



# Reporting Activity



State 4-H O-Rama – Senior 4-H'ers Only  
Ag Communications

4-H reporting provides senior 4-H members a unique opportunity to practice the journalistic skills of listening, interviewing, and writing; develop an appreciation of journalism and its delivery of information and ideas to a large group of people through mass media; become aware of the necessary skills in reporting 4-H activities in a timely, accurate and thorough manner.

## OBJECTIVES

Targeted Life Skills: Communication, Marketable Skills and Planning/Organizing.

Opportunities will be provided for faculty to share information about related college degree programs in agricultural communications and journalism and career options in public relations, communications and newspaper and television journalism.

## ELIGIBILITY

Each county may enter one senior member in the Reporting Activity at the Arkansas 4-H O-Rama.

## ACTIVITY

The first part of the Reporting Activity is participation in an intense workshop covering basic news writing – writing leads, arranging information in the inverted pyramid style, formatting of a news release, and determining news value – conducted by media professionals and/or journalism professors. Exercises and interaction are part of the workshop. Publicity chairman and 4-H club reporters should find it relevant and extremely helpful. The workshop is a "how-to."

The second phase of the activity is a mock news conference in which the instructor introduces an idea or project. Participants question the instructor to elicit information just as journalists do at press conferences. Each "reporter" then writes a one- or two-page story on the topic of the press conference.

## PREPARATION

No longer is preparation necessary for an "edge." In the past, participants have had varying skill levels. Participation in the intense workshop is designed to "level the playing field." Scrutinizing news stories from state and local newspapers to become familiar with the news format (inverted pyramid) may prove helpful.

Familiarity with information on the following pages: communicating, news writing, newspaper style rules, and rate your news story may be helpful although it will be covered in the workshop. The information is applicable to the successful completion of the activity.

## **JUDGING**

News stories will be judged by media professionals according to the 4-H Reporting Score Sheet.

## **AWARDS**

The 4-H'er receiving the highest score receives a trophy. Ribbons are presented to the second-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-place winners.

## **PREPARED BY**

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
 University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture, and County Governments Cooperating

4-H REPORTING SCORE SHEET

CES-688

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

I. STORY FORM (15 points)

“Slug Line” and title placement (3 points) \_\_\_\_\_

Story placement (2 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Properly placed on the page with correct margins)

Instruction marks (5 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Marks properly used for additional pages, “-more-,”  
 and end, “-30-“)

Copy rules followed (5 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Paragraphs end on the same page they begin, words  
 are hyphenated)

II. STORY CONTENT (65 points)

Lead (20 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Interesting, tells the story’s vital information,  
 facts are accurate)

Inverted pyramid form (20 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Most important information is given at the beginning  
 of the story, the 5 W’s and H are found in the story)

Readability (10 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Sentences and paragraphs are short; facts are  
 coherent and follow a logical pattern)

Grammar rules followed (15 points) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Standard grammar rules used, correct spellings used)

III. OVERALL STORY EFFECT (20 points) \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL SCORE (100 points) \_\_\_\_\_

County Extension Office  
100 Main Street  
Yourtown, Iowa 50000  
March 11, 2001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:  
Terry Smith (999) 999-9999

Put out a good-looking press release

YOURTOWN, Iowa--A good-looking press release tells the news editor you're a professional. It's clean, accurate, attuned to the needs of the busy editor.

Your logo or letterhead and the date go at the top of the press release. Next comes the release date for the story. FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE means the editor can use the story as soon as it's received.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (USE BEFORE MARCH 25) means the story can be used immediately and that the material in the story will be out of date if it's used March 25 or later. FOR RELEASE MARCH 7 means the story shouldn't be used before that date, but can be used anytime March 7 or later.

After the release date, include a line or two telling the editor who to contact for more information about the story. A phone number is more important than an address here.

The editor may or may not use your story headline suggestion. But put one in anyway to help give the editor an idea of what the news release is about. Leave a few empty lines above the head in case the editor wants to write in a different headline.

Double space the news release. Indent paragraphs five spaces. And keep paragraphs short. Two long sentences or four short ones make a good paragraph size.

Leave at least one-inch margins around the page edge. If the release runs over a page, put the word "more" at the bottom of the first page. At the top left corner of the second page, write "Add 1" and the first few words of your headline.

At the top of the third page, write "Add 2" and so on. At the end of the story, type "-30-" or "XXX" or "#."

### RATE YOUR NEWS STORY

1. Did you use the inverted pyramid style of organization?
2. Are the most important ideas first?
3. Does your lead attract attention?
4. Is the lead no more than 25-30 words?
5. Are all of the 5 W's located somewhere in your story?
6. If your story has more than one news idea, did you separate them into different leads, the most important one first?
7. Has the body of your story documented your lead?
8. Are your sentences short?
9. Are your words familiar and understandable?
10. Did you avoid unnecessary words?
11. Did you use active verbs in the present tense?
12. Did you write as you talk?
13. Do your words paint a picture?
14. Does your writing interest many readers?
15. Are your grammar and spelling accurate?

## news writing

### in this section

Many people would like to be able to use the newspapers to publicize events or programs they are involved with. But most people don't know where to start. Though reporting and news writing are skills that can require years of study, this section should enable you, with practice, to write an acceptable news story. Specifically, you will learn:

- What is news?
- How to plan a news story.
- How to write a news story.
- How to edit for accuracy, grammar and style.
- How to prepare your story for publication.
- Where and when to send your news story.
- How to write cutlines for pictures.

### what is news?

Before you begin to write, back up a few steps and consider – what is news? News is:

- Timely. Something that has just happened or is just about to happen is timely. Words such as "yesterday," "Thursday" or "tomorrow" make a story timely. The odds for successful publication will climb if your story is current.
- Close. Your story should have a local angle or appeal. Something that happens close to home or that affects local residents is more likely to make it into the media than something that happens far away.
- Important. Events that have an impact on your readers or that concern prominent people are important. One way to make your story "important" is to have a local personality or political figure comment on your program or situation and include his or her views in your story.
- Unusual. When the man bites the dog, it's news.
- Of human interest. Some stories are newsworthy because they bring about an emotional response in their readers – rage, laughter, tears, etc.

### when to use newspapers

If the story you have in mind is timely, close and important, or if it is unusual or has human interest, you must next figure out if the newspaper is the best place to tell it.

Use the newspaper if:

- Your story appeals to a varied audience.
- Your intended audience reads the newspaper.
- Your story has a good chance of being printed. (This may depend on your newspaper's policies, as well as the newsworthiness of the story.)
- You want to give your audience more details than radio or television would carry.
- You don't have much money to spend. (All a news release costs is the price of the paper it is typed on.)

	<p>If these conditions aren't true in your situation, consider using another communication method to present your message. You may still want to prepare a news story, though, in addition to your other communication efforts.</p>
<p><b>planning</b></p>	<p>The first step in planning a news story is to identify the group you're trying to reach. The newspaper is one of the mass media, so your audience will be diverse. There are some characteristics they may share, however, such as how old they are or where they live. If the newspaper has sections for special interests (such as religion or farm pages or regular columns for 4-H activities), your audience may be narrowed down.</p>
<p><b>consider your audience</b></p>	<p>Keep your audience in mind as you plan your story, and anticipate what impact your story will have on them. For instance, high crop yields and low prices mean one thing to the consumer and quite another to the farmer.</p>
<p><b>consider your purpose</b></p>	<p>Next, determine the purpose of your story. There are three basic types of news stories, each serving a different purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advance stories give important information about something that is going to happen.</li> <li>• Follow-up stories tell about events that have already happened.</li> <li>• Feature stories provide information and interpretation, instruction or entertainment. They are different from straight news stories in both structure and style.</li> </ul>
<p><b>writing</b></p>	<p>When you have determined your audience and the intent of your story, you are ready to put it in writing.</p> <p>News stories have a definite structure – they get to the point fast. The most important facts of the story should be presented in the first sentence or two (the summary lead), with details following in order of importance:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> <b>SUMMARY LEAD</b>        Elaboration of lead        details become        less and less        important        as story        unfolds.     </p> <p>This way of organizing facts is called the "inverted pyramid." This type of structure is important because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readers who haven't the time or the desire to read the whole story can get the most important information at a glance.</li> <li>• If the newspaper doesn't have enough room to print the whole story, it can easily shorten it by chopping the end off – without losing the "meat" of the story.</li> </ul> <p>Until you have written several news stories, it may help to list the facts in order of importance before you start to write.</p>

**what are  
 the  
 facts?**

Most news stories can be summed up by what is known in journalistic circles as the “five W’s and an H.”

- Who? Who said it? Who is the subject of the story?
- What? What happened?
- Where? Where did it happen?
- When? When did it or will it happen?
- Why? Why did it happen? Why is it important?
- How? How did it happen?

The summary lead usually answers the most important of these questions. It may answer more than one. Which elements are most important will depend on your story and its intended audience. Keep in mind what makes your story news – is it where it took place? Who was involved? The facts that make your story news should be presented in the summary lead.

After the lead, the remaining facts should follow in order of importance. Details and background information usually appear at the end of the story. After you have planned your story, follow these rules of writing to assure that your story will be easy to read:

- Stick to the facts! There is no place in news writing for the opinions or assumptions of the reporter.
- Use short sentences. Sentences should express ideas clearly. Use no more words than necessary. The average sentence length should be 16 to 19 words.
- Use short paragraphs. Short paragraphs are easy to read and will hold your readers’ attention. Average paragraph length should be two to five sentences.
- Use active verbs. “Bill threw the ball” is better than “the ball was thrown by Bill.”
- Use short, simple words. Why make it difficult? Instead of “deficiency,” use “shortage”; “attempt,” “try”; “prior to,” “before”; “construct,” “build”; “this point in time,” “now.”

**feature  
 stories**

Feature stories seldom follow the inverted-pyramid format of the straight news story. The first paragraph of a feature story sets the tone for the story and grabs the reader’s attention. It can’t stand alone as a summary of the facts as the first paragraph of a straight news story can. Most newspapers prefer to leave feature writing to their own reporters; but if you care to try your hand at it, be as creative as you wish. Just remember that, though the feature story format is more flexible than that of the straight news story, the rules for good writing still apply. Avoid opinion, excess description, clichés and complicated construction.

**editing**

When you have completed your story, read it carefully to check for these points of accuracy, grammar and style:

- Make sure you stick to the facts. There is no place for opinions or assumptions in a news story. If you are quoting someone else's opinions or assumptions as part of the story, be sure to say so.
- Check and double-check your facts; spelling of names, address, meeting places, times, dates, titles, awards, etc. **ACCURACY IS ESSENTIAL IN ANY NEWS STORY.**
- Check each sentence for mistakes in spelling or grammar.
- Check for errors in style: improper capitalization or punctuation, improperly hyphenated or abbreviated words, etc. Use a stylebook from AP or UPI as a guide. They are quite inexpensive and available at most bookstores.
- Eliminate clichés and empty phrases, and clarify confusing or complicated sentences.
- Check once more to make sure your story is written for your readers. Put the facts most important to them in the first paragraph.

**publication**

When you are convinced you have written a straightforward news story that is aimed at your audience and free of inaccuracies to fact, spelling, grammar or style, you are ready to submit your story for publication.

Preparing your story for publication is a matter of carefully typing it in the standard format preferred by newspapers editors.

At the top of the page, type your name, title and telephone number, so the editor knows where the story came from and how to get more information. Leave the top third of the page blank so the editor can mark the copy for a headline, size of type, etc. Double or triple space.

If you will be submitting stories to one newspaper regularly, ask the editor how he or she prefers to have the stories prepared.

**know your  
local  
newspaper**

It is a good idea to become familiar with the newspapers in your local area. Read them regularly to get a feel for the types of articles they print and the style they prefer.

It also helps to get to know the editors you may be working with and what their responsibilities are. The staff of a weekly county paper may be quite small, with workers sharing responsibilities. Large daily papers usually have several editors, each in charge of a different department.

Make sure you submit your story to the appropriate department. If you aren't sure who the appropriate editor is, check with the receptionist or city editor.

Getting to know your papers' staff may mean the difference between success or failure in getting a story published. But remember, editors and other media people are busy professionals. Before visiting, try to find out which days are least busy and schedule an appointment then. Keep your visit brief – just introduce yourself and your program. Don't call the editor every time you think you have a great story, but do send a press release. Save the phone calls for the truly unique stories.

**sending  
your story**

The subject of your story will probably determine the newspapers it should be submitted to. Local stories go to the local papers. Stories that may be of interest to people throughout the state should be more widely distributed. Use a directory of newspapers (Ayers is one, or check with your librarian) to find the correct addresses for newspapers.

**Do's and  
Don'ts**

- Do learn the papers' deadlines. By what time must a story be submitted for inclusion in the day's/week's edition? What are the editors' busy work hours/days?
- Do learn who's who on each paper's staff.
- Do read the newspapers. Are there regular columns that might use your material? What is each paper's style? Policies? Do the papers welcome stories from outside, or do they prefer news tips to their own reporters?
- Don't wait until the last minute to send your story. Try to give the editors enough time to plan ahead for the best time to print your story. Use deadlines only as a guide for your planning.
- Don't miss deadlines.
- Don't call or drop in on editors during their busy times.
- Don't be upset if your story is edited to fit the paper's style or space.
- Don't be upset if your story isn't printed. The paper has many releases to consider. Don't give up.

**cutlines**

You may submit photographs by themselves or with a story. All pictures should have an explanatory "cutline" – the written explanation under the picture. Cutlines vary in length and purpose. Mug shots may require only the name of the subject. Cutlines for pictures and awards ceremonies should name everyone in the picture, usually from left to right, and explain the award being presented. Candid action photos should also be explained.

Some rules for cutlines:

- Write short, clear, complete sentences.
- In addition to making sure names are spelled correctly, make sure they match up with the people in the photo.
- Identify people by the position they occupy in the picture, not by physical characteristics – for instance, "Jon Doe (left)," not "Jon Doe (bearded)."
- Remember: A cutline is for information and clarification. It deserves the same careful attention that should be given to a news story.

**summary**

News writing is a valuable skill. Use the tips in this section to gain access to the newspaper. To further improve your writing, ask for pointers from high school journalism instructors or a staff member of your local paper – and practice.

## Newspaper Style Rules

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How many times have you sat down to write a news story or magazine article only to be faced again and again with decisions about proper style usage?

The following rules, borrowed from the *Associated Press Style Book*, may help you develop an acceptable newspaper style. They were picked to answer some of the most common questions.

### CAPITALIZATION

1. Capitalize titles preceding a name: *Secretary of Agriculture Clifford Hardin*.

Don't capitalize titles when they stand alone or follow a name: Clifford Hardin, *secretary of agriculture*.

2. Capitalize *U.S. Congress, Senate, House, Cabinet*. Capitalize *legislature* when preceded by the name of the state: *Indiana Legislature*.

Don't capitalize *legislature* when it stands alone: the *legislature* passed 300 bills.

3. Capitalize *committee* in full names; the *Gorden Leadership Camp Continuation Committee*.

Don't capitalize *committee* when it stands alone: The *committee* set June 3 for its next meeting.

4. Capitalize *Social Security* when referring to the U.S. system: He was receiving *Social Security* payments.

Don't capitalize *social security* when used as general reference: He is an advocate of *social security* for farmers.

5. Capitalize specific regions: *Mideast, Middle West, Midwest, Upper Peninsula, Southern Illinois, Chicago's South Side, Loop*, etc.

6. Capitalize common nouns when they are part of a formal name: *Hoover Dam, Illinois River, Kane County Courthouse, Ottawa Consolidated High School*.

Don't capitalize *dam, river, courthouse, high school* when they stand alone.

7. Capitalize proper names of livestock, animals, fowl, etc.: *Airedale, Percheron, Hereford*.

Don't capitalize the kinds: *whiteface, bantam, terrier, horse*, etc.

8. Capitalize the important words in the titles of books, plays, poems, songs, etc. and put the titles in quotation marks: "*The Courtship of Miles Standish*".

Don't capitalize articles (*a, an, the*) or short prepositions (*in, of, too*) unless they are at the beginning or end of a title.

9. Use all capital letters (or underline – check local style) to designate the names of magazines or newspapers (do not include *The*): *FARM JOURNAL* or *Detroit Free Press*.

10. Capitalize important words in the names of organizations, expositions, etc.: *Boy Scouts, Red Cross, Illinois State Fair*.

Don't capitalize *scout* or *fair* when it stands alone.

### ABBREVIATIONS

1. As a general guide, don't use abbreviations that the average reader will not clearly understand. Always spell out a name the first mention unless the abbreviation is generally known.

2. The abbreviated names of groups, government agencies, military or civil organizations, time zones, and commonly known corporations and the designations of radio and television stations are used without spaces or periods: *ECA, TVA, FCC, AFL-CIO, YMCA, USDA, B&O, CST, CDT*.

3. Lower-case abbreviations usually take periods: *m.p.h.*, *f.o.b.*, *c.o.d.*, and *a.m.* and *p.m.*
4. Names of business firms are abbreviated: *Warner Bros.*, *Brown Implement Co.*, *Smith & Co., Inc.*
5. In addresses abbreviate *St.*, *Ave.*, *Blvd.*, *Ter.*  
  
Don't abbreviate *Point*, *Circle*, *Plaza*, *Place*, *Drive*, *Oval*, *Road*, *Lane*.
6. Names of foreign countries are always spelled out: *England*, *France*, *Germany*.
7. Abbreviate *United States* and *United Nations* in titles (with periods but no spaces): *U.S. Department of Agriculture*, *U.N. General Assembly*.
8. Degrees are capitalized when abbreviated, left lower case when spelled out: *B.S.*, *bachelor of science*.
9. In newspaper writing, *Mr.* is used only with *Mrs.*
10. Abbreviate the month when the day of the month is used; otherwise spell it out: *Dec. 10, 1952*, but *December 1952*.

## NUMERALS

1. In general, spell out numbers *below 10*. Use numerals for *10 and above*.
2. In series of related expressions, treat all numbers alike: He had *3 suits*, *12 pairs of shoes*, *65 shirts*, and *102 ties*. There were *three horses*, *two cows*, *six pigs*, and *one dog*.
3. Use figures for exact sums of money: *\$4,567,436*. For round sums of millions or billions, check local style: *\$2 million*, or *\$2,000,000*, or *two million dollars*.
4. Spell out a figure when it begins a sentence: *Fifty cows* died in the fire.

EXCEPTION: Don't spell out *4-H* when it starts a sentence.

5. Use numerals for highway designations: U.S. *310*, Interstate *90*, Illinois *45*.

## THE HYPHEN

1. The general rule for using the hyphen in abbreviation is:

Unlike characters (mixed letters and figures) are printed solid: *3D*, *B29*.

Like characters are hyphenated: *A-bomb*, *U-boat*, *20-20 vision*.

Exception: *4-H* is an organization with no other designation.

2. The hyphen is used for clarity: the *6-foot* man eating shark was killed. (The man was.) The *6-foot man-eating* shark was killed. (The shark was.)
3. An adverb ending in "ly" NEVER takes a hyphen when used with adjective to form a compound adjective: It is *badly mangled*, *fully informed*, *newly chosen*.
4. The hyphen has been abandoned in words formed with "week", "wide", "over", "pre," "non": *weekday*, *nationwide*, *overconfident*, *preschool*, *nonfat*.