

# ONLINE NEWS ONLINE NEWS



2015-16

## Evaluative Criteria Booklet

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Virginia High School League  
1642 State Farm Blvd.  
Charlottesville, VA 22911  
434-977-8475 / 434-977-5943 (fax)  
[www.vhsl.org](http://www.vhsl.org)

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Newspaper: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates URL Viewed: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

Rating:  Superior /  Excellent /  Good /  Needs Improvement

## **ADOPTION OF ONLINE NEWS EVALUATION SERVICE**

Interest in online news evaluations for VHSL member schools began in the early 2000s as professional print news publications started offering versions of their papers on the Internet, some exclusively. Although there were some exploratory discussions at that time, the new service evolved from Scholastic Publications Advisory Committee discussions beginning in 2010.

The committee included Shannon Dalton, yearbook adviser at Carroll County High School; Beth Hoer, newspaper adviser at Bethel High School; Trish Lyons, yearbook and newspaper adviser at Deep Run High School; Linda Parks, newspaper, magazine and yearbook adviser at Northumberland High School; Pat Rose, newspaper adviser at Eastern Montgomery High School; and Leslie Stevens, yearbook adviser at Turner Ashby High School. Valerie Kibler, newspaper adviser at Harrisonburg High School; Beth Skaggs, yearbook adviser at Osbourn Park High School; and Chris Waugaman, newspaper adviser at Prince George High School also took part in the revision stage of the initial drafts. Lisa Giles, VHSL assistant director, facilitated the process.

The guidelines in this evaluation are borrowed in part from the 2009 Multimedia Guidebook from the National Scholastic Press Association. They are used with permission.

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Virginia High School League's Online News Evaluation Service is to facilitate improvements in Virginia high school websites. The evaluator's comments and suggestions should be used primarily as guidelines to increase the effectiveness of scholastic websites.

Your evaluation is a critique from another qualified person's perspective. That perspective includes many variables -- education, experience, trends and even subjective preference. When submitting a publication for critique, there is an expectation of acceptance of results, whether or not you agree with or choose to implement them.

VHSL recommends that you submit your website to other evaluation services in addition to the League's for additional comments and suggestions.

### **WEBSITE EVALUATION SERVICE ENTRY POLICY**

Online news websites submitted for entry in the VHSL Website Evaluation Service are considered officially entered only if the following conditions are met:

1. The VHSL Online News Evaluation registration form has been completed.
2. Site URL for the website that will be produced the upcoming school year has been submitted. This site will be viewed by the judge on three different days during the school year.
3. The correct entry fee accompanies your entry.
4. Your entry is RECEIVED by the October 15 deadline.

For additional information contact VHSL at 434-977-8475 or by e-mail at [lgiles@vhsl.org](mailto:lgiles@vhsl.org).

VHSL awards are presented annually at the VHSL Regional Media Championship. Publications are evaluated by out-of-state evaluators who are experts in scholastic publications: Suzanne Bardwell, Ann Bertoldie, Don Bott, Alexis Bunka, Pam Bunka, Eva Coleman, Kathy Craghead, Carolyn Crist, Leslie Dennis, Melissa Dixon, Susan Duncan, Allison Floyd, Kathleen France, Christina Geabhart, Donna Griffith, H. L. Hall, Mary Jessica Hammes, Nancy Hastings, Ken Henderson, Carole Henning, Marva Hutchison, Lisa Kritchman, J. Grady Locklear, Jim McGonnell, Janet McKinney, Amy Morgan, R. J. Morgan, Mitzi Neely, Casey Nichols, Sarah Nichols, Jane Robbins, Matthew Schott, Terry Sollazzo, Brian Thies, Lizabeth Walsh, Anne Whitt, Lori Wilken, Stan Zoller.

**STUDENT WEBSITES:** Work on a student website should be one of the most challenging academic experiences a high school provides. Students not only learn to write for a real audience from original research, they receive training in editing, layout and design, photography, computer skills and business management. Beyond that, personal growth is achieved in responsibility, dependability, leadership, teamwork and ethical decision making. The product should be student produced, under the training and supervision of the adviser and other professionals. Since the purpose of the VHSL's program is to encourage schools to produce quality student websites, work done by individuals other than students at your high school must be clearly identified.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** No website will be rated, nor will it receive an award if it uses obscene graphics or language (whether obvious, coded or disguised). No website containing plagiarized or libelous material will be rated, nor will it receive an award. Websites must credit the source of copyrighted material (for example: used with permission by Associated Press).

**REVISED: November 2014**

## GENERAL STIPULATIONS

On the following pages the evaluator will mark "Superior," "Excellent," "Good" or "N/I" (Needs Improvement) for each specific point as it pertains to your website.

The categories are as follows:

- |                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Coverage & Content        | 4. Design & Navigation |
| 2. Interactivity & Community | 5. Rich Media          |
| 3. Breaking News             |                        |

The evaluation in each category will be separate.

Websites will also be rated in each category as to the overall quality of work relating to that evaluation criteria:

Superior / Excellent / Good / Needs Improvement

The rubric shall be used as a guide, not a score card. Evaluation is not based on a point system. The check marks denoting Superior, Excellent, Good and Needs Improvement are ratings, not rankings. Ratings are defined as relative standings. Therefore, the final cumulative ranking given to the publication will be based upon, but not necessarily equal to the number of Superiors, Excellents, Goods and Needs Improvements given to the publication.

## **RESULTS**

Good sportsmanship is expected of all VHSL activities participants and includes conduct becoming to a participant and graceful acceptance of results.

If you have legitimate concerns with the results of your evaluation (e.g. your evaluation is incomplete), the League may review your evaluation. Please provide the League with a detailed letter stating your concerns and a copy of your Evaluative Criteria Booklet via e-mail, mail or fax within 14 days of the posted results.

Please note that disagreeing with the judge's findings is not justification for review and remember that the primary purpose of an evaluation is to provide information to a staff that will help it to improve its publication. Awards are secondary.

### **EVALUATOR: QUESTIONS AND SCORING**

Please mark SUPERIOR, EXCELLENT, GOOD or N/I (needs improvement) for each SPECIFIC POINT as it pertains to the publication. Include under the COMMENTS FROM THE EVALUATOR section any ideas or suggestions you have for improvement as well as praise for those things well done. When you have completed the entire section, please circle a rating based on your overall assessment of the quality of that section.

We do expect that final ranking -- Trophy Class, First Class, Second Class and Third Class -- will match up with a majority of Superior, Excellent, Good or Needs Improvement ratings. If it does not, please provide specific justification to help advisers and staffs to understand your conclusions.

## I. CONTENT AND COVERAGE

A good multimedia site can't survive on flashy graphics and cool video alone. It needs to have substance—good, solid content. And just as with a print website, its service to readers may go beyond the traditional newspaper audience to include not only students, faculty and staff but also alumni, parents, prospective students, community members and web surfers.

<b>SPECIFIC POINTS:</b>	<b>Superior</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
1. Coverage is comprehensive, focusing on many aspects of the high school community it serves, including academics, school activities, faculty and administration, and student affairs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The site includes web-exclusive content, such as blogs, interactive elements, video, audio and breaking news that is original and not a copy of a print edition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Coverage reflects the diversity of the school population and aims to be inclusive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Content is well coordinated, with different media contributions for different parts of the story rather than repeating the same information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Stories are thoroughly reported; multiple points of view are represented.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Coverage is accurate, fair and balanced.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Writing is engaging, informative and to the point	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Opinion pieces, including columns, editorials and blogs, cover issues and events of interest to the school community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Opinion pieces are well researched and well argued, citing factual evidence to support views expressed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Special reports and in-depth coverage is well planned and includes multimedia components.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. The site maximizes the capabilities of the web, making use of multiple media and interactivity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Controversial issues are included and reported thoroughly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## I. CONTENT AND COVERAGE, CONTINUED

<b>SPECIFIC POINTS:</b>	<b>Superior</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
13. All stories, except for editorials, opinion columns, blogs and analysis pieces, are free of the writer's opinions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Headlines, captions and teasers are accurate and engaging, drawing readers into the material.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. The site demonstrates a spirit of experimentation by taking risks and trying new things.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### COMMENTS FROM THE EVALUATOR:

#### STRENGTHS:

\_\_\_\_\_

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

\_\_\_\_\_

**RATING:**  Superior /  Excellent /  Good /  Needs Improvement

## II. INTERACTIVITY AND COMMUNITY

Interactivity is an essential element of 21st Century journalism. It's no longer simply about giving information to the reader; it's about creating a dialogue between the website and its readers.

<b>SPECIFIC POINTS:</b>	<b>Superior</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
1. Readers are able to interact with the website in numerous ways, which may include comment functions, discussion boards and polls.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Social networking such as Facebook and Twitter and community tools, such as links to other information and guides to community services, are used to empower the reader.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Games, polls, quizzes, interactive maps and other interactive tools are used to engage the reader with the news.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Readers are invited to submit story ideas and given a way (either a story submission form or an email address) to do so.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Contact information is provided for readers who want to write a letter to the editor, buy an ad or contact the adviser and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. The website makes use of reader-generated content, which may include stories, photos and videos.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Links on stories direct readers to other sites with useful and credible information that enhances the story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**COMMENTS FROM THE EVALUATOR:**

**STRENGTHS:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**RATING:**  Superior /  Excellent /  Good /  Needs Improvement

### III. BREAKING NEWS

Since high school print publications generally come out infrequently, the web offers students the opportunity to report important news events in a timely manner. Websites may be updated on a daily basis, even if the print edition only comes out a few times a year.

<b>SPECIFIC POINTS:</b>	<b>Superior</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
1. The site is updated regularly, daily, if possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Important news events are reported in a timely way.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Multiple media—which may include photos, graphics, text, audio, video and interactive elements—are used to report breaking news events.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Breaking news reports are updated as information comes in.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. News is covered in a fair and balanced manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Coverage includes useful information such as notification of school closing in the event of bad weather or an emergency.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. News coverage includes stories of interest to the school community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Coverage of national and international events is related to the school community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. News is accurate, even if the information is incomplete.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**COMMENTS FROM THE EVALUATOR:**

**STRENGTHS:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**RATING:**  Superior /  Excellent /  Good /  Needs Improvement



## IV. DESIGN AND NAVIGATION

A website should be attractive and easy to navigate, steering the reader toward the newest and most important information. Content should drive design, not the other way around.

SPECIFIC POINTS:	Superior	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement
1. The site is visually appealing, drawing readers into stories.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Navigation is easy; readers can effortlessly find what they are looking for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The home page is simple and uncluttered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The site provides links to relevant resources, such as the high school website.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. A dominant piece of art, at least twice as large as anything else, anchors each page.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Visual elements, such as photos and graphics, are purposeful rather than merely decoration.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. News is presented in a clear hierarchy, with the most important and/or newest stories prominently displayed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Tabs clearly direct readers to different sections, such as news, sports, entertainment and opinion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Multiple elements of a story are packaged together into an integrated unit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Bullets, fonts, boxes and other design elements are used to facilitate reading and navigation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Links provide access to related content on the site.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**COMMENTS FROM THE EVALUATOR:**

**STRENGTHS:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**RATING:**  Superior /  Excellent /  Good /  Needs Improvement

## V. RICH MEDIA

Multimedia offers a rich sensory experience. New media is constantly changing, and innovation should be a vital element of any website. Student sites, in particular, which are less bound by convention and market pressures, should be creative and pioneering.

<b>SPECIFIC POINTS:</b>	<b>Superior</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
1. The site uses a variety of media, which may include audio, video, slide shows and audio slide shows, text and graphics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Media are used to enhance content and help tell stories rather than simply add flashy elements to the site.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Each media element—slide show, video, podcast, etc., tells a story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Photos and video are adequately lit and well composed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Photo illustrations are clearly labeled.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. In photos and video, a variety of shots—action, candid, long shots, close-ups and detail shots—are used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. In audio and video reports, sound quality is clear; voices are easy to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Audio reports make use of ambient and natural sound as well as interviews.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Graphics are clear and easy to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Special projects and packages are well organized and designed to help readers navigate through the content.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Copyright laws are understood and respected; only original content or copyright-free material (music, photos, videos, etc.) is used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**COMMENTS FROM THE EVALUATOR:**

**STRENGTHS:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**RATING:**  Superior /  Excellent /  Good /  Needs Improvement

## EVALUATOR'S SUMMARY

### TOTAL SCORING

	Rating			
	S	E	G	NI
I. Content and Coverage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
II. Interactivity and Community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
III. Breaking News	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
IV. Design and Navigation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
V. Rich Media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**NOTE:** Please provide a final ranking of Trophy Class, First Class, Second Class or Third Class based on the individual section ratings as well as the overall rating. Generally, Superiors=Trophy, Excellents=First, etc. Please do not assign combination ratings or rankings.

**EVALUATOR'S OVERALL RATING:**  Superior /  Excellent /  Good /  Needs Improvement

**EVALUATOR'S OVERALL RANKING:**  Trophy Class /  First Class /  Second Class /  Third Class

**EVALUATOR'S GENERAL COMMENTS:**

\_\_\_\_\_