

2026 Missouri Press Foundation Better Newspaper Contest General Rules & Categories

The 2026 Missouri Press Contest will be conducted online with rules similar to the 2025 contest. Entrants will continue to use the Advanced Contest Entry System (ACES) to upload entries. The process is easy but requires a new registration for the current year's template. You will upload files (or links to bulky entries) to the contest template, and the judges will judge them online.

REMINDER: Missouri's 2026 Better Newspaper Contest requires digital entries.

[Missouri Press has created a user guide linked here to help you enter the contest.](#)

Registration instructions and upload directions are here:

<https://www.newspapercontest.com/Contests/MissouriPressAssociationBNC.aspx>.

Due to the way the ACES platform operates, your PUBLICATION will need to re-register for the 2026 Better Newspaper Contest. Login credentials from the previous year's contest will not be valid for this year's contest template.

Each PUBLICATION requires a unique email address for uploading contest entries. You can re-use the same email address from the previous year's contest when registering for the 2026 Better Newspaper Contest.

Missouri's BNC Association Code is: MOPRESS

If you have not yet done so, you are encouraged to begin gathering digital files of your entries now. You can submit your entries at any time after the template has been activated; you need not wait until the deadline to submit entries and are encouraged to **SUBMIT YOUR ENTRIES AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE** to take advantage of reduced entry fees.

Deadline: The template will close automatically at 11 p.m. Monday, April 6, and no entries will be accepted after it closes.

The 2026 BNC entry fee structure is as follows:

Entries uploaded before March 1: \$6 per entry;
Entries uploaded before April 1: \$7 per entry; and
Entries uploaded April 1-6: \$10 per entry.

If you have questions or need help entering any category, contact Matthew Barba (mbarba@mopress.com) or Kristie Fortier (kfortier@mopress.com) for assistance.

Upload entries in any of these formats: PDF, DOC, JPG, GIF, PNG. **NOTE: When an entry consists of more than one file, combine them into a single file for uploading to the template, so the judge has to open only one file to see the entire entry.**

NOTE: For large files, you may use an outside file hosting site and submit the URL. You **MUST** make sure the file is public, or otherwise shareable and/or that a password is provided, so it can be viewed, printed or downloaded for judging and/or display purposes. Submit smaller files as PDFs within the template. If a file cannot be easily accessed, it could be skipped over for judging.

This year's contest has 44 Categories. With a few exceptions, each Category has four Circulation Classes (WEEKLIES Classes: 0-2,000; 2,001-5,000; 5,001 and over. All DAILIES have been combined into one class.).

The "Photo of the Year" award will be chosen from first-place winners in the news, feature, sports and sports feature photos categories.

When entering this year's contest, make sure you only include one item per entry. For example, if you plan to enter three Best Sports Photo items, review your entries to make sure there are three separate submissions in that category.

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1. Publications must be ACTIVE, ACTIVE ONLINE, MAGAZINE, SPECIALTY PUBLICATION or FRIENDS OF members of Missouri Press Association to enter the contest.
 2. Entries must have been published predominantly during 2025, but if an entry is a series or an on-going story and coverage includes content from 2024 or 2026, that content may be included.
 3. Work must have been done by full- or part-time members of the publication's staff. The same work may be entered in more than one category. Work done by third parties may be entered, but that work must have been done *exclusively* for the publication entering the material.
 4. Entries will be accepted until 11 p.m. Monday, April 6.
Entries uploaded before March 1 are \$6 per entry;
Entries uploaded before April 1 are \$7 per entry; and
Entries uploaded April 1-6 are \$10 per entry.
- A payment portal will be available through ACES after you finish uploading your contest entries. You may also call Missouri Press to provide credit card information (573-449-4167) or send a check payable to the Missouri Press Foundation.
5. Combination and group publications may submit separate entries in each category, but if the same content appears in more than one newspaper, only one publication may submit the content.
 6. Each publication will have its own registered username to upload contest entries.

You will have to share login information within your office if more than one person is responsible for uploading entries. This is a limitation of the ACES platform and cannot be changed.

Your publication will need a new registration for the current Better Newspaper Contest template. Login credentials from the previous year's contest template are not valid for the current year's contest, however, you can re-use the same email address when registering for this year's contest.

7. Missouri Press entered your publication into the contest template using the most recent circulation information reported to MPA. (WEEKLIES Classes: 0-2,000; 2,001-5,000; 5,001 and over. DAILIES are now combined into a single division.) If you have concerns about your division, please contact mbarba@mopress.com or kfortier@mopress.com

Missouri Press staff will exercise discretion to combine classes within a category.

8. Unless otherwise noted in the category descriptions, all entries are full-pages or if a URL is being shared, the website page should have the date of publication displayed. The dateline on the page proves publication date.

Entries should have 1-3-word titles that tell the judge precisely what material on the page is to be judged. The Title of a photo entry should include the date the photo was published, example: Car crash, 7-26-15; or Out at home, 4-15-15. You should also mark the page to indicate which item is to be judged.

9. Judges are directed to award and comment on first, second and third places.

10. Gold Cups will be given to the publications that win the most points in each circulation class. Points will be awarded as follows:

General Excellence: 1st-12 points; 2nd-10 points; 3rd-8 points

Community Service: 1st-10 points; 2nd-8 points; 3rd-6 points

Investigative Reporting: 1st-10 points; 2nd-8 points; 3rd-6 points

All Other Categories: 1st-6 points; 2nd-5 points; 3rd-4 points

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NOTE: Entries should consist of one single file whenever possible. If a category calls for more than one piece, such as Best Front Page or Best Columnist, combine the pieces into a single file for uploading to the contest template. If your publication enters more than one entry in a category — say for columnists Smith and Jones — each entry should be a separate file. In other words, combine Smith's columns into one file to upload, but don't combine Smith's columns with Jones' columns.

EMAIL QUESTIONS TO mbarba@mopress.com OR kfortier@mopress.com

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01. GENERAL EXCELLENCE

Limit one entry consisting of 3 complete issues from different, non-consecutive months during the contest year. For **Dailies**, only 1 of the 3 may be from a Sunday or weekend issue. Award is made to the publication.

Judging criteria: All 3 issues are to be judged as one body of work. Judge the newspaper on: Breadth of news coverage—20 points; Quality of writing—10 points; Advertising Design and Layout—10; General Layout—10; Use of Photos and Artwork—10; Editorial Page—10; Front Page—10; Sports Page—10; Headline Language—5; Treatment of Public Notices—5.

02. BEST OVERALL DESIGN

Limit one entry consisting of three issues from different, non-consecutive months during the contest year. For **Dailies**, only 1 of the 3 may be from a Sunday or weekend issue. Award is made to the publication. An evaluation of the overall design of the entire newspaper.

Judging criteria: All issues are to be judged as one body of work. Judge on the *consistent quality* of layout and design of all 3 issues of the *entire newspaper*, including typography, photography/graphics, white space, all design elements.

03. BEST FRONT PAGE

Limit one entry consisting of three front pages from different, non-consecutive months during the contest year. For **Dailies**, only 1 may be from a Sunday or weekend issue. Award is made to the publication. Combine all 3 pages into a single file for uploading.

Judging criteria: All 3 issues are to be judged as one body of work. *Design is a major element of this category, but not the only element.* Judge on the *consistent quality* of writing, layout, design, headlines, white space and other elements.

04. BEST EDITORIAL AND OPINION PAGES

Limit one entry consisting of editorial, op-ed and/or opinion pages from three different, non-consecutive months during the contest year. For **Dailies**, only 1 may be from a Sunday or weekend issue. Award is made to the publication.

Judging criteria: All 3 issues are to be judged as one body of work. Power of original editorial matter; layout and design of pages; quality and diversity of content; informational value; community involvement.

05. BEST SPORTS PAGES

Limit one entry consisting of sports pages from three different, non-consecutive months during the contest year. For **Dailies**, only 1 may be from a Sunday or weekend issue. Award is made to the publication.

Judging criteria: All 3 issues are to be judged as one body of work. Quality of writing; layout, design and photography; scope of content; headlines; local features and columns.

06. BEST PAGE DESIGN

Do not enter page 1A in this category. Any one page or story — other than page 1A — demonstrating creativity of layout and design. Up to 4 entries per publication. (If the design involves more than one page, all pages should be submitted.)

Judging criteria: Layout and design of page(s) or story other than page 1A, including all design elements.

07. BEST BREAKING NEWS STORY

The judges will decide how well the material fits into “breaking news.” Entries may include sidebars and/or supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person. For each entry, combine all content into a single file for uploading.

Judging criteria: Style and quality of writing and reporting on deadline.

08. BEST NEWS STORY

Entries may include sidebars and/or supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person. Stories entered in the “Breaking News Story” category CANNOT also be entered in this category.

Judging criteria: Style and quality of writing and reporting.

09. BEST FEATURE STORY

Entries may include sidebars and/or supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; interest and impact; subject and composition.

10. BEST NEWS OR FEATURE SERIES

A series of stories, including sidebars and/or supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.), on the same topic or with the same general theme, all in the same issue or in multiple issues. Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Style and quality of writing and reporting; interest and impact; subject and presentation.

11. BEST SPORTS NEWS STORY OR PACKAGE

Entries may include sidebars and/or supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) “Package” refers to stories and sidebars about the same subject that may appear in the same issue or in more than one issue. Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality and style of writing.

12. BEST SPORTS FEATURE STORY

Entries may include sidebars and/or supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality and style of writing.

13. BEST EDITORIAL

Editorials only! Do not enter columns. Weeklies category is called the Tilghman Cloud Memorial Editorial. Each single editorial shall constitute an entry. Award is made to the publication, not to the writer. Limit 4 entries per publication.

Judging criteria: Significance; clarity of style; power to influence opinion; sound reasoning; writing quality.

14. BEST HUMOROUS COLUMNIST

15. BEST SERIOUS COLUMNIST

Do not enter Editorials! Columns must be regular features of the publication. One entry per writer in each category, Humorous and Serious. An entry consists of three columns. **Weeklies:** 2 columns from consecutive months and one of your choice.

Dailies: 2 columns from the same month and one of choice.

Judging criteria: We're looking for the **best columnist**, NOT the best single column.

Judge consistent quality and style of writing in all 3 columns judged as a body of work; content, topic, effectiveness.

16. BEST SPORTS COLUMNIST

An entry shall consist of three columns, two from consecutive months and one of choice. One entry per writer.

Judging criteria: We're looking for the **best columnist**, NOT the best single column.

Judge consistent quality and style of writing in all 3 columns judged as a body of work.

17. BEST NEWS PHOTOGRAPH

18. BEST FEATURE PHOTOGRAPH (A human-interest photo with no manipulated elements beyond basic adjustments made for contrast, clarity and cropping. NOTE: This is NOT a staged photo or photo illustration. Staged and heavily manipulated photos should be entered in Category 21, Best Photo Illustration.) Up to 6 entries per publication per category for Categories 17-20; no more than 4 entries per person per category.

19. BEST SPORTS PHOTOGRAPH (A game action photo showing a player or players making or failing to make plays. This is not a game or play reaction photo.)

20. BEST SPORTS FEATURE PHOTOGRAPH (NOTE: This is NOT a game action photo. It should be a sports related, human-interest photo. Game action photos should be entered in category 19, Best Sports Photograph) Up to 6 entries per publication per category for Categories 17-20; no more than 4 entries per person per category.

Upload the JPG files or PDFs of the images. If a photo appeared in print, include a PDF of the page where the photo was published. You can upload the photo as a separate file, in addition to the page PDF. The Title of a photo entry should include the date the photo was published, example: Car crash, 7-26-15; or Out at home, 4-15-15.

Judging criteria: Composition, cropping, impact.

21. BEST PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Photo Illustrations are *staged or manipulated photographs* created to illustrate a story or ad. Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Upload JPG files or PDFs of the images. The Title of a photo entry should include the date the photo was published, example: Vegetable face, 7-26-15.

Judging criteria: Entries in this category are staged photos. Judge the concept, creativity, composition and impact. Disregard photos that should be in the News, Sports or Feature Photo category.

22. BEST PHOTO PACKAGE

Two or more photos relating to the same subject, on one or more pages or in an online gallery. Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Upload or link to entire pages, not individual photos, or link to the photo gallery.

Judging criteria: Quality of photographs; layout; story, headlines, captions.

23. COMMUNITY SERVICE

Submit projects — reporting, programs, activities, sponsorships, special events — that extend over and above the routine community service mission of the newspaper. The projects should have occurred substantially during the contest period. Limit of 2 entries per publication. Entries should include a brief cover letter that explains the project and how it goes beyond the publication's regular role in serving the community, as well as any public involvement or response generated by this community service. Awards go to the publication. (Enter Newspaper In Education projects in Category 24.) Judging criteria: Importance of project, depth of research and reporting, involvement of the community, use of pictures and editorials, general appeal.

24. BEST NEWSPAPER IN EDUCATION PROJECT

Rather than the publication's NIE program for the year, entries consist of NIE projects or features. Limit 2 entries per newspaper. Entry may include a letter of explanation about the project or feature.

Judging criteria: Originality, creativity, presentation.

25. BEST SPECIAL SECTION, MAGAZINE OR ALTERNATIVE PUBLICATION

Upload PDF or provide URL of complete special section, magazine or alternative publication. Limit of 4 entries per newspaper.

Judging criteria: Judge content, cover design, overall quality. Advertising can be considered in the Overall Quality but this is not an advertising category.

26. BEST INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

A story or series showing enterprise reporting beyond the routine. Limit 4 entries per newspaper. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.)

Judging criteria: Enterprise and ingenuity in gathering information; quality and style of writing and reporting; local significance; use of headlines; treatment of the story relative to its importance.

27. BEST NEWS OR FEATURE OBITUARY

Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing and reporting.

28. BEST BUSINESS STORY

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., about local business(es). Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Entries need not be from "Business" pages. Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

29. BEST STORY ABOUT GOVERNMENT

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., about topics related to government, such as a project, controversy or issue. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) No more than 4 entries per publication; no more than 2 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

30. BEST ELECTION STORY

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., about elections at any level and include pre- and post-election coverage. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

31. BEST STORY ABOUT RURAL LIFE OR AGRICULTURE

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., related to rural living or agriculture. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

32. BEST STORY ABOUT RELIGION

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., related to religion. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

33. BEST STORY ABOUT EDUCATION

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., related to education. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

34. BEST STORY ABOUT THE OUTDOORS

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., related to the outdoors. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

35. BEST STORY ABOUT HISTORY

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., related to a historically significant person, place, event or time. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

36. BEST MILITARY STORY

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., related to the military or military service. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

37. BEST HEALTH STORY

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., related to health or medicine. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

38. BEST STORY ABOUT MARGINALIZED OR UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES

An entry may consist of a(n) story with sidebar(s), column, editorial, analysis, or photographs, etc., related to marginalized or underrepresented communities in your coverage area. Sidebars may include supplemental multimedia content (video, audio, graphics, etc.) Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Quality of writing; lead; significance; presentation, including photos and artwork.

39. BEST INFORMATION GRAPHIC

Maps, charts, diagrams or other freehand or computer-generated graphics used to provide, explain or clarify information. Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person.

Judging criteria: Originality, craftsmanship, presentation of information, clarity of message of the graphic.

40. BEST EDITORIAL CARTOON

Submit full pages containing the cartoons. Up to 6 entries per publication; no more than 4 entries per person. Cartoons must have been created initially for the newspaper submitting the entry.

Judging criteria: Originality, presentation, clarity of message.

41. BEST ONLINE NEWSPAPER OR WEBSITE:

Submit the web address of your website. Provide a password to allow the judge to gain access to all areas of your website.

Judging criteria: ORIGINALITY, graphic appeal, ease of use, LOCAL content, advertising, overall utility.

42. MULTI-MEDIA REPORTING

Entries may consist of representative materials from coverage across platforms, including print, online, social media, mobile, video, audio, slideshows, music, etc. All content or links to content should be collected in one PDF to be uploaded through the contest template. Two entries per publication.

Judging criteria: Innovative use of original content in a variety of formats, reader interaction, ease of navigation and value to the reader.

43. BEST HEADLINE WRITING

One entry per publication consisting of 5 headlines. Award goes to the publication.

Weeklies & Dailies: 5 headlines of choice published during the year. Entries should be submitted with file names using key words of the headlines to be judged.

Judging criteria: All 5 headlines are to be *judged as a body of work* on accurate description of the story, word selection, creativity and overall impact.

44. BEST REPORTING USING THE SUNSHINE LAW

A story or series showing reporting that utilizes Missouri's open records and meeting law, known as the Sunshine Law. Reporting should convey to readers how the Sunshine Law's use aided in information gathering, highlight obstacles in acquiring information for the reporting and/or recognize individuals/public bodies that facilitated Sunshine Law requests. Limit 2 entries per newspaper.

Judging criteria: Enterprise and ingenuity in gathering information; depth of information gathered; quality and style of writing and reporting; Sunshine Law's significance in the published reporting; use of headlines; treatment of the story relative to its importance.

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