The personal column is among the traditional publications written by Extension agents. These “intimate” musings from the agent to the reader often appear at regular intervals in local newspapers. When writing a personal column, keep these tips in mind.

• Personal columns should be fun for the reader. The tone should be conversational. In other words, write the personal column as though you were sitting across the table from the reader, sipping a cup of coffee. Use personal pronouns, like "you" and "I." Contractions are good, too. Use "it's (for "it is"), "don't," "won't," "can't," "you'd," "shouldn't" and others.

• Don't be afraid to use local tie-ins. Mention people and places that the readers will know. Just be careful not to embarrass anyone or put someone in a bad light for the sake of your point.

• Unlike a news story, you can change subjects in a personal column. Just separate the different topics with a subhead or set of asterisks.

• Personal columns can express an opinion, but be careful to distinguish between your opinion and the university’s recommendations. Share your personal experience, but advice geared toward UGA research-based information.

• Don't waste your personal column on stories that can go in the newspaper as a news story. For example, information on 4-H winners will run elsewhere in the newspaper. For example, use your column to brag about a few specific 4-H’ers who may not have actually placed in a competition.

Localizing – You can often localize an article that has been sent out through the college’s news distribution website, Georgia FACES (www.georgiafaces.com). For example, take an article on food safety research. Begin your article by recounting a personal experience, e.g. when you undercooked a hamburger or had your family take a vote as to whether a pack of ham you found in the fridge was safe to eat. Once you have lead into the story by presenting a problem, then use the material from the FACES article to explain what UGA is doing about the problem and/or give cooking tips.

Questions to ask yourself – When writing a personal column, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the problem or situation?
2. Why is it a problem?
3. How does this problem affect the people in my community?
4. What can be done to solve the problem?
5. What results can be expected?
6. What can local people do about the problem?
7. What examples can I present?

Answering these questions will give you some “meat” to add to the “bones” of your story. Always close your story by either directing the reader to a website or providing them with your email or other contact information.