

## Recordbook Essentials

**Overview.** A 4-H recordbook is a 4-H member's annual record of growth and accomplishments. It is an historical record of the member's 4-H career. 4-H members record the projects they have been involved in, what they have learned, and how they have grown both in their knowledge and personally. With recordbooks, 4-H members can reflect on their entire 4-H career even after their 4-H career is completed.

Recordbooks are a part of the core life skill of record keeping, which should be taught in every 4-H project. Record keeping teaches responsibility, self-reflection and accountability. If a project involves monetary transactions, keeping records also teaches basic bookkeeping skills. 4-H members who complete recordbooks throughout their 4-H career have the skills to complete college, award and scholarship applications.

Recordbooks are typically completed in early summer (June) and evaluated at the county level in late June/early July. District recordbook judging competitions occur in July, followed by the state judging for senior 4-H members in August. It is important to know your district judging date so members will have ample time to edit and correct their recordbooks before the district judging.

**Recordbook basics.** Recordbook guidelines are consistent for each category and age division. The guidelines for developing a 4-H recordbook are found on the Texas 4-H and Youth Development Web site under the publication pages, in the record keeping section.

- *Recordbook category.* 4-H members may select one of 39 categories in which to enter a recordbook. Categories related to FCS projects are listed below. A 4-H member can change categories each year, though many stay with the category in which they are most active.
- *4-H story.* Part of the recordbook is the 4-H story (up to ten pages), in which the 4-H member discusses highlights or points of interest that may not fit into the 4-H project report form. The story is a vital part of the recordbook because it helps the judges get to know the 4-H member. Stories can be written according to a theme, or simply be chronological histories of 4-H careers. The story should be personal, written in first person, and should express both the good things and unfortunate things that have happened in the member's life. Recordbooks also include photos of members at work during their 4-H careers. The best photos are action shots of 4-H members working with their projects, leading others, and assisting in their communities.
- *Project experiences and participation.* Because 4-H members are typically very involved in their 4-H work, it is necessary to limit the amount of information in a recordbook. 4-H recordbooks cover up to four projects for up to the past 4 years. This means that a 4-H member who has been in a project for 7 or 8 years will include only information about the past 4 years of experiences. Members who have been in a new project for only 1 to 3 years will list all those years. This does not mean that a 4-H member must have four projects or be in all of them for at least 4 years!
- *Leadership.* Leadership is a vital part of the 4-H experience and it is demonstrated through the 4-H recordbook. Members record their experiences in leadership roles they have had—elected/appointed offices, volunteer roles, or promotional leadership at the club (local), county, district, state, national, and even the international level. The recordbook should include information about how being a leader helped others and what effect it had on the 4-H member.
- *Community service.* Community service is a way for 4-H members to contribute to their communities. A recordbook should describe the number of community service projects a member has been involved with, how many people were served through the events, and the highlights of community service for the 4-H member.
- *Other 4-H projects.* Because many 4-H members are involved in more than four projects, there is a section of the recordbook where they can demonstrate successes in other minor projects. Members who have been involved in



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only four projects are encouraged to list three of them in the first section, and the one in which they have been least involved in the Other Projects section.

- *Recognition and awards.* In the recordbook a 4-H member highlights the most significant and special awards received during the years in 4-H.
- *Non-4-H experiences.* Developing a well-rounded 4-H member has always been a focus of the 4-H Program. Members are encouraged to be active in school, church and civic organizations. One section of the recordbook allows 4-H members to describe their involvement in these aspects of life.
- *4-H resumes (senior 4-H members).* Senior 4-H members are encouraged to begin planning for summer jobs, graduating from high school, and then going on to work or college. Having a good resume is very important. Senior 4-H members are asked to include a one-page resume of their 4-H and non-4-H career. This resume gives them a head-start on the career and college path because it is a resource they can present to colleges/universities and/or potential employers.

**Recordbook categories.** A 4-H recordbook can be done in many different areas in the disciplines of family and consumer sciences, agriculture or natural resources. These are the categories that correspond with Family and Consumer Sciences Projects.

- Clothing and Textiles
- Consumer and Family Science Open Category
- Consumer Education
- Family Life
- Food and Nutrition
- Health
- Healthy Lifestyles Open Category
- Housing and Home Environment
- Safety

**Development of a 4-H recordbook.** Developing a 4-H recordbook is a family affair. 4-H members and their parents/guardians should develop a record-keeping system for recording all the events in which members are involved. The record keeping can be as informal as keeping a calendar on the refrigerator and writing down all activities, or as complex as a computer spreadsheet a family designs. The system should make it easy for the family to extract information for the 4-H recordbook forms.

Once the information has been gathered, the 4-H member decides which category to enter the recordbook in. It should be a category in which he or she has actively participated and in which growth can be demonstrated.

In the writing process, the project report form should be completed first, then the 4-H story and photo portfolio. In the story, a member can address any topics not covered in the report form and demonstrate creativity. Once the recordbook is complete, it should be proofread for grammatical errors.

**Coordinating a recordbook contest.** It is important to have a county 4-H recordbook evaluation event so members will be prepared for the district competition and, for seniors, the state competition. Recordbook judging can be held in the evening or on a weekend; or it could be done with other county 4-H programs as a recordbook trade. Recordbooks (even those not entered in a competition) should be reviewed and reviewers' comments provided to 4-H members so they will know how to strengthen their books for clarity and readability. Reviewers' comments should be positive so that 4-H members feel good about what they have accomplished and what they can do to strengthen their 4-H careers.

Whether a county recordbook judging is held to select qualifying entries for the district level or simply to give feedback to 4-H members, consider these things when organizing the event.

- Secure a facility and announce the location, date and time of the event at least a month in advance so volunteers and leaders will have adequate time to prepare.
- Ask 4-H volunteers and committees to organize the event. Give volunteers responsibility for recruiting and

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training judges and other event workers, arranging for awards and/or recognition, and other logistics such as refreshments.

- Ask judges to give the feedback necessary for participants to improve their recordbooks before the district competition.
- Have county 4-H youth leaders host a recognition assembly for all who participate.

**Benefits of completing a 4-H recordbook.** A 4-H recordbook helps a member organize both 4-H and non-4-H information that is useful in applying for awards and scholarships. The current 4-H recordbook requirements mirror those of the Texas 4-H Scholarship Application, making the application process much easier for those who have completed recordbooks. Also, many county award applications require the recordbook, or components of it, as part of the award submission process.

4-H members who have completed recordbooks over the years have a vast resource of information for their college applications and other scholarships. Recordbooks are also a source of personal satisfaction, as 4-H members reflect on how they have grown over the years.

### **Resources.**

Printed/Web resources:

- Record-keeping and recordbook forms – [texas4-h.tamu.edu](http://texas4-h.tamu.edu)
  - ✧ Member Achievement Plan (MAP)
  - ✧ Record Improvement Guide
  - ✧ Clarifications to Record Improvement Guide (2003)
  - ✧ Personal Information Page, Report Form, and Checklist
  - ✧ Recordbook Score Sheet
  - ✧ “For the Record” Completion Certificate
  - ✧ “For the Record” Teaching Plans
  - ✧ Recordbook Judges Training Packet

Specialists:

- Texas 4-H Recordbook (General): Kyle Merten, Extension Associate, [KJMerten@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:KJMerten@ag.tamu.edu), 979-845-6533
- District 4-H specialist

