

PRACTICAL VOTER PRODUCTION

Some Helpful Tips for Editing & Production

The job of editor of the bulletin or *VOTER* is an extremely important one in any local League, whether your newsletter is mailed only to members or to contributors and the community as well. Remember that your newsletter is for many members the only source of information about League activities, positions on issues, membership news, and a variety of other concerns. It also may represent your organization to the community and your League will look only as good as your *VOTER* does.

GOALS AND THE BOARD

Your board of directors should decide what they want their newsletter to be and should provide you with a budget to achieve those goals. Get board input on the planning of each issue, including suggested length for each piece, and *always* get your president's approval on the final copy before printing. Many of your board members will serve as reporters. Impress on them that their goals can be met only if they meet your guidelines, which include deadlines. A typed copy of your guidelines for each board member or reporter can be helpful.

SCHEDULE

Start with the date you want the issue in your readers' hands and work backwards in time, calculating the number of days needed for each step. Remember everything takes longer than you think it will. A good example of such a checklist is found in *Editing Your Newsletter*, by Mark Beach.

CONTENT

Your goals, of course, will determine content. But generally you should include the following:

- Nameplate and logo.

- Bannerhead with name and telephone of the League, editor, president, and perhaps other board members, especially the membership chair.
- Date, page number, and name of newsletter on each page.
- Column by the president.
- Lead article on front page: news you most want readers to see, such as an item on your next meeting or program.
- Membership information: how to join, names of new members or other directory changes, etc.
- Calendar of League activities: better if it includes more than the current month.
- Action information: what issues require prompt response from the members. Be careful about timeliness.
- State and national League news: remember that few people see the mailings from the state and national Leagues, so share pertinent parts via your *VOTER*. Don't repeat items, however, already printed in a state or national Voter.
- Items enclosed in most mailings from the LWV-Texas board which include ready-to-use articles for your *VOTER*.

Refer to the "LWV-Texas Style Sheet" for accepted usage of punctuation, capitalization, abbreviations, and League jargon or lingo. A copy is included in the *League Directory*.

Remember that the newsletter is your League's. There is always enough League information to include without promoting other community activities. An occasional inclusion in your calendar may be appropriate, but don't devote valuable space to business of other organizations. The daily newspaper

can do that job. Otherwise, it looks as if nothing much happens in the League.

Keep your audience in mind when putting the *VOTER* together and editing. Not all readers are old hands at League and many may be outsiders. If your reporters forget this, help them by making changes:

- Don't assume that readers know background information on article topics; fill in the gaps.
- Avoid League jargon, or fully explain its meaning when used.
- Use both first and last names when referring to members (except in a second reference in a single article).

PRODUCTION

There are three options for designing and producing your newsletter: manual production, professional designers, and personal computers. Of the three, personal computers/desktop publishing is the most efficient and cost-effective method.

Desktop Publishing

Because desktop publishing software is so widely available, most newsletters are produced either partly or entirely on computer. The results are very near those produced by professional printers, but at a lower cost.

Equipment and software are costly, but your League may find a willing in-kind donor.

DESIGN

Desktop publishing provides powerful page layout tools, but the user must know how to best utilize them if the expense is to be worthwhile.

Some elements of newsletter design are intended to be more pleasing to the eye. Others are *essential* to assure that it is read, understood, and remembered by the largest number of readers. Remember that the goal is clear communication.

Readability

Several factors determine readability, including line length and justification, size of type, hyphenation, length of articles, and use of sub-headings, indentations, boxes, and bullets or other symbols.

Line Length. Line length is one of the most critical factors of readability. Since generally 30 to 45 characters is the optimum per line, each page should be divided into *columns* to limit the distance the reader's eye must scan. Depending on text size, text column width should vary from 2 to 4 inches.

Type Size. Sizes for text are usually between 10 and 12 points. Contrary to what might seem true, larger type size is not necessarily more readable. The smaller the type size, the more compact each word, phrase, and sentence is, making each more easily recognizable.

Type Case. Because lower case type is more readable, avoid use of all caps whenever possible. Underlined text also is difficult to read. Bold or italicized text are better means for emphasis.

Type Face. The most readable type styles for text are those with *serifs*, or the lines crossing the main strokes of the letter, such as the "feet" on the bottom of the letter "k." Examples are Times Roman, Bookman, and Century. These classic styles offer more visual clues so that readers more easily identify each letter. Gothic or *sans serif* styles are better used for larger type sizes, such as for headlines, graphics, or other emphases.

Hyphenation. Setting the software default to hyphenate words at ends of lines makes the right side less ragged and helps to eliminate large irregular white spaces.

Line Justification. Lines that are left justified, ragged right, serve to make characters most evenly spaced along the line, therefore more recognizable and readable. Right justified lines, especially those set in a larger type size, can have distracting gaps of white space throughout the text, and can sometimes even cause spaces within a word.

Plan Layout Ahead [Principles of Good Page Design:]

Layout is the process of arranging copy and other elements in patterns to create pages which are attractive and invite attention. Although this is an artistic activity, editors do not need an art degree if they follow the basic design principles outlined by Beach:

Balance – No part of the design should so dominate as to outweigh the other parts.

Contrast – If the page appears too white or too black it will seem lifeless.

Unity – Even though materials may relate to separate stories or items, they should belong together visually.

Proportion – Lines dividing pages can make them seem awkwardly composed. Thinking in thirds rather than halves or quarters will generally give more pleasing results.

Consistency - Placing articles and features in a designated area from issue to issue helps your readers locate them easily. For instance, if your calendar is always on the same page, readers will be able to find it immediately.

**Tips for Professional Appearance
Grid System.** Use a grid system –

consistent alignment of margins, columns, *headers*, and *footers* – to assure consistency within your publication.

Columns. Designers prefer an uneven number of columns – that is, three or five – for the interest and flexibility they provide. A column need not always be a text column, but may be used for headlines, graphics, pull-quotes, sidebars, charts, or other elements.

Headers and Footers. Text or a graphic repeated at the head or foot of every page in a publication – such as the title, logo, issue or date, page numbering, etc. – should be consistent in size and weight from page to page.

Leading. Another consideration is the line height or space between lines, called *leading*. Since most desktop publishing software allows almost infinite variations in line height, there is little reason to crowd type lines. Although the default setting usually is pleasing and easily read, experimenting with various heights can create different looks for the publication, depending on the mood or style you want to achieve.

White Space. A page crowded full with text from can overwhelm the reader. Use white space to give the eye a break, with either generous margins, expanded line height or leading, or by separating articles with boxes with open areas and little text.

Article Placement. There is no question that the top portion of a page is read first. Place your lead articles at the top of page one, as a newspaper does (usually to the right). The second most important item would then be at the top left.

Because the bottom of the page is noticed least by the reader, draw attention to those areas with photos, boxes, graphics, shorter articles, and other techniques.

HEADLINES

If you read a daily newspaper, you know how headlines help readers find and remember information. Their construction and placement are both important.

Headlines serve several functions. They draw attention to the article, indicate its relative importance, and summarize it.

Size and Placement.

If an article is to take up two or more columns, set the headline to extend across all those columns (called an *umbrella head*), signaling to the reader that the article is a unit.

Vary the type size of headlines according to the importance of the article, giving lead articles headlines set at 28 to 35 points and shorter ones heads set from 15 to 20.

- Keep headlines short and compact, especially those across only one column. Each headline should summarize the article; therefore it should be a sentence, or at least be understood as a sentence.
- Keep headlines horizontal.
- Keep them tight so that they may be read at a glance.
- If two lines are needed, keep them about the same length.
- Place headlines close to the story, make them an integral part of it.

A page is more attractive, interesting, and readable if headlines are not placed side by side throughout the page. Side-by-side headlines, called *tombstoning*, confuse the reader by making him see them as a unit, rather than as signals for two separate items.

If two similar-sized heads are placed side-by-side at the top of the page, take care to fit copy so as to

leave some white space at the end of lines in the left headline.

Headline Construction:

- Good headlines are full sentences, usually with a noun and a verb. The verb should be active voice and in the present or future tense.
- Headlines should suggest the nature of the article, not tell the whole story.

Typographic Techniques

Several other techniques are used to summarize and draw the reader's attention to a section of text: boxed or indented text, bulleted points, pull-quotes, and side bar items.

Pull-Quotes

Select phrases for pull-quotes that summarize the article or emphasize a main point. Pull-quotes give the reader a tidbit that whets his interest to read the entire article. Pull-quotes are repeated in the article.

Side Bars

A side bar is information related to the main article, but not essential to it, such as supporting statistics, names of committee members, background information, or how to obtain more information. A side bar is not repeated in the main article.

Bulleted Points

Always indent bulleted points, aligning text on the left so that the bullet or other symbol stands out from the text. Example:

- This information can be seen readily because it is set apart from the bullet.

Rules

Vertical *rules* are the lines placed between columns (in the *gutter*) or along the left and/or right sides of text. Rules are especially good with left justified/ragged right text because they help to define each column. Decide on rules based on the

look you wish to achieve, but be consistent from page to page.

Screens

Screens or *screen fills* are another way to differentiate parts of a page. Use them to highlight important points or to set off your side bar.

THE PROFESSIONAL TOUCH

There are some tips that can make a good publication better—techniques that make the difference between the look of a novice and professional production and contribute to overall readability.

- Use the typographic symbols in your desktop publishing software. The dash, left and right quotation marks, copyright symbol, bullets, and fractions are good examples of the fine-tuned publication.
- Use only one space after the period at the end of a sentence. Two spaces tend to create distracting rivers of white flowing through text.
- If paragraphs are indented, set tabs to indent in proportion to the column width, roughly 10% of the line length.
- Likewise, set indentation to be one space after a bullet or other symbol, avoiding a wide gap after the symbol.
- Avoid *widows* and *orphans*, a word or line separated from the rest of a paragraph—that is, left in a previous column or carried over to the next column.
- Use the same font or type face throughout. Too many different type faces cause clutter and confusion, giving the publication the “ransome note” look. Rather than with a different face, emphasize with the italic or bold style of the same face.

GRAPHICS Graphics are pieces of art used to express ideas – not just any art, but art which helps to meet the goals of your newsletter. As Mark Beach points out in his book *Editing Your Newsletter*, graphics can be used to facilitate reading (borders, lines, bullets), to transmit information (pictures speak louder than words), or to convey a message, mood, or image.

The Bannerhead or Nameplate

The design at the top of your first page, called the nameplate or bannerhead, is the most important one as it is the first thing readers see. It should include the publication name, the organization name, perhaps your logo and the date. Because most of the bannerhead does not change from issue to issue, this is a good place to use color. Copies of the bannerhead page (excluding the date) can be reproduced in large numbers at a lower cost.

Some Rules for Use of Graphics

- Keep it simple. Choose simple designs and use them minimally. White space can be your most effective graphic element.
- Black-and-white line drawings are the best art and dark shades will copy best.
- Place graphics to draw the eye to the right and to the page bottom, as those areas receive the least attention from the reader.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND COLOR **Photographs**

Sharply-focused black and white photos with close-up detail can add to your newsletter. Use them as you do other graphics – to attract readers to the less-read areas of the page, provide information, illustrate an article, or convey a mood. They always should be consistent with the newsletter as a whole and serve some purpose.

There are a number of ways to use photos in your publication. Standard prints must be changed to **halftones** (a process which makes an image out of a series of small dots). If you have several photos, not necessarily for the same issue, you can hold down costs by shooting all at once (ganging).

A photochemical transfer (PMT) also can be made and may be less expensive. Another option is to take photographs using a screen kit (an inexpensive kit is available for Polaroids).

Today's technology also makes it possible to shoot photos directly (called the JE-PEG process) or those with access to computers can import photos into a program using a scanner.

Color

If you want color, remember that colored paper is less expensive than a second color of ink. However, avoid dark shades of paper as they make text hard to read.

If you use two colors of ink, plan your layout so that colors do not bump against one another. Color screens backing a short article can emphasize it and give visual relief to your page. A box of colored lines rather than black is also effective. Remember that exact placement of colors is sometimes difficult.

Computer Printers

High resolution (1200 dpi or above) laser printers produce copy very close in quality to typesetting. Ink-jet printers, although lower

resolution, are good too.

Dot matrix printers vary in quality. A 24-pin will give the best copy. Anything less produces type which is virtually unreadable.

Be sure that the printer ribbon or toner is new.

PROOFREADING – THE FINAL STEP

Remember that crisp type and snappy graphics alone cannot make up for sloppiness in other steps. Attention to content and style, fundamentals of good page design, and careful proof reading are even more important when desktop publishing is used. Ask someone else to proof your final copy, and always get your president's approval before going to press.

PRINTING/REPRODUCTION

A variety of printing methods is available at varying prices. All can be effective if principles of good design and effective writing have been followed in other steps of your newsletter's production.

Offset

Offset printing gives high quality and the most professional look at the least cost. For large runs this method is less expensive than photocopying.

Photocopying

This method has many advantages. New copy machines can give a final product that is as sharp as offset printing. Your camera-ready copy must be clean and straight. A sloppy, crooked original won't look good in print no matter how great the reproduction process.

FINAL PACKAGING Once your newsletter is ready for distribution, think about its packaging, or the way it will arrive to the reader. Design the newsletter so that the space for a mailing label or handwritten address falls on the outside. Don't ruin a well-done newsletter by using staples, the removal of which often mutilates the publication. Fold the newsletter once and use an adhesive circle or strip to close the open flap. Readers will appreciate the extra effort.

DISTRIBUTION

Determination of the mailing list for *The VOTER* should be made when the board sets goals for the newsletter, since that decision affects all other publication steps. If distributed outside your membership, the publication becomes more than a service to members. It is a public relations tool and content and appearance are more critical. A well-planned, well-designed VOTER, however, can do much for your League's visibility and exposure.

Expanding distribution can, in fact, save money in postage if it allows use of bulk mailing. To see if savings are possible, compare the costs for printing and postage for membership only, to the same costs for 200 issues, the minimum allowed for bulk mailing rates.

Always include in your mailing list current presidents of other local Leagues, state board members and others designated in the *League Directory*. Keep your mailing list up to date by revising monthly, adding new members as they join and making other changes.

FUNDING YOUR NEWSLETTER

While some funds should be budgeted in your League's general budget for *The VOTER* editor, there are ways to subsidize the funding of the bulletin.

- Advertising is a common means for those who use third-class mail. Your League's finance committee may find advertisers who

would not otherwise donate. The most cost-effective method is to sell ads by a set deadline each year and to print enough of the advertisement page for the entire year.

- In-kind donations – especially a printer who will provide services free or at a discount in exchange for advertising – are a good means of funding. Other in-kind cost savers are use of typewriters and word processors, computers and software, drafting and headline-making equipment, and copiers and mimeograph machines. The board should start with its own membership in searching for these items.
- Your board may find a sponsor who is willing to fund or subsidize the newsletter, either anonymously or with credit on each issue.
- Look to other non-profit organizations for possible sharing, or low-rate rental, of equipment and for cooperative purchase of paper and other supplies for quantity discounts. You or your board may seek a grant to publish your *VOTER*.

ROLL THE PRESSES

Armed with these tips and the LWV-Texas booklet, *Publication Production Kit*, an editor should be ready to effectively augment the board's efforts to communicate with League members, the community and with LWV state and national

boards.

Typesetting

This method is most expensive but looks the best. You may not, however want to project an image of affluence to your donors or members.

Typewriter

- Use an electric or electronic typewriter. Manual typewriters cannot produce the even type needed for a publication. If no typewriter is available, ask a local business if they will provide the use of a typewriter or word processor for in-kind donation (such as a small ad or recognition in the newsletter).
- Carbon ribbon is a must if copy is typewritten. If your typewriter has no carbon ribbon, buy one and wind it on your typewriter's spools.
- Keep **typing** elements, keys, and daisy wheels clean.
- Bolder type faces work best. Most electronic typewriters have a bold feature as an option.
- If copy is to be reduced, elite type should be reduced to no less than 75%. Pica type is better.
- Corrections must be made with lift-off film or Liquid Paper, not with white type-over tape or erasers. 3M makes a Post-it Cover-Up Tape which is good for deleting or replacing entire lines or blocks of type. It also works well for deleting paste-up shadows.