

Surviving and Thriving in the Slot

Surviving

- **Make deadline.** Usually, the slot is the end of the line; it's up to you to get a story or page out on time. Sometimes triage is the best you can do late in the process.
- **Do no harm.** The worst thing you can do is change a headline and make it wrong, or insert an error into copy. Realize that the rim editor probably has spent longer on the story than you have and probably is more familiar with it.
- **If it ain't broke, don't fix it.** The only thing worse than changing a perfectly good headline for no good reason is exchanging a good headline for one that's wrong.
- **Delegate.** There are more rim editors than slots; if a question comes up in a story or a headline needs rewriting, kick it back to the rim editor whenever possible. Ask strong rim editors to help in slot when needed, or ask a strong headline writer to rework a problematic headline for you.
- **Know the desk's strengths and weaknesses.** It's a fact: Some copy editors are better word editors than others; some are better headline writers. Be aware that a headline or story from one rim editor might take you longer to slot. Also, be wary of a weak reporter paired with a weak line editor; anticipate that the story is going to require extra time and attention.

Thriving

- **Be organized.** Keep track of where stories are in the process. Sometimes you may need to help out in the rim, and know when to ask for help in slot.
- **Keep up with the news.** The background will help you spot errors and inconsistencies, and reading all sections of the paper will alert you to stories that have already run.
- **Give rim editors the chance to edit.** Don't tell people what to do before they've edited the story. If you have time, look at a story in read-only mode and make notes to yourself about any mistakes or problems. Then when the story comes to slot, you can either catch the errors or praise the copy editor for the catches he or she made.
- **Seek the counsel of veterans.** Make longtime editors on the desk your allies. Showing a little respect goes a long way toward helping a new slot head off friction and gain acceptance.
- **Praise in public, criticize in private.** Give credit where it's due; when a rim editor writes a great headline, make sure everyone knows it. Take responsibility for errors; if an error makes it past you and into the paper, it's your fault, too.