

Writing News Releases

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Today's Agenda

- What makes a good news release
- Anatomy of a news release
- Critiquing news releases

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Think like a reporter!

- What makes you read a newspaper story or online article?
- When does a TV story catch your attention and draw you into watching and listening?

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Characteristics of News Releases

- Convey newsworthy information about your organization to the news media
- Written as ready-to-publish article
- Provide ideas, facts for journalists' stories

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Characteristics of News Releases

- News release or "press" release?
- Print media
- Broadcast media
- Online, Web sites

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What makes a story newsworthy

- **Timeliness** Contains fresh, new information that's relevant today, tomorrow
- **Impact** Affects journalists' readers, viewers, listeners
- **Uniqueness** Intrigues because surprising, novel, unexpected

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What makes a story newsworthy

- **Change** Involves major change, competition, conflict
- **Proximity** Describe geographically close, audience-relevant information
- **Prominence** Involves famous people, places and institutions

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Types of News Releases

- **Announcement** (straight news story)
- **Feature story** (combination of information and entertainment)
- **Hybrid story** (combination of feature and news announcement)

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Successful News Releases

- Audience for news release is a journalist
- Good releases written as reporters would write their stories
 - Concise
 - Specific
 - Reputable sources
 - Objective facts
 - Honest and direct

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Ineffective News Releases

- Bury the news inside the release
- Contain hyperbole, excessive adjectives
- Come across as promotional ad
- Written using wordy language, too long
- Include unattributed opinions
- Offer stiff-sounding, empty quotes

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Release Format and Design

- Follow AP Stylebook – correct grammar, punctuation, spelling essential!
- Use your organization's stationery with letterhead, logo for first page
- Text double-spaced for releases on paper; single-spaced for e-mail, CD, Web sites

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Release Format and Design

- **News Release** under letterhead
- **For Immediate Release** and the date of release
- **Contact:** followed by **name**, **department name** or **title**, **phone number** and email address

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Headlines

A good headline:

- Follows newspaper style – shortened sentences
- Summarizes the “news”
- Smoothly incorporates organization, product name
- Includes local connection

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Headlines

- Usually use present tense, which means recent past in headline language
- Some headlines require future tense to announce upcoming events, actions

Examples:

Red Cross Launches New Blood Drive
Red Cross to Launch New Blood Drive

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Headlines

Additional tips

- Use headline to capture attention
- Use action verbs
- Don't end a line with a preposition
- Add detail through subheads
- Follow consistent style (capitalization, bold, etc.)

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Writing Headlines

Turn this information into a strong headline

Schools in Fulton County introduced a wide variety of health and fitness initiatives to encourage healthy, active lifestyles among students of all ages.

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Dateline

- Begin release with dateline

Examples:

ATLANTA, Apr. 9, 2008 – An inspection by auditors ...

ATHENS, Ga., Feb. 16, 2008 – City officials announced ...

DUBLIN, Ohio, Aug. 20, 2007 – Real estate values ...

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Release Copy

Open with a strong lead

- Concisely covers the most important elements of *who, what, when, where, why, how* of the story. May need second sentence to cover main points.
- Includes most important information
- Independent of headline
- Keep it short (about 25 words)

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Release Copy

- Organize release as inverted pyramid
 - Most important information first
 - Less critical information later in release
- Write in short paragraphs
 - Often one or two sentences, max

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Release Copy

- Use meaningful quotation/s
 - Add perspective, opinion
 - Sound natural, conversational in tone
 - Attribute to appropriate person
 - Use past tense for attribution (i.e., she said)

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Quotations

- Example (weak)

"The players played a really good game. I was very, very happy with the way they performed," Mark Richt, head coach of the Georgia Bulldogs said.

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Quotations

- Example (better)

"Our football team showed the kind of determination that will help make us a winner in the SEC this season," said Mark Richt, head coach of the Georgia Bulldogs.

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Release Copy

- End page with complete sentence or paragraph
- Indicate release carries over to next page using -- more -- at bottom of page
- Enter slug at top of new pages

Page 2/Red Cross Launches New Blood Drive

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Release Copy

- Close with standard or "boiler" paragraph
 - Brief description of organization/s and/or product mentioned in news release
 - Include Web site address for more information
 - Indicate end of release with centered #

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Distribution

- Send to specific journalists, editors by name
- Use current distribution lists
- Send event announcements at least 10 days before event; more lead time for magazines
- Make follow-up calls selectively

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Distribution

- Snail mail?
- E-mail?
- Fax?

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Evaluate News Releases

- Is lead direct, to the point? Does it contain most important, interesting aspects of story?
- Are sentences concise? Paragraphs short? Words common, concrete?
- Quotes natural sounding? Attributed to appropriate person?
- Grammar, punctuation, spelling correct?

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First integrated project assignment

Write a news release about some aspect of your chosen topic:

- Policy proposal under consideration
- Speech made by someone on topic
- Relevant study about topic
- Etc.

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