



GUIDELINES FOR THE NGS NEWSLETTER COMPETITION

Prepared for the National Genealogical Society
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Purpose

Editors and staff of genealogical newsletters spend a vast amount of time gathering copy, writing articles, editing submissions, creating attractive designs, and arranging for timely publication and dissemination of information. Recognizing this tremendous effort, the National Genealogical Society sponsors a newsletter competition each year to acknowledge these individuals. The competition also provides participating organizations with suggestions for further improvement of their publications.

Requirements for Submission

This competition is for newsletters only. Newsletters are periodical publications that convey information in a timely manner to a specific audience composed of readers with common interests. They are more than simply an announcement of the next meeting, a call for volunteers, and a reminder to pay dues. They usually are published more frequently than journals, include notices of events, stories of personal interest, more current information, announcements, and are generally less formal.

Newsletters that have received awards in previous competitions have included items such as announcements or notices of events; articles about local history – dealing with specific families, buildings, and /or incidents; articles about genealogical methods and resources; copies of members' pedigree charts; information about or transcriptions of local data sets or unpublished reference material; lists of the names being researched by members; queries and the responses to them; reviews of books and/or software; and stories of personal interest about organization members and/or organizational events.

Most of the prize-winning newsletters have contained at least one or two original articles in each issue.

Journals provide a variety of articles on topics of a more scholarly nature and are of interest to a broader audience. New discoveries and insights are covered in-depth as well as tools and research techniques. Journals generally are more formal in tone and do not contain topical announcements and events. Journals are not eligible for this competition.

County and local societies whose publications consist of lists of genealogical information and indexes are not considered newsletters and are not eligible for this competition.

1. Newsletters will be accepted in the following three categories:
 - a. Major Genealogical and/or Historical Societies
 - b. County and Local Genealogical and/or Historical Societies
 - c. Family Associations
2. Newsletters will be chosen for the following awards in each category:
 - a. First place (one winner) will receive a one-year free institutional membership, one page in the *NGS Magazine*, and will be presented a certificate.
 - b. Runner-up (one winner) will be presented a certificate and have their winning newsletter displayed at the NGS Family History Conference.
3. Each applicant must be a National Genealogical Society member organization.
4. Newsletters will not be accepted from individuals.
5. The completed entry form and four copies of two consecutive issues from the current year must be submitted along with the completed entry form.
6. Electronic newsletters will be accepted. One copy of two consecutive newsletters from the current year along with the completed entry form should be emailed to: awards@ngsgenealogy.org, include ""NGS Newsletter Competition"" in the Subject line of your message.
7. Deadline for submission is December 15.

Other Considerations

Newsletters will be evaluated on content and on design by a panel of three judges. Sixty percent of the final score will be based on content and forty percent on design. The accuracy of genealogical content in articles will not be evaluated. We expect that "The Guidelines for Sound Genealogical Research" posted on the NGS website will be followed. The key to a good newsletter is consistency and readability.

Content (60%)

1. Statement of Purpose: A statement of purpose or mission statement should be posted in a prominent location in each issue, and the purpose of the society or association should be clearly accomplished through the content and design of its newsletter. (5%)
2. Genealogical, Historical, and Family Content: Strong genealogical and/or historical content balanced with family material for family publications is a requirement for every genealogical newsletter. Newsletter content should be suitable for the audience it is trying to reach, i.e., state or county publications should concentrate on that state or county, national publications should be more general and varied, and family publications should relate to that particular surname. (15%)
3. Variety of Interesting Feature Articles: Newsletters should include at least one or two original articles in each issue. They should be well researched, detailed, and attention grabbing. Possibly continuing from issue to issue, these could be articles on genealogical methods applied in different situations; genealogical information; human interest articles about how individuals solved various

research problems; and articles on how to use research tools such as libraries and software. These should be balanced with other, more topical material throughout the newsletter. It is important that original source information be provided for every article. (15%)

4. **Strong Audience Identification:** Articles in the newsletter should meet the aim of the society as stated in the mission statement. Members should be able to read the newsletter and find information that applies to their own areas of interest. Reprints from other publications generally do not meet this criterion but can provide useful information if carefully selected. Newsletters are often the only contact between members and organizations, and meeting the needs of those members can determine keeping or losing them. The tone of the publication should be appropriate for the organization's membership. For example, a jokesy, personal tone would not be appropriate for a newsletter with a large national membership, whereas a stiff, excessively formal or impersonal style would be inappropriate for a small family newsletter. (10%)
5. **Necessary Information:** The masthead should include clear and easily found identification of editor, organization, address, telephone number, and subscription information. This must be in every issue and in the same place in every issue along with a list of officers. Two popular locations are inside the front cover and on the back cover. It should be easily visible and readable. Each page should be numbered and show the date of publication, the volume number, the issue number and the name of the organization. Researchers will then know exactly where to find the original article when working from a copy. (5%)
6. **Well Written, Edited, And Proofed:** The standards for a genealogical society newsletter should be no different than any other publication. All good writing employs proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Material that is poorly written, contains errors in grammar and spelling, fails to follow a consistent editorial style, and contains typographical errors is unprofessional and injurious to the reputation of the society that publishes the newsletter. Good newsletter writing is usually characterized using understandable words in short sentences, arranged in short paragraphs.
A newsletter should have a consistent editorial style, i.e., a consistent way of using capital letters, punctuation, abbreviations, and numbers. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage*, or even the old standby, *Strunk and White's The Elements of Style* are guidebooks which can be used to develop an editorial style. The key to editorial style is consistency within and between issues. Changes to a style should come only at the beginning of a new volume.
Obviously proofing a newsletter should be done by someone who is a good speller, but content is just as important as spelling. Articles should always make good sense. Clear, logical expression; good grammar and spelling; and consistency of style and tone are all equally important. It should be clear to the reader that someone took the time to read the newsletter carefully before it was printed. (10%)

Design (40%)

7. **Harmony and Balance:** Continuity and consistency through each issue and between issues provides a sense of harmony and balance. Making the newsletter easy to read by putting regular articles in the same place every issue and identifying them by page design, font, graphics, or spacing will encourage readers to pick up every issue. For example, the newsletter should be limited to one or two headline styles, and the feature article should be easy to find in every issue. People get busier every day: make them want to read your publication. (5%)
8. **Typography:** Typography should be appropriate to the page by providing sufficient space between the lines and limiting the use of too many different fonts. Use larger size text for wide columns, smaller for narrow columns. Newspapers generally use 9-point type. A newsletter will generally use one typeface for text (serif for text readability) and one or two for headlines. The type should be the right size for the page, and the font appropriate for the tone and content. The science of typography is beyond most of us so it might be wise to constrain your impulses. (10%)
9. **Graphics, White Space, Color, Paper:** Graphics should be appropriate for the article they accompany and of high quality. Pictures should be an appropriate size for the page and easily identifiable. Older photos may not reproduce clearly but are often valuable and can be enhanced by layout, captions, and clear identification. If using older letters and documents which don't reproduce well, a transcription and a source citation should always be provided. The decision to use less than the highest quality graphics or photos should rest on if they add value to the story. Clip art might be used when consistent with the article. White space will provide clarity to the printed page and opens the page. Too many lines or columns on a page distract from its readability. The use of color should enhance the newsletter rather than be a distraction. The use of colored ink is often expensive and not cost effective, and colored paper can make poor copies. Care should be taken to ensure that if color is used, it is aesthetically pleasing in keeping with the overall style and tone of the publication. The quality of paper will not be part of the evaluation for newsletters submitted electronically. (20%)
10. **Organization Reflected in Overall Appearance:** The appearance of the newsletter should provide the reader with clues as to the type of society producing it. For instance, a Greek society newsletter might add a drawing or a photo of the Parthenon to its nameplate. (5%)