So You Are Reporter...

As a reporter, you represent your 4-H Club through the stories you submit to the newspapers and other media. You are an important 4-H officer. You help your club members feel good about themselves and the things they’ve done in 4-H by sharing their 4-H stories with the community.

Checklist for reporters

- I make and update a list of news story possibilities for our 4-H club.
- I submit articles to the newspaper as soon as possible since old news is usually no news.
- I work with our photographer to include photos with 4-H news stories.
- I work with our historian to provide photos and news clippings for the historian’s book.
- I know the names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses and submission deadlines of our county newspapers and 4-H newsletters.
- I know how to write a caption, or cutline, for a photo that’s included with my news stories.
- I make sure that names are spelled correctly and people are identified correctly for all news stories.
- I make sure to have a signed photo release for every person shown in a photo that I’m going to submit for public use. Member photo releases are included in the health form. Check with your local University of Missouri Extension center.
- I keep a record book (string book) containing my work and contact information from the year.

Guidelines for reporters

While the secretary takes detailed notes on everything that happens in meetings, you only report the interesting things that 4-H’ers are doing — inside and outside the meeting. Your job is to be a little nosy and know everything that’s going on in your club.
so you can tell your county about the good things! Here are some ways to focus your stories:

- ✓ Advance raises interest so people will want to attend or participate. Several versions may be required. The information may be released over time.

- ✓ Follow up happens after the event and tells what happened, such as what people learned, a funny thing that happened or awards or honors given.

- ✓ How-to often quotes experts to explain what readers need to do or understand, such as how to groom a sheep, find an insect exhibit or join 4-H.

- ✓ Feature is an in-depth story, such as writing about a new project or members’ experiences while exhibiting at the fair.

Be prepared. As a reporter, it is important you are on the spot to get good news stories. Make sure you carry a supply of pencils and paper so you can take accurate notes. Always prepare questions before you talk to a source for your story. If you do not understand your source, ask more questions. You may want to create your own shorthand notes to help you write down the information more quickly. As a reporter, make sure you ask enough questions to get enough facts to write an accurate story. Writing the story as soon as the interview or event is over will help keep the facts fresh and clear.

Different types of news stories

Straight news reporting

Straight “hard” news informs readers about what happened, is happening or will happen. Straight news can quote experts on “why?” or can compare and explain. There are basic rules for writing straight news.

Just the FACTS

Use only facts, not opinions. An opinion becomes a fact if someone has said it. In this case, the person is quoted. The quote needs to be very clear.

*The game is challenging.*

This sentence is an opinion. Ask yourself, who said the game was challenging?

*His brother said, “The game is challenging!”*

This sentence is a direct quote. The statement is an opinion, but it is reported as a fact because it is a fact that Eric said it. Always put direct quotes in parentheses.

*Tracy said that the game was difficult.*

This sentence is called an indirect quote. Instead of a comma and quotation marks, the word *that* is used. We still know Tracy said it.

News is TRUE

Don’t make up anything. Just write what happened, is happening or will happen. Include everything needed to make the story clear and fair. To get the facts, the professionals follow these guidelines:

- ✓ Who is the story about?
- ✓ What are they doing?
When did it, or will it, take place?
Where did it, or will it, take place?
Why did it, or will it, happen?
How did it, or will it, happen?

Test your sentences to make sure there are no unanswered questions. If after the sentence you have to ask another question such as why, how or when, your sentence is unanswered. Here are some examples.

Sue Ness said that storm data is vital.
Unanswered question is who is Sue Ness and why can I believe what she says?

Meteors will arrive this summer.
Unanswered question is when will the meteors arrive?

The only fee is the cost of lunch.
Unanswered question is how much will the lunch cost?

Weather data is vital,” said Sue Ness, the state of Texas climatologist.
The question is answered by who is Sue Ness. She is the state of Texas climatologist.

No mistakes!
Make sure names, addresses, times, dates, costs, rules, titles, ages, offices held, ingredients and quoted words are correct! Always double check your spelling!

Third person only
Write stories in the third person, not in first or second person. News is not personal. As you write your stories, it is important to remember this grammar rule.

- Use: Third person is he, she, it, they, him, her or them.
- Never use: First person is I, we, me or us.
- Never use: Second person is you.

Keep it simple
- Include all needed facts. No less. No more.
- Don’t use a long word when a short one will do. For example, use the word said instead of commented, the word tiny instead of miniscule.
- Include quotes to make stories more interesting.
- Explain or define any unfamiliar term that you may use. For example, he’s in the triathlon – a long distance race combining swimming, bicycling and running.
- Write sentences that are easy to read. (Breath Test: If you read a sentence aloud and run out of breath, it’s too long!)
- Keep paragraphs short. In news, one or two sentence paragraphs are okay. Type news stories, if at all possible, in 11 or 12 point in a standard font such as Times New Roman or Arial.
Begin with a lead

News stories begin with a good lead. The beginning paragraph, or lead, is the most important part of the story. The lead needs to grab the reader’s attention and make them want to continue reading. Here are some good examples:

- A surprise gift will help 19-year-old Casey Jones take an international exchange 4-H trip next year.
- Casey Jones began baking 720 chocolate chip cookies today, so that each Kansas 4-H club member could have a dozen.
- Can 60 young people, plus their parents, keep a secret for more than six months?

The body

The part of the news story that follows the lead is called the body. It explains the lead and gives more details. The body is written in the opposite order as books where each chapter builds to the exciting end. The exciting part of a news story is summed up in the lead. Each paragraph that follows contains details that are less important. This is called an inverted (upside-down) pyramid. If stories are too long to fit the space, editors may cut paragraphs off the end of the story.

1. Start with the facts that readers need most (the lead)
2. Next, put what’s second in importance
3. Continue with the most important to the least important
4. Put the facts that could be deleted (without harming the story) last. When editors need space, they often delete these less important facts that appear at the end of the story.

Feature reporting

Features, also called “soft news,” are more about people and less about events. A feature can describe such things as a funny mistake, a concert, how to look for termites or an unusual project. Generally, features follow the same rules as straight news except the story may not be organized in an inverted pyramid.

Depending on the topic, organize the facts in a way that makes the subject interesting and the story easy to understand and follow. For example, a feature about Doug’s clowning project might begin with a description of how he puts on clown makeup and then describe a step by step of what Doug does after that. Other options with examples are:

- **Compare and contrast:** What a member learned on an exchange trip contrasted to what it is like in the member’s home.
- **Option-outcome order:** Choice A and its result contrasted with choice B and its result.
- **First to last or step-by-step:** First, second, third and so forth.
- **Chronological or time:** Early, an hour after that, then as it got later…
- **Joke or “build the case” order:** Here’s the situation, next details, more details, punch line!

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*I never write “Metropolis” for seven cents because I can get the same price for “city.” I never write “policeman” because I can get the same money for “cop.”*  
— Mark Twain  
 *(1835 - 1910)*
Press releases

Most often, newspapers want your stories submitted as press releases. The press release contains the lead and body of your story, but also contains other information for the newspaper. The parts of a press release are:

(A) **Organization contact information**
Contact information so the newspaper knows whom to contact to confirm the story or ask questions. It is a good idea to include your organization and even the 4-H Clover.

(B) **Date**
The date the press release is sent to the newspaper.

(C) **Headline**
A short title that tells what the press release is about.

(D) **Writer’s name** (called a byline)
The name of the person who wrote the press release.

(E) **Source contact information**
Contact information for those interviewed in the press release including name, phone number or e-mail.

(F) **Dateline**
City and state where the story took place. Write the city in CAPS and make sure to capitalize the state name.

(G) **Body**
Your story with a lead and the paragraphs arranged in an inverted pyramid.

(H) **Story end mark**
Type either -30- or ### to show the end of the story.
(B) October 8, 2006

(C) Missouri 4-H Dairy Judging Team Places 4th at National Contest

(F) (G) COLUMBIA, Mo. — Missouri 4-H came home with lots of hardware from the 2006 National 4-H Dairy Judging Contest held Oct. 2 in Austin, Texas, according to Karla Deaver, 4-H youth development specialist. The team placed fourth in a field of 19 teams, behind the strong dairy states of Tennessee, Arkansas and Texas.

“Only two Missouri 4-H dairy judging teams have ever placed higher at the national contest,” Deaver said. “The team won two breeds, had two All-American judges, and was mentioned in the top of several judging categories, finishing just 85 points behind a Tennessee team.”

The team of Billy Bob, Gary Quail, Jimmy LeVox and Keith Buffett won the Brown Swiss and Guernsey breeds. “According to our records, this is the first time a Missouri 4-H team has won two breeds at the national contest,” Deaver said. The team also placed fifth in Jerseys.

Buffett, son of Brad and Sara Buffett of Mt. Vernon, and Quail, son of Frank and Susie Quail of Paris, earned All-American honors. Buffett was the fifth high individual in the contest, four points behind the first place individual. He placed first in Brown Swiss, first in Guernseys, and 60th in reasons in a field of 232 contestants. Quail was the 20th high individual in the contest, and was 60th in Guernseys, and 21st in Brown Swiss. Bob, son of Randy Bob and Ashley Erwin of Hartville, was 10 points away from All-American status. He was 26th in Brown Swiss, 20th in Guernseys, and 60th in Jerseys. LeVox, son of Michael and Alison LeVox of Ozark, was 20th in Brown Swiss and 50th in Holsteins.

Contestants placed one cow and one heifer class in Ayrshires, Brown Swiss, Guernseys, Holsteins and Jerseys and gave five sets of reasons. The team coaches are Ted Probert, University of Missouri dairy specialist, and Karla Deaver, University of Missouri Extension 4-H youth development specialist, headquartered in Wright and Lawrence counties, respectively.

The team receives funding from several Missouri dairy organizations to assist with judging trip expenses. They thank all their sponsors for their support. For more information about the Missouri 4-H dairy judging team, contact Ted Probert at (555) 275-1505 or Karla Deaver at (555) 404-0061.

(H) ###
Additional tips

Photos
Include a photo with your news story. Photos can help tell your story and may give you a better chance of your news story being published. Include a cutline to help readers understand more about the photo. Be sure to identify people in your photo from left to right and spell names correctly. Work with your club photographer (if you have one).

Contact information and deadlines
Don’t waste your time and talent by missing newspaper and newsletter deadlines. Work with your 4-H club reporter to submit your 4-H news and photos together and on time. Contact newspaper editors to ask for suggestions, deadlines and formatting preferences. Because digital photos are becoming more standard, ask about the best way to submit photos electronically. Contact your local University of Missouri Extension center about their guidelines for submitting stories and photos to the county 4-H newsletter.

Other media
In addition to your county newspapers and 4-H newsletters, there are other places to submit your 4-H Club stories. Learn how to submit your story as a Public Service Announcement (PSA) on your local TV and radio stations; they are free and can help promote your club or event. Just as you do for newspapers, find out the name, contact, address, phone number and email of your local TV and radio stations. Ask about deadlines, what type of news stories they look for and how to submit information to them.

Now It’s Your Turn — Practice for Reporters

Test yourself
Which of the two story ideas would your newspaper be more likely to use? (Answers on the following page)

Question 1
A. Your club leader is going to Japan on a 4-H exchange.
B. The state 4-H leader is going to Japan on a 4-H exchange.

Question 2
A. Your club had a car wash last month.
B. Your club had a car wash today.

Question 3
A. Your state governor will speak during achievement night.
B. Your mother will speak during achievement night.

Question 4
A. Joni Lee, who is 12, won the poultry contest award today.
B. Joni Lee, who is blind, won the poultry contest award today.
My notes:

Question 5
A. Your club will be leading games for 4- to 6-year-olds in the park.
B. Your club will be leading an old-timer sing-along at the nursing home.

Question 6
A. Tim Lot, who lives in town, ordered 30 chickens to raise in his basement.
B. That same Tim Lot, who ordered 30 chickens, got a shipment of 300.

Problem: Use the stories below to create two press releases. Be sure to write a good lead to grab the reader’s attention and decide how the facts could be arranged the best in the story. Keep it interesting!

Story 1: Your club, Tigers 4-H Club, just completed a community service project. The members worked all year to coordinate with the other 4-H clubs in the county to fill 100 suitcases with personal care items for the local battered women’s shelter. Your president, Sarah Good, and representatives from the various clubs presented the suitcases to Julie Smith, director of We Care About Women, on Saturday, October 10. Afterward, group members played with some of the children who were staying at the shelter.

Story 2: It is state fair time! Several of your club members have swine projects this year and showed their hogs at the fair on Friday and Saturday, July 8-9. This year, the fair also had a parade on Saturday morning, which included a “dress the animals” contest. Your group joined the fun and “dressed-up” your hogs as a team. Your group won first place! In addition, Lisa Johnson and Carrie Clark placed first in the swine competition. You have a photo of the “dressed-up” hogs to send to the newspaper.

Test answers
1. A. Local stories are nearly always chosen over stories that have little to do with hometown people’s lives.
2. B. Take the letter “s” out of the word news! Unless a report is new (timely), editors are seldom interested.
3. A. Editors like stories about well-known or widely important things or people.
4. B. Things that are unusual make the news, such as people who overcome great odds.
5. A and B. Surprise! Both of these are news because people in your town will see them as praiseworthy.
6. A and B. Both are news, but because B also can be funny, it has a stronger human interest appeal.