How to Start a High School or Middle School Newspaper  
(So you have been asked to advise the school paper)  
Also useful to yearbook sponsors  
By Susan Newell, MJE

1. Recruit a staff
   - Ask students to apply to be on the staff. See the final pages of this guide for an application.
   - You need writers, photographers, artists and people who are good on the computer.
   - Order a sample staff manual from the JEA (Journalism Education Association) bookstore until you have time to create one for your staff. A staff manual will list staff positions and their duties as well as your newspaper policies.
     - You may also create your own stylebook that will list things like the point size you want bylines, etc. You may attach this to your staff manual as an addendum. I add our staff manual to our syllabus.

2. Find a printer or publisher.
   - Many schools use their local newspaper publisher. I used The Tuscaloosa News to print our school newspaper until The New York Times purchased them and our service became slow and our turn around was several weeks, so the news in our paper was too old. The Tuscaloosa News is now owned by the Halifax Media Group, so they may agree to print your newspaper.
   - You may also transmit your paper over the Internet and your turn around time will be two or three days. We have used the printers below.
     - J & S Printing in Birmingham, Alabama. They have a wonderful web site that offers help to new advisors and has links to scholastic press associations. Their web site is www.jsprinting.com.
   - You may place a PDF of your print newspaper online using issuu.com/.
   - Create an online newspaper using Wordpress.com.
   - Use social media to help get important news to students. We use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

3. Create a budget
   - Talk to your publisher about a rate chart. They will charge you by the number of pages and the number of papers you print. Color is extra. White paper is extra. Newsprint is included in the price. Sometimes folding your paper is extra.
     - Decide how many times a year you will publish. I suggest you publish only about two times your first semester. I would go slowly until you learn what you are doing. We print about once a month or eight times a year. It costs us about $450 to $500 each time we publish an eight-page paper. Our printing costs run about $4,000 each year.
   - We have used about three cartons of 8 1/2 by 11 copy paper and two cartons of legal size copy paper each year, but we did not use that much this year, as a lot of our editing is done online now using Word and Google Docs which saves paper.
   - Budget for printer cartridges unless they are provided by your school.
   - We use a digital Canon Rebel for photographs. You can find one online, sometimes with a zoom lens for about $500 if you look hard enough.
   - We spend almost $500 each year on contests and memberships to scholastic organizations.
I suggest you buy red editing pens, black art pens and miniature legal pads for reporting information. Allow about $250 for incidentals.

- We need about $6,000 each year to operate.
- Check with SNO to see what they charge.

4. Secure funds

- Sell ads. If you give the newspaper to every student and place the newspaper online, advertisers get a great value for their money because every student and staff member will get a copy of the newspaper. A sample ad contract can be found on the last page of this guide.
  - Start early – the summer before school starts is best. (Remember you are competing with other schools and every other organization on your campus.)
  - Role-play ad sales – make sure students stress how the advertiser will benefit from purchasing the ad. Ads are not contributions but are a bargain for businesses that have products or services to offer teenagers. School newspaper ads are the cheapest way to target students.
  - Survey schools near you to see what they are charging for their ad space. I have attached an ad contract from the paper I advise as a guide.
  - We also survey students to see how many work, how much money they have to spend and what they spend their money on. This is good information to provide advertisers.
  - Establish a client base and go back to the same advertisers every year. Make sure you make advertisers happy with their advertisement.
  - Get ads pre-approved by advertisers before you go to press and send thank you notes along with a copy of your paper after you print.

- Ask your school board for funds. You do not have much if any time to fund-raise if you print in a timely manner.

5. Locate a classroom and secure materials.

- Your classroom needs to be large if possible, and you need to have several large tables for meetings. As a staff you need to plan the paper, brainstorm story ideas, an editorial idea, an editorial cartoon idea, etc. so you need space to meet.
- You need a phone, so you can contact advertisers, and so you can conduct interviews with persons who are off campus.
- You also need use of a fax machine and email, so you can communicate easily with advertisers and sources for stories. All of my students have a Gmail account.
- Ideally, you need a computer for every student. The software and graphics you use to publish dictate the kind of computer you must have. You can publish with two or three high-end computers, but you will not be as competitive in contests nor will you be able to come out as often. Designing pages takes a lot of time, and you need fast computers.
- You need at least one top of the line Laser printer, ideally one that can be networked. I try to have a few inexpensive printers as backups, and so we can print and edit often.
- A flatbed scanner or scanning capability is necessary, so you can scan artwork for your publication.
- You need a 35mm digital camera, so you can get quality photos. We have had good luck with Cannon Rebels; they are sturdy and take excellent photos.
- Software:
  - Microsoft Word or Google Docs. I like the editing features in both.
  - Adobe InDesign and Photoshop (industry standards).
  - Adobe Illustrator if you can afford it.
  - Adobe offers packages of software that include InDesign, Photoshop, and Illustrator.

**NOTE about page design software:** Some beginning newspaper sponsors use Microsoft Publisher because it is inexpensive, but I suggest that as soon as you can get a better design
program because your graduates are marketable and can get jobs straight out of high school if they know an advanced design program like InDesign. Some newspaper sponsors prefer Macs because the professional press often uses that operating system, but I prefer a PC because most school systems, including mine, use this operating system. There is not a lot of difference in the operating systems. I learned PageMaker (preceded InDesign) at a workshop on a Mac, but then had to use a PC at school. Photoshop helps you clean up photos and artwork. Illustrator helps you create and manipulate attractive text.

- You will also need tables for computers that are at the appropriate height for students working on keyboarding and designing.
- I have also found the following helpful:
  - A LCD projector helps you teach layout and editing skills.
  - An opaque projector is handy for displaying handouts from workshops.
  - A light table, a T-square, rulers and a paper cutter help you design attractive ads and graphics for the paper.
  - A podium is handy for teaching and meetings.
  - You need a storage unit to help you organize old newspapers.
  - You need a file cabinet with scholastic newspapers you have collected at workshops and examples of good professional papers across the country.
- You need a bookcase to hold resource books. Try to collect the following books as soon as you can. Most of these books can be ordered from the JEA bookstore.
  - The newest edition of the AP Stylebook.
  - Columbia Scholastic Press Association's Stylebook for Scholastic Journalism.
  - Columbia Scholastic Press Association’s Scholastic Newspaper Fundamentals.
  - Elements of Style by Strunk and White
  - A new dictionary (Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language is used by the AP Stylebook). We use dictionary.com, vocabulary.com, and thesaurus.com.
  - A grammar book
  - One Word, Two words or Hyphen book (Can be ordered from the JEA bookstore).
  - Textbook: I prefer Journalism Today, but Journalism: Writing for Publication is also helpful.
  - Miniature legal pads are useful for interviews.
  - Black rollerball pens are needed to outline black and white artwork.

6. Join scholastic press associations. I suggest that at first you join just your state and one national association because membership can be expensive. The web site for each organization is very helpful. Begin an honor society for student journalists through Quill & Scroll as soon as you can if your school does not have one.

- Journalism Education Association (JEA) [www.jea.org](http://www.jea.org), offers certification for journalism educators and cosponsors national conventions twice a year. JEA has a bookstore for journalism educators and provides curriculum to members online, including [www.jeadigitalmedia.org/](http://www.jeadigitalmedia.org/), which has materials for digital media.
- Alabama Scholastic Press Association (ASPA) [www.aspa.ua.edu/](http://www.aspa.ua.edu/), sponsored by The University of Alabama, holds summer and fall workshops and a spring convention. They provide critiques and contests.
- National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA) [http://www.studentpress.org/nspa/](http://www.studentpress.org/nspa/) is the primary national organization and resource for journalism students. NSPA cosponsors a national workshop in the fall and spring. It also provides a critiquing service and contests.
- Student Press Law Center (SPLC) [www.splc.org](http://www.splc.org) is an advocate for student free press rights. Provides information, advice, and free legal service to students and educators who work with them.
**Southern Interscholastic Press Association (SIPA)** [http://sipa.sc.edu/](http://sipa.sc.edu/) at the University of South Carolina in Columbia offers workshops, contests, and critiques. At their convention in March, they have good workshop presenters and a lot of activities for advisors. It is an excellent workshop for new advisors who want to learn how to be a better advisor.

**Columbia Scholastic Press Association** [www.columbia.edu/cu/cspa](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cspa) is a prestigious national organization at Columbia University in New York City that provides workshops, a convention in March, a critiquing service, and contests.

**Quill & Scroll Society** [quillandscroll.org/](http://quillandscroll.org/) provides an honor society for student journalists and offers a critiquing service and contests.

7. **Attend scholastic press workshops.**
   - You and your students can learn how to have a better publication

8. **Have your publication critiqued and enter contests.**
   - Then publicize your victories.

9. **Reward your students.**
   - Give them pats on the back. (Let every student have a pad of sticky notes. They write something nice about everyone else in the class or congratulate everyone else in the class on something they did for newspaper. Then they give it to the other students by patting them on the back.)
   - Take them out to eat. Even if everyone buys his own, it is still a treat.

10. **Plan to work after school with students.**
    - If you want to have a good publication it will take a lot of extra time.

11. **Spend time with family or do something for yourself.**
    - You can let yourself do nothing but work on your publication. Make an effort to do something for yourself and your family every once in a while, so you do not burn out.

**ADVICE from newspaper advisors**

**Donna Morgan**, former newspaper advisor at Opelika High School

**How did you go about putting your paper together?**

Only about three or four students work on layout. Everyone writes. We brainstorm for ideas, then divide into sports, news, features and those editors give out ideas for stories and students volunteer. We discuss as a class editorial ideas, and the entire staff chooses the staff editorial (sometimes after much discussion). We have deadlines for drafts and for final copy.

**What advice would you offer new advisors?**

My advice to new advisors is to be organized. Organization skills are most important. They must also have an evaluation plan in place from the beginning. Students must be held accountable for what they do in the newspaper class; they must have specific guidelines and boundaries. Also, the more ASPA functions they can attend the better.

**Larry Haynes**, former newspaper and broadcast advisor at Montevallo High School

**How did you go about publishing your paper at Montevallo?**

We published our newspaper every two weeks and planned each page in advance with assignments. Each student had to contribute at least four articles during a six weeks grading period. If they did more than four articles, they received grades for their best four articles. They were counted off for missing deadlines.
How did you go about putting your paper together?
Editors were responsible for laying out particular pages, and they also evaluated the entire staff for their work with each publication. Staff members were also required to turn in a self-evaluation on how they completed their assignments at the end of each publication cycle. Photographers were graded on quality of pictures taken, and they were also expected to meet deadlines.

What advice would you offer new advisors?
My first advice to new advisers would be to contact veteran journalism teachers. They can get good advice by contacting ASPA for names, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses. There's no need to “reinvent the wheel.” Learning how veteran advisers organize a staff, raise money, work on a publication, and evaluate students is the easiest way to become a successful publications adviser. New teachers should also join ASPA, obtain other scholastic publications to review and pick up some ideas, and take their staff to as many good workshops as possible. I also suggest joining at least two national press associations, send in your publication each year to be critiqued, and take your students to an out of state workshop at least every other year. Next, make being on your staff a privilege and fun. Celebrate birthdays, staff milestones, and always mix your high expectations with a positive attitude.

Katie Burnside, former newspaper advisor at Homewood High School

How did you go about publishing your paper at Homewood?
I would let the students brainstorm topics. We would try to cover all aspects of the student body. They would then divide up the topics. They would go out interviewing, then write their stories, and then type them in Word. I required at least two people to proofread every story before placing it on the page. For all but the last year, it was during lunch/study hall and not even a class, so I had to make it enjoyable and couldn’t hold grades over them for motivation.

How did you go about putting your paper together?
Most of the years I had one to three people who could work the design software. They were the ones to place the stories on the pages. I let the staff all have input as far as deciding what went on which spreads. They then had more ownership. We all wrote headlines and captions together as a staff. We were small, so this worked well.

What advice would you offer new advisors?
Get involved in the national organizations and attend conventions. You pick up so much by attending as many classes as possible. Stay up on the technology. Don’t be afraid to admit to the students that you don’t know how to do something on the computer. They love teaching you things about technology.

Susan Newell advised the newspaper at Eastwood Middle School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama for 13 years and at Central High School for six years. She currently advises the newspaper at Northridge High School. She advised the yearbook at Eastwood Middle School for ten years, at Central High School for six years, and at Northridge High School for ten years.
Addendum: Hints for a Yearbook Sponsor

1. Find a yearbook company. I would recommend one of the four major companies. Do not consider a small company, as they will not be able to provide you with the service a major company can. Find a company that offers what you want and stick with it. They are all a little different, especially the design programs they offer. You do not have time to learn a new design program every year.
   - Walsworth [www.walsworthyearbooks.com](http://www.walsworthyearbooks.com).

2. Helpful materials
   - You need most of the materials listed for newspaper.
   - Columbia Scholastic Press Association’s *Scholastic Yearbook Fundamentals*.
   - The yearbook company will send you a kit with some supplies you need.

3. Helpful advice
   - Yearbook *copy* is written like newspaper copy.
     - Every double page needs copy.
   - Every picture needs a caption.
     - The first sentence should be in present tense and should tell what is happening at the time the picture was shot. It should not be obvious in the picture.
     - The second sentence should be in past tense and should give some history behind the picture.
     - The third and fourth sentence should give additional background information and may include a direct quote from someone in the picture or someone not in the picture that knows about the event.
   - Photos
     - Should show action. No posed photos.
     - Should be shot close.

3. Money
   - One thing you must always be thinking about when advising a yearbook is money. It is very easy to run short of money because yearbook companies will add extra costs to the agreed upon and signed contract. Be careful that you know what everything cost and always ask if this is included in the contract price. Be especially careful when you pick the cover for the yearbook, as it can be very expensive and not included in the contract price.
   - Try to keep some money in surplus and keep close tabs of all money.
     - negotiate with several yearbook printers to get the price you need.
     - lock the yearbook company into a contract price for three years. (Yearbook companies increase their prices every year.)
     - increase yearbook ad sells by adding incentives (free T-shirts, yearbooks, etc.)
     - make sure all advertisers pay for their ads by the deadline you set each year.
     - keep a close check on charges by the yearbook company and the costs agreed upon in the yearbook contract and make certain that you do not pay for things that were not agreed upon in the contract
     - sell digital photographs not used in the yearbook at the end of the school year by posting them on an online photo sales site.
     - increase the sale of senior ads
       1. send senior ad letters to parents in the spring of the student’s junior year.
       2. make announcements and banners announcing the availability of senior ads.
2014-2015 Application The Northridge Reporter

Date _________________

(Check all that apply) I want in Journalism I (class all year)______, Journalism II (2nd class all year) _____.

Please print

Name: ___________________________ Birthday: ________ Grade level 2014-2015 __________
Home phone: ___________________ Cell phone: ___________ e-mail ______________________
Parent’s name: ___________________ Parent’s work phone: _________________________
Mother’s email _______________ Father’s email _____________________________
Home (mailing) address & zip code: ________________________________________________

English teacher’s name (this year): _______________________ GPA ________
List the classes you plan to take in 2014-2015
1. __________ 5. __________
2. __________ 6. __________
3. __________ 7. __________
4. __________

Do you have a computer at home? _______________ Do you have a personal laptop?_________
Do you have a Dropbox? ______ Do you use Google Drive? ________ Do you have Gmail? _________
Do you have a Facebook account? ______ Do you use Twitter? ______ Do you have a blog? _________
What other social media do you use?

Do you drive? ________________ Will you have a car to use to run errands? Yes ____ No____
Do you expect to work an after school job next year? Yes ___ No ___ If so, what job? ________________
If extra work is needed to meet deadlines on the publication will you be available to help?______________
When? Before school ____ After school ____ Lunch _______ Free time in another class ______ Advisory _____

What are your interests and goals? ________________________________

What do you want to learn in this class? ________________________________

Do you know anyone on the current staff? If so, who do you know?
Do you know someone else who would be good in this class (Is there someone you know who should be recruited for the class?)
___________________________________________________________________________________________

List the subjects you took this year, the level of the subject (Honors, AP), the grade you made and your class attendance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>ABSENCES</th>
<th>TEACHER’S SIGNATURE</th>
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Return your completed application to your English teacher and ask her to send it to Susan Newell at Northridge through intercampus mail or bring it to room 109 at Northridge. Don’t forget the teacher questionnaire.

This part is for RETURNING STAFF MEMBERS ONLY. Do not do this unless you have been on the staff before.
Position most interested in (check one).
____ Editor-In-Chief __________ Art Editor
____ News Editor __________ Advertising & Sales Manager
____ Feature Editor __________ Computer Design Editor (Page Editor)
____ Copy Editor __________ Distribution Manager
____ Sports Editor __________ Photographer (must be present at events)
____ Infographics Editor __________ Reporter Write a paragraph stating why you are interested in

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TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE (NEWSPAPER)

(TEACHING NAME) _______________

Subject Taught ________________

This student has applied for a position on newspaper or yearbook staff.

Please respond to the following questions which will help me in my evaluation of this student. Additional remarks are welcome.

1. Does this student have trouble meeting deadlines? 
   Often  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

2. Does this student use nonstandard English in writing assignments? 
   Often  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

3. Does this student have trouble working without close supervision? 
   Often  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

4. How would you rate this student in terms of absences and tardies? 
   Absences: Never  Infrequently  Frequently 
   Tardies: Never  Infrequently  Frequently

5. How would you rate this student in terms of maturity? 
   Mature for age  Average maturity  Immature for age

6. How would you rate this student in terms of overall writing skill? 
   Excellent  Good  Average  Poor

7. How would you rate this student in following directions? 
   Excellent  Good  Average  Poor

8. How would you rate this student on his ability to accept criticism? 
   Excellent  Good  Average  Poor

9. Rate this student on his ability to work well with others. 
   Excellent  Good  Average  Poor

10. What kind of job would this student do for the newspaper staff? 
    Excellent  Good  Average  Poor

Thank you for your help.
Susan Newell, newspaper and yearbook sponsor

Dear teacher: This questionnaire should be confidential. Place it in a sealed envelope if possible. Please return it to Susan Newell at Northridge as soon as possible. You may send it to me through intercampus mail if you are at another campus or place it in my box in the main office if you teach at Northridge.
**The Northridge Reporter Advertisement Contract 2014/2015**

Northridge High School  
2901 Northridge Road  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35406

Principal: Kyle Ferguson  
School Phone: 759-3590  
School Fax: 759-3605

Adviser: Susan Newell  
Newspaper Phone: 759-3590 ext. 3432  
Adviser E-mail: snewell@tusc.k12.al.us

**Complete Name of Business**  
**Address**  
**City/State**  
**Zip**  
**Phone Number**  
**Fax Number**  
**Email**

**Date of Transaction:** _______________ 2014/2015

The client agrees to purchase the indicated ad space in *The Northridge Reporter* for the designated number of issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ad size</th>
<th>Price per issue</th>
<th>4 Issues</th>
<th>8 Issues</th>
<th>Savings</th>
<th>8 Issues</th>
<th>Savings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full page 11 in. x 17 in. (one per issue)</td>
<td>$310</td>
<td>$1000</td>
<td>$240</td>
<td>$2000</td>
<td>$480</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert (8.5 in. x 11 in.)</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$850</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$1600</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 page (7.5 in. x 10 in.)</td>
<td>$160</td>
<td>$540</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$1080</td>
<td>$200</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/4 page (7.5 in. x 5 in.)</td>
<td>$85</td>
<td>$290</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$580</td>
<td>$100</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/8 page (5 in. x 4 in.)</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>$185</td>
<td>$35</td>
<td>$380</td>
<td>$60</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/16 page (5 in. x 2 in. or 2 in. x 5 in.)</td>
<td>$35</td>
<td>$110</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td>$230</td>
<td>$50</td>
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<td>Subscription for all issues of the paper</td>
<td>$20</td>
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By purchasing an advertisement, the client agrees to supply the correctly-sized advertisement copy at the time of purchase or to approve an advertisement created by *The Northridge Reporter*.

Duration of Advertisement  
*Please indicate the projected publication date(s) you would like your advertisement to run.*

Issue 1 (September 19) _____  
Issue 2 (October 24) _____  
Issue 3 (November 14) _____

Issue 4 (December 12) _____  
Issue 5 (February 6) _____  
Issue 6 (March 6) _____

Issue 7 (April 3) _____  
Issue 8 (May 8) _____

**Payment is expected on the date of purchase** unless special arrangements have been made otherwise. Make checks payable to *The Northridge Reporter* - Northridge High School.

Number of Issues _____  
Total _____  
Paid _____  
Billed _____

One copy of the issue containing the advertisement will be sent to the client immediately after publication.

Business Contact’s Name (Please print) ______________________________________________________

Business Contact’s Signature ________________________________________________________________

Student Salesperson’s Name (Please Print) ____________________________________________________

*The Northridge Reporter* expects to be an award-winning newspaper with a distribution of 1200 or more. It is read by students, teachers, parents, community leaders and city board personnel. The newspaper has several links on the web: issuu.com, Facebook, twitter, [http://northridgereporter.wordpress.com/](http://northridgereporter.wordpress.com/) and [http://nhsrecipes.weebly.com/](http://nhsrecipes.weebly.com/).

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