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A New Voice for Chariho

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A guide to starting a high school student newspaper

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May 2008**

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Introduction

About this guide

This guide is meant to serve as a starting point for those looking to start a high school student-run newspaper. Ideally, this guide is meant to be integrated into a journalism class where students from the class join other students after school in publishing a paper. The guide is aimed at newspaper advisers, but includes handouts and activities that can be provided directly to students.

Christopher Barrett, a senior journalism and political science student at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston, Rhode Island, developed this guide during the spring of 2008 as his Senior Honors Project. The author served as editor-in-chief of his high school newspaper, a local weekly newspaper and his daily university paper.

In addition, he served as the newspaper adviser for the Chariho Regional High School for just under six months in the spring of 2008. There he field-tested a draft of this guide and made adjustments based on experience and feedback from university and high school professors and students. He would like to thank Chariho English teacher Christopher Fee and URI journalism professor John Pantalone for their assistance throughout the project.

What is a student newspaper?

At the high school level, students ideally run a newspaper as an extracurricular activity. Students join the newspaper for a variety of reasons. Some are looking to build their resumes, others are required to join a group for one reason or another and still others genuinely find it interesting. More often than not, the newspaper is connected to a journalism class and offers students an opportunity to publish their work.

The goal of a student newspaper is two-fold. On an educational level, a student-run newspaper provides a unique opportunity for students to gain valuable writing, reporting and management skills. In addition, unlike a classroom, a published newspaper gives students something tangible to show employers or colleges.

A newspaper is also unique in that unlike a classroom assignment, a published paper can have real-life consequences. If handled correctly, a paper at a high school level can force administrators to reevaluate policies, provide an outlet for students to express opinions and give businesses a chance to support their local school district while gaining new customers.

It is important to note that at the large majority of high schools the administration endorses the paper's operation. While this can provide a paper with resources, it also puts that paper's content under the administration's control. Unlike a college or professional paper, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that high school newspapers do not enjoy full First Amendment rights.

First Steps

The role of the adviser

To operate successfully, a newspaper requires an adviser. In most schools, the adviser comes from the English department. While such an adviser brings invaluable grammar and language skills, he or she may not be familiar with journalist style or reporting techniques. The ideal candidate is someone with a background in journalism who has experience working with students.

One of the primary roles of the adviser is to find students interested in publishing a newspaper. The adviser must solicit students in class, hold after-school meetings and arrange for announcements on the school's public address system, Web site or e-mail list-serve. He or she must answer student questions and present a plan to the administration. A good adviser also reaches out to other teachers and extracurricular groups to find ways to work together.

The adviser also provides continuity to the program that will see students come and go as they graduate or move onto other interests. In most districts, the adviser is also the link to the administration and the custodian of the group's finances.

The adviser also serves a key role in helping guide students to produce responsible and relevant content. The adviser must also be prepared to defend content decisions in front of the administration and faculty. The role of adviser sometimes will not be popular if students choose to take unpopular positions or report on issues the school would rather keep under the rug. However, the role of adviser can be incredibly rewarding as students learn more about the world around them and recognize the power of a free press.

Finding Funding

Like any activity, a high school newspaper requires funding. Depending on the school, selling advertisements to cover the cost of printing may or may not be possible. In a country seeing rising lawsuits many administrators are hesitant about sending students into the community as salesmen. Selling ads is complicated by the fact that many students may not be able to drive and few have their own independent modes of transportation.

To find funding advisers should look to a few key sources. Principals usually have a “principal’s fund” that allows funding of student groups. In addition, parent teacher organizations normally maintain small pools of money they distribute in the form of grants. Finally, lucky advisers might find the local school committee funds extracurricular activities directly from the budget.

It is important that advisers establish an account for the newspaper within the school system. Establishing an outside account may be frowned upon or downright banned. The adviser should contact the district’s business manager to find the proper method of collecting and dispersing funds.

Advisers should remember though that newspapers are unique. The closer funding ties to the administration, the more uncomfortable students may feel attacking the administration, lest losing their budget. Managing money also means complying with the district’s purchasing procedures, which might mean restrictions on which company can print the paper.

Sample Grant Proposal

Give a brief summary of the impact the project will have on students or the educational process in general, as well as the anticipated outcome or achievement.

A student newspaper is truly interdisciplinary. Besides refining students' writing skills, students gain valuable reporting skills, interviewing techniques and learn background information on topics important to them as citizens and students. Already, students explored the No Child Left Behind Law, interviewed the superintendent and conversed with guidance counselors.

The newspaper offers students a chance to connect topics they learn in the classroom to the real world. In the end, there is a hope that students will become more aware of the world around them and realize the importance and impact of the media.

In addition, a published paper allows valuable leadership training for the editors and provides all involved with both a resume-builder and clips to show future employers or colleges.

Finally, a published paper will help students not involved in creating it by bringing them relevant news written by the peers. These students will have a newspaper written for them, by them and about them.

Timetable

Most student newspaper take at least one month, more often two, to put together. Ambitious advisers could aim to publish as many as eight papers a year. Others might look to publish one a quarter, or four total.

Cost

The cost of papers varies depending on its size and whether or not color is added.

Advisers may also wish to add the following paragraphs:

The district will not permit me to require students to sell advertisements to fund the paper. (I would not want to go this route anyway.) While students have attempted to sell ads, many are young and without transportation and unable or unwilling to approach businesses to solicit money.

The principal has generously offered to help fund the paper through the Principal's Fund. However, I am asking for your assistance. Depending on the award amount and the number of ads sold, your assistance could help determine how many issues students print.

Identifying other needs

While the major obstacles to starting a newspaper are finding students and funding, advisers should be aware of other requirements.

Space

Although it sounds elementary, a newspaper requires space to operate. Normally a classroom can be reserved for this. It is important though that students have a consistent place to meet and a safe place to store equipment such as cameras.

Technology

A newspaper requires computers with word processing and design software. The most common word processing software is Microsoft Word and popular design software includes Adobe InDesign and Quark or QuarkExpress.

In the best of worlds, students also have access to a common network drive where they can share stories and photographs.

For photographs, students will require access to a digital camera.

Lessons

Defining News

Time Required

30 minutes

Objectives

Students will learn news determinants or the generally accepted principles of what news is fit to print.

Materials Required

Newspapers, whiteboard

Lesson

Generally, news is considered an issue, a story or person that has some or all of the following characteristics:

1. Relevance – Does the story affect students, teachers or parents?
2. Timely – Keeping in mind that most student papers come out only a few times a year, will the story still be interesting and accurate when published?
3. Controversial – Does the story involve conflict?
4. Money – “Follow the money,” it leads to great stories.
5. Human Interest – Does the story involve an interesting person, situation or emotional connection?
6. Proximity – Does the story affect the school, the town, the state?
7. Prominence – Does the story involve a well-known person or issue?

In addition to news determinants, well-crafted news stories contain the following characteristics:

1. Accurate – Are names spelled correctly, do numbers add up, etc.?
2. Fair – Are all involved allowed an opportunity to speak and are their quotes and information presented in proper context?
3. Depth – Does the story include enough detail?
4. Breadth – Does the story include all the points of the issue?
5. True – Self explanatory

Teaching Suggestion

Before class, have students read a selection of national and local papers. Through a question-and-answer session during class, lead students to generate the news determinants and characteristics of well-written stories on their own. The list above is meant as a general guide and is in no way conclusive.

An Abbreviated History of Journalism

Time Required

40-50 minutes

Objectives

Students will receive a brief taste of the history of journalism by learning about some of history's most famous journalists.

Materials Required

Famous journalists names on slips of paper, Name That Journalist handout, computers with Internet access

Lesson & Teaching Suggestion

Have students draw the name of a famous and/or important journalist out of a hat. The student will research the journalist's life and answer the following questions:

1. Before this assignment, had you heard of this person?
2. When did the journalist live?
3. In two or three sentences, what is his or her background?
4. What is his or her "claim to fame?" Was there one specific incident, story or publication your journalist is known for or credited with?
5. Do you think this person made a difference? Why or why not?

After students gather their information have each briefly present what they found to the class. The hope is that students will learn about the history of journalism and realize that journalists can and do make a difference.

Name that Journalist

Directions: Your job is to become an investigative journalist and research an individual who contributed or is contributing to the field of journalism. Write a few paragraphs about your assigned journalist, being sure to answer the following questions. **Be sure to cite your sources and, please, do not use Wikipedia.**

1. Before this assignment, had you heard of this person?
2. When did the journalist live?
3. In two or three sentences, what is his or her background?
4. What is his or her “claim to fame?” Was there one specific incident, story or publication your journalist is known for or credited with?
5. Do you think this person made/is making a difference? Why or why not?

Famous Journalists

The following is a list of journalists to use along with the Name That Journalist handout. The list provides a sampling of both print and broadcast journalists, as well as both modern and historical reporters. Additional journalists may easily be added.

Carl Bernstein

Ben Bradlee

Samuel L. Clemens

Walter Cronkite Jr.

Bill Keller

Daniel Ellsberg

William Randolph Hearst

Seymour Hersh

Edward R. Murrow

Joseph Pulitzer

Dan Rather

Joel P. Rawson

Jim Taricani

Helen Thomas

Jack White

Bob Woodward

Newsroom Management

Time Required

40 minutes

Objectives

Students will learn what it takes to make the “behind the scenes” operations of a newspaper work

Materials Required

Job descriptions

Lesson

Like any business a newspaper needs a management structure to operate successfully. But instead of CEOs and vice presidents, newspapers use terms like executive editor, managing editor and desk chief. The following are roles to review with students:

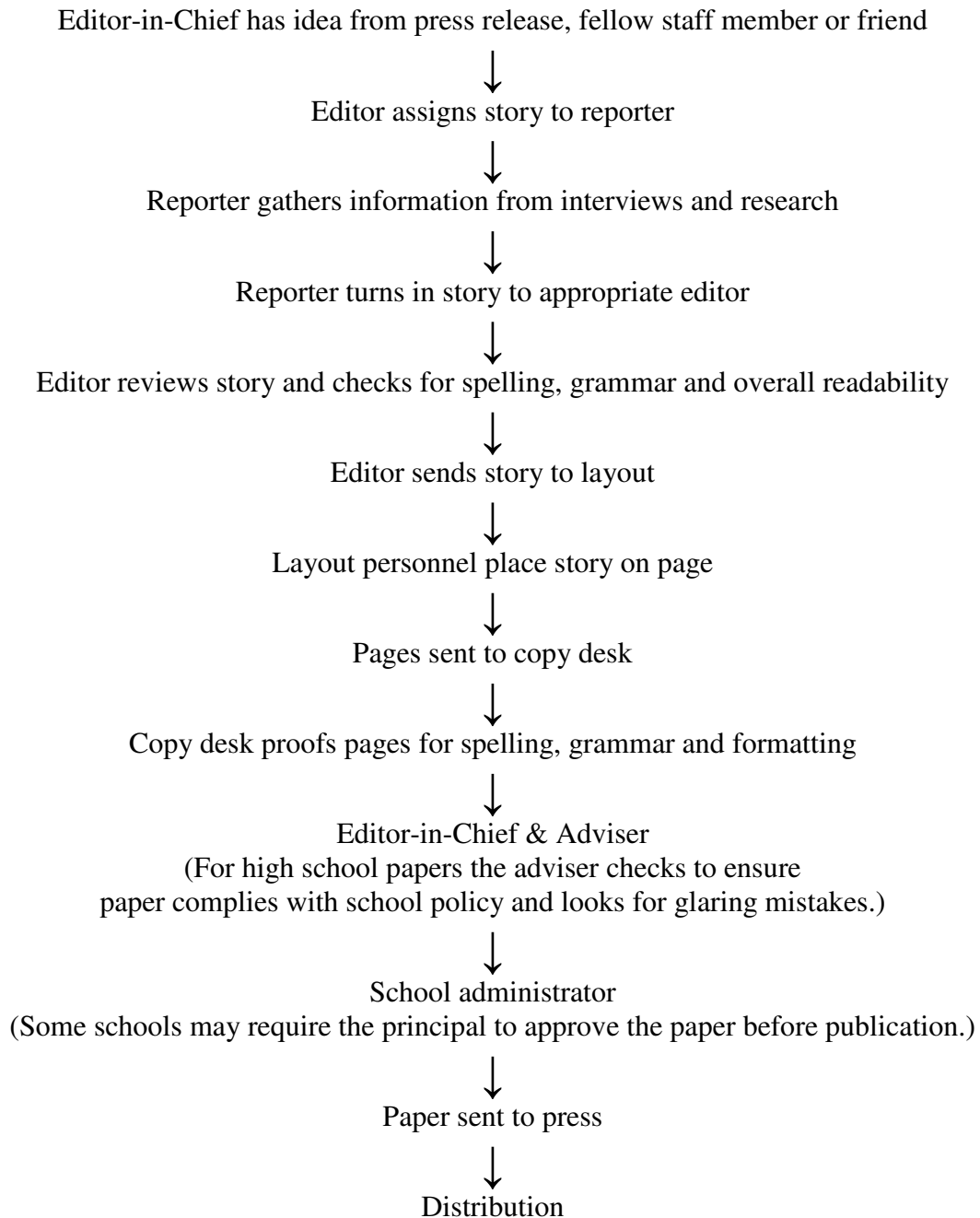
- Reporter: A reporter gathers the story through interviews and research, sorts through the information and writes an article.
- Photographers: Photographers take pictures and write captions.
- Mid-level editors: Mid-level editors include those such as the sports editor, arts editor or news editor. Ideally, these editors act as a stopgap between their reporters and senior editors. For smaller high school papers, there may be little need to create such positions.
- Photo editor: The photo editor oversees photographers and the artwork related to the paper.
- Editor-in-chief: The editor-in-chief is the senior editorial officer. He or she assigns stories, makes final decisions on what to publish and represents that paper to the public. Depending on the paper’s organization, the editor-in-chief may also sit on an editorial board that decides what position the paper takes on its editorial pages.
- General (Business) manager: The business manager keeps the paper’s books and bills advertisers.

Teaching Suggestion

At the start of the class ask students to name positions at a paper. Students will generally give blank stares, however, a little prodding with normally lead them to realize that they know more about the management positions of papers than they thought.

After reviewing management positions, go through the process of how an idea becomes a story using the flowchart on the following page as a guide.

How an idea becomes a story



Job Descriptions

Clear guidelines lead to clear expectations and a smooth operation. The following are sample job descriptions for a high school newspaper staff. Note that in many cases some the jobs may be eliminated or combined depending on the size of the paper and staff.

Reporter (news, sports, entertainment, etc.)

- Gather the necessary information to write an article. Gathering information can include conducting interviews, researching a topic or attending events.
- Reporters should also strive to be objective, fair and accurate. For this reason, reporters should avoid interviewing friends or teachers they are close to.

Mid-Level Editors (sports, arts, other special sections)

- Mid-level editors oversee specific departments. Ideally, they have an interest and expertise in the subject and can help guide reporters through their stories.
- Mid-level editors assist staff as necessary with writing and editing.
- Mid-level editors write stories as needed.
- Mid-level editors develop story ideas for the paper.
- Mid-level editors edit and approve their section before turning it over to the copy desk.

Editorial Page Editor

- The editorial page editor oversees the editorial pages of the paper.
- The editorial page editor gathers and verifies the authorship of letters to the editor.
- The editorial page editor edits letters to conform to the paper's style.
- The editorial page editor edits all other opinion content such as columns.
- The editorial page editor writes (with assistance from the editorial board) the editorial.

Photographers

- Photographers take pictures to accompany stories.
- Photographers load pictures to the computer and edit them.
- Photographers help maintain cameras, computers, etc.
- Photographers write cutlines for their photographs. The cutline should identify who is in the photograph and what is going on and when.

Photo Editor

- The photo editor meets regularly with editors to discuss the photo requirements.
- The photo editor oversees the photographers and hands out photo assignments.
- The photo editor helps photographers with technical or other questions.
- The photo editor helps maintain cameras, computers, etc.

Editor-in-Chief

- The editor oversees the production of the paper from start to finish.
- The editor assigns news stories.
- The editor works with the photo editor to assign photos/artwork.
- The editor assists staff with writing, editing and reporting.
- The editor works with editors and the general manager to design the paper's layout.
- The editor edits paper before publication.
- The editor serves as the representative of the paper to the administration and public.
- The editor seeks new staff members.

General (Business) Manager

- The general manager manages the fiscal side of the paper with help from the adviser.
- The general manager bills advertisers and receives and tracks payments.
- The general manager works with editors and the editor-in-chief to place advertisements.
- The general manager ensures all advertisers receive a copy of the finished paper.
- The general manager handles interactions with advertisers.
- Working with the adviser, the general manager keeps the paper's books.

Ethics 101

Time Required

40 minutes

Objectives

Students will learn the major theories behind ethical decision making as they apply to newspapers

Materials Required

Media Ethics PowerPoint, SPJ Code of Ethics

Lesson & Teaching Suggestion

Handout and review the Society of Professional Journalist's Code of Ethics.

Start the PowerPoint presentation. Stop at the first picture of a child and vulture in the Sudan during 1994 and ask students if they would run it. Be sure to note that the photographer had the chance to help the child, but did not. He also waited some time for the vulture to appear in his view. (The child was attempting to reach a UN food camp less than a mile away.) Also note that the picture won a Pulitzer Price and that the photographer later committed suicide after heavy criticism about the photo that ran in dozens of newspapers. Finally, point out that while the picture might have shown the problems in the Sudan more than a decade later those problems remain.

The next photo shows a woman and a child falling from a fire escape in Boston. Firefighters were just moments away from rescuing the pair. The woman died and the child sustained heavy injuries. It was editors, not the photographer, who decided to run the photograph. Ask students if the picture invades the privacy of the subjects or their family. Would publishing the photo encourage Boston to take action to inspect fire escapes? Can the Los Angeles Times use the same justification for running the photo? Finally, should the photographer have a say in what photos his or her paper runs?

The next slides lay out two ways of making ethical decisions, including the Potter Box and Sissela Bok. The following slides review the major philosophies of ethical decision making.

The presentation ends with a picture of a man jumping from the World Trade Center during the attacks of September 11, 2001. Ask students if this is too graphic, invades the privacy of the man (even though he is not identifiable) or is even necessary to show the scale of the attacks.

SPJ Code of Ethics

Media Ethics PowerPoint Presentation

Presentation here 2

Presentation here 3

Writing 101

Time Required

40-60 minutes

Objectives

Students will receive a primer on basic newspaper writing skills, with a particular emphasis on how writing news articles differs from writing an English paper.

Materials Required

On Writing Well handout, What's Wrong with this Story? handout, whiteboard

Lesson & Teaching Suggestion

Lecture students on how to tell the difference between a news story, feature and editorial.

- *News stories* are objective articles that do not include opinion and have attributed information.
- *Features* are light news stories that contain attributed information. The opinion of a reporter is normally not present.
- *Editorials* are articles written by editors that take a stance for the paper. Well-written editorials do not use first person, are based on facts rather than personal opinion and attribute all information.

After students are comfortable telling the difference between a story and an editorial, distribute the “What’s Wrong with this Story?” handout. Ask students to read it and identify what they do and do not like about it. Ask the following questions to spur discussion.

- What do you think of the story? Do you like it? Why or why not?
- Did you notice names spelled wrong? Does this ruin the credibility?
- Do you even know if the council approved the project?
- Do you find it hard to read with such long paragraphs?

Distribute and review the “On Writing Well” handout and ask students to apply the tips by rewriting the story as an in-class or homework assignment.

On Writing Well

What constitutes a “good” news story is a somewhat subjective question. However, there are some commonly accepted standards for writing news stories. When you write your articles please try to keep these in mind.

- **Research:** Do research, speak with the adviser, talk to your friends. Understand the subject behind your article *before* you go asking questions. It would be very embarrassing if you asked an administrator about No Child Left Behind and had never read the pertinent sections of the law.
- **Remember your audience:** Students will be the primary readers of your article. Use layman’s terms and stay away from technical jargon. And **never assume** that they know something. When in doubt, include the information.
- **Objectivity:** Remember your story must take a detached viewpoint. As such, do not express your opinions and **do not use first person**.
- **Story Structure:** Studies have shown most readers rarely finish reading an entire story. As such, follow the inverted pyramid philosophy of putting the most important information at the top of your story and the least important at the bottom. Also, unlike writing for English class, news stories do not contain introductions or conclusions. Instead, stories contain leads and end when they do, no wrap-up, no summary.
- **Avoid Chronicle Story Telling:** Don’t say this happened, and then this happened. Your readers don’t care about the order; they care about what happened. Put the most important information at the top.
- **Lead:** The lead is the “nut” of your story. It should explain in a succinct way the who, what, where, when and why of the story. It should be no more than 30 words long.
- **Paragraph Structure:** Unlike a paper you would write for your English class, news articles are built with paragraphs that are normally no longer than three sentences each. This is to make the story easier to read and so it looks better on the page when it is presented as narrow columns.
- **Quotes:** The spice of any story is quotes from people involved. Be sure that if you quote someone, you have the *exact* quote. Also, be aware not everything needs to be quoted. If Joe Smith says, “I have been working at here since, let’s see, 1987,” you don’t need to quote it. Instead, paraphrase it to “Smith has been working at the school since 1987.” Or, better yet, do the math for the reader and say, “Smith is entering his 21st year at the school.”
Quotes always go in their own paragraph and are followed by attribution.
“Working at this school is amazing,” Smith said. “I find this school the most spirited of all the schools I’ve ever worked in.”
- **Attribution:** Where quotes don’t work, you might need attribution. If someone says the food in the cafeteria is bad, you need to name that person. There is a large difference between a student making the comment and the head of dining services making it. If the person has a title be sure to include it, if it’s a student, what year is he or she?
- **Names:** Always double-check the spelling of the subject’s first *and* last name. Chris can be spelled Chris, Kris, Cris, etc. Green can be spelled Green or Greene. Misspelling someone’s name ruins your credibility.

What's wrong with this story?

Directions: Using the On Writing Well worksheet, identify what is wrong with this story and rewrite it properly.

The Chariho Town Council is a powerful body and they make many important decisions. To find the story of why the council wants to approve building more than 200 single-family homes near Route 112 near the High School, I went to the meeting last night, Tuesday, March 11, 2008.

At the meeting, the council members first approved the minutes from the previous meeting. Then, the members discussed the agenda for the evening, and decided to move the development issue to the start of the meeting.

First, Mac Butler, a lawyer for the development company, stood up and told the council the development, called High Meadows, was legal and the council could do nothing to stop it. Council President Kris Fee said he was concerned about the traffic such a project would bring and asked Butler to expand on the issue. "I think the traffic could be a problem," Fee told Butler, a very good lawyer from Providence. "I want to protect the calm of the neighborhood and I need a traffic study before I can vote." Other council members then questioned Butler. After, Butler took his chair at the front of the audience, residents stood up. One asked, "How will my children sleep with all these new homes?" Another asked, "What strain will this put on city services?" Kayla O'Brien stood up and gave an elegant speech about how a new development had been put behind her house and it ruined her view. The huge crowd cheered. After the meeting, I asked Butler about the questions residents had asked. He promised that all the concerns would be taken care of and pointed out the Zoning and Planning boards had approved the project. That wasn't a good answer for Fee who, after the meeting, told me that there were "more questions than answers."

Overall, the project would be a disaster for Chariho. It will bring too many cars and strain city services and fill the town's already overwhelmed schools.

After the heated discussion about High Meadows, the council voted on less important items like honoring a local Eagle Scout and giving \$500 to a local community food bank. The council adjourned its meeting by a vote of 5-0 at 9:43 p.m.

What's wrong with this story?

Answer Key

Directions: Using the On Writing Well worksheet, identify what is wrong with this story and rewrite it properly.

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Legal Considerations I

High School Limitations

Time Required

45-60 minutes

Objectives

Although the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that high school students do not lose their First Amendment rights when they step through the schoolhouse door, the courts have ruled the administration may place certain restrictions on school-sanctioned, student-run high school papers.

Materials Required

Whiteboard

Lesson & Teaching Suggestion

This is one of the few lessons that is most effectively delivered by simple lecture. However, before explaining the court's ruling in *Tinker* and *Hazelwood* ask students how they would have ruled had they been the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The First Amendment

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or *abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press*; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

The Constitutional amendment seems clear-cut, but in reality there are many restrictions on speech and the press.

Prior Restraint

Prior restraint is the concept of someone – usually an authority – ordering the stopping of information from going to print before it is published. Generally, in the United States, prior restraint has been struck down by the courts as in violation of the First Amendment's freedom of speech and press. However, in some cases such as high schools, the courts have allowed prior restraint.

Court Cases

Tinker vs. Des Moines. In December 1965, a group of adults and students decided to show their opposition to the Vietnam War by wearing black armbands to school. The administration of the Des Moines, Iowa school district learned of the plans and adopted a policy where "any student wearing an armband to school would be asked to remove it, and if he refused he would be suspended until he returned without the armband." The Tinkers, although aware of the policy, chose to wear the armbands to school and were suspended. They appealed to the courts and the case eventually made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The court ruled, “It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” The court said it recognized the need for administrators to control conduct, but it must be consistent with constitutional safeguards. Specifically, the court ruled:

“For the State in the person of school officials to justify prohibition of a particular expression of opinion, it must be able to show that its action was caused by something more than a mere desire to avoid the discomfort and unpleasantness that always accompany an unpopular viewpoint. Certainly where there is no finding and no showing that engaging in the forbidden conduct would ‘materially and substantially interfere with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school,’ the prohibition cannot be sustained.”

Hazelwood School District vs. Kuhlmeier. The U.S. Supreme Court case decided in January 1988 by a 5-3 vote narrowed the ruling laid down in *Tinker*. The case involved a principal at East Hazelwood High School in Missouri that directed two pages be removed from the student newspaper because they either contained stories about pregnancy and divorce where quoted students were identified or the principal believed they could be identified. The pages also contained unrelated stories.

In a reversal from *Tinker*, the court ruled, “A school need not tolerate student speech that is inconsistent with its basic educational mission, even though the government could not censor similar speech outside the school.” The court also ruled there was difference between a paper created as part of an educational curriculum environment (i.e. class) and one specifically created for the purposes of a “public forum.” Papers connected to the official curriculum do not enjoy First Amendment rights unless specifically designed as a “public forum” by the school.

Finally, the court, noting *Tinker*, said, “Educators do not offend the First Amendment by exercising editorial control over the style and content of student speech in school-sponsored expressive activities so long as their actions are reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns.”

The case remains the precedent for high school newspaper First Amendment rights. Most high school student newspapers remain connected to the curriculum and thus lack of a designation as a “public forum.”

References

Lotridge Levin, Linda. *Mass Communication Law in Rhode Island*. Stillwater, Oklahoma: New Forums Press, 1998.

Middleton, Kent R. and William E. Lee. *The Law of Public Communication*. Allyn & Bacon, 2006.

Legal Considerations II

What is Libel?

Time Required

1 hour

Objectives

While the First Amendment protects free speech, the courts have ruled that free speech does not apply to libelous statements. The students will learn what constitutes libel.

Materials Required

Whiteboard, Hypothetical Situations handout

Lesson & Teaching Suggestion

Start the lesson by giving students hypothetical situations and asking them if they believe they meet the definition of libel. Lecture with opportunity for questions and bringing in the scenarios. Before telling students the results of actual court cases, ask them what they think happened and what they would decide.

What is libel?

- In the United States, people can sue for printed or spoken words that “diminish the esteem, respect, good will or confidence” others have in them or for language that incites “adverse, derogatory or unpleasant feelings or opinions” (Middleton 93). In most states, libel is printed word and slander is spoken word.
- Today, libel is normally a civil matter punishable by monetary judgments. Criminal libel virtually ended with the dawn of the 20th century.

Who can sue for libel?

- Any individual, living or dead. (Rhode Island is one of only two states, the other being New Jersey, where a dead person can sue for libel.)
- Virtually any private or corporate organization

Who cannot sue for libel?

- The courts have consistently ruled that libel does not “rub off” on another person. For example, if you wrote a story that portrayed the principal in a poor light, his secretary could not sue for libel by claiming making him look bad made her look bad.
- The government
- Certain individuals who have lost all reputation and cannot be further damaged by anything. For example, Paris Hilton or Britney Spears.
- Groups cannot usually sue for libel. So writing a story about how your school’s teachers as a whole need to iron their clothes could not serve as a basis for all teachers to sue. However, some courts have said groups smaller than 100 people – like a football team – can sue.

In Rhode Island, a plaintiff in a successful libel suit must prove:

1. *Publication* – Printed and distributed to at least one person (single issue).
2. *Identification* – Must identify a *specific* person, but not necessarily by name. Saying the tall, brown-headed man who works in the principal's office could be a veiled reference to the principal. However, one cannot successfully sue as part of a group. So if we say all teachers are terrible, one cannot sue.
3. *Defamatory words* –
 - a. Per se language is to be taken in "ordinary sense." For example, calling a lawyer an "ambulance chaser" is usually libelous on its face. So is mistakenly saying someone was accused of a crime.
 - b. Per quod language is defamation by innuendo. For example, "Police inspectors searching for Max Ross" is *not* innuendo. The court ruled that taken as a whole the headline and article properly explained that the police were looking for his car after it was stolen, not that he was a criminal fleeing police. However, another court ruled that a paper mistakenly reporting the day of a tennis match defamed the athlete because the day it reported the match occurred was a religious holiday the athlete observed. Reporting the wrong day made him look poor in the eyes of his religion. Another example was *TV Guide* reporting Pat Montandon as the only guest on a show called "From Party Girl to Call Girl." The description made it sound like Montandon was a call girl, when in fact she was the author of a book about "party girls."
4. *Fault* – Did the reporter take reasonable steps to avoid making the mistake? Public officials must also show "actual malice" or that the reporter intended harm.
5. *Personal Harm* – Such as a loss of reputation, emotional distress or loss of business revenue

Photographs

Photographs can be libelous too. For example, a Boston lawyer received a jury trial after the *Boston Herald-Traveler* put his photo under a headline "Settlement Upped \$2,000: \$400 Kickback Told." The photo had meant to go along with a different story.

Actual Malice: *New York Times v. Sullivan*

- The police commissioner in Montgomery, Alabama sued the *New York Times* after it ran an advertisement in March 1960 purchased by a committee of civil rights activists that documented a supposed confrontation of police and nonviolent demonstrators at Alabama State College. The ad contained several minor false statements that exaggerated the incident. The commissioner, L.B. Sullivan, sued. While lower courts ruled for Sullivan, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public officials needed to show "actual malice" on behalf of the paper and the Sullivan had not proven the paper intended him harm.
- This ruling was later expanded to include "public officials" and "public figures" such as elected officials, judges, major government employees and celebrities. Public figures are those "intimately involved in the resolution of important public questions or, by reason of their fame, shape events in areas of concern to society at large."

Limited or “Vortex” Figures: *Gertz v. Welch*

Elmer Gertz was a prominent Chicago Civil rights lawyer. The *American Opinion*, a right-wing magazine, said that Gertz, who was representing the family of a child murdered by a Chicago Police officer in a civil suit, was a communist attempting to discredit the police and replace it with a national police force that would support a Communist dictatorship. None of it was true.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Gertz was a private figure because he did not gain widespread fame or “thrust himself into the vortex” or tried to influence the outcome of the officer’s criminal trial.

The court has ruled that people who inject themselves into public controversy are public figures. The court declared three requirements “1. The alleged defamation involves a public controversy. 2. The person suing for libel has voluntarily participated in the discussion of that controversy, and 3. The person suing for libel has tried to affect the outcome of the controversy” (Middleton 131).

But some people – such as a well-known sports coach or celebrity – may still be considered public figures even if they do not voluntarily inject themselves into controversy. For example, the court ruled the University of Georgia athletic director was a public figure after he sued the *Saturday Evening Post* for writing about allegations that he tried to fix a football game. High school principals have generally been considered public officials if the story relates to their job.

References

Lotridge Levin, Linda. *Mass Communication Law in Rhode Island*. Stillwater, Oklahoma: New Forums Press, 1998.

Middleton, Kent R. and William E. Lee. *The Law of Public Communication*. Allyn & Bacon, 2006.

Sue Me Now! (For libel that is)

Would the following situations be considered libelous? Why or why not?

1. The *High School Times* reports that Richmond Police arrested Jake Averich yesterday for assaulting the hall monitor after getting into a dispute over the signature on a hall pass. The paper reports that Averich tells police he was simply in a hurry to get to the bathroom and may have “accidentally pushed” the unnamed monitor. Averich calls the *Times* and threatens to sue. Would and should he win? Why or why not?
2. The *Rhode Island Journal* reports that Marc Smith was arrested for breaking and entering into the high school cafeteria in a failed attempt to steal a Snickers bar. The only problem is that it was Frank Smith that was arrested, not Marc Smith. Marc Smith sues, claiming the *Journal* made him appear a raging Snickers-obsessed student and now his neighbors taunt him by leaving half-eaten Snickers in his driveway. Should he win? Why or why not?
3. Gov. Donald Carcieri speaks at your high school in Potatoville. The paper covers his speech and writes an article that says, “The governor appeared detached from the speech, relying on obviously recycled notes and at one point thanked the students for inviting him to ‘the finest school in all of Providence.’ All in all, the governor’s speech showed Carcieri does not care enough about education to even get the name of the school he is speaking at correct. It was a sad day for high school students.” Carcieri, saying the article damaged his reputation, and concerned about the impression the story left on local potato farmers, sues the paper. Should he win? Why or why not?
4. The high school paper writes an opinion piece that claims, “High school teachers today are failing America’s students. Instead of focusing on important lessons of the day such as turf management techniques, the teachers bore us with lessons in geometry and Shakespeare.” Taking offense, a group of English teachers led by Christopher Fees sues, charging the paper portrayed teachers in a poor light. Should they win? Why or why not?

5. The paper receives and runs an advertisement from the PTO calling for the resignation of Superintendent of Schools Barry Rich. Among other items, the ad claims Rich spends his Friday nights in a shady part of town and entertains female acquaintances who are not his wife at his large estate on Potato Drive. The School Committee votes the issue has nothing to do with his job performance and considers the issue closed. Yet, Rich sues the paper, announcing at a press conference that “I did not have sex with that woman.” Would he, and should he, win?

6. Copying an item from the *Potatoville Times*, your paper reports that high school English teacher Christopher Fees is part of an underground communist organization that is conspiring to overthrow the state government. Following the publication, the principal places Fees on unpaid administrative leave and police are assigned to guard his house after threats. Fees, already suing the paper for portraying teachers in a poor light, launches another suit. He claims he has no association with communists. In fact, Fees claims he is secretly a die-hard Republican working on a Constitutional amendment that would allow George W. Bush to serve a third term. Assuming that is true, should and would Fees win his case?

Sue Me Now! (For libel that is)

Answer Key

1. The *High School Times* reports that Richmond Police arrested Jake Averich yesterday for assaulting the hall monitor after getting into a dispute over the signature on a hall pass. The paper reports that Averich tells police he was simply in a hurry to get to the bathroom and may have “accidentally pushed” the unnamed monitor. Averich calls the *Times* and threatens to sue. Would and should he win? Why or why not?

Averich would likely lose. The story was accurate, attributed to the police and fair.

2. The *Rhode Island Journal* reports that Marc Smith was arrested for breaking and entering into the high school cafeteria in a failed attempt to steal a Snickers bar. The only problem is that it was Frank Smith that was arrested, not Marc Smith. Marc Smith sues, claiming the *Journal* made him appear a raging Snickers-obsessed student and now his neighbors taunt him by leaving half-eaten Snickers in his driveway. Should he win? Why or why not?

Smith would likely win. The courts have ruled that negligence is a key part of determining whether libel occurred. In addition, Smith suffered actual harm by having neighbors taunt him.

3. Gov. Donald Carcieri speaks at your high school in Potatoville. The paper covers his speech and writes an article that says, “The governor appeared detached from the speech, relying on obviously recycled notes and at one point thanked the students for inviting him to ‘the finest school in all of Providence.’ All in all, the governor’s speech showed Carcieri does not care enough about education to even get the name of the school he is speaking at correct. It was a sad day for high school students.” Carcieri, saying the article damaged his reputation, and concerned about the impression the story left on local potato farmers, sues the paper. Should he win? Why or why not?

The governor would lose. Courts have consistently ruled that public officials cannot sue for libel while acting in their official capacities.

4. The high school paper writes an opinion piece that claims, “High school teachers today are failing America’s students. Instead of focusing on important lessons of the day such as turf management techniques, the teachers bore us with lessons in geometry and Shakespeare.” Taking offense, a group of English teachers led by Christopher Fees sues, charging the paper portrayed teachers in a poor light. Should they win? Why or why not?

The teachers would likely lose. The courts have consistently ruled that a large group cannot sue. Identification must be made.

5. The paper receives and runs an advertisement from the PTO calling for the resignation of Superintendent of Schools Barry Rich. Among other items, the ad claims Rich spends his Friday nights in a shady part of town and entertains female acquaintances who are not his wife at his large estate on Potato Drive. The School Committee votes the issue has nothing to do with his job performance and considers the issue closed. Yet, Rich sues the paper, announcing at a press conference that “I did not have sex with that woman.” Would he, and should he, win?

This is a tricky one. If the courts consider Rich a public figure, he would need to prove “actual malice.” While it could likely be proved the PTO had a vendetta against Rich, the paper might have simply been running the ad as it would any other advertisement.

6. Copying an item from the *Potatoville Times*, your paper reports that high school English teacher Christopher Fees is part of an underground communist organization that is conspiring to overthrow the state government. Following the publication, the principal places Fees on unpaid administrative leave and police are assigned to guard his house after threats. Fees, already suing the paper for portraying teachers in a poor light, launches another suit. He claims he has no association with communists. In fact, Fees claims he is secretly a die-hard Republican working on a Constitutional amendment that would allow George W. Bush to serve a third term. Assuming that is true, should and would Fees win his case?

Fees would likely win. Even though the paper did not make the initial mistake, courts have ruled that a publication and reprinting something does not exempt the paper from a libel suit. Fees also can show personal harm by being placed on administrative leave and his house being threatened.

Advertising 101

Time Required

30 minutes

Objectives

Students will learn how to sell advertisements for the paper, including how to carry themselves in a professional manner, skills transferable to job interviews, college interviews and life in general.

Materials Required

Tips for Selling the Paper handout

Lesson & Teaching Suggestion

Survey students on what they buy and write it on the board. Connect this to an opportunity to sell ads to the businesses that provide these goods and services.

After reviewing the selling points of a student newspaper pair students up and have students practice pitching selling an ad by asking one student to play the salesman and another a manager.

Papers survive on receiving advertising revenue. Sometimes local businesses look at placing an ad in the local high school paper as a donation. However, if presented correctly, placing an ad is a real business opportunity. Review the Tips for Selling Ads with students.

Before breaking students into pairs give them the following advice.

- *Know your product* – Know what you are selling, how much it costs, etc.
- *Have forms ready* – Carry the rate card and placement form.
- *Dress sharp* – Who is taken more seriously, the student wearing ripped jeans or the one in slacks and a nice shirt?
- *Ask for the manager* – It would be a shame if you wasted your speech on a clerk that has no authority to buy an ad.
- *Choose your words* – Do not introduce yourself by saying, “I’d like to know if you want to buy an ad for my high school paper.” Try something along the lines, “I’m here to offer you a business opportunity and a chance to support your local high school.”
- *Say please and thank you* – It sounds like a minor point but using basic courtesies can go a long way.
- *Skip the chains* – Large chain stores like CVS and Wal-Mart have corporate headquarters far away that decide advertising. If you’re feeling ambitious you can call corporate, but your time will likely be much better spent soliciting local shops.

Tips for Selling Ads

Sometimes local businesses look at placing an ad in the local high school paper as a donation. However, if presented correctly, placing an ad is a real business opportunity.

Any student newspaper has a number of selling points

- The paper will reach the entire student body
 - Students buy stuff. They buy music, coffee and services every day. Word of mouth is important when selling to students. A student is much more likely to buy from a place his friend recommends or he has heard of than from an unknown company.
- The paper will reach dozens of faculty and staff
 - Faculty and staff usually look to support their students and school. If they see a business supporting their local school, they may be more inclined to shop at the store.
- The paper will reach parents of students
 - Parents have many needs, including shopping for their children. They also wish to support businesses that support their child's school.

Tips for selling ads

- *Know your product* – Know what you are selling, how much it costs, etc.
- *Have forms ready* – Carry the rate card and placement form.
- *Dress sharp* – Who is taken more seriously, the student wearing ripped jeans or the one in slacks and a nice shirt?
- *Ask for the manager* – It would be a shame if you wasted your speech on a clerk that has no authority to buy an ad.
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- *Say please and thank you* – It sounds like a minor point but using basic courtesies can go a long way.
- *Skip the chains* – Large chain stores like CVS and Wal-Mart have corporate headquarters far away that decide advertising. If you’re feeling ambitious you can call corporate, but your time will likely be much better spent soliciting local shops.

Sample Advertising Letter

Dear local business,

The students at Chariho High School would like to offer you an opportunity to grow your business while supporting your local school. The Chariho Times is published twice a semester and reaches 1,000 students, 100 faculty and staff and countless parents. Placing an advertisement in our paper allows you to reach a wide-ranging group of potential customers.

The Times offers a wide variety of options and would be happy to work with you on additional options.

Thank you,

Jane Smith
Business Manager

Sample Advertising Form

Business Name: _____

Contact Person: _____

Phone Number: _____

Circle Ad Size: (prices per issue)

Quarter Page, \$25

Half Page, \$50

Three-quarter Page, \$75

Full Page, \$100

Circle Issue(s):

October

December

March

May

Amount Due: \$_____

Price per issue x No. of issues

Advertising Representative _____

Please attach ad copy or e-mail it to newspaper@highschool.com

Thank you for supporting your local school newspaper!

Photography 101

Time Required

40-60 minutes, pared down. Ideally, this lesson would be spread over two class periods.

Objectives

Students will learn the theory behind news photography.

Materials Required

Sample photographs, digital or disposable cameras

Lesson

Photography adds a new dimension to news, bringing the reader images from award ceremonies to warzones. The following lesson is meant to be an overview of the theory of photography rather than a lesson in its many technical aspects.

Before you even raise the camera...

A good photographer must understand when it is appropriate and legal to shoot a photograph. In general, adhere to these guidelines:

- High schools, while considered public buildings, are not open to the public. Administrators and teachers will likely allow student photographers wide latitude to shoot school activities or facilities but efforts should be taken to ensure the photographer is not distributing the educational process. Ask students how they would feel if they were taking an important exam and a photographer walked in and started taking pictures.
- Other locations: Students working for a high school newspaper will likely limit their photographs to their high school. However, some stories may demand photographs elsewhere. Places such as public streets, most public buildings and anything easily viewable from such a public place are normally allowed to be photographed without permission. When shooting elsewhere students should ask permission beforehand as to avoid confrontations.
- Special situations. Some events, such as sporting events or plays, may place limits on what the photographer can shoot to protect the safety of participants or the audience's enjoyment. Photographers should check with management before using flash in situations where it might pose a problem. Sometimes using flash can be arranged if worked out beforehand.
- Dress appropriately. A photographer covering the National Honors Society induction might want to think twice about showing up in shorts and a T-shirt.

A question of ethics

- Do you run a photograph of a student previously arrested for possession of marijuana next to a story about drug use? Even if you do not identify him by name people will recognize him. Even if he provides permission what damage could the photograph do if an employer sees it?
- Photographers should be aware that, legally, people under the age of 18 – most high school students – cannot give permission to be photographed. However, if they are in a public setting with no expectation of privacy, such as playing in the public park, the photographer need not gain their permission to photograph them. In addition, some school administrations may require signed permission forms be kept on file of those appearing in published photographs.
- Photographers should not stage photographs or edit them for reasons other than technical. Using software to rearrange the objects in a photo, add to the photo or subtract from the photo is never allowed. The only exception allowed by most newspapers is when photographing individuals for profile pictures. Posed photographs will normally be allowed if it is clear to the reader the photo was posed. For example, asking an award-winning science teacher to pretend to teach a class for a photo is unethical. However, asking the teacher to sit at a lab bench surrounded by lab equipment and look at the camera tells the reader the photograph was staged and would likely complement the story well.

What makes a photo a good photo?

First, distribute sample photographs from the National Press Photographers Association. Make a list on the board of what students like about each of the photographs. Are there common themes? Students will, hopefully, reach a list similar to the one below.

- *Identification*: Good photographs show identification. The photo clearly shows the person involved or identifies him or her in the cutline. The cutline and photograph also show how the person is important to the story.
- *Emotion*: Good photographs display emotion. There is nothing more boring than a picture of a first baseman standing at first base looking bored. How about a close shot that shows his anticipation and stress during the bottom of the ninth?
- *Framing*: Good photographs do not cut off people's limbs. Good photographs also don't show a basketball player jumping but leave the ball out of the frame. Good photographs also show the photo's subject up close. There is nothing worse than taking a picture of a speaker from the back of a large auditorium where the size of his head appears no larger than the head of a pin in the final photograph. Use a powerful lens to zoom in or get up close.
- *Composition*: A photographer can't re-arrange people or objects in documentary photos. Instead, re-arrange yourself. Get down low, or climb a flight of stairs and shoot from the balcony. Try to leave out anything extraneous that might distract from the photo's message.
- *Atmosphere*: Try to take photos of individuals within their "element." If you are photographing the school resource officer, take him in uniform working with a student or in his patrol car in front of the school. Remember though we should still see his face and be able to tell it is that police officer as opposed to another one.

Teaching Suggestion

Give each student a disposable camera after reviewing the above lesson. Ask them to take a picture of their favorite teacher, a picture of a sporting event and a picture of a school event. Develop the photos and have a photo contest. Hang the photos – without names – in a public area and let other faculty and students comment. Announce the winner with great fanfare and run the photo as an award winner in the next issue.

National Press Photographers Association 2008 Award-Winning Still Photos

1st Place, Photojournalist of the Year (large markets)

John Moore/Getty Images



Mary McHugh mourns her slain fiancé Sgt. James Reagan at the Arlington National Cemetery May 27, 2007, Memorial Day weekend. Reagan, a U.S. Army Ranger from Long Island, was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq in February, and this was the first time McHugh had visited the grave since the funeral. When he died, Reagan was on his fourth combat deployment - twice in Afghanistan and twice in Iraq.

3rd Place, Photojournalist of the Year (large markets)

Stephen M. Katz/The Virginian-Pilot



UVA's cornerback Chris Cook breaks up a pass intended for Georgia Tech's wide receiver Demaryius Thomas during the second quarter of Saturday - 9/22 - afternoon's game in Charlottesville.

Honorable Mention, Photojournalist of the Year (large markets)

Mona Reeder/The Dallas Morning News



Chains of Poverty In Texas, a child is born into poverty every seven minutes, and Texas has the most teen births in the nation, earning a ranking of 50th in the U.S. Barely one day old, Jasmine Williams sleeps on her mother's lap as they wait for the baby's paternal grandmother to come and take custody of her. Jasmine's mother, Kimberly Williams, 15, is in TYC custody and correctional officers shackled her feet shortly after giving birth to her baby in Victoria, Texas. Both of Jasmine's parents were 15 when she was born, and her paternal grandmother will care for her until her mother's release from TYC.

Photo Assignment Sheet

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Assignment:

Reporter's Name: _____

Layout 101

Time Required

45-60 minutes

Time Required

40 minutes

Objectives

Students will learn the elements of a newspaper layout and what makes a newspaper attractive.

Materials Required

Example newspapers, handout, whiteboard

Lesson & Teaching Suggestion

Students will start the lesson by receiving a handout with today's headlines from the *Providence Journal*. The sheet will ask students to select which stories belong above the fold and which below the fold, as well as ask them to pick the lead story. Students will be provided headlines but no additional information unless requested. The tally of the results will be recorded on the board. Students will be asked why they chose what they did and if pictures played a role. At the end of the lesson, students will have a chance to reevaluate their choices.

Students will then look at examples of real newspapers from today (excluding the *Providence Journal*) and discuss which ones they like and why. Inherent in this question is why it is important to produce a visually pleasing paper.

Then, students will learn the basics of newspaper layout, including:

- Columns and modular format
- Typeface
- Justification
- Position of stories based on news deterrents, desire to sell paper, etc.
- Size and position of headlines (including decks)
- Use of pictures, graphics and info graphs
- Balance
- Advertising position (including why it's not normally put on the Front or Op/Ed pages)

Advice for the Adviser

Reflections from an Adviser

For just under six months, I served as the Chariho Regional High School newspaper adviser. I entered the position with four years of experience working on my college newspaper, as the former editor of a local weekly and the former editor of my high school paper. I never thought the job would be easy, but I would warn anyone considering serving as a high school newspaper adviser that the role is one of the most challenging extracurricular activities at a high school.

Unfortunately, today's students display a general lack of enthusiasm for the world around them. Students associate newspapers with politics, a topic relegated to discussions among their parents. Students find newspapers something that their parents read and filled with information irrelevant to young people.

This makes starting a high school newspaper particularly challenging. Students do not have a record of previous issues to look at and see how a student newspaper can carry items of interest to students. For this reason, I learned – albeit too late – that showing the power high school reporters can have is one of the first steps to encouraging students to join a newspaper staff.

One of my favorite examples for students was asking them how the decision to cancel school due to snow was made, who made it and what the repercussions are. A frequent complaint among students in the Northeast is that the superintendent “never” cancels school due to snow. But if you press students on the issue, they will quickly spar about who makes the decision and what happens if students miss a day of school.

Suddenly, students care about the issue after most reach the conclusion that missing school means adding more days at the end of the school year. The issue is of particular concern for seniors anxious to leave. I tried to stress to students the issue would be a perfect story for a student newspaper and, if done correctly, could pressure the administration to become more transparent about the snow day policy.

Ironically, if and when students are motivated, the most dedicated ones are normally the most involved. This means a student who fits the mold for an editor might also be the star in the upcoming drama performance or the editor of the yearbook. Students also normally lack their own transportation, meaning reporting must be done during school hours or in a short period after school.

There is also the question of a naturally suspicious administration. While I personally encountered few demands from the administration over editorial content, some principals are more leery than others. Newspaper advisers can put in natural conflict with their superiors as they attempt to balance free speech and their employment.

There are bright spots, however. Starting a student-run newspaper forces student reporters to learn about issues of local interest. Though this process students often find they have been spoon-fed a view of an issue and never doubted it. Bright students also

recognize the connection between good reporting and writing to other subjects. And being a newspaper adviser leaves you with a sense that rather than assign mere busy work that will never be read outside the classroom, students had a real opportunity to demonstrate their skills and bring about positive change.

Additional Resources

Association of Newspaper Editors

<http://www.highschooljournalism.org/Teachers>

The association provides a comprehensive archive of lesson plans and general tips for running a high school newspaper.

Society of Professional Journalists

<http://www.spj.org/educators.asp>

The society provides some lesson plans and other ways to motivate students interested in journalism.

Associated Press Stylebook

The stylebook, part dictionary part encyclopedia, provides a listing of common language mistakes made by journalists. Recent editions also include primers on libel laws.