First things first: Column writing is a craft, and like other craft (wood working, sewing or cooking) – you get better at it the more you practice that craft.

There’s a step-by-step method to produce writing that achieves your goals.

**THE WRITING PROCESS**

Plan >>> Draft >>> Clarify and Edit >>> Proofread

**PLAN**

Where do we find ideas for columns?
- The calendar
- Questions from constituents
- Newsletters and Listserves (Georgia Forages, Urban Ag Listserve, Master Gardeners’ Listserves)
- Pinterest, how-to magazines/shows
- Georgia FACES or other state’s Extension outlets
  - [www.georgiafaces.caes.uga.edu](http://www.georgiafaces.caes.uga.edu)
  - [www.backyardwisdom.info](http://www.backyardwisdom.info)
- Recent happenings (storms, new watering regulations, new county ordinances)
  - Read the paper
  - Pay attention to the scuttle butt

**Narrow Your Focus:** Instead of focusing on a broad topic like spring gardening: talk about one aspect of spring gardening – best cultivation practices for tomatoes, tackling tomato pests, soil preparation before planting, how many/what variety of pole beans do you need this year.

Narrowing your focus will make the job of organizing your column much easier. Remember there will be many more columns to write, so you don’t have to use up all your good ideas in one column.

Where to find information for your column?
- UGA Extension Publications  [www.caes.uga.edu/Publications](http://www.caes.uga.edu/Publications)
- Contact specialists.
- Personal experience
- What were hot topics last year at this time?
DRAFT

Get things down on paper or fill up that screen!

At first, just loosely organize your main points, advice and personal experiences and sit down to write.

To me, facing a blank screen is the hardest part of writing. Here are a few tricks that I use to overcome that:

• Start writing on the second paragraph (you can go back and add a funny lead later).
• Set your self a time limit (try to get as much down as you can in that time).

CLARIFY AND EDIT

You will be surprised by how different, you’re writing looks when your revisit it later.
Go back the next day or a few hours later, and read your draft again.

❖ Does it make it make sense? Do you have all the information that you need?

❖ Cut out the extra: Try to keep it under 600 words.

❖ Use everyday language. Use the same language you would use when explaining something to your mother or grandmother.

❖ Use active verbs.

Inverted Pyramid

❖ News writers use a writing tool called the “inverted pyramid.” They write this way because editors know that people often don’t read to the end of the story.
Also, it is most convenient for editors to trim from the bottom of a story if they don’t have room for the whole thing.

❖ What does that mean for you? Put the most important facts at the top and the least important details at the bottom.

❖ Look at most forms of writing and you’ll find that the inverted pyramid is seldom used.
Most writers start with lots of explanation and get to the important facts somewhere in the middle, while others expose the important facts with a flourish at the end. Resist these temptations when writing news releases and or your columns.
PROOFREAD

The spell check and the grammar checker are awesome tools, and they make writing a lot easier. However, they don’t catch everything. Sloppy copy is at best obnoxious to the person who is editing it, and at worst can be extremely embarrassing if it makes it to print.

Here are a few tips:

- Print it out. It’s a lot easier to spot mistakes in print.
- Google proper names and double check web addresses.
- Don’t rely on spell check, but use it.
- There’s no harm in getting someone else to read after you.
- If you’re stressed and you know you are rushing more than you should, read your copy backwards, one sentence at a time. It’s crazy, but I swear it works to slow your eyes down.

Contacts
Sharon Dowdy — Public Relations Coordinator, Team Leader — Griffin Campus
sharono@uga.edu, (770) 229-3219
J. Merritt Melancon — Public Relations Coordinator — Athens Campus
jmerritt@uga.edu (706) 542-9724
Clint Thompson — Public Relations Coordinator — Tifton Campus
cbthompson@uga.edu, (229) 386-3800