

PROJECT

Staff Manuals

OBJECTIVE

Students will create a professional staff manual for their yearbook program that demonstrates understanding of staff organization, journalistic ethics, copywriting and design principles. The project will function as a portfolio piece and a functional tool for the current or next year's staff.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to design software
- Staff manual examples
- Rubric and project checklist

DAY 1

INTRODUCTION AND BRAINSTORMING

CLASS STARTER

Prompt the class to respond to the question, "Why do we need a staff manual?"

Example: Every organization – from schools to businesses, and even newsrooms – has a guide that explains how things should run. A staff manual does the same for your yearbook team. It outlines expectations, responsibilities and how to handle challenges. Having one keeps everyone on the same page, builds consistency and helps your staff work like a professional publication.

MINI LESSON

Show sample pages of existing manuals from the [Staff Manuals](#) page. Discuss how these are both policy and branding tools. As a class, identify the key features of the staff manuals and what patterns you notice when looking at a variety of different manual styles. What is consistent in its content and structure?

ACTIVITY

- Break into small groups to brainstorm **key sections** (e.g., expectations, workflow, ethical standards, design guidelines).
- Each student (or team) chooses **one section** they will author or design.

DAY 2-3

WRITING AND COPY DEVELOPMENT

CLASS STARTER

Prompt the class to review the staff manual samples provided on the [Staff Manual](#) page. What are the common characteristics in writing style, tone and format? Identify key characteristics you feel are important for the audience of your manual: community, administration and current/future staff members. This can be repeated multiple days with different style guides as prompts.

PROJECT

Staff Manuals

DAY 2-3

MINI LESSON

- Copywriting for clarity and tone – focus on concise, professional language.
- Cover AP style, consistency and avoiding bias in policy writing.

Reference the Yearbook Suite “Make Copy Shine by Editing” unit as needed for AP style standards and strategies on how to review your staff manual copy.

ACTIVITY

- Students write their assigned section (mission statement, job descriptions, production workflow, etc.)
- Peer-edit for clarity and tone.
 - Adviser provides checkpoints: “Does it sound official, approachable and accurate?”
 - Ensure writing adheres to AP style standards

DAY 4-5

DESIGN AND VISUAL LAYOUT

CLASS STARTER

Show five well-known brand logos (Nike, Starbucks, Disney, etc.). Ask your staff to respond to the following questions

- What colors, fonts or styles make them distinct?

Your yearbook should have the same kind of recognizable visual identity, and your staff manual should reflect that.

MINI LESSON

- Creating a cohesive visual identity with fonts, colors, design elements, spacing and hierarchy.
- Review strong examples of visual consistency in previous manuals or yearbooks.

Reference Walsworth’s [Training Videos](#), [Podcast](#) and [Yearbook Suite Curriculum](#) to aid your lecture.

DAY 4-5

ACTIVITY

- Students will design their section using grids, paragraph styles, current theme elements and visual anchors.
- Integrate logos, staff photos or icons that match the yearbook's brand.
- Students should adhere to the style of their yearbook, including brand colors, headline treatments, etc.

Day 6

PEER REVIEW AND EDITING

CLASS STARTER

Project a sample yearbook spread or staff manual page (real or created for this purpose) that contains a few intentional errors: a design inconsistency (misaligned text box, wrong font, uneven spacing) and a couple of AP style or grammar mistakes.

Ask students:

- What feels “off” about this page?
- Where do you see design or writing errors?
- How could small mistakes like this affect the reader's trust or the book's professionalism?

Continue: “Today, you'll be the editors. Use that same critical eye as you review your classmates' work. You're not just checking for mistakes; you're checking for consistency, clarity and professionalism.”

ACTIVITY

Gallery walk or peer review:

- Check for design alignment and consistency.
- Proofread for grammar, punctuation and AP style.
- Verify accuracy of policies and credits.

Day 7

PRESENTATION AND REFLECTION

ACTIVITY

Each group (or student) presents a 2-minute walkthrough of their section, explaining:
 Why they wrote/designed it the way they did
 How it reflects their staff's culture and values
 What design or writing technique they're most proud of

RUBRIC

CATEGORY	3 – EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	2 – MEETS EXPECTATIONS	1 – NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	Notes
CONTENT & ACCURACY	All key sections included; information is accurate, thorough and clearly tailored to the program.	Most key sections included; minor inaccuracies or omissions.	Important sections missing or content unclear/ inaccurate.	
WRITING & EDITING	Writing is clear, concise and professional with strong editing and AP style consistency.	Writing is mostly clear with a few grammar or style errors.	Writing is unclear, contains frequent errors or lacks editing.	
DESIGN & VISUAL PRESENTATION	Layout is cohesive, visually balanced and consistent with current year's branding.	Layout is mostly consistent; minor issues with spacing or alignment.	Design lacks organization, consistency or readability.	
CREATIVITY & BRANDING	Strong visual identity and creative design choices that reflect the staff's tone and theme	Some creative or branding elements present but not fully consistent.	Minimal creativity and/or no clear brand identity shown.	
COLLABORATION & REFLECTION	Actively participated, gave constructive feedback and reflected meaningfully on process and results.	Participated in review and gave brief reflection.	Limited participation or no reflection.	