

THE PUBLIC EDITOR MARGARET SULLIVAN

Cover to Cover, and Beyond

ALTHOUGH most of the mail that comes to the public editor's office can be described as frustrated complaints (Misleading headline! Wrongheaded columnist! Enough about Brooklyn already!), there is a second category of correspondence. Let's call it "perfectly reasonable questions."

Since the answers to those questions might interest readers other than those who wrote, I'll use today's column to give a few of them a wider audience.

Q. Fred Fejes of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., who describes himself as a 40-year reader of The Times, writes: "I am trying to make sense of the digital editions,

business and so on — can almost replicate the print experience, and can provide some extras, like video.

Mr. Fejes mentioned trusting the judgment of Times editors, a reference to what Mr. Bodkin calls "curation." The home page, particularly, is a product of that kind of editorial judgment, but because the page changes constantly, taking advantage of that judgment requires checking it frequently.

Mr. Bodkin also suggests checking the "most e-mailed" list to see what readers have found particularly interesting. And Ms. Chira suggests scrolling about halfway down the home page to the area labeled "Inside NYTimes.com" to look at the illustrated horizontal bar, featuring some of the more interesting items of the moment, and beneath that bar to a full index of sections and their offerings.

For those who prefer the traditional presentation of the newspaper, the "Today's Paper" tab at the top of the home page will be a useful guide.

Ms. Chira and Mr. Bodkin agree that the amount of material can seem overwhelming and that one may never get the sense of completion that comes from paging through the entire printed newspaper. Unlike the Web site, Mr. Bodkin said, "the paper has a fixed volume and you can finish it."

Although it may be a less structured experience, they agree, reading The Times online can also be a richer one. But, as Ms. Chira puts it, "You have to be more purposeful about it."

Q. Mark Stokoe of Dayton, Ohio, asked about the way editorials now appear online, signed "By The Editorial Board." "Does that mean that all the members of the board agreed with the editorial positions?" he asked. "Or just a majority? How does that work?"

A. Andrew Rosenthal, the editorial page editor, says that using the byline, which began just last month, is an effort to help readers understand more about editorials.

"We did some research recently that showed us that people don't generally know what an editorial is, or who writes them," he said. (Editorials are opinion pieces that represent the view of the pa-

per's editorial board — Mr. Rosenthal and 17 other writers and editors — and The Times's publisher, Arthur O. Sulzberger Jr.)

"All editorials represent the views of the board as a group," Mr. Rosenthal said, though some members of the board may disagree. "And I also take personal responsibility for them." The digital byline functions as a link that takes readers to short profiles of the board members, which describe their areas of expertise.

Q. This one has come from many sources. Readers often ask whether their online comment, or their quote in an article, or even their wedding announcement, can be removed from the digital archive because it may be causing them embarrassment, difficulty in job hunting, or trouble of one sort or another.

A. The answer is (almost always) a simple one: sorry, but no. Philip B. Corbett, the associate managing editor for standards, said The Times receives frequent requests that an article be removed or altered. And although he is sympathetic — "People often are upset, and I can understand why" — The Times has a firm policy against "unpublishing."

"We consider the archive to be a permanent record" of The Times's journalism, he said, and it is important to preserve that digital record. The standard for online reader comments is a bit different. Comments are moderated, in advance of publication, for appropriateness and taste; if a published comment later is thought not to meet that standard, it may be removed, Mr. Corbett said. But generally, other than removing factual errors and noting corrections, the record is the record, he said, and "we don't mess with it."

Last week, my blog took up the obituary of Yvonne Brill, a rocket scientist, after many readers found it sexist. I also wrote about The Times's use of the phrase "illegal immigrant." You can read these at nytimes.com/publiceditor.

How are readers to find their way around The Times's Web site?

both on the Web and on my iPad. Having read the paper copy for so long, I am very used to the section and page arrangements. I also have a great deal of trust in the section and page editors, and headline writers (as well as the reporters), to give me the news that is important. I have a very good sense of how the paper edition is laid out, but what is the structure and logic of the digital layouts, and how do they correspond to the paper edition? Half seriously, is there a booklet on "How to Read the Digital Times"?

A. Alas, there is no booklet, but I talked to two Times editors — Susan Chira and Thomas Bodkin. Ms. Chira is the assistant managing editor for news, both in print and on digital platforms. Mr. Bodkin, The Times's chief creative officer, is leading a redesign of its Web site, in part to make it easier to navigate.

Their advice was similar in many ways: Readers should use the home page (or, on mobile devices, the "Top News" tab) as a starting point — reading it as a kind of expanded digital front page. After that, systematically reading section by section — foreign, national,

E-mail: public@nytimes.com