

# Writing, editing, and designing an award-winning publication

**S**tate society newsletters are judged on educational content; national, state and chapter news; appearance, writing and editing; and frequency of publication. The following tips were prepared to help state society newsletter editors in their quest to create an award-winning publication.

## Educational content

Promoting professionalism through education is one of the key missions of this association. Therefore, providing members with information that will help them on the job is important. Such information includes the following:

- Articles and news clips on a variety of general, clinical, administrative, and managerial topics
- Information on continuing education, including how, where, and when to get CEUs

## Tri-level news

Keep members “in the know”:

### Chapter and state society information.

Provide news about the professional activities of the local chapters and state society. Keep readers posted on upcoming continuing education workshops and the state meeting.

**National information.** Inform readers about association news and help promote Medical Assistants Recognition Week and the AAMA Annual Conference.

## Appearance

**Cover.** Is the cover visually appealing and well organized? Does the banner (title of

the newsletter) stand out? Are the volume and issue numbers consistently and neatly placed? Is “A publication of [state society name]” displayed in an attractive manner?

**Table of contents.** Is the contents page well organized, attractive, and easy to read?

**Masthead.** Is a masthead included within the publication which clearly displays the issue and volume number, the names of those working on the publication, and where to send news items?

**Stock.** Is the paper used for the newsletter attractive? Is it a light color that contrasts sharply against the ink? Is it thick enough so that the ink from the other side does not show through?

**Ink.** Is the ink dark enough so that it can be read easily? If you are limited to one color, use black. Hot colors, such as reds, oranges, and yellows, are difficult to read; limit the use of such colors to headlines and clip art.

**Format.** The one-column format is easiest to produce, but hard to read because of the long lines of type (especially on an 8-1/2 x 11 inch page). If you use this format, try extending the single column over three-quarters of the page, leaving a “scholar’s margin” next to the main text for pull quotes, table of contents, news clips, a calendar of events, illustrations, and other information.

The two- and three-column formats are most popular because they offer a lot more design flexibility and are easier to read.

**Type.** Is the type easy to read? Can you flip through and readily identify the contents of the newsletter?



**Avoid all caps.** AVOID TYPING IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. AS YOU CAN SEE, READING TEXT IN FULL CAPS CAN BE DIFFICULT.

It is best to put heads in a boldfaced font and put stressed items in italics.

**Consistency.** It’s fun to PLAY with a variety of FONTS when you have them, but using many **different** types of fonts can be *distracting* to the reader’s eye.

Instead, select two or three fonts that you like and use them throughout the newsletter.

The following type specifications have been found to be the easiest to read and most can be found in publishing and word processing programs:

1. Ragged right, flush left
2. Serifed type or type that curves (e.g., Times New Roman, Garamond, Palatino) for body copy; and sans serifed type or type that’s straight-edged (e.g., Helvetica, Univers) for headlines
3. 10 or 12 point type size for text
4. Underlined, boldfaced, and italic type used sparingly to add contrast and emphasis (to use them in excess defeats their purpose)

**Photos.** Here are some rules of thumb for using photographs:

1. Run them big
2. Crop them tight
3. Print them light (but not too light)
4. Use good, quality photographs or none at all
5. Choose and place them so they are part of the overall design, not the design itself

**White space and contrast.** Avoid cramming information on one page. Allow for enough white space so as not to overwhelm the reader's eye.

Create contrast with bold headlines, lots of white space and careful combinations of thick and thin rules (lines). Here are some other design elements that help create contrast:

- bulleted lists, such as this one
- drop caps (letters) to begin the first sentence of each article
- sidebars printed in a 10–20% screen
- graphs and charts
- clip art and photos

## Writing and editing

**Content.** Editorial content is the backbone of any publication. A pretty package without any content is, simply put—empty. Decide what is to be the primary focus of your newsletter: to educate, to inform, to advise, to entertain (or, preferably, a combination), and then choose your newsletter content accordingly.

Keep in mind that state society newsletters reflect the profession and the association, and therefore should reflect professionalism. The state newsletter can be used as a marketing tool to attract other members, and to share with other allied health groups or the state medical association. Avoid including cutesy, personal, or religious material. Save such items for personal letters. Here are some other tips to consider:

- **Write conversationally**, as if you were speaking directly to your readers.

## Tips to keep it cheap

Restricted by budget constraints? Here are some tips for producing an appealing publication within the budget:

- Design your newsletter as a self-mailer to save dollars (and trees). Without the added weight of an envelope, mailing costs might even be less.
- Check with your local post office for information and regulations about mailing third-class, bulk rate. It takes a little longer to get where it's going, but the cost savings are significant.
- Contact area colleges for volunteers. Offer journalism students the opportunity to edit your newsletter, and graphic design students the opportunity to layout or redesign your newsletter. Ask if they have desktop publishing capabilities. Overall, it's a mutually beneficial situation: Students can beef up their résumés or portfolios, and you can concentrate more on content.

“Peoplize” your writing with warm words. Create an informal, relaxed style; however, avoid being too cute, or adding too much personal information, which is unprofessional.

- **Edit concisely.** Remember this: The art of writing lay in thrift. Say what you need to say in as few words as possible.
- **Proofread carefully.** A lot of hard work will be laid to waste if the final product is chock full of misspellings, grammatical errors, and unclear, run-on sentences.
- **Invest in a good style book.** *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *The*

*Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual*, and *Strunk's and White's The Elements of Style* are all good examples.

**Punctuation.** Use exclamation marks sparingly, otherwise readers may get the impression you are yelling at them. One exclamation mark is all you need to show the message is important. Better yet, ask yourself if a period would do just as well:

Avoid multiple punctuation!!!  
Avoid multiple punctuation!  
Avoid multiple punctuation.

Likewise, one question mark is all that is necessary to convey a question.

**Plural vs. possessive.** An apostrophe shows possession. Therefore, when typing CMAs (AAMA) or CEUs in the plural form, an apostrophe should not be used.

**Capitalization.** Just like the titles of physician, editor, and lawyer, the title of medical assistant is a job title, not a proper noun, and therefore should not be capitalized.

## Frequency

Communication is the lifeblood of any organization. Disseminating information in a timely manner means keeping members up to date. Obviously, a newsletter that goes out four times a year offers more current information than one that goes out annually.

If the frequency of your publication must be limited, then publish a calendar that provides a look at the year ahead, including dates, times, places, and contact information of all upcoming events and workshops. Include a roster of state and chapter presidents and officers with contact information. Make it a pull-out or “clip & post” sheet so readers will hang it on their bulletin boards to refer to year round.

Enter your state publication in the Excel Awards competition held each year at the AAMA Annual Conference. The Excel Awards competition packet and entry form are posted to the AAMA website every spring. Or call 800/228-2262 to request one.