



2026 BETTER NEWSPAPER CONTEST RULES

Who can enter?

The MNA BNC is open to all Professional Members in good standing.

What can be entered?

All issues published during the calendar year 2025. Entries must be produced by employees of the newspaper or a direct agent of the newspaper. A direct agent of the newspaper would be a centralized production facility utilized by your newspaper that is not located on your physical premises. Independent advertising agencies are not considered to be direct agents of newspaper, and ads created by such agencies would not qualify for entry.

When is the contest open for entries?

The contest opens on **Friday, February 13, 2026.**

What is the entry deadline?

Monday March 23, 2026, 10:00pm MST. Categories 601 and 602 must be postmarked no later than March 16, and be scheduled to arrive at the Utah Press Association office **on or before March 30, 2026.** No extensions to our deadlines will be granted.

Utah Press Association
8789 South Redwood Road, Suite 200
West Jordan, UT 84088

How do I get started with the online registration?

Go to: www.newspapercontest.com/montana and follow the Instructions on the site.

What are the costs for entering?

Entry fees are \$6 per each entry. The online registration platform will compute your fee.

How should I handle payment of my entries?

Newspapers will pay for their entries on the contest website when they finalize their submissions. DO NOT PAY until all entries have been submitted. If you need to add entries after you have already paid, please contact Katie Nelson (801-599-1347) to help you.

How are circulation divisions defined?

Group	Frequency	Circulation From	Circulation To
1	Weekly	0	1,250
2	Weekly	1,251	2,000
3	Weekly	2,001+	
4	Daily (3+ days per week) & Digital Only Publications		

A daily newspaper is defined as publishing 3 or more days a week.

Use the average total paid distribution figure from your October 1, 2025 Statement of Ownership or 2025 Sworn Statement of Circulation. It is the responsibility of the newspaper to select and verify the correct circulation division. Newspapers may voluntarily move up into a higher division for the competition if they so choose.

Who will judge the contest?

Our 2025 contest will be judged by volunteer members of the Maine Press Association.

What awards will be given and when?

Judges will designate first, second-, and third-place winners. You will be notified if your newspaper won an award soon after the judging has been completed. Awards will be presented at the 140th MNA Annual Convention Awards Banquet.

What if something goes wrong?

Please double check all you work and make sure you attached all your files and links. Any entry submitted in violation of our rules will be disqualified.

How should file entries be prepared?

All electronic entries must be one Full-page PDF with exception of the photojournalism category. Categories 301 – 305 should be a single photo. Include only pages related to the entry in the logical page order. Include jump pages. Render all PDF files as small as possible. For digital entries simply include the hosted file's URL. Be sure to identify the ad or editorial content on the page.

How should print entries be prepared?

The only print entries are categories 601 and 602. For print/mail-in entry categories, print and attach the entry label (which automatically appears after each entry is submitted) to each hardcopy item. **Print categories must be postmarked no later than March 16, 2026 and arrive at the judges' office on or before March 30, 2026.** Please include the entire publication. Publications without entry labels will not be accepted. We will give you the address to ship your entries when judges have been assigned.

Print categories must still be entered at www.newspapercontest.com/montana.

2026 BETTER NEWSPAPER CONTEST CATEGORIES AND JUDGING CRITERIA

EDITORIAL CATEGORY

101 Editorial Category: **Best News Story**

Your best single news story published in one issue.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of reporting; clarity of writing; importance and relevance to the reader; impact of headline and lead.

102 Editorial Category: **Best Breaking News Coverage**

Your best breaking news coverage resulting from newly received information about an event that is currently occurring or developing. This could have been published in print or digitally, as a single article or collection of articles focused on the event. You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of reporting; clarity of writing; importance and relevance to the reader; impact of headline and lead.

103 Editorial Category: **Best Sports Story**

Your best single sports-related story published in one issue.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of reporting; clarity of writing; importance and relevance to the reader; impact of headline and lead.

104 Editorial Category: **Best Feature/Lifestyle Story**

A story relating to a person, event, an aspect of a major event, or the like, often having a personal slant and written in an individual style.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of writing, content, originality, imagination, research and display quality, including art.

105 Editorial Category: **Best Sports Feature Story**

Your best single sports-related feature story published in one issue.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of writing, content, originality, imagination, research and display quality, including art.

106 Editorial Category: **Best Political Coverage**

Your best single political story published in one issue.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of reporting; clarity of writing; importance and relevance to the reader; impact of headline and lead.

107 Editorial Category: **Best Education Coverage**

Your entry should consist of an individual article or a series that communicate information about student achievement and learning trends in local education.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on thoroughness, use of art and relevance to a community.

108 Editorial Category: **Best Continuing News Coverage**

Your entry should consist of a continuing coverage of a single news topic.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on thoroughness, use of art and relevance to a community.

109 Editorial Category: **Mark Henckel Outdoor Writing Award**

This award honors Mark Henckel, longtime outdoor enthusiast and writer for the Billings Gazette. Your entry should consist of a single outdoor activity or wildlife story (excluding sports) or items pertaining to policy matters concerning outdoor issues.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of writing, importance and relevance to the reader.

110 Editorial Category: **Best Investigative Journalism**

This category is your best example in which reporters deeply investigate a single topic of interest, such as crime, political corruption or corporate wrongdoing. If the story carried over to subsequent issues, include the continuations.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of reporting; clarity of writing; depth of research; difficulty of subject matter and relevance to readers.

111 Editorial Category: **Best Column Writing**

Columns may be on a single topic or a variety of topics, including business, education, the arts and others. The column must be from a regular staff member and be a regular feature of your newspaper.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of writing; originality and imagination.

112 Editorial Category: **Best Sports and Outdoors Column Writing**

Columns may be on a single or variety of sports or outdoor related topics. The column must be from a regular staff member and be a regular feature of your newspaper.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on quality of writing; originality and imagination.

113 Editorial Category: **Best Editorial**

Each entry can consist of up to 3 editorials written by the same individual.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on strength; relevance; editorial leadership and presentation.

114 Editorial Category: **Best Headline Writing**

Each entry will consist of 3 headline examples from the same individual.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on clarity, aptness and creativity; versatility and consistent quality.

DESIGN CATEGORY

201 Design Category: **Best Front Page**

Each entry will consist of your very best page 1 design.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on use of headlines; photography; graphics; content; overall design and newsstand appeal.

202 Design Category: **Best Page Layout and Design**

Each entry will consist of your very best single page design from any section or placement in your newspaper.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on use of headlines; photography; graphics; content and overall design.

203 Design Category: **Best Sports Page Layout and Design**

Each entry will consist of your very best sports-related page design.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on use of headlines; photography; graphics; content and overall design.

204 Design Category: **Best Graphic**

Your best example of visual art that supports content.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on use of headlines; photography; graphics; content and overall design.

PHOTOJOURNALISM CATEGORY

301 Photojournalism Category: **Best Breaking News Photo**

This category is for breaking news photos only. Subjects must be unposed. Photos must be from an unplanned, breaking news event.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on news value; originality and imagination and photo technical quality.

302 Photojournalism Category: **Best General News Photo**

This category is for general news photos only. Subjects must be unposed. You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on news value; originality and imagination and photo technical quality.

303 Photojournalism Category: **Best Sports Photo**

This category is for sports photos only. Subjects must be unposed. Photos must be from a competitive individual or team sporting event or contest.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on news value; originality and imagination and photo technical quality.

304 Photojournalism Category: **Best Feature Photo**

This category is for artistic, unusual or illustrative photos.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on news value; originality and imagination and photo technical quality.

305 Photojournalism Category: **Best Portrait Photo**

A photograph of a person or group of people that captures the personality of the subject.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on news value; originality and imagination and photo technical quality.

ADVERTISING CATEGORY

401 Advertising: **Best Online Ad**

Your entry requires a single example of the best ad on your website.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on creative design; engagement and lasting impression on the reader.

402 Advertising: **Best Ad to Sell or Promote Merchandise – Black and White only**

Your entry requires a single ad that entices the reader to purchase or use the item in the ad.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on creative design; engagement; call to action and lasting impression on the reader.

403 Advertising: **Best Ad to Sell or Promote Merchandise – Color**

Your entry requires a single ad that entices the reader to purchase or use the item in the ad.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on creative design; engagement; call to action and lasting impression on the reader.

404 Advertising: **Best Ad to Sell or Promote Services – Black and White only**

Your entry requires a single ad that entices the reader to use the services of the advertiser.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on creative design; engagement; feeling and lasting impression on the reader.

405 Advertising: **Best Ad to Sell or Promote Services – Color**

Your entry requires a single ad that entices the reader to use the services of the advertiser.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on creative design; engagement; feeling and lasting impression on the reader.

406 Advertising: **Best Sponsor Page**

Your entry should provide an ad with some single or multiple sponsors to promote an event or organization. You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on creative design; engagement; feeling and lasting impression on the reader.

407 Advertising: **Best Newspaper Promotional Ad**

This category is for examples of how you promote your newspaper, products, services, innovations, employees, community service or awards. You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on creative design; engagement and lasting impression on the reader.

408 Advertising: **Best Use of Local Photography in an Ad**

This category is for examples of the best use of local photography in an advertisement that promotes products or services. You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on advertising value; originality and imagination and photo technical quality.

409 Advertising: **Best Marketing Campaign**

This category is for examples of a specific, defined series of advertising used in marketing a new or changed product or service or building a brand.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on advertising value; originality and imagination and photo technical quality.

DIGITAL CATEGORY

501 Digital: **Best Website**

The entry in this category is your website. The judge will view your site at an unspecified time during the judging period. If portions of your website are behind a pay wall, login information must be provided for the judge.

You may submit only 1 entry.

Judging will be based on design; content; interactivity; ease of use and navigation and connection with the local community.

502 Digital: **Best Digital / Multimedia Presentation**

Each entry should include a unique digital / multimedia layout of an individual story or stories, such as embedded digital elements, videos, photos, animations, maps, etc.

You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on relevance, timeliness and impact.

503 Digital: **Best News Video**

Your best single news video. Your entry should provide an example of locally produced video. You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on video quality and editing.

504 Digital: **Best Sports Video**

Your best single sports video. Your entry should provide an example of locally produced video. You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on video quality and editing.

505 Digital: **Best Features Video**

Your best single features video. Your entry should provide an example of locally produced video. You may submit up to 7 entries.

Judging will be based on video quality and editing.

506 Digital: **Best Use of Social Media**

Entries should showcase how your newspaper uses social media to share news or engage with your audience. Provide hyperlinks to each public post or upload a screen-capture of each post. You may submit up to 7 entries.

GENERAL CATEGORY

601 General: **Best Newspaper Special Edition**

Any special edition that was inserted into your newspaper and delivered to your general circulation may be entered in the category.

You may submit up to 7 print entries.

Please mail the complete, printed special edition to the Utah Press Association Office and must be postmarked no later than March 16, and be scheduled to arrive **on or before March 30, 2026. Mail to Address listed on Page 1.**

Judging will be based on design; quality and depth of the local story telling and advertising content.

602 General: **Best Niche Publication**

This category allows for any publication produced by your newspaper that targets a specific audience, topic or event in your market.

You may submit up to 7 print entries.

Please mail the complete, printed special edition to the Utah Press Association Office and must be postmarked no later than March 16, and be scheduled to arrive **on or before March 30, 2026. Mail to Address listed on Page 1.**

Judging will be based on design; quality and depth of the local story telling and advertising content.

SPECIAL AWARDS

Special Award: **Best Reporting Based on a Public Notice**

A news or feature story that was generated because of a public notice that drew attention to the subject, or because a public notice or the omission of the public notice figured heavily into the subject. Stories must reference and/or provide a link to an actual public notice. If the public notice requirement was not met or was deficient, the story must describe the deficiency.

All MNA circulation groups compete together for the Public Notice Award. This award is not considered for General Excellence Award calculation.

Judging will be based on quality of reporting; clarity of writing; importance and relevance to the reader; impact of headline and lead.

Special Award: **Division General Excellence Award**

This award recognizes the very best newspaper in each of the 5 circulation divisions.

The award is based on a point system:

- 3 points for each first-place award
- 2 points for each second-place award
- 1 point for each third-place award

There is no entry or fee for this category.

Judging will be based on the greatest number of points in each category.

Special Award: **Mel Ruder Photograph of the Year Award**

This award honors Mel Ruder, founder of the Hungry Horse News and Pulitzer Prize winner.

There is no entry or fee for this category.

All first-place winners of the Photojournalism Categories, for all circulation divisions, will be re-judged for this special single award.

Special Award: **Best Weekly Newspaper – The Thomas Dimsdale Award**

This award recognizes the very best weekly newspaper in Montana.

The award is based on a point system:

- 4 points for division general excellence award
- 3 points for each first-place award
- 2 points for each second-place award
- 1 point for each third-place award

There is no entry or fee for this category.

Judging will be based on the greatest number of points in each category.

Special Award: **Best Daily Newspaper – The Sam Gilluly Award**

This award recognizes the very best daily newspaper in Montana.

The award is based on a point system:

- 4 points for division general excellence award
- 3 points for each first-place award
- 2 points for each second-place award
- 1 point for each third-place award

There is no entry or fee for this category.

Judging will be based on the greatest number of points in each category.

Special Award: **Best Online Newspaper**

This award recognizes the very best online newspaper in Montana.

The award is based on a point system:

- 3 points for each first-place award
- 2 points for each second-place award
- 1 point for each third-place award

There is no entry or fee for this category.

Judging will be based on the greatest number of points in each category.