

Story Checklist

Please ensure your content follows these writing style guidelines. For more tips, see go.illinois.edu/quicktips.

Headlines

- Every story has a headline.
- Every headline includes a noun and an active verb.
- Every headline is written with sentence capitalization. Do not capitalize every word.

Story Text

- Use one space after periods.
- Use tabs instead of spaces.
- Only use bold on the left side of the page; thus, only at the beginning of paragraphs or for headings. Do not use bold inside lines of a paragraph
- Use the Oxford **serial comma**.
For example: I drove a car, truck, and tractor.
- Write in third person. Do not use “our,” “I,” “we,” “us.” Only the county director letter is written in first person.
- Use Illinois Extension throughout. The county director letter should include the full name University of Illinois Extension.
- Do not use “the” in front of University of Illinois Extension, except if University of Illinois Extension is used as an adjective.
Allowed: The University of Illinois Extension office is on State Street.
Not Allowed: ~~The~~ University of Illinois Extension provides excellent programming.
- Never identify the unit by number. State county names. See go.illinois.edu/units
Allowed: All staff in the unit provided programming.
Not Allowed: ~~Unit 28~~ staff provided programming.
- Do not capitalize staff titles which follow a person’s name.
Allowed: Lisa Torrance, county director, updated the council on unit finances.
Allowed: County Director Lisa Torrance updated the council on unit finances.
- The first time an event is held, it cannot be called First Annual.
- Do not use ampersands (&) in stories or headlines.
- Capitalize County when used as the name of a single county. Do not capitalize counties when listing multiples counties.
For example: Capitalize Bond County; use lowercase when stating Bond and Greene counties (except for the cover text).
- Be sure you know the difference between plurals and possessives.
- Do not include dates of when things happened unless it is critical for the meaning of the story. 2023 is also not needed.
- Review guidelines for commas and semicolons at go.illinois.edu/commas.
- Do not include “naked” URLs. https:// is not necessary when referencing a website. Learn to create a short URL at go.illinois.edu/GoLinks.

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- Never say a program team did something; say Illinois Extension.
Don't Use: The nutrition and wellness team provided a lesson.
Use: Illinois Extension provided a lesson.
Or Even Better Use: Participants learned to reduce their sodium intake at a lesson Extension provided.

Content Development

There's a formula that will make report writing easier.

WARNING: Stop writing what *you did*. Write what changed in the world because you did something.

Get started: Number your paper 1 through 5 and answer these five questions about the program:

1. What's wrong in the world that this program was developed to improve?
2. What happens to the world if we don't fix this problem?
3. What will fixing the problem achieve? (How will our participants or communities be transformed?)
4. How many people were reached with each thing you did to address the problem you stated in #1? (What's our footprint in addressing the problem?)
5. What changed for the participants or community because Extension did this program?

Before you begin writing: Annual Reports are *collections* of impact stories, so meet as your unit team to contribute to a collection of activities. Gathered together, your impact is greater. Then, determine what you, as a team, say for steps 1, 2, 3.

After your first draft: Check yourself:

- Do not include processes.** It is not important that you called a meeting, set up a display, etc. Instead, tell the impact because you did those things. Remember, ONE BIG THING.
- Stop using excess words.** Edit. See the common errors at go.illinois.edu/EditYourself.
- Do not have every staff member write a story.** They often overlap. Instead, collate related story content by topic to show greater impact.
- Follow the template.**
 - **INDESIGN SUBMISSION:** Do not divert from the InDesign template without advance knowledge.
 - **TEXT SUBMISSION:** Number of characters does not exceed the characters available for this type of page story. Use the Character Calculator
- Use photos thoughtfully.** More photos aren't always better and can clutter the page. Fewer, larger, better photos show more impact. Do not add more photos than is allowed in the template. Put ORIGINAL photos in your Annual Report Box file.
- EVERY photo needs a caption that identifies the action and the people.**
- Don't use your PEARS reports as they are.** Those reports focus on you. The focus of your story should be on what changed in your community because you did something.