Editor Basics: Taste and Logistics

General

An editor is a curator of style. They sift through mountains of writing and choose which pieces to offer the public. They are the bridge between the artist and the world. On a practical level, editors of one sort or another are responsible for every step of the publication process, from finding submissions to the final printing. At school literary journals, we encourage student involvement at all steps in the editorial process.

- Benefits of working as an editor: seeing the submission process from the inside helps improve submissions, exposure to a wide variety of work, aid in developing own aesthetic and learning to articulate it.
- Different Editor Roles: Most journals have different people acting in different capacities to divide up the responsibility. Not all journals have every position listed.
  o Editor-in-Chief: The head honcho. Makes final decisions and is responsible for the entire publication. For school publications, this will often in effect be the faculty adviser.
  o Managing Editor: Often the second-in-command. Responsible for coordinating the lower-level editors.
  o Genre Editor: Responsible for curating a certain type of content, generally fiction, poetry, or nonfiction.
  o Assistant Editor/Editorial Assistant/Editorial Intern: Generally staff members who mostly contribute by reading and voting on submissions, but they may help with some other editorial duties in smaller journals.

When you’re thinking about editorship and editorial process, the most important thing is to be aware the mission of your organization and use that mission to guide your decisions. For most school journals, this mission will be to showcase the best work of the school’s students.

Getting Submissions

Call for Submissions: This is the general announcement that a journal puts out saying that they’re looking for work. It’s good to be as clear as possible about how you’d like to receive the work and any guidelines you have. It should reflect your journal’s mission. Often journals indicate a max number of submissions and a max length either in word count or pages. You may want to require prose writers to submit their work double spaced for easier reading or specify particular types of files. If you’re reading work blind, you can specify that submitters not include their name in the
If your journal has content restrictions or a particular theme for the upcoming issue, you can mention that as well.

Promotion: Send your call for submissions to the entire school. Have it included in announcements. Ask teachers to encourage their students to submit. Make fliers. Solicit work from students who you know write. Do short presentations asking for writing in language arts and writing classes.

Choosing Work

It’s important to know how decisions will be made before the decision process begins. There’s a few common models that are used.

- **Collaborative:** Everyone reads all the work and discusses which pieces they’d like to accept. Generally the readers have to negotiate their way to agreement. This model can be fairly time consuming, but it’s a good fit for smaller staffs.

- **Head Honcho:** This model requires clear editor roles. The lower tier editors recommend work to the higher tier editors, and one or two of the higher tier editors make all the final decisions. This model can work well with larger staffs or for journals that have enough submissions that it’s unreasonable for everyone to read all of them. Note: Under this model, there is still often conversation between the different editors about what to publish.

- **Division of Space:** This model divides content responsibility among different groups of editors. The most common division is along genre lines (fiction, nonfiction, poetry), but it could also be theme-based or just a simple division of available space. Within these groups, decision making could be made like the Collaborative or Head Honcho models. This model is a good way to make a journal more aesthetically diverse, and it’s a good fit for larger journals with staff members who are willing to be involved and would like more responsibility.

Decide beforehand if you’ll read submissions blind. Reading submissions blind is a good way to reduce favoritism, but often readers recognize each other’s work anyways. Consider conflicts of interest, like asking students to recuse themselves from decisions about their own work and the work of people that they can’t read fairly. There are no hard and fast rules for this, but it’s good to ask the readers to consider their own ethical boundaries.

When selecting work, keep in mind the journal’s mission. If it is to publish the best student work, encourage readers to look beyond their own aesthetic preferences for an overall sense of completeness and quality language. Having an aesthetically diverse staff helps with this.

Contests

Be extra clear in contest submission guidelines!
Contests can be a great way to increase the exposure of your journal and a way to garner more submissions. Prizes can be anything from an award certificate to copies of other literary journals to gift certificates to cash.

If there’s any type of tangible prize, it’s best practice to read contest submissions blind. Normally the usual literary journal readers choose 3-10 semifinalists and then forward those semifinalists on to an outside judge who makes the final decision.

Notification

Try to notify all submitters (in writing) at around the same time, particularly if you’re doing a contest. It’s kinder than leaving people hanging and reduces speculation.

Contracts

It’s good to have simple contract with the contributors to document them giving the journal permission to print the work and to certify that the work is their original creative property.

Sample Language
[Author’s Name] grants [Journal Name] nonexclusive rights to print their creative work, “[Insert Title]”, in their upcoming issue. [Author’s Name] warrants that this work is original and that they are the sole author and owner of the work.

Edits

During the proofreading process (see the last page of the Lit Press Fest 2014 program for more details about proofreading), you may find things in the pieces that appear to be errors. You may also find things that don’t meet your journal’s content guidelines. In both cases, approve any edits with the author before going to print. With creative work (unlike journalism work), it’s considered best practice to give the author a chance to explain their choices or to decide exactly how to make the change or even to withdraw their work if they’re unwilling to make edits.

Design and Publishing

See the third page of the Lit Press Fest 2014 program and the Binding Books by Hand document for more informant about design and publishing.