

**Q:**

Students who work on  
high school newspapers  
and yearbooks:

**A:**

- Get better grades  
in high school
- Earn higher scores  
on the ACT
- Get better grades  
as college freshmen
- All of the above

## High School Journalism Matters

NAA Foundation's 2008 Research Study Shows a Positive Link Between  
High School Journalism and Academic Achievement



"If you are engaged in your school newspaper or your yearbook in high school, the research suggests you will be better with critical thinking skills, better with your grades and a more rigorous contributor to society."

Bruce Bradley  
 Publisher, The Virginian-Pilot, Norfolk  
 President/Publishing Group,  
 Landmark Communications Inc.  
 Chairman, NAA Foundation Board of Trustees

▶ "In this day and age, when school systems are so concerned about academic performance, no school can justify not having a student newspaper and yearbook."

Mark Goodman  
 Knight Chair in Scholastic Journalism  
 Kent State University

○ "If schools want to motivate and have motivated students who are involved in a multiplicity of activities, clearly journalism is a significant component of that."

Gene Policinski  
 Vice President and Executive Director  
 First Amendment Center  
 Nashville



# High School Journalism Matters

High school journalism students earn higher grade point averages, score better on the ACT college entrance examination and demonstrate better writing and grammar skills in college, compared with students who do not have those journalism experiences.

**T**hese findings are the result of new research conducted in 2008 for the Newspaper Association of America Foundation by Jack Dvorak, Ph.D., director of the High School Journalism Institute and a professor of the School of Journalism at Indiana University.

The research is based on high school grade point averages and ACT performances of 31,175 students who are attending or have attended colleges and universities in all 50 states and some foreign countries. The ACT, formerly known as The American College Testing Program Inc., is universally accepted for college admission and is administered annually to more than 1 million high school students.

Of the survey total, around 20 percent of the students served on the staffs of their high school newspapers or yearbooks. In addition to learning the practice and craft of journalism, photojournalism and publication design, they honed their critical thinking, leadership and self-management abilities.

The results show a statistically significant difference in performance of the students

involved with high school journalism compared with those who had no high school journalism exposure. In this type of research, statistically significant results mean the variance in the findings actually is caused by the factor being studied, not by chance or an unrelated element.

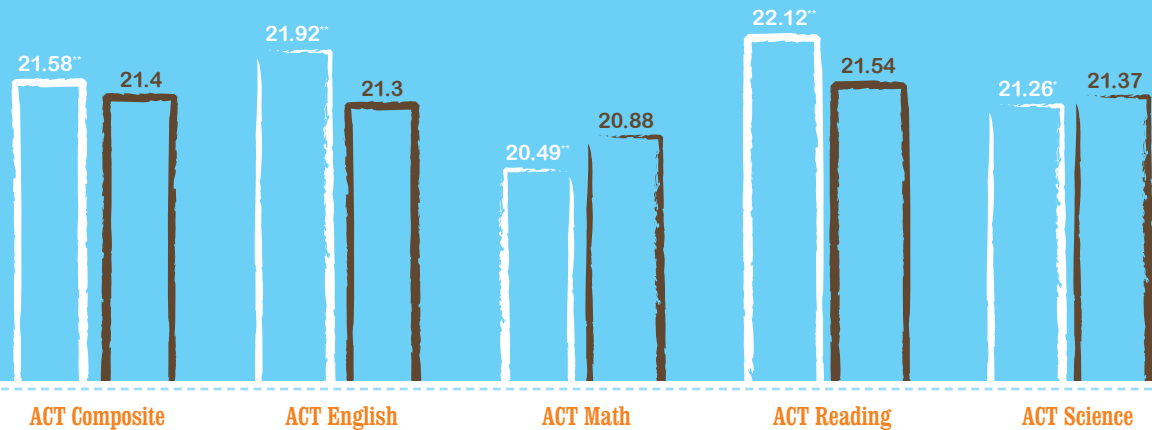
These results mirror findings of earlier research, conducted 21 years ago, that also concluded that students with journalism experience in high school did better than non-journalism students in terms of both high school grades and ACT scores. The 2008 study involves a larger sample than the previous research and includes a more diverse set of students.

In both the 1987 and the 2008 studies, students with journalism experience in high school earned higher scores than non-journalism students in these areas:

- \* High school overall grade point average
- \* ACT Composite score
- \* ACT English score
- \* College freshman English grade
- \* College freshman grade point average

## ACT Scores by Journalism Staffers and Non-Staffers

■ J-Staff  
■ Non-Staff



Source: ACT/NAA Foundation (2008)  
 J-Staff n=6,137 Non-Staff n=25,038  
 \* Difference significant beyond .05  
 \*\* Difference significant beyond .01

The journalism students also had higher grades in high school mathematics, social science, science and English courses than non-journalism students.

Interestingly, in both 1987 and 2008, despite earning higher grades in their classroom studies, the journalism students did not fare as well as their non-journalism peers when it came to ACT Math scores.

The study also looked at a subset of the students who took Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) tests as college sophomores to see whether work on high school newspapers or yearbooks translated to better performance in colleges and universities. On both the CAAP Writing Essay and Writing Objective tests, students with high school journalism experience performed significantly better than those who lacked journalism exposure.

In terms of the college entrance examination, high school journalism staffers scored in the 64th percentile on the ACT Composite compared with scores in the 56th percentile for non-journalism students. With ACT English

scores, journalism students finished in the 65th percentile compared with the 59th percentile for non-journalism students.

And those students with high school journalism experience also fared better in ACT Reading, with scores in the 59th percentile compared with the 56th percentile for non-journalism students.

The study does not resolve the issue of whether students do better because of their journalism work or because students involved with journalism are better students. However, it shows conclusively that journalism experience in high school translates into better college performance in several key areas, such as the ability to express oneself clearly and reason incisively.

“If nothing else, we can conclude that high school newspaper or yearbook staff involvement is an excellent outlet for talented, active and involved students,” the study concludes. “It also gives them a chance to apply their natural leadership abilities while also exercising their critical thinking, designing and writing skills.”

In addition, based on the students’ own descriptions of their activities in the profile

section of the ACT, journalism students tend to take part in far more outside-the-classroom activities than non-journalism students. Their involvement includes stage and musical performances, community endeavors and other volunteer initiatives.

These findings build on previous research by the NAA Foundation showing that students who worked on their high school newspapers or student-oriented sections of their hometown papers and who used newspapers in class or for homework were more engaged in civic activities, better educated and more involved citizens as they grew older.

For more details on this study and other NAA Foundation research, visit  
[→ www.naafoundation.org](http://www.naafoundation.org).



# Methodology

This research is based on a study of 31,175 students who took the ACT college entrance examination during the past five years as either juniors or seniors in high school.

One of the questions in the Student Profile Section of the ACT asked students to respond to the following statement: “Worked on the staff of a school paper or yearbook.”

In this study, 6,137 of the students or roughly 20 percent responded “Yes, applies to me” to that statement.

Using the data collected for the entire group of students, it was possible to compare the outcome for journalism students and non-journalism students in a number of areas, including scores on the ACT, collegiate performance, final high school grade point

averages and grades in the last high school courses taken in various subjects.

A smaller subset of the overall group also had taken the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency examinations as sophomores, making it possible to compare the results of journalism and non-journalism students for those tests as well.

Jack Dvorak, Ph.D., of Indiana University, who prepared the study for the NAA Foundation, was part of the research team behind the 1987 study “High School Journalism Confronts Critical Deadline.” It also compared the performances of high school journalism students and non-journalism students.



**Newspaper Association of America Foundation™**

4401 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 900, Arlington, VA 22203-1867

[www.naafoundation.org](http://www.naafoundation.org)

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Merrifield, VA  
Permit No. 1924