

## How to write a press release

Source: <http://www.wikihow.com>

A press release, also known as a *news release*, is simply a written statement to the media. They can announce a range of news items: scheduled events, personnel promotions, awards, new products and services, sales accomplishments, etc. They can also be used in generating a feature story. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a release. It is a fundamental tool of PR work, one that anyone who's willing to use the proper format can use.

### Write the headline

Write Headlines that Leap Off the Page and Grab Readers by the Throat. It should be brief, clear and to the point: an ultra-compact version of the press release's key point.

A successful headline has 4 very important jobs to accomplish:

- Get attention.
- Select an audience.
- Deliver a complete message.

Draw the reader into the body copy. Most people skim-read, so your headline has only an instant to capture your reader's attention.

**Avoid using ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.** On a subconscious level, we have learned to recognize the "shape" of words. If your words are all in capital block letters, they appear as RECTANGULAR BLOCKS OF PRINT, and a person quickly skimming a page will miss your entire message.

**Avoid all punctuation.** Periods, commas, explanation marks, quotations and even question marks act as "full-stops" to the reader. You don't want anything to stop the reader's flow from advancing from your headline directly into the main body. The best headlines will appear as though the headline is merely the first half of a longer sentence, thus the reader does not stop reading to discover more. You do not win awards for proper prose and grammar.

**Keep it very simple and understandable.** Do not use abbreviations, technical jargon, or hard to understand words. A well written headline and the following copy, should be written at a grade 7 reading level.

**Don't clown around.** Do not be fooled into believing word-play, puns or "cute" copy has any place in a headline. Humor is exceedingly difficult to pull off with profitable results.

**Don't get fancy.** The best typeface for both headline and copy, are fonts people are already accustomed to reading. If you get creative with fonts, colors, negatives (white type on black background) plus the vast array of other options now available with computers, you will only "lower" readership, and by a

great margin! It is a myth that fancy headlines get seen above the crowd, and thus increase readership. **Target your exact audience.** Try to target your customer specifically in your headline. If you attempt to reach everyone, you'll come across as vague and impress no one.

**Be Precise.** Avoid writing "Blind Headlines" that reveal nothing about your program. A headline must stand entirely on its own merit, without the reader being forced to read on to discover what the headline was meaning.

**Leave your pride at home!** Do NOT use a headline or even the top three quarters of the space to say anything about yourself, your club, [Logo](#) or anything else related to the vanity of wanting to see your name in lights. A headline's purpose as the gateway into reading must contain a leading benefit; intriguing wordage; spark curiosity or ask a thought provoking question. Nothing else. Save your name and contact info for the fine print hidden down at the bottom of the page.

**Use a Thesaurus.** When composing a headline, look up every word of your headline in a Thesaurus to find better words, then look up each of the new words you have found to find even more.

**Write and re-write.** Keep reworking the headline, rearranging the words, and write several versions of a headline always trying to tweak and improve upon it. Then select the best one. A great headline will often take longer to compose, than the entire matter to follow. Try to find a new angle, direction, or twist at looking at your subject matter from the readers perspective, so your headline is not boring and engages the reader.

**Try to connect to your reader's self-interest on a level of emotion.** A great headline should contain a leading benefit that triggers some level of excitement. This could include any of the following:

- fear
- a need
- want or desire
- curiosity
- factual news or statistics of interest
- or a gripping question.

**Copy the Masters.** Creating an entirely new blockbuster headline is no easy task. Successful copy writers stay close to proven formulas that work, by reworking classic models that have weathered the test of time.

Headlines are written in bold and are typically larger than the press release text. Conventional press release headlines are present-tense and exclude "a" and "the" as well as forms of the verb "to be" in certain contexts.

The simplest method to arrive at the press release headline is to extract the most important keywords from your press release. Now from these keywords, try to frame a logical and attention-getting statement. Using keywords will give you better visibility in search engines, and it will be simpler for journalists and readers to get the idea of the press release content.

**Write the press release body copy.**

The press release should be written as you want it to appear in a news story.

Start with the date and city in which the press release is originated.

The lead, or first sentence, should grab the reader and say concisely what is happening. The next 1-2 sentences then expand upon the lead.

The press release **body copy** should be compact. Avoid using very long sentences and paragraphs. Avoid repetition and over use of fancy language and jargon.

A first paragraph (two to three sentences) must actually sum up the press release and the further content must elaborate it. In a fast-paced world, neither journalists nor other readers would read the entire press release if the start of the article didn't generate interest.

Deal with actual facts - events, products, services, people, targets, goals, plans, projects. Try to provide maximum use of concrete facts. A simple method for writing an effective press release is to make a list of following things:

**Communicate the 5 Ws and the H.** Who, what, when, where, why, and how. Then consider the points below if pertinent.

What is the actual news?

Why this is news.

The people, products, items, dates and other things related with the news.

The purpose behind the news.

Your company - the source of this news.

- Now from the points gathered, try to construct paragraphs and assemble them sequentially: The headline > the summary or introduction of the news > event or achievements > product > people > again the concluding summary > the company.
- The length of a press release should be no more than three pages. If you are sending a hard copy, text should be double-spaced.

- The more newsworthy you make the press release copy, the better the chances of it being selected by a journalist for reporting. Find out what "newsworthy" means to a given market and use it to hook the editor or reporter.

### Points to remember

- Include the organisation name in the headline, any subhead, and in the body of the first paragraph for better visibility via search engines and for news professionals and other readers. If you're mailing a hard copy, you may put it on club letterhead.
- If the press release is for immediate release, you may write "IMMEDIATE RELEASE" in all caps on the left margin, directly above the headline. If the release is embargoed, put "EMBARGOED UNTIL..." with the date you want the story released. A release with no release date is presumed to be for immediate release.
- Research actual press releases on the web to get the feel of the tone, the language, the structure and the format of a press release.
- The timing of the press release is very important. It must be relevant and recent news, not too old and not too distant.
- A follow-up call can help develop a press release into a full story.
- Include a "call to action" in your release. This is information on what you want the public to do with the information that you are releasing. For example, do you want them to visit your project? If so, include information on where the project is. Do you want them to visit your Web site to enter a contest or learn more about your organization? If so, include the Web address or a phone number.
- Send your release by e-mail, and use formatting sparingly. Giant type and multiple colors don't enhance your news, they distract from it. Put the release in the body of the e-mail, not as an attachment. If you must use an attachment, make it a plain text or Rich Text Format file. Word documents are acceptable at most outlets, but if you are using the newest version (.docx), save down a version (.doc). Use PDF files only if you are sending a full media kit with lots of graphics. Please don't type a release on letterhead, scan it, and e-mail a jpeg of the scan. That's a waste of your time and the editor's. Just type the release into the e-mail message.
- Use your headline as the subject line of the e-mail. If you've written a good "grabber" headline, this will help your message stand out in the editor's e-mail inbox.
- Craft each release to target a specific media outlet and send it to the specific reporter who covers that beat. This information can usually be found on the outlet's Web site. Blasting the identical press release to multiple outlets and multiple reporters at the same outlet is a sign that you are taking shortcuts rather than targeting a specific market.
- Avoid jargon or specialized technical terms. If accuracy requires the use of an industry-specific term, define it.

## 10 Essential Tips for Writing Press Releases

Source: <http://www.press-release-writing.com>

1. Make sure the information is newsworthy.
2. Tell the audience that the information is intended for them and why they should continue to read it.

3. Start with a brief description of the news, then distinguish who announced it, and not the other way around.
4. Ask yourself, "How are people going to relate to this and will they be able to connect?"
5. Make sure the first 10 words of your release are effective, as they are the most important.
6. Avoid excessive use of adjectives and fancy language.
7. Deal with the facts.
8. Provide as much Contact information as possible: Individual to Contact, address, phone, fax, email, Web site address.
9. Make sure you wait until you have something with enough substance to issue a release.
10. Make it as easy as possible for media representatives to do their jobs.

### **Press Release Content Basics**

There are seven basic elements that every press release should have in terms of content and how it appears:

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** These words should appear in the upper left-hand margin, just under your letterhead. You should capitalize every letter.

**Contact Information:** Skip a line or two after release statement and list the name, title, telephone and fax numbers of your spokesperson (the person with the most information). It is important to give your home number since reporters often work on deadlines and may not be available until after hours.

**Headline:** Skip two lines after your Contact information and use a boldface type.

**Dateline:** This should be the city your press release is issued from and the date you are mailing your release.

**Lead Paragraph:** The first paragraph needs to grasp the reader's attention and should contain the relevant information to your message such as the five W's (who, what, when, where, why).

**Text:** The main body of your press release where your message should fully develop.

**Recap:** At the lower left hand corner of your last page restate your project/ program and give date.

### **Press Release Template**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact:

Contact Person

Company Name

Telephone Number

Fax Number

Email Address

Web site address

### **Headline**

City, State, Date — Opening Paragraph (should contain: who, what, when, where, why):

Remainder of body text – Should include any relevant information to your [products](#) or services. Include benefits, why your product or service is unique. Also include quotes from staff members, industry experts or satisfied customers.

If there is more than 1 page use:

-more-

(The top of the next page):

### **Abbreviated headline (page 2)**

Remainder of text.

(Restate Contact information after your last paragraph):

For additional information or a sample copy, Contact: (all Contact information)

Summarize product or service specifications one last time

Company History (try to do this in one short paragraph)

**###**

(indicates Press Release is finished)

### **Press Release Formatting Suggestions**

Use 8 ½ x 11 paper.

Use a minimum of one-inch margins on each side of the page.

Use a Bold typeface for the headlines to draw attention.

Capitalize the first letter of all words in the headline (with the exception of: “a”, “an”, “the”, or prepositions such as: “of”, “to”, or “from”). The combination of upper and lower case makes it easier to read.

Complete the paragraph on one page instead of carrying it over onto the next page.

Use only one side of each sheet of paper.

Use the word “more” between two dashes and center it at the bottom of the page to let reporters know that another page follows.

– more –

Use three numbers symbols immediately following the last paragraph to indicate the end of the press release:

# # #

For sample Press releases go to:

<http://www.lionsclubs.org/EN/member-center/managing-a-club/communicating-your-activities/news-news-sample.php>