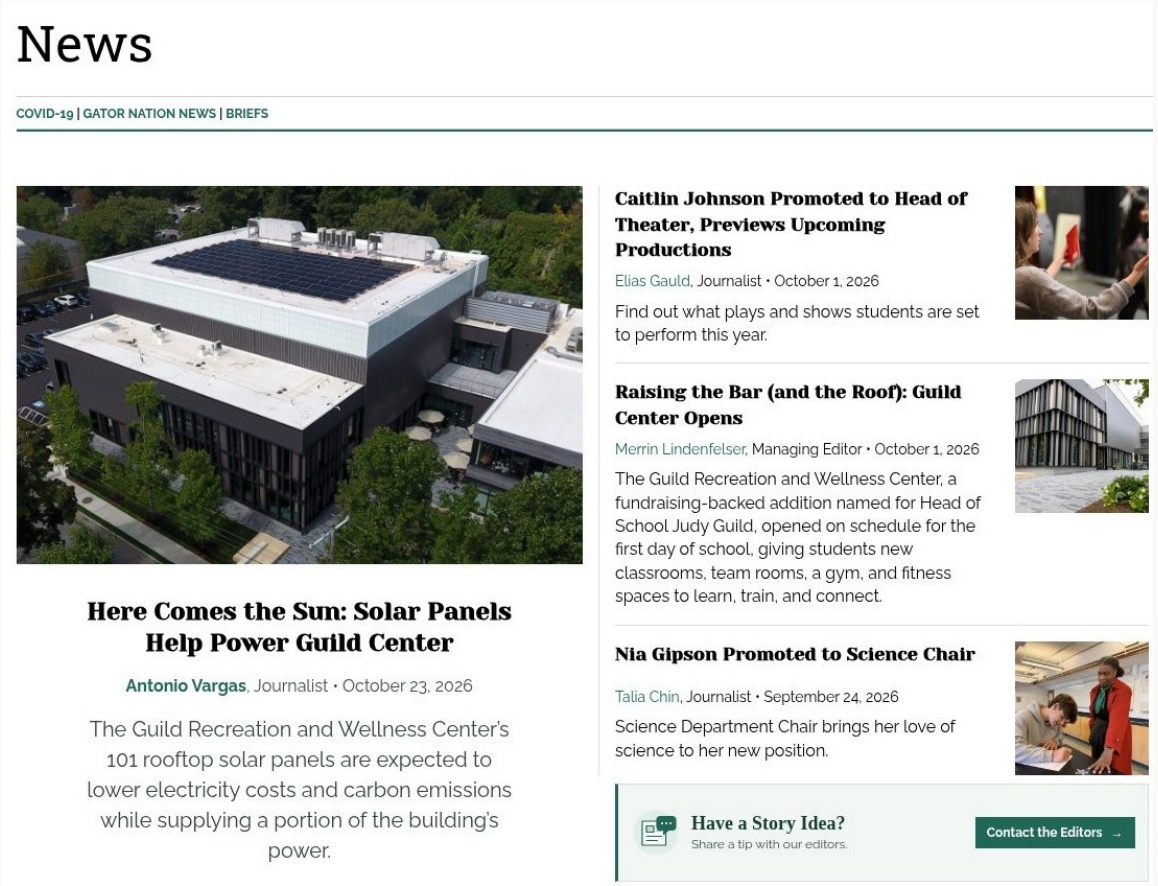
What judges look for in online news sites

Reporting, design, and a reason to return



[Open this presentation's resources ↗]

David Cutler

Adviser, The Gator · Founder, PSJA

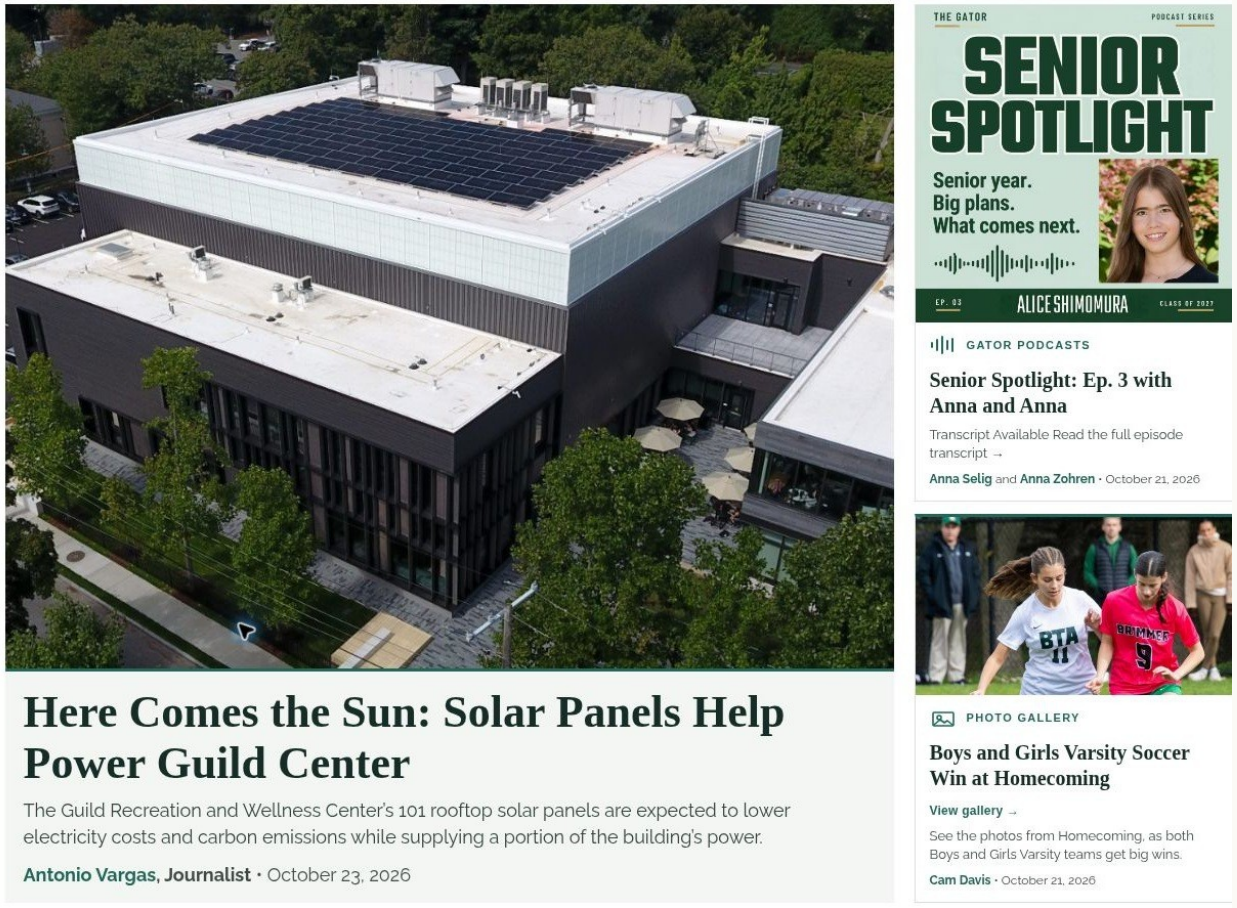
Give readers a reason to return

Publish with purpose

Keep the homepage and every major section current. A beautiful page cannot compensate for stale reporting.

Show the whole school

Look beyond the most visible teams, activities, and students.



The Gator · homepage lead

Open The Gator example ↗

Slides & resource links ↗

Make every story useful

Report first

Interview people with different stakes. Verify facts, quotations, names, and context.

Ask your staff

What will readers understand after this story that they could not understand before?

Explain what it means

Use analysis, source links, and follow-up reporting to move beyond announcements.

Study the evidence

Read one story closely. Follow its links and ask whose perspective is missing.

Open slides and resources ↗

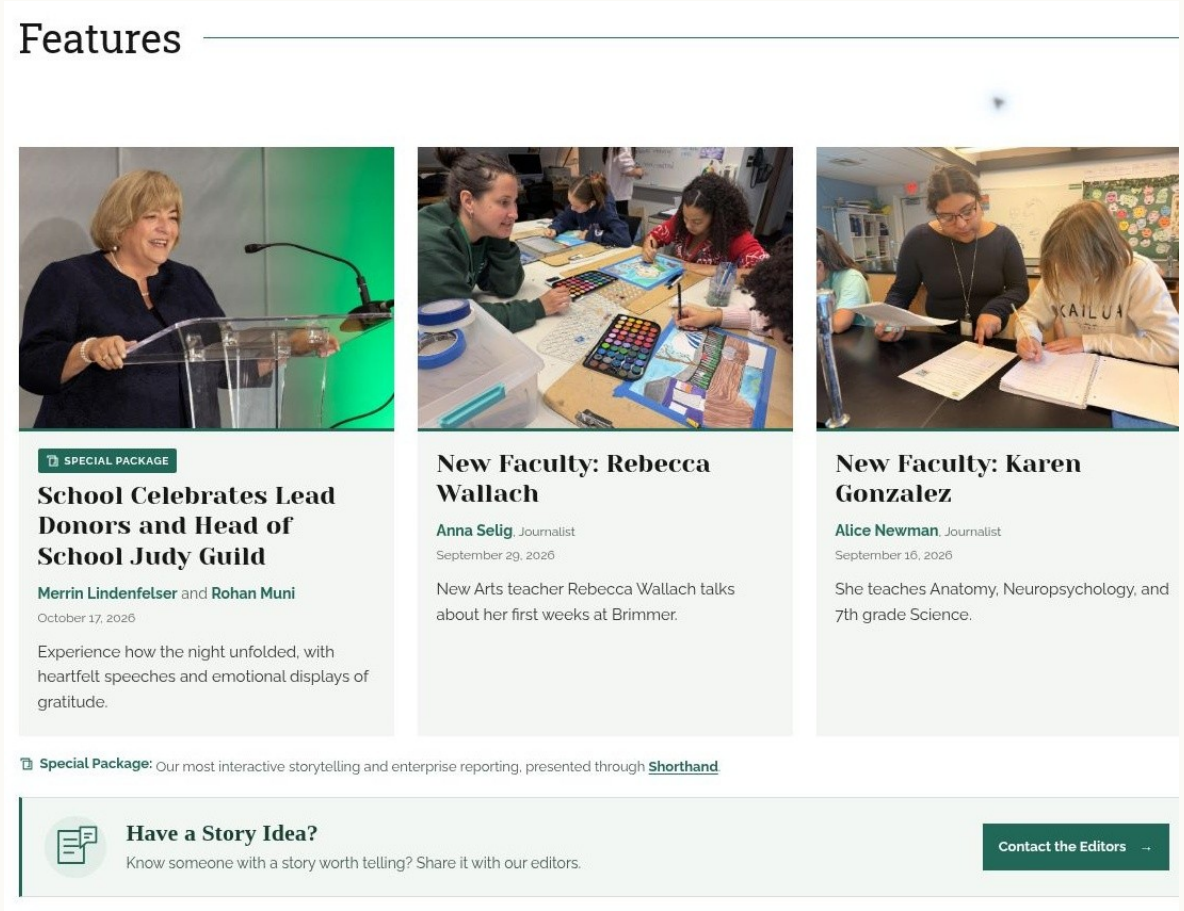
Make the page easy to read

Build a clear hierarchy

Give the strongest story prominence. Use readable type, concise labels, and predictable navigation.

Check the small screen

Test image crops, menus, captions, links, and embeds on a phone.



Open The Gator example ↗

The Gator · feature coverage

Slides & resource links ↗

Use original visual journalism

Work with student artists

Plan photographs, graphics, and illustrations with the reporting rather than adding decoration at the end.

Keep the source clear

Credit creators and label illustrations. Preserve the distinction between documentary evidence and design.



Harvest Fest illustration by Juliet Grenzke · The Gator

Open The Gator example ↗

Slides & resource links ↗

Cover difficult questions with care

Serve your community

A strong student press can examine serious issues in its own school. Newsworthiness comes with a duty to be fair.

Give people a chance to respond

Document your reporting, consider harm, and explain decisions when that helps readers.

Discussion

Name an important story your newsroom has avoided. What reporting would make it responsible to pursue?

Editorial independence

Students should develop and exercise judgment, with an adviser who teaches and supports them.

Open slides and resources ↗

Respect copyright and authorship

Use what you own or may lawfully use

A credit alone is not permission. Check licenses, permissions, and the rules of the contest you enter.

Keep a record

Save the creator, source, license, and permission for outside material.

Before publishing

Review music, photographs, illustrations, screenshots, and embedded material.

Before entering

Read the current contest rules. Do not assume every competition applies the same eligibility standards.

Open slides and resources ↗

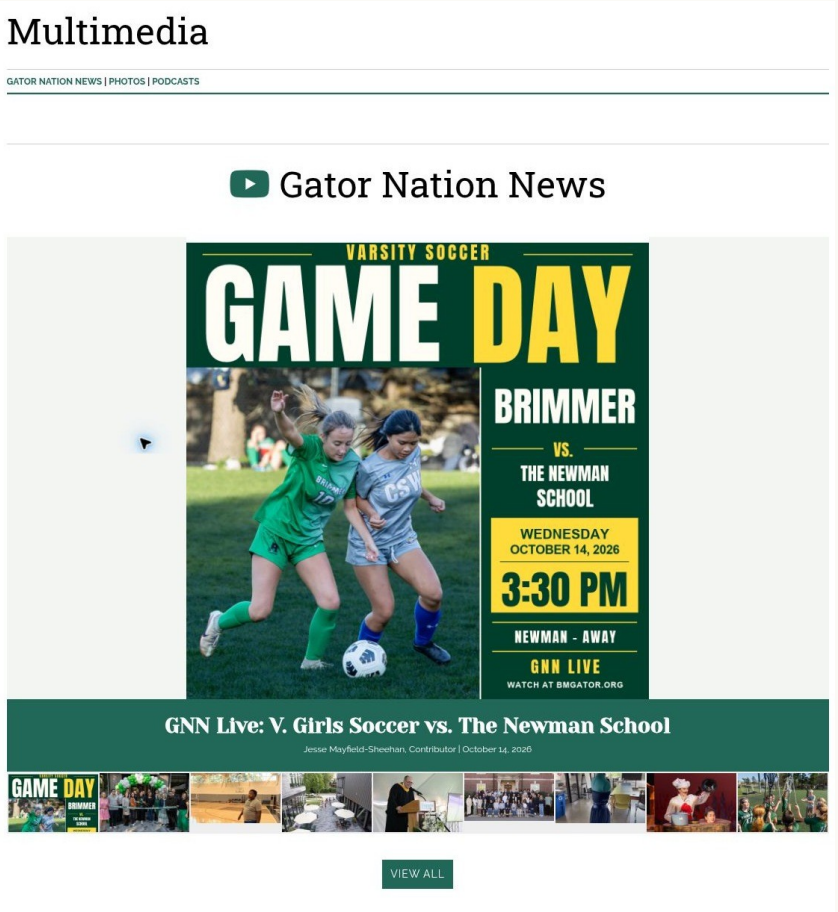
Choose digital tools that help the story

Add a useful format

Audio, video, galleries, and interactive elements should help the audience understand or access the reporting.

Test the experience

Check playback, captions, links, loading, and accessibility before you publish.



Open The Gator example ↗

Live sports coverage · The Gator

Slides & resource links ↗

Audit one section, choose one improvement

01 Open one section of your publication as a first-time reader.

02 Check freshness, breadth of coverage, reporting, visuals, navigation, and credits.

03 Choose one repair with an owner and a realistic deadline.

WORKING TIME

10 minutes

YOU WILL PRODUCE

A specific improvement your staff can complete and evaluate. These are workshop priorities, not an official contest scoring rubric.

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