REDESIGNS

EVALUATING YOUR NEWSPAPER

Every newspaper is unique – and so is every newspaper staff. Some excel in photography. Some produce award-winning text. Some create graphic wizardry.

So how would you assess *your* staff? Before you begin tinkering with your format, take inventory. Make sure your staff agrees on what's working, what's broken – and where a redesign should take you. This do-it-yourself design checkup will help you itemize your newspaper's strengths and weaknesses.

NEWSPAPER DESIGN

REPORT CARD

Answer each question by marking the corresponding box **yes** *(worth two points),* **somewhat** *(worth one point)* or **no** *(zero points).* You can earn up to 10 points per category or 100 points overall.

no (0 pts.) · *somewhat (1pt.)* · *yes (2pts.)* — **score / comments**

Category	Question	no	somewhat	yes	score/comments
HEADLINES & TYPE	*Do news headlines intrigue, inform and invite readers in?*	☐	☐	☐	
	Do feature headlines project a friendly, appealing personality?	☐	☐	☐	
	Do decks summarize and sell stories to readers in a hurry?	☐	☐	☐	
	Do headlines and text use an effective mix of styles and weights?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are all typographic details consistent and professional-looking?	☐	☐	☐	
PHOTOS	*Are photos active and engaging (rather than dull and passive)?*	☐	☐	☐	
	Are photos cropped, sized and positioned effectively?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are photos sharp and well-composed?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are key photos in color — and is the color well-balanced?	☐	☐	☐	
	Do enough photos appear throughout the entire paper?	☐	☐	☐	
GRAPHICS & ARTWORK	*Do maps, charts and diagrams supplement text where necessary?*	☐	☐	☐	
	Is graphic data meaningful, accurate and understandable?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are sidebars and agate material typographically well-crafted?	☐	☐	☐	
	Is artwork polished and professional-looking?	☐	☐	☐	
	Is there witty/provocative art on the opinion page?	☐	☐	☐	
SPECIAL PAGE DESIGNS	*Are special pages active, attractive and well balanced?*	☐	☐	☐	
	Are display elements — art and type — given bold treatment?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are headers and logos polished and eye-catching?	☐	☐	☐	
	Is color used effectively in photos, graphics, standing elements?	☐	☐	☐	
	Do themed pages use distinctive packaging, formats or grids?	☐	☐	☐	
INSIDE PAGES	*Is the content organized in a logical and consistent way?*	☐	☐	☐	
	Do layouts use modular shapes with strong dominant elements?	☐	☐	☐	
	Is there a mix of briefs and analysis throughout the paper?	☐	☐	☐	
	Is each page's contents labeled with a consistent header style?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are jumped stories well-labeled and easy to find?	☐	☐	☐	

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		no	somewhat	yes	score / comments
THE BASIC FIXTURES	Are liftout quotes used often and effectively?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are margins and spacing uniform and appropriate?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are column logos and sigs attractive, helpful and consistent?	☐	☐	☐	
	Do rules, boxes and screens effectively organize material?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are bylines and jump lines well-designed and -positioned?	☐	☐	☐	
VOLUME & VARIETY	Does the front page cover an interesting variety of topics?	☐	☐	☐	
	Have major stories been packaged with short, effective sidebars?	☐	☐	☐	
	Do key pages highlight special topics of high reader interest?	☐	☐	☐	
	Is there an appealing mix of live news and regular features?	☐	☐	☐	
	Do stories appeal to a broad range of tastes and temperaments?	☐	☐	☐	
ADS & SELF-PROMOTION	Do front-page promos catch the reader's eye in a lively way?	☐	☐	☐	
	Did you offer any contests or giveaways? Sponsor any events?	☐	☐	☐	
	Is your Web address easy to find?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are ads well-designed? Arranged in neat, unobtrusive stacks?	☐	☐	☐	
	Have you given readers reasons to anticipate your next issue?	☐	☐	☐	
USER-FRIENDLINESS	Is there a complete index in a consistent, obvious spot?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are some stories interactive (quizzes, tips, Q&A's, checklists)?	☐	☐	☐	
	Do you run complete calendars (for meetings, sports, events)?	☐	☐	☐	
	Is it clear how to reach key staffers (by phone, fax, letter, e-mail)?	☐	☐	☐	
	Do you solicit reader input throughout the newspaper?	☐	☐	☐	
PERSONALITY	Does your paper's personality match that of its target audience?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are regular columnists given mug shots? Anchored consistently?	☐	☐	☐	
	Is the paper's flag distinctive and sophisticated?	☐	☐	☐	
	Are there any surprises on Page One?	☐	☐	☐	
	Will anything in today's paper incite reactions from readers?	☐	☐	☐	

THE GRADING SCALE	**90-100:** Outstanding! A top-notch publication.	
	70-89: Good, but could still use new ideas and improvements.	YOUR TOTAL SCORE ▶
	50-69: Average – possibly dull. Time to think about a redesign.	
	below 50: Sorry, but you're old-fashioned. Your readers are probably bored. You need to consider a major overhaul.	