



Guidelines on writing news releases

A press release is a simply written announcement targeted specifically at journalists. Press releases are often sent out about:

- A planned event (often an unusual one)
- A celebration
- New research findings
- A local interest story

How do you make news?

Journalists receive many press releases each day, so you have to grab their attention. Be factual, concise and be explicit about why your story is important, exciting or unique. Short, punchy releases are easier to slip into a paper; and remember, your story must be new.

It also helps to know your local media. Pay attention to what type of stories your local paper or radio/TV station picks up on. Find out who your local journalist is and the best time to contact them. If they're not interested in a story, don't be afraid to ask why. Feedback will only help to build your experience for next time.

Content

Whilst preparing and writing you release, keep coming back to the following questions; why am I writing it; what do I hope to achieve; whom am I writing it and why should the readers care?

- **The headline** should be conventional, descriptive and straight-forward. Leave the puns and bad jokes to news sub-editors.
- **The first paragraph** is your opportunity to grab the reader's attention. It should contain the single most important idea and not much else. Aim to keep your introductory paragraph to two-three short, snappy sentences. If your group's name is long, refer to it as 'local bat charity', for example, and then write in full later in the story.
- **The main story** should include all of the facts and it is best to stick to just the facts. Report who, what, where and when, stating the most important points first. Try to avoid waffle and exaggerations. As a general rule, a press release that is more than two pages of double-spaced typing is too long.

Style

If you are unfamiliar with writing news articles these pointers may help.

- Use **active** rather than passive voice. For example, you might say "John achieved greatness" rather than "greatness was achieved by John".
- **Mentioning people** can help to put a friendly face on a story and thereby increase press interest.
- **Quotes** humanise a story and allow you to portray opinions - journalists assume that information not in quotes is fact.
- Limit use of **abbreviations** and if need ensure to provide the full name at the start.
- Be wary of **jargon**. Only use language that everyone will understand.
- **Grammar** - Avoid exclamation marks and if unsure keep grammar simple. Quite often a sentence can be restructured to use less words and need less punctuation.

Formatting

- **Double-spacing** should be used, with a margin of not less than one inch each side of the text.
- **"More" or "m/f"** should be written at the end of a page to indicate the story continues, and each following page should be numbered. The word "ends" should appear clearly several spaces below the last line of text.
- **Contact details** - All releases must contain the name and telephone number of the person issuing the release for use by journalists requiring further information. They should be printed at the end of the press release, under the notes to editors - a section at the end for additional background or supporting information.
- The **release date** needs to be included on the bottom of the release.
- Before submitting your release, make sure you have **permission** to use any quotes and photos included.