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Creating An Effective Newsletter

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History of the Newsletter

- Over 400 years old
- Increasing in popularity
- E-newsletters next trend



- The Newsletter made its debut in 1585 over 400 years ago.
- Newsletters continue to rise in popularity because they offer unique information to a niche audience.
- E-newsletters are becoming more popular, basically they are HTML documents that can be sent to your e-mails list without losing the graphics. There are companies and programs out there that can assist you in setting this up for your PTA.

Your Reader



- 50% skim through
- 23% all the way through
- 27% never even open it!

A recent study regarding the reading of newsletters showed that

- about 50 percent of readers skimmed or partly read newsletter
- only 23 percent of readers read the newsletters all the way through.
- the remaining 27 percent were never even opened the newsletter.
- This is because people are afraid if they read your newsletter it will ask them to do something!

This does not mean you should throw in the towel.

- These figures show you the importance of creating an effective newsletter that gets your reader's attention right away with a good subject line and then keeps the reader interested with engaging and easy-to-read content.

Before You Begin

- Know your audience
- Plan ahead
- Write the "right" stuff



Before you even sit down at your paper or computer you need to

Know your audience

- You need to know their interests, their knowledge of the subject and their reading level.

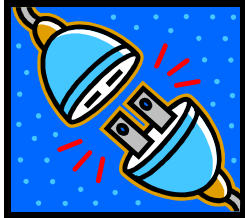
Then you need to plan ahead

- Plan what articles are to be written several months to a year ahead. Use your PTA calendar at the beginning of the year to write up master schedule of articles for the year.

After that then you need to write the "right" stuff

- Write what your audience is interested in. Write clear, concise, and interesting "news". Present tomorrow's issues today. Keep your reader up to date.
- Write about your audience and what they are doing. Include quotes from some of your membership. Feature their successes

Connect With Your Reader



- Personalize it
- Use humor
- Make it come alive!

Now you need to make a connection with your reader – how do you do that?

Personalize your newsletter

- Use a personal touch, if appropriate. Write your newsletter as though it was going to one individual directly from you - because it is. If they feel that they know you as a person, they may be more likely to call on you for additional information or read it more often.

Use humor when you can

- Humor can also help develop a relationship with your reader. However, be very careful when using any humor at all. With the written word, you lose a lot of the message. Realize that the reader may not be in the same frame of mind when reading the article, as you were when you wrote it. They may have just had a bad day and that little bit of sarcasm you laughingly included does not have that hint of levity in your voice to carry it. Sarcasm is very easy to take literally when written on paper.

Make it come alive!

- Use active verbs and personal pronouns (*you, he, she, I, etc.*). This makes it more interesting and draws the reader into the article.

Attract Your Reader



- Grab your reader!
- Use proper grammar
- Write like a child
- Does it make sense?

Once you have the connection with the reader you need to get them to actually read the newsletter. This can be done by

Make it easy on the eyes and you will grab your reader

- Write titles, pull-quotes that grab the reader. A 'pull quote' is a key phrase or quotation "pulled" from the text and used as a graphic element. Pull quotes are usually set larger than the body text and positioned to attract the reader's attention. The title, pull-quote or graphic gets them to read the first paragraph or lead. This is your opportunity to get them into the article. If you have a lousy lead, they won't find out how great the rest of the article is.

Use proper grammar

- Be consistent in your tense and person. Use correct grammar and spelling. There are many resources out there for you to use if you are uncertain.
- Spell out any acronyms or abbreviations at least the first time they are used in each issue.

Avoid technical jargon as much as possible. Write in English, not Ph.D.

Write like you are talking to your children

- If your audience is representative of the general population, write at about a 5th grade level. Lower the reading level use shorter (three syllables or less) words and shorter sentences.

Let it Go !



- Give it a break
- Pass it off

Don't feel like you have to do it all at once and that you are alone in the process

After writing your newsletter give it a break!

•Put it down for a couple of days. Would you write it the same way today? You will be amazed at how much difference just one day makes in reading your own writings.

Then let someone else deal with it

•Send it off to your PTA President and Vice Presidents (if appropriate) to read it over. Nothing is worse than sending out your newsletter and discovering you had the wrong dates and times, misspelled names, and incorrectly reported financial information. This is why **it is imperative that your president sees it BEFORE it goes out the door.**

Legality & Scheduling

- Postal regulations
- Copyright infringements
- Publishing schedule & deadlines



Next comes the legal stuff and the deadlines

Make sure it is legal

- Be aware of postal regulations, such as bulk mailing regulations, penalty mail requirements if appropriate, sorting, packing and sealing.

Be aware of copyright infringements.

- Give credit where due and quote your sources. Adding articles written by others (with permission) can add to the credibility of your newsletter. It can also give the perception of having less personal bias.

Publish regularly and post your deadline dates!

- By publishing your newsletter on a regular schedule, your readers will come to expect it. If you have regular articles announcing upcoming events or chores to be done at this time of year, they will count on your newsletter as a reminder. Failing to deliver will reduce your credibility. If you publicize your newsletter as a monthly, put it in the mail the same day every month (or at least the same week of the month). If it is a quarterly, make sure it goes out every quarter.

- Post the deadline as part of your newsletters. Use e-mail to remind your chair people and your executive board that articles are due at least one week prior to the deadline. If they can not get the article to your right away ask them to let you know if you should save a space for them in the newsletter.

Create an Effective Newsletter

- Use your front page
- Impress them with some pizzazz!



What makes a effective newsletter – one that people are going to read all the way through and actually might do one or more of the calls for actions that you printed?

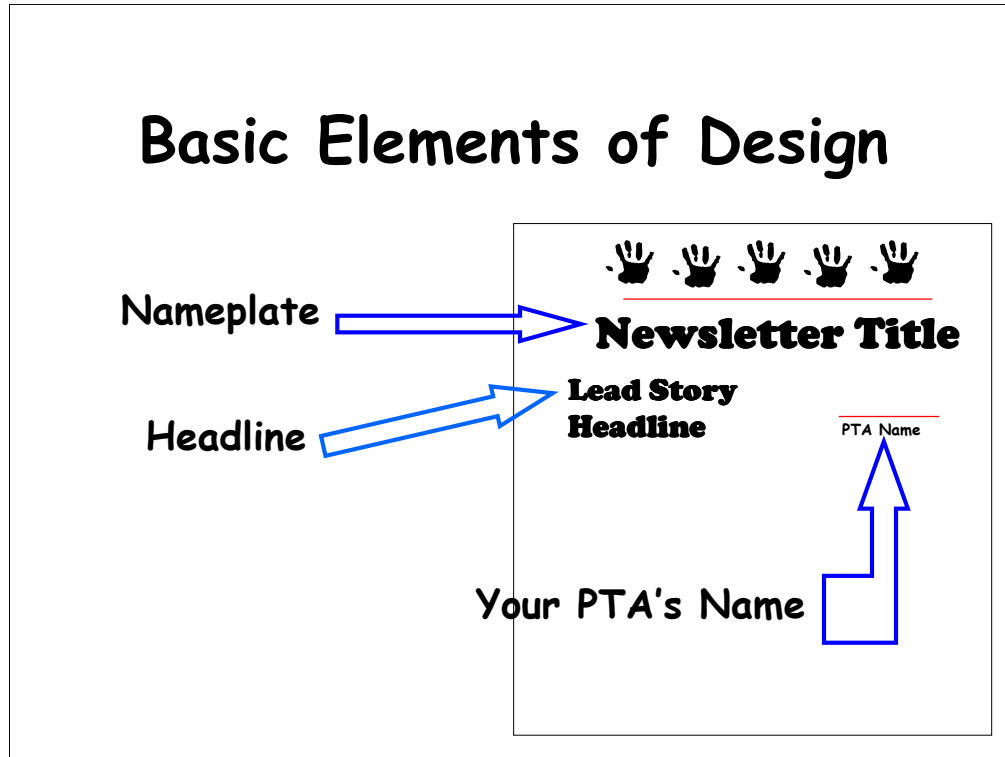
Use your front page to its potential

• First impressions last and are important! The front page of your newsletter is YOUR first impression.

Impress them with some pizzazz!

• Create a unique nameplate (banner) to go across the top of the page. While your banner is busy catching the attention of your readers, some well-chosen headlines and/or graphics should reel them in! (*Try to avoid too much body copy!*)

Basic Elements of Design



Know the basic elements of design and use this to attract readers

Nameplate

- The nameplate is the name of your newsletter set in a distinctive typeface or design. It can be a catchy phrase or description.

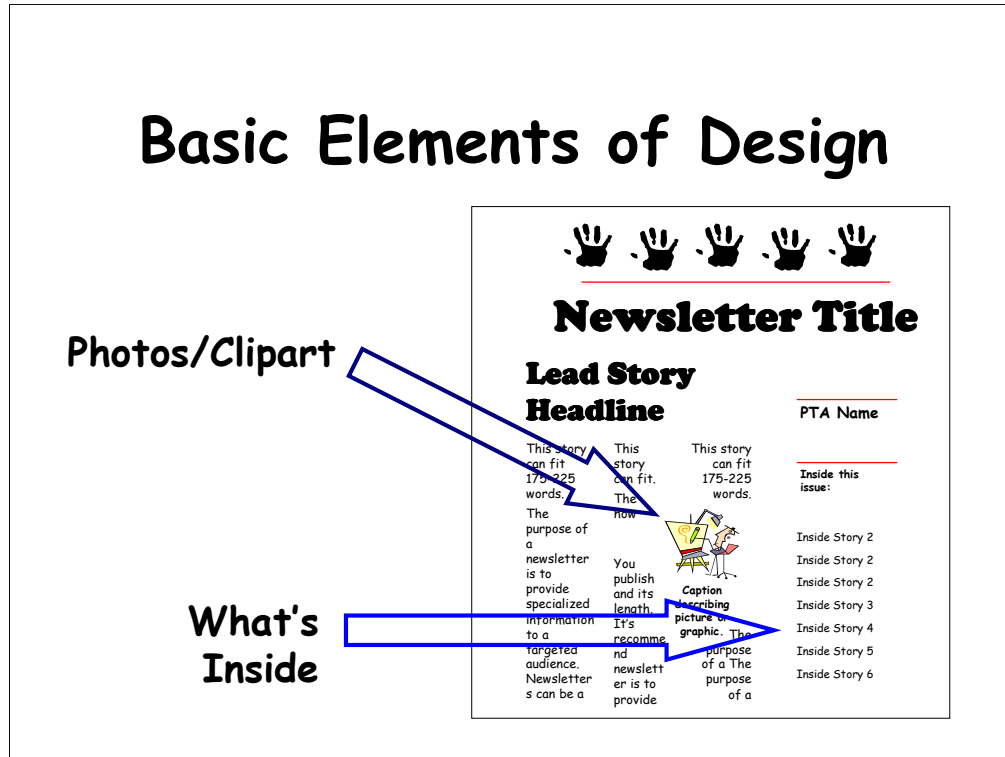
The Headline

- This is your most important story (you may choose to place the actual article inside your newsletter)

Your PTA's Name

- Let the readers know who is writing the newsletter

Basic Elements of Design



Other elements of design to attract your reader are

Photos & Clipart

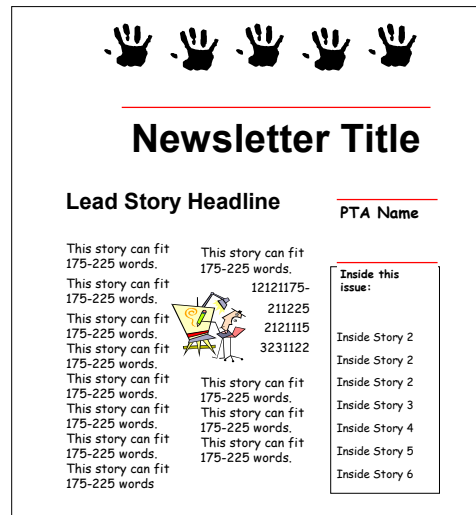
- Yes, it's true...a good picture is still worth a thousand word

A 'teaser' box

A "What's Inside" - hints and teasers to entice your readers to come inside

Bigger is Better

- Large Type Size
- Wider columns
- Bolder fonts



As far as the front page bigger is better!

Extra readability

- can be gained by using a larger type size and wider column width for the text of the main story in your newsletter

Headings

- The **head, heading or headline** is a display line(s) found at the top of the printed matter.

Bolder fonts

- In most cases, the headline is usually typeset larger and bolder than the text copy below it.

Keep it Simple

We Need You!

verses

**The PTA is Currently
In Need of New
Volunteers**

- Keep it short!
- Keep it active!

A note about your headlines

Keep you headlines short!

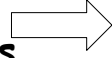
- Use three to eight short, simple words

Keep it Active!

- The headline should be active, not passive, and set in big, bold type. Use 'we' and 'I' and action verbs.

Avoid Confusion

Double
meaning words

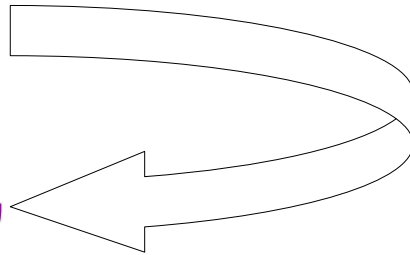


Lead?

Single or Double?

Family Night

Premeries 'Cinderalla'



Another thing to remember about headlines

Avoid double meaning works

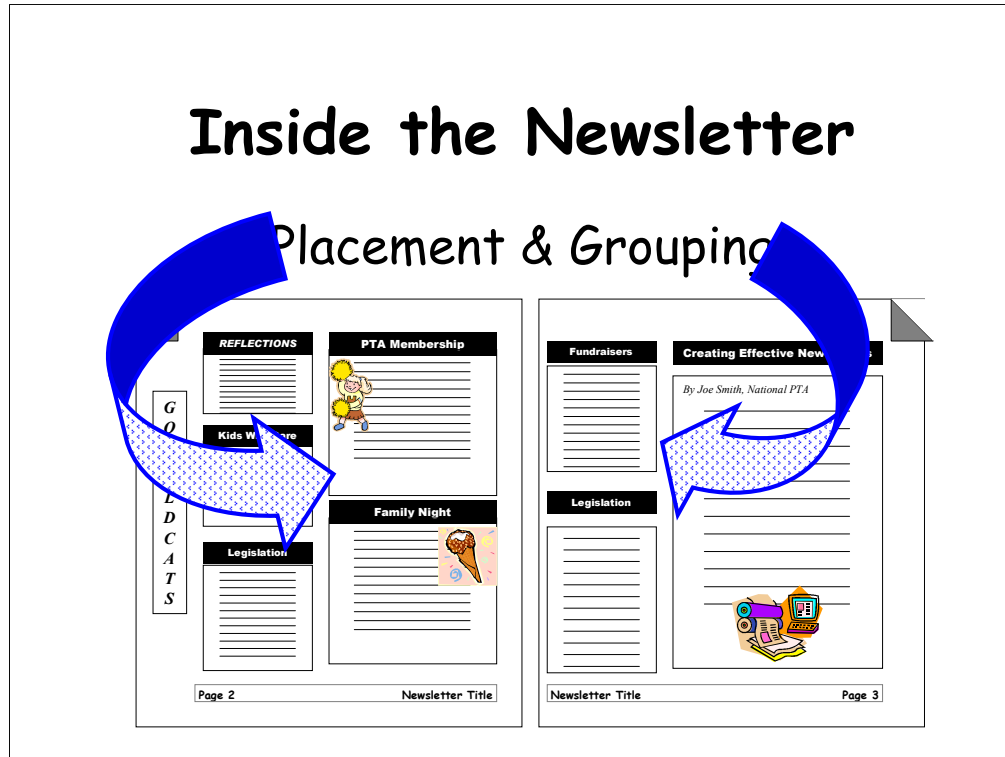
- Examples of "double meaning" words (ex. lead could be pronounced "led" or "leed")
- Use the headline to pinpoint the most interesting single idea from the article.

When using quotation marks

- If you are going to use a quote in your headline, use single quote marks rather than double quote marks.

Inside the Newsletter

Placement & Grouping



Now onto the inside or second page of your newsletter

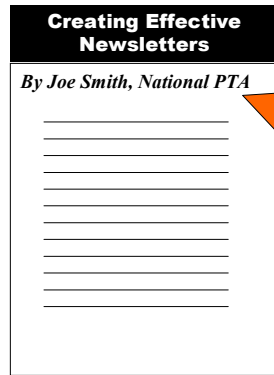
Article placement in this area is crucial

- The rule of thumb for placement of articles on the inside pages of your newsletter, is to keep the best articles and pictures on the right-hand sides.

Grouping

- Subordinate topics or groups of small paragraphs can then be set in smaller type and a narrower column width.

Bylines



▪ Definition

Placement

Bylines

- Whenever someone else contributes an article to your newsletter, they should be given credit for their piece; by using a byline, the person who wrote the article also assumes responsibility for what is written. Most of the time when an article is printed *without* a byline, readers will assume the article speaks for the entire group publishing the newsletter. Also, a newsletter without bylines, will seem cold and unfriendly
- The byline is usually set in text-size type under the headline of the article

The Meat of Your Newsletter



- Stay focused
- PTA newsletter vs. School's newsletter

What should you newsletter say?

Stay focused

• Make sure to stay focused on the task at hand. Your job is to communicate what is happening within the PTA, show the accomplishments of the PTA and get people to move into action.

The PTA newsletter verses the school's newsletter

• **The newsletter of the PTA is NOT the newsletter of the school.** Although it CAN be a part of the school's newsletter.

PTA Substance

- What's important to the PTA/PTSA
 - Advocacy
 - Legislation
 - Membership
 - Reflections Art: Program
 - PTA Programs/Events



What does the PTA write about?

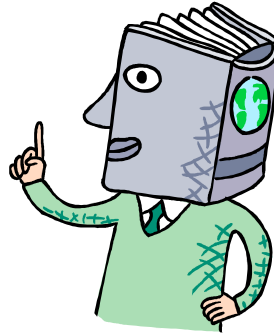
Write about what's important to the PTA/PTSA

- **Advocacy:** we are here to speak for those who can not speak for themselves write about what the PTA is doing for all of the children.
- **Legislation:** Advertise the Member to Member Network, write Legislative Alerts, what's happening in Madison
- **Membership:** encourage, promote and offer the benefits of membership.
- **Reflections Art:** Advertise the program, advertise deadlines, students who have entered, past winners.
- **Programs:** advertises the National PTA programs, local meetings, PTA sponsored student events and family events. Make sure to include correct times, dates, places - they won't come if they don't know about it or where to go!

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Other Articles

- 'How-To' Articles
- Tips, Ideas, etc.
- Guest Articles



Other Articles of interest

Write 'How-To' Articles

• You can write how-to articles about almost anything. People love how-to articles! Here are some sample titles...

- How to Go to Get Your Kids to Study
- How to Make Your Mornings Great
- How To Communicate with Your Child's Teacher

Give a Certain Number of Tips, Ideas, etc.

• People love articles that promise to give a certain number of tips. These articles are also easy to write. For example you can easily find 3 tips about any topic and turn it to an article.

Use Guest Articles

- Don't feel like writing an article or just don't have the time? No problem. You can publish someone else's article in your newsletter for free.
- Since it's much easier to copy and paste a written article than spending time on writing your own, you may be tempted to use guest articles as your main article in many of your issues. **Don't do it too often.** Since the goal of your newsletter is to show your audience your expertise in the field. If you don't write the majority of your newsletter articles yourself, how can you prove your expertise?

Break it up with Graphics



Clip Art



Borders



Photos

A great technique for breaking up the text so it does not appear to be daunting is to break it up with Graphics

- Clip art is available from a number of sources (including online) that produce this material in book form or by a monthly subscription service (usually for a fee).
- Typically to find clipart you must search on keywords

Using Photos

• Most people like to see photos of actual people. So if you are able, invest in a photo editing program so that you can crop, enhance, adjust the gradient of the picture. Keep in mind that photos do not always copy as well as they appear in your final copy.

Borders

Borders can be used to create interest to your newsletters. There are countless number of borders out there to be used and they draw the eye to the area that they are being used.

Grammar 101



- Writing in the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd Person
- Contractions

- Numbers in the middle
- Numbers in the beginning

Writing in the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd Person

- When you are writing in:
 - First Person, use "I," "me," and "we." This refers to the person who is speaking.
 - Second Person, use "you." This refers to the person who is listening.
 - Third Person, use "he," "she," "it," and "they." This refers to the person or thing the writer (speaker) is talking about.

Contractions

- Contractions are generally accepted in most non-academic writing (feature stories). When used in a conversational tone, they help to add personality and users will find your articles easier to read. Some of the most common contractions include:

it's (it is), he's (he is), who's (who is), let's (let us), I'm (I am),
won't (will not)

Numbers in the middle

- If you are using numbers in your articles, the rule of thumb is to write out numbers one through nine and use numerals for everything else that is 10 or higher.

The exceptions are: street addresses, time of day and date, page and chapter numbers, percentages, temperatures, money, ages, channels, unions, sports scores, voting results, and proper names like 7-Up!

Proofreading



- How many times?
- Changing copy

Proofreading

- Not sure how many times to proofread an article? Easy! Keep proofreading until you are absolutely, positively convinced there are **NO ERRORS** anywhere!

Can you change the copy?

- One sure-fire way to get a writer to quit writing for your newsletter is to completely rewrite an article without discussing it with them beforehand. They will feel extremely insulted and as though their work is of little value to you. Unless you know what the writer knows about the subject, you may have also inadvertently changed the entire point of the story. Not sure what to do? Except for correcting glaring errors, go ahead and leave the story alone.

Errors



- Spelling errors
- Grammar errors

What do you do about spelling errors?

- The only time you should change the spelling of a word when you are typing from a manuscript, is when you are **ABSOLUTELY** sure the word is misspelled. If you are not the original author and you are in doubt, contact the person who wrote the article.

Correcting grammar mistakes?

- Be careful when you are correcting grammar; common usage does **NOT** always mean the copy is incorrect. As with suspected misspelled words, if in doubt, contact the author of the piece.
- Read out loud. Here's a little trick that will help you find missing words or awkward sentences: Read your text out loud! By hearing what you have written, you will easily determine if it "sounds" correct.

Read backwards: Have you looked at your text over and over, but are still concerned as to whether there may be a typo or a word left out?

Try reading what you've written - backwards (right to left). This forces you to say each word and see exactly what you have typed. Your brain will not "automatically" fill in words as it sometimes does when reading normally (left to right).

Stinky Articles

- Rewriting articles
- Giving constructive criticism



What do you do with articles that are not written very well?

Should you rewrite articles?

Unless you are familiar with a particular topic, have personally done the research, or conducted the interview on a news article, you probably don't have all the information or facts to do a complete rewrite of another writer's work. (Besides, that's not your job!) Instead, suggest revisions.

How do you give the writers constructive criticism?

Editing should be a learning experience. You should be able to explain why you made changes to copy without bruising egos. The same philosophy that applies to raising children can be used here, "Choose your battles." It will do more harm than good to criticize every little mistake a writer has made. Instead, point out the most significant problems and focus on those. Give suggestions, rather than demands, and praise their strong points. A little bit of kindness can go a long way.

The Final Details



- Newsletter length
- Paper sizes
- Paper colors
- Clean copy!

The final details

Newsletter length

- Generally, you will be able to adjust the size of your newsletter to the amount of information you'll be providing. You can assume you'll have space for 3 to 6 items per 8-1/2x11" size page.
- A newsletter for a small company, such as a daycare or home-based business, is best kept to two pages (one 8 ½ x 11" sheet). At the most you should only have four pages (either two 8-1/2x11" or one 11x17 with a half-fold) or eight pages (two 11x17 with a half-fold). Cost is another factor that will determine size.
- Readers usually like to finish a newsletter in about 4-5 minutes...if your newsletter takes longer than that, they will start to lose interest.

Know your paper sizes

Knowing standard paper sizes will help you choose the size that is best for your newsletter (and determine the press it will run on). If you are printing a single sheet, 8-1/2"x11" works well. Newsletters with four pages or more are usually run on 11"x17" stock with a half-fold.

Know what paper color works best

The most effective colors of paper to choose for printing your newsletter are: white, ivory, cream, or "natural." You can also help out the environment by selecting recycled paper.