



# APA Media AWARDS

Print | Digital | Magazine

## 2026 APA Media Awards

Editorial Rules



**ENTRY DEADLINE:** Monday March 9, 2026

# 2026 AMA Editorial Contest Essentials

## Contest Deadline: Monday, March 9, 2026.

Deadline for receipt of entries is 11:59 PM, Monday, March 9, 2026. All entries must be entered online at [www.newspapercontest.com/Alabama/](http://www.newspapercontest.com/Alabama/) on this date. Categories that require mail-in entries must be postmarked no later than Monday, March 9, 2026.

## Contest Period:

January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025

## Number of Entries:

Only one entry may be submitted by each newspaper in categories 1-8 and in Most Improved, Best Production and Printing, Best Newspaper Website and General Excellence. **No more than four (4) entries may be submitted for categories 9-35, Best Public Service, and FOI – First Amendment Award.**

## Entry Fee/Payment:

Newspapers in Divisions A, B, C and D will pay \$8.50 per entry. Division E papers \$11.50 per entry.

## Divisions:

- A: Daily newspapers (publishing 2+ days/week) with a total paid circulation of 10,000 and above.
- B: Daily newspapers (publishing 2+ days/week) with a total paid circulation of 9,999 and below.
- C: Non-daily newspapers (publishing less than 2 days/week) with a total paid circulation of 3,001 and above.
- D: Non-daily newspapers (publishing less than 2 days/week) with a total paid circulation of 3,000 and below.
- E: Associate Member Newspapers and Active Member affiliate free circulation products (TMC's).

**NOTE:** Your newspaper division will remain unchanged going forward. For example, if you entered the 2025 contest in Division A, you will remain in Division A. APA staff will review the USPS Publisher's Statement of Ownership each year to evaluate any significant changes in paid circulation. *Newspapers wishing to compete in a different division must seek the approval of the AMA Committee.* Newspapers entering the contest for the first time will be assigned a division based on circulation.

## Eligibility:

The contest is open to active newspaper members, active member affiliate free circulation products (TMC's), and publication associate members of the Alabama Press Association. Active member affiliate free circulation products may enter the contest in Division E.

All entries must be original from your newspaper or newspaper website. They must be conceived and written by the newspaper staff members. A staff member is defined as a regularly employed, full-or-part-time person who works for your newspaper. Free-lance work is allowed only if it appears exclusively in your newspaper.

Entries in all categories may be submitted from newspaper print and online products, newspaper websites, or newspaper niche publications. This excludes magazines that are published on a quarterly basis.

**Papers entering the contest must provide at least one (1) judge per paper.**

A signed Publisher's Statement of Validity is required.

# 2026 AMA Editorial Contest Essentials

## Group Publications:

In instances in which more than one newspaper under one ownership cooperates in its news and advertising, a single piece of work can be entered by only one newspaper in the largest category. Entries for affiliates of active member papers that enter in Division E should only enter work unique to their product. For example if a story, photo, or ad is entered under the active member paper, it is not eligible to be entered in Division E under the affiliate member paper.

## Entry Prep:

All entries should be submitted as full-page PDFs or URLs, showing date of publication and paper name (no cropped pieces). Be sure to include jump pages. Note: Entries for General Excellence and categories 1-8 are required to be from specific date ranges. Check the rules for details. Also, some categories are required to be submitted as hard copies. PDF's should be print quality resolution, but please try to optimize the file to the smallest size. Articles for entry should be clearly marked so it is obvious what to judge.

## Web Categories:

If linking to a part of your website that is behind your pay wall or password-protected area, make sure to include a user name and password for the judges that will work in the months of March, April and May. Judges may disqualify your entry if work samples are inaccessible. Simply enter your paywall info into the paywall info box or Title/Outline box or create a PDF with the access info and upload when you submit your entry.

## Judging information:

Judging will be handled by newspaper professionals from another state. **The 2026 contest judging partner is the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association.** When possible, panelists from dailies will judge daily entries and those from weeklies will judge weekly entries. Judges reserve the right to disqualify entries submitted in an inappropriate category or that do not otherwise follow the criteria described herein. Decisions of the judges are final, however the APA Media Awards Contest Committee reserves the right to revoke any award found to be in violation of the contest rules. Judges will be asked to include brief, useful and constructive comments for each first place award. Comments will be published in a contest publication and distributed to all member newspapers.

## Awards:

Newspapers will receive awards at the APA Summer Convention. Not all winners will be announced prior to the banquet. Newspapers will be notified if they are among the winners in the unannounced categories.

## Special Notes:



Indicates that category has specific date requirements .



Indicates that category is a mail-in category.

Packages should be shipped to : Alabama Press Association  
AMA Entry  
2180 Parkway Lake Drive  
Hoover, AL 35244 .

Packages must be postmarked by **March 9, 2026**

## PDF Instructions

- Each entry must be less than 100 MB, but smaller files are better.
- Eliminate extra pages. Upload only the page(s) on which the entry is located.
- For multiple-page entries, combine all pages, including jumps, into one PDF.
- If you don't have Adobe Acrobat or can't figure out what to do, call APA for help.

### **Extract pages from multi-page PDFs:**

- If your entry is part of a multi-page PDF, open the PDF with Adobe Acrobat and save it with a new name.
- Open the new PDF, go to "Document" menu, select "Extract Pages" and follow the directions.
- Eliminate all pages that are NOT part of your entry. In the "Pages" panel, you can rearrange the PDFs in the order you want the judges to see them.
- Save the new PDF.

### **Combine multiple PDFs into one:**

- Each entry should consist of one single Pdf file whenever possible.
- If a category calls for more than one piece, combine the pieces into a single file for uploading to the contest platform. It is especially important that jumps are included!
- Using Adobe Acrobat, open the first PDF that you want in your entry and save it with a new name.
- Open the new PDF, go to the "Document" menu and choose "Insert Pages." Navigate to the next PDF that you want in the entry and select it.
- Continue until you have inserted all of your pages. In the "Pages" panel, you can rearrange the PDFs in the order you want the judges to see them. Save the new PDF.

### **Marking an entry on a full-page PDF:**

- Within Acrobat, you may mark your entry with an arrow or box so judges will know what to judge.
- This is especially important if you have more than one story per page.

### **Make PDF files smaller:**

- For printing, most newspaper PDFs include high-resolution images. However, contest entries will be viewed and judged on computer screens at low resolution and in RGB color.
- Changing the resolution and changing the CMYK color mode to RGB are the two most effective ways to reduce file size without sacrificing the screen viewing quality.
- Winning entries will be displayed in a printed tab, so do not reduce below average print quality.

## BASIC ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS

<http://www.newspapercontest.com/Alabama>

**The Association Code is: AlabamaPress**

Step 1 — Login to <http://www.newspapercontest.com/Alabama> . Complete rules for editorial, advertising and magazine contests are available online. Some browsers, such as Safari, will open the rules in a new window; others will require you to download the PDF file to your computer.

Step 2 — Click on the “Register” tab.

Step 3— Register on the contest website using your email address. **The Association Code is: AlabamaPress.** You will receive a confirmation email, which you will need to complete your registration. **Note: You will need separate email addresses for the Editorial, Advertising and Magazine contests.**

Step 4 — On this page, select your newspaper name. If you do not see your paper listed or if the information is incorrect, please call APA at (205) 871-7737. Your division will be selected for you based on your circulation. Fill in the preparer’s name.

Step 5 — Select “Editorial” or “Advertising” or “Magazine” to begin submitting entries. As you create entries, this field will not change unless you select to change it. All required fields are marked with a red asterisk.

Step 6 — Select the contest category. These are drop-down menus for your convenience. This field will clear each time you save an entry, so you must select a class for each new entry. When you select the class, special instructions will appear below it.

Step 7 — If necessary, provide an explanation of your entry. The explanation/cutline box is limited to 3,000 characters. It’s a good idea to write your explanation in another program, such as Word, and copy/paste into the explanation box. If a URL is required, fill in the URL box; there is no need to type “http://.”

**Step 8 —Please name/save your entry (the uploaded file) as the title of your story, ad or photograph. i.e. “APA Wins Contest” or “Sunset on the bay”** If you wish, also include the name/number of the category you are entering.

**Step 9 — Include the name of the person or people who should be credited for any award.** This is generally the writer, reporter, photographer, graphic artist, cartoonist, etc. It is not necessarily the name of the person submitting the entry nor the person picking up the award at the convention.

Step 10 — Add your file or files. You can drag and drop files or use the “Add files” button to navigate your files. Generally, files should be in PDF format except photos, which should be in high-resolution JPG format. Other files and URLs may be acceptable as noted in the special instructions. Upload as many files as are necessary to complete your entry but refer to the special instructions for any limitations. Mail-in categories must also be entered into the online system.

Step 11 — When you have completed your submission, click the “Save” button. If you click the “Back to list” button, you will lose the entry you just completed. After clicking “Save,” you will be directed back to the list of your entries. You may not change an entry, but you may delete an entry and resubmit it.

Step 12 — To submit another entry, click “Add New Entry.” As long as you have not logged out of the system, your newspaper name will still be in place and you can simply start at Step 6 again. You may log out and log back in later to continue adding entries. You will need to select your newspaper name each time you log in.

Step 13 — If you are finished submitting entries, please review the list. When done uploading all your entries, click the “Billing” button on the list page. This will take you to a page where the entry fee is automatically generated. You will have the option of paying online with a credit card via PayPal (you do not have to have a PayPal account to use this feature), phoning in a credit card payment or mailing in payment. Once payment is made, we will disable your access to the page. If you find out later that you need access, you would need to call the APA office at (205) 871-7737 or register using a different email address.

## SPECIAL CATEGORIES:

### General Excellence ONE ENTRY PER PAPER



This is the top award given in each division. Winners in the General Excellence category can be said to be consistently outstanding issue to issue.

Papers **MUST** enter the General Excellence category to be eligible to win the General Excellence award.

The judge's points awarded for your General Excellence entry are based on the following criteria:

<b>General and department news coverage:</b> Consistent newswriting quality and depth of coverage weighted heavily, with headline quality weighted less heavily.	Up to 25 points
<b>Editorials:</b> Pertinence of comment on local, national or international events.	Up to 15 points
<b>Photography:</b> Consistent technical quality, placement, composition, variety and cropping.	Up to 15 points
<b>Layout and design:</b> Overall appearance and organization; effective use of typography, illustration, general makeup, layout and presswork.	Up to 15 points
<b>Advertising enterprise:</b> Design and layout; quality and technique of copywriting; handling of classified and/or reader ads; taste.	Up to 15 points
<b>Public interest:</b> Emphasis will be on research and reporting that enhance the public service mission of the newspaper. Judges will also consider the effective use of related photographs and editorials.	Up to 10 points
<b>Mechanical excellence:</b> Evidence of craftsmanship and skill in the art of printing.	Up to 5 points

*To Enter: Select the "category name" from the online entry tab, name the entry: "General Excellence" and submit (no other fields should be filled out). You must submit this entry as a hard copy through the mail. **Submit four (4) complete newspapers, two issues of your choice** and one each from February 2-8, 2025 and August 24-30, 2025. Only **ONE** of the four issues can be from a **SUNDAY** paper.*

**Additional Notes on General Excellence** Awarding of the General Excellence prizes will be based on a point system, with the judge's points awarded for your General Excellence entries added to points you earn by winning awards in other categories. Each newspaper that wins a first, second or third place award in the other numbered Better Newspaper Contest categories will receive points toward the General Excellence award. Points will be awarded as follows: **(1)** Points you earn by winning awards in special categories 1-7, Public Service, Best Newspaper Website and FOI. (Points will be awarded as follows: 20 points for first, 15 points for second and 10 points for third). **(2)** Points awarded in categories 8-33. For each award won in these categories 5 points will be added to your General Excellence score for first place, 3 points for second, and 2 points for third. **(3)** Points awarded in the Advertising Contest. For each award won, 3 points will be added for first place, 2 points for second and 1 point for third. Winners of the Advertising Sweepstakes Award will receive the same as points won in categories 1-7 (20 points for first, 15 points for second and 10 points for third). After the judging is completed, all points will be totaled to determine the top awards given in each division.

### Best Public Service UP TO THREE ENTRIES PER PAPER

Any public service news project that culminated during 2025, even though it may have started during 2024, can be entered in this category. Projects should extend over and above the normal public service mission of the newspaper. Judges will consider the relative importance of projects, depth of research and reporting on projects. Judges will look for news stories and related editorials appropriate to the size of newspaper.

*To Enter: Submit one "project" per entry. You may enter three separate "projects". Select the "category name" from the online entry tab, name the entry what the subject or coverage is. Enter URL's or upload full-page PDF(s). Use the explanation box online to provide a statement on the service project, its goals and reasons for its success. **Entry will be disqualified if there is no summary included.***



## SPECIAL CATEGORIES:

### FOI-First Amendment Award UP TO THREE ENTRIES PER PAPER

This award recognizes excellence in reporting that highlights the importance of a free press and open government. May be one story, or it may be all stories and editorials related to a specific issue or subject. The award gives weight to four areas:

- 1) Stories that uncover actions detrimental to the public good that would otherwise have remained hidden.
- 2) Stories and editorials that lead to more openness in local government.
- 3.) Promotion of Public Notice.
- 4.) A newspaper's leadership in explaining the importance of public access to government and the newspaper's leadership in going to court, if necessary, to protect the public's right to know.

*To Enter: Submit one "issue" or "subject" per entry. Select the "category name" from the online entry tab, name the entry what the subject or coverage is. Enter URL's or upload full-page PDF(s). Use the explanation box online to provide a statement that describes the impact of the story. **Entry will be disqualified if there is no explanation included.***

### Most Improved ONE ENTRY PER PAPER



A special award will be given to one newspaper from each division that shows the greatest overall improvement in news coverage and writing, appearance and editorial vigor during the period of one year.

Judging will be based on the following:

- News coverage and writing. Improvements in both quality and quantity of news stories and photographs; the addition or revision of sections, departments, features; better editing to improve quality of editorial matter.
- Editorial vigor. Improvements made by adding an editorial page or new columns or by giving greater strength to the existing editorial section of the newspaper.
- Makeup and appearance. Improvements in format, headlines, layout and mechanical reproduction of newspaper.

*To Enter: Select the "category name" from the online entry tab, name the entry: "Most Improved". Use the online explanation box or upload a PDF to explain the changes/improvements from the previous year. Mail three (3) consecutive and complete issues published in 2024 and three (3) corresponding issues published during 2023 (dailies submit corresponding days of the week). **Entry will be disqualified if there is no explanation submitted/uploaded.***

### Best Production and Printing ONE ENTRY PER PAPER



Judging will be based on quality of production and printing. The award will go to the newspaper, not the printer, but please include the name of the printer you use.

*To Enter: Select the "category name" from the online entry tab, name the entry: "Best Production" and submit (no other fields should be filled out). **Mail one (1) complete issue of your choice.***

### Best Newspaper Website ONE ENTRY PER PAPER



The newspaper website will be randomly visited by judges a minimum of three times during **March, April or May**. This award will recognize excellence in newspaper websites based on the following criteria: **Content:** Quality of news and editorial matter; **Navigation:** Ease of finding and retrieving information from site; **Visual/design:** Evaluated on layout, use of graphics, photos, animation, color, multi-media, podcasts and other visual elements; **Advertising:** Innovative strategies and evidence of revenue generation; **Community:** Demonstration that website fulfills a "community" role.

*To Enter: Select the "category name" from the online entry tab, name the entry: "Newspaper Website". Put the link to your website in the "URL" field. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your website. See note regarding "Web Categories" under Contest Essentials section **REMEMBER to provide login if you have a paywall!***

### Photograph of the Year ONE AWARD ONLY

Judges will select a winner from all first place winners in photo categories 22-25.

### Story of the Year ONE AWARD ONLY

Judges will select a winner from all first place winners in categories 9-13, 18-20 and 32

## GENERAL CATEGORIES:

### Category 1: Best Editorial Page or Section [ONE ENTRY PER PAPER](#)

Judging will be based on the following: planning, appearance and general organization of page(s); strength of local or locally applicable content; quality of editorials; quality and appropriateness of columns; use of outside opinion, including letters to the editor.

*To Enter:* Select the “category name” from the online entry tab, name the entry: “Editorial Page”. Submit URL’s or upload full-page PDF (s) from three different issues: one from **March**, one from **October** and one from **the month of your choice**. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry.

### Category 2 Best Lifestyle/Family Pages [ONE ENTRY PER PAPER](#)

Judging will be based on the following: planning and general organization of the section; news and informational value; quality of copy and page design; use of locally written columns and photos.

*To Enter:* Select the “category name” from the online entry tab, name the entry: “Lifestyle Page”. **Submit URL’s or upload full-page PDF (s) from three different issues:** one from **January**, one from **July** and one from **the month of your choice**. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry.

### Category 3 Best Local Sports Coverage [ONE ENTRY PER PAPER](#)

Judging will be based on the following: planning, general organization and presentation; writing skill; scope and variety of content; typography, photography and other art.

*To Enter:* Select the “category name” from the online entry tab, name the entry: “Sports Coverage”. **Submit URL’s or upload full-page PDF (s) from three different issues:** one from **April**, one from **September** and one from **the month of your choice**. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry.

### Category 4 Best Local Economic Coverage [ONE ENTRY PER PAPER](#)

Judging will be based on coverage of local business, financial, real estate, agriculture and related economic news. Business sections and farm pages are appropriate for this category. Pages from other sections of the selected editions that contain locally produced economic coverage may be part of the entry.

*To Enter:* Select the “category name” from the online entry tab, name the entry: “Local Economic”. **Submit URL’s or upload full-page PDF (s) from three different issues:** one from **February**, one from **July** and one from **the month of your choice**. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry.

### Category 5 Best Local Education Coverage [ONE ENTRY PER PAPER](#)

Judging will be based on coverage of local education issues. Pages from other sections of the selected editions that contain locally produced education coverage may be part of the entry.

*To Enter:* Select the “category name” from the online entry tab, name the entry: “Local Education”. **Submit URL’s or upload full-page PDF (s) from three different issues:** one from **April**, one from **November** and one from **the month of your choice**. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry.

### Category 6 Best Local News Coverage [ONE ENTRY PER PAPER](#)

Judging will reward consistent excellence in staff-generated newswriting and news coverage considering both quality and scope. Design and appearance will be de-emphasized in this category compared to the copy itself.

*To Enter:* Select the “category name” from the online entry tab, name the entry: “Local News”. **Submit URL’s or upload full-page PDF (s) from three different issues:** one from **December**, one from **May** and one from **the month of your choice**. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry.

### Category 7 Best Use of Photographs/Editorial Content [ONE ENTRY PER PAPER](#)

Judging will be based on consistent technical quality, creativity, composition, cropping, placement and variety.

*To Enter:* Select the “category name” from the online entry tab, name the entry: “Best Use of Photos.” Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry, and submit (no other fields should be filled out). **Mail three (3) complete issues** one from **January**, one from **June** and one from **the month of your choice**.



## Category 8 Best Layout and Design ONE ENTRY PER PAPER



Judging will be based on headline style and effective use of type, art/illustration, judicious use of color and general makeup. The front page will be the most important factor in reaching a decision, but other pages will also be considered.

*To Enter:* Select the “category name” from the online entry tab, name the entry: “Layout and Design.” Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry, submit (no other fields should be filled out). **Mail three (3) complete issues** one from both **April**, one from **September** and one from **the month of your choice**.

## SINGLE EVENT CATEGORIES:

**Up to four entries per category. Each entry should be entered separately into the system. For example you may have four separate Category 9 entries in the system.**

### Category 9 Best Spot News Story

Judging will be based on community-wide importance and significance; impact of lead; thoroughness of fact reporting; and sentence and paragraph structure. Judges will also consider quality of work under deadline pressure.

*To Enter:* Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be the headline of the story. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).

### Category 10 Best In-Depth News Coverage

Judging will be based on community-wide importance and significance; thoroughness of research and fact reporting on the series or in-depth article; and quality of writing. **May be in one issue or over several issues, but should cover a single event/topic.**

*To Enter:* Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to describe the issue you are reporting on. You may also upload a pdf with additional information about the coverage. Entry name should be an encompassing name of the coverage. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).

### Category 11 Best Business Story or Column

Judging will be based on a single story or column on local business, financial, real estate, agriculture and related economic news.

*To Enter:* Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be the headline of the story or column. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).

### Category 12 Best Feature Story Coverage

Judging will be based on style, research, editorial effectiveness, use of art, and the ability to entertain or hold the reader's interest. May be in one issue or over several issues.

*To Enter:* Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be an encompassing name of the coverage. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).

### Category 13 Best News Feature Story Coverage

Story should be tied to a specific news event. Judging will be based on quality of writing, thoroughness of research and ability to hold readers' interest. May be in one issue or over several issues.

*To Enter:* Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be an encompassing name of the coverage. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).

### Category 14 Best Editorial

The column must be locally written and published. Judging will be based on the quality of writing and the originality of the work. **Enter 1 single column per entry.**

*To Enter:* Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be the headline of the editorial. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).

## Category 15 Best Humorous Column

To qualify, a column must be locally written and should be a regular feature. Judging will be based on the quality of the humor as well as on the quality of writing, originality, effectiveness of presentation and interest to readers. **Enter 1 single column per entry.**

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be the headline of the column. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 16 Best Human Interest Column

To qualify, a column must be locally written. Judging will be based on the quality of the human interest as well as on the quality of writing, originality, effectiveness of presentation and interest to readers. **Enter 1 single column per entry.**

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be the headline of the column. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 17 Best Editorial Column or Commentary

To qualify, a column must be locally written and should be a regular feature. Judging will be based on the quality of the writing, effectiveness and interest to readers as commentary. **Enter 3 examples of a running column per entry. Award will be given to recognize the title of column series and writer.**

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be the headline of the column or commentary. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 18 Best Sports News In-Depth Coverage

Judging will be based on community-wide importance and significance; thoroughness of fact reporting; and readability.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. You may also upload a pdf with additional information about the coverage. Entry name should be an encompassing name of the coverage. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 19 Best Sports Single Event Story

Judging will be based on one story of a single event in a single issue of the newspaper. A sidebar may be included.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be the headline of the story. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 20 Best Sports Feature Story

Judging will be based on style, research, editorial effectiveness, use of art and the ability to entertain or hold the reader's interest.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be the headline of the story. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 21 Best Local Sports Column

To qualify, the column must be locally written. Judging will be based on readability, style, originality, knowledge of sports and interest to readers. **Enter 1 single column per entry.**

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to offer additional information about your entry. Entry name should be the headline of the column. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 22 Best Feature Photo

Entry should be a photo not considered “hard news.” Photo could show an unusual event, animal, item or person; a studio shot or illustration with the skill and imagination of the photographer playing a major role in making the photo worthy of an award.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify the photo being judged. Entry name should be the name, caption, or specific description of the photo. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s), and a hi-res cropped version of the image in a jpg format.*

## Category 23 Best News Photo

Entry should be a photo of news events of any of the happenings in the community which are known, assigned and planned in advance.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify the photo being judged. Entry name should be the name, caption, or specific description of the photo. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s), and a hi-res cropped version of the image in a jpg format.*

## Category 24 Best Spot News Photo

Entry should be a photo of unexpected news events, for which no advanced assignment or planning is possible.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify the photo being judged. Entry name should be the name, caption, or specific description of the photo. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s), and a hi-res cropped version of the image in a jpg format.*

## Category 25 Best Sports Photo

Entry should be a photo of sports-related subject matter.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify the photo being judged. Entry name should be the name, caption, or specific description of the photo. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s), and a hi-res cropped version of the image in a jpg format.*

## Category 26 Best Photo Essay

Primary consideration will be given to the quality of the photographs, the layout and design of the page(s), and whether the photographs tell the story. Although the text will be considered, primary considerations will be given to the photographs.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify the photo being judged. Entry name should be the name of the photo essay or subject matter. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s), and a hi-res cropped version of the images in a jpg format.*

## Category 27 Best Use of Graphics or Illustrations

The focus will be on a photograph, free-hand drawing, etching, computer-generated art by staff or a combination of graphic design elements to enhance a story or featured group of stories.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify the illustration (photo, drawing, etching, computer-generated art or combination) being judged. Entry name should be the name or caption of the illustration. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 28 Best Headline

Judges will consider originality, creativity, appropriateness, clever use of words, impact, attention-getting quality, humor, etc.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify the headline being judged. Entry name should be the actual headline. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 29 Best Special Section – Newsprint

The entry must be an entity unto itself, separate and distinct from the regular edition of the newspaper yet inserted in the newspaper. **Tabs and broadsheet entries printed on newsprint should be entered in this category.** Examples include seasonal or commemorative sections or editions. Judging will be based on the following: originality of the idea; editorial content; photography and makeup and appearance. Advertising content will not be considered.

\*Note: sections with a glossy cover but inside pages are on newsprint should be entered here.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab, name the entry the name of the special section. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry, and upload a pdf or jpg of the cover of the special section. **Mail one copy per entry of the sectional supplement to be considered.** Must be a section or supplement distinct from the regular edition of the newspaper.*

## Category 30 Best Niche Publication - Newsprint or Glossy

For the purpose of this contest, a 'niche publication' will be defined as a special publication, **published less than 4 times a year**, distributed independently of the newspaper, but a publication is not excluded if it is also distributed with the parent newspaper. This also includes any printed product that is sold as a stand-alone product for a specific targeted market.

**Examples:** Football Preview Sections, Bridal Magazines, Cutest Kids Calendar, Community Calendar, Phone Books, Dining Guides, Gift Guides, Cookbook, Election Guides, City Map and Visitors Guides. Judging Criteria: will be based on the following: originality of the idea, editorial content, photography and makeup, and appearance. Advertising content will not be considered.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab, name the entry the name of the publication. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry, and upload a pdf or jpg of the cover of the publication. **Mail one copy per entry of the entire niche publication to be considered.** Must be a section or supplement distinct from the regular edition of the newspaper, which the majority of its circulation is not inserted into the newspaper.*

## Category 31 Creative Use of Multimedia

Submissions should demonstrate work that incorporates distinguished journalistic storytelling via media other than the print format. Submissions may consist of Web-based interactive graphics and displays, videos, podcasts, photo galleries and audio slideshows, or any combination of all of these elements. Creativity, ease-of-use for the website visitor, impact on the community and overall technical execution will be among factors considered by the judges.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify what is being judged along with a brief explanation of how each entry was used. Entry name should be the name "multimedia". Submit URL's if the site is still live or upload full-page PDF(s).*

## Category 32 Online Breaking News Coverage

Submissions should demonstrate effective newspaper response to a breaking news story online. Submissions may consist of a single story or a group of stories by one or more reporters relating to the same event. Submissions should demonstrate clarity, thoroughness, balance and aggressiveness in the coverage of local spot news. Please submit a PDF, JPEG or a link (URL) and include timestamps showing when the news was posted on your website if possible.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify what is being judged along with a brief explanation of how each entry was used. Entry name should be an encompassing name of the coverage. Submit URL's if the site is still live or upload full-page PDF(s). See note regarding "Web Categories" under Contest Essentials section.*

## Category 33 Best Social Media Presense

Submissions should demonstrate excellence, efficiency, and innovation in social media use by newspapers. Entries may include examples of crowd sourcing; community engagement but must include links to your newspaper's social media like Facebook, X, LinkedIn, TikTok, video and photo sharing sites, etc. Judges will visit these sites during March, April and May 2026.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. You may use the explanation box to provide a statement describing the use of social media tools and resulting success but you must list links for judges.*

## Category 34 Best Podcast Series

Each entry must include 3 separate episodes from a single podcast series, MP3 (or WAV), from within the qualifying period. No non-podcast audio should be included. Please write a brief explanation of your series' focus and name your files to include the title of the podcast.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab, name the entry the name of the podcast. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry, and upload a MP3 or WAV.*

## Category 35 Best Use of Video (Shorter than 2 minutes)

Recognizes short video that stands alone or enhances other multimedia aspects of an online package or news or features story. Limit three entries per newspaper organization in all classes.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab, name the entry the name of the podcast. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry, and upload a MP4 or MOV or any other widely used format.*

## Category 36 Best Use of Video (Longer than 2 minutes)

Recognizes long video that stands alone or enhances other multimedia aspects of an online package or news or features story. Limit two entries per newspaper organization in all classes.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab, name the entry the name of the podcast. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry, and upload a MP4 or MOV or any other widely used format.*

## Category 37 Best Community Event

A community event can be sponsored by advertisers but should be **newspaper generated** and the **original idea of your publication staff**. Also included are sports media days and fund raisers. Entries should include a description and photos of your event.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Use the explanation box to identify what is being judged along with a brief explanation of how each entry was used. Submit URL's if the site is still live or upload full-page PDF(s) and other supporting media.*



## Publisher's Statement of Validity

I hereby certify that all entries submitted by this newspaper in the 2026 APA Media Awards meet the prescribed requirements and qualifications as related to circulation figures, membership, publication dates and all other aspects spelled out and implied by the rules of the 2026 AMA Editorial Division.

I understand that any violation brought to the attention of the APA Media Awards Contest Committee is subject to review. Any award found to be in violation of the contest rules can and will be revoked.

All entries must be original from your newspaper. They must be conceived and written by the newspaper staff members. A staff member is defined as a regularly employed, full-or-part-time person who works for your newspaper. Freelance work is allowed only if it appears exclusively in your newspaper or on your website.

Signature of Publisher: \_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You can email this form to [jaclyn@alabamapress.org](mailto:jaclyn@alabamapress.org).

**You may also include it with any hard copy entries you are mailing to APA.**

### PLEASE NOTE:

\*Entries must be uploaded no later than 11:59 PM, Monday, March 9, 2026.

\* Entries requiring hard copies should be postmarked no later than Monday, March 9, 2026, and mailed to: APA Media Awards, 2180 Parkway Lake Drive, Hoover, AL 35244



# 2026 APA Media Awards Hard Copy Entry Form

Name of Newspaper: \_\_\_\_\_

AMA Division (check one):    A \_\_\_\_\_    B \_\_\_\_\_    C \_\_\_\_\_    D \_\_\_\_\_    E \_\_\_\_\_

## Check categories entered & list publication date(s) for each mail-in entry:

### ☐ **General Excellence:**

Only ONE can be from a Sunday paper (one entry per paper made up of four issues \*see rules\*)

Dates (4): ☐ From Feb. 2-8    ☐ From Aug. 24-30    ☐ \_\_\_\_\_ Your choice    ☐ \_\_\_\_\_ Your choice

### ☐ **Most Improved:**

Dates must be consecutive and corresponding from year to year.

2025 Most Improved dates: \_\_\_\_\_

2024 Most Improved dates : \_\_\_\_\_

### ☐ **Best Production and Printing** (one entry per paper)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### ☐ **Category 7 Best Use of Photographs/Editorial Content**

Dates: January: \_\_\_\_\_ June: \_\_\_\_\_ Your choice: \_\_\_\_\_

### ☐ **Category 8 Best Layout and Design**

Dates: April: \_\_\_\_\_ September: \_\_\_\_\_ Your choice: \_\_\_\_\_

## List number of entries & list publication date(s) of your choice for each entry: (four entries maximum per category)

### ☐ **Category 29 Best One-Time Special Section – Newsprint or Glossy**

Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

### ☐ **Category 30 Best Niche Publication - Newsprint or Glossy**

Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

## Labels for Required Hard Copy Entries

**STAPLE** label to the upper left-hand corner of each entry. **Each individual entry should have its own label.**

**Do not use paper clips** or tape to affix entry labels or multiple pages. Make copies if you need more.

<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>	<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>
Contest Category (name & number): _____	Contest Category (name & number): _____
Division: A B C D E (circle one)	Division: A B C D E (circle one)
Newspaper: _____	Newspaper: _____
<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>	<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>
Contest Category (name & number): _____	Contest Category (name & number): _____
Division: A B C D E (circle one)	Division: A B C D E (circle one)
Newspaper: _____	Newspaper: _____
<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>	<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>
Contest Category (name & number): _____	Contest Category (name & number): _____
Division: A B C D E (circle one)	Division: A B C D E (circle one)
Newspaper: _____	Newspaper: _____
<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>	<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>
Contest Category (name & number): _____	Contest Category (name & number): _____
Division: A B C D E (circle one)	Division: A B C D E (circle one)
Newspaper: _____	Newspaper: _____
<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>	<b>2026 APA MEDIA AWARDS</b>
Contest Category (name & number): _____	Contest Category (name & number): _____
Division: A B C D E (circle one)	Division: A B C D E (circle one)
Newspaper: _____	Newspaper: _____