

SIPA Online Evaluation Guidebook

Guide to SIPA ratings:

All-Southern- This is SIPA's highest evaluation rating. These publications demonstrate excellence in all areas of scholastic journalism production. These publications effectively integrate writing, design, photography, and graphics and cover a wide range of content to give readers an excellent record of the school year.

Superior-These publications demonstrate excellence in most areas of scholastic journalism production. While they consistently integrate writing, design, photography, and graphics into the publications and cover a variety of content, they lack in at least one area of overall execution.

Excellent- These publications demonstrate a basic understanding of general scholastic journalism standards. These publications consistently integrate writing, design, photography, and graphics into their publication and cover a variety of content, but they lack in at least two areas overall execution that makes for a Superior publication.

Merit- These publications demonstrate some general journalistic standards.

PART I: CONTENT AND COVERAGE

*NOTE: With all content and coverage, journalistic legal and ethical standards should be followed. (Please note any site that you feel may have infringed on copyright violations, ranging from audio to photos on the site. Any site infringing on copyright is ineligible to gain the top ranking.)

The strongest sites should have a variety of ways they are getting information to their readers from stories and photos to video and multimedia. Sites should also strive to have a

variety of content and coverage from opinion and news to sports and features. Sites should be updated frequently.

- Coverage is comprehensive, focusing on many aspects of the high school community it serves, including academics, school activities, faculty and administration and student affairs.
- The site includes web-exclusive content, such as blogs, interactive elements, video, audio and breaking news.
- Coverage reflects the diversity of the school population and aims to be inclusive.
- Content is well coordinated, with different media contributing different parts of the story rather than repeating the same information.
- Stories are thoroughly reported; multiple points of view are represented.
- Coverage is accurate, fair and balanced.
- Writing is engaging, informative and to the point.
- Opinion pieces, including columns, editorials and blogs cover issues and events of interest to the school community.
- Opinion pieces are well researched and well argued, citing factual evidence to support views expressed.
- Special reports and in-depth coverage is well planned and includes multimedia components.
- The site maximizes the capabilities of the Web, making use of multiple media and interactivity.
- Controversial issues are included and reported thoroughly.
- All stories, except for editorials, opinion columns, blogs and analysis pieces, are free of the writer's opinion.
- Headlines, captions and teasers are accurate and engaging, drawing readers into the material.
- The site demonstrates a spirit of experimentation by taking risks and trying new things.

Overall COVERAGE AND CONTENT rating:

All-Southern

Superior

Excellent

Merit

Strengths:

Suggestions for improvement:

PART II: BREAKING NEWS

Sites should be updated frequently with stories of interest to the school population. Schools should strive to post something new daily and have a way to let their readers know what content is new and fresh. The website should not just be a regurgitation of the printed newspaper and should have a different focus than any other student media outlet at the school.

- The site is updated regularly, daily if possible.
- Breaking news reports are updated as information comes in.
- Important news events are reported in a timely way.
- A variety of media — which may include photos, graphics, text, audio, video and interactive elements — are used to report breaking news events.
- News is covered in a fair and balanced manner and is of interest to the school community.
- Coverage includes useful information for readers, such as notification of school closing in the event of bad weather or an emergency.

- Coverage of national and international events is related to the school community.
- News is accurate, even if the information is incomplete.

Overall BREAKING NEWS rating:

All-Southern

Superior

Excellent

Merit

Strengths:

Suggestions for improvement:

PART III: INTERACTIVITY

Interactivity is an essential element of 21st century journalism. No longer can you simply give information to the reader. Now you need to create a dialogue between the website and your readers.

- Readers are able to interact with the site in numerous ways. These ways may include comment functions, discussion boards and polls.
- Social networking and community tools, such as links to other information and guides to community services, are used to empower the reader.
- Games, polls, quizzes, interactive maps and other interactive tools are used to engage the reader with the news.
- Readers are invited to submit story ideas and are provided with instructions on how to do so (either a story submission form or an email address).
- Contact information is provided for readers who want to write a letter to the editor, buy and ad or contact the adviser and staff.
- The website contains a state policy for its forum status.

- Publication policy is clearly stated on the site.
- The site makes use of reader-generated content, which may include stories, photos and videos.
- Links on stories direct readers to other sites with useful and credible information that enhances the story.

Overall INTERACTIVITY rating:

All-Southern

Superior

Excellent

Merit

Strengths:

Suggestions for improvement:

PART IV: DESIGN

Sites can be created using a variety of content management systems – Dreamweaver, Weebly and Wordpress for example. Using templates to create sites is fine. However, staffs should strive to use templates simply as a starting point and then make the necessary modifications to the templates to best suit the staff’s needs and set their website apart from other sites.

- The site is visually appealing, drawing readers into stories.
- Navigation is easy; readers can effortlessly find what they are looking for.
- The home page is simple and uncluttered.
- The site provides links to relevant resources, such as the high school website.

- A dominant piece of art, at least twice as big as anything else, anchors each page.
- A mobile version of the site displays content simply and efficiently.
- Pages load relatively quickly and are of a reasonable length.
- Visual elements, such as photos and graphics, are used to enhance content, not as decoration.
- News is presented in a clear hierarchy, with the most important and/or newest stories prominently displayed.
- Tabs clearly direct readers to different sections of the publication, such as news, sports, entertainment and opinion.
- Multiple elements of a story are packaged together into an integrated unit.
- Design elements – bullets, fonts, boxes and other elements – are used to facilitate reading and navigation.
- Links provide access to related content on the site.

Overall DESIGN rating:

All-Southern

Superior

Excellent

Merit

Strengths:

Suggestions for improvement:

PART V: RICH MEDIA

Websites should be utilized to disseminate information in a variety of ways from stories and photos to audio and video. Multimedia and other non-traditional storytelling components should be utilized to help relay information to readers.

- The site uses a variety of media including, but not limited to audio, video, slide shows and/or audio slide shows, text and graphics.
- Media are used to enhance and supplement content and help tell stories rather than simply add flashy elements to the site.
- Each media element — slide show, video, podcast, etc. — tells a story.
- Photos are displayed at the proper resolution in the proper format (72 pixels per inch in JPEG or PNG format), while graphics are displayed in GIF or PNG format.
- Captions for graphics and photos follow journalism rules.
- Photos and video are adequately lit and well composed.
- Photo illustrations are clearly labeled.
- In photos and video, a variety of shots — action, candid, long shots, close-ups and detail shots — are used.
- In audio and video reports, sound quality is clear and free of obvious background noise and distortion; voices are easy to understand.
- Audio reports make use of ambient and natural sound as well as interviews.
- Video image is relatively stable. Tripods are used for stationary shots, while mobile shots are held steady.
- Graphics are clear and easy to understand.
- Special projects and packages are well organized and designed to help readers navigate through the content.
- Live video broadcast – live events with the help of livestream or ustream.
- Copyright laws are understood and respected; only original content or copyright-free material (music, photos, videos, etc.) is used.

- Embedded content does not significantly alter load time.
- RSS feeds are used to link site with third-party sites such as Twitter, Delicious, etc.
- Issues are archived as cross-platform PDF files for viewing and/or download.

Overall RICH MEDIA rating:

All-Southern

Superior

Excellent

Merit

Strengths:

Suggestions for improvement:

OVERALL rating:

All-Southern

Superior

Excellent

Merit

Final comments from judge: