



ALL-COLORADO YEARBOOK CRITIQUE

Colorado Student Media Association

Jack Kennedy, Executive Director, 9253 Sori Lane, Highlands Ranch CO 80126 / 303-550-4755
www.colostudentmedia.com / @ColoradoSMA

evaluation guide

- This guide is designed to be an educational device to improve the quality of your yearbook.
- This guide is intended to point out positive aspects of your publication as well as to point out possible deficiencies.
- Judging comments are designed as suggestions for improvement. Keep in mind that these comments represent just one individual's opinion.
- Comments should represent current trends in yearbook production.
- Judge's comments may not apply to all school situations. Please understand that it would be impossible for your judge to be aware of the specifics of each school.
- Each of the five sections contained in this guide book has an overall evaluation where the judge must rate the section according to an overall set of criteria. The final evaluation is based on the judge's holistic assessment of the overall quality of the book.
- All five sections will conclude with a holistic narrative critique, an opportunity for judges to specifically note positives and suggestions for improvement.

Yearbook: _____

School Name: _____

School Address: _____

City & Zip Code: _____

Adviser: _____

Adviser Email [critique will be sent here]: _____

School Classification [based on CHSAA class]: 5A 4A 3A-1A Middle School

Official enrollment: _____

Judge: _____

theme evaluation criteria

If you are simply conducting a self-assessment using this critique document, please pay particular attention to the following questions. If your answer is YES, the vast majority of the time then our advice is to keep doing that. If the answer is YES, sometimes, consider whether it is possible to be more consistent doing something you already value. If the answer is NO or I don't understand, we hope you will do some research, check out some other publications and otherwise educate yourself to move your yearbook publication closer to YES, always.

If you are judging, these questions are meant to help you assess how this yearbook publication is doing in its theme development. Some publications will be quite strong in theme but will appreciate not only a pat on the back but any tips you can share to improve the development of their theme even more. For publications that are clearly in transition or are struggling to get their theme where it should be, please provide focused, specific advice. Please identify issues and page numbers clearly when you reference particular thematic elements from the past school year.

This critique is designed to be read on the computer screen, rather than printed, so the more narrative you can provide, the more specific ideas you can share, and the better the students and advisers will be served.

Questions about theme development/structure standards

Theme Development

- Is there an original, imaginative theme or concept developed through words or design elements serving as a unifying element for the book?
- Does the cover have an immediate visual appeal and introduce the theme/concept visually and verbally?
- Do the endsheets coordinate with the cover and may also contain conceptual development? [Some staffs may choose to leave the endsheets blank due to reader preferences or budget constraints.]
- Is the theme/concept developed through reporting and/or words, photographs and graphics on the opening and closing pages and dividers, with details showing relevance to the particular year?
- Do the opening, closing and divider pages have design styles distinctively different from the rest of the book?
- Do both verbal and visual theme elements appear throughout the book to create unity and a consistent personality, although one aspect may be more prevalent?
- Does the book clearly and logically depict the personality of the school and captures the specific year?
- Does the book's organization and overall effect demonstrate evidence that the theme/concept influenced major decisions in design, coverage angles and photo editing?

Book Structure

- Do the name and date of the book appear on the front cover?
- Do the book name, school name, city, state and volume number appear on the spine?
- Does the title page have a distinct and thematic design that includes the name of the book, the year and volume number of book, school name, school address, enrollment and other pertinent data?
- Does the table of contents appear early in the book for the reader to navigate through the book? While it may be creative and theme-oriented, is it reader-friendly and accurate and does list all major sections including reference areas? [i.e. On Top of the Heap – Sports]
- Are effective folios included that give the reader the page number as well as the page content?
- Does the book include a complete index of people, organizations, and activities with accurate page numbers?
- Does the book have a colophon, which gives information on staff policies, technical aspects of the book and the printing, including fonts, equipment used and sale prices?

theme development/structure

All-Colorado:

Staff has created an exemplary publication in the areas of Theme and Book Structure. Staff has developed a theme in such a way to guide readers through the content and effectively structure the reporting of the year.

Award of Commendation:

Staff has created a publication that uses many aspects of the areas of Theme and Book Structure. Staff has developed a theme that somewhat guides the readers through the content and effectively structure the reporting of the year despite some obvious inconsistencies.

Award of Merit:

Staff has created a publication that uses few aspects of the areas of Theme and Book Structure. Staff has developed a theme that only occasionally guides the readers through the content and effectively structure the reporting of the year, and there are some obvious inconsistencies.

Judge's narrative comments on theme and book structure:

coverage

If you are judging, these questions are meant to help you assess how this yearbook publication is doing in its coverage. Some publications will be quite strong in coverage but will appreciate not only a pat on the back but any tips you can share to improve the development of their coverage even more. For publications that are clearly in transition or are struggling to get their coverage where it should be, please provide focused, specific advice. Please identify issues and page numbers clearly when you reference particular coverage from the past school year.

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Questions about coverage standards

Coverage Development Overall

- Is the coverage plan specific to the school and the year rather than following a pattern from past books?
- Is the number of sections and their organization logical and in relation to the theme?
- Content may be presented in traditional, blended (umbrella), or chronological style, but are all major areas present to represent lifestyles, academics, organizations, sports and people?
- Does coverage reflect the diversity of the school population in an effort to cover all individuals?
- Is the coverage personalized by the use of strong storytelling photos and meaningful quotes?

Student Life

- Does the yearbook provide full-year coverage of the school?
- Is student life covered topically by spread? [Or within spreads, if book is chronological]
- Does coverage avoid stale and over-used coverage ideas?
- Is the coverage selected in such a way as to provide something for all readers?
- Has alternative coverage been included to enhance the overall coverage concept?
- Does coverage reflect the diversity of the school population and students' varied interests both in and out of school?
- Are major school events as well as daily routines covered to show the full student experience, on campus and off?
- Does this section feature students' varied interests both in and out of school?
- Are major school events as well as daily routines covered to show the full student experience, on campus and off?

Sports

- Is the sports coverage appropriate for the size of the book and the size of the school?
- Does the staff attempt to provide equal and adequate coverage for both boys and girls athletics?
- Does the staff supplement the athletic coverage with coverage of intramurals [if offered] and non-organized athletic involvement? [If not covered in this section, are these covered in an appropriate section?]
- Does the coverage include complete scoreboards with overall win/loss records?
- Is sports coverage set up in such a manner as to report a feature story of the season and leave the win/loss record to scoreboards and other statistics boxes?
- Does sports coverage include photography that reflects the stories of the season?
- Does the sports photography cover more than two events in a season?

coverage

Academics

- Does this section feature unique and lively aspects of the academic side of coverage, avoiding the typical “sitting in a desk” type photo and coverage?
- Do topics in this section have meaning for a majority of the readership?
- Does coverage focus on student perspectives, but also include faculty perspectives?
- Does academic coverage go beyond the four walls of the building to feature learning in other arenas such as workshops, conventions and field trips?
- Does the coverage give a complete view of the school year by covering electives, required courses and vocational offerings?

Organizations

- Keeping in mind that some schools have a limited number of clubs, does organizations coverage seem appropriate to the size of the school?
- Does the coverage emphasize the unique and lively aspects of the organization, focusing on events and activities versus meetings?
- Does the reader obtain an overview of the organization offerings at the school?
- Has staff selected coverage that includes reactions to events, activities, competitions, and does the coverage span more than one meeting or event?

Coverage emphasizes student involvement; group photos are included here or may appear in a separate reference section.

People

- Does this section include portraits of faculty, support staff, and administration, as well as of all grade levels of students?
- If included, is faculty information complete, including subjects taught and activities coached/sponsored?
- Are portrait head sizes consistent and appropriate to the size of the book as well as to the size of the school, unless senior portraits are taken by multiple photographers and student-submitted portraits are included?
- Does each portrait spread include a copy feature and/or secondary coverage?
- Does the section include coverage of the faculty, support staff, and administration without allowing such coverage to dominate the section?
- Does feature coverage emphasize unique talents, personalities and individuals?
- If blended with another section, [such as Academics] does the people section provide proper coverage?

Ads/Community/Index/Special Sections

Note to Judge: Not all schools will incorporate these three elements, but all schools should have at least one. Evaluate the book on the basis of what is there and do not penalize a school for that which is not included.

- Is the ad section as a whole [business and/or senior ads] consistent and professional in appearance?
- Is community coverage complete enough to serve as a reminder to the reader 25 years from now?
- Does community coverage emphasize the locale's uniqueness?
- Does community coverage highlight community-sponsored activities for student readers?
- Do special sections, ads, or community coverage blend into overall flow of the book and reflect the design and theme of the book?
- Is the reason for the inclusion of the special section apparent?
- Is the special section appropriate to the size of the school and to the book?
- Is there a complete list of all persons, events, clubs, activities, sports and advertisers referenced each time they appear in the book?

coverage

All-Colorado:

Coverage is complete and thorough and helps to tell the story of the school year in both words and photos. Staff indicates an obvious awareness of coverage ideals. Staff approaches coverage with an emphasis on the unique and unusual.

Award of Commendation:

Coverage is generally complete and adequately serves the readership. Staff shows an awareness of unique coverage concepts and is generally able to incorporate them throughout the book.

Award of Merit:

Coverage is not complete and only occasionally serves the readership. Staff usually does not explore new/unique coverage concepts and does not appear to regularly cover events and activities throughout the year.

Judge's narrative comments on coverage:

reporting

If you are judging, we know there is not time to read everything, but please sample all types of writing found in this yearbook. These questions are meant to help you assess how this book is doing in its reporting. Some publications will be quite strong in reporting but will appreciate not only a pat on the back but any tips you can share to improve the development of their reporting even more. For publications that are clearly in transition or are struggling to get their reporting where it should be, please provide focused, specific advice. Please identify issues and page numbers clearly when you reference particular reporting spreads from the past school year.

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Captions

- Do captions employ a variety of openings; begin with impact words; are often two or more sentences long and give specific details on who, what, when, where, why and how?
- Do captions generally not contain adverbs but utilize strong nouns, adjectives and active voice verbs?
- Is the ongoing action in the photo records in the caption in present tense with subsequent information in past tense?
- Are quotations used in captions to give a more complete picture and are used as a meaningful storytelling device?
- Do the captions add to photos, don't state the obvious, don't editorialize or speculate about or comment on photos?
- Are all people featured in photos identified completely and in consistent format?
- In group identifications, are "Front...Row 2...Back" used so road signs like "left to right" or "pictured above" are *not* used?

Headlines

- Do headlines use well-chosen words that most accurately describe specific story content, and do more than state the obvious or label (i.e boys basketball)?
- Do headlines lead reader into copy and are clever/imaginative without using clichés?
- Are headlines written in present tense?
- Are headlines and subheadlines placed above/next to primary copy to complete the copy package?
- Do the subheadlines expand on the topic/angle to inform the readership?

Writing & Editing

- Does each story focus on an original and unique angle; reflect research and reporting; avoid generalities; specifically answer who, what, when, where, why and how and does not contain editorializing (writer's opinion)?
- Are traditional blocks of copy written in third person (unless part of the theme of the book), in active voice, and past tense?
- Are leads taking on a variety of forms such as description, direct quotations, anecdotes, etc., and capture the readers' attention and encourage them to read on?
- Are there meaningful storytelling quotes and background material reflected thorough interviewing in both traditional copy and secondary packages?
- Are there effective transitions, a variety of sentence types and lengths and short paragraphs used to enhance readability of all copy?
- Are secondary stories presented in a variety of forms (feature, infographs, Q and A, first person anecdotes, quotes, etc.)?
- Do writers rely on specific details to better tell the story of the school year?
- Do writers attribute information obtained from sources correctly?
- Is all copy (captions, headlines, copy) carefully edited, proofed and following AP style or a clear and consistent local style?

reporting

All-Colorado:

All copy supplements the photographic action in the book. Each spread includes specific and complete copy. All copy demonstrates quality writing skills by student staff members. Copy is free of typos, spelling errors and grammatical mistakes.

Award of Commendation:

All copy is adequate, but could use more detail or description that will capture the reader's interest. Each spread may include complete copy, and the quality is inconsistent, and needs more work. Copy may have a few typos, spelling errors, and grammatical mistakes.

Award of Merit:

Copy is occasionally adequate, or even nonexistent. The writing often could use more detail or description that will capture the reader's interest. Many spreads need more attention given to the writing, whether in the form of headlines, captions or stories. Copy may have a few typos, spelling errors, and grammatical mistakes.

Judge's narrative comments on reporting:

photography

If you are judging, these questions are meant to help you assess how this yearbook is doing in its photography. Some publications will be quite strong in photography but will appreciate not only a pat on the back but any tips you can share to improve the development of their photography even more. For publications that are clearly in transition or are struggling to get their photography where it should be, please provide focused, specific advice. Please identify issues and page numbers clearly when you reference particular photos from the past school year.

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Composition

- Do photographs show advanced planning by the photographer?
- Does the photography selected in each section of the book help to enhance the coverage and tell a story?
- Does photography on theme pages reflect the theme as well as good photography?
- Do photos reveal a variety of camera angles?
- Do photos reflect action and interaction instead of “mugging for the camera” or posed photos?
- Does each spread contain an obvious dominant photo?
- Do the photos capture a broad range of emotions?
- Have photos been cropped to the center of interest?
- Has an attempt been made to keep head sizes consistent in portrait panels, unless senior portraits are taken by multiple photographers and student submitted portraits are included?
- Do the photos in the book represent the diversity of the student population while telling the story of the year?
- In instances of sports shots, is the ball or opposing team interaction included to enhance the content?
- Are posed shots such as environmental portraits, mugshots and cut outs used for emphasis and illustrative purposes?
- Are individual photo credits used to recognize student photographers for their work? Are photos not taken by staff members listed by proper source/credit?
- Do photos from each topic represent multiple aspects rather than many shots from the same activity or event?
- Do photos reflect a balance of individual, medium and large-group shots without too many one-person images per spread?

Technical Quality

- Are all pictures in proper focus?
- Is consistent contrast apparent in photos?
- Have depth of field and center of visual impact been considered?
- Have group photos been cropped just above the tops of heads in the back row and at the waist in the front row?
- Has white balance been adjusted, particularly in poor gym lighting?
- Have photos been cropped so that the subject fills the frame?
- Were the settings adjusted to capture the action without blur?
- Are digital images free of distortion, not skewed or stretched.
- Are special effects (cutouts, non-rectangular shapes, screens, tilts, color manipulation) used sparingly and for a definite purpose?

photography

All-Colorado:

Photography throughout the yearbook indicates staff has an awareness of the critical role quality photography plays in telling the complete story of the school year. Sound composition and strong technical quality are apparent throughout the book with few lapses.

Award of Commendation:

Photography is generally strong throughout the yearbook. There are some technical problems but these are kept to a minimum. Staff shows evidence of appropriate photo selection.

Award of Merit:

Photography is inconsistent throughout the yearbook. There are many technical problems that more photographic training might avoid. Staff photo selection is inconsistent in terms of storytelling.

Judge's narrative comments on photography:

design

If you are judging, these questions are meant to help you assess how this yearbook publication is doing in its design. Some publications will be quite strong in design but will appreciate not only a pat on the back but any tips you can share to improve the development of their design even more. For publications that are clearly in transition or are struggling to get their design where it should be, please provide focused, specific advice. Please identify issues and page numbers clearly when you reference particular spreads from the past school year.

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Layout

- Is it evident that most, if not all, layouts have been designed in two-page spread units, using a consistent column or grid structure?
- Has a horizontal eyeline, created by an actual line or alignment of photos and other elements, connect the two facing pages? Also, do the subjects of photos not look off page edges, drawing the reader's eye off the spread?
- Is the use of space demonstrating planning and packaging for maximum impact? Are three types used simultaneously: tight spacing to package elements as a unit, standard spacing to separate one content area from another and expanded spacing to isolate or emphasize something special? Is the book consistent in this?
- Do included graphics complement the overall design concept rather than simply decorate the page?
- Does a dominant photo cross the gutter to join opposing sides of the spread?
- Have designers avoided "lost faces" in the book binding by effectively cropping photos that cross the gutter?
- Has the staff utilized consistent and effective internal and external margins?
- Has color been used effectively outside of photographs?
- Has each spread been designed to include photos, copy package, captions, white space, and graphic elements?
- Is white space used effectively in the design?
- Are all captions and copy packages set in easy to read widths on a spread?
- Does the folio reflect the theme design and properly communicate page content?
- Do theme development spreads have a distinctive style to them that helps separate them from the design in the rest of the book?
- Does copy follow a natural hierarchy in proportion, with headlines as the largest copy and each package or content area's point size varying based on its overall size and position on the spread?

Typography

- Has the staff selected no more than three type families (or at least a limited selection of fonts) that complement each other throughout the book?
- Do type treatments direct readers through the book?
- Has staff layered type (bold/light, large/small contrast) effectively within each section?
- Have staff designers included a caption starter that is both functional and eye appealing?
- Did staff avoid the use of overly decorative typefaces or specialty typefaces that draw attention to themselves?
- Has staff utilized a consistent style for headlines?
- Are body copy and captions consistent in type style and size within each section and possibly throughout the whole book for unity?
- Have typographical points of entrance such as large initial letters, pulled quotes and boldface lead-ins been incorporated into the overall design concept?

design

All-Colorado:

Yearbook shows staff understanding of basic design concepts with graphic accent. Spreads reveal a unity of purpose with balance, dominance and perspective. Design helps communicate the message of the spreads without dominating that message. Design is clean, clear and appealing.

Award of Commendation:

Design is clean and appropriate to the message the book is attempting to deliver. There are occasional problems with design elements but generally the design is simple, creative and effective for reader appreciation.

Award of Merit:

Design sometimes does not seem to connect to the message the book is attempting to deliver. There are numerous problems with design elements and the staff needs to work on simple, creative and effective design strategies, with readers in mind.

Judge's narrative comments on design:

overall final evaluation

All-Colorado:

This is a quality yearbook that would compete well at any level. Staff demonstrates a solid understanding of the yearbook and its purpose. Book features well-written copy, attractive design and story-telling photography. This book obviously was produced to serve a readership. Staff and adviser should be most proud of their efforts. Staff goes above and beyond the typical to produce a book that sets the tone of the school year for the readers and does so with a unique and appealing approach.

Award of Commendation:

This yearbook represents a work that is close to becoming All-Colorado. Staff members indicate an awareness of what a quality yearbook should include but fail to consistently carry out that mission. There are flashes of brilliance in all areas of yearbook production but this book lacks a necessary consistency to be really effective. This book is about to break out and make its mark on the scholastic journalism scene once the staff can garner a greater consistency in quality and that extra spark that top yearbooks exhibit.

Award of Merit:

This yearbook attempts to cover a unique year, but is plagued by inconsistency. There may be occasional strong elements (in coverage, photography, etc.) but they don't occur regularly. Yearbook journalism is hard work, and there is evidence of dedication here, but most of the skills needed to produce a top book need to be improved.

Judge's Final Thoughts: