

# We're Telling Our Story – And We Need Your Help!

**NC STATE**  
EXTENSION

Join us in helping connect more North Carolinians to the work we do and the impact we can make in the lives of their families and communities. Use these communications tips and tricks, and add your voice to the narrative. Thanks for helping us tell the Extension story!

## Using Social Media Effectively

- > Include Extension's new hashtag to join the conversation at a statewide level: **#ExtensionServesNC**  
It'll help our central social media team keep track of all that's happening throughout the counties and enable us to further spread your stories.
- > **Shorten links** in your posts using bitly.com or tinyurl.com.  
Only use one link per post.
- > **Keep posts short and conversational** – with appropriate voice and tone.  
Focus on quality, not quantity.
- > **Use hashtags** that are in existing conversations and create new ones only using words that are relevant to the organization.
- > **Tag people**, groups and organizations when you can and always research to know who you're tagging.
- > Engagement and reach provide a **better value** than the number of followers or likes you have.

### **NOT NEWS:**

Dog Bites Man

### **NEWS:**

Man Bites Dog

## Writing Press Releases and Web Stories

- > Follow the inverted pyramid: the **most important information first**, followed by supporting details and quotes.
- > Use Associated Press (**AP style**) – not Chicago style.
- > Write short paragraphs and use straightforward language. **No jargon.**
- > Keep each piece to 300-500 words. **Shorter is better.**
- > Direct quotes are a great opportunity to editorialize. **Say something new** instead of repeating details. Always credit your quote sources.

### **GOOD:**

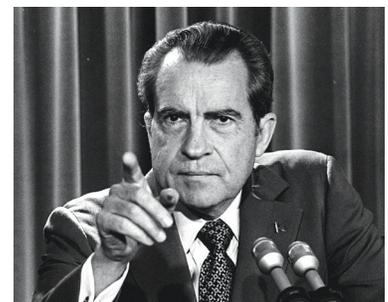
Extension Helps.

### **BAD:**

Local Cooperative Extension personnel have engineered an innovative plan to assist in the latest

## Working with the News Media

- > Preparation is key. **Don't wing it.** If a reporter calls, ask what their story is about, what they want from you, and when they need it. Then say goodbye.
- > Call back once you've had a chance to think about your key points.
- > Follow the **rule of 3s**: Identify 3 main points you'd like to make – and anticipate the 3 likeliest (and scariest) questions for each point.
- > Use simple, everyday language. **Don't use jargon.**
- > Be honest, and keep in mind everything you say is on the record. Remember... **"No comment" is a comment.**



## Taking Good Photos

- > **Shoot horizontal** (landscape) whenever possible.
- > Remember **light direction** and **time of day** when photographing people outside. Sun behind subject = dark face. Sun in front = eye squinting. Find a shady spot.
- > Indoors, put your subject **near a window** so that the window light highlights the face.
- > **Try an angle.** Shooting up or down can be more interesting.
- > Shoot at the **highest resolution** your camera/phone will allow.
- > **Hold the camera still** to avoid motion blur.
- > Ask subjects to **avoid solid white or solid black** clothing.
- > **Focus.** If it's a portrait, keep your subject within 8 feet of the camera. If it's a landscape with a person, put them on one side, not the middle.
- > **What's in the background?** Avoid trash cans, branches sticking out of heads, cluttered shelves, etc.
- > **Learn to crop.** Crop (trim) your photo so it focuses on the most important thing.

## Producing Compelling Videos

- > **Tell a story.** People like – and remember – a good story, rather than facts or statistics.
- > **A visual story.** Sometimes we come across a great story idea, but video may not be the best platform to tell that story. Ask yourself if the story is best told through video, or could it be better explored through a different format?
- > **Know your equipment.** Even a smartphone can produce a good video – if it's a good story. Learn what your video equipment can do and then decide if it's adequate for your production needs.
- > **Invest in a good external microphone.** Viewers tend to forgive bad images a whole lot faster than they do bad audio. Built-in camera microphones are not very good. An external microphone that can be plugged into the camera will do a much better job.
- > **Get a tripod.** Don't allow shaky and handheld footage to distract viewers from your story.
- > **Edit Ruthlessly.** If it absolutely, positively doesn't have to be in the video – take it out. Your favorite commercials are only 30 seconds long and still tell an entire story.



Horizontal



Vertical

- > Good light source
- > Interesting angle
- > Good proportions
- > Clean, simple composition



Boring



Interesting - Action



Interesting - Portrait



Interesting - Unusual