



4-H Club Reporter's HANDBOOK



PENNSSTATE



College of Agricultural Sciences • Cooperative Extension

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You are the reporter of your 4-H Club. Be proud that you were selected for the job. You, and you alone, can do more than anyone else to let everyone know about your club. You can help make your club grow. Take pride in reporting news about your organization and its members. You can make your club an outstanding one in your county, and perhaps in the state and nation. It's up to you!

O. K.— How do you start on your job? I know what I'd do. I would ask who are the members of the club? I would make a complete list of them—their names, addresses, names of parents, telephone numbers, and schools attended. I'd be sure to be accurate about all facts and check each one carefully with the club secretary and members themselves.

What is news

Keep this list of members as a reference guide. Now decide what your club and its members do that is newsworthy. Your newspaper readers most likely will want to read about your club's new, interesting, unusual, and timely activities and events. If one of your club members wins an award, it's news. If you elect officers or get a new leader, it is news. Remember, it is entirely your responsibility to write and deliver a news article reporting this news to your newspaper editor.

What newspapers do the members of your club read? What newspapers do the parents of the club members subscribe to? Find out the names of these newspapers. Your list of newspapers will probably include metropolitan dailies, small-town dailies, and weekly newspapers.

Once you have your list, ask your leader, county agent, or home economist where the newspaper editorial offices are located. Telephone the offices and arrange a convenient time for you and your leader to see the news editor.

A visit with each newspaper editor should determine which of the papers are interested in printing the news articles you write about your club and its members. Probably you will have more luck in getting your news stories printed in the weekly and small-town daily papers. The larger daily newspapers run more national, international, financial, and sports news, whereas the small papers feature local and community activity news.

When you get to each newspaper office, ask the editor or reporter whether you should write the news stories about your club, or whether you should telephone the news facts for a staff member to write.

Or, for important and county events, ask if the newspaper will send a reporter to cover the story. This should be coordinated with the club leader and county Extension agent. In your brief visit to each newspaper office, ask if there is a style sheet or booklet of instructions for correspondents. If there is such a style sheet or booklet, ask for a copy so you may follow the newspaper's style in your writing.

If requested to write your news, ask the editor to whom you should send the news. If you are asked to telephone your news, ask the editor what time would be most suitable for you to call. Also, ask whom you should contact to inform the newspaper of big events that they might assign a reporter to cover the story if they know about it well in advance. When you have visited the newspaper or newspapers in your area, and have made notes on what you need to know to get your news to the right persons, you should be all set to work on your reporting assignment.



What Is News?

Kinds of news

News articles you will be writing most often are called before and after the event stories. A generalized name for the other articles you will write is human interest or feature stories. You also may help the newspaper reporter if he or she comes to cover one of your club's or county's big events.

An advance or before the event news article is designed to inform newspaper readers of a club meeting or event, to create interest in the activity, and to promote attendance. The date, exact time, sponsor of the event, place, importance or purpose—the why for holding the event, and what is going to occur should all be told in the story. If an interesting speaker is featured at the event, or a judging contest or demonstration by a community member is planned, these facts should all be included in a before-the-event news article.

A follow-up news article promptly reports what happened after the event or meeting. This kind of news article would include the important and interesting statements of the speaker, the names of the winners in the judging contest, or the results from a demonstration. Remember this type of story should be written the day of the event. You want your readers to know what happened while your story is still news, not history. A story that does not get written and printed as soon as possible is as stale as yesterday's newspaper!

Most of you will not write as many feature stories as you do advance and follow-up ones: however, you should develop a nose for news so you recognize a success or human interest story when one happens in your club. These stories are usually more interesting to write, but remember to keep them short and use simple, vivid words when telling them. By only using the essential details these stories can be entertaining reading.

An example of a human interest story would be a 4-H member constructing a game room in the basement of the family home after taking several 4-H handyman projects.

A clothing project member might get encouragement to enter fashion design as a career when a New York designer is impressed with her dress review entry.

Writing the article

Now, let's get back to your assignment of reporting the news of your 4-H club. When should you begin? This is what I would do with an advance or follow-up article.

Facts and facts alone are what you must work with when writing news. Get the facts. Write the facts. Submit the facts to your editor in a logical fashion.

What is a fact? It is what has really happened. It is the truth. It is real. It is something known to have happened. Keep your opinions out of your news articles!

Now there are six words for you to remember: **Who**, **What**, **When**, **Where**, **Why**, and **How**. If these questioning words are appropriately answered in your news stories, they will make your stories news. And remember, nothing else will.

- ☛ **Who** is the name of the person, organization, or group of persons.
- ☛ **What** is it—a meeting, scheduled event, roundup, prize list, or picnic.

☛ **Where** is the place. The Youth Center, church, Lititz, Alexandria, Harrisburg, University Park, Grange Hall, YMCA, or any other place.

☛ **When** answers itself, too. It is the time the event occurred. Was it yesterday, this morning, or last week? Or will it be next week or next month?

☛ **Why** is the cause. The meeting was held because officers were elected or a grand champion steer was selected.

☛ **How** is the circumstance, or how did the meeting or anything else come about?

A few news stories will not have all the who, what, where, when, why, and how in them, but all news stories will have most of them.

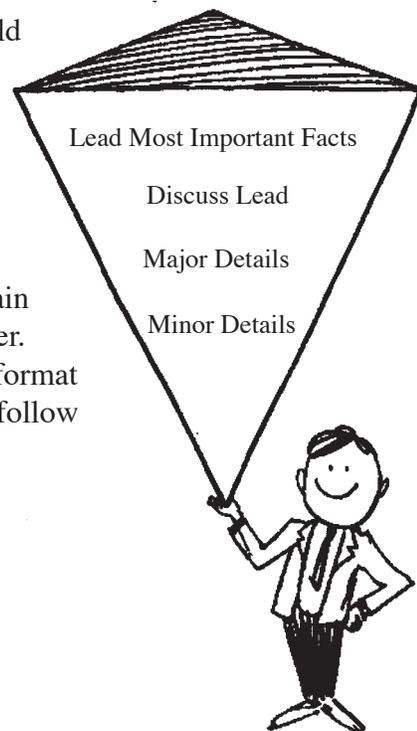
You do not report a 4-H meeting or activity in the same style as a secretary records the minutes. You must decide for yourself whether the who, what, where, when, why, or how was most important. A rule of thumb is: the happening at the meeting which would interest the most people is probably the most important fact.

Think about every aspect of the meeting for awhile, then decide which item or event at the meeting was most important. When you have decided, either write your story promptly, or gather all your notes and call the newspaper when you were told to call. Be sure you have the spelling of all names correct and that you can tell the person you call at the newspaper of this correct spelling. If Sara Hartman spells her name “Sara” and not “Sarah” or if Sallie Madison spells her first name “Sallie”—that’s the way you should report it.

Your introductory sentence is called the lead of the story and contains the most important and interesting fact in the story. The first paragraph of an advance or follow-up story should tell who, what, why, when, where, and how.

The paragraphs which complete your story discuss and explain the facts in the lead and give major and minor details in that order.

Newspaper reporters and editors have long thought the best format for news articles is the inverted pyramid. Do your news articles follow this order of arrangement? They should.



A story you might write about an upcoming club meeting could be as follows:

Herman Weaver, owner of the Hillcrest Greenhouse, will demonstrate the vegetative methods of plant propagation at the May meeting of the Belgium Builders Plant Science 4-H Club. Among the common types of vegetative propagation methods that Mr. Weaver will show examples of are: bulbs and tubers, runners, suckers, layers, cuttings, and division of plants. The meeting will be held Wednesday, May 14, at 8 p.m. at the Youth Center in Mosstown. Parents and friends of club members are invited to watch the demonstration.

Now check the newspaper story and you will see that it answers the following questions:

Who — Herman Weaver

What — will demonstrate

How — show examples of bulbs and tubers, runners, suckers, layers, cuttings, and division

Where — Youth Center in Mosstown

When — May 14, 8 p.m.

Helping a newspaper reporter get the story

Plan ahead and telephone each newspaper to inform the news editor of any important club or county 4-H event in which your club is involved. By doing this you can be a great help to your club leader or 4-H Extension agent. If the event is important enough, the newspaper may send a reporter to cover the story.

You will want to be prepared to be as much help as possible to the newspaper reporter when he or she comes to cover an event. For example, make yourself available to the reporter at the event. Meet him or her when he or she arrives and point out what you think are the most interesting attractions. Introduce the reporter to your club leader and county agent. Then help the reporter get the facts he or she needs for the story. Be sure the names and addresses you furnish are correct and spelled correctly. In most instances, you will be able to answer many of the questions the newspaper reporter will ask you.

You might also help the newspaper reporter by suggesting ideas for pictures that he or she might like to take. Or, for example, help him or her by asking the club member who owns the top winner in the dog show if he and his dog will pose to have their picture taken for the newspaper.

Let's analyze this news article which could have been written by a newspaper reporter. It is a follow-up story reporting the 4-H Dog Show winners named at a typical 4-H County roundup event. Note that the article initially reports what, who, how, why, where, and when. A discussion of the dog show and other winners follows. Then a few remaining explanatory details are given.

A Great Dane named Lobo won "Best in the Show" at the 4-H dog project roundup of Susquehanna County held yesterday in the Oakmont Park Youth Center. Lobo, who is owned by Roger Nelson, 14, of Oakmont Park, excelled in his performance. He won the best in the working group award before his selection as best dog in the show.

The 4-H dog project members exercised their pets on leashes in front of the judge, Hermit Meritt of Purdyville, and then posed their dogs for the judge's examination.

The judge commented that the “exhibitors and their dogs put on an impressive dog show for being so early in the project year.”

Other dogs winning blue ribbon awards were: puppy class Prixie, a Welsh Corgi owned by Susan Michael of Dale Park; novice class—Nicki, a Collie owned by Jim Roxwell of Oakmont Park; and open class—Lobo owned by Roger Nelson.

These winners will compete at the 4-H State Dog Show on August 10th, at the Civic Center in Randolph Park.

Now if you will check closely you will see that the facts you helped the newspaper reporter gather answer the following:

Who — Lobo owned by Roger Nelson

What — won “Best in Show” title

How — excelled in his performance

Where — Oakmont Park Youth Center

When — yesterday

Why — show held to select county winners who will compete in the 4-H State Dog Show

To make the editor look forward to receiving your news copy, adhere to the following guidelines. Remember, good press relations will make your job as 4-H Club Reporter more fun and successful.

1. Type your news articles if at all possible. Double or triple space them. Type on only one side of 8 1/2- by 11-inch paper.
2. Keep a carbon copy of each article you write.
3. Proofread every story for typing errors and to check that it is the best work that you can do.
4. Never submit poor writing or sloppy copy to a newspaper.
5. Never use **we** in a news story. When you are writing about your club, pretend you are a regular reporter and not a member of the club. Say “the meeting was held on”...rather than “we met on October 15.”
6. Do not editorialize! This means write only facts in news articles and keep your opinions out of them. Do not say “Mrs. Evans served delicious cake and lemonade.” Rather, say “Mrs. Evans served cake and lemonade as refreshments following the meeting.” That the lemonade and cake were delicious is an opinion.
7. Do not try to write your own headlines.



8. Report stories soon! There is nothing newsworthy about old news.
9. Do not ask the editor to save clippings for you.
10. Be sure to get ages correct if you feel ages will help your story, or if the editor asks for them.
11. If you mention figures, be sure your total is correct.
12. Check all addresses before using them.
13. Check your facts. Do not say a boy has only tomatoes in his garden if he has other vegetables too.
14. Be sure you spell names correctly. Both first and last names please!
15. Do not use nicknames in writing news. John Jones may be “Shorty” or “Red” to you, but nicknames do not belong in your news article.
16. Never use racial nicknames.

17. Do not write about trivial items that have nothing to do with your story. For instance: If Sally Whitmore wins an award for baking the best bread at roundup, you certainly do not want to mention that she is a member of the United Methodist Church. If she won the award last year or the year before that is interesting so add it to your story.

18. Watch your spelling. Use a dictionary. You can find the correct spelling of any words you will want to use. Look them up.

19. Leave plenty of margin space—at least 1 inch on each side and bottom of the paper. The editor may need this space for corrections and instructions to the printer.

20. Begin your article one-third of the way down the first sheet of paper to allow the editor enough space to write a headline.

21. Type your name, address, telephone number, and name of your club in the upper left corner of the first page of your news article.

22. If your story has a specific release time, specify this in the upper right corner of the first page.

23. If your article continues to a second page, type **-more-** on the bottom of the first page to indicate that there is more copy in the news article.

24. Type ### to indicate the end of your news story.

These last six suggestions will make your news article look like the one on the following page.

*your name
address
telephone number
club's name*

*for release
Oct. 10*

Save 1/3 of 1st page for headline

A Great Dane named Lobo won “Best in the Show” at the 4-H dog project roundup of Susquehanna County held yesterday in the Oakmont Park Youth Center. Lobo, who is owned by Roger Nelson, 14, of Oakmont Park, excelled in his performance. He won the best in the working group award before his selection as best dog in the show.

The 4-H dog project members exercised their pets on leashes in front of the judge, Herman Merritt of Purdyville, and then posed their dogs for the judge’s examination.

The judge commented that the “exhibitors and their dogs put on an impressive dog show for being so early in the project year.”

Other dogs winning blue ribbon awards were: puppy class—Prixie, a Welsh Corgi owned by Susan Michael of Dale Park; novice class—Nicki, a Collie owned by Jim Roxwell of Oakmont Park; and open class—Lobo, owned by Roger Nelson.

These winners will compete at the 4-H State Dog Show on August 10th, at the Civic Center in Randolph Park.

###

Use ### if story ends or -more- if story continues.



Remember, however, photos must be extremely clear, sharp, and in focus.

What about photographs

Does your newspaper print photographs? Most newspapers do. And some newspapers that do not use many pictures would probably use more if they got them. Some newspapers might even send a photographer to your roundup if you tell the editor some time before the event takes place that he could get some photos of the winners.

If you do not have a good camera, perhaps your leader has one. Or, maybe a club member is enrolled in the photography project. Find him and put him to work when there is a picture to take. Remember, however, photos must be extremely clear, sharp, and in focus.

Names make news

You have probably heard the expression “names make news.” And, names certainly do make NEWS in capital letters, particularly in a small town or community newspaper.

Try not to use the same names of club members in every story you write. Naturally some boys and girls will be more active than others and will deserve to be mentioned more frequently than those who show little interest and miss every other meeting.

Keep a scrapbook

It is always nice to have a record of the accomplishments you made as reporter of your 4-H Club. You can keep such a record quite easily by clipping your news articles out of the newspapers each time an article is printed. Then paste these clippings in a scrapbook which you can keep after your year as reporter is completed. Remember each clipping should be marked with the name of the newspaper that it appeared in and also the date that it was printed.

Why stories are not printed

Do not be discouraged if some of your news articles do not get printed. Remember as the world gets more and more complex more news is reported and more advertising space is sold. In addition, printing production costs are increasing. Journalism people refer to the entire problem as the “shrinking news hole.”

However, if you follow these guidelines, your story will have a better chance of getting printed. Make sure your story is news, of general local interest, well written, easy for the editor to read, and timely—do not miss your deadline.

4-H Club Motto

“To make the best better”

4-H Club Pledge

I pledge
my head to clearer thinking,
my heart to greater loyalty,
my hands to larger service, and
my health to better living, for
my club,
my community,
my country, and
my world.

4-H Club Colors

Green and White

Prepared by Nelson H. Gotwalt, former editorial communications specialist.

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