content or copyright-free material and material in the public domain?

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

All-Kansas Interactivity & Multimedia:
Staff makes full use of interactive elements to help cover its audience and to involve its audience in the production of news. The staff also uses multimedia effectively and strives to meet high standards in its production.

Award of Commendation Interactivity & Multimedia:
Staff occasionally uses interactive elements to help cover its audience and to involve its audience in the production of news. The staff includes multimedia elements on its site, but it may not always meet high standards in multimedia production.

Award of Merit Interactivity & Multimedia:
Staff rarely makes full use of interactive elements to help cover its audience. And it rarely involves its audience in the production of news. The staff rarely uses multimedia.

Interactivity & Multimedia Overall Comments:

DESIGN & NAVIGATION

+ ✓ – Does the site balance text and graphics so that both are visible "above the fold" on a computer screen?

+ ✓ – Has the staff made effective use of text on the page to attract readers?

+ ✓ – Is the home page simple and uncluttered?

+ ✓ – Is navigation easy, presenting readers with only enough options on a single page that they won't easily become confused or overwhelmed?

+ ✓ – Are navigation bars and other content presented in an F-shaped pattern that mimics how online readers peruse a page?

+ ✓ – Are multimedia viewing panes large enough so that readers can enjoy the multimedia feature, but small enough to not obscure key written elements of the story?

+ ✓ – Do visual elements enhance but not dominate a page?

+ ✓ – Is there a clear hierarchy of news stories on a page?

+ ✓ – Are stories divided into clear categories and sections, and has the staff created tabs that direct readers to those sections?

+ ✓ – Are multiple elements in any story placed together in a cohesive package?

LEVELS OF DISTINCTION

All-Kansas Design & Navigation:
Staff has created an attractive website that is easy to navigate and points readers toward valuable, fresh and important information. There is good balance between graphic elements and text.

Award of Commendation Design & Navigation:
Staff has created a reasonably attractive website that is easy to navigate overall, but site may have some locations where that's not the case. Stories and links may occasionally be outdated. There is some balance between graphics and text, but it's not fully clear the staff understands that online readers are attracted to text as well as graphics.

Award of Merit Design & Navigation:
Website is mostly outdated and unattractive. There is little balance between graphic elements and text, and the site is difficult to navigate. If present, links are outdated or too general to be useful.

Design & Navigation Overall Comments:

IN SUMMARY

COVERAGE & CONTENT
All-Kansas

Award of Commendation

Award of Merit

WRITING & EDITING
All-Kansas

Award of Commendation

Award of Merit

BREAKING NEWS
All-Kansas

Award of Commendation

Award of Merit

INTERACTIVITY & MULTIMEDIA
All-Kansas

Award of Commendation

Award of Merit

DESIGN & NAVIGATION
All-Kansas

Award of Commendation

Award of Merit

FINAL EVALUATION

All-Kansas:

This is a great website that understands the key concepts of news presentation online. It features important stories, breaking news, valuable multimedia elements, interactivity and reader participation. Further, its design allows for easy navigation. In all, this website reflects the best of online news presentation.

Award of Commendation:

This is an overall good website that may, in spots, hint at greatness. However, its deficiencies in a few areas— be they breaking news, coverage, multimedia, interactivity or design — prevent it from being All-Kansas. Greater attention to the components of web news will make this an All-Kansas site in the near future.

Award of Merit

This is a website that has too many flaws to be rated at the top. It may be a new enterprise, and because of that, the staff and the adviser may just be learning about the nuances of multimedia and Web presentation. Further, the website may have some strong areas, but it also has many areas that need significant improvement.

Final Evaluation Overall Comments:

Judges should use this text box for overall comments on the qualities and suggestions for improvement for the program.

Final Evaluation Overall Comments (continued)