

## Media Guide 3 - Writing media/press releases

The most common way to get information to your media contacts is in the form of a media or press release. A media release can be used to provide a ready-made story, alert the media to an event or launch, spark a feature or as an invitation.

### **Preparation**

Check your media contacts list is up to date and select the appropriate people to send your release to. Identify programmes or journalists you know cover your type of story. You want to establish a reputation for relevant newsworthy material.

You may need to tailor your release to suit the different media. Shift the emphasis of the story to suit the target audience.

Geography – it might be worth producing 2 releases, one focusing on the topic itself and another exclusively on the local angle. These can then be sent to your local press and any relevant national media.

You need to think also of the different needs of newspaper (words and pictures), radio (sound) and TV (moving images). For each of these, is there something in your release they can work with.

### **Format**

Use your organisation's media release paper, or letterhead marked clearly 'Media Release'. You can also head it Press Invitation or Photo Opportunity.

Date and the works 'embargoed until time and date' or 'for immediate release'.

Keep it short - one A4 page or two maximum - preferably typed 11 or double-spaced.

Finish after last paragraph with -ends-.

Always include one or two contacts for further information, who must a) be available and b) be able to answer journalists' comments. This can make the difference between your story being used or not.

Finish with 'Notes to Editors' - these can include:

- a short description of your work
- any photo opportunities you have
- short biography of speaker/celebrity
- statistics
- website details
- refreshments, parking etc

## **Content**

A short snappy headline needs to catch the journalist's/editor's attention. Your press release needs to stand out from the rest.

The first paragraph is absolutely vital, it must be short, to the point and newsworthy and must contain the who, what, why, where, when and how of your story. Your lead paragraph should tell the whole story.

Pyramid effect - follow this with another (short) bridge paragraph providing more details or additional information.

Include a quote from someone, eg an expert, celebrity or local politician. This quote needs to add a new dimension to the release, not simply repeat what is stated. Make sure the person being quoted is contactable and can elaborate on what they say.

Additional short paragraphs can, if necessary, be added.

Be clear, concise and brief. This is not a work of creative genius, this is important information put together in a way that your reader will understand. Write in plain English, most people don't use long words when they speak so don't do it when you write.

Keep sentences and paragraphs short and simple. Put statements positively, be specific, avoid jargon and clichés.

Remember to always assume no knowledge on the part of the reader - include very basic information in your release - perhaps in the notes to editors section.

## **Distribution**

Based on the content of your release, decide who, on your media contacts list, you will be sending it to. Now decide the best method of distribution. If you have enough time, mail it. If time is short, e-mail or fax it.

## **Follow Up**

This is as important as the release itself. It's a chance to make contact, make sure your release has arrived, put your case and offer more information. Always phone to follow up any media contact and make sure you are talking to the right person.

## **Embargoes**

An embargo is put on news to stop it being reported before a particular time or event.

## **Letters to the Editors**

The letters' pages of newspapers are amongst the most widely read. You can use letters to respond to something you've read, or bring up your own issue. A good letter will often spark off a debate amongst readers, and may be picked up as an idea for a feature elsewhere.

Make sure you clearly mark your letter that it's for publication, include your name and contact details.