



News Publication All-Washington Critique & Rating 2015

News publication _____

School name _____

School address _____

City and zip code _____

Adviser _____

Adviser email _____

Actual enrollment (2014-15) _____ Grades in school _____

Publication's URL (if available) _____

Where to find electronic version of publication _____

Judge _____

- This guide is designed to be an educational device to improve the quality of your news publication. It's based on a format and best practices offered within several state critique services, particularly Colorado.
- This guide should offer commendations as well as constructive recommendations.
- Judging comments represent just one individual's opinion.
- Comments should represent current publication.
- 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 asks the judge to rate the section according to an overall set of criteria after noting select commendations/recommendations.
- The final ranking considers all aspects of a news publication.

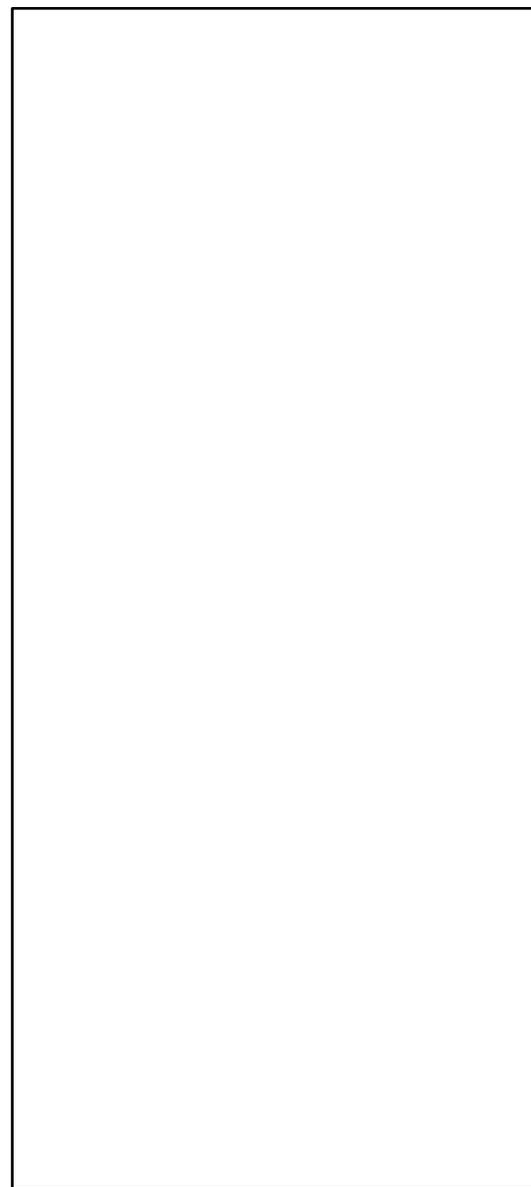
News publication

Coverage evaluation

JUDGES: These questions are meant to help you assess how this news publication is doing in its coverage. Some publications will be quite strong in coverage but will appreciate not only a pat on the back but any tips you can share to improve coverage even more. For publications that are clearly in transition or are struggling to get their coverage where it should be, please provide focused, specific advice. Please identify issues and page numbers clearly when you reference coverage. This critique is designed to be read on a screen, rather than printed, so narrative and specifics will help serve students and their advisers.

- No matter the frequency, does the publication capture life at this school? Does the reader get an “insider’s perspective”?
- Is most coverage focused on people involved and on what readers need to know NOW and in the FUTURE, as opposed to summarizing old news?
- Does coverage exhibit a wide variety of topics of interest to readers?
- Does the publication cover timely issues of interest to student readers, finding ways to localize national trends?
- Does the newspaper exhibit a blend of feature/lifestyle and news coverage?
- Is feature coverage varied to include profiles as well as straight features?
- Are all issues covered from a student perspective?
- Do reporters place an emphasis on the “why” and “how” of the story?
- Does coverage synthesize information, providing insights and perspective, beyond collecting facts and quotes?
- 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?
- Are academics and co-curricular clubs and organizations regularly covered?
- 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?

Commendations/Recommendations



News publication

Coverage overall evaluation

- Superior:** Coverage is complete and thorough and helps to tell the story of the school year in both words and visuals. The staff indicates an obvious awareness of what makes news and presents that information in each issue to its readers.
- Excellent:** Coverage is generally complete and adequately serves the readership. The staff exhibits an awareness of unique coverage concepts and is generally capable of incorporating these concepts from one edition to the next.
- Honorable Mention:** Coverage tends to be a bit shallow and lacks that necessary creative spark to entice the readership. The staff needs to place more emphasis on news events with a featurized angle to enhance coverage.

Final or additional comments on coverage

News publication

Writing evaluation

JUDGES: We know there is not time to read everything, but please sample all the types of writing. Opinion writing will be critiqued in another portion of this document. Please look for improvement over the school year before noting remarks.

- Is writing typically in third person, active voice, precise and concise?
- Do staff writers avoid editorializing in the news stories?
- Are quotes the mainstay of most stories, allowing a variety of sources to have input?
- Do students avoid including quotes that state obvious facts? Are quotes used more to reveal personality than to simply describe?
- Are synonyms for “said” as attribution avoided?
- Does the staff emphasize leads that grab reader attention quickly?
- Do writers generally avoid the use of quote leads? Do writers use question leads with sophisticated restraint, if used at all?
- Are paragraphs generally brief?
- Does writing show rather than tell?
- Do features emphasize human interest?
- Does the staff avoid an overuse of the school name and mascot in reporting?
- Do sports story leads emphasize people?

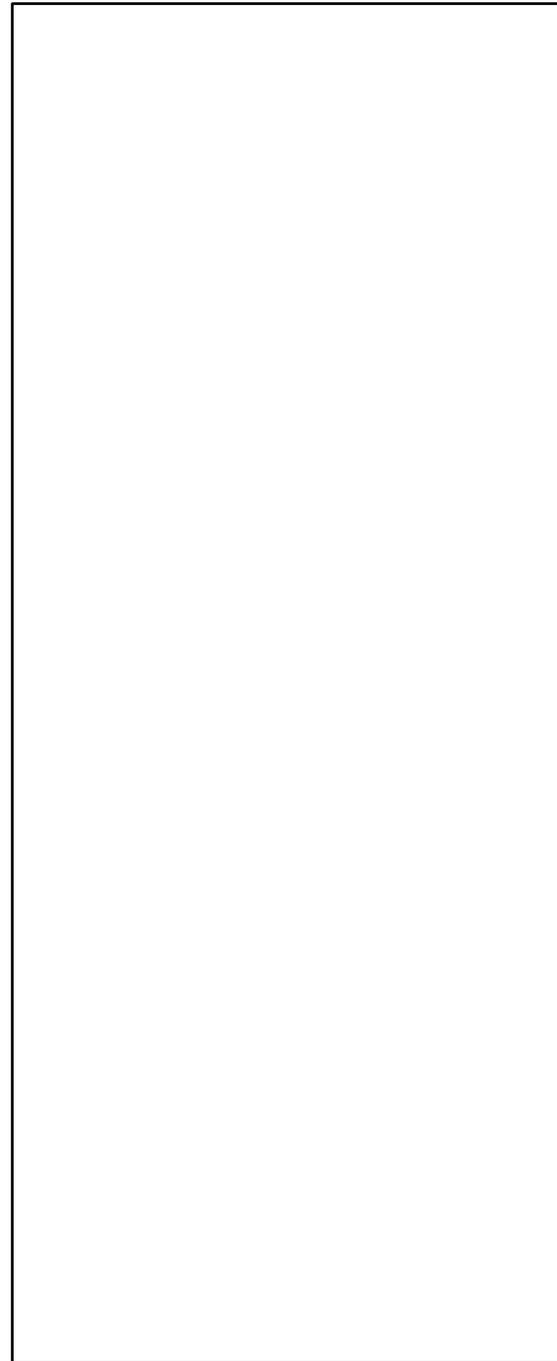
Headlines & Cutlines

- Are headlines effective in encouraging readers to want more information?
- Are headlines normally in present tense?
- Do writers avoid becoming “cheerleaders” for school in heads and cutlines/captions?
- Do writers avoid passive verbs, split phrases, and split modifiers in headlines?
- Do staff writers avoid the use overuse of any one stylistic device in headlines, e.g puns, inside jokes, school mascots, etc.?
- Do cutlines/captions answer questions of who, what, when, where, why and how?
- Are all cutlines/captions written in present tense with a possible switch to past tense in secondary (following) sentences?

Conventions

- Have convention errors been kept to a minimum with effective proofreading?
- Has the publication clearly established a mix of professional style (we recommend AP) along with local style rules?

Commendations/Recommendations



News publication

Writing overall evaluation

- Superior:** 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.
- Excellent:** 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.
- Honorable Mention:** 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.

Final or additional comments on writing

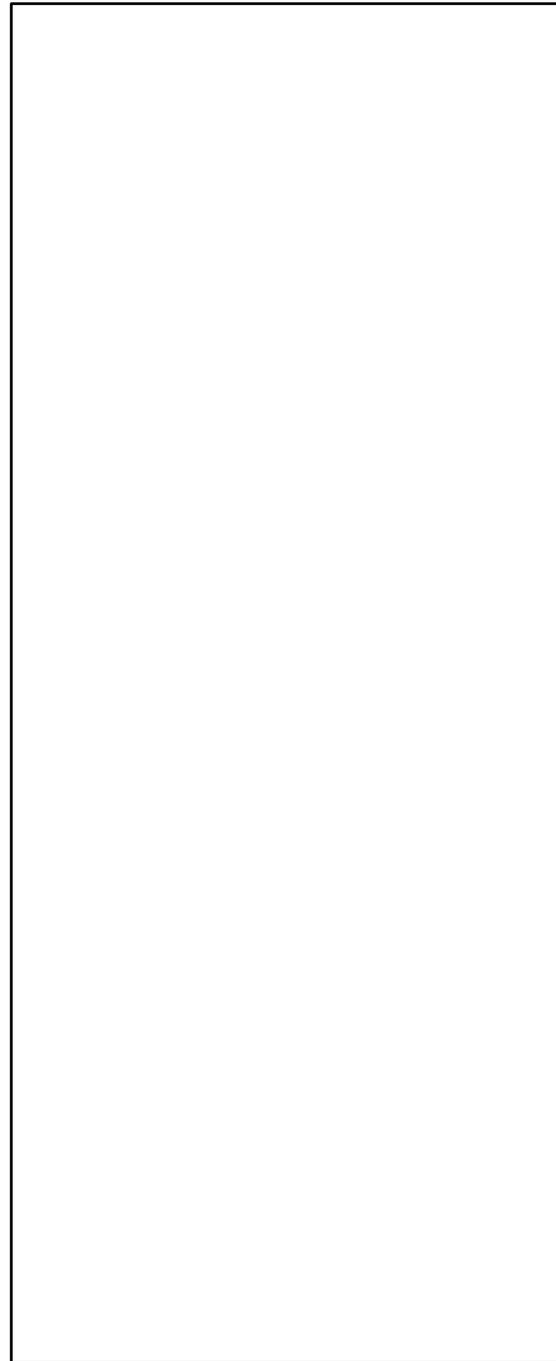
News publication

Design evaluation

JUDGES: Please distinguish between desktop publishing decisions and art choices. This section focuses on shapes on the page and typography. Quality of visuals (photographs, illustrations, etc.) is covered in another section.

- Does the pub's personality match design?
- Is the publication departmentalized as a reader service? Easy to navigate?
- Are folios incorporated into the design and do they include the name of the news publication, the page number and the date?
- Is news judgment evident in the display of major stories, usually given dominant positions in the flow of the design?
- Do staff designers incorporate art and photos into related stories?
- Has column width variety been used with sophisticated restraint (grid system)?
- Are short-item articles packaged into single, rectangular units?
- Have staff designers treated facing pages (DPS) as a single optical area and maintained balance, using art as anchor?
- Do most pages include a dominant element, or center of visual interest?
- 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?
- Is the typography clean and readable? Have designers kept to a small number of font families to enhance consistency?
- Are headline weights used effectively?
- Is there some consistency used in display elements such as nameplate, folios, masthead/staff box and standing heads to create a unified appearance?
- Are stories and related elements (photos, artwork, type, infographic) packaged to provide a variety of ways into coverage?
- Is there some planned space separating content from the edges of boxes?
- If coverage demands lengthier text, have subheads been used to divide gray text?
- Are alternatives to text (sidebars, infographics) complementary of content, with a consistent design philosophy evident?

Commendations/Recommendations



News publication

Design overall evaluation

- Superior:** 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.
- Excellent:** 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.
- Honorable Mention:** 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.

Final or additional comments on design

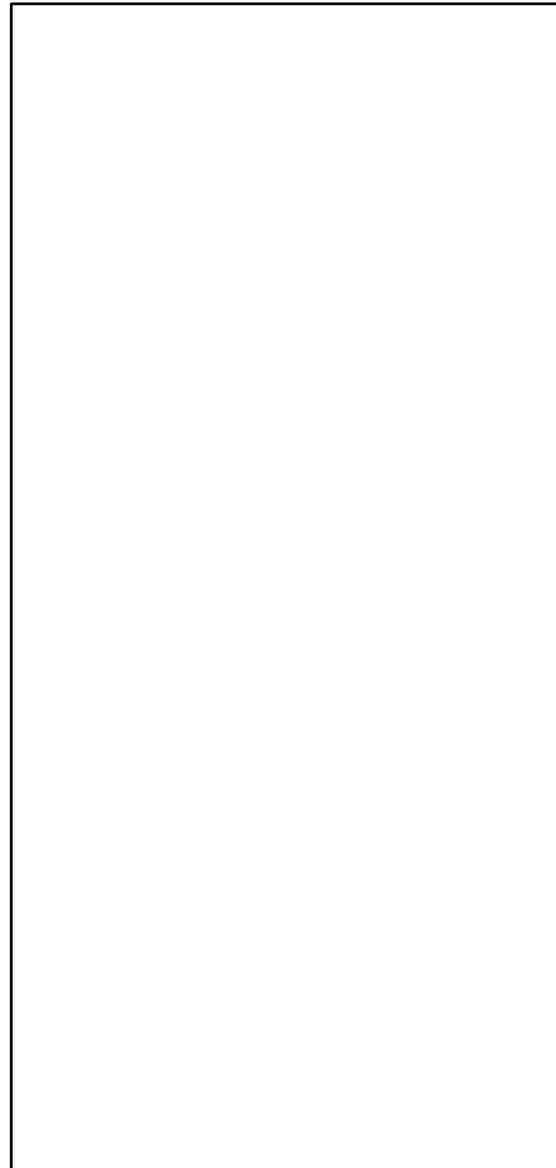
News publication

Visual evaluation

JUDGES: It can be difficult to separate design (how elements are arranged on the page, in short) from visuals (usually photographs and other art), but a publication can be poorly designed yet have quite impressive visuals (and vice versa). We want students to produce high-quality visuals, though photos such as sports will be limited without sophisticated lenses. Your advice is welcomed on how to produce great visuals under tough circumstances. We also address copyright issues. Misappropriating photos and art from the Web is common. Even one misuse of a copyrighted image should take a publication out of Superior consideration for this section.

- Are photos carefully selected for maximum reader interest and reproduction quality?
- Are photos cropped to the center of interest / rule of thirds?
- Has staff avoided the use of posed photos as well as clichés (people shaking hands, principal on phone, teachers at desk, etc.)?
- 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 most photos taken by staff, and are photo credits included to make this clear?
- If any professional photographs are used, has proper permission to reprint been obtained (“photo courtesy of...” is not enough – legal permissions must be obtained and included in captions)?
- If any material from social media is used, have proper permissions been obtained?
- Are special effects and graphic manipulations of photos used sparingly? Is type rarely placed over photographs?
- Have graphics and illustrations been well planned and incorporated?
- Is hand-drawn art, if present, sophisticated, following accepted illustration practices?
- Has the staff avoided sacrificing content for the sake of graphics?
- Are borders, reverses and screens used with restraint and effectively?
- Has color, if available, been used with sophisticated restraint?
- Has the staff avoided: irregularly shaped blocks of copy, stretched type, excessive underlining, unequal spacing, and exaggerated leading, tabs and indents?
- Is artwork used as part of a story package rather than an element to merely fill space?

Commendations/Recommendations



News publication

Visuals overall evaluation

- Superior:** This news publication 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. Photographs and other art are consistently excellent.
- Excellent:** Staff does an adequate job in providing visuals that enhance the publication's content. Visuals are utilized within the design framework but lack a necessary spark. Photographs and other art show promise, but lack some consistency of quality and storytelling.
- Honorable Mention:** Staff needs to place greater emphasis on this area of journalism. Little attention is given to reader needs for consuming the publication. Photographers may need to spend more time on assignments, for instance, so designers have a wider range of choices.

Final or additional comments on visuals

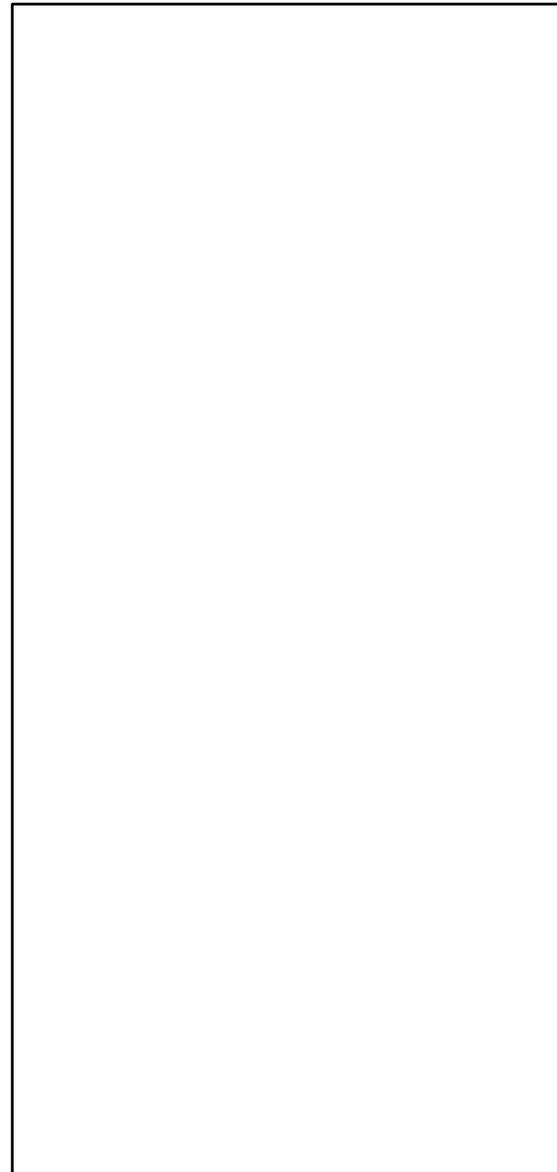
News publication

Leadership evaluation

JUDGES: If this news publication does not include any staff editorials, it cannot earn a Superior rating for this section. One of the few things that distinguishes a news publication from other forms of student media is the staff editorial, representing the voice of the publication. We also value a diversity of student voices. Please also comment on columnists, cartoonists, etc. We have included entertainment reviews (and other coverage) in this section, assuming reviews help readers make choices.

- Have opinion pages been created that indicate a strong editorial voice?
- Do the editorial pages demonstrate breadth of coverage through strong staff editorials, columns, comment, cartoons and letters?
- Do most issues contain at least one unsigned staff editorial, representing the publication's views on an issue of interest to community?
- Are staff editorials generally written in third person or first person plural (as the position of the newspaper, not a specific person)?
- Have staff editorials avoided trite and trivial topics such as school spirit and senioritis?
- Whenever possible, have staff editorials been based on a news story covered elsewhere?
- Do staff editorials stimulate readers to take action, or at least change views?
- Is the lead staff editorial clearly distinguished by position and typography?
- Does the staff exhibit an awareness that the editorial may attack, defend, praise, endorse, instigate, advocate, entertain or predict?
- Have a variety of staff editorials been included over the year (e.g. criticism, problem solution, praise, etc.)?
- Do editorials show evidence of research?
- Are editorials logical, rational and mature?
- Do columns or commentaries exhibit a variety of writing techniques and tones?
- Does coverage on opinion pages provide a full range of student voices?
- Are editorial cartoons (if used) of high enough quality to warrant their space?
- Do responses to letters, when included, show respect and courtesy for dissenters?
- Have staff writers included reviews of things of interest to student consumers, such as concerts, books, restaurants, and cinema?
- Is entertainment coverage based on research and a wide range of topics?

Commendations/Recommendations



News publication

Leadership overall evaluation

- Superior:** This news publication leads rather than follows. It is evident in the content as well as the style of the opinion pages. A full range of offerings, including staff editorials, enhances these pages for the readership.
- Excellent:** Staff opinion 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, including at least one staff editorial.
- Honorable Mention:** This news publication appears to follow without providing the reader much leadership. Staff editorials fail to enhance each edition. Staff members appear to be going through the motions with little regard to the possibilities of providing leadership to the community.

Final or additional comments on visuals

News publication

Overall final evaluation

- Superior:** This is a quality news publication that would compete well at any level. Staff demonstrates a solid understanding of the publication's place in the curriculum. The publication 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. Clear leadership is a hallmark of this publication.
- Excellent:** This news publication represents a work in progress. Staff members indicate an awareness of what a quality publication should include but fail to consistently carry out that mission. There are flashes of brilliance in all areas of your work but the publication lacks a necessary consistency to be truly effective.
- Honorable Mention:** Too many flaws keep this news publication from reaching the higher levels of recognition. Staff and adviser should concentrate on basic publication production concepts. This publication 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 final thoughts

This is your opportunity to discuss issues that were not specifically addressed in the five sections of the critique.