

A self-assessment can be a powerful way to look at your yearbook with a critical eye and think about what works, what doesn't and what you can do to create the very best reflection of your school. These guidelines stem from the fundamentals of scholastic journalism and are based on criteria used by yearbook judges on state, regional and national levels. Asking these questions as you plan and assess your yearbook can help you create an outstanding book—whether you're seeking an award or not!

CONCEPT & ORGANIZATION

- Is the theme original, well-developed, repeatable, relevant and easily identifiable?
- Is the theme communicated on the cover and in opening and closing pages or spreads?
- Are specific details used to enhance the theme and connect it to the specific year?
- Is the theme carried out consistently throughout the book?
- Does the theme relate to the body of the book without being forced?
- Are section titles and divider spreads relevant to the theme?
- Is the table of contents easy to find and accurate?
- Does the title page list the name of the book, school, city, street address, state, zip code, year and volume number? Additional optional information may include the phone number, school enrollment, fax and website.
- Do your school name, city, state and volume number appear on the spine of the book?

DESIGN

- Is the overall design consistent, with variety from one section to another?
- Is there an obvious pattern (e.g., column or grid) that is easy for the reader to follow?
- Are photos of various sizes used within each spread?
- Is placement of faces in the gutter avoided?
- Does each spread have a focal point?
- Are margins consistent and is white space used effectively?
- Do graphic elements enhance design, rather than distract?
- Are typefaces easy to read and consistent within sections and overall design?

More! Teach your staff yearbook design basics by downloading our design lesson plans available at picabooyearbooks.com/tutorial

WHAT'S A COLOPHON? Most award-winning yearbooks contain a colophon at the back of the book that includes details such as the company who printed the book, number of copies ordered, fonts used, paper and cover specifications, computer and software specs and general acknowledgements. **A sample colophon is available for download at picabooyearbooks.com/downloads.** Just plug in your school information and you're good to go!

PHOTOGRAPHY

- Is there a compelling mix of action and candid photos both throughout the book and within each section?
- Do photos convey the essence of the event or experience depicted?
- Have photos been effectively cropped to eliminate waste, busy backgrounds or unwanted elements that distract from the focus of attention?
- Do photos vary in size and composition?
- Are portraits consistent in size and lighting?
- Are photos in focus and clear, not blurry?
- Photographs use leading lines, framing, backlighting or other techniques to draw the reader in.
- Posed shots and "mugging" for the camera shots are not used.

More! Learn more photography tips and tricks from the pros by downloading our photography lesson plans available at picabooyearbooks.com/tutorial

WRITING & EDITING

HEADLINES

- Are headlines both attention-grabbing and representative of each spread?
- Does each spread have a headline?
- Do headlines reflect the tone and content of each story?
- Are headlines technically correct, per AP Stylebook?
- Do headlines avoid labels and editorializing?

BODY COPY

- Is body copy well-written, written in LQTQ or Inverted Pyramid style?
- Does each story have a unique focus?
- Do stories reflect research and reporting, including quotes that are accurately attributed and include grade level?
- Is copy style consistent within each section?
- Is copy grammatically correct and free from errors and typos, per AP Stylebook?

CAPTIONS

- Does every photo have a caption?
- Do captions provide complete information for each photo, answering who, what, when, where, why and how?
- Do captions accurately convey the story behind each photo?
- Do group photo captions have consistent, logical format?
- Are caption typeface and size consistent within sections?

More! Practice makes perfect, so make use of our caption and headline writing lessons available for download at picabooyearbooks.com/tutorial

COVERAGE

While strong writing or design sometimes only showcases the talents of a few key students on a staff, excellent yearbook coverage is the mark of a well-rounded team. Highlighting the year through a perspective each year can be a challenge, but the results will keep your staff on their toes and the readers coming back for more.

OVERALL

- Is the entire year covered, rather than just nine months?
- Is a variety of the student population reflected in all sections?
- Is coverage balanced between school life, student life and individuals?

ACADEMICS

- Does coverage include an overview of all classes as well as unique aspects of academic life and special class activities?
- Are out-of-class activities such as field trips, special events and projects covered?

SPORTS

- Is coverage balanced among all sports?
- Are team photos of every team included?
- Are scoreboards and records included for each sport?
- Does coverage focus on the current season's successes and struggles?

PEOPLE

- Is coverage balanced among all grades?
- Are faculty and administration included?
- Do features highlight accomplishments of students, faculty and administration?

STUDENT LIFE

- Does coverage include both in-school and out-of-school activities?
- Does coverage include day-to-day life as well as major events?
- Does coverage include local culture such as what students are wearing, listening to, reading, buying and consuming?
- Does coverage include national, state and local news with emphasis on reactions from the student body?
- Are regular events covered from interesting angles and unique perspectives?

CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS

- Is coverage balanced among all clubs?
- Does coverage include an overview of all clubs and focus on activities rather than goals or objectives?
- Is there a group photo of every club?

COMMUNITY AND ADVERTISING

- Does coverage show school and student involvement in the community?
- Are personal and business ads blended throughout section?
- Are advertisements geared towards student interests (if possible)?
- Are ads professionally/tastefully designed?

NOTES

While this critique gives you a basic overview of the criteria judges look for in an award-winning yearbook, this is by no means the only way to make a great yearbook. We believe there is a fine balance between "following the rules" and creating a yearbook that will be enjoyed by your entire student body.

If you're interested in learning more about award-winning yearbooks and scholastic journalism, here are a few organizations that sponsor contests and can provide you with a comprehensive critique of your yearbook (usually for a small fee or the cost of membership):

Associated Collegiate Press - <http://www.studentpress.org/acp>
College publications are eligible for membership, contests and critiques.

Columbia Scholastic Press Association - <http://cspa.columbia.edu/>
Middle school, high school and college publications are eligible for membership, contests and critiques.

National Scholastic Press Association - <http://www.studentpress.org/nspsa>
Middle school and high school publications are eligible for membership, contests and critiques.

Visit picabooyearbooks.com for more yearbook tips and resources.

In addition to these national organizations, check with your state or regional scholastic press association to see what they offer.