

# Finding Good Material for Society Newsletters

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“Finding good material to publish is often a challenge for editors of newsletters and journals. The ideal content will be interesting, informative, useful, or original – preferably all of the above. Finding enough of this kind of news to fill issue after issue requires an editor to be resourceful, skillful and imaginative.”

Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, “Finding News: How to Fill Newsletters and Journals”

## Good content for newsletters

- Relevant: fulfills the society’s mission and provides strong audience identification
- Research assistance and guidance focused on the community (region, family, or ethnic group) served by the newsletter. Gail Dever, “Survey results indicate genealogists join societies for camaraderie,” 24 July 2014, *Genealogy à la carte* (<https://genealogyalacarte.ca/?p=4141>)
- Specific topics likely to assist many members: newly available or seldom used resources, problem-solving techniques, repository changes, record indexes, using databases effectively
- Family histories: not recommended (except for newsletters of family societies) unless they feature unique methods, resources, or historical aspects of interest to most members

## Generating good content

Sandra Hargreaves Luebking explains the Busy-B method in “Finding News: How to Fill Newsletters and Journals,” FGS Society Strategies Series, Set VIII, Number 1 (2001), <https://s3.amazonaws.com/fgs-uploads-bucket/fgs2/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/04022022/SSS-VIII-1-CI-FindingNews.pdf>. Examples are based on the presenter’s twenty-five years of experience in editing genealogical periodicals.

### Band

- Recruit authors for regular columns and series
- Ask board and society members to write articles or refer prospective authors
- Hold writing contest; publish winning articles

## **Beg**

- Notice in every issue and on website
- Ask for authors on social media
- Author guidelines on website: specify scope, encourage queries. Example: “Guidelines for *NGS Magazine* Authors” (<https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/magazine> > Guidelines for *NGS Magazine* Authors, under Submissions to *NGS Magazine*)
- Ask librarians and archivists, speakers, authors of articles in other periodicals
- Outline specifics for requested article
- Sharon DeBartolo Carmack discusses asking prospective authors to write articles in her column, “The Editor’s Craft,” in the Fall 1996 issue of *FGS FORUM*.

## **Beat the bushes**

- Check for news and new records on genealogy news sites, local sites, blogs, FamilySearch
- Use RSS feed readers; Carla Cegielski, “Using RSS Feeds for Productivity,” *NGS Magazine*, April–June 2020
- Expand information to make it more useful for members
- Stay in touch with libraries, historical societies, university archives
- Check manuscript registers for indexing and abstracting ideas

## **Brainstorm**

- Keep track of ideas for future development
- Use feature article’s topic as theme for other articles, or create a new theme
- List topics of interest which have not been described in detail in print or online
- Corrine Earnest provides 360 ideas for article topics in Chapter 9, “Checklist of Easy-to-Write Articles,” *The What Shall I Write Handbook for Editors of Family and Genealogy Society Newsletters* (Damascus, MD: Russell D. Earnest Associates, 1992).

## **Borrow (occasionally)**

- Ask author of a newly published book about the region, ethnic group, or family for permission to reprint chapter or section
- Ask newspaper or non-genealogy blog for permission to reprint an article relevant to members
- Reprint an interesting article or chapter about the community from a book or periodical without copyright restrictions; add introduction with context
- Reprints from other genealogy newsletters are not recommended; summarize or ask author to write a new article

## **Article evaluation**

- Does it fit the purpose and style of the newsletter?
- Does it have resources, strategies, and specific information to help the society’s members improve their genealogical outcomes?
- Is it well-written for the most part, or would it take too much time to edit?

# NGS Newsletter Competition Guidelines

<https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/competitions/newletter>

The annual NGS Newsletter Competition recognizes “the hard work, long hours, and creativity that volunteer editors devote to their newsletters.” Content factors determine 85% of the scoring.

Newsletters must be edited by volunteers and published by genealogical/historical societies, family associations, and related member organizations. The competition has two categories: large (five hundred or more members) and small (less than five hundred). Each applicant must be an NGS organization member. The deadline for submissions is 15 December every year.

A panel of judges reviews two consecutive issues of the newsletter, using these criteria:

- material interest, variety, and originality
- writing and editing quality
- readability and attractiveness
- overall publication makeup

Detailed guidelines are available (<https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/competitions/newletter> > Guidelines PDF). Content guidelines include:

1. **Purpose (5%)**: The purpose of the organization should be clearly stated and accomplished through the content and design of its newsletter. Articles should match the purpose of the organization.

2. **Genealogical, Historical, and Family Content (40%)**: Strong genealogical and/or historical content balanced with family material for family publications is a requirement for every genealogical newsletter. Possibly continuing from issue to issue, these could be articles on particular sources or genealogical or historical information; human interest articles about how individuals solved various research problems; genealogical methods applied in different situations; and articles on how to use research repositories such as libraries, archives, and museums and technology tools such as software and apps. These should be balanced with more topical material throughout the newsletter. Newsletters should include at least one or two original articles in each issue. They should be well researched, detailed, and attention grabbing. Every article should provide clarity on authorship and original source information.

3. **Strong Audience Identification (10%)**: Newsletter content should be suitable for the audience it is trying to reach, i.e., state or county publications should concentrate on that state or county, national publications should be more general and varied, and family publications should relate to that particular surname. Members should be able to find information that applies to their own areas of interest. Reprints from other publications generally do not meet this criterion but can provide useful information if carefully selected.

Other guidelines: good writing, editing, and proofing (25%); necessary information (5%); design (15%).

## 2015-2020 NGS Newsletter Competition winners

- *About Towne* (Towne Family Association)
- *GRIVA News and Notes* (Genealogical Research Institute of Virginia)
- *Newsletter of the Irish Family History Forum*
- *Ohio Genealogy News* (Ohio Genealogical Society)
- *The Archivist* (Genealogical Society of Bergen County, New Jersey)
- *The Heritage* (Gwinnett [Georgia] Historical Society)
- *The Hungerford World Tree* (Hungerford Family Association)
- *The New York Researcher* (New York Genealogical and Biographical Society)
- *The Timen Steddem Society Newsletter*
- *The Tracer* (Hamilton County [Ohio] Genealogical Society)
- *The Virginia Genealogical Society Newsletter*
- *Wisconsin State Genealogical Society Newsletter*

## Resources for editing society newsletters

Byrne, Melinde Lutz. "Editing Periodicals." Elizabeth Shown Mills, ed. *Professional Genealogy: Preparation, Practice, and Standards*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2018.

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. "The Editor's and Writer's Craft." *FGS FORUM*, 1996 to 2005. NGS members can view all *FGS FORUM* issues at <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/forum-archives>.

Fonkert, J. H. "The Society Newsletter." NGS Society Management Info & Answers Series. Available for NGS organization members (<https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/society-management-information>).

Luebking, Sandra Hargreaves. "The Society Newsletter." FGS Society Strategy Series, Set I, Number 3 (1999). <https://hobbydocbox.com/Genealogy/120351157-Federation-of-genealogical-societies-set-i-strategies-for-societies-the-society-newsletter-by-sandra-h-luebking-editor-fgs-forum.html>

Meyerink, Kory L. "Genealogical Periodicals." Kory L. Meyerink, ed. *Printed Sources: A Guide to Published Genealogical Records*. Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, Inc., 1998.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. "Editing Periodicals." Elizabeth Shown Mills, ed. *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2001.

Ortega, Gena Philibert. "Finding Content for Your Society Newsletter." *FGS FORUM* 24:1 (Spring 2012): 7-10. <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/forum-archives>.

Peters, Nancy A., and Allen R. Peterson, editors, *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*. "The Editorial Process: What Your Editors Look for—and Why." <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/ngsq/> > Editorial Process (Submissions to NGSQ).