

How to...

Write a Press Release

What is a Press Release?

A press release is a communication about an event, achievement, new service, person or something that's newsworthy sent by an organization to the news media with the intent of achieving news coverage. Press releases are written in the third person, following a generally accepted format.

Remember you are competing with many organizations for media space and media are all competing for audience. Journalists will choose the stories they feel are most likely to appeal to their readers/listeners. So before you sit down to write your press release, think about why the media you are targeting would be compelled to run your story. You may change the approach to your story significantly.

If you are a local organization, unless your story happens to have tremendous breakthrough consequences for the whole country, local media are more likely to cover your story than national media. Conversely, if you are a national or statewide organization, local journalists are unlikely to pick your story unless it has a particular effect on the local community.

Step 1 Write the opening Paragraph.

Start with the date and city. Then try to write a grabber first sentence, something that draws the reader/listener in. The opening paragraph should be short, just 2 to 3 sentences and state concisely what the press release is about. It should sum up the entire article as it may be the only chance you get in front of hurried journalists and readers' eyes. Be sure to include your organization's name.

Step 2 Write the Body Copy of your Press Release.

Expand on the opening paragraph. Avoid long, complicated sentences, erudite language, acronyms and terminology the general public would not understand. Simple, straightforward communication works best. Stick to the facts and answer the questions:

- What is the interesting news?
- Why is this important?
- When and where did it or will it take place?
- Who are the key players?

Use the technique of testimonials to answer some of these questions if it works, but don't force it. Be sure to include your call to action, i.e. if you want the reader to call a number, go to a website, show up for an event, make a donation, etc. be sure to spell it out clearly in this paragraph.

Step 3 Include Information about Your Organization

Title this paragraph "About XYZ Organization" and add a paragraph about your organization. This is generally referred to as "boilerplate", copy that is repurposed over and over. In the boilerplate, you typically state the size, mission, location of your organization and other factual, relevant information such as date founded or constituents served. At the end of this paragraph, include a link to your organization's website.

Step 4 Go back and Write Your Headline.

Now that you have your press release, go back and write an attention-getting headline. First, select one or two keywords from your body copy. Key words are words that will come up in internet searches. If your press release is about homelessness, for example, make sure you select "homelessness" as one of your keywords. You want to include your name in the headline too, to ensure maximum exposure for your organization. Then, try to form a grabber headline combining your organization name, keywords and of course, a hint of your news.

Step 5 Add Contact Information

Above your headline, include the following contact information:

- The name and title of the contact person
- The contact's email address
- Your organization's name
- Email address of the contact
- Phone number(s) of the contact
- Organization's web address

Step 6 Format the Press Release

- If the release is for immediate release, write IMMEDIATE RELEASE in all caps on the left margin, above the contact information.
- Format the headline in bold and capitalize the first word.
- Make sure a link to your organization's URL appears at the end of the About Us paragraph.
- Place three ### centered directly underneath the last line of the release. This is a journalistic standard indicating the end.
- Use formatting colors, typeface, etc., sparingly if at all, they are distracting.
- If you include a photo, make sure it is in JPEG format. A higher resolution will be required for magazines. Some media provide photo specifications on their websites.

Step 7 Send the Release

- Email your press release to a targeted list of contacts and address each contact by name. Don't blast indiscriminately. You can find contacts on the selected media's website.
- Timing is important. Make sure your press release is new news but not too far off in the future to seem unreachable.
- Use your headline as the subject of the email. (It's much more interesting than "Press Release from XYZ Organization".)
- Place your press release in the body of your email. Do not attach it.