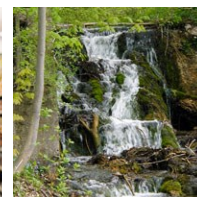
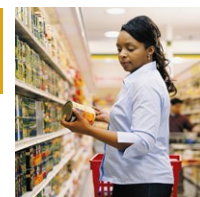


Writing Good Narratives

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension



The Narrative Section provides an opportunity to write about your work from a variety of perspectives. But how do you know when you've written enough to describe your work well, yet not so much that the reader can't follow your progress and make use of the report?

This tip sheet looks at writing a good "Progress toward deliverables" narrative report from the perspective of the fable *The Three Bears*.

Not enough: so little descriptive information that an Institute Director or DC could not discern what progress the educator is making.

Way too much: complete listing of all activities and meetings from educator's calendars; repeats of previous information.

Just right: a concise description of major activities, logically organized, emphasizing what is important and significant, not every little detail.

Progress toward deliverables in your individual plan

How your narrative is written and formatted affects how easily it can be read, or if it is read at all. These suggestions will make it easier to read and understand.

Don't pack it in

Sometimes there is a tendency to pack a lot of information into a written paragraph. If a narrative is describing a number of different ideas and their supporting details in one long paragraph, this can be confusing and tedious to read. Instead, discuss each idea in a separate paragraph or bulleted statement.

It can be tempting, especially if the report deadline is looming, to dump everything - activities, output numbers, outcomes and evaluation results - into a progress towards deliverables narrative report. *The intent of the progress toward deliverables section is to concisely report activities and perspectives related to signature programs or major efforts.* Output numbers should be recorded in the MiPRS output section, quantitative outcome data in the outcomes section, and impact and evaluation results as an impact summary narrative. It may take a little more time to put the appropriate information in the right location, but it will be much more valuable for the reader.

Link narrative to your annual plan of work

Relate your quarterly progress toward deliverable report to your annual plan of work. This can be accomplished by summarizing your overall plan of work goals in two to three sentences. State and relate your quarterly progress toward the achievement of your annual goals.

Avoid vague words

Vague words include: relatively, few, almost, some, usually, approximately, highly, often, appreciable, nearly, many and significant. Even a reader familiar with Extension will not know how many program participants are a "significant" number.

Delete excess

Three words you need to remember when writing a narrative are: **brief, concise** and **readable**. One way to accomplish all three of these ideas is to delete extra words, even whole sentences that do not contribute to telling the story or that add no new information.

Proofread your narrative

A narrative that is full of errors, whether factual, grammatical or spelling, looks unprofessional. The reader may even question your credibility. After you finish writing your narrative, check for typographical, grammatical and other errors, and correct them. Asking someone else to read your narrative is another good way of spotting problems.

Adapted from "Writing Extension Impact Statements", Richard L. Poling, University of Tennessee

See back for more information on progress toward deliverables specific to your Institute →

Greening Michigan Institute

Progress Toward Deliverables Examples

May 2014

Below are examples of narratives in the “Progress Toward Deliverables” section of MiPRS. The text is a mash-up of Michigan educator reports, fictionalized to appear to be programs from another “M” state – Maine.

About right

In this example, progress is listed by signature program or major effort and summarized to highlight important activity. Brief commentary is also included to provide insight into ongoing efforts. Listing by signature program makes it much easier for a reader to get a feel for the effort and connect to workgroup and individual work plans.

Signature Program 1: Expanding Lobster Markets

1. Portland Regional Market: Provided overall leadership for this effort as project leader, including: management, reporting, and outreach on behalf of the market coalition; hosted weekly meetings with project partners (fisherman’s consortium, lobster processors and others) to move the program forward; led tours with stakeholders and press; met with lobster restaurant entrepreneurs; organized a tour of Portland Fish Foods and Market.
2. Development of Down East Lobster Alliance LLC: Collaborated with DELA steering committee to develop and submit articles of incorporation for the Alliance (501c3) as a result of several focus group meetings with lobster marketing consultants. DELA will facilitate development of a regional lobster hub and expand markets for lobstermen in coastal Maine.
3. Lobster in School: Maine Lobster was served in three school districts in Southern Maine last month. This project took several months of effort by me and another Extension Educator along with the food service directors of these districts. We provided a connection with campus-based lobster experts as well as a connection to DELA to supply the schools with the lobster at the right time. I authored a fact-sheet on Maine lobster which was used as a basis for the educational information printed on the school menus. This was well received by students and all districts plan to offer lobster as a regular menu item in the next school year.

Signature Program 2: Mountain Region Forest Stewardship

1. Mountain Region Landowner Business development: The business development workshop schedule to be conducted in the mountain region was cancelled due to very low enrollment. The planning team is still interested in pursuing this opportunity, and the forestry business specialist from Montana is still committed to helping us with this endeavor. We're evaluating possible reasons for low interest - promotion was very challenging and it was difficult to gain attention of the weekly newspapers. Recent University of Maine research confirms other studies that indicate that landowners still want to generate income, but at the same time report that cutting trees on the property is a low priority. Our challenge is to bridge that gap.
2. Forest Climate Change Adaptation Project: During the quarter I continued to participate in project conference calls and discussions related to the pilot communities of Machias and Bangor. I facilitated the meeting in Machias (70+ attendance) and helped develop evaluation tools for use during the second

community workshops. Based on the success of the first meeting, the team anticipates excellent participation in the second session.

3. Forest Zoning - Finalized sample forest protection zoning language, posted it to the Maine Forestry website, and wrote an article for the Maine Planners newsletter, which ran as a special issue this month. Started work on an accompanying program on the topic that will be piloted as a statewide webinar in August. The program is intended for local government officials in the mountain region and the level of instruction will assume a basic understanding of planning and zoning.

Signature Program 3: Sustainable Moose Management

1. Coordinated with other educators our planned professional development workshop for school educators. The Moose for Maine workshop engaged 19 enthusiastic educators who participated in last year's Moose Education Summer Teacher Institute in northern Maine. We also recruited two lead teachers from among those actively involved in the Moose Stewardship Initiative hub, served as workshop leaders and co-lead delivery of this workshop experience. Learning alongside wildlife scientists, teachers explored place-based moose education and wildlife literacy learning. They observed moose, hiked moose habitats, sampled moose food webs, and deployed webcams to study moose movements.

Other activities not related to signature workgroup programs

- Moosehead Lake Project - This project was approved and a three-year contract executed between Maine Extension and the Greater Moosehead Lake Watershed Council. A kick-off event for the effort was held on last month, attended by over 50 local officials and organizational partners. (See output section for session evaluation results.) Planning is underway for winter meetings of local officials and zoning administrators, and a summer lakeshore tour.
- Represented Maine Extension on the Central Maine Land Conservancy's "FishForever" Program, which promotes voluntary ten year conservation easements along Maine rivers.
- This quarter I assumed leadership for the state educators' association awards committee, helping the board of directors revamp the program and streamline the application process. These changes should increase participation in the program and provide more meaningful recognition to outstanding members.
- During this quarter, I traveled to Androscoggin County three times to present on sustainable development issues. Androscoggin County is a one of the most economically distressed areas of our state. I went there to determine if the county could be a candidate for participation in a five-year research project through an AFRI grant. The local tourist bureau is a strong potential partner here. They are currently operating a tourism enhancement project and perhaps I can talk with them to see if they are interested in scaling up. I expect to further develop a project in Androscoggin County for the next program year.
- I continued to promote Maine Extension projects and programs through Facebook and LinkedIn and taped a 20 minute local cable TV show promoting Extension programs.

Too much (excerpt)

In this example, way too much information is included for a single effort. Even though the details related by the author are useful, including this much detail for all efforts makes it very difficult for a reader to wade through it all. Better would be to create a brief narrative and include detailed evaluation results as an attachment or include in an impact summary, not progress toward deliverables.

- Maine lobster was served in three school districts in Southern Maine last month. This project took several months of effort by me and another Extension Educator along with the food service directors of these districts. We provided a connection with campus-based lobster experts as well as a connection to DELA to supply the schools with the lobster at the right time. I authored a fact-sheet on Maine lobster which was used as a basis for the educational information printed on the school menus. This was well received by students and all districts plan to offer lobster as a regular menu item in the next school year.

Cooperators included the York County Board of Commissioners, York County Chamber of Commerce, Down East Lobster Company, Joes Lobster Shack, Lobstermen Joe Smith and Sally Jones, the Kennebunkport School District, City of York School District, the Wiscasset School Board, the Southern Maine Economic Development Corporation, University of Maine Extension, the University of Maine Center for Lobster Research, The State of Maine Department of Education, the Maine Association for Natural Foods and the US Department of Agriculture.

There were a total of 1102 participants, of which 36 were teachers and 1066 students. Of the 1066 students, 48% were female, and 26% were minorities, compared with a county wide minority population of 9.5%. Eighty percent of teachers were female. There were also 34 school volunteer, donating a total of 360 hours of their time to program delivery, valued at \$7,970.

A total of 162 hours of instruction were provided to the 1066 participating students, which equals 5715 educational contact hours before actually eating lobster.

Evaluations were conducted with teachers and adult volunteer. Participants were asked to rate individual lobster learning activities on a 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent) scale, in terms of how well they help achieve curriculum goals. Teacher ratings ranged from a low of 3.50 to a high of 3.90, with a mean of 3.71 (3.43 to 3.82 for chaperones, with a mean of 3.62). When asked to rate the overall Lobster taste experience, the mean teacher response was 4.00 (3.74 chaperones). Teachers were asked to rate lobster compared with other seafood experiences they have had on a 1 (much worse) to 5 (much better) scale, with the mean response being 4.78 (3.71 for chaperones). Of the 89% of teachers who used the lobster in school curriculum, on average they completed 4.5 learning activities prior to eating lobster, and an additional 1.5 following.

Of those teachers with previous lobster experience, 80% shared lobster information with other teachers and/or school administrators; 50% sought more information on ocean science; 91% included more ocean science content in their classroom; 70% encouraged other teachers to participate; 11% visited the ocean more often.

GMI Educators are not expected to chronologically list their entire calendar in MiPRS. Include event descriptions in the context of major efforts. It is not necessary to document every single meeting or event you go to, nor record MSUE News topics or subjects of individual phone contacts.

- Participated in the following meetings:
 - Portland Regional Lobster Market Committee – 4/2/2013, served as facilitator to help the group record 2013 goals.
 - Down East Lobster Association – 4/4/2013, 5/5/2013, 6/9/2013, attended each of these meetings to gather information relevant to the Lobster in Schools program
 - Androscoggin County – 4/8/2013, 4/23/2013, 6/12/2013 Preliminary and final meetings for this group which will be reflected in next year’s plan of work (see above).
 - Effective reporting in-service training – 4/12/2013. This was a very good session that helped participant write concise impact and narrative statements, thus reducing the amount of irrelevant and wording information on the reporting system, which is a problem that needs to be addressed.
 - Director’s webinars – 4/13/2013, 4/27/2013, 5/8/2013, 5/22/2013, 6/4/2013, 6/18/2013
 - Annual Mountain Area Forestry workshop – 4/17/2013. I served as a speaker for this event on the timber marketing principles. 42 people attended the breakout session.
 - Moosehead Lake Watershed Council meeting – 4/23/2013
 - District Extension Educators meeting – 4/28/2013. Made a presentation about the Lobster in the Schools education program
 - Met with three local lobstermen – 5/1/2013
 - Moose for Maine coordinating meeting – 5/8/2013. I took notes for the group during this meeting and forwarded to the chair for distribution to the entire group
 - Maine Forestry Association conference – 5/10/2013 – 5/11/2013. I repeated the timber marketing presentation that I did during the Mountain Area Forestry workshop listed above
 - Effective webinars webinar – 5/13/2013
 - State Extension Educators board of directors meeting – 5/16/2013. During this meeting we identified issues of concern to discuss with the administrative team
 - FishForever meeting – 5/23/2013. During this meeting we made significant progress identifying programs for next year.

- Web site articles: Wrote articles on “How to get kids to enjoy lobster” (April), “Lobster marketing update” (April), “Is more snow the result of climate change?” (May), “Does spring flooding kill trees?” (May), “How to negotiate a timber sale contract” (June), “Export market opportunities for Maine seafood” (June)

- Q&A phone contacts on lobster safety (City of Portland), timber marketing (York County), winter damage on fir trees (Androscoggin County), Moose habitat (York County), sources for lobster traps (Machias), Insect problems on multiple species (Portland), whether forest zoning is a takings (Moosehead Lake), lobster price trends (Bangor), needle loss on pine trees (Freeport)

Not enough

Progress toward deliverables narratives should include enough information that the reader can get a feel for your program efforts and can relate them to workgroup and individual plans. This example does not meet that standard.

- Submitted 2014 plan of work documents
- Participated in lobster program conference planning committee
- Began preparation for timber marketing presentation
- Participated in workgroup conference calls
- Authored and submitted required articles to campus
- Attended and participated in district educators meeting
- Worked with 6 clients and provided 11 hours of assistance
- Many other workshops held: lobster marketing, timber sales, forest zoning laws.
- Had 15 participants in lobster marketing program
- Attended effective reporting in-service training
- 223 web hits, 4 mb document downloads from lobster at school web site
- 83 phone calls
- Continued to read climate change research related to coastal fisheries issues
- Did not work much on Moosehead Lake project other than read previous reports
- Attended DELA meeting, facilitated discussions
- On lobster marketing side, delivered three presentations, two interviews, edited monthly newsletter and developed two fact sheets on pricing and promotion