

OHIO 4-H CLUB OFFICER'S GUIDE



NEWS REPORTER



News Reporter

Authors

Richard L. Poling, former County Extension Agent, 4-H
Vicki Schwartz, County Extension Agent, 4-H
Carol James, City Editor, *Athens Messenger*



Copyright © 1987 The Ohio State University

All educational programs conducted by Ohio State University Extension are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, gender, age, disability or Vietnam-era veteran status.

Reprinted 10/02—1.8M—200146

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Keith L. Smith, Director, Ohio State University Extension.

Your Job as a Club Reporter

Congratulations! As the reporter for your club, you have the important position of public relations manager. You're responsible for keeping others informed about your club—the work you do, the fun you have and the help you give. To get the respect of the people in your community, it's important for you to keep them aware of your 4-H club's work.

Reporting about your club activities includes two initial tasks: (1) knowing who to report to and (2) knowing what to report.

Who to Report to

To be an effective reporter, you must get your message to as many people as possible. The advantage of mass media is that they can reach large numbers of people—more than your club can ever reach on a first-hand basis. You'll want to use as many types of media as are available in your area.

Create your "who" list by listing names and addresses of all the newspapers, radio stations and television stations in your area. Plan to send your articles to these media. If you have difficulty developing your "who" list, ask your 4-H advisor or your county Extension office for help.

What to Report

When you know who to report to, the next step is learning what to report.

It's easy to tell 4-H friends about your club, because they already know about 4-H. But your goal is to tell people who may know very little about 4-H. You must think carefully about each meeting and activity. Decide what you want them to know about and what they'll be most interested in.

Interesting reports highlight a particular activity or unique part of the club program. A report that sounds like the secretary's minutes—that you met, where you met, who made motions, who served refreshments—is not interesting reading to most people you are trying to reach. People are more eager to read about your program topics, guest speakers, field trips and service projects.

It's also important to notify your members about club meetings and special events. An advance is a brief report to remind your club about the time and location of your meeting. You can also mention the program topic or guest speaker for the upcoming meeting.

An advance is a reminder announcement, so be sure to submit it to newspapers and radio and television stations with plenty of time for it to be published or broadcast.

Select what you believe is most appealing and write your story about that event. Articles about the club's guest speakers, special tours and service projects provide worthwhile reading and tell exciting news about your club and 4-H.

Judge for yourself. Read reports of other meetings in your local papers, especially reports from groups you don't know about. Some will strike you as dull. Others will be interesting and full of information. This will help you determine what will be interesting and dull about what you might write.

Using Your Stories

Where should you use your stories and announcements? In less populated areas of the state, this is usually an easy question to answer. Your hometown newspaper or radio station is the logical choice. If you live in a more populated area, you may have more choices. There may be several daily, weekly and neighborhood newspapers and television and radio stations to choose from. In most cases, however, newspapers and radio and television stations that cover a wide area will be less interested in your 4-H club material than the smaller, more local ones.

The best choices for placing your stories are with newspapers and radio stations that cover community events in your club's area on a regular basis. Your 4-H advisor or 4-H agent can help you select the newspapers and/or radio stations to use.

In order for your news articles or radio reports to be effective, they must be used by the local newspapers or radio and television stations. A good way to ensure that your material is used is to contact the person who receives your material and decides on its use. Here are some questions you should ask:

- What type of articles and stories are used?

Some newspapers or radio stations will not use advance meeting announcements, but will use reports of what took place at the meeting. Others have special "community calendars" that are designed for advance stories like meeting or activity announcements. Remember: Some like to tell what is going to happen, others like to tell what has happened, and some will use both—so find out.

- What are the deadlines for submitting material?

Old news is no news in many cases. Find out when they want to use your stories. Stick to these deadlines in order to have your material used.

- In what form do they want to receive the material?

Most media will be able to accept materials if put in the forms used as examples in this book. However, a newspaper or radio station may use its own format, so check. Do they require reports to be typed, or will they accept handwritten reports? Many have guidelines for you to follow. Ask if they have a guidebook they will give you.

Here's How to Put the Story Together

Writing a news story is like putting a kit together. You start with a number of parts, and one by one you put them all together. By using a little imagination and following instructions, you can build a news story just as you would build a model airplane, create a doll house, or paint colors on a numbered picture.

In a news story, the important questions to answer are who, what, where, when, why and how ("The 5 W's and H"). Just use your club's activities to answer each question and you will have a story ready for your local newspaper or radio station. Here's how to do it:

Who Jim Racer, a member of the 4-H Gait and Trotters
What Will represent the club at a Horse Nutrition Workshop
Where In Saddleton, Ohio

When Saturday, June 6
Why Because of the leadership skills he's learned through the 4-H horse program.
How He was elected as a delegate at the club's weekly meeting Monday

These are the parts, now let's put them together:

Jim Racer, a member of the 4-H Gait and Trotters, will represent the club at a Horse Nutrition Workshop in Saddleton, Ohio, Saturday, June 6. He was elected as a delegate at the club's weekly meeting on Monday because of the leadership skills he's learned through the 4-H horse program.

Or, perhaps your kit contains a different set of parts:

What Sewing school dresses kept two dozen hands busy
Where At the Needle Valley School in Seamville, Ohio
When Monday evening
Who Twelve members of the Thimble Fingers 4-H Club
How Started their sewing projects
Why For their club exhibit at the Cotton County Fair

Note that the parts are arranged in a different order. All stories do not have to start with the "who." Here's another set of parts with another order:

Where Roscoe Village, Ohio
What Club trip
Who 15 members of the Eager Viewers 4-H Club
How They will spend two days sightseeing at the popular historic village
When In early June
Why As a special addition to their club's group genealogy project

So far, these kits have contained only the most important parts of the stories, called the "lead," or opening. For most activity stories, you will have other, less important parts, called "details." These explain more about the "5 W's and H" questions, and they can make your story more interesting. Let's add some details to the story about the Eager Viewers 4-H Club.

Roscoe Village, Ohio, is the destination of 15 members of the Eager Viewers 4-H Club. They will spend two days sightseeing at the popular resort in early June. The trip is a special addition to their club's group genealogy project.

The members are especially curious to learn how their ancestors lived during the time Roscoe Village represents. They will pay special attention to the clothing styles, types of transportation, and the variety of occupations.

The club members will be taking slides of their visit to present to the local genealogical society.

As you fit your story together, put the more important details first and the less important ones last. This will allow the editor to leave the end off if space is limited.

"5 W's and H" With Your Own Club

Think about your own club activities. Using one of the worksheets in the back of the book, identify the "5 W's and H" for one of your meetings and write a practice report.

Photographs

The old saying “A picture is worth a thousand words” still holds true. Most newspapers welcome photos of timely, newsworthy events. The best thing to do in deciding whether to use photos is to talk with the editor on the needs and policies of the newspaper. In many cases, newspapers will not accept photographs by amateurs. However, if the quality can be guaranteed, some may be willing to use your photos. If you are not skilled in photography, maybe another member of the club is taking a photography project and can provide the needed ability.

If the newspaper won't accept your pictures, talk with the editor about assigning a staff photographer to cover club events that offer good photo opportunities. While this may not always happen, in many cases you might benefit from the additional coverage a photo provides.

Quick Tips for Reporters

Here are some ideas to help you produce better news stories and to make them more useful to the media:

1. Write the stories in the third person. Don't write “I” or “we,” use “he,” “she” or “they.”

2. Use names and spell them right. Use first and last names.

People like to read or hear their names or names of friends in the media.

3. Keep sentences and paragraphs short and to the point.

Select words that most people can understand. Avoid 4-H slang. Don't write “J.L.'s”, use “Junior Leaders.” Assume that the readers or listeners will not be familiar with 4-H and write accordingly.

4. Report only recent news. Newspapers usually want information within a few days. Radio and television stations need information even sooner.

5. Emphasize unusual or special items in your articles. Include descriptions of demonstrations, tours, trips, community projects, new officers and other happenings. Don't include routine club business such as secretary's or treasurer's reports or refreshments.

6. Include planned future activities in reports—tours, trips, community projects—not future business items or refreshments.

7. Remember, the opening paragraph or two are the most important parts of a story. They should answer the “5W's and H” questions that readers, listeners or viewers have. A catchy headline or title can also be effective in directing the reader's or listener's attention. However, most editors will develop their own, so don't be disappointed if your title isn't used.

8. Check and double-check articles for errors, both in spelling and in facts.

9. If you hand write articles, make sure they are legible. Write neatly on every other line of lined paper. If typing articles, double space them. Use only one side of the paper. Have another person read the article before submitting it to make sure it can be read and easily understood.

10. Indent paragraphs and limit paragraph length to five lines, if possible. Leave wide margins on the sides and bottom to allow for editing. Finish each page with a complete paragraph.

11. Only hyphenate words that naturally contain a hyphen, even if it means having a short line.

12. Stories should be delivered by mail or in person to the individual who will be using them. Making a supply of addressed, stamped envelopes at the beginning of the year can help to get the story mailed immediately.

13. If you find that information in a story already submitted is not correct, either due to a change in plans or an error, call the newspaper or radio station immediately so the story can be corrected if it hasn't been used, or so a correction can be issued if it has. It's important to report changes and correct mistakes immediately so that readers or listeners will not be inconvenienced or embarrassed by incorrect information.

14. Read, clip and save stories after they have been printed. You can learn what the editor is looking for in articles by comparing what actually was printed versus what you submitted. Use this knowledge to improve future stories.

15. Articles can be collected in a scrapbook, club history or as part of the club secretary's book. In doing so, you'll have a record of the club's accomplishments, your work and perhaps something to pass on to future club news reporters to help them with their stories.

16. The articles that you submit are a reflection of the 4-H program, your club and its members, and you. People are interested in what young people are doing. As you write your articles, think of what image you would like people to have after reading or hearing your story.

Don't Forget About Radio

Some radio stations will use your news articles to report about your club's activities. But more likely, the radio stations will make announcements about the club's events.

Public service announcements can be typewritten messages called “copy.” They're sent to the station for announcements on all types of programs. The copy should be brief, able to be read in 10 to 30 seconds. Each station has its own policy on what it considers public service subject matter, and most include 4-H in their material for public service announcements. Check with the radio station for its policy.

The same six questions (“5 W's and H”) are used for radio announcement kits:

Who	Lucky Clovers 4-H'ers
What	Will have club meeting
When	Monday, May 1, at 4:00 p.m.
Where	At the home of Sue Black
Why	To learn about cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and to finalize plans for a car wash
How	A Red Cross instructor has been invited to the meeting

Now, put them together:

The Lucky Clovers 4-H Club will meet Monday, May 1, at 4:00 p.m. at Sue Black's home. Members will learn about CPR from a Red Cross instructor. Plans for the upcoming car wash also will be made.

Try this kit:

Who	Lucky Clovers 4-H Club
How	Will be holding a car wash

When Saturday, May 6, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Where Behind the First Presbyterian Church
What To raise money
Why For the club trip to the state capital

Since radio announcements or “spots” must be brief, include only the most important information. As a rule of thumb, 10-second spots are about 30 words, and 30-second spots are approximately 90-100 words.

Television Possibilities

As you look for ways to promote your club’s activities, you might check out the possibilities of television in your community. Most network-affiliated stations will probably not use meeting announcements or reports. But if your club is conducting a unique or unusual activity, a station may want to do a story on it. Some local independent stations have community calendars and other public service time that might be appropriate for your reports.

Another television opportunity in your community could be an access channel through the local cable television company. Many of these operations encourage community organizations to use their broadcast time. The company might even assist you in producing programs to be broadcast over the access channel.

Again, work with your club leader in locating and using these opportunities.

Sample

4-H Club News Report Format

News Release

Name of Club
Your Name
Your Title (News Reporter)
Your Address
Your Phone Number
“For Immediate Release”
(or for release after Date of Meeting or Activity)
date

Title or Headline

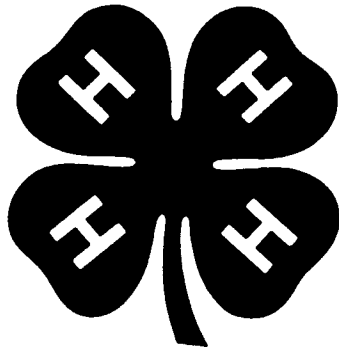
Main Body of News Report

Note: If more than one page is needed, put the word “more” in parentheses centered below the last paragraph.

Double check for accuracy and correct spelling, especially names. For more information, see the section “Quick Tips for Reporters.”

Worksheet

Worksheet



The 4-H Pledge

I pledge:
my Head to clearer thinking,
my Heart to greater loyalty
my Hands to larger service, and
my Health to better living,
for my Club, my Community,
my Country and my World.