

Yearbook photos capture the moment, but the words record the event. Yearbook copy documents the people, the places, the emotions and the stories of the year. Well-written yearbook copy recounts a meaningful and captivating story five or 55 years after the event occurred.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF COPY?

- Headlines hook and entice the reader.
- Sub-headlines provide an intro to the story.
- Captions identify the people and action taking place in a photo.
- Body copy recreates the event for the reader.
- Sidebars provide secondary coverage and often include quotes or infographics.

Pro Tip: Copy is more than words on a page, it is an element of design. Work with the designer and photographer to tell the best story possible.

AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE:

- **Vagueness.** Instead of words like “some,” “many” or “few,” use exact numbers whenever possible. Refrain from making generalizations or obvious statements that apply every year, such as “Homecoming is a time for reflection.”
- **Editorializing.** The yearbook writer’s aim is to capture the stories of the year with accuracy and objectivity. Even phrases such as “tried their hardest,” and “gave it their all” contain editorializing.
- **Redundancy.** Eliminate the words “this year” from your copy unless they are necessary for comparison. Do not use the name of your school unless it is needed; it is obvious which school you are writing about.
- **Favoritism.** Don’t take the easy way out by interviewing your friends. Seek a variety of sources. From the third string quarterback to the star athlete, everyone has a story to tell. Go find it.

MAKE IT COUNT.

- **Use the 5 W’s and H** of journalistic writing (who, what, when, where, how and why). Write in the past tense and use the active voice.
- **Follow AP Style** for grammar and punctuation.
- **Be specific.** Since a yearbook is preserving the year’s history, its copy should be as detailed as possible. Include the date when describing an event. Focus on facts and figures. Songs played at dances, scores from sporting events, exact dollars raised or donated and cost of various items are all details worth mentioning since they offer insight into how the year differs from years past and help ignite memories when readers are reminded later of these specifics.
- **Interviews are integral to any news story.** They provide background information that brings to life the emotions of an event. A variety of sources and noteworthy details add credibility. Conduct interviews before, during and after the event.
- **Include meaningful quotes.** Ask interesting questions to get interesting answers. A direct quote should offer readers a new perspective or piece of information rather than repeat from the body copy.

SAY IT WITH SIDEBARS

Yearbook copy doesn’t all have to be in story form. Consider using infographics, pull-quotes, lists and other bursts of interesting tidbits that can be brought alive with graphics. Look to magazines like ESPN, Men’s Health, Real Simple and Martha Stewart Living for ideas.



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