

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

The press release is the most common method of contacting the press, and is used extensively. The press release competes with literally hundreds of others, so it must immediately attract attention and provide information.

(Sydney Morning Herald receives over 380 a day)

Press releases have three primary functions:

- * They invite the media to cover an event or activity.
(Often called a media alert)
- * They serve as a longer, self-explanatory statement that contains information that you want publicised or which is attached to another piece of material that you have issued
(Called a general media release).
- * They serve as a backgrounder which will educate the media -- and the public -- on your activities and issues.
(Usually as part of a Press Kit)

The release that invites the press to cover an event etc is designed for information only and is not intended to run by itself in the media. However, the release which is as self explanatory statement or serves as a backgrounder should be in the form of a 'news story' and should be able to run by itself, with little or no editing , if the editor so desires. The headline should be one that grabs the **Editors** attention, so he will select and read yours out of the hundreds he has received today. He employs people to rewrite the headlines that eventually go into the paper.

REASONS TO ISSUE A PRESS RELEASE

- * Announce an event ;
- * announce personnel appointment; ie. new president or special training.
- * make a formal statement on news event;
- * release the results of a study;
- * announce appearances or speeches by leaders of our profession or public figures sympathetic to the profession.

A STANDARD FORMAT USED FOR ALL RELEASES

- * **Paper:** A4 good quality bond.
- * **Style:** Typed, double spaced, at least 25mm margins, on one side of the paper only, on official letterhead or special release stationary. Plain bond may be used after the first page. If release is more than one page, the bottom of each page should say "--more--" and the pages should be numbered at the top. Signal the end of the release with '###' or '---30---' symbol. All releases should be dated.

Top right of the page should have the following:

- * **“For Immediate Release”** or **“For release on ‘date’ ”**
- * For further information contact:
Mr Carl Bloggs
03 123 4567 (OFFICE) OR 03 123 9876 (HOME)
(Voice comment available.)

Headline; No more than three short lines, centred in the middle of the page, all capital letters. Headlines should release contents. *(Remember it should be designed to catch the EDITORS attention, he will have it rewritten to fit his paper style.)*

* Content: **WHO** **WHAT** **WHERE** **WHEN** **WHY**

- The lead (first paragraph) must single out the answer to at least two of the five W’s.
- It helps to have a quotable first paragraph. Pick your priorities carefully. Your lead should tell the reporter what he/she needs to know in order to convince him/her and the editor that the story should be covered. If they aren’t hooked by the lead, they won’t read the release and it ends in the bin.
- Releases can be long if you have a long story to tell. But follow the law of diminishing importance (called pyramid style), so that the editor can cut it from the tail up. Use short, declarative words, sentences and paragraphs. Use quotes liberally.
- Always use the title or description of the person you are writing about. (Elizabeth Windsor, Rover spokesperson etc etc.... etc) Include the names of all noteworthy people and, if local press, suburb of local identities or residents.
- Statements of opinion must be enclosed in quotation marks and attributed to a person (Elizabeth Windsor, Rover spokesperson, stated, “ Rovers, the Scouting section for 18 to 26 year olds, have a motto of Service. Over many years local Rovers have helped run a special camp for disabled scouts. These scouts come from all over the State”)
- NEVER editorialise in a news release.**
- Have a closing paragraph, stating succinctly the purpose of the campaign or group. “This 3 day camp, ensures that even scouts with disabilities can enjoy the excitement of scouting and camping with friends. Rovers and Leaders leave the weekend exhausted but the look on the children’s faces make it more than worthwhile.”

BACKGROUNDER

Backgrounders are longer releases that have all the information anyone could possibly want on your project or campaign. If you are working on a project which will feature a prominent speaker, comprehensive biography of the person should also be prepared.

A backgrounder should be prepared on the Association, in particular Rovers, and its spokesperson. So the press know who, when, why they should call you and not some other youth organisation for information on young people.

THE ABOVE POINTS ARE NOT THE ONLY WAY TO DO IT.

HOWEVER THEY ARE THE TECHNIQUES THAT ARE FAMILIAR TO EDITORS AND GIVE YOU A BETTER CHANCE OF BEING PUBLISHED