

EVALUATING YOUR NEWSPAPER

Every newspaper is unique — and so is every newspaper staff. Some excel in photography. Some write award-winning stories. Some create graphic wizardry.

So how would you assess *your* staff? Before 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 (1 pt.)
yes (2 pts.)

**score /
 comments**

<p>HEADLINES & TYPE</p>	<p><i>Do news headlines intrigue, inform and invite readers in?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Do feature headlines project a friendly, appealing personality?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Do decks summarize and sell stories to readers in a hurry?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Do headlines and text use an effective mix of styles and weights?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Are all typographic details consistent and professional-looking?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>PHOTOS</p>	<p><i>Are photos active and engaging (rather than dull and passive)?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Are images cropped, sized and positioned effectively?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Are photos sharp and well-composed?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Are key photos in color — and is the color well-balanced?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Do enough photos appear throughout the entire paper?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>GRAPHICS & ARTWORK</p>	<p><i>Do maps, charts and diagrams supplement text where necessary?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Is graphic data meaningful, accurate and understandable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Are sidebars and agate material typographically well-crafted?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Is artwork polished and professional-looking?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Is there witty/provocative art on the opinion page?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>SPECIAL PAGE DESIGNS</p>	<p><i>Are special pages active, attractive and well balanced?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Are display elements — art and type — given bold treatment?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Are headers and logos polished and eye-catching?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Is color used effectively in photos, graphics, standing elements?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Do themed pages use distinctive packaging, formats or grids?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>INSIDE PAGES</p>	<p><i>Is the content organized in a logical and consistent way?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Do layouts use modular shapes with strong dominant elements?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Is there a mix of briefs and analysis throughout the paper?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Is each page's contents labeled with a consistent header style?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Are jumped stories well-labeled and easy to find?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	

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REPORT CARD

no somewhat yes

score / comments

<p>THE BASIC FIXTURES</p>	<p><i>Are liftout quotes used often and effectively?</i></p> <p><i>Are margins and spacing uniform and appropriate?</i></p> <p><i>Are column logos and sigs attractive, helpful and consistent?</i></p> <p><i>Do rules, boxes and screens effectively organize material?</i></p> <p><i>Are bylines and jump lines well-designed and -positioned?</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>VOLUME & VARIETY</p>	<p><i>Does the front page cover an interesting variety of topics?</i></p> <p><i>Have major stories been packaged with short, effective sidebars?</i></p> <p><i>Do key pages highlight special topics of high reader interest?</i></p> <p><i>Is there an appealing mix of live news and regular features?</i></p> <p><i>Do stories appeal to a broad range of tastes and temperaments?</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>ADS & SELF-PROMOTION</p>	<p><i>Do front-page promos catch the reader's eye in a lively way?</i></p> <p><i>Did you offer any contests or giveaways? Sponsor any events?</i></p> <p><i>Is your Web address easy to find?</i></p> <p><i>Are ads well-designed? Arranged in neat, unobtrusive stacks?</i></p> <p><i>Have you given readers reasons to anticipate your next issue?</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>USER-FRIENDLINESS</p>	<p><i>Is there a complete index in a consistent, obvious spot?</i></p> <p><i>Are some stories interactive (quizzes, tips, Q&A's, checklists)?</i></p> <p><i>Do you run complete calendars (for meetings, sports, events)?</i></p> <p><i>Is it clear how to reach key staffers (by phone, fax, letter, e-mail)?</i></p> <p><i>Do you solicit reader input throughout the newspaper?</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>PERSONALITY</p>	<p><i>Does your paper's personality match that of its target audience?</i></p> <p><i>Are regular columnists given mug shots? Anchored consistently?</i></p> <p><i>Is the paper's flag distinctive and sophisticated?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any surprises on Page One?</i></p> <p><i>Will anything in today's paper incite reactions from readers?</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>THE GRADING SCALE</p>	<p>90-100: Outstanding! A top-notch publication.</p> <p>70-89: Good, but could still use new ideas and improvements.</p> <p>50-69: Average – possibly dull. Time to think about a redesign.</p> <p>Below 50: Sorry, but you're old-fashioned. Your readers are probably bored. You need to consider a major overhaul.</p>		<p>YOUR TOTAL SCORE </p>