

## Criteria for Writing Good Stories

As you write this year, use the lists below to determine if you are meeting the key criteria for good journalistic writing. List based on judging criteria from Colorado High School Press Association, Columbia Press Association, and the Journalism Education Association.

### News...

- Lead covers major points of the 5 W's and H
- First words in lead feature the key element of the news story
- Story is organized according to the best method for this particular story (e.g. inverted pyramid, chronological)
- Story avoids wordiness
- Paragraph length is roughly 1-2 inches in length
- Writing is grammatically correct
- A **minimum** of three appropriate sources is used
- Quotations are properly attributed to source
- Third person point of view is used consistently
- Associated Press (AP) style is consistent
- Attribution is thorough
- Story is objective and avoids editorialism
- Story is localized, if appropriate

### Opinion/Editorials...

- Editorial reflects critical thinking. Evidence of research is clear
- Opinion/Editorial is localized or made relevant to school's audience
- Begins with a well-worded position statement (thesis)
- Point is clearly made
- Editorial is well-organized
- Necessary facts, background materials are included for reader understanding
- Arguments are based on ethical and logical argumentation with emotionalism held to a minimum
- Specific suggestions, if appropriate, are made. Conclusion does NOT summarize; rather it offers solutions or alternatives, outlines short term and/or long term consequences, requests a call for action, and/or emphasizes the importance of the topic in readers' lives.
- Editorial avoids didacticism (preachiness)
- Writing is grammatically correct
- Associated Press style is consistent
- Paragraph length is appropriate (1-2 inches)
- Quotes from relevant sources are used.

### Columns... (e.g. sports, "First on the Scene", "Pirate Voice", etc.). All the above, as well as...

- Each column has a clear point
- Each column is well-organized
- Each column's tone is consistent with its topic
- Display of columns is consistently identifiable
- Writing is grammatically correct
- AP Style is consistent
- Paragraph length is appropriate
- Reporter's voice is strong (by using figurative language, complex sentences, strong vocab)

### Features...

- Feature achieves apparent purpose
- Feature is well-organized (by examples, narration, comparison, contrast, cause/effect, description, etc.)
- Writing style is appropriate for the subject matter and shows voice
- Story is localized and/or made relevant to student audience
- Quotations are adequately and properly used
- A **minimum** of three appropriate sources is used
- Article reflects thorough background preparation and research
- Conclusion offers alternatives, solutions, call for action, brings closures. Does not summarize.
- Lead is enticing and lures reader into article
- Editorializing is avoided
- Writing is grammatically correct
- AP style is consistent
- Paragraph length is appropriate (1-3 inches, max)

### Critical Review...

- Style is consistent
- Paragraph length is appropriate
- Review includes content summary but focuses on the analysis
- Both strengths and weaknesses of subject are evaluated
- Specific examples support writer's judgment
- Review avoids use of clichés and generalizations
- Quotations are adequately and properly used
- A **minimum** of three appropriate sources is used
- Writing is grammatically correct

### Sports...

- Sources are correctly used
- Lead is effect and avoids "we expect to succeed this season" and other such fluff
- Lead focuses on significant issues
- Story is objective
- Story includes specific facts and avoids generalizations
- Story is colorful but not trite; it avoids sports clichés and unfamiliar jargon
- Story gives adequate coverage to the opponent
- Story is as timely as possible, preferably with an emphasis on the future
- Story serves to inform readers while avoiding the function of cheerleader or apologist
- Quotations are adequately and properly used
- A **minimum** of three appropriate sources is used
- Writing is grammatically correct
- AP style is consistent
- Paragraph length is appropriate (1-2 inches)

### Headlines...

- Headline length is appropriate (don't over-scrunch or over-stretch)
- Headline gives an accurate impression of the story
- Headline is appropriate for and consistent with the tone of the story

- Headline is downstyled (Capitalized like a sentence would be) and is flush left (not centered)
- Headline is neatly displayed
- Spelling, grammar and punctuation are correct
- Headline uses strong verbs, active voice, and appropriate images
- Make headlines match the artwork

### **In-Depth Topic...**

- Basic topic is clearly identified
- Topic has an appropriate local angle
- Stories reflect thorough background preparation and avoid being essays
- Includes a variety of sources, including interviews with experts
- Published material, as a source, is used with restraint
- Topic is thoroughly covered from all possible angles
- Topic is adequately illustrated using photos, charts, graphs, or artwork
- Writing provides a balanced treatment
- Writing is grammatically correct
- Attribution of sources is thorough
- Design is attractive

### **Photography and Captions...**

- Subjects in photos are large enough to be recognizable
- Photos are effectively cropped
- Composition is effective (avoids “up against the wall” portraits. Photos tell stories themselves.)
- Photos have technical quality
- Content creates visual impact
- Photos are large enough to be effective
- Caption goes beyond telling what is evident. They are more than labels. They have news value in themselves.

### **Photo Feature...**

- Subjects in photos are large enough to be recognizable
- Photos are effectively cropped
- Composition is effective (avoids “up against the wall” portraits. Photos tell stories themselves.)
- Photos have technical quality
- Layout of photos and text has unity
- Captions/cutlines go beyond telling what is evident. They are more than labels. They have news value in themselves.
- Text effectively achieves apparent purpose and is grammatically correct and consistent in style.

### **Layout...**

- Layout shows effective use of headlines and headline styles
- Layout avoids tombstoning headlines (two headlines butted together)
- Photos and illustrations are effectively used
- Page has effective display below as well as above the fold
- Display reflects sound news judgment
- Layout has overall visual appeal and follows basic principles of design
- Layout reflects contemporary design concepts

### **Editorial Cartoon...**

- Cartoon shows originality
- Cartoon demonstrates technical proficiency
- Cartoon is a statement within itself
- Cartoon is visually appealing
- Cartoon has a clear purpose
- Cartoon follows sound legal and ethical principles

### **Artwork and Graphics...**

- Artwork or graphic effectively illustrates the surrounding materials
- Artwork or graphic demonstrates technical proficiency
- Treatment of subject shows originality

### **Alternative Copy—Story Telling Devices** (bio boxes, quizzes, charts, graphs, etc.)

- Information is clearly, directly presented
- Information demonstrates synthesis of research, demonstrates "newsworthiness"
- Graphic is creative and original (Symbolism and metaphors are striking and effective)
- Graphic contains high quality of execution
- Graphic includes both illustrations and text
- Graphic effectively stands alone or supports accompanying text

### **Advertising**

- Layout is attractive
- Necessary facts about the advertiser are included
- Ad carries a specific message
- Display work (art, photos, lettering, graphics) is neat and effective
- Ad appears to serve the advertiser and the consumer
- Content is accurate and writing is grammatically correct