

editor's page

Writing Clearly . . . "Ask the Right Questions"

My editorial in the previous issue of the *Journal* suggests how to read articles published by the *Journal* to gain the most from each. This editorial reviews writing the article itself. How do I write for the *Journal*?

First, for whom is the *Journal* published? The *Journal* is written for people—Extension educators. It's one-on-one communication, but this communication occurs only in one direction, from the writer to the reader. Before beginning, you must clearly identify the individual to whom you're writing. What do you want this individual to gain from reading your article? Write to a particular person.

Through the *Journal*, our objective is to share current research and programming that has implications for other Extension personnel. Thus, manuscripts need to offer logical statements on why the topic (research or program) is important, what was found or done, and what it means to the rest of us. References to document your approach should be included. Implications for other Extension professionals should always be discussed.

Now that you have decided on your audience and your intent, you can begin to write. Outline what you intend to say before you begin. Then you'll know when to stop.

As you write, use familiar image-making words: say face, not countenance. Use the active voice, if possible; and use contractions to make your writing more readable. Write "a gap exists . . .," not "there is a gap . . ." Or "the process involves 10 steps . . .," rather than "there are 10 steps in the process . . ." Avoiding jargon seems difficult for us in Extension. More reviewers comment on "fuzzy" words, especially in manuscripts discussing evaluation, than on any other item.

Every author that's part of a land-grant university should ask an Extension editor to review the manuscript. Reading the manuscript "cold," the editor can be a "test audience." But, unlike *Journal* readers, this individual can ask questions to help clarify what you mean before it's critiqued by reviewers. Most authors would benefit by using this home-based expertise. Few manuscripts are published without one or more author revisions.

Every manuscript is reviewed by three members of the *Journal's* Editorial Committee, listed inside the back cover. "Manuscript evaluation sheets," outlining the criteria used by reviewers, are available on request from me. Our intent is to publish a *Journal* by and for Extension educators.

