

# *Kansas 4-H Club Officer Materials*

## *The 4-H Reporter*

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Local Unit

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Name of 4-H Club

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Name of 4-H Reporter

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4-H Year



**K-STATE**  
Research and Extension



Congratulations! Now that your club has chosen you as the reporter, you and all other officers of your 4-H club are representatives. As a 4-H officer, you represent not only your club, but also the 4-H program throughout the state. Your skills and abilities, standards and ideals, grooming, speech and even smiles represent Kansas 4-H members. Representing others is one of your most important responsibilities because it exists at all times — not just while you are at 4-H events.

## Lucky You!

As a 4-H reporter, your job is to:

- » Be a little nosey.
- » Know what is going on in your club.
- » Tell your town about the good stuff.

The secretary takes notes on every little thing that happens in meetings and reads them to the club.

You only report the interesting things 4-H'ers are doing — inside or outside of meetings.

To do this well, learn how to see things in a new way. **Look for what your town's readers or listeners might want to know.**

That's Step 1 for you. It's also Step 1 for the pros — reporters who work for newspapers, radio and TV.

### What's news?

In a way, a story becomes news only when someone else reads or hears it.

**So ... what kinds of stories does your paper print? What does the radio station use as news?**

If you can answer those questions, great! You've got a head start on knowing what many people might think is "newsy" — newsworthy — about 4-H.

If you can't answer, start reading and listening. (You'll find editors never like secretary's notes!)

### What else makes a subject news?

You're not going to like this answer: What's news to your friends may not be news for your family. What's news to your family may not be news for parents across town, or the local newspaper editor, or the radio news director. So —

When in doubt, talk over ideas with an adult who reads the paper that you hope will use your news.

Or, talk to someone who listens to the radio station or watches the TV channel.

After that, however, what you do with a subject is always the same, and makes it sound like news:

**a. News is NOT personal.** You don't write about I, me, mine, or our. You don't "talk" to the reader by using the word you. Even if you're writing about your own project, you use your name first and then refer to yourself as he or she.

**b. News is true.** You don't make up anything. You just tell about what happened, is happening, or will happen. Include everything needed to make the story clear and fair. Also make sure everything is correct (spellings, times, dates, etc.).

To get all the facts, the pros use this test :

## Test Yourself:

Which of each pair of story ideas below would your newspaper be more likely to use?

1. Your club leader will be going to Japan on a 4-H exchange.
2. The state 4-H leader will be going to Japan on a 4-H exchange.

**[Local stories nearly always win out over stories that have little to do with hometown people's lives.]**

3. Your club had a car wash last month.
4. Your club had a car wash today.

**[You can find the correct answer to this by taking the "s" off of the word "news." Unless a report is new — timely — editors rarely are interested.]**

5. The president of the United States will speak during Achievement Night.
6. Your mother will be speaking during Achievement Night.

**[You may think No. 6 is big news. But editors like stories about well-known or widely important things or people — from TV stars to a new kind of flu.]**

7. Joni Lee, who is blind, won the herdsman trophy today.
8. Joni Lee, who is 12, won the herdsman trophy today.

**[Things that are unusual make the news. This means people who overcome great odds, too.]**

9. Your club will be leading games for 4- to 6-year-olds in the park.
10. Your club will be leading an old-timey sing-along at the nursing home.

**[Surprise! Both of these are news, because people in your town will see them as praiseworthy.]**

11. Tim Lot, who lives in town, ordered 30 chickens to raise in his basement.
12. That same Tim Lot, who ordered 30 chickens, got a shipment of 300.

**[Both are news. But, because No. 12 also can be funny, it has stronger human interest appeal.]**



## What helps make a subject news?

- Local
- Timely
- Important
- Praiseworthy
- Unusual
- Of human interest

## 5 W's and 1H of News

1. Who is the story about?
2. What is it about?
3. When will (did) this take place?
4. Where will (did) it take place?
5. Why will (did) it happen?

1. How will (did) it happen?

**c. News is NOT opinion.** You may think one kind of video game is fun. But your brother may not. Your mother may not. Your best friend may not. “Fun” is just your opinion, not a fact.

You can't use words such as “fun” in news *unless* you are directly or indirectly quoting someone — unless it is a *fact* that someone *said* it:

- Direct quote: His brother said, “That game is boring!”
- Indirect quote: Tracy said that it's a waste of time.

**d. News is what the reader (or listener) needs to know.** Nothing more. Nothing less.

One way to understand what this rule means is to look at how it applies to other kinds of stories.

For example, which of these jokes do you like best?

### Joke 1.

TEACHER: Why are you so late?

MATT: Because of the sign.

TEACHER: What sign?

MATT: The school zone sign.

*[Is that funny? Or, do you need to know more?]*

### Joke 2.

TEACHER: Why are you so late?

MATT: Because of the sign by the street.

TEACHER: What sign?

MATT: The one that says, “School Ahead. Go Slow.”

*[Do you know enough of the facts now?]*

### Joke 3.

It was 8:30 a.m. when the teacher noticed Matt wasn't in his seat. She asked if he was sick. No one had heard. She marked Matt as absent and started the day's spelling lesson.

She had gotten to “c-h-o-o-s-e,” and Mary was using “choose” in a sentence when Matt tiptoed in.

The teacher asked, “Why are you so late?”

The class giggled and yelled, “Yeah, Matt!”

Matt mumbled, “Because of the sign.”

The teacher shook her head and rolled her eyes. But she had to ask: “What sign?”

Matt walked to the window. He looked up and down until he could point: “That street sign there. The one that says, ‘School Ahead. Go Slow.’”

*[Does this tell MUCH more than you want?]*

## What do 4-H reporters DO?

The answer to that is like the old joke:

Question: What does a 2,000 pound gorilla do?

Answer: Anything it wants to!

So, what do YOU want to do as club reporter?

**Choice A** — Make a notebook for the county and state contests.

If so, keep reading beyond page 6 where you'll learn about the rules and advanced skills.

**Choice B** — Do as little as you can.

Being a lazy reporter is easy. Just copy the secretary's minutes every month and mail them to the newspaper (which probably won't print them). In club meetings, say, “I sent a story, but I guess the paper just doesn't care about 4-H.”

**Choice C** — Try every way you can think of to spread the news about 4-H and your club.

If so, remember everything on pages 3 to 6. Then have FUN!

## How to spread the news about 4-H

- » Start a newsletter for your club. (But talk to your leader or parents first, to get ideas on how you could pay for it, get it to members, and fill the pages.)

**OR...**

- » Offer club news for the county's 4-H newsletter.

**OR...**

- » If your K-State Research and Extension agent has a column in the local paper, pass along ideas for it. Let the agent know when your club or a member is doing "newsy" things.

**OR...**

- » Contact your local newspaper's editor about a great story idea you've found. Ask if it could be used in the local paper. Offer any help the editor may want (phone numbers, photos, the written story, or a fact sheet).

**OR...**

- » Call and set up a time to visit with someone at your local newspaper. Ask:
  - What kinds of news would you like to hear about from our club? (Be ready with examples of what you might supply.)
  - Do you just want me to write or call when I have an idea for a good story?
  - Would you like for the club to pass along good photos of things we're doing?
  - Would you ever print something I write? Regular reports? A few news stories?

**OR...**

- » Work with other club reporters, your Extension agent, or the county 4-H Council and:
- » Make radio spots about county, club, or member news.

- » Make a booth or display on "The News from 4-H" for a county or school fair.
- » Try to talk your newspaper editor into printing a page or two of just 4-H news during National 4-H Week this year.

- » Make an easy-to-read "newspaper" (with lots of drawings or pictures) your agent can give to kids who want to know about 4-H.

**OR...**

- » If your paper prints "Letters to the Editor," write one and mail it when your club, a leader, or a member has done something newsworthy.

**OR...**

- » Start a "Reporter's Report" (each month, tell one piece of news during your officer report). For example:
  - Someone found a strange bug to display.
  - Back when he was a 4-H member, the geology project leader once found gold.
  - The cake some 4-H'ers were making blew up at the last cooking project meeting.
  - A member of another club will be showing a buffalo at the county fair.

**OR...**

- » Find a store owner who will let you put 4-H news in a window or on a counter — perhaps in one of these ways:
  - » A poster about an event the public can attend.
  - » A poster that you change each month. Each one could have a club member's photo and a "newsy" sentence or two about that person's new award, odd project, important goal for public speaking, or something else that's interesting.
  - » A week-long display with pictures



### News itself is:

1. What people need or want to know — no more, no less.
2. Correct facts, not opinions.



## 5 W's and 1H of News

1. Who
2. What
3. When
4. Where
5. Why
  
1. How

with the “news” about the subject of the display, and with anything else that can help tell the story — from purple ribbons to sheep’s wool, from ripe melons to a dog collar and leash.

## OR...

- » Some other way that you think could work well where you live.

## What about keeping a record book?

Even if you don’t plan to enter the county (and, with luck, the state) reporter’s record book contest, you need to talk to your club leader:

1. Find out if the club has traditions. For example, your club’s reporters in the past may have kept a scrapbook of notes and photos.
2. Go over the ideas on the first four pages of this book. Then talk about the kinds of ways you might spread the news about 4-H.
3. Talk about what might be good **goals** for you this year, and **how you can show you’ve met those goals**.

Remember: You are a club officer. You were elected by your fellow members because they believe you can do the job. And, by taking the office, you have agreed to try.

Set your goals with that in mind. You should strive to get club or member news out into the public (actually **READ** or **SEEN** or **LISTENED TO**) at least once in fall, winter, spring, and summer.

Plan to report during every meeting, too, about something interesting that’s happened in the club or to a club member.

Your record can include copies of written stories, photos, newsletters, posters and notes on your work.

## What is 'real' reporting?

Whether they tell the news with photos or words, journalists do two basic kinds of reporting:

1. **Straight** (or *hard news* or just *news*).
2. **Feature** (or *soft news*).

**Straight news** informs readers about what has happened, is happening or will happen. It can quote experts on “Why?” It can compare and explain.

**Features** tend to be more about people and less about events. A feature can describe a funny mistake, tell what it was like to be at a concert, explain how to look for termites, describe an unusual project, or maybe something else that catches your interest.

### Straight news follows a formula.

You already learned most of it on pages 3 through 6. But here's an overview of the entire “recipe”:

- » Just the **FACTS**. Include opinion only if the fact that someone said it is clear:
  - Storm data are vital. (Whose opinion is that?)
  - “Storm data are vital,” Knapp said. (direct quote)
  - Knapp said storm data are vital. (indirect quote)
- » The essential of **WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW**, with the most important of those provided as soon as possible.
- » **NO MISTAKES!** ... in names, addresses, times, dates, costs, rules, rates, titles, processes, ages, offices held, ingredients, or quoted words.
- » **Upside-down PYRAMID form**, so the facts are organized in order of importance:
  1. Start with the facts readers need most.
  2. Next, put what's second in importance.
  3. Continue in declining order.
  4. Last, put the facts you could delete with the least harm to the story (which is what editors do, when they need space).

- » **THIRD PERSON only.**
  1. Refer to people in third person (he, she, it, they, him, her, them),
  2. Not first person (I, we, me, us), and
  3. Not second person (you).
- » **Keep it SIMPLE:**
  - a. Include all needed facts. No less. NO MORE.
  - b. Don't use a long word, when a short one will do. For example:
    - said, not commented.
    - long, not protracted.
    - tiny, not miniscule.
  - c. Quickly explain or define any unfamiliar term(s) that you must use:
    - He's in the triathlon — a long-distance race combining swimming, bicycling, and running.
    - They saw a skink (small lizard) on the way.
  - d. Write sentences that are easy to read. (Breath Test: If you read a sentence aloud and run out of breath, it's too long!)
  - e. Keep paragraphs short. In news, one- or two-sentence paragraphs are OK. Type news items, if at all possible, in an 11- or 12-point font on a computer.
- » **NO UNANSWERED QUESTIONS:**
  - Mary Knapp said that storm data are vital. (Why should I believe Knapp or care what she thinks?)
  - “Weather data are vital,” said Mary Knapp, the state of Kansas' climatologist. (OK!)
  - Officials removed the exhibit Friday. (Why?)
  - Urban 4-H'ers also have calf projects. (How?)
  - The meteors will arrive this summer. (When?)
  - The only fee is the cost for lunch. (Which is?)



## Kinds of stories you may write

**a. Advance** — to try to raise interest so people will want to attend or take part; may require several versions, released over time.

**b. Follow-up** — (after an event) to tell what people learned, how a funny thing happened, which honors were awarded, what's planned.

**c. 'How-to'** — to explain (often quoting experts) what readers need to do or understand — for example, to groom a sheep, find an insect exhibit, join 4-H.

**d. Feature** — to go more in-depth — about a new project, someone's odd project, the feelings of the kids' exhibiting at the fair.

## Have a nose for news:

- Be curious — about people, events, happenings.
- Look for and actually see when a person or activity or situation or fact could be interesting to others.

## Features follow the formula, but ...

Features can also *vary* a bit from the straight news formula and still be good (soft) news writing.

Usually, they follow the formula except they may not be organized in an inverted pyramid.

No single format is "right" for every feature. With each topic, organize the facts in a way that makes your approach to the subject interesting and easy to understand or "follow."

For example, a feature about Tony Smyth's clowning project might begin with a description of how he puts on clown makeup. Then you could write, step-by-step, about what Tony does after that — including his entertaining kids at a nearby school.

To write about what a member learned on a 4-H exchange trip, however, you

might want to compare and contrast the member's home in Kansas with the exchange host's home in another state or nation.

Still other features might lend themselves to:

- » **Option-outcome** order — (Choice A and its likely result. Choice B and B's likely result. Or, entry A and its rating. Entry B and its rating, and so on.)
- » **First-to-last** — (First, second, third, etc.)
- » **Chronological or time** — (Early, an hour after that, then as it got later, etc.)
- » **Joke** or "**build-the-case**" order — (Here's the situation . . . details . . . details . . . punch line!)

## So ... how do you get all these facts?

Ask questions. Then ask more questions. Carry a small pad of paper and some pencils, so you're always ready to take notes.

Keep two goals in mind:

1. **Keep talking** until you find out what will make the subject interesting to others.
2. **Get everything down in writing** — *correct* spellings for all names, the *right* date, time, and location for an event, and the *exact* words said by someone you plan to quote.

You'll end up with more facts than you can use, but you'll also have the elements of a good story.

For example, suppose your club (**who**) plans to build a guard rail (**what**) on the park's bridge (**where**) next Friday (**when**),

using donated materials and member-parent labor (**how**) as a service project (**why**).

Newspaper readers might find that somewhat interesting. The story would be more interesting, however, if you kept talking to people and found out one or more of the following facts including:

- » A donor's small son fell from the unguarded bridge and almost drowned.
- » The 4-H project chairman hopes her guard rail design is a first step in becoming an engineer.
- » The city parks superintendent says money is so tight that your club's project is the only way the rail could have been built.
- » A parent helped build the bridge years ago.



## Strong start makes or breaks the story

Newspaper readers skim. They look at headlines. If one catches their eye, they read the start of the story. They rarely read more than that, except for a few stories that interest them.

Webpage readers do the same thing. Radio listeners “tune out.” Most people are in a hurry.

That’s why the most important part of any story is the opening paragraph or two. This story beginning is called the lead (pronounced “leed”).

### Leads must:

- » Tell everything people NEED to know, in case they don’t read or listen further.
- » Try to make people want to know more.

Many media require reporters to write leads in 20 words or less. Most won’t allow a lead to be more than 50 words long.

### How do you get all that done?

Decide what the readers (or listeners) would think is (1) most important and/or (2) most interesting. Start with that.

If the decision is hard, picture in your mind an adult who likes, but doesn’t love you. This person might be a neighbor, a great aunt, a teacher, a friend’s father.

Then figure how you’d tell your story to that person. What would you say first? What would you leave out — or at least delay telling until you see if the person is interested?

Pros often write a Modified Summary Lead to start most of their straight news stories. They tend to omit some of the 5 W’s and 1 H from their modified summaries because too many facts can hide the point of what you’re trying to say. “Stuffed” leads are hard to read, too. To prove that to yourself, compare these leads:

• **TOO MANY FACTS** — Waving a current bank statement, Ben Day, Kansa

4-H Club leader, said today at a meeting of club members and parents that the group’s secret fund-raising efforts had netted enough that they now could reveal to member Casey Jones, freshman in animal sciences and industry at Kansas State University, that they will sponsor her on an International 4-H Youth Exchange next year.

• **BETTER** — Casey Jones, Kansa 4-H Club member, learned today the club has secretly raised funds to send her on an international exchange trip.

• **ALSO BETTER** — A surprise gift will help 19-year-old Casey Jones take an international 4-H exchange trip next year.

The **Modified Summary Lead** is common, but other types aren’t unusual. The best way to learn about the other types is simply to study what other people write. Here are some to get you started:

### New Information Lead

Casey Jones began baking 720 chocolate chip cookies today, so that each Kansa 4-H Club member can have a dozen.

Casey’s baking urge is the result of . . .

### Current Element (Second Day) Lead

Casey Jones, Kansas State University freshman, has a smile on her face today.

She’s been smiling since last night, when she learned her hometown friends . . .

### Featurized Backgrounder

The whispered chant “Cash for Casey” first hushed through Kansa streets last September. It hissed from person to person at egg sales, paper drives, a county fair food booth, and a Halloween haunted house.

That chanted whisper became a public announcement last night when ...

### Featurized Quotation

“I am sure Casey Jones will agree that Kansa 4-H Club members can keep a



### Matters of Style

You can make a newspaper editor’s job easier if you follow a few guidelines to common newspaper style.

• Follow the time-date-place format when writing about an upcoming event. For example: *The Lucky Clover 4-H Club will have a car wash fund-raiser from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at Bill’s IGA.*

• Don’t abbreviate days of the week in news. For example: *The Lucky Clover 4-H Club met at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Community Center.*

• Abbreviate names of months when they’re part of a date. For example: *The next meeting of the Lucky Clover 4-H Club will be at 7 p.m. Sept. 27 in the Community Center.*

Find more “Matters of Style” tips on page 11.

Source: *The Associated Press Stylebook, 2021.*



## String book records reporting year

Newspaper reporters keep what's called a string book, a sort of scrapbook of original copies and clippings of stories they have written. It is one of the first things they show an editor who might hire them.

You can compete with other 4-H reporters if you keep a similar record, starting with your year's first story. Ask your local K-State Research and Extension agent about this honors program. Judges typically look at record books for:

1. Regularity of club news coverage (at least monthly is preferred). **40 pts.**
2. Feature stories. **40 pts.**
3. Photography. **15 pts.**
4. Neatness, notebook presentation. **5 pts.**

secret when she hears that we have been raising money since September to send her on an international exchange trip," Ben Day, club leader, announced last night.

### Featurized Picture

The teenagers frowned at the youngsters who giggled, wiggled, and pointed to the young woman in the

second row. But the teens also sneaked peeks at her calm profile. Adults in the meeting room smiled and seemed to look at everything except the 19-year-old in Row 2.

No one wanted Casey Jones to know she was being watched. But all wanted to see her face when . . .

## Photos can stand alone or help 'sell' stories, *BUT* . . .

- » **Any action is better than none.** Two people who are talking are more interesting than two people just staring at the camera. Someone stretching to catch a ball is more interesting than someone posing while holding that ball.
- » **Close is better, too** — until, of course, distortion sets in. This is particularly true for "people" photos, because most viewers are more interested in facial expressions than clothing.
- » **Simple is also better.** Viewers like a clear "center" of interest. Messy backgrounds distract — as do pictured items that compete for attention.

**Cutlines.** Always use present tense verbs (see underlined words below photo, right), so they describe what **IS** going on in the picture, not what **WAS** happening.

Cutlines' main purpose is to identify the people — often introducing groups with "From left." They have as many facts as are needed to understand the photo.

Cutlines can explain anything unusual in or about the photo. But they do **NOT** say what is already clear (for example, "Carrie smiles as she types").



**Where 4-H leads?** — Carrie Johnson, past Kansas 4-H horse project winner, still owns horses, but earned a master's degree in journalism that she uses in her job as an editor for a farm and ranch publication.

**Where cutlines go.** Most photos will be submitted digitally. Include the cutline information in your email. If you're familiar with photo editing software, such as Adobe Photoshop, you can add cutline information to the file info. Your phone's photos feature may also include a place to add identifying information.

If submitting a printed photograph, tape a typed cutline to the white margin or back of the photo. Do **NOT** use paperclips or write on the back; that damages photos.

## Tricks of the trade

1. **Read and listen to the media** you want to use.
    - What do they like to run? What is their “style”? (On second reference, for example, does Mary Knapp become Knapp? Miss Knapp? Mary? Ms. Knapp?)
  2. **Develop a personal shorthand** for note taking.
  3. **Turn in professional-looking stories.**
    - a. In the upper left corner, type (or clearly print) your full name. Under that, put your address and home phone number.
    - b. Leave several inches blank above the story.
    - c. Write a headline that sounds like a shorthand sentence, featuring your top news element. For example: “4-H Club to Sponsor Casey Jones Trip” or “Weather Data Vital, Climatologist Says.”
  - d. Type (print) on one side of the page, double-spacing the story. Or, space and one-half.
  - e. Ask someone at your local news outlet if they have a preference for story format. Traditionally, at the end of every page except the last one, put a centered -more- (then put a mini head and the page number at the top of all following pages). At the story’s end put a centered -30- .
4. **Write in active, not passive “voice”:**
    - a. *Survey results were announced today.* (By whom? We don’t know, because this is passive, which can be a way to lie or keep secrets.)
    - b. *State of Kansas Climatologist Mary Knapp announced today that . . .* (This sentence is active because the subject, Mary Knapp, did the action of the verb — she did the announcing.)



### Matters of Style

- Use numerals for ages, addresses, numbers higher than 10, weights, dimensions, dates, decades, years, money. Some examples:  
*Joe Smith, 8, is a new member of the club.*  
*He lives at 822 Maple St.*  
*The Smiths’ new baby was born June 5, 2005. He weighed 8 pounds, 2 ounces and was 20 inches long.*  
*The club earned \$150 from the fund-raiser.*  
*About 75 attended the event.*  
*Joe’s father was a member of this club in the ‘80s.*
- Except for years and the 4 in 4-H, spell out numbers, at the beginning of a sentence. For example: *Seventy-five people attended the dinner.*  
*1975 was the year the club started.*

Source: *The Associated Press Stylebook*, 2021.

Revised by Amy Sollock, 4-H Youth Development Specialist

Original Author:

**Kathleen Ward**

Communications Specialist,  
K-State Research and Extension

**The original author also acknowledged the following:**

Introduction by:

**Katherine Kramer**

4-H Youth Development Intern

**James P. Adams**

Associate Professor,  
4-H Youth Development

Reviewers:

**Rhonda Atkinson**

Editor,

Kansas 4-H Journal

**Rod Buchele**

Extension Specialist,  
4-H Youth Development

**Beth Hinshaw**

Extension Specialist,  
4-H Youth Development

**Diane Mack**

Extension Specialist,  
4-H Youth Development

Additional acknowledgement to:

**Briana Stadlander**, student

**Emily Comoriano**, student

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