

# SELF-CRITIQUE YOUR BOOK



Wondering if it's valuable to send your book to one of the national judging organizations? One of the best things about the judging process is the critique that you'll receive. You and your staff will discover your strengths and areas where you'll want to improve. Do this simple self-critique first. If you find you're "mostly" doing things in a journalist manner, then by all means go for it!

## I. CONCEPT

### A. YEARBOOK THEME/CONCEPT

1. Theme/concept is recognizable, refreshing, repeatable, realistic and relevant. It is unique to the school, the students and the year and avoids the use of song titles and lyrics, well-known poetry and prose.
2. The cover uses type, color and shape and introduces the theme/concept topic or look.
3. The book title and year appear on the front cover and on the spine. The school name, volume, theme/concept and city and state are on the spine.
4. The endsheets develop the theme through the repetition of color, type or theme related graphics.
5. Opening spreads develop theme through story, graphics, type and photos.
6. Division spreads develop theme through story, graphics, type and photos which link each section to the overall theme/concept.
7. Theme relates to the body of the book without being forced.

### B. REFERENCE AIDS

1. The title page is visually connected to the theme. It includes book title, volume number, year, school name, complete address, city, state and zip code. Telephone and fax numbers, school population (broken down by students and staff) and Web site are optional additions.
2. Accurate contents listing, either on endsheets or opening spread (never on the title page) allows the reader to easily find each section of the book.
3. Folios appear on each spread. Folio tabs identify spread content.
4. The index includes an accurate, comprehensive and continuous listing of every person pictured, mentioned or quoted. Also included are all student life topics, academic departments, clubs and organizations, sports, community topics and advertisers. The index is easy to read and use.
5. A complete colophon is included.

## II. COVERAGE

The content of traditional sections is included even if non-traditional section names have been used.

### A. STUDENT LIFE

1. Covers a 12-month time frame, is not limited to special events (e.g. prom, homecoming) and includes everyday routines and activities.
2. Events, lifestyles and situations specific to the school have been covered so that the school's individuality and uniqueness are revealed.



3. Coverage helps date the year by focusing on students' involvement with or reaction to current events and trends.
4. The community has been sufficiently covered to show its influence on students and vice versa.
5. A variety of photographs includes a wide range of students and activities.

#### **B. PEOPLE**

1. Coverage on topics of interest to all students appears in the portrait section (not just mugs).
2. Messages, codes or personal quotes have not been used with portraits.
3. Staff member identification includes subjects taught, positions held and sponsorship or coaching of any group or sport.
4. Head sizes and backgrounds are consistent.
5. Tilts, angles and props do not appear in any portrait.

#### **C. ACADEMICS**

1. Coverage focuses on students and their involvement in the learning process.
2. A variety of photographs shows students in learning activities.

#### **D. SPORTS**

1. Sports coverage spans the entire school year.
2. All sports offered, including girls', JV and intramurals, are covered fairly.
3. Complete scoreboards for each team are included and list the win-loss-tie record.
4. Individual and non-school sports are covered somewhere in the book.
5. Fan support and the influence of coaches, trainers and managers are included somewhere in the book.
6. Copy features season highlights, team or coach reactions and details and is specific to the year.
7. Sports copy omits editorial comments, alibis, congratulations and predictions.
8. Captions include the name of opposing team (not mascot or nickname), winner of the game, match or meet; and individual scores by event, for sports such as tennis, golf, swimming, wrestling, gymnastics.
9. Staff uses a wide range of shots to show scenes from different games, practices, sideline activities, coaches and fans.
10. Team photographs are subordinate to action shots and do not feature sporting equipment, players wearing hats or other distractions.

#### **E. GROUPS**

1. Copy features group activities, captures student participation and highlights group accomplishments.
2. Copy is more than a list of officers, sponsors, projects, goals and objectives.
3. Coverage includes a variety of photographs and complete captions which identify all students.
4. Group photographs are subordinate to action shots and do not contain distractions or unusual formations such as students hanging from trees, forming pyramids, etc.

### **III. WRITING**

Both traditional and alternative copy may be used throughout the book and should include good reporting, detailed quotes and correct style.



#### **A. GENERAL**

1. The school's name, initials and mascot do not appear in copy, except in competitive situations. "This year", "2014" or "14" is not used.
2. Copy sentences are short and paragraphs brief; transitions lead the reader from one paragraph to the next; leads have impact and variety.
3. Student quotes add substance and facts to the story.
4. Alternative copy supplements the spread's topic and uses solid research and reporting.

#### **B. STYLE AND USAGE**

##### **HEADLINES AND COPY**

1. Primary and secondary headlines are used with copy.
2. Headlines are relevant to spread content, highlight copy and attract the readers' interest; avoid repetition, labels and stating the obvious.
3. Run-on sentences do not appear in any copy.
4. All punctuation, spelling, grammar and capitalization rules are followed.
5. Past tense is used, unless another tense is used in direct quotes.
6. Staff avoids using passive voice.
7. Staff uses consistency in grade level identifications, adult courtesy titles, first and last name references, etc. (use a style book).
8. Staff avoids using indefinite terms (many, several, various, numerous, a lot, some, a few, not many); editorial adjectives (beautiful, spectacular, terrific, wonderful) and adverbs (gracefully, adroitly); cliches (takes a break, a night to remember, a night we will never forget); and words like diligently, dedicated, successful, etc.

##### **CAPTIONS**

1. Captions answer as many of the 5 Ws and H as necessary and tell the reader more than can be seen in the photo.
2. Caption leads are varied and avoid overuse of name leads, quote leads, label leads or the word "during".
3. Staff avoids using: passive voice; "is running"; "is playing"; pictured above, below, left etc.
4. Staff avoids stating the obvious and using joke or gag captions.
5. The sentence(s) explaining the action of the photography are in present tense. Subsequent sentences are in past tense.
6. Captions are factual, complete names are used, spelling and grammar are correct.
7. Group photos begin with group identification and then use FRONT (bottom) to BACK (top) row. Avoid use of left to right or l-r.
8. Sports captions identify both school's players and opponents by jersey number and name; tell result of this play or outcome of game.

## **IV. PHOTOGRAPHY**

#### **A. GENERAL**

1. Photographs have excellent contrast (with clean blacks, shades of gray and photographic

- whites) and/or well saturated and accurate color tones.
2. All photographs are clear and sharp, not fuzzy or blurred.



## **B. GROUP PHOTOS**

1. Group photographs do not feature formations, busy backgrounds or props which detract from faces.
2. Cropping of group photos is just above the heads in the back row and to the waist of those in the front row. Dead space is eliminated on sides.
3. Group shots use alternating rows so that faces are not hidden and have been lighted so that faces in the back row have the same light intensity as those in the front.
4. Group shots do not dominate spreads, but each face is recognizable.

## **C. COMPOSITION/CROPPING**

1. All photographs have been cropped to the focal point but never so tightly that the action is exactly centered or loses its meaning.
2. Photographs use techniques such as leading lines, framing, patterns, panning, backlighting and silhouettes to draw the readers' attention.
3. Photographs showing only tops of heads and/or backs do not appear.
4. Posed shots (excluding portraits and group photographs) of students "mugging" or "hamming it up" for the camera are avoided.
5. Action in photographs faces center of page.
6. Photographs which cross the gutter do not split eyes, noses or mouths.
7. Group shots or portraits do not bleed off the page.

## **V. DESIGN**

### **A. DESIGN BASICS**

1. A specific column/grid plan is used in each section of the book. All elements begin and/or end on a column/grid unless bled off the page.
2. Each spread has a dominant visual element (usually a photograph or photo package). Other photographs contrast in size and shape and, with other elements, accentuate the dominant element.
3. The dominant element varies in shape from spread to spread.
4. Spreads contain a primary headline, secondary headline and verbal package. Placement is varied so that visual monotony does not develop.
5. Secondary type packages are designed to visually coordinate with each primary headline/verbal package.
6. Inner spacing is uniform in each section. White space is kept to the outside of the layout unless intentionally using "rail(s)" of isolation to call attention to a specific element in the spread design.
7. Adequate and consistent margins are used for each section, with at least one element touching each outer margin.
8. Each page has been linked to its facing page by an element (such as a photograph or eyeline) that crosses the gutter.
9. Portraits are designed as solid rectangular panels with names to the outside (left or right) of the panel.

### **B. TYPOGRAPHY**



1. Headline type selection is readable and consistent in family, weight, size and leading within each section.
2. Body type is easy to read and consistent in size and leading in each section. Column widths, if varied within a section, follow an obvious plan.
3. A graphic device (overline, dropped letter or phrase) introduces captions.
4. Caption type is consistent in family, size and leading within each section.
5. Captions are placed so that each is close to its own photograph. Captions are not placed between photographs (except group photos).
6. When group captions are used, it should be clear to the reader which caption goes with which photo. Group captions are consistent within each section.
7. Caption widths conform to the column/grid plan in each section.
8. Group identifications begin with the name of each group in contrasting type and with row designations also in contrasting type.
9. If used, overprinted or reversed captions are easily read.
10. A design inconsistency has not been created by manipulating headline type to fit a specific space.
11. If script type is used, it does not appear in all caps.
12. Headline type letters are not stacked vertically.

### **C. GRAPHICS**

1. Graphics do not overpower the spread or detract from spread content.
2. Graphic devices or techniques are used as a tool of communication, to unify or divide spread content or to emphasize an element on the spread. Graphic devices are not used as decoration.
3. If used, infographics are designed to complement the visual and verbal content of the spread.
4. The use of hand-drawn artwork has been avoided.

*Contributed by:*

*Jane Roehrig & Heidi Bryant*

*Herff Jones Sales Representatives, CA*