



NSAA Journalism Event Rubrics

Updated January 2026.

These rubrics are based on the official NSAA Journalism ballots. Each rubric includes three levels of performance: Superior (Always), Excellent (Almost always), and Good (Sometimes). Criteria are specific to each event.

#1 Advertising

Criteria: Uses appropriate fonts, target audience clear, copy effective, Art/photos appropriate size and color, Follows contest rules/regulations, Hierarchy of design with clear contact info, Spelling/grammar accurate, Adheres to legal and ethical practices, **Includes artist's statement.**

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Uses appropriate fonts, target audience clear, copy effective, Art/photos appropriate size and color, Follows contest rules/regulations, Hierarchy of design with clear contact info, Spelling/grammar accurate, Adheres to legal and ethical practices, Includes artist's statement.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Uses appropriate fonts, target audience clear, copy effective, Art/photos appropriate size and color, Follows contest rules/regulations, Hierarchy of design with clear contact info, Spelling/grammar accurate, Adheres to legal and ethical practices, Includes artist's statement.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Uses appropriate fonts, target audience clear, copy effective, Art/photos appropriate size and color, Follows contest rules/regulations, Hierarchy of design with clear contact info, Spelling/grammar accurate, Adheres to legal and ethical practices, Includes artist's statement.

#2 Newspaper Column Writing

Criteria: Clear and compelling opinion, Support with specifics and background, Addresses opposing views professionally, Strong hook and logical flow, Transitions smooth and AP style used, Voice is engaging and consistent, Relevant, offers solution/universal theme, Adheres to legal and ethical practices.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Clear and compelling opinion, Support with specifics and background, Addresses opposing views professionally, Strong hook and logical flow, Transitions smooth and AP style used, Voice is engaging and consistent, Relevant, offers solution/universal theme, Adheres to legal and ethical practices.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Clear and compelling opinion, Support with specifics and background, Addresses opposing views professionally, Strong hook and logical flow, Transitions smooth and AP style used, Voice is engaging and consistent, Relevant, offers solution/universal theme, Adheres to legal and ethical practices.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Clear and compelling opinion, Support with specifics and background, Addresses opposing views professionally, Strong hook and logical flow, Transitions smooth and AP style used, Voice is engaging and consistent, Relevant, offers solution/universal theme, Adheres to legal and ethical practices.

#3 Editorial Cartooning

Criteria: Clear opinion/message through art and copy, Unique, stylized, emotional impact, Art is clean and uses space effectively, Effective use of color and panel flow, Voice is witty, original, and appropriate, Relevant, ethical, **artist's statement included**.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Clear opinion/message through art and copy, Unique, stylized, emotional impact, Art is clean and uses space effectively, Effective use of color and panel flow, Voice is witty, original, and appropriate, Relevant, ethical, artist's statement included.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Clear opinion/message through art and copy, Unique, stylized, emotional impact, Art is clean and uses space effectively, Effective use of color and panel flow, Voice is witty, original, and appropriate, Relevant, ethical, artist's statement included.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Clear opinion/message through art and copy, Unique, stylized, emotional impact, Art is clean and uses space effectively, Effective use of color and panel flow, Voice is witty, original, and appropriate, Relevant, ethical, artist's statement included.

#4 Editorial Writing

Criteria: Identifies a clear issue of importance, Provides strong evidence and support, Addresses multiple perspectives, Logical structure and smooth transitions, Language is persuasive and precise, Tone is authoritative and consistent, Ethical and relevant to audience, AP style used.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Identifies a clear issue of importance, Provides strong evidence and support, Addresses multiple perspectives, Logical structure and smooth transitions, Language is persuasive and precise and AP style is used, Tone is authoritative and consistent, Ethical and relevant to audience.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Identifies a clear issue of importance, Provides strong evidence and support, Addresses multiple perspectives, Logical structure and smooth transitions, Language is persuasive and precise and AP style is used, Tone is authoritative and consistent, Ethical and relevant to audience.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Identifies a clear issue of importance, Provides strong evidence and support, Addresses multiple perspectives, Logical structure and smooth transitions, Language is persuasive and precise and AP style is used, Tone is authoritative and consistent, Ethical and relevant to audience.

#5 Entertainment Review Writing

Criteria: States a clear opinion on subject, Provides context/background, Critique supported by evidence, Addresses strengths and weaknesses, Hook and logical flow, Transitions and AP style usage, Tone engaging and consistent, Relevance and ethical considerations.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: States a clear opinion on subject, Provides context/background, Critique supported by evidence, Addresses strengths and weaknesses, Hook and logical flow, Transitions and AP style usage, Tone engaging and consistent, Relevance and ethical considerations.
Excellent	The entry almost demonstrates strength in: States a clear opinion on subject, Provides context/background, Critique supported by evidence, Addresses strengths and weaknesses, Hook and logical flow, Transitions and AP style usage, Tone engaging and consistent, Relevance and ethical considerations.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: States a clear opinion on subject, Provides context/background, Critique supported by evidence, Addresses strengths and weaknesses, Hook and logical flow, Transitions and AP style usage, Tone engaging and consistent, Relevance and ethical considerations.

#6 Headline Writing

Criteria: Reflects story content accurately, Expressive and engaging language, Variety across headline set, AP style followed, Tone matches story.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Reflects story content accurately, Expressive and engaging language, Variety across headline set, AP style followed, Tone matches story.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Reflects story content accurately, Expressive and engaging language, Variety across headline set, AP style followed, Tone matches story.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Reflects story content accurately, Expressive and engaging language, Variety across headline set, AP style followed, Tone matches story.

#7 Newspaper Feature Writing

Criteria: Creative and inviting lead, Strong detail and description, Bias avoided, Smooth transitions, Active voice, expressive language, and AP style is used, Organization logical, Relevance to audience.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Creative and inviting lead, Strong detail and description, Bias avoided, Smooth transitions, Active voice, expressive language, and AP style is used, Organization logical, Relevance to audience.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Creative and inviting lead, Strong detail and description, Bias avoided, Smooth transitions, Active voice, expressive language, and AP style is used, Organization logical, Relevance to audience.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Creative and inviting lead, Strong detail and description, Bias avoided, Smooth transitions, Active voice, expressive language, and AP style is used, Organization logical, Relevance to audience.

#8 Newspaper News Writing

Criteria: Lead integrates key facts (who, what, when, where, why, how), Balanced reporting, Sources identified and attributed, Quotes are accurate and relevant, Logical structure and flow, AP style observed, Free from bias, Relevance to audience.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Lead integrates key facts (who, what, when, where, why, how), Balanced reporting, Sources identified and attributed, Quotes are accurate and relevant, Logical structure and flow, AP style used, Free from bias, Relevance to audience.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Lead integrates key facts (who, what, when, where, why, how), Balanced reporting, Sources identified and attributed, Quotes are accurate and relevant, Logical structure and flow, AP style used, Free from bias, Relevance to audience.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Lead integrates key facts (who, what, when, where, why, how), Balanced reporting, Sources identified and attributed, Quotes are accurate and relevant, Logical structure and flow, AP style used, Free from bias, Relevance to audience.

#9 Newspaper Sports Feature Writing

Criteria: Creative and engaging lead, Strong storytelling and description, Quotes well integrated, Transitions smooth, Avoids clichés and bias, Organization logical, Voice consistent and clear, AP style used.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Creative and engaging lead, Strong storytelling and description, Quotes well integrated, Transitions smooth, Avoids clichés and bias, Organization logical, Voice consistent and clear, AP style used.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Creative and engaging lead, Strong storytelling and description, Quotes well integrated, Transitions smooth, Avoids clichés and bias, Organization logical, Voice consistent and clear, AP style used.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Creative and engaging lead, Strong storytelling and description, Quotes well integrated, Transitions smooth, Avoids clichés and bias, Organization logical, Voice consistent and clear. AP style used.

#10 Sports News Writing

Criteria: Lead integrates game/event essentials, Clear context and outcome, Balanced reporting, Accurate quotes and sources, Smooth transitions and AP style used, Organization logical, Voice professional and consistent.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Lead integrates game/event essentials, Clear context and outcome, Balanced reporting, Accurate quotes and sources, Smooth transitions and AP style used, Organization logical, Voice professional and consistent.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Lead integrates game/event essentials, Clear context and outcome, Balanced reporting, Accurate quotes and sources, Smooth transitions and AP style used, Organization logical, Voice professional and consistent.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Lead integrates game/event essentials, Clear context and outcome, Balanced reporting, Accurate quotes and sources, Smooth transitions and AP style used, Organization logical, Voice professional and consistent.

#11 Yearbook Feature Writing

Criteria: Engaging lead, Strong detail and description, Transitions smooth, Clear voice and organization, Relevant to yearbook audience, Grammar and AP style correct.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Engaging lead, Strong detail and description, Transitions smooth, Clear voice and organization, Relevant to yearbook audience, Grammar and AP style correct.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Engaging lead, Strong detail and description, Transitions smooth, Clear voice and organization, Relevant to yearbook audience, Grammar and AP style correct.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Engaging lead, Strong detail and description, Transitions smooth, Clear voice and organization, Relevant to yearbook audience, Grammar and AP style correct.

#12 Yearbook Sports Feature Writing

Criteria: Clear and engaging lead, Strong play-by-play storytelling, Quotes are relevant and accurate, Transitions logical and smooth, Voice clear and engaging, Relevance to student audience, AP style used.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Clear and engaging lead, Strong play-by-play storytelling, Quotes are relevant and accurate, Transitions logical and smooth, Voice clear and engaging, Relevance to student audience, AP style used.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Clear and engaging lead, Strong play-by-play storytelling, Quotes are relevant and accurate, Transitions logical and smooth, Voice clear and engaging, Relevance to student audience, AP style used.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Clear and engaging lead, Strong play-by-play storytelling, Quotes are relevant and accurate, Transitions logical and smooth, Voice clear and engaging, Relevance to student audience, AP style used.

#13 Yearbook Theme Copy Writing

Criteria: Theme clearly identified, Consistent throughout copy, Organization logical, Transitions smooth, Grammar and spelling accurate, Voice appropriate to theme.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Theme clearly identified, Consistent throughout copy, Organization logical, Transitions smooth, Grammar and spelling accurate, Voice appropriate to theme.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Theme clearly identified, Consistent throughout copy, Organization logical, Transitions smooth, Grammar and spelling accurate, Voice appropriate to theme.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Theme clearly identified, Consistent throughout copy, Organization logical, Transitions smooth, Grammar and spelling accurate, Voice appropriate to theme.

#14 Info Graphic (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Information accurate, Sources cited, Design visually effective, Space and layout balanced, Graphics original and relevant, Overall effect clear and engaging, **Includes artist's statement.**

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Information accurate, Sources cited, Design visually effective, Space and layout balanced, Graphics original and relevant, Overall effect clear and engaging. Includes artist's statement
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Information accurate, Sources cited, Design visually effective, Space and layout balanced, Graphics original and relevant, Overall effect clear and engaging. Includes artist's statement
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Information accurate, Sources cited, Design visually effective, Space and layout balanced, Graphics original and relevant, Overall effect clear and engaging. Includes artist's statement

#15 In-Depth Newspaper Coverage (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Topic relevant and newsworthy, Multiple perspectives represented, Depth of coverage substantial, Logical structure and organization, Smooth transitions, AP style followed, Voice consistent and professional.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Topic relevant and newsworthy, Multiple perspectives represented, Depth of coverage substantial, Logical structure and organization, Smooth transitions, AP style followed, Voice consistent and professional.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Topic relevant and newsworthy, Multiple perspectives represented, Depth of coverage substantial, Logical structure and organization, Smooth transitions, AP style followed, Voice consistent and professional.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Topic relevant and newsworthy, Multiple perspectives represented, Depth of coverage substantial, Logical structure and organization, Smooth transitions, AP style followed, Voice consistent and professional.

#16 Newspaper Layout (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Typography effective and consistent, Readability strong, Layout logical with hierarchy, Photos/art placed effectively, Spacing and alignment clean, Design visually appealing.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Typography effective and consistent, Readability strong, Layout logical with hierarchy, Photos/art placed effectively, Spacing and alignment clean, Design visually appealing.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Typography effective and consistent, Readability strong, Layout logical with hierarchy, Photos/art placed effectively, Spacing and alignment clean, Design visually appealing.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Typography effective and consistent, Readability strong, Layout logical with hierarchy, Photos/art placed effectively, Spacing and alignment clean, Design visually appealing.

#17 Photo/Artistic Illustration (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Original concept, Enhances story or text, Technique mastery, Clarity of subject, Color used effectively, Relevant and ethical, **Includes artist's statement**.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Original concept, Enhances story or text, Technique mastery, Clarity of subject, Color used effectively, Relevant and ethical, Includes artist's statement.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Original concept, Enhances story or text, Technique mastery, Clarity of subject, Color used effectively, Relevant and ethical, Includes artist's statement.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Original concept, Enhances story or text, Technique mastery, Clarity of subject, Color used effectively, Relevant and ethical, Includes artist's statement.

#18 Action Photography (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Strong composition, Technical quality high, Captures decisive moment, Original and creative angle, Emotionally engaging, Free of distractions.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Strong composition, Technical quality high, Captures decisive moment, Original and creative angle, Emotionally engaging, Free of distractions.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Strong composition, Technical quality high, Captures decisive moment, Original and creative angle, Emotionally engaging, Free of distractions.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Strong composition, Technical quality high, Captures decisive moment, Original and creative angle, Emotionally engaging, Free of distractions.

#19 Feature Photography (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Rule of thirds or effective composition, Strong center of interest, Technical quality high, Emotionally engaging, Original and creative.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Rule of thirds or effective composition, Strong center of interest, Technical quality high, Emotionally engaging, Original and creative.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Rule of thirds or effective composition, Strong center of interest, Technical quality high, Emotionally engaging, Original and creative.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Rule of thirds or effective composition, Strong center of interest, Technical quality high, Emotionally engaging, Original and creative.

#20 Yearbook Layout (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Grid system applied consistently, Readability and balance strong, Photos varied and effective, Captions clear and accurate, Design cohesive with theme.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Grid system applied consistently, Readability and balance strong, Photos varied and effective, Captions clear and accurate, Design cohesive with theme.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Grid system applied consistently, Readability and balance strong, Photos varied and effective, Captions clear and accurate, Design cohesive with theme.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Grid system applied consistently, Readability and balance strong, Photos varied and effective, Captions clear and accurate, Design cohesive with theme.

#21 Yearbook Theme Development (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Theme clearly established, Integrated consistently across spreads, Original content from staff, Typography and design support theme, Coverage broad and inclusive.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Theme clearly established, Integrated consistently across spreads, Original content from staff, Typography and design support theme, Coverage broad and inclusive.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Theme clearly established, Integrated consistently across spreads, Original content from staff, Typography and design support theme, Coverage broad and inclusive.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Theme clearly established, Integrated consistently across spreads, Original content from staff, Typography and design support theme, Coverage broad and inclusive.

#22 Broadcast News Story (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: B-roll relevant and varied, Sound bites clear and purposeful, Voiceover concise and professional, Camera variety effective, Editing smooth and logical, Focus and enunciation clear, Overall effect strong.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: B-roll relevant and varied, Sound bites clear and purposeful, Voiceover concise and professional, Camera variety effective, Editing smooth and logical, Focus and enunciation clear, Overall effect strong.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: B-roll relevant and varied, Sound bites clear and purposeful, Voiceover concise and professional, Camera variety effective, Editing smooth and logical, Focus and enunciation clear, Overall effect strong.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: B-roll relevant and varied, Sound bites clear and purposeful, Voiceover concise and professional, Camera variety effective, Editing smooth and logical, Focus and enunciation clear, Overall effect strong.

#23 Broadcast Sports Story (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Clear game context and essentials, Sound bites and highlights relevant, Voiceover engaging and professional, Camera variety and B-roll effective, Editing smooth and polished, Overall effect engaging.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Clear game context and essentials, Sound bites and highlights relevant, Voiceover engaging and professional, Camera variety and B-roll effective, Editing smooth and polished, Overall effect engaging.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Clear game context and essentials, Sound bites and highlights relevant, Voiceover engaging and professional, Camera variety and B-roll effective, Editing smooth and polished, Overall effect engaging.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Clear game context and essentials, Sound bites and highlights relevant, Voiceover engaging and professional, Camera variety and B-roll effective, Editing smooth and polished, Overall effect engaging.

#24 Broadcast Feature Story (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Narrative clear and engaging, B-roll and visuals relevant, Sound bites purposeful, Editing smooth and polished, Voiceovers professional and clear, Overall impact emotional and strong.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Narrative clear and engaging, B-roll and visuals relevant, Sound bites purposeful, Editing smooth and polished, Voiceovers professional and clear, Overall impact emotional and strong.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Narrative clear and engaging, B-roll and visuals relevant, Sound bites purposeful, Editing smooth and polished, Voiceovers professional and clear, Overall impact emotional and strong.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Narrative clear and engaging, B-roll and visuals relevant, Sound bites purposeful, Editing smooth and polished, Voiceovers professional and clear, Overall impact emotional and strong.

#25 Broadcast Public Service Announcement (Preliminary Submission Only)

Criteria: Clear and focused message, Voiceover professional, Sound bites and video relevant, Graphics support message, Editing polished, Timing precise, Overall effect impactful.

Level	Description
Superior	The entry always demonstrates excellence in: Clear and focused message, Voiceover professional, Sound bites and video relevant, Graphics support message, Editing polished, Timing precise, Overall effect impactful.
Excellent	The entry almost always demonstrates strength in: Clear and focused message, Voiceover professional, Sound bites and video relevant, Graphics support message, Editing polished, Timing precise, Overall effect impactful.
Good	The entry sometimes demonstrates competence in: Clear and focused message, Voiceover professional, Sound bites and video relevant, Graphics support message, Editing polished, Timing precise, Overall effect impactful.