



Spartan Newspaper Critique

School _____

City _____

Newspaper Name _____

To have your newspaper evaluated, your student media outlet must be a current MIPA member.

Michigan Interscholastic Press Association
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OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION

This Newspaper Critique Booklet is designed to provide a framework for the judge in evaluating the newspaper, to reward the staff for creativity and accomplishment and to provide suggestions for improvement for future issues. We have tried to make this guide as open-ended as possible to allow the judge to consider all aspects of the student newspaper and its audience.

We recognize that in today's multi-platform world, publications are developing in new ways and that excellent publications may reflect a variety of approaches to merging news in print and digital formats and this may mean some papers look very traditional while others leave areas of coverage once done in print to other platforms.

We want to allow staffs as much latitude as possible in producing newspapers that fit their school and community — whether that be in a more traditional format or one that reflects modern trends and approaches. All of this must, of course, be built around sound journalism practices. This evaluation is designed to provide meaningful feedback and to recognize and reward excellence.

With this in mind, we award the following ratings:

Spartan Award

900 or more

Gold Medal

800 – 899

Silver Medal

700 – 799

Bronze Medal

0 – 699

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS TO JUDGE

This form may be completed and returned to MIPA as a digital PDF or as a print document completed in pencil. If you have any questions, please contact the MIPA office at mipa@msu.edu or 517-353-6761. Thank you!

Please rank each category according to the scale provided and assign the appropriate number of points. The scale is provided for your convenience. You are not limited to the numbers shown on the scale. You may award the book any number of points from a zero to the highest number available for the category. Please use the space provided for suggestions and comments that will help the staff understand concerns and problem areas and how they may be improved. Please use a pencil to score.

COVERAGE

OVERALL COVERAGE

- The publication attempts to reach the whole school community, is comprehensible to outside readers and emphasizes materials of interest and consequence to most students.
- The publication centers on school news, yet seeks to show how other information about the community, regional, national and international events affect students.
- The publication appears lively, entertaining, enterprising and well-balanced. It incorporates modern trends appropriate to readers in its community.
- Minority groups and diversity issues within a school or community are presented.
- Articles appear to be written following thorough reporting. When applicable, at least three sources have been used.
- Content shows diversity rich with news, opinion, feature and sports, and gives emphasis to advance coverage.
- Coverage may reflect emerging trends in journalism.

Overall Coverage Strengths:

Overall Coverage Recommendations:

NEWS COVERAGE

- A balance of briefs and detailed accounts occur in the publication. *(If some news coverage elements are missing from the print newspaper, they are represented on its website, where more timely coverage can be provided.)*
- A variety of news sources is evidenced.
- Student organizations are covered (government, clubs, activities, etc.).
- All aspects of on-campus student life — curriculum, interests, “glamour” subjects, controversies — are thoroughly researched and presented to students.
- Aspects of off-campus news — local to international — are thoroughly researched and presented to students with a strong, relevant angle.

News Coverage Strengths:

News Coverage Recommendations:

COVERAGE, cont.

FEATURE COVERAGE

- A variety of features is offered. Features are stimulating, interesting, entertaining and/or timely.
- Personality profiles offer realistic, newsworthy portrayals.
- Puzzles, jokes and humor elements are permissible but limited. Horoscopes and gossip columns are omitted.
- The publication covers students' interests and concerns, balanced with community-related activities.
- Polls/surveys emphasize summary results and indicate size and range of sampling and timeliness.
- Staff expands coverage of single subjects and special themes that reflect problems, actions and views of members of the school community.

Feature Coverage Strengths:

Feature Coverage Recommendations:

SPORTS COVERAGE

- Content reflects diversity of competitive team sports, individual sports and leisure activities.
- The publication gives readers information about approaching events, recalls highlights of past events with emphasis on what students do not know and information about opposing teams.
- The publication provides well-rounded season coverage and refrains from "glamorizing."
- May show materials about community, collegiate or professional competition geared toward informing students and including a strong local angle.
- Coverage is original and includes related interviews, personality profiles, surveys and other feature material.
- Some statistics and summaries are provided. Some briefs exist. Playoff, league and conference results are evidenced.

Sports Coverage Strengths:

Sports Coverage Recommendations:

Score for Coverage

0

Needs Improvement

100

140

Average/Good

170

Very Good

200

Excellent

Judges: The numbers above are just markers. You may give any number of points up to 200.

WRITING & EDITING

BASIC PRINCIPLES

- Proper sourcing is evident in all stories.
- Writing style is appropriate to story topic.
- Consistent, concise style appropriate to subject matter is utilized.
- Fairness is crucial. All sides of controversial issues are covered. Accuracy is stressed.
- People are completely identified in a consistent style.
- Paragraphs vary in length and are usually short. Successive paragraphs in a story do not repeat same words in the beginning. Sentences are clear, varied. Journalistic writing style is consistent.
- Attributions are used appropriately. Third person predominates.

Basic Principles Strengths:

Basic Principles Recommendations:

STORIES IN GENERAL

- Leads vary in structure and catch reader's interest.
- Stories catch the reader's attention, are not padded with trite comments. Stories stick to central focus.
- Transitions are evident in stories.
- Objectivity is a major goal.
- Active voice verb dominates.
- Stories reflect sound interviewing and quotes are used effectively.
- Stories stress the "why" element.
- Stories avoid summaries of general circulation material and avoid copying previously published material.

Stories in General Strengths:

Stories in General Recommendations:

WRITING & EDITING, cont.

NEWS STORIES

- Timely.
- Free of editorializing.
- Leads reflect a humanistic angle and appeal to the reader.
- Future events are alluded to in the story.
- May follow inverted pyramid or news feature approach.

News Stories Strengths:

News Stories Recommendations:

FEATURE STORIES

- Story topics are varied and original.
- Leads set tone and focus.
- Quotes enhance story.
- Stories develop a central idea.
- Anecdotes, when appropriate, add life to stories.

Feature Stories Strengths:

Feature Stories Recommendations:

WRITING & EDITING, cont.

SPORTS STORIES

- How and why of action is emphasized.
- Seasonal coverage follows descending order of importance. Avoids chronological accounts.
- Colorful style but objective straight reporting. Columns are not preachy.
- Avoids cliches and jargon.

Sports Stories Strengths:

Sports Stories Recommendations:

HEADLINES/CUTLINES

- Headlines attract reader attention, reflect information.
- Headlines avoid overuse of school name, abbreviations, repetitions, split-infinitives, separation of adverbs and adjectives from verbs and nouns, separation of preposition from object.
- Varied styles of headlines can be used.
- Cutlines have impact with challenging words, phrases. The first sentence in present tense and the remaining sentence in past tense. They avoid cliched phrases. All people are identified. A cutline appears with each photo.
- All photos and art are credited.

Headlines/Cutlines Strengths:

Headlines/Cutlines Recommendations:

WRITING & EDITING, cont.

ALTERNATIVE STORY FORMS

- Are used appropriately to enhance traditional coverage or as stand alone coverage.
- Conveys information in a lively and concise manner.
- Uses visual elements to help tell the story.
- May include elements of humorous, interactive and alternative approaches.

Alternative Story Form Strengths:

Alternative Story Form Recommendations:

Score for Writing & Editing

0 **100** **200** **250** **300** **350**

Needs Improvement Average/Good Very Good Excellent

Judges: The numbers above are just markers. You may give any number of points up to 350.

DESIGN

OVERALL DESIGN

- Modular or mostly modular design is evident throughout the publication.
- Pages are well-balanced with a dominant element toward the top. Other visual items are used to help the reader navigate the page.
- Hierarchy is evident, with most important content at the top of the page.
- Tombstoning and butting heads are eliminated as much as possible.
- A photo or piece of art should not separate a story and its headline in a confusing manner.
- A contrasting typeface should be used for headlines.
- Art heads or display heads are used sparingly, and novelty type is rare.
- An oldstyle serif typeface for body copy is preferred. Text is often set in either 9 or 10 point type, with appropriate leading. Lines of text are locked to the baseline.
- Column widths are appropriate, not too wide or too narrow.
- Captions/cutlines are set in a contrasting or sans serif typeface, preferably in bold or semi-bold.
- Only a few typefaces are used and assist in the organization of information.
- Leading is appropriate and kerning is used when necessary.
- Design is creative and all elements work together to tell each story.
- White space is used well and is purposeful.
- Elements are spaced consistently. Horizontal and vertical hairlines may be used to help separate stories.
- An underlying grid is evident.
- Effects such as pull quotes and secondary coverage are well-executed and visually appealing.
- Colored or shaded boxes are not overused, and do not take away from information that is inside. Screens that are placed over copy are light enough so that text can still be easily read.
- Rules, dingbats, typographic devices are used to enhance or support content, not overwhelm or take away from information.

Overall Design Strengths:

Overall Design Recommendations:

DESIGN, cont.

FRONT PAGE

- Positive first impression sets stage for the rest of the paper and has a strong center of visual interest.
- Nameplate is uncluttered, includes name of publication, date, volume number and issue number, and address if it does not appear elsewhere.
- A page one with a photo or art as its only element (newsmagazine) should include a headline, caption and a reference to where the related story is printed inside the publication.
- Design consistency exists, yet front pages do not become repetitious or predictable.
- Balance should be struck between horizontal and vertical story packages if relevant.
- Teasers, if part of design, should compliment, not distract the reader from focus of the dominant element.

Front Page Strengths:

Front Page Recommendations:

INSIDE PAGES

- Design is built around a single element, major story or dominant art element.
- Editorial/opinion pages occur in every issue and may differ from other pages in the publication to signal a shift from objective or subjective writing.
- Editorial/opinion pages should include either a condensed or full masthead.
- Folios appear on all pages and include publication name, page numbers and dates. Section labels are smaller on inside pages than on section fronts.
- Column logos, bylines and standing heads are consistent throughout and well-designed.

Inside Page Strengths:

Inside Page Recommendations:

Score for Design

0 100 140 170 200

Needs Improvement Average/Good Very Good Excellent

Judges: The numbers above are just markers. You may give any number of points up to 200.

PHOTOGRAPHY & GRAPHICS

PHOTOGRAPHY

- Photos are carefully selected for maximum reader interest and reproduction quality.
- Photos are cropped to the center of interest and the center of interest is focused.
- Elements of composition are incorporated to create artistic photos that fulfill journalistic story telling expectations.
- Content of photos is newsworthy, significant or unusual and is of relevance to the audience.
- A variety of photos—action, mugs, groups, objects—is published. There is evidence that there is photo coverage of news and athletic events.
- Photos shot digitally are free of technical flaws while shooting and are not overly repaired in an imaging program.
- Photos shot with film are free of scratches, dust, lint, water spots or other technical flaws.
- Photo cutouts are executed well and are appropriate to the design of the story.

Photography Strengths:

Photography Recommendations:

GRAPHICS

- Graphics are planned extensively, not used for their own sake but to enhance the story.
- An infographic contains illustrations or graphics to represent and visually interpret the facts and figures within.
- Editorial/opinion cartoons convey the message simply with little text needed.
- Alternative Story Forms feature strong, creative visual elements relevant to the story being told.

Graphics Strengths:

Graphics Recommendations:

Score for Photography & Graphics

0 75 100 125 150

Needs Improvement Average/Good Very Good Excellent

Judges: The numbers above are just markers. You may give any number of points up to 150.

EDITORIAL CONTENT

LEADERSHIP

- Publication expresses concern for the well-being of the school, students, staff and faculty through commentary in editorials and opinion columns.
- Publication expresses concern for the well-being of the community through commentary relevant to student readers in editorials and opinion columns.
- There is evidence of thorough research covering all aspects of the topic being covered.
- There is a mix of coverage of non-school events and issues relevant to students that will make students well-informed citizens.
- Publication attempts to cover topics and issues of concern to its main audience.
- Page one of publication contains information that is most significant of the content within the publication.
- Publication furnishes students with information of immediate and long-range effects on students' lives.

Leadership Strengths:

Leadership Recommendations:

EDITORIAL/OPINION CONTENT

- Editorials/opinion provide leadership through responsible comment on a wide range of subjects. Issues include at least one editorial based on a timely important topic covered elsewhere in the publication.
- Editorials reflect thorough research and suggest, when possible, solutions.
- Opinion coverage provides useful forums for letters to the editor, guest articles, columns, news analysis, editorial cartoons and photographs.
- A published editorial policy encourages readers to write letters and contribute guest articles and explains how to do so.
- The publication presents reviews of films, records, literature and electronic media of interest to students.

Editorial/Opinion Strengths:

Editorial/Opinion Recommendations:

EDITORIAL CONTENT, cont.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND ETHICS

- Students follow ethical practices, accept professional standards and adhere to press law in all aspects of work.
- Students use accepted journalistic forms and style. Any deviation is made because it is appropriate and valuable to readers.
- Fairness is crucial. All sides of controversial issues are covered. Accuracy is stressed.
- The newspaper reflects maturity and responsibility and is a leader in the development of student discussion and opinion.
- The publication is professional and journalistic in its approach to coverage, writing and leadership.

Professional Standards and Ethics Strengths:

Professional Standards and Ethics Recommendations:

Score for Editorial Content

0 60 70 80 100

Needs Improvement Average/Good Very Good Excellent

Judges: The numbers above are just markers. You may give any number of points up to 200.

FINAL ANALYSIS

CATEGORY	TOTAL POINTS	
Coverage (20 percent)	_____/200	<input type="checkbox"/> SPARTAN AWARD 900–1,000
Writing & Editing (35 percent)	_____/350	<input type="checkbox"/> GOLD MEDAL 800–899
Design (20 percent)	_____/200	<input type="checkbox"/> SILVER MEDAL 700–799
Photography & Graphics (15 percent)	_____/150	<input type="checkbox"/> BRONZE MEDAL 0–699
Editorial Content (10 percent)	_____/100	
Total	_____/1,000	

SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Judge's Signature _____

Date: _____

Type name if completing evaluation electronically.

Thank you for evaluating student media for the Michigan Interscholastic Press Association!