News Writing for the Club Boy or Girl

By

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What the Editor Wants

1. Names spelled correctly with first name or initials.

2. All facts correct and unnecessary details eliminated.

3. Copy in early—for weekly paper Saturday or Monday before publication.

4. Copy clean—if many corrections are made, recopy.

5. Double spaced copy typewritten if possible; if not, a wide space between lines.

6. Space left at top of sheet for headline. (But do NOT write headline.)

7. Copy written on only ONE side of sheet.

8. Close of story by mark like this: #

9. If more than one page, word "more" written at bottom of each sheet except the last.

10. Name of writer in upper left-hand corner of first page.
News Writing for the Club
Boy or Girl

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Newspaper editors in your county are in favor of Club work just as they are in favor of every other worth-while enterprise. Why not enlist their support in crystallizing public sentiment in favor of Club work in the county? Every editor will be willing and glad to give space liberally for the publication of Club news. And Club boys and girls who give reports of their projects and Club meetings will be helping to interest other boys and girls in Club work. Each Club and each individual in the Club should be interested in seeing that the newspapers get news of the right kind. It might even be well for each Club to appoint as one of its regular officers a news reporter whose duty it would be to send reports of Club meetings and other Club enterprises to the newspapers.

What makes Club news. What makes good Club news? Any thing about your Club that is of interest to you and your neighbors is news. The best news is that which interests the greatest number of people. News is interesting according to whether it is timely, extraordinary, unexpected or important.

Under this definition of news, anything that has happened so long ago that everybody knows about it, or has become too old for publication, is not news. Therefore the sooner after a thing has happened the news story is printed, the greater its value as news. To be real news, the stories concerning your Club meetings should be sent to your home-town newspapers not later than the day following the Club meeting. This gives them a timely flavor and makes them interesting.

Put this definition of news into practice: If your Club meets, that is not news; but what your Club does at its meeting is NEWS. If what it does is something unusual, out of the ordinary, it has still greater news value.

Hence, if your Club held its regular meeting Wednesday of this week you should not write:

"On Wednesday the Happy Hollow Calf Club held its regular weekly meeting."

You have not yet touched the real news in your Club meeting. What happened at your Club meeting? If you decided to hold a
Club exhibit and made plans for the affair, here is the real news and you would write as follows:

"Plans for a club exhibit to be held August 15 were discussed by members of the Happy Hollow Calf club at its regular meeting at the home of John Jones last Wednesday."

Happenings of frequent occurrence are not to be construed as news. Your Club meetings are a regular thing if your Club is as active as it should be, but each Club program and each activity of the Club is different from the others. It is this unusualness that is news.

All tours and contests that your Club holds are interesting news. On the other hand, do not forget that in each individual member of the Club and his achievements there is a good story. If one of your Club members makes a good record, he should be "written up." Members might also write their own personal stories as one Club boy, who made a good record with calves, did when he wrote a story, "How I Raised My Calf." It was all the more valuable as Club news because it gave valuable information on methods that had helped him succeed.

The beginning and completion of Club projects are usually reported to the newspapers. But seldom are there progress stories on Club work, either on the Club as a whole or on the activities of individual Club members. Every step in a Club project is a story. Take for example a Corn Club project. The organization and election of officers is only the beginning story. Other possible stories are the purchase of seed; the fitting of the ground; the time and method of cultivation; the growth by the 4th of July; the Club tour; the tallest stalk; the inspection by crop experts; getting ready for harvest; yield of the first plot harvested; the biggest yield harvested; the average yield of the Club; methods of curing or storage; selection of seed ears or show samples; entries and winnings at fairs; seed sold by members; profit made by individual members or Club as a whole; completion of work and reorganization plans.

Thus you see there are innumerable interesting stories during the year on every Club project. Following is a suggested list of possible Club stories. There are many more, but these occur in practically every Club.

Meetings

Before meeting
What are you going to do? When? Where? etc.

After meeting
What happened? If you had a speaker, what he said.
Club organization and starting of project
   How many enrolled? Names. Description of project.
   Leader.

Progress stories on Club activities
   On entire Club
      Example: Total canning done to date by girls’ Club.
      Example: Purchase of certified seed potatoes by boys’ Club.
   On individual
      Example: Method by which boy raised a calf.
      Example: Wardrobe made by Club girl and cost.

Final results of project
   Number completing. Names.
   Products raised or made. Number or amount and value.
   Summary of winnings and honors.

Election of officers
   Names and records in Club work.
   Old officers.
      May be occasion for summary of past administration.

Winnings at Club exhibits and fairs
   Story on entries before event.
   Story on winners after event.

Trips
   Story when selected and why.
   Story when you leave.
   Story when you come back.
   Who makes trip possible.

Local Club exhibits or achievement days.
   Before event
      Announcement story of time and place.
      Story on speakers and judges.
      Story on complete program.
      Story on exhibitors. Names.
   After event.
      Winners.
      Crowd attending.
      What speaker said.
      Judge’s comment.

Judging teams and demonstration teams
   Announcement of decision to have one.
   Practice trips or demonstrations (those competing).
   Elimination contests if any.
   Selection of team. Names and their records.
   Where they are going, why and when.
   Story when they leave.
   Story when they come home. What they did.
Tours
Where, when, who went, what they did.
State and national news that affects Club members
   National and state college 4-H Club broadcasts.
   National and state meetings.
   Fair prizes, etc.
Success of old Club members
   In the home or on the farm.
   In high school or college.
What prominent people say about Club work.

How to write Club news. The Club boy or girl who writes successfully for the newspapers will attack this phase of Club work in about the same manner as that of an architect or carpenter building a house. With his kit of tools—the kit being his vocabulary and every word a tool—he builds cathedrals and palaces of news or he builds mere huts and hovels and fails as a builder.

The architect, when he builds a house, begins first with the foundation. It is the most important part. If it is weak, his house falls. If it is strong, his house stands as a monument to his ability as a builder. It is thus with the news-writer. Just as the foundation is the most important part of a house, so the first sentence is the most important part of a news story. The foundation of a house must be strong enough to hold up the framework. The beginning sentence of a news story must be strong enough to arouse interest and strengthen the other facts given in the following paragraphs of the news story.

In structure the news story which Club members should try to write may be said to resemble an inverted triangle in its arrangement, because the most important facts are packed into the first sentence or lead. This is known as the “summary lead,” and answers the following six questions: What? Why? When? Where? How? Who?

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### A. News Story Structure

- **Summary Lead**
- **Explanatory Facts**
- **Details**

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### Structure of Theme

- **Introduction**
- **Explanatory Facts**
- **Climax**

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Your facts should be arranged like triangle to the left.
When Rudyard Kipling was doing newspaper work he expressed the summary lead in verse as follows:

"I keep six honest serving men;
They taught me all I knew;
Their names are What? and Why?
and When?
And How? and Where? and Who?"

Not always will it be possible to answer all of these questions in the beginning of a news story, but as many of them as possible should be answered before a story is finished, for these are the questions that the reader is asking.

To sum up in advance is the news method; but the news story, if correctly written, goes further than this. The most interesting of the important facts is placed first in the first paragraph, the second most important fact second, and so on to the end of the news story.

Gradually as the writer goes into his story the facts of lesser importance are given. He finds when he has finished that the least-important fact is placed in the last line of the last paragraph. There is a reason for this: the editor may not have space to print the entire story, hence it is essential that the story be so constructed that it can be broken off at the end of any paragraph. If it is constructed according to the inverted pyramid form, such breaking off is readily possible.

The good news story uses what are called “block” paragraphs. That is, each paragraph is a complete unit and is clear in meaning. Each paragraph should develop completely a single phase of the subject. Use plenty of paragraphs. The average paragraph is about 75 words. There is more danger of getting paragraphs too long than too short. Paragraph frequently.

In the good news story sentences also are short. The average sentence runs about 15 to 20 words. Use long sentences occasionally to get variety.

Direct, simple sentences in short paragraphs are best. In writing your story use simple language. Write it as you would say it; then make the necessary corrections for arrangement, grammar and punctuation.

In starting your story, avoid the common beginnings such as “Yesterday,” “Last night,” “The,” “An,” and “A.”

Be brief. Remember that your aim in writing a news story is to give the reader facts so concisely that he can grasp them instantly.
Don't ramble. If you were going from your farm over to see a neighbor boy you would take the path that leads straight over the hills to his back door. You would not go down to the old mill pond or out to the pasture to see how your calf is looking before you got there. The same principle applies to news writing. Leave out all unnecessary words.

Keep your opinions out of the news. Opinions of other people included in the news story as quotation are good. They often add weight and authority to the facts that you are presenting.

Know your facts. There is nothing worse than inaccuracy in a news story, except falsehood. The unpardonable sin in news writing is a misspelled name or wrong initials. The misspelled word is almost as bad.

Don't be afraid to revise your news story. Never hand it to the editor until you are satisfied that it is the best you can do.

There you have most of the cardinal principles of news writing. Now put your bump of curiosity to work; you have a "nose for news" if you will develop it. Don't wait for "George" to do it. News is perishable; report it while it's hot.

There's just one more thing to remember. Even though you have done your best, your story will no doubt need some corrections or revision. Even reporters with years of experience expect editors to revise their copy. Don't be disappointed or discouraged if the editor rewrites yours. It's one of the rules of the game.