

CLUB REPORTER

GENERAL RULES
FOR REPORTING

* NEWSPAPER ITEMS

* CLUB ACTIVITIES

* 4-H PROJECTS



Club Reporter

So You're a Reporter!

When your club elected you reporter, you were given a very important job. Along with that job you assume a great responsibility.

It's up to you to tell your club's 4-H story, to inform the people about what the members of your club are doing in 4-H activities. It's your responsibility to tell that story completely, accurately and truthfully.

To be a good club reporter, you'll have to know all about your club — projects, activities and members. You will need to get acquainted with the people at your local newspaper and at the radio or TV station. Finally, you will have to sharpen up your writing skills so you can tell your club's story to the best of your ability.



Meet Your Editor

The very first thing to do is stop by the newspaper and meet the editor or the staff member you will be working with. Introduce yourself, tell her/him what you will be doing and tell her/him a little about your club. But don't overstay your welcome. Editors are very busy people, especially when press time is getting close.

You should be the only person from your club to contact the editor with news. But be sure you always have all the facts the editor may need. Always be accurate, and make certain you have nothing but facts. Don't expect the editor to catch your mistakes. Double check

your story with your president or leader to make sure dates, names and places are correct.

Be on time. Get your story in right after your meeting or event. Find out what the paper's deadline is and stick by it. Get things in early whenever possible, to avoid getting lost in shuffle as deadline approaches.

Don't be upset if your story doesn't make the front page. A newspaper has a lot of news to run, and the editor knows where it fits best. And don't feel hurt if the editor rewrites your story. Read his/her version carefully to see what changes you could make in your writing. Ask your editor for advice. An editor can give you many helpful tips.

Invite the editor to your bigger events — and be sure he/she gets a complimentary ticket. Don't feel badly if he/she can't come — he/she often has to work nights. Get the story to the editor the next day anyway.

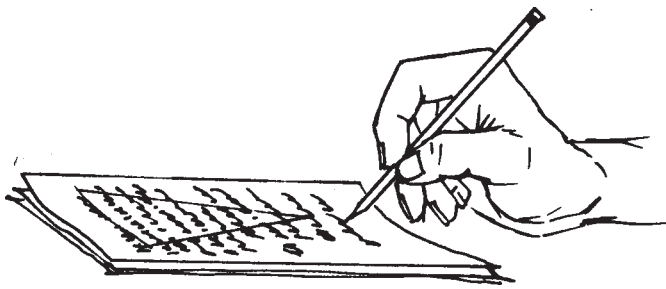
Type or use a word processor on all your stories if at all possible. If not, be careful to write very clearly. Always double- or triple-space, whether using long-hand, a typewriter or a computer. Make an original copy or photocopy of your story for every paper or station.

Your job will be easier — and you will be a better reporter — if you get to know your editor, follow his/her advice, learn about the newspaper and follow his/her style and schedule.

Writing a News Story

The first thing your news story needs is facts — something to write about. But don't hide behind the excuse that you don't have anything to write about. Your club activities are news to your community, so get to work and tell your club's story — try to write a news story every month, or more often if necessary.

Every news story you write should answer six basic questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? If you can answer all these questions, you have all the information your story needs. **Who** is involved in the story? **What** happened? **When** did it happen? **Where** did it happen? **Why** did it happen? **How** did it happen? Not all news stories answer all of these questions, but most good stories do.



After you have all your facts, you put them into your story using the “pyramid” style. This means you put the most important things first and go on to things that are less important.

This form enables the reader to get the main idea of the story in the first paragraph. It catches their attention and makes them want to read more to get the details.

Another important reason for the pyramid style is that the editor may find the story is too long when he/she makes up the paper. He should be able to cut the story at the bottom and still leave all the most important details in the story.

The very first paragraph is your lead. How well you write it may determine how many people read the story through, so make it interesting. And remember the pyramid style. The lead should contain all the essential facts — it should actually be a short summary of the story.

Never start out the story like this: “The regular meeting of the Fantastic Farmers 4-H Club was held last night.” This isn’t too important and it certainly isn’t interesting. What people want to know is what happened at the meeting.

Instead, start with something like: “A community clean-up campaign was organized by the Fantastic Farmers 4-H Club at its regular meeting Tuesday night at the Joseph Doaks home.”

Then fill in the details, such as exactly what is planned, who will be in charge, etc. Report any less important business further down in the story.

Remember, words are your writing tools, so make them work for you. Use short sentences — sentences with one idea. It’s the long, complex sentences that make writing difficult. Use short words — the simplest word usually carries your meaning best. Use personal words — words about people or addressed to people.

If you write as simply and clearly as possible, your story will be readable and make sense to your readers. Don’t try to impress your readers with your vocabulary of big words or with long, rambling sentences. Chances are you’ll wind up confusing people instead of informing them.

What is News?

You have a wealth of potential news stories at your fingertips. Names make news. If members of your club receive awards or win contests, tell about it — that’s news. Human interest makes news. Maybe your club has a member with an unusual project, or who had some unusual experiences with his/her project. Events make news. Meetings, tours, special activities, etc., can all make news both before they happen and when they happen. But they aren’t news very long after they happen.

One of the secrets to being a good reporter is learning how to find and recognize news stories — developing a “nose for news.” There should be enough happening in your club to write a news story every meeting. Just learn to recognize the details that make a story interesting and write them. Some stories may be short, perhaps they won’t all be used, but you won’t do your best job as reporter unless you try.

You have a responsibility to both the public and your club. Your responsibility to the public is to let the people know what 4-H is doing. And you also have the responsibility of giving your club and its members the recognition they deserve — which just might stimulate more activity in your club.

— Gary Moran
Agricultural Editor





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