



Publishing a Newsletter is a Process

Successful writing starts with planning: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. Keep it simple. Take complex material and present it in such clear and simple terms that all of your readers will understand it. Use a mix of articles for 30-second readers, three-minute readers and 30 minute readers. The first sentence in an article should grab the reader's interest and they will read the rest.

Start Writing

- Organize your thoughts.
- Know your audience.
- Use plain, uncomplicated language — write to express not impress. Avoid bias.
- Use concrete words — don't clutter — don't be vague
- Use strong, action verbs.
- Use simple sentences rather than a long-winded compound sentence.

Develop Articles

- Use a dictionary and thesaurus.
- Proofread! Proofread! Proofread! – Names, dates, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, vocabulary.
- Use an outside source such as a school secretary to proof.
- Use Concrete Writing: Which sentence below would be easier to read?
 1. *All aspects of the situation should be taken into careful consideration prior to the implementation of corrective action. What?????*
 2. *Don't change anything until you've checked it thoroughly.*
- Observe deadlines for submission of articles.

Ask Questions

- Who are we?
- What is our basic message?
- Who? What? Where? When? Why?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Will a graphic such as our logo, a cartoon, our flag, or a photograph convey the message more clearly?
- What format should we use — flyer, newsletter, tri-fold?

Space Wisely

- Keep text columns in an even line from the top
- Avoid separating a subhead from the body copy.
- Don't throw a bunch of graphics on the page to fill space. It is distracting.
- Type size is important. Make headlines 2-3 times the size of body copy.
- Decide what is important and make that your focus using appropriate spacing and type size.

Create Emphasis

- If you have a long list, use bullets rather than a series with commas allowing the reader to focus more easily.
- Use Jump lines such as: *Continued on page 2.*
- The size of your graphics will depend on their relevance.

Choose Font

The use of fonts is very important in the development of your publication. There are hundreds of fonts from which to choose. The choice of font conveys an important and unique message to the reader. It can enhance or hinder your reader's focus.

- Which one will attract your readers?
- Which one is easier to read?
- Which one will best fit on the page?
- Which works with this particular publication?
- What works with the layout of this page?
- Can everyone read this font? Should I use it?
- Serif versus Non-Serif?
 - Serifs (flared out tops and bottoms) help the reader recognize the shapes of the letters. Take away the serifs and there's less letter-to-letter distinction.
 - Times New Roman is a serif font.
 - Helvetica is a non-serif font.
- How many fonts? Use only 1-2 fonts in your newsletter. It is less distracting.
- CAPS need not be used for emphasis. You may use **Bold** or Underline. Both are not necessary.

More Tips

- Hyphenation: Compound words should be hyphenated. One-syllable words should never be hyphenated. Do a soft return. Examples: Bo-ok a-bout
pro-American
Numbers: Fifty-five
Five-or six-story building
- Numbers one to nine should be spelled out.
- Italicize books, newspapers, magazines.
- Use quotation marks for titles of articles, essays, short poems, short stories, radio, and TV programs.
- No need to capitalize offices/chairmanships unless in front of name.
 - Example: President Bruce Bohren (no comma)
- Use boxes to capture small articles or to emphasize.
- Don't use acronyms such as IRS unless you have used the entire name spelled out somewhere before using the acronym.
- Don't end sentences with a preposition. For example: Who did you go with? NO
With whom did you go? YES
- Leave enough "white space" —at least 1/2 inch all around and usually 1/2 inch between articles and columns.

Copyright Laws

- Nothing can be put into a newsletter that has a copyright without the consent of the creator. These laws stay in effect for 50-70 years. Written permission is required to be protected.
- Anything in the *Illinois PTA Bulletin* may be used if you credit the source.
- Most articles in the National PTA publications may be used except for copyrighted articles in *Our Children*.
- National and Illinois PTA logos are registered trademarks. Permission is needed to use them.
- Copyrights include literature, cartoons, photographs, graphics and poems - anything created by another person. The copyright does not need to be registered formally.
- **Always credit the source when using reprinted articles.**



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Make your PTA Newsletter a Winner

Why should your PTA have a newsletter?

Ask Pat Schwarze, former public relations officer for Illinois State PTA, who says: “Every school needs a newsletter so it has some way to get across what it needs to tell people.”

A newsletter *informs*—about PTA and what it is doing; about what is happening in the school; and about the problems and concerns of parents.

“A newsletter is an important membership tool,” continues Schwarze, “because it answers that often-asked question ‘Just what does PTA do?’ After reading your newsletter, no one should have to ask that question.”

Schwarze recommends that the newsletter reach beyond its own PTA members to nonmembers, teachers, the principal, school board, central administration, other newsletter chairmen, PTA council officers, and the local newspaper.

What should a newsletter contain?

First, think of the audience and ask, “What do they *need* to know?” In order to compete with the evening news, *Picket Fences*, telephone calls, and frisky children, the newsletter must contain material worth reading.

Here are some hints on what kinds of information to include:

PTA News: membership information (not just requests for money); press releases from National PTA; items of interest from the state PTA bulletin; news from the cultural arts chairman, safety chairman, juvenile protection chairman, etc.; news of National PTA projects and activities; news of state PTA programs, projects and activities; news from units and councils; PTA president’s message or an interview with the president.

Parenting News: excerpts from articles in *Our Children*; information on legislation that affects children and schools and what to do about it; excerpts from articles in *What’s Happening in Washington*; parent education programs; community resources; excerpts from newspaper and magazine articles; community news; healthful snack recipes; safety tips; health information (from school nurse); reading suggestions from the local library; other information from government agencies, nonprofit associations, educational organizations, and family agencies (ask to be put on their mailing lists).

School News: school activities and events; calendar with dates and school lunch menu; news of individual classes; aspects of an instructional program with background possibly written by a teacher; school news; school board decisions and news; biographical sketches, interviews with teachers, the principal, school nurse, counselor, and community leaders; student articles

The editor’s role

The newsletter editor’s task is no small one, but the rewards can be great.

- A good editor stays informed about what is happening in the school, PTA, community, field of education, and legislation. This is accomplished by reading, talking to others, and attending meetings.
- The editor needs to have a good picture of the newsletter’s readers—what their concerns and interests are—and plans articles accordingly.
- The editor is responsible for establishing a certain style and then editing according to that style.
- The editor also establishes a schedule, gives article assignments, locates writers, conducts interviews, manages reporters, and coordinates all the pieces so that the issues come out on time.
- Other tasks the editor may do include design, layout, and paste-up; typing, locating a printer; investigating ways to distribute the newsletter; taking photographs; proofreading; checking accuracy.
- It is a wise idea to think small at first. Concentrate on producing a meaty, information-filled one-page (front and back) newsletter that comes out regularly, on time. It’s better to produce a concise publication that everyone wants to read than a long document that sits on coffee tables gathering dust.

Excerpts taken from an article by Pamela Reynolds, Past Editor of *PTA Today*, now *Our Children*.