

# Magazine self-critique

**How is your magazine perceived by the first-time reader? Does it make a strong first impression? Does it have a distinct personality that sets it apart? Does it draw in passive readers?**

A magazine should:

- Reveal the meaningful or useful importance of every story
- Use creativity to serve rather than amuse
- Be a clear, navigable document
- Respond to the readers' needs
- Consciously out-perform direct competitors
- Be responsive to the changing competition for readers' time
- Follow the rules of clear communication except when it is appropriate to make a particular point

The following questions are worded so that yes is always the right answer. The answers are evident but their rightness is debatable. There is no right or wrong in magazine making, only more or less effective. Effectiveness must be consciously chosen. These questions will help you consciously choose, after some discussion with your colleagues, how to make your magazine as effective as possible given your preferences and unique situation.

**Developing your magazine's personality**

Are you unique? Do you stand apart from your competition? Do you look more valuable? Is what makes you special noticeable?

- Is the product recognizable at first glance?
- Is the product unique enough to distinguish it from the competition?
- Does the product have a characteristic cover format?
- Does the cover format allow flexibility while maintaining uniformity?
- Is the logo distinctive, not just plain type?
- Is the logo large enough to be proudly visible?
- Does the cover arouse curiosity and lure the passive?
- Does the paper stock give an impression of value?
- Is the logo echoed in the dept headings?
- Do you have characteristic page makeup in patterning and texture?
- Does typography unify pages without boring sameness?
- Is there enough consistency to make the product distinctive?
- Is there enough variety within the consistency to generate liveliness?
- Are people in photos interesting: alive, unposed, believable?
- Does the reader have a reason to look forward to the next issue?
- Do ads and edit benefit from strong visual contrast?
- Is the design responsive to substance, or is it just surface gloss?

**Wayfinding**

Are readers guided through information? Must they search, ever? Are the directions user-friendly?

- Is the product service oriented?
- Are story beginnings recognizable?
- Does the presentation make the content more intelligible?
- Is the contents page always in the usual, findable place?
- Is what the reader needs to know edited and planned to be most visible?
- Are identity signals (logos and sinkage) used consistently?
- Is information ranked so uncaring readers can skim?
- Can the potential reader learn the gist of the story just from the display material?
- Are cover lines used to entice the reader inside?
- Are coverlines repeated verbatim on both the contents page and story openers?
- Do heads pop out because of size and weight contrast?
- Are related topics close, unrelated ones separated?
- Is spot color reserved only for functional, explanatory emphasis?
- Is the stopping power of huge images used appropriately?
- Do captions describe the significance of the imagery?
- Are captions treated as display type to lure readers into the story?

**CONTINUED ...**

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### Reasons for reading

Do you challenge your readers to read? Do you make them dig for the good stuff? Do you really think they will?

- Are you predigesting the editorial content?
- Are you making it plain why each story is important to the reader?
- Do all heads, decks, and quotes imply "What's in it for me?"
- Do decks and captions focus on the significance of the story?
- Is each item announced by a dominant element?
- Is there exactly one sell line per page to turn scanners into readers?
- Does contents page give reasons for reading as well as just listing story titles?
- Are stories shown so readers can gauge time and effort?
- Are big stories broken into bite-size chunks?
- Are sidebars used as backdoors into the main story?
- Is the editorial significance of visually boring photos exposed?
- Are pictures cropped ruthlessly to home in on the most telling part?
- Do illustrations advance understanding and enrich the information?
- Do words and images support each others' message?
- Is there a caption for every picture?
- Do the words of captions fascinate as if they were headlines?
- Is statistical information reported visually?
- Are visuals explained in callouts instead of tedious captions?
- Is color used to explain content rather than decorate the page?
- Does color emphasize what is worthy of emphasis?
- Do you create interest and loyalty by showing your indispensability?

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### Are you reader-friendly?

Editorial attitude makes reading easy. You have to sell, sell, sell your content. That is why everything that can be made attractive, charming, and easy to absorb should be.

- Do you deploy the best material visually to pull in the scanning reader?
- Is the personal value of the stories used as bait?
- Do you involve the reader fast enough to avoid "I'll come back to that later"?
- Does information - rather than cute punning - in headlines intrigue the reader?
- Does the reader benefit come across immediately?
- If the headline has to be a topic title, is the reason for reading in the deck?
- Are active, positive verbs used in every headline?
- Are ideas boiled down to their simplest expression to reduce reader effort?
- Are text columns narrow enough to avoid discouraging readers?
- Are columns wide enough to avoid excessive hyphenation and uneven wordspacing in justified text?
- Is the ratio of type size and line length related to adequate linespacing?
- Does the product make the hard work of reading look effortless?
- Are typefaces chosen for reading comfort rather than mere novelty or fashion?
- Are all-capitals restricted to very short headlines?

- Is white type on black (or tint or texture) used rarely and then only for special, self-communicative purpose?
- Is dropped out type made a bit larger and bolder to compensate?
- Does the succession of impressions accumulate into a feeling of muchness?
- Is there a cheerful variety or is the total effect gray and pallid?
- Is the reader satisfied enough to remember, quote from, and like your product?
- Do you mistakenly assume your readers care, or do you sell them on everything, every time?

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