



2026 OCNA Better Newspapers Awards

College/University General Excellence Judging Criteria

A. Front Page 150 Points

News stories or articles that are relevant to the community. Tight and intriguing leads. Simple and straightforward writing. Design should be clean and sharp with simple, uncluttered mastheads. Lead stories and pictures should feature prominently. Creative use of spot color which contributes to a powerful image or front page is an asset. Photos must be judged on news or feature content, composition, cropping, quality, size and placement. A powerful headline should easily identify lead story. Heads should be informative and pull readers into stories.

B. Community News 150 Points

News content relevant to the community; gives a clear reflection of the nature and people of its area. Well-written stories; tight leads. Reporter insight, initiative and a complete understanding of the events/issues. A mix of reporter-generated news with some input from sources within the community. The use of outside sources should be localized. The "5 Ws" must apply. Stories should attempt to answer readers' questions. Solid and attributed quotes. Long stories should have visual breaks. Photos should be relevant, sharp, active, well composed, tightly cropped and properly sized. Stand-alones should be designed to clearly identify them as separate news items.

C. Editorial Page and Op-Ed 100 Points

The editorial page and/or op-ed page are the heart of the newspaper. One or more staff-written editorials; an appropriate cartoon or editorial photo that makes a statement, letters to the editor, editorial style columns and/or guest opinions. Content is the most important element, but all elements of good layout and design should be present. Editorials should score the most points. Editorials should be written in simple language and have a clear message. Tight and concise writing is paramount to length. Editorials question, inspire thought, and provoke action. Editorials are opinions. Good letters attract readership. Quality local opinions score higher than syndicated columns. Look for a balance of opinion.

D. Presentation 100 Points

Composition and layout contribute to continuity and logical sequence of elements, resulting in an attractive package. Crisp design with rationale or continuity of layout of news and advertising. Boxes, screens, sidebars, and graphics should enhance the look of the paper. Font, type and column sizes should make it easy to read. Good use of white space and continuity of style in standing heads and section heads. Photos should be well played; well composed, tightly cropped and attractively laid out. Photos should be active. Cutlines must accompany photos to clearly identify subjects. A good paper is easy to read, consistent in its layout and design, and organized according to topic.

E. Photography 100 Points

A photo is the focal point of the page. Colour or black-and-white photos which have impact, action, technical quality, good composition and are well cropped. Properly sized and positioned on the page. Effective use of color where applicable, rather than the presence or absence of it. Quality is better than quantity. Cutlines should fill in the significant details and clearly identify all subjects.

F. Advertising 25 Points

Advertising is an indication of how well the newspaper and the community work together for the readers. Innovative ideas that bring additional lineage into the paper. Look for simple promotions which build extra revenue on community interests (i.e. sporting events, seasonal topics or product or customer features). There should be evidence of both traditional advertisers and creative new ideas. Look for effective advertising. Good ads laid out attractively and easy to read ads. Placement conducive to overall design of the paper. Effective, uncluttered artwork; effective use of white space; copy that is complete, easy to read and understand, and provides extensive information about the product. Four basic elements of an ad (headline; body copy; graphics or photos; and signature) must work together to sell the product.)

H. Local Features 100 Points

Local features go beyond the news, providing a more in-depth look at the issues and people of the community. Features must offer subject diversity, and can include the arts, science and technology. Interesting topics, accompanied by powerful presentation, creativity, and graphic elements.

I. Sports 50 Points

Sports and recreation are a significant part of community life. Sports pages which include a variety of events and activities which reflect the community. Staff-generated copy should be active, lively and concisely written. Photos should be featured prominently. Interesting and well-written local sports opinion columns are a definite asset as are local sports features. The page design must be lively and attractive. Headlines should be active.

TOTAL 775 Points