PNW325

4-H REPORTER

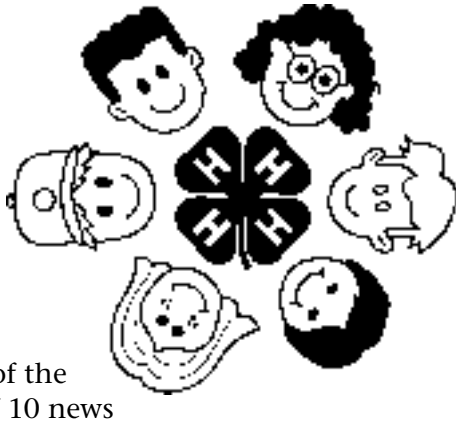
A Pacific Northwest
Extension Publication
Washington
Oregon
Idaho

4-H REPORTER

As 4-H reporter, you are responsible for telling your community about your club and its activities. The first part of this manual tells how to get your story and photos used in a newspaper; the second part tells how to get news about your club on radio and television. Meet with your leader and work out a plan for your reporting efforts.

You may not deal with all the media, but the information for all three is here for you. If you don't understand something or if you need more information, ask your leader to explain it or to help you find what you need.

REPORTING FOR NEWSPAPERS



Why should we try to get our stories used by the mass media—radio, TV, and newspapers? The mass media can help us reach a lot of people we don't know personally. And we can tell more people about 4-H, our club, and the good things it does.

While this sounds great, there are disadvantages, too. The biggest one is that themedia use only a fraction of the stories submitted to them. Generally, only one out of 10 news releases ever sees print. There's also no guarantee when stories will be used (perhaps today, perhaps next week), where they will be used (maybe buried in the back pages), or in what form they will be (often rewritten).

Why is that true? Examine your newspaper. You will see there isn't a lot of space for your story. Only half the newspaper is news; the rest is ads. If you subtract state and national stories, stories written by the newspaper staff, columns, editorials, cartoons, sports, and stories about local government, there isn't much room left for stories like ours.

Limited space is not the only problem. Editors also reject news releases because: (1) they only serve the interests of the person or organization writing them; (2) they're of little interest to most readers; (3) they're poorly written; (4) they're too long. We can't do anything about the problem of limited space, but we can overcome the other objections. If we overcome them, the chances our story will be used are much better. There are four things we can do: (1) make certain our stories are newsworthy, (2) make certain they are written to the best of our ability and presented neatly, (3) make certain they follow newspaper style, (4) make certain they reach the right person at the paper before deadline.

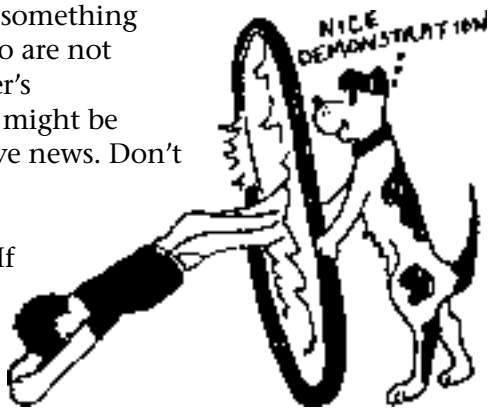
WHAT'S NEWSWORTHY?

To make certain our stories are newsworthy, we must know what news is and how editors who get our stories interpret that definition. Fred Fedler, author of *Reporting for the Print Media*, says something is news if it is (1) important, (2) unusual, (3) local, (4) relevant to readers' lives, OR (5) current. A news story is a factual description of a newsworthy occurrence.

While our news releases will probably never report world-shaking events, some or all of the other news elements should appear in them. For example, an unusual project could be the subject of an interesting story. A club member who breeds exotic chickens might be the subject of a feature story. A community service project also might qualify. A fair winner is the perfect subject for a story.

Since you are writing about your club and club members in your own community, your stories will have local interest. If you write about a member who wins a prize at the State 4-H Fair, that story also has local interest although it happened somewhere else.

Most of all, your stories must mean something to the paper's readers. Do not turn in a story about your regular meetings unless something happened during the meeting of interest to people who are not members. You should not write a story about a member's demonstration unless it was unusual in some way and might be interesting to the public. Write a story because you have news. Don't write a story just to get clippings.



Your story must always report about a current event. If something of interest happens today, write about it today and turn it in to the newspaper today, unless you have made other arrangements with the editor.

Once you are convinced you have a newsworthy story, write it so a newspaper can use it without making many changes. The easier you can make an editor's task, the better your chance of seeing your story in print.

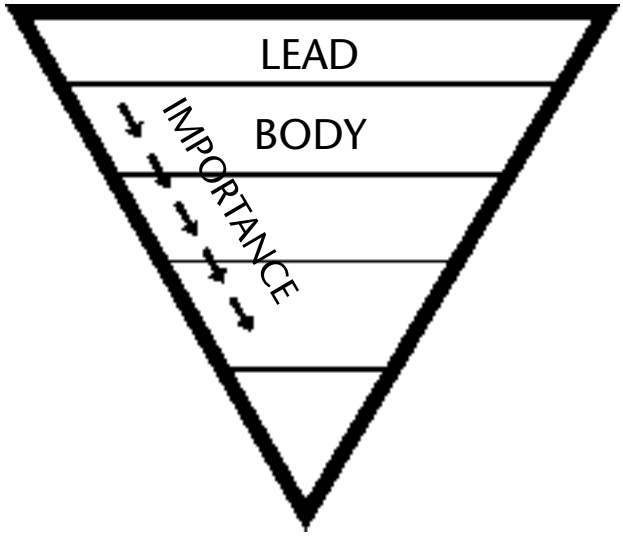
NEWS STORY CATEGORIES AND FORMS

News stories can be separated into two categories. An advance story announces *future events:* "The Sunnyside 4-H club is scheduled to meet Tuesday..." Most stories can be classified as reports of *current events*. "Susan Smythe, a member of Sunnyside 4-H club, won four blue ribbons Tuesday at the Jones County Fair."

There are two basic news story forms, too. Most stories will be *straight news stories*, reports of events that have taken place or will take place. Eventually, you may want to try writing the second type, *feature stories*. Feature stories explain why an event is happening, tell about its background, or explore a human interest angle. Many 4-H stories have human interest possibilities. A club member who overcomes obstacles to succeed is just one example.

News Story Structure

The basic writing structure used by newspapers is the upside-down pyramid. Unlike books, where each chapter builds to an exciting conclusion on the last page, the conclusion of a news story is in the first one or two paragraphs.



The first one or two paragraphs, known as the lead, sum up all the important elements of the story. Each paragraph that follows contains details that are less important.

Why is this structure used? It makes editing easier. Editors correct any errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling; then they write a headline to go along with the story and size it to fit the available space on the page. To fit the story on the page, the editor may lop off whole paragraphs at the end without destroying the essential part of the story.

Take a look at the front page of a newspaper. Read one of the stories all the way through. Then cover the last paragraph with your hand, then the one above it, and the one above that. If the story follows the upside-down pyramid style, it will still be clear and understandable when you've covered most of it with your hand.

The Lead

The most important part of a story is the lead—the opening paragraph or two. Spend some time working on your leads because they should summarize your story.

The lead should be one or two simple sentences summarizing the most important information. It should answer some—if not all—of the following questions:

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

The lead should capture the attention of the reader, so work to make it as interesting as possible. Since you are writing a newspaper article, it must be entirely factual. You can't

make up any information, but you can try to make what information you have sound interesting.

How long should it be? Not long at all. About 50 words is a good rule of thumb.

The Body

The rest of the story is called the body. It explains the lead and provides more details. In the upside-down pyramid structure, details are added in order of importance. The more important details go near the top of the story. Less important ones follow.

Writing the Story

When you write your story:

1. Write complete sentences.
2. Write short paragraphs, no longer than 50 to 60 words.
3. Use full names the first time you mention people. If they have a title or hold a position in the club, that title should follow the person's full name the first time you use it. "John Jones, president of Sunnyside 4-H Club...." The second time you refer to the club member, use just his or her first name, unless someone else in the story has the same first name. In that case, repeat the full name.
4. Be absolutely certain of your facts. Check and double-check.
5. Proofread your story after you are finished. Correct any errors. Don't assume your spelling of names is correct just because the name is simple or common. A "Smith" may be spelled "Smythe."

The Final Copy

Your news story should be written in a news format to compete successfully with all the other stories editors see every day. Follow the directions below and on page 9 and look at the suggested format on pages 7 and 8.

1. Type or neatly print (on lined paper). Put "news release" in the upper left corner. Below it type or neatly print your full name, your title—"4-H Reporter," the name of your club, your address, your home telephone number, and today's date.

2. About a third of the way down the page, write "For Immediate Release" on the right side of the paper. This tells the editor it is O.K. to use your story right away. Write "For Release After (month) (day) (year)," if you are writing about a future event and don't want the story used until that time.

3. Leave a couple of lines blank and write a headline. A headline is a brief title summarizing the content of the story.

4. Leave a couple more lines blank. Start the first paragraph with your dateline. That's the name of your town in capital letters, followed by a comma, then the name of your state ("Wash.," "Oregon," "Idaho"). Then write your lead and the body of the story. If it runs more than one page, write "(more)" in the middle at the bottom.

5. Use a new sheet of paper for the second page. At the top, repeat your slugline (short version of title) followed by two dashes, and then write the phrase "add one." That will

(SUGGESTED NEWS RELEASE FORMAT)

News Release

Your Name

4-H Reporter
Club Name
Your Address
Your Home Phone
Today's Date

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TITLE THAT SHOWS ACTION, HITS MAIN POINT

DATELINE IN CAPS—Leave a blank area at the top for newspaper use. Begin first paragraph here. Double-space your (text). Type or print neatly on one side only.

Indent each paragraph seven letters. Limit paragraph length to five lines. Leave wide margins on the sides and at the bottom.

Do not hyphenate at the end of a line, even if it means having a short line. Just hyphenate words that naturally have a hyphen.

Double-check your story for accuracy and correct spellings, especially names.

Finish each page with a complete paragraph. Don't divide a paragraph by starting it on one page and continuing it on another.

If you do need to continue your story on another page, put the word "more" below the last paragraph and center it. Circle the word or put it in parentheses.

-more-

SLUGLINE IN CAPS—add one

Put the slugline in the upper left corner of each page after the first page.

The slugline is a shortened version of the title. After it put a dash, then "add one" or "page 2." Change the add or page number, of course, with each additional page.

Start your new page with a new paragraph, and again, finish the page with a complete paragraph.

When you've finished the story, place either three number signs (###) or "–30–" below the last paragraph, centered. This is journalese for "the end."

Staple your pages together.

When you send copies to more than one paper, it's o.k. to send good photocopies, although originals are better. Some papers also accept faxes and stories sent by electronic mail.

If you are not hand-delivering the article, allow enough time for the story to go through the mail. Ask your local newspapers what their deadlines are.

-30-

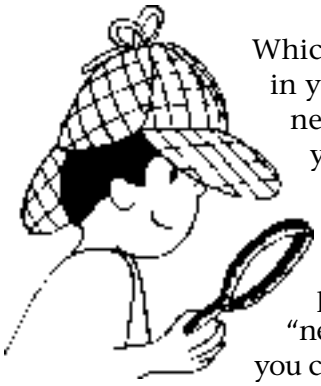
help everyone at the paper keep all the pages of your story together while they're working.

6. At the end of your story type or write "–30–." That's a symbol used to signal the end of news stories.

Always leave lots of space at the top, bottom, and sides of your story, and leave a blank line between each line you write. That may seem like a waste of paper, but it isn't. Editors mark corrections in those spaces and write instructions for their printers.

Placing Your Stories

The last step in writing news is placing your story in the hands of the right person at the newspaper. In fact, before you sit down to write your first story, you should make a contact at the papers that will be getting your stories.



Which papers should get your stories? Probably only the paper printed in your home town. In big cities, you may have a choice of several newspapers. However, large papers will probably be less interested in your stories than smaller dailies, weeklies, and neighborhood papers.

How do you find out which papers to contact? Ask your friends what papers they and their parents read. Look in the phone book under "newspapers." Jot down names and phone numbers of the newspapers you can visit personally. Then call each and ask for the name, title, and phone number of the person who handles 4-H news. Write down that information and ask when is the best time to call. Don't call just before a deadline. The editor will be too busy to talk with you. Call afterwards, identify yourself as a 4-H club reporter, and set up an appointment for you and your leader to meet with them. At this meeting:

- Find out what stories the paper wants. Meeting announcements may be O.K., but meeting reports may not be. You may also have awards and officers to announce. Is the paper interested in those?

- Find out if the paper has any guidelines for you to follow when you write. You may be given a handout on things to do and not do.

- Find out when you must turn in your story. That's the deadline. Never turn in a story after the deadline and never complain if your story was not used. You never can win an argument with an editor. The editor has final say about what stories are used.

Why is person-to-person contact important? It is the key to getting your news releases used. Editors see many news releases every day. It is a fact of life that your story will have a better chance if the editor knows you.

Hints from a Newspaper Editor

1. Want to know what an editor thinks is news? Study his or her paper. Get to know what he or she thinks news is and try to write with this idea in mind.

2. Remember you are writing for the general readers in your community—not just for the club's scrapbook. Put news of general interest, such as an upcoming bake sale, ahead of news about past events.

3. Learn your newspaper's deadlines and set deadlines of your own in order to meet them. Almost all good reporters try to write their stories immediately after an event or the first thing the next day. 4-H reporters would do well to get into this habit.

4. Don't be afraid to ask newspaper editors about story or picture ideas. It is part of their job to help you and others tell the community about things you may be doing or are planning to do which are of community interest. This is particularly true of upcoming events, such as the club's achievement night.

And, don't forget follow-up stories. If you tell the community in this week's newspaper that the Sew and So 4-H Club will have an achievement night Sunday at the Grange Hall, you owe it to those who read the story to have a follow-up in next week's paper on who was recognized for achievement. If you wait two or three weeks, you lose publicity impact, and if you didn't think it was important enough to bring in right away, why should an editor think it's very important to use now?

5. Since all newspapers have rules of their own concerning how they want stories presented, make it a point to find out these things along with the paper's deadlines. Generally all newspapers expect double-spaced typewritten copy, but because of the age of 4-H members, most will accept carefully handwritten copy—if it is legible. A simple test of legibility is to have a brother, sister, or parent read your story. If they can read and understand it easily, it should be acceptable to the editor.

6. Please use full names the first time a person is mentioned in a story and full names where there are, as is often the case in 4-H, several members of the same family. Spell names correctly.

7. As your club's reporter, you have another important responsibility. If you have sent in a story on your club and you find there has been a change in plans (bake sale cancelled, for example) or an error (wrong date because someone looked at the wrong day on the calendar) call the newspaper immediately so the story can be changed if it has not been printed, or ask for a correction to run, if it has.

   Most editors will not fault you for mistakes or changes over which you have no control, so do not be afraid to call. While it is extremely important to get it right the first time, mistakes will happen and plans can change. It is equally important to promptly report changes and make corrections where mistakes have been made which, if left uncorrected, will create unnecessary reader inconvenience or embarrassment.

8. Read your stories after they have been printed. This is how you learn what the editor thinks is most important to the reader and it will also show you the way editors prefer stories to be written for their newspapers.

9. Reporting club news to your newspaper is an important link between your club and the community. People are interested in what young people do and how they do it. Fairly presented, news reports of your club can encourage your members to do better by giving them recognition where recognition is due, and in doing so, help bring new members into the club.

10. Deliver your stories in person or mail them to the paper. Most editors don't have time to take stories over the phone. (However, if you discover an error, don't be afraid to call in a correction.)

11. You need not be a top-notch writer, although organizing your reports in good sentences is a help. Just start with the facts and go on from there.

In summary: Know deadlines, study newspaper writing styles, answer the five W's and H and remember that the early 4-H news report usually gets the newspaper space.

Newspaper Words You May Need to Know

Advance story. Story about a coming event.

Body. The part of the story that follows the lead. It fills in details and provides further information.

Copy. Material to be set in type.

Dateline. The city and state at the beginning of stories from out of town.

Deadline. The latest time stories will be accepted.

Editor. Someone who selects and prepares copy for print.

Feature. A story that explores a human interest angle, explains why an event is happening, or provides background information on an event in the news.

Five W's. The questions a story should answer: Who? What? Where? When? Why? There is also an H: How?

Headline. Also known as "head." The big type above a story in the paper that summarizes what it is about.

Lead (pronounced "leed"). The opening paragraph or two of a story. It summarizes the content.

News release. Also known as release or handout. Your report or story written in a form that can be published by a newspaper or broadcast by a radio or TV station.

Straight news. Reports of events that have happened or that are planned.

Style. Rules for writing. Newspapers have many rules regarding such things as capitalization, spelling, etc. The idea behind them is to keep all writing in the paper consistent.

Upside-Down Pyramid. The story form in which the most essential information appears in the lead and the less important information appears in the paragraphs below.

Photos

Most newspapers have a continuing demand for pictures. If you can supply good pictures you can take advantage of this and get good publicity for your club. However, if you are not interested in photography or don't have the necessary equipment, or skills, skip this section.

While not all newspapers will accept photos by amateurs, quite a few will, especially weeklies, if the pictures are good enough. Find out by calling. You may find some editors reluctant to accept photos because they get so many unusable pictures from clubs and organizations.

Your job is to convince editors to consider your pictures and then supply pictures that will meet their standards. That's what this section is all about. If they won't accept your pictures, see if they will assign a staff photographer to cover club events that offer good picture opportunities. Young people and animals are always good potential subjects for news pictures.

What You Should Do

Find a good photographer to take pictures for you. If you can take good pictures, your problem is solved. If not, another club member may be a skilled photographer.

Next, arrange for rapid processing of your film. News pictures are like news stories. Unless you can get them to the paper while they're still news, the chances they'll be used are slim.

There are several options to consider. A few papers will process your film and return the negatives after they've used them. You should check this possibility on the phone. Most papers will expect you to give them in-focus black and white glossy prints, usually no smaller than 5 by 7 inches in size. If you or another club member can process film in a day or two, that should be O.K. A third option is commercial processing. Some photo processors offer 24-hour service, but that may be expensive.

Color slides and instant prints such as those made by Polaroid are not acceptable normally. Instant prints usually don't meet quality standards, and most papers don't want to take the time to convert slides to prints. Some quality is lost in the process, too.

What's a Good News Photo?

A good news photo is something more than a simple snapshot. A snapshot is an informal picture usually taken in a hurry. A family group picture taken during a holiday is an example. Good news photos are usually informal as well. However, they usually record events while they are happening, people in action, rather than pictures of people who have gathered to have their picture taken. Here are some tips to help you make better news pictures.

1. Strive for action. Action may be implied rather than actual. A picture of a club member grooming a horse is more interesting than a picture of the same club member standing beside the horse.

This photo brings all the essential story-telling elements together: the girl, her horse, and the ribbon they just won.

This photo would be better if the background was less distracting. This might have been done by waiting for people to walk out of the picture, finding another place, or using a wider f-stop to blur the background.

Group shots are sometimes unavoidable. Get the group close together and get everyone looking at the camera at once. Take several shots, because someone will undoubtedly blink when you snap the shutter.

2. Strive for a natural look. Subjects should concentrate on what they are doing rather than looking at you and your camera.

3. Move up close. You usually don't need to show a person's entire body. The face and hands are the most important things. Have members hold small animals near their faces so you can get a close-up of both. The same goes for a cake that has just come out of the oven.

4. Avoid distracting objects in the background. Telephone poles, for example, will look like sticks growing out of people's heads if you're not careful.

5. If you use a flash, don't pose your subjects in front of a window or a mirror. The flash will be reflected in the glass, causing a distracting "hot spot" in the picture.

6. Don't expect too much from your flash. Know its limits. It may not provid adequate lighting much beyond 7 to 10 feet.

7. Make sure your flash is synched to the correct shutter speed before using it. When you remove it from your camera, take the shutter off its synch position.

8. Avoid pictures of large groups. Two or three people in a news picture is an acceptable group.

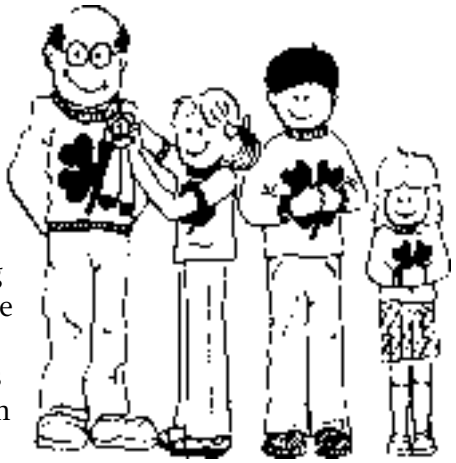
Captions
Each picture should have a caption or cutline. A caption is a brief description of what is happening in the picture. All the people in the picture are named (another good reason for restricting group size). Don't forget their titles—club president, leader. Identify individuals from left to right. Usually it's not necessary to say Johnny Jones, left, and Mary Jones, right. Instead, say Johnny Jones, Sunnyside 4-H club member, demonstrates grooming to fellow club member Mary Jones. You may have to say, "from left to right" if there are three or more people in the shot. Type or neatly print captions on separate pieces of paper and tape them to the back of the pictures they describe. Never write on the backs of prints.

Delivery
Most of the time you should deliver your pictures in person to make certain they get to the paper safely and on time. If you must mail prints, insert a piece of stiff cardboard in the envelope along with the pictures to protect them. On the outside of the envelope on both sides print the phrase "PHOTOS ENCLOSED—DO NOT BEND." Mail the envelopes first class to avoid delay.

RADIO NEWS REPORTING

Radio differs from newspapers in two important ways. First, it happens immediately. Sometimes this works to your advantage, sometimes not. But most radio stories will be used within a couple of days, or not at all. Second, radio uses sound to communicate, not paper.

Since you're the reporter for your club, you must get any news releases to your radio station right away. Newspapers may not be printed for a day or a week, but radio stations are on the air every day. Unlike newspapers, radio stations usually don't run advance meeting stories, unless the event is very important or unless they have a special program of community meeting notices. Because of this, most of your stories will talk about something that has already happened.



Your story should be at the station the day after anything newsworthy happens. If your club wins a contest Tuesday night, you should get your story to the radio station Wednesday. If you don't, it may never be used because the reporter at the station may consider it "old news." There are some exceptions, called "soft news" or "features," and they usually involve interesting news about people doing interesting things. These can be as timely tomorrow as they are today because they're about people, not just an event. However, many stations don't use these stories, so don't assume you can get them on the air.

Your best bet to get on the air is with a short, well-written story about something of interest to the general public right now. Whatever happens, remember this: If you absolutely don't have time to rewrite a story for radio, give them your newspaper story. They are more likely to use that than a story that gets to them late.

What's Newsworthy on Radio

For a story to be news for radio, it must be both interesting and understandable to the general public. This means you can't assume that the people hearing it will be familiar with 4-H or how it operates. It also means that people may not be interested in a lot of details. In spite of this, the definition of "news" we gave earlier holds true for radio. When you write your story, talk about the things that are (1) important, (2) unusual, (3) local, (4) relevant to readers' lives, (5) current. For radio, you must stress the current parts of the story, since news may never be used if it becomes old news.

It's important that we in 4-H write stories that people will be interested in. Unless we give people a reason to listen, they won't bother; and if they aren't going to listen, the station won't use our story. Always keep in mind the question, "Why should a listener care about this story?" and write your story to answer that question.

Writing Your Story

Writing for radio is different from writing for newspapers in some ways. This means even the best newspaper stories need to be rewritten for radio, and vice versa.

The most important difference is that the upside-down pyramid we talked about earlier isn't used in radio. It's not necessary to sum up your whole story in your lead paragraph, because it puts too much information at the beginning of the story. Instead, your lead should contain an "attention getter." This is called a soft lead. Many times, this will be the information that tells the listener why he or she should listen. An example of this kind of

lead might be: “Two (home city) 4-H members won regional awards in competition last night.”

This lead sentence tells listeners why they should listen, but doesn’t bother them with names and ages...yet. You can get to that in the next sentence or two.

Once you have the listener’s attention, you can add details. When you do this, ask yourself how much detail you could listen to without becoming bored. Don’t write anything in a story that you wouldn’t be willing to listen to if you heard it on the radio. If there are details that only matter to your club members, leave them out. Instead, tell them what the whole club did, or what was unusual about the meeting, or about some function the club is working on. These are things listeners can understand without confusion.

The story should be developed pretty much the way you’d tell a friend what happened. Make sure to cover the who-what-when-where-why and how.

Basic Construction

Every radio story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end: the lead, body, and conclusion. The lead gets people into the story. The body gives the information you want to put across; it explains the facts. The conclusion wraps up the story and brings it all together so the listeners aren’t left hanging in the air.

As we said earlier, one of the best things to put into a lead is the answer to the question, “Why should the listener care about this story?” The lead about the 4-H members winning a regional award is a good example of this. You can also use a lead with a surprise or an unusual statement in it. Let’s say your club had a cooking demonstration. You could write a story that begins something like “Last night in (home town) you could have had dinner with us. The (home town) 4-H club put on a cooking demonstration and passed out free samples to the audience.” That’s a different way to start a story, and it would catch the audience’s attention. Details can come later.

The body of the story is just that. It’s where the information is and what makes a news story genuine news. Once you get the listener’s attention, you should have something worthwhile to say, and this is the place. Tell your audience who was there, what they did, why they did it, and the rest of the basics. Tell your story the same way you'd tell one of your friends, so it will go in a logical order. Remember, you have to take things one at a time, regardless of whether you're addressing a friend face to face or an audience on the radio.

The conclusion lets the listener know the story has come to an end. An example would be telling people when the next event is planned: “Last night’s cooking demonstration was a big success, and the club plans to have another next month.” If you were writing the story about regional 4-H awards, you might sum up with something like: “The awards presented last night were the fifth and sixth regional awards won this year by (home town) clubs.” The important thing for a conclusion is that you don’t leave something unsaid or leave your audience hanging in the air. You must let them feel they’ve heard the whole story when you’re finished.

Radio Writing Style

The writing style for radio is different than that for newspapers. Radio style is very much like the spoken word. On the radio, people will only hear something once. They can't go back and read it again, so you must make your story understandable the first time someone hears it. Here are the basics of writing for radio:

1. Always put titles first, names afterwards. This is backwards from newspaper style. A story about your club leader would begin "4-H club leader John Smith...." A story about a club member with no title would not begin with a name, but with something else, such as "A (home town) 4-H member, Mary Jones...." The reason for this is that the first words in a story may not be heard by the listener. Since names are important, you put words in front of them to get the listener's attention. Never start a sentence with a word you want people to remember. Put another word in front of it.

2. Don't use details you don't need. Forget about middle initials unless the person always uses them. Leave out numbers that aren't important. Don't put anything in the story listeners don't need to know; they can only remember so much while they're listening. Unnecessary details confuse people.

3. If numbers are important to a story, round them off. If your club raises $103, you could write a story that reports "over $100 was raised." If your club sends someone to the National 4-H Congress and there are 584 members attending from all over the country, you can say "almost 600 delegates will attend." You have to use your own judgment, but go easy on the numbers.

4. Don't use words you don't understand. If somebody gives a speech and talks about "per capita income," don't use that phrase unless you understand it. And if you don't understand, ask questions before you write your story. Radio stations prefer plain, simple language to fancy words. Again, if you write your story the way you'd tell it to a friend, you're probably O.K.

5. Keep sentences short! Twenty words is a long sentence for radio. If you find a long sentence, break it up into two sentences. They'll be easier for the announcer to read, and easier for listeners to understand.

6. Watch out for tongue twisters. These are word combinations that can sneak into a story such as "six thick sticks" or "at an animal." If you read your story out loud before turning it in, you can find these and get rid of them.

7. Keep your story reasonably short. Most club meetings and events don't justify a two- or three-page story. Your station will appreciate a story that's well-written and is two or three paragraphs long. Don't try to "blow up" your story to make it look more important than it really is. On the other hand, don't write two sentences and call it a story. If you can't write a paragraph or two, the story probably isn't important enough to make it worth your work.

Recordings

One thing newspapers can't do is let people listen to what actually happened at a news event. Radio can do this. You can record news on your own tape recorder. But you have to

record the right kind of thing, and the recording quality has to be good. So before you try this, you or your leader should talk to the station to see if the people there are interested.

What to record. Record important speeches, important presentations, a club member winning a regional or national award, or somebody winning a big prize. It should be unusual and interesting.

What not to record. Don't record regular meetings, people who mumble, meetings with a lot of noise in the background so you can't hear the speaker, everyday awards or announcements. Either sound quality would be unacceptable, or the story wouldn't be unusual enough for the station to use. If you can't get a good recording, don't bother; just write the story.

If the station uses your recording, it will often be 60 seconds or less of the most important statement or interesting happening on the tape. This is called an actuality. Give the station the tape with the important part marked, or with a written explanation of where to find the point they'll want to use. This requires using a procedure you and the station both understand. In some cases, the station may use 2 minutes or an even longer portion of your tape. You still need to give them good directions to find the part they want to use.

How to record. Use a small cassette recorder. It doesn't have to be expensive, just with fresh batteries. Whenever possible, plug your machine into a wall electrical outlet so the tape won't sound like Mickey Mouse when it's played back.

The other thing you need is a microphone. You can't record a good tape with the little microphone built into the top or side of most recorders. You must have a microphone you can plug into the recorder. Make your recording with the "mike" no farther than 2 feet from the speaker's mouth.

Sometimes, this means you'll have to stand next to the speaker and point the microphone at him or her. Other times, the speaker will be at a podium where there are other microphones, and you'll be able to put yours next to them or tape it onto the side of another microphone like a double-barreled shotgun.

When you record, leave some blank tape at the beginning of your reel or cassette. This makes sure you don't miss something if the beginning of the tape gets fouled up. This is called a leader. To provide this leader, always have your tape running before the important things happen, instead of trying to start it at the vital moment.

After you have your recording, listen to it and see if it sounds good. Can you hear the speaker clearly? Does the background noise drown out the speaker's voice? Did the speaker hit the microphone, causing loud thumps? Did the wind whistle across the microphone so there's a loud rustling noise that makes it hard to hear? Obviously, it takes practice to make a good tape. You have to decide for yourself if it's worth it.

If you have a good tape, write your story and indicate in your story where you think the tape should go. Then take it to the station, explain what you've done, and see if they're interested in using it. If they don't have time to sort through your tape and find the right spot, or if they turn down the idea, don't be too disappointed. Just ask them how you can do it better, and maybe you'll be luckier next time.

Radio News Format

Although there are many variations in the ways stations want a story written down on paper, there are some common practices.

1. Type! If you can print very neatly, the station may use it, but typing is much better because it's easier to read. And double-space your typing. If you print, use lined paper and print clearly. The announcer reading your story on the air has to be able to read it smoothly, not stop to figure out what a word is.

2. If you use a tape during the story, put the directions in parentheses between paragraphs of the story, like this:

   (Run tape, :33 seconds. In-cue:
   "I don't know about you...."
   Out-cue: "And that's that.")

This example tells the station to run the tape at exactly that point in the story and how long the tape runs. It also tells them which words begin the actuality and what the last words are before they should turn the tape off. In and out cues tell the announcer exactly where to start and stop the tape. It's important to give cues for any tapes you use. Without them, the station could play parts of the tape you don't want on the air.

Otherwise, follow the typing or writing format you saw in the newspaper section about putting the story on paper. It's most important to have a well-organized format that's easy for the station to follow. As long as your story is organized, well written, and legible, the station will probably accept it.

Contact the Station

As a reporter, it's a good idea for you and your leader to meet the people who will use the stories. Go to the station in your town or the closest station. The person who makes decisions about what goes on the air is the news director. At some stations, one person does this all the time. At others, the news director may have other jobs that take him or her out of the station, so it's a good idea to call the station. Ask for the news director, and make an appointment to talk about what you want to do.

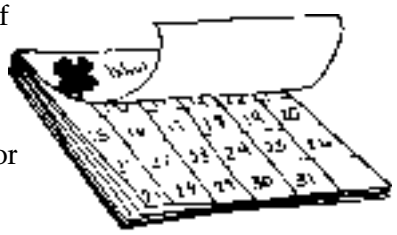
When you see the news director, explain what you're trying to do. Ask if the station has an interest in particular types of news and if there are things they don't want stories about. Follow the guidelines they give you so you won't waste effort on stories they won't use. You can also ask them to look at your stories and make suggestions about how you could do a better job next time. After all, the better the stories suit the station, the more the stories will be used. Also, find out about deadlines. If the station only has one local newscast a day, make sure you get your story to them well before the air time for that newscast. After you do this, keep in touch with the news director. If the people at the station recognize you and realize you're trying to do a good job, your stories will be used more often.

Public Service Announcements

Another way to get attention for good projects or programs is to contact the station's public service director. Most stations air messages about topics of public interest or concern. These are called Public Service Announcements, or PSAs. Although they are aired at no charge, they are not free commercials; they should address a public concern or need.

Stations want to use PSAs to inform their audience about programs that help the community or issues that concern people. Some 4-H programs qualify. Ask the station for the chance to announce 4-H activities or programs that help your community. Most stations will simply ask you to supply information, and they'll write and air the PSA.

Some stations also have public affairs programs that cover topics of community concern or interest. Ask about these; if you can get on one, it's a good chance to talk about interesting and positive aspects of the 4-H program. They also may air a community calendar format which could be used to announce 4-H meetings or special events.



WORKING WITH TV STATIONS

Most opportunities to get TV stations interested in club activities result from something happening which (1) fits the definition of what's newsworthy, and (2) has some visual appeal. With TV you must think about both the news and the visual qualities of your story. One of the first things most TV reporters ask about a story is, "What's visual about it?" Good, attractive visual content can make a marginal story into a useable story on TV. Be ready to explain what is visual about the story and you're halfway there. If it will also interest a large portion of the public, you have a good chance of getting coverage.

The biggest difference between working with TV stations and other media is that you usually get a TV news crew to come to you and shoot the story during an event. This is different from radio and newspapers, where you usually take the story to them after the event. It's important to contact the news department at TV stations before the event.

TV reporters like having advance notice; it beats having nothing to videotape except people talking about what has already happened. If something unexpected or newsworthy does happen without warning, let reporters know what happened and see if they're interested in following up. Most TV stations dislike reenacting or staging events, so help them contact the people involved and let them tell the story their own way.

How do you get ready for a TV contact? First, be able to explain your idea or story briefly; this will get the station's attention. Second, be ready to answer the question, "What's visual about it?" The more visual it is, the more chance TV will use it. Finally, be ready to get the people involved in front of the cameras. The easier it is to shoot the story, the more likely a station will come out to shoot it.

There are other ways to work with TV stations. One is to ask the public service director for PSA time just like with radio stations. However, a good TV PSA tells a story and is visual. Be ready to supply the story and visual ideas. Many stations will produce the PSA for you.

Another opportunity is a public affairs program. Many radio and TV stations have weekly or other regular programs that talk about community activities or concerns. You may be able to get your activities or 4-H club discussed on these shows. The public service director is also the contact for these and can be a good station contact for you in general.

4-H REPORTERS

You probably have ideas or suggestions that would make this bulletin more valuable to you and other 4-H reporters. Please send them to Dennis Brown, Information Specialist, 401 Hulburt Hall, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164-6244.

Written by H. Dennis Brown, Extension Information Specialist, Washington State University, Pullman, WA; Albert E. Powell, Jr., Director of Distance Education Development, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO; and Floyd G. Larson (deceased), former Editor, *Pullman Herald*, Pullman, WA.

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