

CREATIVE MEDIA CONTEST

TIPS FROM OUR STAFF

Look for personal columns in the Region and Life sections. Personal columns are easily identified by the "mug" shot of the writer that accompanies the column.

PERSONAL COLUMN

Edie Gross, reporter and columnist

Share a little about yourself while telling an interesting story. Look to the times in your life when you've learned something, perhaps unexpectedly, and draw inspiration from those moments—a family trip, the first time you rode a bike, the weekend you were grounded.

All of life is fodder for good storytelling, and many experiences are universal—lots of us have gone through them. It's what you take away from those experiences, the message that you share in your writing, that makes a personal column funny or moving or just plain entertaining to the reader.

Personal columns are almost always written in first-person and are based on real-life experiences.



Judging criteria: Effective use of a personal tale to communicate a clear, relevant message.

Bill Rechin's comic strip "Crock" appears in more than 200 newspapers worldwide, including The Free Lance-Star.

COMIC STRIP

Bill Rechin, syndicated cartoonist

Create a short, amusing story that you can tell in a comic strip format. Draw characters that make you smile when you look at them, and have fun. Keep it simple. Don't clutter backgrounds.

Think funny and simple!



Judging criteria: Creativity, humor and originality. Neatness counts.

Read editorials and commentaries in the Opinion section every day and Viewpoints on Sunday.

COMMENTARY

Karen Owen, Op-Ed/Viewpoints editor

When writing an editorial or an opinion column, it's important to do the research to make sure you have the details right, and then write as persuasive an article as possible. Try to know both sides of an issue, and then present what YOU think. You can have an opinion on just about anything, but write about what you know.



Judging criteria: Well-argued main point supported by effective use of facts and opinions.

Check out Clay Jones' editorial cartoons on the Opinion page. Read his blog and view his rough sketches at fredericksburg.com/blogs.

EDITORIAL CARTOON

Clay Jones, editorial cartoonist

The idea is 90 percent of your cartoon. Cut to the chase with your point. Avoid the obvious.



Judging criteria: Clarity of message and originality. Neatness counts.

You will find photographs of all types throughout the newspaper. Some are taken by staff photographers; others are transmitted by wire services.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Ben Fredman, photo journalist

Photographs should be of spontaneous, non-staged moments from daily life. Try to isolate and compose the moments around you in dynamic ways. Remember that things like light, composition and compelling moments make great pictures. Do not turn a blind eye to the things you see in your daily routine. In short, look for fresh ways to find the extraordinary in the ordinary.



Judging criteria: Composition, lighting, exposure, and strength of moment.

Display ads appear throughout the newspaper.

AD DESIGN

Bob Hebert, sales development team leader

Simply put, the goal of advertising is to get the reader to take action. Newspaper readers seldom spend more than a few seconds reading an ad. Think of the ad as a story told at hyper speed. Great ads are those that clearly communicate three things to the reader: "What is for sale?"; "What is the benefit to me?" and "How can I get it?" In other words, make the reader aware, and make them care!

The addition of large, exciting artwork will attract the reader's eye. Don't clutter up the ad with lots of tiny art—it's better to go with a single dominant illustration.



Judging criteria: Ability to create awareness and desire for the product being sold.

You will always see feature stories in the Life section and will often find them in other sections.

FEATURE STORY

Kim Baer, reporter and columnist

Feature writing tells a story about a person, a place, a family, an event, or a trend. The story can be light—about someone taking a driving test for the third time, for example. It also can be serious, such as a story about someone who is suffering from a disease. Feature writing uses the same literary devices that make the fiction you read interesting: conflict, imagery, dialogue, irony, foreshadowing, and metaphor.

Pay attention to detail and record it in your notebook. What does a place look like, sound like, smell like? Talk to people. Include some of the best quotes in your story.

Feature stories are generally written in third-person.



Judging criteria: Ability to build and sustain interest, use of quotes and details.

More tips at fredericksburg.com/nie



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The Free Lance-Star