

HOW YOUR NEWSLETTERS WERE JUDGED:

A group of professional co-workers served as judges, each independently covering one set of newsletters. As might be expected, the comments- both positive and negative- varied. Some focused more on the format/layout, others on the content. We all have our pet notions about such aspects as typesetting, and it may seem that we've been unduly harsh. Our recommendations are intended to help you improve the overall professional appearance and communication efficiency of your newsletters.

ABOUT CONTENT – MAKE IT WORTHWHILE

An association newsletter has three basic functions:

1. To inform

Facts about who we are, what we are about, what's going on. The classic "who, what, when, where, why & how" applies to every item that deals with facts.

2. To improve the profession

Articles relating to job performance, procedures, "how-to" hints, personal matters such as reducing stress, improving skills, dealing with difficult people, office and telephone etiquette, grammar and punctuation, etc.

3. To develop pride in the profession

Local news of member activities, personal profiles, and inspirational articles are appropriate and welcome. Nationally, you are part of a nationwide community of people with similar responsibilities, facing similar challenges, and enjoying professional prestige. News on the broader (statewide, national) scale helps build this sense of belonging.

TO ACCOMPLISH POINTS 1-2-3, MAKE IT INTERESTING.

Write in a comfortable, easy-reading style. Put action in your headlines. Avoid printing minutes of a meeting; few readers' care of need to know who moved, who seconded. But do report in everyday language any action your readers do need to know.

Why do we place so much importance on style and appearance? You are a worthy professional, as important in your position as the educators you work for and with. To project this professional stature, your newsletter must look equally professional.

Assuming the content is excellent, physical appearance has much to do with attracting the reader and holding attention. That is why we devote so much attention to the makeup-to typeface, column widths, boxes and rules, clip art, photos, etc.

ABOUT FORMAT AND LAYOUT – BE CONSISTENT

Many studies have shown that the choice of typeface and column widths greatly affect ease of reading.

1. Columns

a) Try never to set lines of type the width of the page. Two or three columns are much more readable.

b) "Justified" margins (squared, all lines same length) are stiff and formal, not as inviting as letting the righthand margin fall naturally – as in this document.

c) White space is the best column divider. For a clean, modern look, omit vertical rules and limit box frames.

2. Typefaces

a) Articles set in a serif face are much easier to read than sans serif and infinitely better than novelty faces. It is best to stick to a single type style throughout, except for headlines, charts, etc. If you yearn to use a "cute" type, limit it to brief quotes or light comments, not text.

b) Headlines need to be larger and bold. Current style; Capitalize only the first word and don't use a period at the end. Whatever style you choose, stick to it! Do include a verb in headlines to enhance the sense of action.

c) Be consistent. Whatever layout, type, and headline style you adopt will work if you maintain it throughout!

d) Remember that a hyphen ties two words closely together; the longer dash "dashes away" to a different thought. If your keyboard offers no real dash, space before and after a single hyphen; don't fall back on the old double hyphen we all learned in typing class.

e) Number every page. The cover is page 1, all right-hand pages are odd numbered, and all left-hand pages even. This is a universal rule in publishing.

3. Punctuation, spelling, grammar

Look it up! Use your computer's spell-check, but be sure you've used the right word, not one that sounds like it.

a) Do not turn simple plurals into possessives! Plurals have no apostrophe. Watch out for its. To show possession, it has no apostrophe. With apostrophe, it's means it is or it has. Hint: Read the sentence out loud, but say "it is" for it's, and you'll write it right!

b) Read aloud when proofing. Or ask a colleague to proof your final camera-ready copy; the outsider will notice errors that escape your eagle eye.

c) Periods and commas go inside the final quotation marks.

4. Boxes, rules, screens, clip art, color

Don't get carried away just because you can! One box on a page draws attention, every additional box dilutes it. This includes frames around the entire page.

a) Don't mix frame styles, round & square corners, plain & fancy etc. Be sure clip art adds instead of detracts.

b) Type inside a box must never touch the sides of that box. Learn how to set interior margins.

c) Color is nice if you can afford it, but don't count on color salvaging shallow content or awkward page makeup.

5. Photos

a) Choose photos with strong dark/light contrast. A poor photo will always reproduce badly.

b) Crop ceilings off the top to focus on the people.

c) Caption from left to right, under the photo.

d) Photos slanted on the page tend to resemble a teenager's photo album. Especially don't be tempted to cut around the images for a "photo montage;" it nearly always looks amateurish. But it's OK to mix large and small photos, even horizontal and vertical, if they're square cut and you group them into a neat, artistic unit.

Finally, don't hesitate to ask a designer for help—perhaps the journalism teacher or a graphic artist friend. Often the simplest changes will turn your newsletter into a real winner!