

## Writing a Press Release

A good press release is clear, focused and readable. If well-written they are often printed with few changes in newspapers.

### Press releases include:

- letterhead or logo
- release time (either “For Immediate Release” or for release on a specific date)
- date
- headline that highlights the message
- location
- body (5–7 short paragraphs)
- end: marked by “–30–” centered
- contact name and information

### Structuring the Press Release:

Start with strong headline. It should be short, active and descriptive. Decide what the most important element of your piece is, the part you most want your readers to remember. This headline statement should be 10 words or less.

Start your first paragraph with a strong lead, something that will catch your readers’ attention and lead them into the rest of the piece. Your headline and first paragraph should tell the whole story. The lead paragraph should cover who, what, where, when and how.

The rest of the press release should provide the detail, starting with the most interesting or pertinent information and followed by the rest of the details in order of decreasing importance. Avoid hype and unsubstantiated claims.

Be active and to the point. Keep the length to one page. If you can’t state your message in a page, you’re not getting to the point. Keep it to 5–7 paragraphs, and no more than 3 sentences per paragraph.

Remember, the aim of the press release is to have the greatest impact with the fewest words. Make your press release timely. Tie your news to current events or social issues if possible. On occasion a press release will be used with little or no modification, but more commonly it will be used as a springboard for a larger feature story.

### **Writing Tips:**

- Keep things short, simple and to the point. Make every word count.
- Keep the writing clear, tight and straightforward. Don't use technical terms. Use real English, not lingo.
- Use a conversational tone, but keep it neutral and relatively formal.
- Put the most important details – who, what, when, where, why and how – in your first paragraph.
- Write a concise middle – only the details that reflect exactly what you want to say.
- Write a brief, concise ending that ties things off (conclusion).
- Proofread. Don't trust your word processing program to catch errors in grammar and spelling. Have a few people read the release before sending it out.

### **Editing Tips**

- Use these questions:
  - Will your readers be able to visualize what you're talking about? Use words that people can "see" (places, people, things), rather than abstract terms (strategies, concepts, initiatives, improvements).
  - Have you eliminated every unnecessary word?
  - Have you provided good transitions between paragraphs?
  - Have you varied the length of your sentences? Too many short sentences can give a choppy quality to your writing.
  - Is the tone conversational? Read your article aloud and edit as you go.

*Adapted from:*

<http://web.uvic.ca/~sdoyle/E302/Notes/PressReleaseNotes.html>