

## Homeschool Newsletter Editors FAQ

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### How Did I Get Myself Into This?

A newsletter is more than just typing. You need to have organizational skills and an eye for detail. Communication skills (and patience!) are also important as you'll spend time contacting people who haven't turned in their articles or information. Good listening skills help. If you hear someone talking about a great activity they did, ask them to write about it or get a thorough description so you can write it yourself. A good newsletter takes hours and hours of time, but it's also very rewarding.

### What Do I Include?

#### THE BASICS:

- An editor's column
- Local activities: upcoming field trips, reminders about regularly scheduled events (park days, board meetings, etc.)
- Community activities that might interest homeschoolers. Possible sources of information include library message boards, community & family newspapers, and community or rec. center

bulletins/catalogues.

- Don't forget the seasonal stuff: swim lessons, baseball, softball, soccer, etc. Many museums, theatre groups, zoos, etc. will send out free information if you sign up for their mailing list.
- Legal information
- Monthly support group meeting minutes
- Date/time for next meeting

#### OTHER THINGS YOU MIGHT WANT TO INCLUDE:

- Homeschooling articles (written by you or others)
- Useful/interesting web sites
- Book & Movie reviews
- Family features (why we homeschool, a day in our life, project ideas)
- Poetry (written by homeschoolers, of course)
- Recipes (Frugal recipe ideas, things kids can make, holiday recipes, etc.)
- Kids pages (written by and for kids). Ask a different family to be responsible for this each month, you'll probably end up with some interesting content!
- Content relevant to different age groups

#### **How do I find content for my newsletter?**

Ask, ask, ask! Ask for specific articles from people you know. For instance, ask someone who's recently planned a successful activity to write about it. Is there someone who always plans the park days, book fairs, etc.? If they're uncomfortable about writing an article, ask if you can interview them. Ask someone who has used a particular resource to write a review of it. Ask people for project & craft ideas. Interview the librarian at your local library. Ask the local museum curator for an interview about an upcoming exhibit. Most people are glad to talk to you if it helps get the word out about their service or organization.

If your group has an email chat list, make sure you subscribe. People will often post about activities they've done, ask (and answer) questions about resources, mention a new book they've read, a movie they've seen or place in your community they've visited. Just make sure you ask their permission before publishing their comments in your newsletter.

\*\*Check the [NHEN Article Clearinghouse](#) for articles on a variety of topics you can include in your newsletters.

#### **Calendar Ideas**

If the main purpose of your newsletter is to keep members informed about upcoming activities, a calendar of some kind is a necessity. This can be as simple as a bulleted list or a real calendar page made with a word processing or publishing program. Some editors choose to make their calendar a pull out page that can be hung on a bulletin board or the refrigerator.

#### EMAIL CALENDARS

If you're using a service like Yahoo! Groups to send out your newsletter, they have a calendar available. You can even set it up to send out reminders prior to an event.

#### WEB BASED CALENDARS

A free online calendar service is available at:

<http://www.conweb.com/calendar/>

<http://www.conweb.com/calendar/za2-more.cfm#free>

A free trial period is available. After that, you have to fill out some hard copy paperwork, and mail it to them. But there is no cost because you're offering a community service. If your group has a webpage, your conweb calendar can match it. Events are added with passwords. The title of the activity is listed in the calendar date square, but then down under that calendar month, you have the text from the activity. It can be as long as you want, give as many details as you need. Completed calendars can always be printed out for the non-internet members of your support group.

### **How do I copyright my newsletter?**

Your newsletter (and anything else you write) is automatically copyrighted, protected from use by others. You hold the copyright to your original work automatically. Most editors add a copyright disclaimer to their newsletters to ensure that others know the material is yours and to list any reprinting issues. Here's the one we include with *NHENotes* each month:

Copyright (c) 2001, National Home Education Network,  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

*NHENotes* is a free monthly newsletter sponsored by the National Home Education Network. Subscribers are welcome to reprint and/or distribute NHENotes for nonprofit use as long as the appropriate credit is given.

### **General Formatting & Layout**

Front page or top of the newsletter: Start with a logo or nameplate. It doesn't have to be fancy, just the title of your newsletter or the name of your organization. Always include a dateline.

#### **TYPEFACES & FONTS**

- Keep typefaces consistent. A typeface is simply a font family, like Times New Roman, or Arial. Whether you use all CAPS, *italics* or a *COMBINATION*.
- Use only one font in the body of the newsletter, throughout the publication.
- You can alter it by using bold or italic text, and by changing font size.
- Never use italic or cursive fonts for body text.
- Use boldface sparingly.
- Don't use ALL CAPS for anything.

#### **HEADLINES**

- Headlines should be a complete sentence.
- Put headlines in a larger type size than the body copy.

#### **LAYOUT**

- Use columns. This is important for print newsletters, optional for online newsletters (as long as articles are clearly divided) & just one column for email newsletters.
- Keep the margins consistent.
- Don't go overboard with clip art and borders.
- You don't need to fill every square inch of a page.
- Single space after all punctuation marks, don't use two spaces anymore.
- Indent only 2-3 spaces instead of the old standard of 5.

- Place the same features in the same spots each issue.

## **Print Newsletter Information**

### **PRINT PROS & CONS:**

Pros:

- People still like paper.
- It gives the air of being official or at least, less likely to pack up and be gone overnight.
- Having a print newsletter tells people that someone is taking a lot of time to see that they get the information.
- Subscribers feel valued and they feel they are \*receiving\* something for their money.
- Subscribers can easily share it with friends.
- If the contents are good, it stays at their house for re-reading when they might need a little inspiration. And if the contents are not-so-good, it makes decent fire starter.

Cons:

- The most costly and time-consuming option.
- Shorter deadlines than web or email because you have to allow for mailing time, especially if your information is time critical.
- You have to be aware of space limitations.
- Some months you'll have more content than you can squeeze into your pages. Other times, you'll be frantically searching for content to fill extra space.

### **How do I figure out what to charge?**

- Having a consistent number of pages from month to month will make it easier to calculate.
  - Will you be going to your local print center and printing it yourself or will you be having a print shop do it for you? Call several different print shops, both large and small, to get price quotes.
  - Keep in mind that your time is valuable and it might be worth the extra money to have a print shop print, collate and staple your newsletter for you, especially if you have lots of pages and/or a large subscriber base.
  - Are you going to give away sample issues to new members or prospective subscribers?
  - Are you going to provide free copies to area libraries?
  - How many issues are you going to do? Is it monthly, bimonthly, quarterly?
  - Don't forget the small stuff...mailing labels, printer cartridges, staples, etc.

Mailing costs: Take a copy to the post office and have them weigh it or see <http://www.usps.com> for help.

Once you've worked out these details you can more easily figure out how much it'll cost to produce.

## Web Based Newsletter Information

### PROS & CONS

#### Pros:

- You can truly unleash your creativity! Since you don't have to worry about print cost considerations, or the limitations of email, you can make your newsletter as colorful as you want, publish pictures in full color, etc.
- Once you have a template adding new information is a breeze!
- You can archive your past issues so they'll be available for reference...a feature that will be greatly appreciated by your subscribers.
- You don't have to be as concerned about size. If you have more content than usual, add an extra page. If you have less, no one will know!
- Forgot that message from your groups' president or the date of the next board meeting? Did you suddenly realize you misspelled a word? No problem! You can make additions or corrections at any time.
- Good for the environment.

#### Cons:

- Sometimes the server you have your web site on will be down for maintenance, because of some glitch, etc.
- Unless you have a way to protect your site with a password, it will be available for all the world to see, which may make some people uncomfortable about providing contact information.

For some excellent advice about putting your newsletter on the web from someone who's done it see the article, [Taking Your Newsletter Online](#), by Charlotte Richter VP THEA Communications.

### PRIVACY ISSUES

The following sites offer free websites with the ability to password protect parts of your web site. For prospective members and visitors, you can have a general information page about who they contact to join. Keep in mind, however, that all these sites will put advertisements (usually banners or pop-up ads) on your page. In some cases you can upgrade for a fee and have an ad free site.

- DJ Café: <http://members.djcafe.com/>
- Cool Free Pages: <http://www.coolfreepages.com/> All kinds of extras, but they don't offer email
- Bravenet: <http://www.bravenet.com>

### WHAT ABOUT MEMBERS WITHOUT COMPUTER ACCESS?

Show them how to get access your web site at the library. They can even get a free email account if they want one.

### ONLINE NEWSLETTER EXAMPLES

Acceleration Homeschool Club Newsletter

[http://www.homeschoolclub.org/iss2000\\_1.htm](http://www.homeschoolclub.org/iss2000_1.htm)

At Home Family:

<http://www.geocities.com/athomelearning/index.html>

Home Education Magazine's online Newsletter:  
[http://www.home-ed-magazine.com/wlcm\\_hemnewsltr.html](http://www.home-ed-magazine.com/wlcm_hemnewsltr.html)

The Link  
<http://www.homeschoolnewslink.com/index.html>

### **Email Newsletter Information**

Pros:

- The quickest and easiest option
- If you use an email list host like yahoogroups or Topica, you only have to send one email. The service does the rest.
- Little or no cost.

Cons:

- Dealing with bounced emails, subscribes and unsubscribes can be a hassle
- You have to consider subscribers different email programs, computers and modem speeds

For a very thorough guide to email newsletter, read [Publishing Email Newsletters](#), by Sue Patterson, the editor of *NHENotes*.

### **PRIVACY ISSUES**

Sometimes privacy issues arise because local newsletters need to publish telephone numbers. You can set up an account with Yahoo! Groups: <http://groups.yahoo.com> or Topica: <http://www.topica.com>. These list hosting services offer the option of keeping your list private, or posting it in their directory where others can find it. You can also choose the option of approving everyone that wants to sign up and of setting the list up as "announce only", which means only you can post.

You can get a free email account (just do a web search for "free email") and have people contact your organization through this account. You can post this address in your newsletter and have people contact you here.

### **HTML, PLAIN TEXT, OR ANOTHER FORMAT?**

The format you use is up to you, and, if you're so inclined you can even give your readers a choice when they subscribe, but here are some things to consider:

- HTML is definitely the most visually attractive. You can make your email look (and sound) just like a web page. The biggest drawback is that not everyone can read html email (some people deliberately turn this feature off because of the increased risk of email viruses).
- Plain text is probably the most used option, even by hardcore techies. It's not fancy, but can be read by anyone. It downloads fast and is the fastest to produce.
- A couple other options are sending your newsletter out as a Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat attachment. You have to first make sure your subscribers can read a Word document, but the Adobe Acrobat Reader is free. The advantage of using Adobe Acrobat is that your format, fonts and pictures stay where you want them, just like a print newsletter.

Go to <http://www.adobe.com> to download the latest version of Acrobat. Here

are a couple of places on the web that will convert your document to pdf for free:

GoBCL: <http://www.gohtm.com> is a company that makes plug-ins for Adobe Acrobat. They require you to register and log on each time you use the service.

Tom Server Document Converter: <http://wheel.compose.cs.cmu.edu:8001/cgi-bin/browse/objweb> will convert many different types of documents, including web pages, to text, pdf, rich text, etc.

## TEXT WRAPPING

Sometimes the text wraps at odd places in text newsletters. Prevent this by composing your newsletter using a fixed width font and make sure each line is between 60 to 65 spaces long. A fixed width font is one like Courier, Courier New or Lucida Console, where all the letters are the same width. It's usually easier to compose your newsletter using a text editor or word processing program so you can set the line breaks (margins) exactly where you want them.

If you're using a word processing program like Microsoft Word most show you where carriage returns and other hidden characters, like extra spaces, etc. are if you click on the little paragraph symbol on your tool bar. You'll see either curved arrows or paragraph symbols at the end of lines. Just take the symbols off the ends of the lines where you don't want a carriage return.

## **Time-Saving and Cost-Cutting Ideas for Any Newsletter** *from the archives of the Homeschool-Editors email list*

- Have everyone to donate self-addressed stamped envelopes for as many issues as you send out.
- If you're group has a Park Day or other regular activity, bring the newsletter with you, along with a list of members/subscribers. Have members check their names off as they pick up their newsletter. This will not only cut mailing costs, but save time as well.
- Encourage people to do submissions via email.
- What many support groups do is have one person who does the newsletter and another who handles the printing and mailing.
- Set up a regular schedule and stick to it.
- Proofread and proofread again.
- Create a look that will be consistent from issue to issue

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