Organizing Your Press Release

Inverted Pyramid

A useful guide for organizing your news release

- Readers start at the top.
- Editors cut from the bottom.

News writers follow a writing tool called the “inverted pyramid” because editors know that people who start reading a story often don’t read to the end. Also, it is most convenient for editors to trim from the bottom of a story if they don’t have room for the whole thing.

What does that mean for you? Put the most important facts at the top and the least important details at the bottom. Seems like common sense, doesn’t it? Look at most forms of writing and you’ll find that the inverted pyramid is seldom used. Most writers start with lots of explanation and get to the important facts somewhere in the middle, while others expose the important facts with a flourish at the end. Resist these temptations when writing a news release.

- The five Ws. You’ve probably heard that these are the most important facts of any news story. You’ve heard right. In many news stories all five Ws are in the first paragraph. In some stories, all five are in the first sentence. If you’re writing about an upcoming meeting you’ve scheduled and you get all five Ws in the first paragraph and the editor trims the rest of your story, your readers still get the most important facts.

- Information that helps the reader. Next, provide any information that will immediately help your readers. Give them directions to the meeting site. Tell them what to bring. Will there be a registration fee? If you’re writing about an emerging crop or livestock disease in your area, this section may explain new treatments or where to go for more information. This part of a news release often explains “how.” This should be the next-to-the-most important information in your story.
• **Information that provides context.** Explain your points more fully. This may be the place where you outline the “why” of the story in more detail. Why is it important that readers attend your meeting? How much will that new fungicide improve yields? What kind of improvement can you expect in your child’s behavior if you use the parenting skill outlined above?

• **Useful detail and history.** After the context, provide other details and history that might be of use to the reader. Explain what’s gone on before. What led to the planning of this meeting? How does the meeting relate to the one held last month or in the next county over? What’s been the impact of this disease and treatments in other counties and states? Explain your organization or list other sponsoring organizations. Here is where you would add your boiler-plate language or elevator speech about what FCS is.

A few other tips for effective news releases:

• Keep it short – a single page is best.

• Don’t use jargon and acronyms. Outside of Extension, not everyone knows the meaning of FCS, EFNEP, BMI, BMPs and IPM. Write these out on first reference and explain what they are.

• Most news organizations prefer to receive news releases by email. Paste the news release text into your email.

• Have someone proofread the release before you send it. It’s hard to see your own mistakes, but someone in your office should be able to help.
Note: Please add local information for the areas highlighted in yellow. Remove highlighting before sending via email to local news media.

DATE (that release is sent out)

Media contact: Name, phone and email for someone in the county who can answer questions about ECA

(Your county) celebrates 100 years of home demonstration clubs in North Carolina

North Carolina owes much of its success today to women who participated in extension “Home Demonstration Clubs,” working to improve the well-being of families and their communities. In 2013, North Carolina’s Extension and Community Associations celebrate 100 years of home demonstration and community development across the state.

In (your county), the Extension and Communication Association clubs are active in their communities today. Through the educational guidance and researched-based information provided by N.C. Cooperative Extension’s family and consumer sciences agents and specialists based at N.C. State and N.C. A&T State universities, ECA is a grassroots institution that has actively addressed the needs of families in their communities for 100 years.

In 1911, Jane S. McKimmon, North Carolina’s first woman home demonstration extension agent, convinced 14 county superintendents of education to employ home demonstration agents to support the girls’ tomato club program. Tomato clubs were the girls’ counterpart to the boys’ corn clubs, teaching rural youth valuable skills for life on the farm.

By 1913, the mothers, who had learned to can so well and were canning leaders in their own communities, began to ask for clubs of their own where they might learn other skills for the home. Thus home demonstration clubs for women were organized in all 14 counties.

(Here, talk about some of the projects that your ECA groups are involved with. Be sure to include the full names of partner organizations and the individual clubs. Begin with something like, “Today, in your county, ECA is …”)

Throughout the last century home demonstration clubs, later renamed Extension Homemakers and today known as ECA clubs, have been involved in helping North Carolina become the progressive state it is today. From the earliest days, women organized efforts beyond their own homes to support their communities.

During the 1918 flu pandemic, home demonstration clubs provided food for those who were ill and even helped run emergency hospitals. Home demonstration clubs launched efforts to feed school children, a precursor to today’s school lunch programs.

In times of economic hardship like the Great Depression, curb markets started by home demonstration provided much-needed family income. The markets provided a place where women could earn money selling eggs, butter, garden produce and canned goods.
Home demonstration clubs supported war efforts during World War II, conducting scrap drives and even selling war bonds to outfit the Larkspar as a military hospital ship. Clubs encouraged literacy in their communities, first by borrowing books from the state library in Raleigh and later developing book lending programs that led to the establishment of county public libraries.

Today, ECA clubs are still involved in their communities, encouraging healthy lifestyles, supporting community literacy and providing for our state’s military personnel. Clubs also educate future generations by providing scholarships and loans for higher education. More information on 100 years of ECA is available at go.ncsu.eca_centennial.

For more information on (your county)’s Extension and Communication Association, contact (who) at (phone number and email address) or visit the N.C. Cooperative Extension website for (your county) at: (web address).