

**Dealing More Effectively  
With  
The 4-H Story**

Your 4-H Story is a very important part of your 4-H record. While it should focus on the program in which you are submitting your record, try to convey how your participation in 4-H contributed to your self-respect and concern for others; and influenced you in school, use of leisure time and career plans.

The following outline may help you in developing your story. It is divided into parts merely to help you outline what you want to say about yourself. Do now identify these parts in your story.

Introduce yourself - include your age, interests, parents, brothers and sisters, where you live, where you go to school, when and why you joined 4-H.

Tell about the program in which you are submitting your record: How 4-H helped you learn things about this subject you didn't know before; how your project grew in size and scope; and some things you tried successfully or unsuccessfully.

Highlight other 4-H projects and activities – including major learning experiences, special interests and unusual situations you encountered.

Explain how 4-H has helped you become a better leader and citizen: How 4-H has increased your interest and participation in community affairs, and what you have learned from team efforts.

Describe how 4-H participation has helped you to feel good about yourself, influenced your school and career goals and you use of leisure time. Tell about your future plans and career you want pursue.

Story must be typewritten or printed double spaced and no smaller than 10 pt type. At least 3 pages is a good rule of thumb.

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### *Notes from Michelle*

*This document was used in record book trainings way back when. The date on the file copy is 1985. It was useful to us then and is still relevant today. The following are some examples of actual senior 4-H stories. The names and places have been changed. Notations are hand written notes from the original training or what I could decipher of those notes.*

*Please remember there are no bad stories. The following pages are only to help you polish your story and make it better. Also keep in mind that the judges are volunteers and have different reactions to different styles of writing. The notes here are one person's opinion of the ideal story.*

## MY 4-H CLOTHING STORY

I became interested in 4-H by attending meetings and 4-H events with my older brother. Since I attended all 4-H events, I wanted to join as soon as I was old enough. I'm Jane Doe the 15 year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Doe. I have an 18 year old brother and a 10 year old brother. We live in Timbucktu Texas, where I will be a sophomore at Timbucktu High School.

4-H clothing projects interested me early because I wanted to learn to sew and learn to look my best. My clothing project has encouraged me to sew and has given me opportunities to learn better grooming. This project has taught me to select my own clothes, patterns, and fabrics that are becoming, and ways to make the clothes look their best on me. Choosing the correct accessories is very important. Grooming and skin care are also important part of a clothing project.

**This story gives you the bare bones, but not very interesting. Sounds like a list of her form.**

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## MY 4-H SWINE STORY

My story takes place in Timbucktu, a small town in South Texas. It is the home of the Hogwash Swine Farm, a thriving business that began with one 4-H show hog. Through eight years of 4-H leadership, it has grown. It has steadily developed into a successful breeding operation.

My name is Pete Duroc and I am the owner and manager of the Hogwash Swine Farm. I became interested in 4-H when my family moved to the country. I didn't know much about animals or farming, but I soon began to learn, when a friend told me about 4-H

When it came time for me to select my animal project, my mom and dad told me the project would be my responsibility. To finance my project, I took money out of my savings. I had been saving money ever since I was a kid.

**This is more like a story.**

## MY 4-H BICYCLE STORY

Hello, I am Suzy Que, a 15 year old member of the Horseshoe 4-H Club, Sum County, District Whatever. My parents are John and Jane Que. I have four brothers and one sister. We are an active 4-H family. Three of my older brothers have completed their 4-H careers, the other a recent graduate of high school, is very active in 4-H. My younger sister, who just turned 10- is just starting her 4-H career. My 4-H years started in 19?? when I turned 9. I had attended meetings for a long time with my brothers and parents, who were leaders. I will be a sophomore at Horseshoe High School this fall.

**Don't start with Hello. This is not a letter to a friend.**

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## MY 4-H CLOTHING STORY

My name is Jane Doe. I am 17 years old. Fifteen of those years were spent in Daytona Beach, Florida where I was born. I first joined 4-H when I was 10 years old because I wanted to meet people and learn how to sew. I am presently living in Singer, Texas. My parents names are Joe and Judy Doe. I have one sister, Suzy who is also in 4-H. I will be attending Singer High School as a freshman in the fall. Besides 4-H I have been swimming competitively for eight years. I am also a lifeguard, assistant swim coach for summer league, and swimming instructor at a nearby pool.

Making your own clothes emphasized the personal uniqueness and individuality of the wearer, contributing to her self development.

**Written in the third person.**

## MY 4-H AGRICULTURAL ACHIEVEMENT STORY

Once again, I find myself reflecting upon the past and recollecting my thoughts so that you can obtain some insight as to the impact 4-H has had on my life. Although it is true that I am only 17 years old, I feel I have progressed further along in maturity than my peers because of 4-H. There is more depth in my character, because of the responsibilities, duties, activities, functions, projects and experiences that 4-H has provided me with, and, above all, because of the people with whom 4-H has put me in contact with. Out of all the people I have encountered in 4-H, the one that I got to know the best is a girl by the name of Suzy Que. 4-H really helped me find a direction and allowed me to excel to my fullest potential. Please allow me to tell you about myself so you can get to know me, too.

**A bit much.**

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## MY 4-H CLOTHING STORY

You are now entering a time warp. No, it is no longer 2080, but the year 1981 – almost a century ago. Keep in mind that the primitive people living on earth then didn't have access to the highly modernized technology that currently exists. No, they settled for sewing machines, tractors, automobiles, and presidents. Now, to show an idea about a common and ordinary life, we will take a peek into the life of a girl who her superiors called Suzy Que.

Her life centered about 4-H activities since she belonged to the Alamo 4-H Club for seven years.

**Told in the third person, not first. Like talking about somebody else. Mixed reaction.**

## MY 4-H DAIRY FOODS STORY

MOOO-- says Elsie, the Cow, but a great big HI from me, Suzy Que, a 16 year old 4-H'er from Sum County.

Though I did not realize it at the time, DAIRY FOODS became an important part of my life as I listened to the old nursery rhyme, HEY DIDDLE DIDDLE, THE CAT AND THE FIDDLE, THE COW JUMPED OVER THE MOON.

Since that time, DAIRY FOODS have gone to the moon in reality with the astronauts and have been a valuable part of my learning experiences in 4-H.

**Too cutsey.**

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## MY 4-H FOOD PRESERVATION STORY

What would you do if your Dad had 100 acres of tomatoes, which he couldn't sell, ripening and rotting in the Texas sun? "Can them", maybe?

That's what happened to me the second year that I was a 4-H member, and that's when I really knew that Food Preservation would be a continuous project for me. —And, that I, Suzy Que could actually contribute to the well being of my younger brother and sister, and to my Mom and Dad by preserving some of our own home-grown produce.

**Good, This gets their attention and tells the problem.**

## MY 4-H FOOD AND NUTRITION STORY

I may never be another Betty Crocker, but it's a great feeling being 17 and doing my best to measure up. It seems like yesterday that I, Suzy Q, couldn't even boil water. I started by 4-H learning experiences at age 10, after talking to the county Extension agent about 4-H opportunities.

I'm really looking forward to being a senior this fall at Untied High School in Untied. I like playing flute, arts, crafts, collecting recipes and arrow-heads. My 4-H family is Mrs and Mrs. John Que, Johnny, my 13 year old brother and Sue, my married sister who lives in Germany.

**Good**

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## MY 4-H PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT STORY

I began work in the area of photography as an inexperienced shutterbug. Through my project, I have been able to form a clearer concept of what photography actually is and what purpose it has in my life. My project provided me with a basis for learning and experimentation. It enabled me to relate my feelings and emotions in a material form rather than an abstract one. I now see photography as an art: an art that possesses infinite possibilities to the imaginative. I also feel that photography is very important element in my life. Through the medium, I have met a countless number of individuals, gained greater understanding of other art forms and provided myself with a method of self-expression.

**Too deep right away.**

## 4-H Story References

1. Persuasive Writing by Herman Holtz  
“One surefire way of persuading others is to tell them what they want to hear. They’ll always believe that.”
2. A Concise Guide to Composition by Louse E Rorabacher
  - A. Theme - Organization  
“To organize your material, you must divide all its parts and their order.”
  - B. Theme - Introduction  
“Consider how you can capture your reader’s attention with an interesting beginning.”
  - C. Theme - Conclusion  
“Consider how you can leave your readers with a sense of finality.”
3. Overcoming Writing Blocks by Karin Mark and Eric Skjei
  - 4 States of Writing
    - A. Pre-writing (preparing to write)
    - B. Organizing
    - C. Rough Drafts
    - D. Revising
  - “Eating an Elephant: One Bite At A Time”
  - The reviser’s Toolkit
    - A. Sharpen You Transitions
    - B. Make it Concrete
    - C. Avoid Cliches
    - D. Avoid Jargon
    - E. Use Strong Verbs
    - F. Delete Unnecessary Words
    - G. Vary Sentence Length
4. Writing Effectively by Mary Lynn Kelsch and Thomas Kelsch  
“A traveler can get lost for two reasons. He does not know where he is going, or he does not know how to get there.  
Writers get lost for the same two reasons. However, while no sensible traveler would think of starting out until he knew where he wanted to end up, writers do so regularly.”  
  
Hints
  - Be specific because
    - specific is more interesting
    - specific helps the audience to visualize  
“With the constantly increasing price of gasoline, a new trend in entertainment is

developing in this country. More and more people are spending more and more time at shopping malls but buying less and less. They are going to entertain themselves rather than to purchase items.”

Or:

“Eight-year-old Sally Thomson and her little brother timmy love to go to the beach. But they don not go as often as they used to, even in midsummer. The beach is 4-miles away. Now on hot evenings they drive four miles to the shopping mall. There they wander through the stores looking for bargains, stopping for pizza or an ice cream cone, playing with the puppies and kittens in the pet shop, and fingering the stuffed pandas and Barbie dolls in the toy department. Sally and Timmy are victims of the rising price of fuel. So are the merchants in the mall, because millions of Americans are doing exactly what the Thompson family is doing. They are taking their entertainment together in the air-conditioned mall, instead of the beach, the mountains, the campsites, the parks, the cities and the museums, or the ballparks. They are saving gas. But they are not visiting the mall to buy; they are visiting it for entertainment. And the merchants are not furnishing entertainment; they are trying to sell. So the parking lots are crowded, but the stores are going broke.”

- Be simple and direct

-adjectives -

“He was small and wiry, quick on his feet and quick of wit. When he walked, his narrow hips swayed and his bony shoulders hunched forward eagerly.”

“He held his red and blue, red visored baseball cap in his chubby, stubby, fat, short-fingered hands. His big, blue, wide, unblinking eyes looked up at he tall, long legged, muscular figure towering over him.” **Cross out all the unnecessary junk. It does not add to the description. It does not improve the picture.** “He held his re-visored baseball cap in his chubby hands. His unblinking eyes looks up at the figure towering over him.”

“It was a very hot day with scarcely any movement. A boy and his dog wandered slowly, listlessly and effortlessly through the slightly grimy street. The clearly shimmering heat really left very little energy in the atypically poor hamlet.” **Try it this way:** “It was so hot there was scarcely any movement. A boy and his dog wandered through the grimy street. The heat left little energy in the malnourished inhabitants of the poor hamlet.”

-Adverbs-

- unnecessary repetition

- Not enough to say

- simple words

- short and clear sentences

Short sentences portray action, excitement, urgency. Long sentences portray contentment, leisure, peace.

- fuzzy thinking

- specialized jargon

- slang

## 5. Making Every Word Count by Gary Provost

Wasted words. When you write, don't use extra words that serve no purpose; they slow you writing down. Wasted words frequently show up in the form of overused, meaningless phrases like "in the event of" (if); "on the occasion of" (when); "owing to the fact that" (because); "for a period of a month" (for a month).

Words are also wasted in an attempt to modify that which cannot be modified, as in "very unique" and "slightly impossible." These phrases seem to be the special pets of the educated but insecure, those people who think that more words equal more thought and knowledge. Wasted words proliferate in business memos, government manuals, Rotary Club speeches, grant proposals, even-pay-by-the-word ads.

Weak words. One of the best ways to improve what you have written is to throw out two or three weak words and replace them with a strong one that conveys the same meaning. Listen to what happens when:

"He was a generous and thoughtful man" becomes "He was a saint."

"He passed away early in the morning, and people all over America cried" becomes "He died at dawn and the nation wept."

When you can change 10 words to seven, or two words to one, the writing almost always will work better.

Here's a tip for finding weak words. Be wary of adverbs ending in -ly, such as rapidly, perversely, and lavishly. They often pop up because you used a weak verb and tried to boost it. Whenever possible, chuck them in the wastebasket and replace them with stronger verbs.

For example, if Stan jumped suddenly upon the burglar, you reader will see it better if you say he pounced upon the burglar. If Maria ate her supper quickly in order to keep her date with Mark, your reader will see it better if Maria gobbled her supper.

(Note, particularly in the second example, how the stronger verb gives you reader not only a clearer picture of the specific action, but also a stronger sense of the overall mood and emotions involved.)

Use active voice - most of the time

Be specific - most of the time

Which do you visualize more clearly?

dog	or	Doberman pinscher
gun	or	Smith and Wesson .38
car	or	red Corvette
woman	or	nun

Show, don't tell

“Larry Bird is a very tall man.”

“Brad ducked as he came through the doorway to the living room.”

Appeal to the senses

For example, if your environment were a “movie theater,” you might mention the sight of an usher, the sound of some bratty kid kicking the back of a seat, the smell of popcorn, the taste of a candy bar, and the feel of the floor that is invariably sticky from spilled sodas and discarded wads of chewing gum.

The important thing to remember is that you should use sensory stimuli that are associated with that environment but not with environments in general. If you say “It was noisy at the baseball game,” you haven't gained any ground in trying to engrave the image of a baseball game on the reader's brain. But if the noises you mention are the crack of the bat, the whizzing of a fastball, the roar of the crowd, the heckling from the bleachers, and the hush that falls over the stadium when one more strike will complete a no-hitter, then you have used “baseball words” to remind the reader of where he is.

Weigh jargon carefully

Avoid clichés like the plague

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### *Notes from Michelle*

*This is **your** story. A chance for your personality to shine through. It should not be a re-listing of the items in your report form, but a behind the scenes look at that report form. How did you feel when the pig died or the cake fell when your sister slammed the door? What did you do differently this year and why? Why did you have to learn the substitute for baking soda? Was it because you started your cake at midnight and Mom wouldn't take you to the store? The goat died of urinary calculi, what did you go through trying to fix it? What will you watch for the next time? Did you run for student council president because of the office you held in 4-H? Did some activity in 4-H give you the courage to ask that girl/guy to dance?*

*Write your story early enough so you will have time to read it out loud to someone. Have them read it out loud to you. You will find mistakes and rough wording and will be able to add polish to your story even more.*

*I struggled to get a 4-H member to understand what the 4-H Story should be. We went back and forth trying to hit upon a common idea. She finally said, “Oh an English paper with facts” so yes this is creative writing using the facts and experiences of your 4-H career.*