

Adviser Academy

Critiques That Teach: Submitting Your Yearbook for Judging

Objective

Students will learn how yearbook critiques and contests work, understand the submission process for major journalism organizations and explore how critique feedback can be used to improve future coverage, design, writing and staff growth.

Materials Needed

- Sample critique sheets or scorebooks
- Contest deadlines/example
- Sites for critique organizations
- Sticky notes or annotation tools

Step 1

Introduction and Hook

Begin by asking students:

- “Why do yearbooks get critiqued?”
- “What makes critique feedback valuable?”

Show examples of critique sheets, scorebooks or judge comments from previous books if available.

Briefly discuss the idea that critiques are not just about awards, they are tools that help staffs identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for growth.

Step 2

Researching Organizations

Split students into groups and assign each group to research major journalism organizations and what they offer for yearbook staffs.

Discuss:

- National Scholastic Press Association
- Columbia Scholastic Press Association
- Quill and Scroll
- Southern Interscholastic Press Association
- State organizations (example: Interscholastic League Press Conference in Texas)

After researching, students should be able to explain:

- Critique opportunities
- Contests and awards
- Conventions/workshops
- Submission timelines and shipping logistics

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Step 3

Critique Organization Decision Discussion

Have each group give a quick presentation of their findings for each organization. Then, have students discuss and decide which critique opportunities would best fit the program.

In groups, ask students to consider:

- Which organization(s) would provide the most useful feedback for growth?
- Do we want a regional focus, national feedback, or both?
- How much weight should be placed on cost, deadlines and logistics?
- Which organizations align best with our current goals (design, writing, coverage, etc.)?

Should we submit to multiple organizations or focus on one primary critique system?

Have groups share out and build a class consensus list of preferred critique submissions. *(Hint: for your first year submitting, maybe just pick one organization. For your second year, pick a different one & compare, or pick two, etc.)*

Step 4

The Submission Process

Once you have decided on your critique organizations, discuss steps such as:

- Keep track of deadlines, submission forms and specific entry requirements for each organization
- Determine how many books need to be set aside for submission OR if a PDF entry needs to be completed
- Package and ship books carefully to ensure they arrive on time and without damage (personal recommendation: www.pirateship.com)
- Organize critique results once they return

Step 5

Jigsaw the Critique

Divide students into small groups and give each group a different section of a critique or scorebook (coverage, writing, photography, design, theme, etc.).

Ask groups to:

- Read and summarize their assigned section
- Identify key strengths highlighted by judges
- Identify repeated concerns or areas for improvement
- Decide whether they agree or disagree with the feedback and why
- Suggest one specific action the staff could take to improve in that area this year

Have groups share out so the class can reconstruct the full critique and see how all sections connect into one overall evaluation. Discuss how critique feedback should directly influence:

- spread planning
- coverage decisions
- design systems
- writing expectations
- photography direction

Emphasize that critiques are most valuable when they become part of everyday decision-making, not just something reviewed once after submission.