

Ocala Star-Banner

STRAIGHT,
NO CHASER
RASHIDA RAWLS



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What's in a newspaper?

Earlier this month, I got an e-mail from a student who wanted to learn more about the newspaper industry.

In her message, Megan Slocumb mentioned that she's enrolled in Florida Virtual School. According to its Web site www.flvs.net, "Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is an established leader in developing and providing virtual K-12 education solutions to students throughout the country. A nationally recognized e-Learning model, FLVS was founded in 1997 and was the country's first statewide Internet-based public high school. Today, FLVS serves middle and high school students with more than 90 courses. In 2000, the Florida Legislature established FLVS as an independent educational entity with a gubernatorial appointed board. FLVS is the only public school where funding is tied directly to student performance."

Being involved in an award-winning program like FLVS, obviously says a lot about Megan's commitment to education. Here's what she wrote:

"Hi my name is Megan Slocumb and I attend Vanguard High School. I am a Senior this year and I'm currently enrolled in Florida Virtual School. I'm doing an assignment and it requires a newspaper editor's help. I've tried to get in touch with other editors but no luck. Since I read your articles and enjoy them, I figured I'd write you. We have to contact an editor and have them answer a few questions, then make a newspaper. I've included some questions that need answers...Can you help?"

1. What do you consider to be the three most important elements of a successful newspaper article? Please explain your three choices.

* Accuracy - If you misspell people's names or get other facts wrong, readers won't trust you. Once your trust is broken with readers and/or sources, it's difficult to re-establish credibility. This will not only hurt you personally as a reporter, but it will also tarnish the image of your newspaper.

* Clarity - If you don't understand what you're writing, the reader won't either. People don't have time to decipher code in writing, so keep it simple and to the point.

* Newsworthiness - What makes a topic worthy of an article? If you can't answer this question, more than likely it won't be important to your readers.

2. If you could only read one section of your local newspaper each day, which section would it be (front page, life/times, sports, local news, etc.)?

It would probably be local news. That's what makes a newspaper special, the news written about the community. I could go online or watch TV for national, international and entertainment news.

3. How important are images/graphics to the overall appeal of a newspaper? Can a newspaper be successful without images/graphics to support the news articles?

Images and graphics are extremely important to the overall appeal of a newspaper because they provide eye-catching entry points into a story. No, I don't think a newspaper can be successful without some form of a graphic, photo or other illustration, because you'll end up with walls of gray text. Then there's nothing visually that differentiates your newspaper from a book.

4. What would be a great name for your own newspaper? We like Virtual Times, but we know there are many other neat newspaper names out there. Please note your newspaper name should include at least two words.

Maybe the Ocala Gazette! I don't know. I've just always liked the way gazette sounds.

Megan, let me know whenever your newspaper comes out because I want a copy!

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