

Press Releases

Writing the Release

What is a press release?

A press release is a short, informative article designed to bring free publicity and/or information about an event, organization, or community concern.

How do I start?

Before writing a press release, follow the first rule of press releases; “Know your audience!” Is this release for a specific group or a wider audience? This determines what style of writing to use (formal or informal).

What is included in a press release?

A press release always includes the organization’s name and phone number, as well as the name and phone number of a contact person (someone who is familiar with the release and can answer any questions about the subject). A press release has a headline directly stating what the release is about. The first paragraph summarizes the major points of the press release. Then, there is a paragraph that answers these questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

How long should it be?

The first paragraph should never be more than four lines. The entire press release should be one or two pages and less than 500 words.

How do I get the reader’s attention?

After selecting which type of media to use, focus on writing the headline. A clever and well-crafted headline will attract attention without being too “sensational”.

Sending the Release

What should I do before sending out a press release?

Schedule a session with a CWC Writing Assistant. An impartial reader will be able to gauge the reaction the release will generate. There are a number of nuances to discuss when drafting an effective press release. It’s very important to proofread and double-check the facts included in the release. Any mistake in the facts will undermine the effectiveness of the press release.

Who do I send it to?

Which forms of media (TV, Radio, Magazines, Newspapers, the Internet) are being targeted? Every media outlet has a “Gatekeeper”, usually a news director, reporter or editor. This person handles letters, e-mails, and press releases at that particular media outlet. Find out who the gatekeepers are. When it comes to the flow of information, a gatekeeper can be either a dam or a pipeline.

How do I send it out?

Call before sending out a release, as a courtesy. The initial call should cover these questions: Are there submission guidelines? When is the deadline? Do they want a cover sheet? Do they want an “Editor’s Advisory”? Send the release to the gatekeeper, using their title.

The Community Writing Center has a collection of resources on press releases that will provide more information on writing and sending them.

CWC Writing Assistants are available to assist you at any stage of your journal writing process. Just ask to sign up for an appointment.

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