

Final Copy



Annual Newspaper Contest
Print and Online

~Logistics and Category Descriptions~

LOGISTICS

The deadline for all 2025-2026 contests (yearbook, print, online) is July 1, 2026.

The contests are judged by experienced advisers and journalism professionals from outside New Jersey, and every entry will receive feedback.

Winners will be announced at our Fall Press Day on Oct. 26, 2026.

Criteria for Submission

You must be a current GSSPA member to enter the contest. Not a member? [Download the membership form](#) and join today. Not sure? Contact Sue Everett at <everetts@earthlink.net> or 201-906-8661.

For the print and online newspaper contests, content published from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026 is eligible.

See categories below for information about the number of entries allowed per category. Entries that are submitted to the wrong category will not be judged.

Fees

News Media: Newspaper & Online

\$5 per entry in individual categories (List of categories below)

\$10 per entry in Social Media category

\$45 for Overall Excellence

Submissions

News Media entry forms and judging sheets are all digital.

Print, Online Newspaper, & Broadcast Contest Entry Forms

[Division A](#)—schools with enrollment over 1,000 students

[Division B](#)—schools with enrollment under 1,000 students

Ready to Enter?

>> [Step-by-step directions for submitting to the contest.](#)

News Media Categories – (up to 5 entries per category, except Overall Excellence)

1. News Writing
2. Feature Writing
3. Sports Writing
4. In-Depth Reporting
5. Editorial Writing (unsigned)
6. Opinion Writing (signed)
7. Personal Narrative
8. Column Writing
9. Review Writing
10. Artwork/Illustration
11. Photography
12. Infographics
13. Editorial Cartooning
14. Layout and Design
15. Multimedia Package (Online Only)
16. Multimedia Package (Online Sports)
17. Broadcast Segment
18. News Show
19. Podcast
20. Breaking News
21. Photo Gallery
22. Print Overall Excellence (\$45)
23. Online Overall Excellence (\$45)
24. Social Media Overall Excellence (\$10)
25. Distinguished Journalism

Questions?

Contest Questions – gssspacontests@gmail.com

Membership – Sue Everett – everetts@earthlink.net

1 - News Writing

Please provide the story by providing EITHER a link to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the story:

- * uses an interesting, effective lead that identifies the real angle of the story, written concisely.
- * identifies students and adults by using class, position or role, or other relevant details.
- * uses the feature approach only if it will tell the news more effectively after major events are well known before the date of publication.
- * includes the source of all information in the story, and uses multiple sources and interviews.
- * varies direct and indirect quotes.
- * provides readers with sufficient information and important details.
- * uses third person/objective voice.
- * does not exaggerate, fake facts, distort details, mislead, take sides, express bias or editorialize.
- * is structured logically and does not bury a main angle in the middle or end of the story.

2 - Feature Writing

Please provide the story by providing EITHER a link to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the story:

- * focuses on a human interest story or a social issue important to the readers.
- * preferably been written in third person, but first may be used when more effective.
- * a lead that is more lively than routine news leads.
- * effectively uses direct and indirect quotes and sources, and the writer is able to discriminate when to quote and when to paraphrase.
- * goes beyond the basics of reporting to emphasize a strong narrative.
- * provides vivid description, imagery, and details to bring the story to life.
- * does not exaggerate, fake facts, mislead, distort details, take sides, express bias or editorialize.

3 - Sports Writing

Please provide the story by providing EITHER a link to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the story:

- * tells the reader why something happened and what was important about the people, event, and/or story.
- * uses an interesting, effective lead that identifies the real angle of the story, written concisely.
- * avoids clichés and obscure or excessive sports jargon.
- * uses quotes from credible sources like players and coaches.
- * uses effective direct and indirect quotes and sources and discriminates when to quote and when to paraphrase.
- * does not overdo statistics, but uses them effectively to enhance information.
- * does not exaggerate, fake facts, distort details, take sides, mislead, express bias or editorialize.

4 - In-Depth Reporting

This category is for a spread in a print issue OR a *series* of 3 (minimum) related online stories which contain multiple angles and perspectives of a single topic.

Please provide the package by providing EITHER a link(s) to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the story package:

- * A main unifying topic or theme to connect each story or element.
- * A variety of stories or elements showing various perspectives or angles.
- * Creative and accurate use of graphics or visuals — charts, graphs, maps, art — designed to enhance storytelling.
- * Careful attribution of information to primary and reliable secondary sources.
- * Effective use of direct and indirect quotes and sources, and the writer is able to discriminate when to quote and when to paraphrase.
- * Stories do not exaggerate, fake facts, distort details, take sides, express bias or editorialize.

5 - Editorial Writing (Unsigned)

Please provide the story by providing EITHER a link to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the editorial:

- * stresses quality in writing, timeliness in content.
- * looks for local angles of city, state, national and world topics
- * emphasizes exposition and analysis.
- * provides strong introduction, discussion, and conclusion.
- * provides adequate proof and/or logical thought to support stands.
- * avoids unnecessary rhetoric, slang and wordiness.
- * uses appropriate tone and effective voice for the topic.
- * does not back away from supporting desirable but unpopular causes or examining controversial issues.
- * provides a unique angle, perspective, or idea.

6 - Opinion Writing (Signed)

Please provide the story by providing EITHER a link to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the opinion article:

- * stresses quality in writing, timeliness in content.
- * looks for local school angles of city, state, national and world topics
- * emphasizes exposition and analysis.
- * provides strong introduction, discussion, and conclusion.
- * provides adequate proof and/or logical thought to support stands.
- * avoids unnecessary rhetoric, slang and wordiness.
- * uses appropriate tone and effective voice for the topic.
- * does not back away from supporting desirable but unpopular causes or examining controversial issues.
- * provides unique angles, perspectives, or ideas.

7 - Personal Narrative

Please provide the story by providing EITHER a link to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the narrative:

- * Piece uses appropriate tone and effective voice for the topic.
- * Piece does not back away from supporting desirable but unpopular causes or examining controversial issues.
- * Writer provides unique perspectives and ideas and avoids cliches.
- * Writer includes vivid details and "shows" rather than "tells" in creating an engaging narrative.
- * Piece adheres to journalistic conventions appropriate to a personal narrative.
- * Narrative includes, and achieves, a journalistic aim or purpose.

8 - Column Writing

To enter this category, please submit **three columns** by the same writer. These columns will be scored as a single entry. Provide them by providing EITHER one or more links to the set as they were published OR one or more PDFs.

Judge's criteria is that the columns should:

- * each include the columnist's thoughts on a single theme.
- * effectively uses word choice and tone.
- * challenge the readers with novel slants on the theme.
- * present the columnist's point of view effectively and articulately.
- * be clearly presented as a column in the layout of the pages with a column title, head shot or graphic.
- * have a strong introduction/lead, discussion and closing.

9 - Review Writing

Please provide the story by providing EITHER a link to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the review:

- * includes the columnist's assessment of a movie, restaurant, play, book, concert, video, album, television show, or other entertainment medium.
- * is a complete and thorough critique without excessive detail.
- * shows clear knowledge and expertise in the medium.
- * shows imagination and creativity.
- * presents a point of view effectively and articulately.
- * establishes an effective voice.
- * has a strong lead/introduction, discussion and closing.

10 - Artwork/Illustration

Please provide the artwork/illustration with the story it accompanied. Provide EITHER a link to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the art/illustration:

- * illustrates the stories it appears with on the page.
- * is accurate and immediately understandable.
- * is complete, creative and attractive.
- * is original and adheres to copyright law, and proper credit is given to the artist.

11 - Photography

Please provide EITHER a link to the photo as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the photograph:

- * Candid shots of people or events in action are favored over posed shots. Head shots or portraits are limited in use.
- * is clear and in focus.
- * Main subjects are distinguishable from backgrounds.
- * looks into related story and not off page or into wrong stories.
- * displays sharp details and creative mastery of compositional elements.
- * shows subject in as creative a fashion as possible, avoiding the cliché shot.
- * is cropped effectively.
- * gives proper photo credit, and the photo includes a detailed cutline that adheres to standard journalistic conventions.

12 - Photo Gallery

The photos must have been published together as a unified photo gallery on the publication's website or as part of a spread in a print publication.

Please provide EITHER a link to the gallery as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

The criteria for the photo gallery:

- * Photos display creative mastery of compositional elements.
- * Photos tell a compelling story or convey a unified theme.
- * Photos are varied and judiciously selected.
- * Photos are clear, and attention is paid to contrast, focus, and exposure.
- * All photos are credited and include detailed cutlines that adhere to standard journalistic conventions.

13 - Infographics

Please provide the infographic with the story it accompanied. Provide EITHER a link to it as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria is that the infographic:

* tells a complete story either adding to the article on the page or as a standalone without relying on related stories.

*includes a headline, an explainer, a pertinent chart or graph, a source line noting where information came from and a graphic producer's/creator's name.

*headline is appropriately sized.

*explainer summarizes the purpose of the infographic.

*chart/graph is easy to understand and appropriate for the subject.

*attention is paid to the design of the piece, including organization, balance, color, and contrast etc.

14 - Editorial Cartooning

Please provide EITHER a link OR a PDF version of the cartoon as it was published.

Judge's criteria is that the cartoon:

* is related to the editorial it appears on the page with and is not art for art's sake or filler.

OR

states the editorial board's view on a topic mentioned elsewhere in the current issue.

OR

stands by itself as a commentary of relevance to students.

* Cartoon is accurate and immediately understandable.

* Cartoon is complete, creative and attractive.

* Cartoon is original and not a copy of any copyrighted character.

15 - Layout and Design (PRINT ONLY)

Please provide EITHER a link to the spread OR a PDF version of it.

Judge's criteria for the layout:

- * Pages create reader interest and have a dominant element.
- * Pages are attractive, readable and well-balanced; adheres to standard newspaper conventions/style.
- * Pages include pull quotes, subheadings, decks, diverse photo elements, and varied fonts.
- * Headlines use consistent style (up or downstyle), use no more than two typefaces, and fit the assigned space.
- * Visual elements are of adequate size, varied, well-cropped, clear and sharply detailed.

16 - Multimedia Package (ONLINE ONLY)

Pieces that explore a non-sports topic from multiple perspectives and include a variety of multimedia elements such as video, audio, embedded interactives, infographics, etc.

The criteria for this package:

- * Coverage includes a variety of multimedia elements to cover a single story including an article and non-reader elements (infographics, charts, timelines, etc.), video clips and/or audio clips.
- * Coverage goes beyond the surface; it successfully uncovers a specific story (such as a preview of an event, a recap or breaking news, for example) by exploring it in depth and from a variety of angles.
- * Non-story components supplement the text; they serve a distinct purpose and are not present simply for the sake of being present.
- * The coverage makes an impact on the reader and is likely to be something in which the reader devotes time to reading.
- * Where applicable, coverage adheres to standard journalistic conventions (structure, AP style, balance, no editorializing, etc.).

17 - Multimedia Package (Online Sports)

Pieces that explore a sports topic from multiple perspectives and include a variety of multimedia elements such as video, audio, embedded interactives, infographics, etc.

The criteria for this sports package:

- * Coverage includes multiple pieces, such as stories, non-reader elements (infographics, charts, timelines, etc.), video clips and audio clips.
- * Coverage goes beyond the surface; it successfully uncovers a sport (as a feature, preview or recap) by exploring it in depth and from a variety of angles.
- * Non-story components supplement the text; they serve a distinct purpose and are not present simply for the sake of being present.
- * The coverage makes an impact on the reader and is likely to be something in which the reader devotes time to reading.
- * Where applicable, coverage adheres to standard journalistic conventions (structure, AP style, balance, no editorializing, etc.).

18 - Broadcast Segment

NOTE: Eligible entries should be **no longer than 5 minutes** and must have been published on a publication's website or YouTube channel. Submissions in this category can be news, feature, or sports.

The criteria for this segment:

- * Segment successfully covers a specific topic in an appropriate amount of time (longer is not necessarily better).
- * The writing is appropriate for broadcast and is presented in a conversational style written for the ear.
- * Quality of audio and video is clear and understandable; voices are discernible over music and/or background sounds.
- * The segment is successfully edited to best inform readers or effectively tell a story.
- * The segment includes a variety of well-composed shots, angles, and sequences.
- * The video deftly includes natural sound, sound bites, lower screen and full screen graphics and B-roll as necessary.
- * The segment goes beyond the surface; in digging deeper, it likely informs readers about something they didn't know before or tells an impactful story.
- * The segment adheres to all aspects of fair use and copyright law.

19 - News Show

NOTE: Eligible entries should be no longer than 20 minutes long, feature multiple segments, and must have been published on a publication's website or YouTube channel.

The criteria for this show:

- * Shows exhibit a variety of subject matter.
- * The show exhibits appropriate tempo. None of the segments feel too long or short, and the episode does not exceed 20 minutes.
- * Anchors provide a charismatic, professional presence and effectively transition the show into and out of segments.
- * The writing is appropriate for broadcast and is presented in a conversational style written for the ear.
- * Quality of audio and video is clear and understandable; voices are discernible over music and/or background sounds.
- * Appealing graphics and visuals are used effectively throughout the episode.
- * The segments in the show are successfully edited to best inform readers or effectively tell a story.
- * Segments in the show include a variety of well-composed shots, angles, and sequences.
- * Segments deftly include natural sound, sound bites, lower screen and full screen graphics and B-roll as necessary.
- * The show adheres to all aspects of fair use and copyright law.

20 - Online Podcast

Please submit THREE exemplary episodes of the same podcast, which will be scored as one entry.

The criteria for podcasts:

- * Audio quality is clear and free of background sounds that interfere.
- * Podcast is structured in such a way that makes sense and keeps listeners engaged.
- * On-air personalities sound prepared and well-informed.
- * Audio is well-edited.
- * Podcast adheres to standard journalistic conventions and copyright law.
- * Regardless of its chosen format, the podcast is story-driven and maintains a clear focus.

21 - Breaking News

This should be a story that is published in a timely manner, either written or video. Submissions in this category can be in the form of news, features, or sports.

Please provide EITHER a link to the story as it was published OR a PDF version of it.

The criteria for breaking news stories:

- * The writing is well-developed from a variety of independent sources and presents fair and balanced information. All information is sourced.
- * Story identifies students and adults by using class, position or role, or other relevant details.
- * Story addresses something that just happened in a timely -- better yet, immediate -- manner.
- * Story is structured logically, preferably using inverted pyramid structure.
- * Effectively varies direct and indirect quotes.
- * Story uses third person/objective voice.
- * Story contains a photo or other visual to successfully supplement it.
- * Coverage adheres to standard journalistic conventions (AP style, balance, no editorializing, etc.).

22 – Print Overall Excellence

Print Overall Excellence entries are composed of **THREE** issues. Please provide EITHER a link to the publications as it was published OR PDF versions of them.

*NOTE: Print editions do not have to contain every element listed below to be considered for this category. Be sure to note explanations in Column F of the entry form.

Coverage

General

The newspaper or newsmagazine

1. emphasizes material of importance to the student body of the school in a flexible but definite style.
2. covers all portions of the student body without catering to any one ethnic or social group.
3. Covers curriculum matters as well as social and sports topics.
4. focuses on balanced, thoroughly researched, original material.
5. includes the source of all information in the story, and uses multiple sources and interviews.
6. stresses quality in writing, timeliness in content.
7. puts its main emphasis on school related news and covers news outside the school by leading students to see how this news relates to them.
8. does not exaggerate, fake facts, distort details, take sides, express bias or editorialize.
9. uses index, table of contents or teasers to aid readers in finding information.
10. The following are used **sparingly** or are **omitted** from the newspaper or newsmagazine: a-puzzles, b-jokes, c- horoscopes, d-gossip columns, e-student superlatives, f-student wills, g- advice columns.

Coverage

The Opinion section:

1. does not back away from supporting desirable but unpopular causes or examining controversial issues.
2. does not play up trite, hackneyed or overworked topics.

3. shows that the writer gathered, researched and verified facts to support positions, emphasizing what mature and responsible students can do.
4. looks for local school angles of city, state, national and world topics, emphasizing what action students might take.
5. emphasizes exposition and analysis.
6. Balances laudatory, analytical and critical pieces.
7. does not scold, whine, nag, sneer, grumble, complain or stress childish attitudes, display bias, prejudice, intolerance or poor sportsmanship.
8. An unsigned editorial is included in every issue.
9. A letters policy and letters to the editor are included in every issue.
10. Reviews of a variety of performances or entertainment media are included.

Coverage

The Feature section:

1. puts the focus on human interest stories or social issues important to the readers.
2. goes beyond the basics of reporting to tell the story behind the story.
3. when possible, stories have a news peg.
4. uses sidebars to show many sides of the same story.

Coverage

The Sports section:

1. tells the reader why something happened and what was important about the people and the event.
2. avoids cliches and obscure or excessive sports jargon.
3. uses effective quotes from players and coaches.
4. gives highlights of season, not just scores; includes statistics, and dates of past and future events.
5. focuses on upcoming events and potential of players.
6. does not offer excuses or blame the results on referees.
7. Includes coverage of all sports, not just winners or major sports.
8. includes labeled analysis / opinion pieces along with objective coverage.

Writing / Editing:

The newspaper or newsmagazine

-contains correct grammar and spelling, and avoids typos.

-stresses quality in writing, timeliness in content.

Writing / Editing:

The newspaper or newsmagazine

- emphasizes writing in an articulate and consistent journalistic style.
- {varies direct and indirect quotes; varies beginnings of paragraphs or sentences (generally avoiding “the” or names) and varies the lengths of sentences; does not use first person except in rare cases when it is clearly the best way to tell a story; does not use second person; generally avoids passive voice}
- clearly identifies the sources of all information.
- identifies students and adults by using class, position or role, or other relevant details.

Writing / Editing:

The newspaper or newsmagazine

- emphasizes exposition and analysis.
- avoids clichés and obscure or excessive jargon; avoids unnecessary rhetoric and wordiness.

Writing / Editing:

The newspaper or newsmagazine

- Headlines highlight the story and grab the reader’s attention.
- Headlines are in active voice and have a subject and verb.

Writing / Editing:

The newspaper or newsmagazine

- does not bury the significant angle in the middle or end of the story.
- does not play up trite, hackneyed or overworked topics.
- Stories are complete and answer all questions.

Design & Graphics

Page 1 Section Score:

1. A nameplate with publication’s address, date and volume number is prominent on page one.
2. Front page attractively conveys the tone of the publication.
3. Significant stories are prominently displayed.

Design & Graphics

Inside pages: News and features Section Score:

1. Folios are included on each page with page number, paper name and date included.
2. Section labels identify each section.
3. The publication shows a consistency in style of headlines (up or downstyle), taking advantage of the graphic variations used in the professional press but using restraint in font choices, and fitting the assigned space.
4. Pages create reader interest and have a dominant element.
5. Pages are attractive and well balanced with a variety of headline sizes and photos.
6. Glaring errors such as tombstones, poorly written heads and poorly cropped photos are avoided.
7. Large areas of gray type are avoided by using copybreakers.
8. Double trucks should have an obvious theme. A graphic or photo should unite the theme and the design of the two pages. On double trucks, no other topics than those related to the theme of the double truck should be covered on the page.

Design & Graphics

Opinion pages:

1. The opinion page is clearly labeled as such and contains no advertising.
2. A masthead appears on the editorial page with the staff, full address of school and the letter to editor policy included.
3. The editorial cartoon relates to the editorial it appears on the page with, **or** states the editorial board's view on a topic mentioned elsewhere in the current issue **or** stands by itself as a commentary of relevance to students.

Design & Graphics

Photography:

1. Photos are of adequate size, varied, well cropped, clear and sharply detailed.
2. Candid shots of people or events in action are favored over posed shots. Head shots or portraits are limited in use
3. Photographs are clear and in focus. {Please keep in mind that student staffs may not have control over the production process that affects the printing of photos.}
4. Main subjects are distinguishable from backgrounds.

5. Photographs look into related stories and not off page or into wrong stories.
6. Photographs have sharp contrasts and details.
7. Photographs show subject in as creative a fashion as possible, avoiding the cliché shot.
8. Captions offer more than just full identification of subjects in photograph, telling the story of before or after, or adding additional pertinent information to the photographs.
9. Photos from internet sources are clearly identified and used only with the permission of the copyright owner.
10. Every photo has a caption and a credit.

Design & Graphics

Artwork & Illustration:

1. Artwork is related to the stories it appears on the page with and not art for art's sake or filler.
2. Artwork is accurate and immediately understandable.
3. Artwork is complete, creative and attractive.
4. Artwork is properly attributed .
5. Artwork is original and not a copy of any copyrighted character.

Design & Graphics

Advertising:

1. Ads contain graphics, logos or photos that help convey the client's message.
2. Ads show readers the benefits of the product or service to them, and are not "Compliments of" type of ads
3. Ads are arranged attractively on the page.

23 - Online Overall Excellence

Online Overall Excellence entries are judged as comprehensive reviews of entire online publications. Please provide a link to the publication's homepage for judging.

- * Online publication covers a wide range of stories from a wide range of angles.
- *Online publication incorporates social media, either on the site itself or as a separate complement. Links to these platforms are easy to find.
- *The writing is appropriate for an online publication and follows the inverted pyramid when necessary.
- *The publication is generally free of stylistic and grammatical errors.
- *The online publication takes risks; it covers topics not typically covered and/or seeks to present information that cannot be found elsewhere.
- *Artwork and photography are clear and successfully supplement stories. Captions and credits are appropriately used.
- *The publication successfully incorporates multimedia, such as video and audio clips, interactives, embedded content, etc.
- *The navigation of the site is organized; someone can easily find key areas, including an archive, stories and basic newspaper info.
- *The site appears to be updated regularly and includes timely content.
- * The site engages its audience through story coverage, student voices, interaction, polls, social media, etc.

24 – Social Media Excellence

Social Media Excellence is awarded to a staff that effectively utilizes a variety (minimum of 2) of social media platforms to promote their work and publication.

Submit links/handles to all social media accounts that you would like considered by the judges based on the following criteria:

*Robust followings have been built on multiple platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.).

*Publication's content is consistently promoted on multiple platforms.

*Publication goes beyond just promoting work and creates content native to social media.

*Social media is used for timely and immediate coverage (breaking news, live tweeting, Instagram/Facebook Live, etc.).

*Social media is used as a tool to connect and interact with the publication's audience.

*Overall impression of style, structure and content

25 – Distinguished Journalism (Print / Online)

***The Distinguished Journalism program has been revised for the 2026 Newspaper contest.

This year, publications will select up to 10 submissions of their choosing to be considered for the Distinguished Journalism recognition at the Fall Press Day at Rutgers University. Publication staffs should select the stories that they feel best represent the talent of the staff and indicate those stories on the entry form in column E. If more than 10 are noted on the form, we will only judge the first 10 indicated for the Distinguished Award.

Of the indicated submissions, publications will earn points based on how they score in those categories' contests. The chart below details the scoring system:

1 st Place recognition:	5 pts.
2 nd Place recognition:	4 pts.
3 rd Place recognition:	3 pts.
Honorable Mention:	2 pts.
No recognition:	1 pt.

The publication(s) to earn the most points from their selected best entries will earn the Distinguished Journalism distinction from the GSSPA. There will be no distinction between Print or Online publications; however, there will be a distinction between Division A (over 1,000 students enrolled at the school) and Division B (fewer than 1,000 students enrolled at the school).

A winner will be recognized from each division.