

Writing press releases

Press releases are a means of getting news and other information distributed to a wider audience via a newspaper, radio, television or web site. It should not be viewed as a substitute for a paid advertisement.

To write a press release

PREPARATION

1) **Decide why you are writing a press release and determine your focus.** Make sure it's newsworthy. Don't use it for the sole purpose of trying to get free advertising.

2) **Determine the audience.** Does the press release contain newsworthy information that will be used by the target audience? Editors can be very picky; if they do not see relevance to their readership in your press release immediately, they will discard it.

3) **Select an appropriate news angle for your press release.** Make it relevant. Keep in mind what's going on with social issues and current events and sculpt your press release accordingly. This will make your story even more attractive and worthwhile to potential readers.

4) **Take a look at some other press releases that have appeared in the paper/magazine/web site** to make sure that you have followed the proper format.

BASICS

5) **Keep it short and to the point.** Usually, press releases are no more than one page. If you must go longer than one page, do not continue on the back of first page. Press releases should be typed and doubled spaced.

6) **Be concise and grammatically correct.** Avoid excessive use of adjectives and fancy language. Avoid clichés and jargon. Be sure to check your release for punctuation and grammatical errors. Have someone else proofread the press release.

7) **Indicate time sensitivity.** Is it for FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE? Or is there an embargo date: DO NOT PUBLISH BEFORE MARCH 15, 2008. Or, is there a

date when it is no longer useful: DO NOT PUBLISH AFTER MARCH 15, 2008.

8) Provide relevant contact information for:

- a) The writer of the press release, in case the editor/reporter has questions about the press release itself.
- b) The person with specific information about the news or event.

This may not always be the same person. Include: name, title, address, phone number and e-mail address.

CONTENT

9) **Suggest a headline** and center it in bold type just above the first line of the body of the press release. Headlines typically highlight the most important or significant facts in the release. Headlines should never be more than 8-10 words long.

10) **Make certain the first paragraph includes all the vital information:** the who, what, where, when and why. Make sure the first 10 words of your release are effective, as they are the most important. Never use run-on sentences (more than 25 words or so).

11) **Include other details or facts to spark curiosity in following paragraphs.** Readers are very picky; if they do not see relevance in your press release immediately, they will discard it. A good press release not only informs, but also teases.

12) **Wrap up the last paragraph with a "for additional information" line,** a place readers can find more details. Include a phone number, e-mail address or web site.

13) **Center these marks, "###" or "-30-,"** at the bottom of the page to indicate the end of your release.

Delivering a press release

1) **Prepare a media outlet list in advance.** Make a list of key contacts, addresses, phone numbers and e-mails for all newspapers, radio and television stations and other communication outlets. Survey your congregation to get a complete list of local media they receive. Contact the outlets to see if they accept press releases, and if they have any submission guidelines.

2) You'll be more likely to get your press release printed or used if you have a relationship with the right people and know who it should be directed. That takes some groundwork/investigation, and it may depend on content of the press release. Is there a separate editor for the "Community Calendar" page if the press release is about an upcoming event?

Is there a separate editor for the "Religion" page? Is there a separate editor for the "Human interest" feature page?

2) What are the deadlines? Many small community papers are weekly, with a printing deadline several days before the paper is distributed. Monthly magazines or publications may have deadlines a month or more in advance of the printing date.

3) How do they prefer to receive press releases? In paper form? Electronically? Both? Many newspapers and magazines have small staffs. Submitting a press release electronically will save them time and money, because they don't have to re-type it. Check in advance to make sure it is in a computer format they can use.

4) Will they accept photos? If so, what format: color/BW; photos or electronic images. If electronic, what format and resolution (minimum pixels)? For example, most electronic images posted on web sites will not work in magazines and newspapers, since the resolution is too small/low.

Other

- **If writing a press release for radio or television,** be sure to include phonetic spelling of uncommon words or names. In general, press releases for radio and television must also be shorter.

- **If writing a press release that may be posted on a web site,** be sure to determine proper format in advance.