

Subject: ag jour skills  
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## COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN WHICH UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN AGRICULTURAL JOURNALISM/COMMUNICATIONS NEED TO BE MOST PROFICIENT.

Today's Agricultural Journalism/Communication students need a **Collegiate dictionary**, a **grammar book**, and an **Associated Press Stylebook**, and they need to learn how to use each of those books.

They need proficiency in the use of punctuation, particularly the comma, the quotation marks, and the dash.

They need to know that attribution should be in the first sentence, that when you change speakers, attribute first; and how to handle attribution within quoted matter.

They need to know that a government official's statement may not be accurate or even true, which is why attribution is so important. Just because a police officer identifies a traffic victim as John Doe does not mean that the victim is John Doe. The victim may have stolen John Doe's driver license.

They need to know the use of pronouns, particularly **me**, **it**, and **they**, and the reflexive pronouns, e.g., **myself**.

They need to write simple sentences in the active voice and use strong verbs.

They need to know how to use the dictionary to learn not only the definition of words, but also the usage of words.

They need to know the following rules of writing news.

Get to the point quickly with the summary lead: Tell **Who**, **Did What**, and **Why** in 30-35 words in the first sentence of a one-paragraph lead. The **Where**, **When**, and **How** may go in the second paragraph.

Use the inverted pyramid approach and write tersely, concisely, and to the point.

Write tight.

No paragraph longer than five lines on screen.

No line longer than five inches on screen.

Paragraphs separated with a blank line.

Every four or five paragraphs, insert a subhead to indicate what is coming next.

Write in the conversational active voice: subject, verb, object. Tell, rather than write, the story.

Write in the strong past tense.

Avoid the weak present perfect tense and progressive tense.

Avoid synonyms; repeating key words reinforces understandability.

Remove redundancies.

Obey the rules of grammar, punctuation, syntax, precise word use and spelling, particularly subject verb agreement and noun-pronoun agreement.

Write objectively; no opinion words.

Copyedit the story, and rewrite it as many times as necessary.

With the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web, Ag Comm students should know how to write a second-day story because the Web

page gets the first story. The newspaper (which is published tomorrow) needs the same information but not the same story.

Instead, the second-day story leads with current information and includes yesterday's information in the body of the story. For example,

If a prisoner escapes jail, the first story is the escape; the second-day story leads with the search. The escape is described later in the story.

If the price of fertilizer increases, the first story is about the price increase; the second-day story leads with farmers cutting back on crops that use a lot of fertilizer. The fertilizer price increase is described later in the story.

Ag Comm majors need to know how to use the dictionary to learn not only the definition of words, but also the usage of words.

For example: A reporter covering a criminal case wants to use the attributive verb "admit." The dictionary definition is "disclosed something reluctantly." But the entry suggests looking up *synonyms* for "acknowledge."

The dictionary definition of acknowledge is "admitted to be true or as stated; confessed." But, in the synonym section below the definition, the usage of "admit" is "describes assent that has been elicited by persuasion and implies a conceding of a fact."

Therefore, to use "admit," the reporter must ask the interrogating officer whether the information was obtained by persuasion. Otherwise, the reporter must stick to "said," an attributive verb with no hidden meanings.

#### **PARTICULAR AGRICULTURAL AREAS, IF ANY, IN WHICH STUDENTS NEED MORE SCHOOLING.**

My background in agriculture is limited, but I think that students need to know and be aware of and knowledgeable about officials and news sources in various fields of agriculture.

**WHETHER STUDENTS NEED TO BE EDUCATED IN COMMUNICATION  
THEORY AND RESEARCH.**

I strongly advocate this because it will stand them in good stead regardless of where their careers take them.

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