

## Newsletter Tips

Newsletters are valuable forms of communication between the school and home. To ensure that families read the newsletter some important points must be considered.

- If possible, keep newsletter to one page front and back.
- Do not use any more than two fonts per page (bold, italic, and various sizes are considered one font).
- Use positive, active words in the headlines, not passive words.
- Break up the page and give clues to importance by using subheadings.
- Experiment with one-, two-, or three-column formats for a more professional look.
- Write at sixth-grade level (like *USA Today*) and do not use technical terms.
- Proofread!
- Keep the masthead of the newsletter simple, and use it consistently.
- Use 12-point fonts for easy reading. Headlines should be 18 or 24 point.
- Use tag lines above or below headline (use smaller size font to clarify headlines).
- Include graphics (like clip art) to prioritize and add interest to the page.
- Use short sentences (10-12 words) and short paragraphs (about 6 lines).
- Blocked areas indicate special attention items.
- Use boldface instead of underline for a more professional look.
- Do not overuse capital letters; they are harder to read.
- Be an individual—write to express, not impress.
- Prioritize. Put the most important stories first.
- Ask teachers, families, administrators, and children for input into the newsletters.
- Use bylines to credit the authors.
- Get to the point. Let families know who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- Be direct: Speak to each family member. Use “You should,” “Please do,” instead of “Parents should.”
- Be careful not to overuse words like *seems*, *usually*, *possibly*, *may*, or *perhaps*.
- Use boldface to emphasize important words and phrases.
- Try not to continue stories; family members do not like to look for them.
- Topics for your newsletter might include current events within school, upcoming television programs recommended for viewing, calendar of events, individual/class goals, changes in school rules or policies, educational information, suggested children’s books, suggested parenting books, or suggested children’s software.
- Include classroom highlights, children’s birthdays, a spotlight on new students, volunteer recognition, recipes for clay or silly putty, future thematic units, or updates on centers.
- Offer snack ideas, request volunteers or materials, or write a regular “From the Teacher’s Desk” column.
- Distribute the newsletter on a regular schedule so it will become anticipated by the audience.
- Keep a newsletter file. Study the ones that were successful and analyze they worked.
- Proofread!

Adapted from Watkins, R. Z. (1993). Two-way communication: Sharing personal perspectives with parents. *Scholastic Early Childhood Today*, 8(1), 41.

## Tips for Writing the Newsletter on the Computer

Writing a newsletter may seem simple, but keep some basic tips in mind regarding content and format. If transitioning from a typewriter to a computer, there are some fundamental “rules” learned in Typing 101 that need to be revised and others that need to be totally rewritten that differentiate the “typist” from the “keyboardist.” *The Macintosh Is Not a Typewriter* by Robin Williams is a style manual available at most bookstores and is a great reference book (72 pages) for any “would be” desktop publisher.

Most computer users pick up rather quickly on the concept of “text wrap.” The computer actually moves the text on to the next line without activating the **return** key. Other differences between the typewriter and the computer may not be so obvious. For example, unlike the typewriter, when two spaces would normally be left between the sentences, on the computer, leave only one. Other useful formatting and printing tips are as follows:

- Don't use more than two fonts per page (italics and bold forms are not considered different fonts).
- Don't underline. Underling makes the characters more difficult to read—especially when the letter has a descender like j, g, q, y, or p. Use *italics* or **bold** instead. If a word must be underlined, draw a line under the text and position it lower than the underline option in the “Style” menu.
- Use *italic* and **bold** type sparingly.
- If a word needs an accent mark, use it. For example, instead of using papier-mâché, type papier-mâché. Look in the “Menu for Key Caps” and use the **Shift** and **Option** keys for symbols. Try this with different fonts, too. Each font has its own set of Key Caps.
- NEVER USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS IN BODY TEXT, and rarely in headings. It is too difficult to read.
- When printing on a LaserWriter, never use city-named fonts like Chicago or Monaco.
- Never use the space bar to align text. It might look all right on the screen, but it won't when it comes out of the printer. Set the tabs and use the tab key.
- Use a decimal or right aligned tab for the numbers in numbered paragraphs.
- Either indent the first line of paragraphs or add extra space between them; don't do both.
- Use serif type for body text unless allowing for the lower readability of sans serif. This is a serif text. This is sans serif text.
- Never combine two serif fonts on one page. Therefore, if using two fonts, one should be serif and the other should be sans serif. Sans serif is commonly used for headings while serif is used for text.
- Allow for plenty of white space.
- Use some sort of bullet when listing items. Don't use a hyphen.
- Set the space before an italicized word also in italics.
- Reduce the size of punctuation marks in headlines.

For a clear understanding of the new rules and why the rules of the game have changed, *The Macintosh Is Not a Typewriter*, published by Peachpit Press, Berkeley, CA, is an investment which will not be regretted.

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