

Your Job as Newsletter Editor

By Selena Butler, Sunshine School PTA President

As the editor of your PTA newsletter, it is your role to provide your members with information that is clear, concise and correct.

It is also your job to present the information in a way that is attractive and easy to read.

This is a challenge. However, as with so many PTA jobs, it's also an opportunity for learning, creativity and growth.

This mock-up newsletter provides information on how to be an editor, as well as ideas for the design and layout of your own publication.

There are many other sources for ideas as well. Look at newsletters from other PTAs or organizations and examine how they are put together. Check your bookstore or library for books on newsletter production. Desktop publishing programs usually have templates that will help you design your publication.

Take your job seriously. Your newsletter will represent your PTA to your membership and the community. Do your best to make sure there are no spelling, grammar or punctuation errors.

The appearance of your newsletter may vary with the level of school it represents. PTA units at elementary schools may have more casual, playful layouts, while high school PTA newsletters will likely be more professional looking. Most important is for your publication to reflect your community.

Be sure your newsletter reflects the PTA basic policies. PTA is noncommercial, nonsectarian and nonpartisan. Respect all of the cultures in your school community and do not jeopardize your nonprofit status by advertising for businesses.

And finally, never distribute the newsletter until it has been read by at least two proofreaders and until it has been read and approved by the PTA president and the school principal.



Selena Butler

Layout tip: When using a picture, be sure the person faces *into* the page.

Information about Mailing Your PTA Newsletter

To use a bulk mail permit, you must mail at least 200 pieces. PTA may receive nonprofit bulk mailing rates, but you must apply for the rate at your post office and pay an annual fee. Nonprofit bulk mailing rates depend on the weight of your newsletter and the number mailed, and are about half of first class rates.

If your PTA council or district has a nonprofit bulk mailing permit, your PTA can save on annual fees and mailing costs by using the same permit number. Check with your council or district before using the account.

Current first class standard mailing rates are based on size, rather than weight. An 8.5x11 newsletter may be mailed for \$.58 apiece if it is folded in half and taped.

Many school districts and county departments of education have their own mail systems for delivering items to their departments and schools. Your PTA may request to use this system for the distribution of newsletters and other PTA materials. However, newsletters going to the homes of members would still have to be sent via United States Postal Service (USPS).

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Sunshine School PTA

Make it easy for the reader to identify and find your PTA. List the following items:

- Name of the unit, council or district PTA.
- Contact information (units should use school address; council and district PTA should use office or mailing address).
- Name of other PTA levels to which the unit belongs (council and district PTA, California State PTA and National PTA).
- An e-mail address and phone number, so that the PTA can be reached for more information.

Sunshine School PTA

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Anytown, CA 92867
(555) 123-4567
SunshinePTA@abc.com
www.SunshinePTA.org

A member of:

ABC Council PTA
Fortieth District PTA
California PTA
National PTA

You may also list the names of the principal and PTA officers, with phone numbers and/or e-mail addresses, with their approval. Some PTAs use one email address, then an officer forwards the email to the appropriate officer or chairman.

California State PTA The Communicator, July 2010

Make Your PTA Newsletter Attractive to Your Readers

By Phoebe Hearst, Sunshine School PTA Editor

A newsletter with nothing but text is gray and uninviting.

On the other hand, a newsletter with numerous font styles and sizes, packed with graphics, looks cluttered and confusing.

Aim for a newsletter that is clean, simple, and attractive to the reader. Here are some ways to make that happen:

- Use a two- or three-column layout. You can vary this from page to page.
- Pick no more than three fonts for articles and headlines, and use them consistently.
- Leave white space between articles and around pictures. Horizontal white spaces are particularly calming to the eye.
- Use photographs and graphics judiciously. Create a balance among the text, graphics and white space on each page.
- Do not use all capital letters in headlines or articles. This implies shouting and is difficult to read.
- Use italics sparingly — for book titles or to highlight something important.
- Break up the page by putting short articles or announcements in boxes.
- Try to avoid “widows” and “orphans” — single lines at the end or beginning of a column.
- Ragged columns are easier and quicker to read. Justify both sides of the column for a clean, professional look.

What Goes in Your PTA Newsletter?

By Patty PTA, Sunshine School PTA Secretary

What do you put in your newsletter?

Your president and other officers and chairmen will want to include articles about important meetings and events. If your PTA is a unit, invite your principal to submit an article for each issue.

It's a good idea to give each of these people a schedule showing newsletter deadlines and publication dates for the entire year. Remind them to keep articles brief and concise, and let them know that you will edit articles for length and form. Send timely deadline reminders before each issue.

Be sure to give each writer a byline, identifying his or her position in your organization.

Don't forget that you can use information or articles from the publications and web sites of National PTA, California State PTA, or your PTA district or council. Be sure to give credit to the source in your own publication.

Write Articles that are Easy to Read

Like all parents, our PTA members are busy people.

Make it easy for them to read your newsletter by keeping your articles brief, crisp and readable.

Here are some ideas:

- Most people skim when they read and many do not finish reading articles. Put the most important information at the beginning.
- Keep articles short and concise; three to five paragraphs, if possible.
- Split long paragraphs into shorter ones.
- Trim unnecessary verbiage out of long sentences. For example, "All of the fifth grade students in Mrs. Brown's class were excited and thrilled on the day that they received the CD player that was donated by the PTA" could be shortened to say "Mrs. Brown's fifth grade students were thrilled about the CD player donated by the PTA" (15 words, as opposed to 29.)
- Use the active voice. Instead of: "The Math Night at Sunshine School was attended by 100 students and parents," write "One hundred students and parents attended Math Night at Sunshine School."
- Use bullets, when appropriate, but not for every article.

How to be an Expert Editor

By Alice Birney, Sunshine School PTA Vice President, Ways and Means

Don't be afraid to edit the articles that other officers or chairmen give you for the newsletter. Your officers will appreciate it if you make them look good!

Correct grammar and punctuation errors, trim down lengthy sentences, split long paragraphs into shorter ones, and make sure the information is clear and easy to understand. If you make substantial changes, you can return your draft to the original writer for review to assure that you haven't lost their meaning.

If you are confused or uncertain about something written in an article, your readers will be, too. Check with the writer of the article for clarification or more information. Or go to the national, state or local PTA web site to get additional information.

Don't use acronyms (such as AYP or HSA) without explanation. Help to educate your newer PTA members.

Don't rely on your computer to tell you when you have made a spelling or grammar error. Computers make mistakes, too. For example, the last word of the previous sentence was not highlighted as an error by the computer because it is spelled correctly, even though it's the wrong word in that sentence.

Be sure to have at least two people proofread your newsletter to find those little mistakes that you just can't see anymore after staring at your publication for hours!

If you are in a PTA unit, both your principal and your PTA president *must* read and approve the newsletter before it is distributed to members.

Sunshine School PTA Calendar

September

- 3** PTA Executive Board Meeting, 3 p.m., School Library
- 6** School Carnival, 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Everyone welcome!
- 17** Family Math Night, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., School Auditorium. Call 555-6798 to reserve your place.
- 20** PTA Association Meeting, 6:30 p.m., School Library.
- 25** Honorary Service Awards Banquet, 6 p.m., Sunshine Hotel

October

- 7** PTA Executive Board Meeting, 3 p.m., School Library
- 15** PTA Association Meeting, 6:30 p.m., School Library.
- 20** Awards Assembly, 10 a.m., Quad
- 28** Red Ribbon Day observance



Show that Your PTA is Part of Something BIG!

Make sure your newsletter, web site and other materials connect you with the largest and oldest national organization dedicated to children. Everything your PTA publishes should include the official PTA logo.

Using the registered servicemark helps create a consistent, recognizable brand identity for PTA.

You can download the logo at <http://www.pta.org/members/respub/prores/logos.asp>. Use it alone, or add the name of your association.

Here are a few guidelines for using the logo:

- Always reproduce the logo with its registered trademark symbol.

- When adding your association name, use Arial Black or Helvetica Black font and center the name above the logo. Do not repeat “PTA” or “PTSA” above the logo.
- The PTA logo should always be shown in either black or corporate dark blue, or it can be shown in white, reversed out of a solid field of color. If you add your association name, it should be the same color.
- Do not change the logo by altering the spacing between letters or stacking the letters vertically.



When listing names of students in the newsletter, list the first initial and the last name only, with parent permission.

Personal Information

Do not publish, without written permission, personal information about students or adults. This includes:

- Photographs of students or adults (with/without first or full names).
- Home addresses and/or telephone numbers of students or adult.
- E-mail addresses of students or adults.
- Students or adult class schedules.

Resources and References

By Gisela Meier, Sunshine School PTA Newsletter Editor

Here are a few resources you will want to keep close to your computer for quick reference. These books will also be useful to your children as they work on school projects.

To make sure you are using the correct word, a good dictionary is essential! There are several to choose from.

Do I need a comma or a semicolon here? A grammar and punctuation reference book will answer this and other basic questions. Examples include:

- *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk and E.B. White.
- *The Essential Writer's Companion*, by Editors of the American Heritage Dictionaries.
- *The Associated Press Stylebook*.

In addition to these essential basics, there are several other books that will help you be a better editor:

- A thesaurus (several are available) or *The Synonym Finder*, by J.I. Rodale.
- Is the correct word *capital* or *capitol*? *Stationery* or *stationary*? *Continual* or *continuous*? The answers to these and hundreds of other puzzles can be found in the *Dictionary of Problem Words and Expressions*, by Harry Shaw.

If you are serious about improving your writing skills, dive into *On Writing Well*, a classic by William Zinsser that is not only very instructive, but also a delight to read.

PTA's Basic Policy Guides Your Publications

As you work on PTA newsletters, flyers, banners, or other publications, be sure to remember PTA's basic policy.

PTA is:

- noncommercial
- nonsectarian
- nonpartisan.

Noncommercial

To protect its tax-exempt status, a PTA may not promote the goods or services of a business or organization.

PTAs may acknowledge contributions and sponsorships:

The Sunshine PTA newsletter is printed courtesy of John Smith Printers.

PTAs may not endorse products or services or encourage members to purchase them. If using the name of a business or organization that has supported your school or PTA, print a disclaimer such as:

The mention of any business or service in this publication does not imply endorsement by Sunshine PTA.

Accepting advertising in PTA publications may create complications in distribution or mailing, as well as potential tax liability.

Carefully review section 6.2.2a in the *California State PTA Toolkit*.



Nonsectarian

PTA welcomes into its membership people of all cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and religious beliefs. Using graphics that pertain to any specific religious holiday violates the nonsectarian policy.

Nonpartisan

PTA does not support or oppose candidates for political office. However, PTA does take positions on issues affecting children and schools.

If your publication includes advocacy (as opposed to information) on an issue, check with your school district regarding its policies on materials distributed at school and taken home by children.

If the newsletter is mailed at PTA expense, there is no restriction on the printing of advocacy materials, except that it must comply with State and National PTA policies.

What is a Style Guide and Why do I Need One?

Do I use numerals or spell out numbers? Should titles of books be in italics or in quotation marks? Is it "preschool" or "pre-school"?

A style guide gives the answer to these and similar questions. Using a consistent style for numbers, common terms and capitalization gives your PTA publications a clean, professional look.

California State PTA's style guide for PTA publications can be found on pages 353-354 of the 2009 *California State PTA Toolkit*.

You can find the PTA style guide on the California State PTA website at www.capta.org. Just search for "style guide."

You may also refer to *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*.

Be Inclusive! Translate Part or All of Your Newsletter

By Jo Loss, Sunshine School PTA Outreach Chairman

PTAs must work closely with the school to meet the language needs of all who receive the publication.

To translate information and materials, seek help from bilingual parents on the executive board, teachers or support personnel in the classrooms or the school district, or the foreign language departments at local high schools, community colleges and universities.

Some units present side-by-side translations of articles on each page while others print or post a separate issue. Still others offer all information in English with short recaps of major information in languages needed in their school community.

The California State PTA offers grants to unit, council and district PTAs to pay for translation services. More information is available in the *California State PTA Toolkit*, Section 7.17.1. Application forms may be found in the Forms section of the *Toolkit* and on the California State PTA web site, www.capta.org.

Readers will probably see this page first!

Use this page for awards, events, or other important announcements.

Be sure to include all the important information for events:

- **Date and Time**
- **Location**
- **Cost, if any**
- **Who is invited**
- **Who to call for more information**



Sunshine School

PTA[®]

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