



CONNECTING | EDUCATING | ADVOCATING

2026 College Newspaper Competition

ENTRY PACKAGE

STUDENT JOURNALISM MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

Recognizing the creativity, dedication and impact of college journalists across New England.

FRESH IDEAS.
BOLD STORIES.
BRIGHTER
TOMORROWS.

*The next
generation
of journalism
starts here.*



PEOPLE | STORIES | OPPORTUNITIES

*Investing in
the future of local news.*

Welcome to the 2026 College Division

The New England Better Newspaper Competition's College Division recognizes outstanding journalism produced by student news organizations at colleges and universities throughout Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

The 2026 competition has been updated to reflect how student journalism is produced today - in print, online and across digital, visual, audio, and social platforms - while continuing to recognize excellence in the fundamental skills of reporting, writing, editing, design, and photojournalism.

At a Glance

- **Eligible work:** Published August 1, 2025 through July 31, 2026.
- **Deadline:** Friday, October 30, 2026.
- **Eligibility:** All New England colleges and universities are invited to enter.
- **Entry platform:** newspapercontest.com/nenpa. Use association code NENPA.

Entry fee: \$150 includes up to 15 entries. Additional entries are \$15 each. Newspaper of the Year may be entered at no additional charge by any school purchasing the 15-entry package.

USE YOUR 15 ENTRIES

Gather your staff, review the category list, and identify the work you are most proud of. If you're proud of it, enter it.

2026 Category Lineup

REPORTING / WRITING

Arts & Entertainment
Criticism
Feature Story
Good News Award
In-Depth Reporting
News Story
Press Freedom / Right-to-Know
Civic Issues Reporting
Sports Story
Sports Game Story
Digital Storytelling
Editorial

SECTIONS & DESIGN

Arts & Entertainment Page or Section
Special Section / Special Project
News Design
Opinion Page(s)
Graphics & Visual Journalism

PHOTOJOURNALISM

Feature Photo
General News Photo
Spot News Photo
Sports Action Photo
Portrait / Personality Photo
Photo Story / Essay

DIGITAL

Best News Website
Podcast
Video Journalism
Social Media Journalism
Newsletter

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Collaborative Journalism

TOP HONORS

Top College Journalist
College Rising Star
Newspaper of the Year

CATEGORIES & CRITERIA

Complete entry descriptions and judging criteria

NEWS REPORTING

Arts & Entertainment Criticism

Recognizes outstanding criticism, commentary or review of arts, entertainment, culture or lifestyle topics, including music, film, television, theater, books, dining, visual arts and other cultural subjects. Judges will consider originality of perspective, depth of knowledge, quality of writing, analysis and the writer's ability to engage the audience.

Feature Story

Recognizes outstanding feature writing on any non-sports subject. Judges will consider reporting, originality, storytelling, writing quality, structure, use of detail and the story's ability to engage the reader.

Good News Award

Recognizes outstanding journalism that tells an uplifting, hopeful or solutions-oriented story without sacrificing depth or journalistic rigor. Entries may spotlight acts of kindness, everyday heroes, resilient communities, creative solutions or positive change. Judges will consider reporting, originality, storytelling, emotional resonance and the ability to inform as well as inspire.

News Story

Recognizes excellence in coverage of a significant campus, local or regional news event or issue. Entries may include one primary story and related sidebars published as part of the same coverage. Judges will consider reporting, accuracy, writing, sourcing, context, significance and presentation.

In-Depth Reporting

Recognizes a single story or series demonstrating substantial reporting and depth on an important issue. Entries should include a brief statement describing the reporting process, challenges encountered and any impact or follow-up. Judges will consider significance, depth, sourcing, use of data and documents where appropriate, clarity, originality and overall journalistic impact.

Press Freedom / Right-to-Know

Recognizes outstanding work by a student journalist or student news organization demonstrating a strong commitment to press freedom, transparency and the public's right to know. Entries may include a single story, series, editorial, body of work or documented effort by the newsroom to obtain information, hold officials

accountable or defend the rights of a free and independent student press. Judges will consider perseverance, significance, journalistic quality and impact.

Civic Issues Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting on issues of significant concern to a campus or community. Entries may include coverage of protests and demonstrations, activism, elections, student government, free speech, institutional policies, community debates and other issues involving civic participation or public life. Judges will consider depth of reporting, fairness, context, inclusion of diverse perspectives and how effectively the work helps audiences understand the issue.

Sports Story

Recognizes outstanding sports journalism about an athlete, team, sport or issue related to athletics. Entries should go beyond routine game coverage. Judges will consider reporting, originality, writing, storytelling, sourcing and significance.

Sports Game Story

Recognizes outstanding deadline coverage of a sporting event. Judges will consider reporting, accuracy, writing, scene-setting, use of detail and the writer's ability to convey the significance and drama of the competition.

Digital Storytelling

Recognizes journalism that uses digital tools and multiple forms of media to tell a story in a compelling and effective way. Entries may incorporate text, photography, video, audio, graphics, data visualization, interactive elements, social media or other digital techniques. Judges will consider journalistic quality, creativity, user experience and whether the chosen formats enhance the storytelling.

Editorial

Recognizes an unsigned editorial representing the institutional voice of the student publication. Judges will consider quality of writing, strength and clarity of argument, fairness, significance of the issue, originality and relevance to the publication's audience.

SECTIONS AND DESIGN

Arts & Entertainment Page or Section

Recognizes an outstanding print or digital section devoted primarily to arts, entertainment and culture. Judges will consider quality and variety of content, writing, visual presentation, originality, organization and appeal to the audience.

Special Section / Special Project

Recognizes an outstanding special editorial project devoted to a particular topic, event, issue or theme. Entries may be published in print, digitally or across platforms. Judges will consider ambition, reporting and writing, organization, design and presentation, originality and overall value to the audience.

News Design

Recognizes excellence in the visual presentation of journalism in print or digital formats. Entries may include a newspaper front page, section front, magazine-style presentation, digital story presentation or other designed news presentation. Judges will consider news judgment and hierarchy, organization, typography, use of headlines, photography, graphics and other visual elements, readability, creativity and overall effectiveness of the design in serving the journalism. Submit one complete example as it appeared to the audience. For digital entries, provide a URL and screenshots when appropriate.

Opinion Page(s)

Recognizes an outstanding print or digital opinion section or presentation. Judges will consider the quality and variety of editorials, columns and commentary; relevance to the audience; diversity of viewpoints; writing; design and overall impact.

Graphics & Visual Journalism

Recognizes outstanding original visual journalism used to explain, clarify or enhance a story or topic. Entries may include illustrations, informational graphics, maps, charts, diagrams, data visualizations or other visual storytelling. Judges will consider clarity, accuracy, originality, design, journalistic value and how effectively the visual helps the audience understand the subject.

PHOTOJOURNALISM

Photo entries should be submitted as JPEG files and accompanied by a digital tearsheet, screenshot or link showing the image as published. Images entered as part of a Photo Story / Essay may also be entered individually in another appropriate photo category.

Feature Photo

A compelling photograph of a person, place, moment or event that captures human interest, emotion, humor or an unusual perspective. Judges will consider storytelling, composition, creativity, technical quality and impact.

General News Photo

Coverage of a planned or anticipated campus or community news event. Judges will consider news value, storytelling, composition, timing, technical quality and impact.

Spot News Photo

Coverage of an unexpected or breaking news event for which there was no advance assignment or planning. Judges will consider news value, timing, storytelling, composition, technical quality and impact.

Sports Action Photo

A photograph capturing action, competition or a decisive moment during an athletic event. Judges will consider timing, composition, technical quality, storytelling and impact.

Portrait / Personality Photo

A posed or candid photograph of an individual or group that reveals something meaningful about the subject's personality, character, work or role. Judges will consider composition, lighting, creativity, technical quality and storytelling.

Photo Story / Essay

A collection of photographs that work together to tell a story, document a subject or explore a theme. Judges will consider storytelling, journalistic value, visual variety, sequencing, technical quality and the strength of the images as a body of work.

Digital

Best News Website

Recognizes overall excellence in a student news organization's website. Judges will consider quality and timeliness of journalism, organization and navigation, visual presentation, mobile usability, use of photography and multimedia, audience experience and overall service to the campus or community. Submit the website URL and login information if access is restricted.

Podcast

Recognizes outstanding journalism produced in podcast or audio form. Entries may be a single episode or one episode from an ongoing series. Judges will consider reporting, storytelling, writing, interviewing, production quality, originality and effective use of audio.

Video Journalism

Recognizes outstanding journalism produced primarily in video form, including news, features, sports, explanatory or documentary work. Judges will consider reporting, storytelling, visual quality, editing, production, originality and how effectively video is used to tell the story.

Social Media Journalism

Recognizes outstanding journalism created or adapted specifically for social media platforms. Entries may include a single project or a coordinated series of posts using text, photography, video, graphics or other formats. Judges will consider journalistic quality, creativity, platform-appropriate storytelling, audience engagement and overall impact.

Newsletter

Recognizes an outstanding newsletter produced by a student news organization. Entries may be general-news or topic-specific newsletters. Judges will consider editorial judgment, writing and curation, design, usefulness, voice, audience engagement and how effectively the newsletter serves its intended audience.

Special Recognition

Collaborative Journalism

Recognizes outstanding journalism produced through a meaningful collaboration between student news organizations or between a student newsroom and another journalism organization. Entries should include a brief description of the partnership, each participant's role and the resulting journalism. Judges will consider the quality of the journalism, effectiveness of the collaboration, innovation, impact and whether the partnership accomplished something the participants could not have achieved as effectively alone.

Top Honors

Entry materials for individual honors

Nominees must be college students studying journalism or a related field at a New England school. Submit the following as a single PDF:

- A nomination or cover letter
- Resume or brief biography
- Letter of recommendation
- A representative body of published journalistic work from a student news organization, general-circulation publication or similar outlet, and/or work prepared for a journalism class

Top College Journalist

Recognizes an outstanding graduating college journalist who has demonstrated excellence, leadership and commitment to journalism throughout their college career. Nominees may work in reporting, editing, photography, video, audio, design, digital journalism or other areas of student journalism. Judges will consider the quality and breadth of the nominee's work, journalistic achievement, leadership, initiative and contribution to their news organization and community.

College Rising Star

Recognizes an exceptional first- or second-year undergraduate who is already demonstrating extraordinary promise as a journalist. Nominees may work in reporting, editing, photography, video, audio, design, digital journalism or other areas of student journalism. Judges will consider journalistic ability, initiative, growth, leadership potential and contribution to their news organization.

Top Honors

New England College Newspaper of the Year

Recognizes overall excellence by a student news organization.

Submit two representative print editions published during the contest year (if applicable), the publication's website, and a brief statement describing the organization and its work during the contest year.

Judges will consider quality and breadth of journalism, reporting and writing, editing, design and visual presentation, digital journalism, innovation, coverage of the campus and surrounding community, and overall service to its audience. First, Second, and Third Place will be awarded.

General Entry Guidelines

Original work: All entries must be the work of the student publication or student news organization. Material from syndicated or wire services is not eligible as the entrant's own work.

File formats: Acceptable formats include PDF, URL and JPEG for photographs and graphics. When a URL is submitted, it should bring the judge directly to the entry whenever possible.

Restricted access: If an entry is behind a paywall, registration wall or other restricted access, include working login information in the contest entry explanation field.

PDF entries: When multiple pages or supporting materials are required, combine them into a single PDF whenever practical rather than uploading each page separately.

Digital entries: Provide stable URLs and screenshots when appropriate so judges can evaluate the work as it appeared during the contest year.

Judging: Entries will be evaluated using the criteria listed for each category. NENPA reserves the right to adjust awards or cancel a category if there are insufficient entries.

Questions?

Contact NENPA at students@nenpa.com or info@nenpa.com.



2026 NENPA COLLEGE CONTEST ENTRY PLANNER

What was your newsroom proud of this year? If you're proud of it, enter it.

\$150 includes up to 15 entries • Additional entries \$15 each • Newspaper of the Year included at no additional charge

REPORTING / WRITING

☐ Arts & Entertainment Criticism: _____

☐ Feature Story: _____

☐ Good News Award: _____

☐ In-Depth Reporting: _____

☐ News Story: _____

☐ Press Freedom / Right-to-Know: _____

☐ Civic Issues Reporting: _____

☐ Sports Story: _____

☐ Sports Game Story: _____

☐ Digital Storytelling: _____

☐ Editorial: _____

PHOTOJOURNALISM

☐ Feature Photo: _____

☐ General News Photo: _____

☐ Spot News Photo: _____

☐ Sports Action Photo: _____

☐ Portrait / Personality Photo: _____

☐ Photo Story / Essay: _____

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

☐ Collaborative Journalism: _____

SECTIONS & DESIGN

☐ Arts & Entertainment Page or Section: _____

☐ Special Section / Special Project: _____

☐ News Design: _____

☐ Opinion Page(s): _____

☐ Graphics & Visual Journalism: _____

DIGITAL

☐ Best News Website: _____

☐ Podcast: _____

☐ Video Journalism: _____

☐ Social Media Journalism: _____

☐ Newsletter: _____

TOP HONORS

☐ Top College Journalist: _____

☐ College Rising Star: _____

☐ Newspaper of the Year: _____

*Quick newsroom check: major story? strong feature? civic issue? great photo? podcast/video?
newsletter? social project? collaboration? standout student?*

Entry deadline: Friday, October 30, 2026 • newspapercontest.com/nenpa • Association code: NENPA