



**I** once heard of a school that worked long and hard on its book and then submitted it for critique to a national ratings service. The book was good, but when the staff got the critique back the judge asked, “Does anyone at your school go to school?” Looking through the book, the judge had not found even one photo of a student in a classroom.

### How big of a section?

Keep in mind that we spend more than 75% of our time in school, in class. Yet many books have small or no Academics sections at all. The rating services suggest that you devote 10-15% of your yearbook to academics. We agree!

### Not just faculty mugs.

While we are suggesting that you devote this amount of your book to academics, keep in mind that the Academics section is not the place for the faculty mug shots. They belong in the People section. Contrary to popular belief, faculty and staff are people, too.

### Make it about students.

Good academic coverage is about students and teachers. You should try hard never to have a photo in the Academics section of your yearbook that doesn't have a student in it. And those photos should be showing something exciting that goes on in your school, not posed pictures of teachers writing on blackboards. Academics can be interesting.

Take Biology as an example. If you have finished Biology, what is the one thing that you will never (and we mean never!) forget about that class? Dissection! Cutting up frogs or birds or pigs or cats or whatever it was that you



cut up. It sticks in your mind. It's something that your student readers will want to remember in the future. Not the gory details of cutting up the frog, but the details of how students handled it. Did someone faint? Did someone throw up? How did the students feel about cutting up dead animals?

### No course descriptions!

What is not interesting in an Academics section is a course description. Too often, yearbook Academics sections are just copies of the course description. They read like the school handbook—“Snodgrass High School offers 14 courses in science. They include the following: Basic Science taught by Mr. Smith, etc., etc., etc!” This is not what today's Academics sections are all about. They are interesting and fun to read.

### How to cover academics.

You can choose to cover academics by topic areas (a featurized approach): research (English, history, science), lab work (home ec, physical educa-

tion, sciences, art), drama in the classroom (English, foreign languages, history, drama).

Or you can go the more traditional department coverage. Either way you choose to go, make it readable and fun. To get a good start, try brainstorming with the yearbook staff. See the column at right for ideas on getting the most from academics.

A third possibility is to organize your yearbook chronologically and feature things as they happen. If there is something special happening in a classroom that would make an interesting photo or feature, then cover it in the month or week that it happens. As an example, the aforementioned biology dissection usually happens in November after the Bio class has been going for awhile. That would be the best time to cover it.

For more on how to decide what to cover, check out the Academics brainstorming side bar on the next page.

## The key to a great Academics section is to brainstorm!

If you are doing your best to try and make your academic section the best that it can be, here's one way to do it. Get the whole yearbook staff together and brainstorm academic topics.

Ask staff members what they think they will remember most about their classes in the years to come. Weed out the non-printable stuff about teachers' bad habits and go to work developing photo and copy ideas for these memories.

### Great Academic Brainstorming Questions

- What are the fun courses at your school? Why are they fun?
- What are the most difficult classes? Brainstorm these by year; toughest freshman class, sophomore class, etc.
- Why are they difficult? Was it grades, length of assignments, number of assignments? A combination of all those things?
- What courses made you think? Really challenged you? In what way?
- Which one made you happy to attend? Which ones did you never miss?
- What field trips did you take that you found enlightening? Check with the teacher you had and find out if he or she will be taking his or her classes to the same place again this year.
- What guest speakers have you had in what class? Who inspired or entertained you? Check with that teacher and see if he or she will be having the same people back.
- Which course gave you the most homework? The biggest project? The most challenging term paper?
- Which course had the toughest tests?
- Which teacher was the toughest grader?
- Which course has new equipment or facilities that are different from last year?