SOUTH CAROLINA PRESS ASSOCIATION

2026 COLLEGIATE CONTEST RULES

Entry Deadline: Dec. 4, 2026

scnewscontest.com

Recognizing the best college journalism in South Carolina

CONTEST DEADLINE | Friday, Dec. 4, 2026

CONTEST PERIOD | Dec. 1, 2025 – Nov. 30, 2026

CONTEST DIVISION | Competition for all contests will take place in two divisions:

- **DIVISION H:** Undergraduate enrollment of 10,000 or more
- **DIVISION I:** Undergraduate enrollment less than 10,000

SCNEWSCONTEST.COM | Each editor/adviser will be given a username and password for scnewscontest.com. You are welcome to share this log-in info with staffers so they can upload their entries.

ELIGIBILITY | ONLY COLLEGIATE MEMBERS THAT HAVE PAID DUES FOR THE 2026-2027 ACADEMIC YEAR ARE ELIGIBLE TO ENTER. All entries must have been published in a member news publication or on a member news site. Entries must be staff-produced.

AI | Every entry submitted in this contest should be produced by human contestants as listed under the eligibility rule above. Entrants must disclose and explain any use of generative AI in an entry (e.g., data collection, research and analysis). You may not enter anything created, produced or altered primarily by AI, including graphics, photographs, illustrations, stories and videos. AI-generated content may be used if the use of AI is the point of a story, package or project being entered, or if AI is used as an analysis tool (such as use of AI to summarize or identify noteworthy material in a collection of records), but in such cases the AI use must be labeled and explained for the judges. All entrants using AI-generated materials must respect copyright and data ownership.

ENTRY FEES/PAYMENT | A fee of $5 will be levied for each entry in the contest. On the Entry Report page, you will see a breakdown of all of the entries that are being submitted for your news organization. No total entry fees will be displayed. Instead, SCPA will ensure that all of your entries are correct and contact the organization's adviser with an invoice that can be paid by check or credit card.

NUMBER OF ENTRIES | Unless otherwise specified, no individual entry may be entered in more than one contest, with the exception that all or part of any entry in (200) General Excellence, (201) Collegiate Journalist of the Year, (202) Collegiate Photojournalist of the Year and (213) Photo Story. **If you enter in more than one category where not allowed by the rules, SCPA will determine in which category the entry should compete and disqualify the other entries. Your entry fee(s) will not be returned.**

MULTIPLE BYLINES | Entries that are the work of more than one person may be submitted as a single entry unless otherwise noted. Only one plaque will be awarded. Additional awards may be ordered.

NUMBER OF ENTRIES FOR COMPETITION | There must be a minimum of six entries from two separate member organizations for judging to occur. If not, the SCPA Co-Executive Directors and judges reserve the right to judge the category as is, or with the other division, or to declare the category null and return the entry fee.

DISQUALIFICATION | Entries that do not meet contest criteria may be disqualified and entry fees will not be returned. All participants agree to accept as final the decision of judges recruited by SCPA staff. Any entry may be disqualified that does not, in the opinion of the judges, comply with the rules.

AWARDS | Unless otherwise specified, awards will be made for first, second and third places. Awards will be presented on April 9, 2027 at SCPA Offices in Columbia. More details coming soon!

FILE TYPES ACCEPTED

- All design contests must be submitted as PDF files.
- All photography contests must be submitted as JPG files.
- All online contests must be submitted as URLs.
- Writing contests can be submitted as full-page PDFs or as a URL to the story on your website.

FILE NAMES | When uploading a file, any file name can be used.

TITLE/CUTLINE | In the Title/Cutline box, enter the headline of the article exactly as it appears on the page. For categories that require more than one example per entry, you may use the series/topic title. If you think judges might have a hard time finding your entry, you can mark the headlines and jumps in Adobe Acrobat with an arrow or box.

NEED HELP? Call Jen Madden at (803) 750-9561 or email jmadden@scpress.org.

HOW TO ENTER

1 | Acquire your log-in information from SCPA. Contact Jen Madden at jmadden@scpress.org.

2 | Log in at scnewscontest.com. You will see a page showing any entries you have already submitted. Complete rules for the contest are available above.

3 | Click on the "Add New Entry" link.

4 | On this page, select your newspaper name. A lot of information, including your division, will autofill. If this information is incorrect, please contact SCPA. Fill in the preparer's name. (The preparer is the person uploading the entry into the online contest platform, not the staffer that will be credited for any award.)

5 | In the Newspaper Group drop-down menu, select Collegiate.

6 | Select the contest category from the drop-down menu. When you select the category, special instructions will appear below it. This field will clear each time you save an entry, so you must select a category for each new entry.

7 | Enter the title/cutline for your entry. If uploading full-page PDF files, make sure the entry name matches the headline on the page so the judges can find it easily.

8 | Include the name of the person or people who should be credited for any award. This is generally the writer, photographer, graphic artist, etc.

9 | Add your file or files. You can drag and drop files or use the "Add files" button to navigate your files. Upload as many files as necessary to complete your entry but refer to the special instructions for any limitations.

10 | If you are submitting URL(s), enter each URL in a separate box.

11 | WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR SUBMISSION, CLICK THE "SAVE" BUTTON.

12 | To submit another entry, click "Add New Entry." Start at Step 6 again. You may log out and log back in later to continue adding entries. You will need to select your newspaper name each time you log in.

13 | Click Entry Report for listing of entries submitted. No fee will be displayed. Instead, SCPA will ensure your entries are correct and contact the adviser with an invoice that can be paid by check or credit card.

PDF INSTRUCTIONS

COMBINE MULTIPLE PDFS INTO ONE | EACH ENTRY SHOULD CONSIST OF ONE SINGLE PDF FILE WHENEVER POSSIBLE. If a category calls for more than one piece, combine the pieces into a single file. It is especially important that jumps are included!

MARKING AN ENTRY | Within Acrobat, you may mark your entry with an arrow or box so judges will know what to judge. This is especially important if you have more than one story per page.

MAKE PDF FILES 100 MB OR SMALLER | Changing the resolution and changing the CMYK color mode to RGB are the two most effective ways to reduce file size without sacrificing the screen viewing quality.

CONTEST CATEGORIES

200. GENERAL EXCELLENCE | Submit two complete issues of your newspaper: one closest to Sept. 15, 2026, and one issue of your choice. Criteria include every aspect of journalism, including content, writing, design, editing, headlines, use of photographs, editorial page quality, sports and lifestyle coverage. The entire newspaper, excluding advertising, shall be considered. **If your newspaper does not meet certain criteria, you are still eligible to enter (you will just not receive points in that area).** For detailed criteria and points awarded, see the General Excellence judging criteria below. **Each newspaper is limited to ONE entry.**
Submit: Upload all full-page PDFs from each or submit URL to e-edition viewer. Enter the issue dates into the Title/Cutline box.

General Excellence Criteria:

- In a 25 point category: Excellent = 20-25 points; good = 15-19 points; fair = 10-14 points
- In a 15 point category: Excellent = 12-15 points; good = 8-11 points; fair = 4-7 points
- In a 10 point category: Excellent = 8-10 points; good = 5-7 points; fair = 2-4 points

Content/coverage: Quality and quantity of news, staff generated coverage, and balance and depth of coverage	Up to 25 points
Quality of writing/editing: Story organization, quality of ledes, editing, headlines, mechanics and style	Up to 15 points
Design/layout	Up to 15 points
Use of photographs/graphics	Up to 15 points
Editorial page quality	Up to 10 points
Sports coverage	Up to 10 points
Lifestyle coverage	Up to 10 points

201. LEE HARTER COLLEGIATE JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR | This award is named in honor of Lee Harter, retired editor of The Times and Democrat and retired advisor of The Panther at Claflin University. Many years ago, Mr. Harter worked to save and relaunch SCPA's collegiate division, making it into an active and important part of the association. In 2025, SCPA renamed this top honor to recognize Mr. Harter's commitment to collegiate journalism, leadership and service to the Press Association and for all he's given back to generations of student and professional journalists. Students winning this top honor should be proud to display an award bearing the name of this South Carolina journalism legend. This competition is open to any collegiate journalist of an SCPA member news organization. Criteria should include the quality of the journalist's published work and actions demonstrating significant impact to their news organization and on their campus and in their community. Nomination shall be made by the editor or adviser of the nominee's newspaper. The nomination shall consist of a letter outlining the nominee's contributions to journalism and samples of the nominee's work. **Each newspaper is limited to ONE entry.** Only first place shall be awarded.
Submit: Upload nomination letter as a PDF. Enter work samples as full-page PDFs, JPGs and/or URLs.

202. COLLEGIATE PHOTOJOURNALIST OF THE YEAR | An entry shall consist of 10 published single photographs and one photo story containing up to 14 images. **A maximum of 24 photographs may be submitted.** Criteria include photo quality, creativity, relevance, ability to communicate subject, impact of photos and editing. This award is for the body of work, not an individual photo. Photos entered in this contest may be entered into any other category. There is no limit on the number of photographers at each news organization who can enter. Only first place shall be awarded.
Submit: Upload ten single high-res images as JPG files. For the photo story, you may upload high-res JPG files or submit a URL to a gallery online. Type the cutlines in the Title/Cutline box.

203. NEWS STORY | Entries in this contest should be a single news story, including breaking news. Criteria includes writing quality and thoroughness of coverage for a news event or issue.
Submit: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL to story. Enter the story's headline into the Title/Cutline box.

204. FEATURE STORY | Entries in this contest should be a single feature story. Criteria includes originality and effectiveness of writing a feature or profile article. Enter arts and entertainment features in 205. Arts and Entertainment Story.
Submit: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL to story. Enter the story's headline into the Title/Cutline box.

205. ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT STORY | Entries in this contest should be a single arts and entertainment story. Criteria includes originality and effectiveness of writing. Enter first person reviews relating to arts and entertainment into 207. Column/Editorial Writing.
Submit: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL to story. Enter the story's headline into the Title/Cutline box.

206. SPORTS STORY | This award is for the best single sports story. Entries in this contest should demonstrate strength in sports reporting, writing quality, editing and originality. Sports action (game stories) and sports features may be entered into this contest. Enter first person sports columns into 207. Column/Editorial Writing.
Submit: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL to story. Enter the story's headline into the Title/Cutline box.

207. COLUMN/EDITORIAL WRITING | Each entry shall consist of a single column, editorial or opinion piece. Criteria includes writing quality and the writer's ability to provoke, inform and/or entertain the reader on an original account of an issue. News, entertainment, reviews, sports and humor columns may be entered into this contest.
Submit: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL to piece. Enter the headline into the Title/Cutline box.

208. PAGE ONE DESIGN | Each entry shall consist of a single front page. Criteria includes creativity and effective communication to readers, clear and forceful headlines, captions and photographic display.
Submit: Upload full-page PDF. Enter page date into Title/Cutline box.

209. SPECIALTY PAGE DESIGN | Each entry shall consist of a single page of the entrant's choosing. Criteria includes creativity and effective communication to readers. Any page other than page one is eligible.
Submit: Upload full-page PDF. Enter page date into Title/Cutline box.

210. NEWS PHOTOGRAPH | Each entry shall consist of a single general news or breaking new photograph. Criteria include quality and impact of the photo. Photos may cover spot news (including but not limited to fires, vehicle accidents, natural disasters, shootings, etc.) as well as scheduled or organized news events (or issue-photography that explores an important social, economic or political issue) for which advance planning was possible. Examples include: rallies, government meetings, speeches, pickets, election coverage, homelessness, etc.
Submit: Upload one high-res image as a JPG file. Enter cutline in Title/Cutline box.

211. FEATURE PHOTO | Each entry shall consist of a single photograph, usually of a "found" situation, with strong human interest. Criteria include quality and impact of the photo.
Submit: Upload one high-res image as a JPG file. Enter cutline in Title/Cutline box.

212. SPORTS PHOTOGRAPH | Each entry shall consist of a single sports photograph. Sports action and sports feature photos should be entered in this contest. Criteria include quality and impact of the photo.
Submit: Upload one high-res image as a JPG file. Enter cutline in Title/Cutline box.

213. PHOTO STORY | Each entry shall consist of any designated series of photographs, gallery or photo page on any subject. Criteria include quality and impact of the photos. Individual photos entered in this contest can be entered into other categories.
Submit: Upload high-res images as JPG files or as a full-page PDF or enter the URL to the photo gallery. If submitting JPGs, type the cutlines in the Title/Cutline box.

214. CARTOON OR ILLUSTRATION | Each entry shall consist of a single illustration or cartoon, including editorial cartoons and comic strips. Judging is based on skill, creativity and, if applicable, the ability to evoke a humorous response.
Submit: Upload as high-res JPG or full-page PDF file. Enter cartoon title in Title/Cutline box.

215. INFOGRAPHIC | Each entry shall consist of a single infographic, including graphs, charts, maps and other staff-produced graphics used to convey information in a succinct manner. Criteria include creativity, effectiveness, clarity of information and accuracy.
Submit: Upload graphic as high-res JPG, full-page PDF or URL. Enter title into the Title/Cutline box.

216. MIXED MEDIA ILLUSTRATION | This contest is for the best single illustration in which elements are manipulated by an artist or photographer, and can include, but are not limited to, the use of illustrations, clip art, Photoshop, photographs and images. Photo illustrations and social media graphics may be entered into this contest.
Submit: Upload one full-page PDF, high-res JPG image or URL. Enter illustration title in Title/Cutline box.

217. ADVERTISEMENT | Entries shall consist of a single staff-designed and produced print or digital ad. Criteria include creativity, design and headline.
Submit: Upload full-page PDF for print ad or high-res JPG or URL for digital ad. Enter the ad's headline into the Title/Cutline box.

218. WEBSITE | This contest will be judged on the usefulness of the website to the reader, quality and quantity of community content and ease of navigation and accessibility. This is not a design-based contest. Judging will be template-neutral and instead will look at how a newspaper staff uses its digital platforms (including desktop and mobile sites) to share content and engage readers. Judges will consider special features which encourage significant audience engagement, like social media integration, push alerts, e-edition newsletters, multimedia offerings and more. Staff designed sites, as well as sites using third-party or campus-designed templates and blogging software can be entered into this contest. Entrants are not required to publish on multiple digital platforms. Submit a letter of explanation describing how journalists utilize the site to share news and engage readers. Traffic analytics should be included. Entries will be live judged during the judging period.
Submit: Enter the website's URL. Upload your letter of explanation as a PDF file.

219. VIDEO | Entries shall consist of a single news, sports or feature video. Criteria shall include quality of the video and audio, content and editing.
Submit: Enter the URL to the video. Enter title in Title/Cutline box.

220. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA | This award will recognize excellence, effectiveness and innovation in social media use by the newspaper staff or an individual staffer. Entrants are not required to use multiple social media sites. Just show us what you're using and how you use it. Each entry may include examples of crowd sourcing, news sharing and community engagement through social media sites like Facebook, X, Instagram and TikTok. Entrants must submit a letter of explanation describing the use of social media tools, and resulting success. Judges will consider: appropriateness of content, timeliness, efficacy, innovation, creativity, impact and results. Entries will be live judged during the judging period.
Submit: Enter the URL(s) to your social media site(s). Upload your letter of explanation as a PDF file.

221. PODCAST | This contest is for best staff-produced podcast. Regularly produced and limited special project podcasts are eligible. Topics/genre can include, but are not limited to, news, sports, politics, features and entertainment. Criteria include quality of the audio (and video, if applicable), editing, content, flow, engagement and logo design. Podcast can reside on a newspaper's website, social media page or hosted in an app like Spotify or Apple/Google Podcasts. Entrant may submit a letter of explanation describing concept, strategy, audience, promotion, reach and impact. This contest is not for a single podcast episode, but rather a podcast series. There is no limit on the number of entries you may submit in this contest, but each podcast series must be submitted as an individual entry.
Submit: Enter the URL to the podcast. Enter title in Title/Cutline box. If you choose to upload a letter of explanation, include it as a PDF.

222. NEWSLETTER | This contest is for best email newsletter. Each entry shall consist of three editions of a flagship or topic-specific newsletter. There is no limit on the number of entries you may submit in this contest, but each topic-specific newsletter must be submitted as a separate entry. Criteria include quality of content (writing, photography, graphics and use of links), editing, design and efforts to engage your audience. Entries must be accompanied by a letter of explanation describing concept, strategy, audience, frequency, engagement and reach metrics (new subscriber acquisition, open and click-through rates), as well as promotion efforts and impact.
Submit: Enter URL(s) to your campaigns. Upload your letter of explanation as a PDF file.